



Research Article

# Is it about me or my partner's personality? Personality traits as correlates and predictors of jealousy in couples

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## ABSTRACT

A high number of studies on romantic jealousy in heterosexual couples has accumulated in the past decades, including those intended to explain how this phenomenon relates to personality traits. This study aimed to advance current knowledge by using the HEXACO model supplemented by the Disintegration trait and presenting novel findings on how these traits in couples relate to their own and their partners' (cognitive, behavioral, and emotional) jealousy while also assessing traits' explanatory power for each aspect of jealousy. The HEXACO-PI-R Inventory, the DELTA-20 instrument, and the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale were administered to the sample of 400 heterosexual participants (200 couples dating or being married), and the correlations and the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) were applied. As the APIM showed, both women and men tend to have higher levels of cognitive and emotional jealousy if they score lower on Honesty-humility. Women tend to achieve higher scores in cognitive and emotional jealousy if they score higher in Emotionality. Men tend to score higher in all aspects of jealousy if their partners score lower on Agreeableness. Low Openness in men may contribute to behavioral jealousy in women, while high Disintegration in women could facilitate the development of emotional jealousy in men. In general, the effects of a partner's personality traits on jealousy in women were weaker compared to the effects on jealousy in men.

**Keywords:** Jealousy, HEXACO, Disintegration, Couples

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## Introduction

### Jealousy

Jealousy is a phenomenon inherent to humans, probably as old as humanity, which tends to occur in many forms, including jealousy in couples (also referred to as “romantic” jealousy), friendship, professional context, siblings’ jealousy, and jealousy among parents respective of their relations with children. Out of these, jealousy in couples – which is the focus of our work – is one of the most explored forms, especially in a heterosexual context. As defined by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989), jealousy is a complex set of emotions, cognition, and behavior. The emotional aspect of jealousy refers to feelings of insecurity, fear, or anger that arise as a response to a perceived threat to the relationship, which can be either actual or suspected, but in any case, includes the third person (a rival). Cognitive jealousy includes ruminative and intrusive thoughts related to the rival’s interest in the partner and the partner’s interest in the rival. At the behavioral level, jealousy manifests in various ways, including surveillance of the partner and attempts to control and restrict the partner’s behavior, involving a confrontation with the third person in some cases. Unlike some other scholars differentiating between normal and pathological jealousy (see Marazziti et al., 2003; Seeman, 2016), Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) do not make such a strict delineation; instead, they see jealousy as a continuum. From their point of view, each of the three aspects of jealousy could take an extreme form. However, while low to moderate levels of emotional jealousy could be considered normal, high levels of emotional jealousy, usually coupled with moderate or high levels of cognitive and behavioral jealousy, are likely to indicate pathological levels of jealousy. Of course, Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) were not the only ones who defined the structure of jealousy and proposed a corresponding model. Buunk (1997) also offered a dimensional model of jealousy comprising reactive, anxious, and possessive jealousy. From his standpoint, reactive jealousy is a response to the real threat (e.g., a partner showing interest in someone else), anxious jealousy is a tendency to be worried and suspicious about potential threats, even if there is no actual reason, while possessive jealousy is the manifestation of the desires to control the partner and prevent any possible threats. Some of the

dichotomous views on the nature of jealousy were also proposed. For instance, Parrott (1991) proposed the division into suspicious jealousy, which arises as a response to a possible threat, and *fait accompli* jealousy, which is a response to infidelity that has already occurred. Moreover, Rich (1991) offered the division into jealousy as a state (provoked by the actual threat) and jealousy as a disposition (i.e., a tendency to develop jealous responses irrespective of the actual threat).

Jealousy in couples is mainly viewed in a negative light, as there is evidence that it is related to decreased relationship satisfaction (Kılıç & Altınok, 2021) and quality (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007) and increased relationship conflicts that may result in violence (Kyegombe et al., 2022). However, jealousy in emotional relationships between partners does not necessarily need to be a negative phenomenon, especially if not exaggerated. As Attridge (2013) reported, satisfaction with a relationship relates negatively to cognitive jealousy but positively to emotional jealousy. Such a finding corroborates the postulates of the evolutionary framework (Buss & Haselton, 2005). As explained by Buss and Haselton (2005), jealousy is an evolved adaptation activated by the threat to a valuable relationship, and it has a purpose to protect it from the possible reproductive consequences of infidelity. Further, they elaborated on the sex/gender differences, indicating that men are more likely to be triggered by the cues of sexual infidelity and distressed by threats from rivals with more resources (seen as a threat to paternity certainty). Women, on the other hand, tend to be more upset by the possibility of emotional infidelity (seen as a threat to the partner's commitment), especially if the rival is more physically attractive. These considerations received empirical support, as other scholars showed that women tend to score higher than men on emotional and behavioral jealousy (e.g., Elphinston et al., 2011; Zandbergen & Brown, 2015).

