

## The Mediating Role of Guilt in the Relationship Between Dark Personality Traits and Tendency Toward Marital Infidelity Among Married Individuals

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the introduction, the paragraph beginning “Individuals enter marriage for a variety of reasons, including love, commitment, personal growth, and the pursuit of life goals” needs stronger theoretical grounding. The manuscript would benefit from a clearer conceptual transition from marriage as a relational institution to marital infidelity as a violation of commitment and trust. At present, the paragraph moves quickly from the general meaning of marriage to infidelity without developing why marital commitment is psychologically relevant to the variables under study.

The sentence “One of the most destructive events that can occur within a marital relationship is marital infidelity” is appropriate, but the introduction should clarify whether the study examines actual infidelity, attitudes toward infidelity, or tendency toward infidelity. These constructs are conceptually related but not identical. The manuscript should define “tendency

toward marital infidelity” more precisely and distinguish it from actual extramarital behavior, because the measurement instrument appears to assess inclination or attitude rather than documented behavior.

In the Methods section, the sentence “The statistical population consisted of all married individuals residing in Neyshabur, Iran, in 2024” is broad, but the recruitment procedure indicates that many participants were selected from universities, public gatherings, Friday prayer ceremonies, and psychology workshops. This may introduce a systematic sampling bias. The authors should more clearly describe the sampling frame and acknowledge that the sample may not fully represent all married individuals in Neyshabur.

The sample description reports that 80.3% of participants were female. This imbalance is important because gender may influence marital infidelity attitudes, guilt-proneness, and responses to dark personality traits. The manuscript should either statistically control for gender in the path model or justify why gender was not included as a covariate. At minimum, the limitation section should explicitly address the gender imbalance and its implications for generalizability.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing the adverse consequences of infidelity, the manuscript mentions “individual, familial, social, and spiritual harms” but does not organize these consequences analytically. I recommend restructuring this paragraph by separating psychological outcomes, couple-level outcomes, and family/social outcomes. This would strengthen the rationale for why infidelity tendency is a significant preventive target rather than merely a post-betrayal clinical concern.

The paragraph beginning “Personality disorders are defined as enduring, pervasive, and maladaptive patterns...” needs refinement because the study does not assess personality disorders clinically. The manuscript should avoid implying that participants have personality disorders. Instead, it should emphasize that dark personality traits are subclinical personality tendencies that may exist in the general population and influence relational functioning without necessarily meeting diagnostic thresholds.

The introduction introduces the Dark Triad through narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, but the results and tables use the term “Antisocial” instead of “Psychopathy.” This inconsistency should be corrected throughout the manuscript. If the Dirty Dozen psychopathy subscale was used, the variable should consistently be labeled “psychopathy.” If the authors intentionally renamed it “antisocial traits,” they must justify this operational decision and explain how it corresponds to the original scale.

In the sentence “Individuals high in dark personality traits often exhibit limited self-awareness and may be perceived as maladaptive by others without recognizing these characteristics themselves,” the manuscript should explain how this feature is relevant to guilt. The study’s core mediation hypothesis depends on the assumption that dark traits reduce moral-emotional sensitivity; therefore, the introduction should more explicitly connect dark personality traits to reduced guilt, diminished remorse, moral disengagement, and interpersonal harm.

The paragraph beginning “One variable that may mediate this relationship is guilt” is central to the study but needs more conceptual depth. Guilt should be distinguished from shame, remorse, regret, and moral standards. Since the study uses the Guilt Inventory with trait guilt, state guilt, and moral standards, the introduction should briefly explain which aspect of guilt is theoretically expected to mediate the relationship between dark traits and infidelity tendency.

The final paragraph of the introduction states the study aim, but the manuscript should also explicitly formulate the research hypotheses before the Methods section. For example, the authors could specify that dark personality traits are expected to positively predict marital infidelity tendency, negatively predict guilt, and indirectly predict infidelity tendency through reduced guilt. This would improve logical coherence between the theoretical rationale and the path model tested later.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.