

Article

# Exploring How the Dark Triad and Curiosity Shape the Trajectory of Affective Events in Response to COVID-19 Stress and Psychological Well-Being: A Three-Way Interaction Model

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**Abstract:** Background: The present research relied on the affective events theory to develop a framework explaining how daily micro-events trigger affective reactions that, in turn, influence quality-of-life indicators (i.e., psychological well-being and COVID-19 stress). We further delineated theoretical arguments for curiosity as a boundary condition that moderated this relation and proposed the dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) as a threatening factor. Methods: We conducted two studies to test the model. Study one analyzed the moderated mediation model regarding COVID-19 stress (n = 241), and study two (n = 653) analyzed the model regarding psychological well-being as the outcome. Results: Study one demonstrated that daily hassles increased COVID-19 stress via a negative effect, but this was not contingent on the levels of curiosity and the dark triad traits. However, the mediating path of positive affect between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress was conditional upon the levels of curiosity and the dark triad traits (Machiavellianism and psychopathy), such that when individuals scored high on curiosity and dark traits, the indirect effect became stronger. The results showed that narcissism did not moderate the moderated mediation relationship. Study two showed that daily uplifts boosted psychological well-being through positive affect, and this relation was dependent on curiosity and on the three dark traits, such that it became weaker as curiosity decreased and the dark triad traits increased. We also found that daily hassles, by triggering negative affect, decreased psychological well-being, in particular for those who scored lower on curiosity and higher on psychopathy and narcissism (but not for Machiavellianism). Conclusions: Overall, COVID-19 stress seems to be more responsive to daily hassles than to daily uplifts. Nevertheless, when daily uplifts are factored in, they foster a sense of well-being that helps reduce COVID-19-related stress, especially in individuals who are naturally curious and exhibit high levels of Machiavellian and psychopathic traits. Conversely, psychological well-being appears to be more influenced by situational factors, as it is affected by both types of daily micro-events. We discuss the implications of both studies in light of the affective events theory.

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**Keywords:** daily micro-events; affect; curiosity; well-being; dark triad; COVID-19 stress

## 1. Introduction

Interest in quality-of-life indicators has increased in the past years. This is particularly important if one considers the pandemic times in which we are living, mainly characterized by enhanced emotional distress in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This has had a significant impact on individuals' psychological well-being (e.g., Bhuiyan et al. 2021). Their fear of infection has impaired individuals' psychological functioning (Bonanno et al. 2007). Moreover, the identified nonadherence to COVID-19 treatments or

vaccines may also be exponentiated for some individuals, for instance, for individuals with dark traits (Pompili et al. 2013).

Relying on the affective events theory (AET; Weiss and Cropanzano 1996), we expect that daily events, daily hassles, and uplifts trigger affective reactions, which, in turn, influence COVID-19 stress and psychological well-being. The AET suggests that these mediation paths are moderated by personal characteristics, such as traits.

In such unpredictable and volatile times, curiosity can be a personal resource to creatively adapt the individual to uncertain conditions. Even though curiosity has been positively associated with diverse indicators of well-being, namely life satisfaction (e.g., Park et al. 2004) and well-being (Peterson et al. 2007), there have been few studies exploring if curiosity may be a characteristic framed in the AET, which may moderate the link between affect and the delivered outcomes.

Moreover, recently, there has been an increased interest in socially aversive traits, known as the dark triad (DT) traits (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism). In the current study, we expect that the DT, due to its pervasive nature, may buffer the moderated mediation of curiosity on the relationship between daily micro-events and quality-of-life indicators via affect.

Thus, the present research aims to contribute to the expanding of knowledge about daily events and their relations with affect and two indicators of quality of life. We expect that daily micro-events will influence COVID-19 stress (study one) and psychological well-being (study two) via affect. We also expect that these relations will be moderated by curiosity and the DT.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses

### 2.1. Affective Events Theory

The importance of affective events to individual experiences and behavior within organizational settings is increasingly acknowledged. The affective events theory has focused on its importance and assumes that work conditions (e.g., task characteristics) stimulate the occurrence of daily micro-events (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996). These are the tiny and affective things that occur at work and promote affective reactions. Daily micro-events include daily uplifts and daily hassles. Daily uplifts are defined as daily pleasures that uplift an individual's daily satisfaction (Junça-Silva et al. 2021, 2022b). Instances of daily uplifts include receiving positive feedback, experiencing a pleasant respite during work, or interacting with individuals who display empathy (Junça-Silva and Silva 2023). The encounter of such daily uplifts tends to elicit positive emotions, such as pride and happiness (Basch and Fisher 1998), subsequently leading to favorable behaviors within the workplace. Conversely, daily hassles encompass minor irritations, frustrations, or distressing occurrences that affect individuals somehow (e.g., encountering someone with a sour disposition or facing interruptions during work), consequently evoking negative affective responses like sadness or anger. These negative affective reactions, in turn, detrimentally impact their level of work engagement (Junça-Silva et al. 2022a; Newman and Nezlek 2021).