Guerrero and Andersen (1998) have offered the componential model as one of the theoretical and descriptive frameworks for understanding romantic jealousy. According to this model, the perception of a threat to the valued relationship generates jealous cognitions and emotions that shape communicative responses (i.e., behavior). Consequently, communicative responses impact relational outcomes such as satisfaction and stability. The entire process is framed by six so-called “antecedent” factors: socio-

biological, cultural, personality, relational, situational, and strategic. Socio-biological factors, viewed through an evolutionary lens, suggest jealousy serves as a mechanism for mate retention, with gender differences as previously described. Cultural factors influence how jealousy is experienced and expressed, with norms varying across societies – some see jealousy as a sign of love, while others view it negatively. Regarding personality factors, the authors argue that individual differences, such as personality traits or attachment styles, influence how jealousy is experienced. For instance, individuals with high trait anxiety or insecure attachment styles may be more prone to intense jealous feelings and maladaptive responses. These personal dispositions shape the cognitive and emotional components of jealousy, influencing both the perception of threats and the subsequent emotional and behavioral reactions. Relational factors, such as satisfaction and commitment, can either mitigate or heighten jealousy, depending on the strength of the relationship. Situational factors refer to specific events or contexts that trigger jealousy, like seeing a partner interact with a potential rival. Finally, strategic factors encompass how individuals manage jealousy and may range from constructive problem-solving to destructive confrontation, depending on the relational goals.

The componential model offers a comprehensive description of the factors that influence jealousy at the individual level, including the role of personality. However, this model does not underscore that individual outcomes inherent to romantic relationships, such as jealousy, can be influenced not only by individuals' own but also by their partners' personality traits. Other researchers interested in personal relationships tested this assumption. For instance, Caughlin et al. (2000) examined the connections between marital satisfaction and personality traits in married couples and proposed two models. The first one is the intrapersonal model, which assumes that an individual's marital satisfaction is directly influenced by their own personality traits. The second one is the interpersonal model, which assumes that the personality traits of one person, as they generate corresponding behavior, influence another person's marital satisfaction. Their study provided support for both models, which can also be applied to jealousy. These two models are complementary and provide a valuable explanation of how one person's personality might influence their own and

partner's outcomes. However, this framework does not account for the interdependence in couples.

To the best of our knowledge, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) is the most comprehensive framework for examining dyad-level outcomes because it encompasses the intrapersonal model, interpersonal model, and interdependence. The APIM is an analytic framework based on interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), which posits that functioning in close relationships is dynamic and reciprocal in nature, meaning that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of two coupled individuals are interconnected. The APIM relies on a dyadic perspective, meaning that couples are considered the unit of analysis and account for both intrapersonal and interpersonal effects (i.e., actor effect and partner effect). Besides, the APIM can be a useful tool to estimate not only the actor and partner effects in couples but also the differences in strength of these effects for dyad members. For instance, Robins et al. (2000) reported that both women's and men's personality traits have actor and partner effects on their perceptions of relationship quality, with the actor effect being stronger in women. This model has been widely used in research on romantic relationships and applied to a variety of outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Conradi et al., 2017), relationship quality (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007), mate retention behaviors (Kardum et al., 2019), marital stability (He et al., 2018), marital satisfaction (Stroud et al., 2010), and romantic jealousy (Brauer et al., 2021).

## Personality and jealousy

Personality traits are usually considered to have an important role in one's behavior, emotions, and cognition. The HEXACO (Lee & Ashton, 2004) is one of the comprehensive models of personality, encompassing six basic traits: Extraversion, Emotionality, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to experience, and Honesty-humility. Extraversion refers to the tendency to feel confident, enjoy social gatherings, and experience positive feelings. Emotionality depicts the proneness to experience fear of physical danger and anxiety in response to life stressors, accompanied by elevated empathy, sentimental attachment to others, and a need for emotional support. Agreeableness refers to the proneness to forgive others for their

wrongdoing, being lenient in judging them, willingness to compromise and cooperate with others, and having a high ability to control own temper. Conscientiousness corresponds to tendencies to be organized, self-disciplined, accuracy- and perfection-seeking, and careful in decision-making. Openness represents proneness to enjoy the beauty of art and nature, be imaginative in everyday life, be inquisitive about knowledge, and be interested in unusual ideas and people. Lastly, Honesty-humility refers to tendencies to avoid manipulating others, to have little interest in wealth and luxuries, and to feel no special entitlement to social status (Ashton & Lee, 2008; Lee & Ashton, 2020). The HEXACO model is similar to the traditional Big Five model (Goldberg, 1990), which includes Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience. Moreover, it could be seen as its extension because they are both based on the lexical approach, and there is a substantial overlap in their content. However, the HEXACO model includes Honesty-humility as a unique factor that emerged as the sixth factor in early studies on the Big Five traits space. Even though the HEXACO model can be considered to have some advantages over the Big Five (see Ashton & Lee, 2007), none of the two models includes proneness to psychotic-like experiences, which are equally important for one's cognitions, emotions, and behavior in everyday life. For that reason, Knežević et al. (2017) proposed the Disintegration trait, which reflects the disturbances in emotional, behavioral, and cognitive regulation (e.g., the tendency to see connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena). It was shown that both the Big Five (Knežević et al., 2016; Knežević et al., 2017) and the HEXACO (Knežević, Lazarević, Bosnjak, et al., 2022) models can be supplemented by Disintegration trait, which leads to a more comprehensive assessment of personality and increases the predictive power of personality traits (see Lazarević et al., 2021; Lukić & Živanović, 2021; Nedeljković & Topalović, 2023; Stanković et al., 2022).

Over the decades of exploring jealousy, some researchers opted to examine how jealousy relates to personality traits. However, the empirical literature in this field is relatively limited. To the best of our knowledge, the HEXACO model has not been used in this setting. Previous endeavors were mainly focused on the Big Five model and considered the personality–jealousy nexus as an intrapersonal process, but they provided valuable knowledge. As shown by previous studies, jealousy is likely to be higher in people high in Neuroticism and those low in Agreeableness (see Gubler et al.,

2023; Richter et al., 2022), which stands as one of the most robust associations when it comes to personality traits. Although the data regarding the other personality traits encompassed by traditional five-factorial models are not entirely consistent, Conscientiousness might also be relevant in understanding jealousy in couples. As Dijkstra and Barelds (2008) reported, low Conscientiousness in one partner is predictive of their own and their partners' jealousy. There are also some findings on the relationship between jealousy and the Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy), which are relevant for the Honesty-humility domain due to the substantial overlap between the negative pole of this trait and the Dark Triad construct (see Dinić et al., 2018; Dinić & Wertag, 2018). It has been shown that the Dark Triad relates positively with jealousy (Barelds et al., 2017; Burtăverde et al., 2021; Chin et al., 2017). The individuals high in the Dark Triad are not just more likely to be afraid of and anticipate the infidelity of their partners, but they are also more prone to engage in infidelity behaviors (March et al., 2023; Lişman et al., 2023). Although no studies considered Honesty-humility in the context of jealousy, some findings indicate that low scores on this trait can play an important role in a dyad setting. For instance, as Reinhardt and Reinhard (2023) reported, persons who score low in this trait tend to be less committed and less close to their partners while being more dishonest in the existing relationship (e.g., lying to their partners more frequently). Further on, psychotic features could also have a role in jealousy. A positive relationship between jealousy and psychoticism was found in the non-clinical population (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020), while schizophrenia-spectrum disorders are characterized by a high prevalence of delusional jealousy (Soyka & Shmidt, 2011).

## Current study

Previous research has provided valuable insights into the association between personality and jealousy. However, those studies have primarily focused on five-factor models and have mainly neglected possible differences in how personality traits in women/men relate to their partner's jealousy. Therefore, the objective of this study is twofold: firstly, to expand the knowledge on the personality–jealousy nexus by applying the HEXACO model supplemented with the Disintegration trait, and secondly, to investigate how jealousy in couples relates to their own and partner's