### 2.2. COVID-19 Stress

The concerns with the coronavirus crisis regarding individuals' mental health have been increasing all over the world. The coronavirus crisis, which started in 2019 (COVID-19), has been recognized as a major crisis with a significant impact on individuals' psychological wellness (Bhuiyan et al. 2021). For example, data from China has demonstrated that 25% of the overall population has experienced moderate to severe levels of anxiety or stress-related symptoms (e.g., Wang et al. 2020). Other studies have shown that the fear of COVID-19 is associated with its related stress (Park et al. 2020). Thus, the fear of COVID-19 and the stress related to COVID-19 appear to be increasing all over the world.

The COVID-19 stress syndrome has been conceptualized as a collection of five interlinked symptom categories: (1) fear of danger and contamination, which involves apprehension regarding the harmful nature of COVID-19 and the fear of coming into contact with potentially contaminated objects or surfaces (known as fomites) carrying SARS-CoV-2; (2) concerns related to socioeconomic factors, encompassing worries about the economic and social costs associated with COVID-19, such as personal financial difficulties and disruptions in the supply chain; (3) xenophobia, characterized by apprehensive attitudes towards foreigners as potential spreaders of SARS-CoV-2; (4) symptoms of traumatic stress, including experiences of direct or indirect exposure to trauma linked to COVID-19, such as distressing nightmares, intrusive thoughts, or disturbing mental imagery; and (5) compulsive behaviors of repeatedly checking and seeking reassurance. These symptom categories were identified by Taylor et al. (2020a, 2020b) in their research.

Some studies have demonstrated the impact that COVID-19 stress syndrome has on individuals. For example, Taylor et al. (2020a) showed that anxiety may influence behaviors in such a way that low levels result in reluctant prevention behaviors (e.g., handwashing), and high levels may trigger socially disruptive behaviors (e.g., panic about going shopping). Additionally, COVID-19 psychosocial impairment is related to suicidality, as there are neurobiological factors, neuro-immunological biomarker brain-derived neurotrophic factors, and other neuromodulators in both COVID-19 psychosocial impairment and suicidality (Orsolini et al. 2020). Lastly, the identified nonadherence to COVID-19 treatments or vaccines appears to increase negative reactions for some individuals, for instance, for individuals with dark traits or personality disorders (Vazquez-Nava et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2020).

COVID-19 stress was also related to other psychopathologies, such as health anxiety, anxiety sensitivity, intolerance of uncertainty, disgust propensity and sensitivity, perceived infectability, germ aversion, or obsessive-compulsive contamination concerns (Taylor et al. 2020b). Taylor et al. (2020a) also evidenced that individuals with higher COVID-19 stress were more likely to feel anxiety and depression, tended to believe more in COVID-19 conspiracy theories, performed more frequent hygiene behaviors, were more likely to wear facemasks, tended to stockpile food and other items, and were more likely to avoid public transportation (due to its crowded nature) and grocery stores.

Despite the existing studies on COVID-19 and its impact on diverse behaviors, much remains to be explored regarding the sources of distress (Breslau et al. 2023; Taylor et al. 2020a). Because COVID-19 stress appears to be affective in nature, we believe that situational factors, such as daily micro-events, by being a source of affective responses, may enhance or minimize COVID-19 stress (e.g., Alyami et al. 2022; Junça-Silva and Vilela 2023; Lo Destro and Gasparini 2021). Moreover, there is empirical evidence that the preponderance of negative affect, compared to the positive ones, is closely related to illness, low mental health, or stress (Diener et al. 2009; Kimhi et al. 2020). For instance, recently, Junça-Silva and Vilela (2023) showed that daily micro-events predicted stress responses through affective reactions.

Even though COVID-19-related stress is important, nowadays, few studies are analyzing it as a result of daily micro-events at work (see Junça-Silva and Vilela 2023). Based on the mentioned assumptions and the affective events theory, we expect that daily uplifts may be a positive antecedent of a positive affect, which may minimize the levels of COVID-19 stress. Therefore, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1a.** *Positive affect will mediate the negative relationship between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress.*

**Hypothesis 1b.** *Negative affect will mediate the positive relationship between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress.*

### 2.3. Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being describes the eudaimonic nature of well-being (Ryff and Keyes 1995). Psychological well-being has been defined as “the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one’s true potential” (Ryff 1995, p. 100). This concept of well-being not only includes a happy life, as proposed by hedonistic well-being, which is also called subjective well-being but also a meaningful one. It includes perceptions of engagement with existential challenges of life as well as human development and examines perceived thriving concerning the existential challenges of life, such as growing and developing as a person or establishing quality ties to others (Keyes et al. 2002). Based on this, Ryff and Singer (1998) postulated that psychological well-being included six dimensions of human actualization: (1) autonomy, (2) personal growth, (3) self-acceptance, (4) life purpose, (5) mastery, and (6) positive relatedness.