personality traits, and to what extent own and partner's traits can explain jealousy. We assumed that jealousy would demonstrate positive associations with Emotionality and Disintegration while exhibiting negative relationships with Agreeableness and Honesty-humility – the same pattern for both women and men. This is a general expectation when it comes to how one's jealousy could relate to their own personality, and it is based on previous findings (e.g., Barelds et al., 2017; Gubler et al., 2023; Richter et al., 2022; Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2020). Additionally, we hypothesized that jealousy in both women and men would be related negatively to their partners' Honesty-humility. Previous studies showed that individuals who score low on Honesty-humility tend to be more dishonest in actual romantic relationships and display lower levels of commitment and closeness (Reinhardt & Reinhard, 2023). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that their partners can perceive these characteristics as a cue of interest in another person, which might provoke jealousy. Finally, we hypothesized that individual differences in jealousy in women could be, to a greater extent, attributed to their own personality traits compared to jealousy in men, while not having a specific hypothesis about the amount of variance of jealousy in women and men explained by personality traits of their partners. This hypothesis is explorative; however, it has some foundation. First, women tend to score higher on emotional and behavioral jealousy (see Elphinston et al., 2011; Zandbergen & Brown, 2015). Second, they also tend to score higher on the Emotionality trait (Lee & Ashton, 2020), meaning they are more prone to experiencing anxious feelings and developing sentimental attachment to others. In the context of a romantic relationship, this might be seen as favorable for developing jealousy. Third, as Robins et al. (2000) reported, the effect of own personality on perceived relationship quality was shown to be stronger in women compared to men. This is a piece of evidence that the effect of own personality on some dyad-level outcomes might be stronger in women.

## Method

### Participants and procedure

The sample comprised 400 heterosexual participants: 200 women ( $M_{age} = 27.05$ ,  $SD_{age} = 6.29$ , min = 19, max = 47) and 200 men ( $M_{age} = 29.35$ ,  $SD_{age} = 6.87$ , min = 20, max = 52). The sample included couples who

were dating ( $N = 151$ ) or being married ( $N = 49$ ) for at least one year ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 2.81$ ,  $\max = 15$ ) to ensure that patterns of behavior and communication inherent to each couple were already more or less developed. The data was collected using the *Google Forms* platform, and the survey was distributed through social networks, mailing lists, and authors' personal contacts. Participation in the survey was anonymous, voluntary, and without any compensation. The data were merged using the unique codes created by each couple, which comprised a combination of the last two digits of their phone numbers and the first letters of their mothers' names. Participants were asked to fill out the survey independently of their partner and to abstain from discussing their answers and influencing their partner's responses in any way. The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments.

## Measures

### HEXACO-60

HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009; for Serbian translation, see Međedović et al., 2019) was used to assess Honesty-Humility (e.g., “*I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me*”), Emotionality (e.g., “*I sometimes can't help worrying about little things*”), Extraversion (e.g., “*On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic*”), Agreeableness (e.g., “*I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me*”), Conscientiousness (e.g., “*I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute*”), and Openness (e.g., “*People have often told me that I have a good imagination*”). Each domain was assessed by 10 items, administered with a 5-point scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

### DELTA-20

DELTA-20 instrument (Knežević et al., 2017) was used to estimate the Disintegration trait, which reflects the tendency toward experiencing psychotic-like phenomena characterized by cognitive and perceptual disruptions, emotional instability, and disorganized thinking. It comprises 20 items (e.g., “*People speak ill of me*”), administered with a 5-point scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

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### *The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS)*

The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989; for Serbian translation, see Tošić-Radev & Hedrih, 2017), a 24-item measure, was used to assess cognitive, behavioral, and emotional jealousy aspects, previously described in the Introduction. In assessing cognitive and behavioral aspects, participants respond how often they have specific thoughts about their partners (e.g., “*I suspect that my partner may be attracted to someone else*”) and how often they engage in certain behaviors (e.g., “*I question my partner about his/her telephone calls*”) using a 5-point response scale (from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*). In assessing the emotional aspect, participants evaluate their emotional experiences in specific situations (e.g., “*My partner smiles in a very friendly manner to someone of the opposite sex*”) using a 5-point response scale (from 1 = *very pleased* to 5 = *very upset*). Each aspect was measured by 8 items.

The scores were calculated as the mean of responses on corresponding items.

### **Data analysis**

Before examining the associations between the variables of our interest, we computed basic descriptives (means and standard deviations) of personality and jealousy scales and their reliabilities for women and men and examined gender differences. We calculated Pearson correlations to get the fundamental insight into how personality traits and jealousy in women and men relate to their own and their partners’ jealousy. To estimate the effects of personality traits on jealousy in couples, we applied the APIM framework. The analyses were performed by an online tool, APIM\_MM, which estimates the APIM using multilevel modeling (Lederman et al., 2019). In this approach, the actor effects (one’s jealousy regressed to their own personality traits) and the partner effects (one’s jealousy regressed to their partner’s personality traits) are estimated for women and men separately, whereas the dyad is taken into account at the first level of the model (women and men are nested into dyads). The APIMs for cognitive, behavioral, and emotional jealousy were controlled for relationship type and duration (included as dyad-level covariates).

## Results

As displayed in Table 1, all the scales produced satisfactory levels of reliability ( $\alpha > .70$ ), except for the Emotionality dimension, where alpha values were somewhat lower in both genders. The differences in personality traits and jealousy were observed. Women displayed higher Emotionality, Openness, and Honesty-humility, and higher levels of the three aspects of jealousy compared to men. These differences ranged between small and medium in magnitude, except for Emotionality, where the difference was large (Cohen's  $d$  values of around .20, .50, and .80 or higher are considered as small, medium, and large effects, respectively; for details, see Sullivan & Feinn, 2012).

**Table 1**

*Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and gender differences between the variables*

	Women		Men		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	$\alpha$	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	$\alpha$		
Extraversion	3.24 (0.69)	.76	3.36(0.66)	.71	1.87	.13
Emotionality	3.69 (0.59)	.67	2.71 (0.60)	.64	15.65**	1.11
Agreeableness	2.90 (0.68)	.73	2.87 (0.68)	.72	0.33	.02
Conscientiousness	3.65 (0.67)	.77	3.57 (0.70)	.79	1.15	.08
Openness	3.81 (0.71)	.77	3.65 (0.80)	.79	2.53 <sup>†</sup>	.18
Honesty-humility	3.76 (0.66)	.69	3.45 (0.80)	.76	4.82 <sup>†</sup>	.34
Disintegration	2.26 (0.72)	.88	2.18 (0.71)	.89	1.38	.10
Cognitive jealousy	1.94 (0.80)	.88	1.74 (0.66)	.85	3.54 <sup>†</sup>	.25
Behavioral jealousy	1.78 (0.60)	.76	1.52 (0.55)	.77	5.13 <sup>†</sup>	.36
Emotional jealousy	3.55 (0.77)	.84	3.29 (0.96)	.90	3.41 <sup>†</sup>	.24

*Note.*  $d$  = Cohen's measure of the effect size

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

In line with our aims and hypotheses, we first applied the correlation analysis to examine how the three aspects of jealousy in women and men relate to their own and their partners' personality traits (see the Appendix).

We will first introduce the associations between jealousy and own personality traits. Cognitive, behavioral, and emotional jealousy in women was associated with their high Emotionality and Disintegration and low Agreeableness – those were the correlations indicating a consistent pattern of relationships between specific traits and all three aspects of jealousy. Further inspection of the correlations indicated that cognitive and behavioral jealousy in women relate negatively to their Honesty-humility, while this trait was not associated with the emotional aspect. Cognitive jealousy in women correlated negatively with their Emotionality and Conscientiousness, while the behavioral component achieved a negative (although weak) correlation with Openness. In men, Honesty-humility was the only trait that produced systematically negative associations with all jealousy aspects. Among the other traits, Agreeableness in men was associated with their behavioral jealousy and Openness with their emotional jealousy – both negatively. In men, Extraversion, Emotionality, Conscientiousness, and Disintegration remained unrelated to their jealousy.

The following step was to analyze how jealousy relates to a partner's personality traits. In women, cognitive and behavioral jealousy were related in the same way to a partner's traits – negatively to Openness and Honesty-humility and positively to Disintegration. However, the emotional aspect of jealousy in women turned out to be entirely unrelated to the partner's personality traits. In men, the three aspects of jealousy were found to relate negatively to their partners' Agreeableness only; the behavioral aspect was negatively associated with partners' Conscientiousness, while cognitive and emotional jealousy aspects were found to be positively associated with partners' Disintegration.

Correlations between women's and men's personality traits were mostly non-significant; the highest correlation was between their Disintegration ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). All aspects of jealousy in women aspects correlated positively with all aspects of jealousy in men (from  $r = .14, p < .05$  between women's behavioral jealousy and men's emotional jealousy, to  $r =$

.43,  $p < .01$  between women's cognitive jealousy and men's cognitive jealousy). For a detailed review, see the Appendix.

As introduced in the Data Analysis section, we estimated three APIMs, one for each jealousy aspect. The estimates of actor and partner effects from the APIMs are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Standardized regression coefficients for actor and partner effects of personality traits on jealousy based on APIMs*

Predictor	Cognitive		Behavioral		Emotional	
	actor ( $\beta$ )	partner ( $\beta$ )	actor ( $\beta$ )	partner ( $\beta$ )	actor ( $\beta$ )	partner ( $\beta$ )
	W→W M→M	M→W W→M	W→W M→M	M→W W→M	W→W M→M	M→W W→M
Extraversion	-.11	-.05	-.00	-.04	.01	-.04
	.00	-.08	-.06	-.00	-.11	.04
Emotionality	.19*	-.06	.13	-.01	.17*	-.03
	.05	-.00	-.06	.02	.10	-.06
Agreeableness	-.10	.08	-.10	-.01	-.11	.13
	-.06	-.20*	-.18*	-.21*	-.04	-.19*
Conscientiousness	-.10	.08	-.02	.02	-.07	.10
	-.05	-.04	.10	-.17*	.12	.09
Openness	.18*	-.13	-.03	-.15*	-.06	-.08
	-.08	.08	-.01	.03	-.09	-.13
Honesty-humility	-.18*	-.18*	-.29**	-.09	-.02	-.09
	-.16*	.06	-.14*	.05	-.17*	.25**
Disintegration	.13	.07	.00	.08	.06	.11
	-.06	.11	.05	-.00	-.06	.24**

Note. W = women; M = men;  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

The APIM for cognitive jealousy ( $\chi^2_{30} = 74.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed that own and partners' personality traits account for a greater proportion of variance in the criterion for women ( $R^2 = .18$ ) compared to men ( $R^2 = .07$ ), controlling for covariates. On the other hand, the APIM for behavioral jealousy ( $\chi^2_{30} = 97.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed that own and partners' personality traits

explain a negligibly greater proportion of variance in the criterion for women ( $R^2 = .17$ ) compared to men ( $R^2 = .15$ ), controlling for covariates. Similarly, the APIM for emotional jealousy ( $\chi^2_{30} = 66.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed that own and partners' personality traits explain approximately equal levels of variance in the criterion for women ( $R^2 = .07$ ) and men ( $R^2 = .06$ ), controlling for covariates.

In women, Emotionality was found to be predictive of the higher levels of cognitive and emotional aspects of their jealousy, Honesty-humility negatively predicted the cognitive and behavioral aspects, and Openness was found to be predictive of higher levels of cognitive jealousy only. The only significant partner effects on jealousy in women were the negative effects of men's Openness on behavioral jealousy and Honesty-humility on cognitive jealousy.

For men, the Honesty-humility trait was found to be the most predictive, as it was shown to predict lower levels of all three aspects of their jealousy. Another significant trait in men was Agreeableness, which was found to predict their low behavioral jealousy. When it comes to partner effects on men's jealousy, high Disintegration and Honesty-humility in women were predictive of emotional jealousy, low Conscientiousness was predictive of behavioral jealousy, while all three aspects were negatively predicted by Agreeableness.

## Discussion

In this study, we aimed to shed light on connections between the three aspects of jealousy and personality traits framed under the model encompassing HEXACO and Disintegration, proposed as a seven-factor model (Knežević, Lazarević, Bosnjak, et al., 2022). As we employed correlations and the APIM, we will focus mostly on the effects that were confirmed at the dyad level.

The most remarkable differences were observed for cognitive jealousy, where own and partners' personality traits explained 18% of the variance in women and 7% in men. In women, this aspect of jealousy was predicted by their high Emotionality and Openness, low Honesty-humility, and their partners' low Honesty-humility. In men, however, cognitive jealousy was predicted only by their low Honesty-humility and their partners' low

Agreeableness. Hence, it is plausible to note that cognitive jealousy in women can be attributed to a greater extent to their own personality traits. Even though the design of the study does not allow these effects to be interpreted as causal, we can still offer some speculative and theoretical interpretations of possible influence. People who score low on Honesty-humility can be described as self-centered, and if their partners are not fully committed to them, that may provoke jealous thoughts. Such a tendency might be amplified in women if they score high on Emotionality because high scores indicate proneness to worrying and experiencing anxiety. On the other hand, the positive effect of Openness on jealous thoughts might seem surprising at first glance. However, after considering the content of the Openness trait, this effect becomes less surprising. Among other descriptors, Openness encompasses imaginative thinking, which could facilitate cognitive jealousy in women, especially if they score higher on Emotionality and are paired with men who score low on Honesty-humility. The effect of a partner's low Honesty-humility on cognitive jealousy in women is quite straightforward. As Reinhardt and Reinhard (2023) reported, individuals with low scores in Honesty-humility are more inclined to be dishonest in emotional relationships and usually display lower levels of commitment and closeness. Of course, such characteristics and behaviors in men may facilitate jealous thoughts in their partners.

Regarding behavioral jealousy, there was almost no difference between women and men in the amount of variance explained by personality traits (17% in women and 15% in men). However, the effects of personality traits on this aspect were quite different between women and men, with the exception of the already discussed negative actor effect of Honesty-humility in both genders. The partner's low Openness was predictive of behavioral jealousy in women. Individuals who score low on Openness are usually expected to be "closed-minded" (see Kashima et al., 2017; Knežević, Lazarević, Mededović, et al., 2022; Kruglanski, 2013), meaning they are likely to have conservative and traditional attitudes in general, including their views of social roles and related behaviors. Specifically, in men, this might include, for instance, going out and socializing with female friends while resenting such behavior in their partners and trying to impose "appropriate" behavior. Consequently, this may induce a jealous response in women. As we already mentioned, there is a reasonable overlap between the negative pole of



Honesty-humility and the Dark Triad traits (see Dinić et al., 2018; Dinić & Wertag, 2018), which have been studied in the context of relationship dynamics and mating strategies. Studies have shown that individuals who tend to score high in the Dark Triad usually have a higher number of sexual partners (Borráz-León & Rantala, 2021), a greater preference for short-term mating (Tucaković et al., 2022), and are more prone to infidelity (March et al., 2023; Lişman et al., 2023). Given this, men with low Honesty-humility might display at least some cues of interest in extra-dyadic relationships, if not actual infidelity. Hence, this may provoke jealousy in their partners. On the other hand, it seems that behavioral jealousy in men, related to low Agreeableness and Conscientiousness of their partners, could be explained in an entirely different way. The behavior associated with low scores on these two traits in women can be described as temper-driven and unpredictable – characteristics that their partners might perceive as a lack of commitment and a threat to the relationship, and that might facilitate monitoring behaviors in men. Although there is not much research on dyad-level associations, Seiffge-Krenke and Burk (2015) found in adolescent couples that non-constructive conflict resolution (i.e., psychologically and physically aggressive) in females relates positively to their male partners' jealousy. Hence, rebellious and disobedient acts in women are more likely to trigger jealous behavior in men than *vice versa*. However, it remains quite challenging to discern the actual reason for the difference we found.

Emotional jealousy produced somewhat different connections with personality traits compared to the previously discussed cognitive and behavioral aspects in terms of significant predictors in the APIM. However, an approximately equal amount of variance in this criterion was explained by personality traits (7% in women and 6% in men). Our results showed that women tend to experience higher levels of emotional jealousy if their “personality profile” is characterized by higher Emotionality, which is the only significant effect of all possible actor and partner effects. From a theoretical perspective, this result is not surprising. Women are indeed more prone to developing emotional jealousy (Buss & Haselton, 2005), and their emotional vulnerability (i.e., high Emotionality) might be one of the main factors contributing to jealous feelings, irrespective of whom they are coupled with. In men, emotional jealousy was predicted by their own low Honesty-humility, which is a reasonable effect that has already been discussed. However,

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emotional jealousy in men was also predicted by their partner's high Disintegration and Honesty-humility and low Agreeableness. The partner effect of low Honesty-humility has already been addressed as well. Still, the partner effect of Disintegration on men's emotional jealousy is unique and needs clarification. Previous studies have shown that Disintegration is related to proneness to intuitive and irrational thinking (Purić & Jokić, 2023) and insecure attachment (Stanković et al., 2022). Along with low Agreeableness, these characteristics in women may contribute to an atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity, which might provoke a jealous emotional response in men. However, the positive partner effect of women's Honesty-humility on emotional jealousy in men is quite challenging to understand; moreover, it is atheoretical and could be seen as a statistical artifact.

Although novel and important findings are presented, some important limitations of the study need to be noted. The sample was not representative of the general population, limiting the generalizability of the findings. While the APIM is widely considered the best choice for analyzing dyadic data, it is important to note that many significant associations observed in the correlation analysis were not supported by the APIMs (i.e., they turned into non-significant effects). This is a consequence not only of partners' interdependence but also of the high number of variables included in the model. Therefore, some of these connections should not be discarded easily; rather, they should be further examined in future studies. As mentioned, the design of our study does not allow us to claim causality; instead, our interpretations of the findings should be seen as theoretical speculations about potential influence, providing pathways for future research and justifying further examination of personality–jealousy connections. Future studies are needed to thoroughly explain the relationships our study revealed and to better understand the nature of these connections. These future efforts should primarily focus on longitudinal designs, though some cross-sectional studies are also desirable. For instance, it would be beneficial to include partner-assessments (i.e., observer-reports) of jealousy alongside the self-assessments we applied.

## Conclusion

Our study significantly contributed to the empirical literature on the relationships between jealousy and personality traits, pointing to the novel findings about (i) how jealousy in partners relates to their traits and (ii) how jealousy in women/men relates to their partner's traits, (iii) the extent to which the three aspects of jealousy can be explained by the HEXACO traits and Disintegration, and (iv) the most substantial differences. According to the APIM, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional jealousy in women was shown to be more strongly related to their own than their partners' personality traits. Their Emotionality emerged as a unique predictor of their cognitive and emotional jealousy, while it was not even associated with any aspect of jealousy in men nor with a partner's jealousy in either women or men. Therefore, it seems that high Emotionality in women – but not in men – amplifies the proneness to develop jealousy. On the other hand, women's low Honesty-humility was a significant predictor of their cognitive and behavioral jealousy. This indicates that women tend to develop higher levels of jealousy if they are more self-centered and emotionally vulnerable, whereas partners' influence is relatively weak. Unlike women, all aspects of jealousy in men were predicted by their low Honesty-humility and their partners' low Agreeableness. Hence, it can be concluded that the partner effect is somewhat stronger on men's jealousy. In sum, we can draw some conclusions with regard to similarities and differences by looking back at the most stable findings. Both women and men tend to be more jealous if they score low on Honesty-humility. This proneness is likely to be amplified in women if they score high on Emotionality and in men if their partners score low on Agreeableness. The findings we highlighted have some practical implications. These insights can be beneficial in psychotherapy and counseling related to relationship problems revolving around jealousy. Specifically, some interventions can be reorganized to be gender-specific and more effective. For women, interventions should focus more on their emotional vulnerability. For men, interventions should focus more on communication strategies, which could help reduce the effect of their partners' Agreeableness.

### Conflict of interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

### Data availability statement

Data used in this paper are available upon a reasonable request.

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# Appendix

Table A1

*Intercorrelation matrix for personality traits and jealousy aspects in women and men*

	Women										Men									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<b>Women</b>																				
1. Ex (w)	-																			
2. Em (w)	-.28**	-																		
3. Ag (w)	.09	-.18**	-																	
4. Co (w)	.10	-.09	.01	-																
5. Op (w)	.14	.19**	.13	.02	-															
6. Ho (w)	-.03	-.05	.23**	.14*	.10	-														
7. Di (w)	-.32**	.20**	-.12	-.20**	.14*	-.28**	-													
8. CJ (w)	-.14*	.24**	-.20**	-.19**	.04	-.27**	.31**	-												
9. BJ (w)	-.05	.22**	-.23**	-.12	-.15**	-.33**	.18**	.56**	-											
10. EJ (w)	-.11	.26**	-.18**	-.11	-.13	-.11	.15**	.40**	.38**	-										
<b>Men</b>																				
11. Ex (m)	.00	.07	.04	.08	.01	.06	-.16**	-.05	-.06	-.06	-									
12. Em (m)	.01	-.11	.09	-.01	.20**	.02	.02	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.10	-								
13. Ag (m)	.08	-.05	-.04	.07	.02	-.02	-.17**	-.05	-.08	.10	.09	-.04	-							
14. Co (m)	.03	-.05	.05	-.03	-.06	-.15**	-.01	-.03	-.02	.03	-.15**	-.09	-.12	-						
15. Op (m)	-.04	-.23	.08	.12	.25**	.05	-.13	-.18**	-.22**	-.11	-.07	.11	.14*	-.05	-					
16. Ho (m)	-.14*	-.07	.10	.10	.09	.24**	-.06	-.24**	-.23**	.03	-.08	.02	.27**	.06	.16**	-				
17. Di (m)	-.17**	.09	-.15**	-.03	.02	-.02	.33**	.16**	.14*	.10	-.33**	.23**	-.18**	-.36**	.10	-.28**	-			
18. CJ (m)	-.11	.10	-.22**	-.10	-.03	-.06	.19**	.43**	.26**	.24**	-.00	.01	-.13	-.06	-.14	-.21**	.11	-		
19. BJ (m)	-.05	.10	-.22**	-.20**	-.04	-.06	.10	.28**	.24**	.21**	.10	-.10	-.28**	.13	-.12	-.26**	.08	.59**	-	
20. EJ (m)	-.04	.05	-.16**	.14	-.11	.03	.17**	.15**	.14*	.23**	-.09	.03	-.13	.07	-.15**	-.15**	.10	.34**	.29**	-

Note. Ex = Extraversion; Em = Emotionality; Ag = Agreeableness; Co = Conscientiousness; Op = Openness; Ho = Honesty-Humility, Di = Disintegration; CJ = Cognitive jealousy; BJ = Behavioral jealousy; EJ = Emotional jealousy; w = women; m = men.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