Individuals’ well-being is significantly impacted by the continuous affective fluctuations experienced as a result of micro-daily events (Junça-Silva and Caetano 2011). It is crucial to recognize that well-being is highly contingent upon the unique experiences of each individual (Kettlewell et al. 2020). Nevertheless, the majority of research has primarily focused on subjective well-being. For instance, empirical studies have demonstrated that micro-daily events exert influence over various aspects of work-related well-being, such as work engagement and satisfaction (Junça-Silva et al. 2018). When employees encounter daily uplifts, it not only serves to enhance their well-being but also acts as a buffer against the adverse effects of daily hassles (Rueff-Lopes et al. 2017). This is because daily uplifts, through the activation of positive affect, promote well-being and mitigate the fatigue that individuals may experience throughout the course of their workday. Haider et al. (2017) also demonstrated that events related to work-life balance influence psychological well-being, which results in better performance. In a similar vein, Cobo-Rendón et al. (2020) demonstrated that balanced affectivity (between positive and negative affect) predicted psychological well-being, which was also predictive of affective balance. Likewise, Mäirean et al. (2019) demonstrated that gratitude, which is prompted by events, delivered higher scores on well-being through the affective response to those events. As such, based on all the empirical evidence, we hypothesized the following.

**Hypothesis 2a.** *Positive affect will mediate the positive relationship between daily uplifts and psychological well-being.*

**Hypothesis 2b.** *Negative affect will mediate the negative relationship between daily hassles and psychological well-being.*

### 2.4. Work-Related Curiosity

People possess a natural inclination towards various aspects and domains of life. In the realm of contemporary work marked by its volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, curiosity plays a pivotal role in facilitating learning as a means to adapt to ever-present and unpredictable changes. Curiosity, as defined by Kashdan et al. (2018), refers to the inclination to actively seek out unfamiliar, intricate, and demanding interactions with the surrounding world. It drives individuals to explore unanticipated problems and events, enabling them to alleviate uncertainties and simultaneously cultivate a sense of mastery (Litman 2008). Research has demonstrated that curiosity possesses a motivational nature that profoundly influences the processes of learning, knowledge acquisition, and overall life satisfaction (Kashdan et al. 2020). Furthermore, consistently embracing and acting upon curious inclinations tends to expand one’s knowledge, foster intellectual and creative prowess, and strengthen social relationships over time (Von Stumm and Ackerman 2013).

The presence of curiosity in the realm of work and organizations holds significant value. Mussel (2013) contended that curiosity empowers individuals to adapt to organizational changes, augments receptiveness towards novelty in the form of individuals,

ideas, and technologies, and enhances flexibility when confronted with the need for change.

Work-related curiosity encompasses four dimensions as outlined in the research conducted by Kashdan and Steger (2007). The first dimension is characterized by joyous exploration, which refers to the experience of happiness while seeking new solutions, ideas, and experiences. The second dimension, known as deprivation sensitivity, is the inclination to persist in the face of challenges until problems are effectively resolved. Stress tolerance, the third dimension, pertains to the perceived ability to withstand the anxiety that arises from encountering new and unfamiliar situations. Finally, the fourth dimension involves openness to people's ideas, also referred to as social curiosity.

Consequently, curiosity plays a pivotal role in various aspects of work. It brings forth joy during the process of exploration, enhances the focus on resolving complex problems due to its association with deprivation sensitivity, enables individuals to be receptive to the ideas of others, and fosters resilience and the capacity to effectively manage stress, which are essential attributes for pursuing new, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous endeavors (Kashdan et al. 2020). A curious individual tends to exhibit certain traits that are highly beneficial in the context of organizational dynamics. They are responsive and adaptable to changes within their work environment, readily embracing the need for adjustment. Moreover, they approach new colleagues and technologies with enthusiasm, actively seeking to comprehend and incorporate them into their work practices. Furthermore, they showcase adaptability when faced with unfamiliar circumstances and remain composed and unfazed when encountering unexpected events (Neubert et al. 2015).

The empirical investigation into the influence of curiosity on various personal outcomes such as well-being (Kashdan and Steger 2007) has been a subject of interest in personality research. However, the significance of curiosity in organizational settings has only recently gained recognition (Kashdan et al. 2020). The existing body of literature suggests that curiosity is conducive to positive outcomes (Kashdan et al. 2018). For instance, at an intrapersonal level, individuals with a curious disposition have been found to exhibit reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kaczmarek et al. 2014). Additionally, curiosity has been shown to have a positive impact on motivation and is a predictor of life satisfaction, well-being, and a sense of meaning in life (Boehm et al. 2011). At an interpersonal level, Kashdan et al. (2004) demonstrated that curiosity has a positive association with the social support individuals receive and provide to others. Similarly, Litman (2010) revealed that curiosity positively predicts a cycle of responsiveness between individuals, thereby enhancing the quality of their relationship. Furthermore, trait curiosity is linked with higher partner ratings of attraction and closeness. Nevertheless, this association is influenced by social anxiety, as curiosity is more strongly associated with greater attraction among individuals with lower levels of social anxiety compared to those with higher levels (Kashdan and Roberts 2005). However, the positive effects of curiosity on social support are diminished in the presence of high levels of dark personality traits, such as the dark triad (Muris et al. 2013).

According to Kashdan et al. (2018), curiosity plays a significant role in promoting well-being and positive affect in the workplace by stimulating exploratory behaviors and fostering adaptability to unpredictable changes and events. Furthermore, individuals who exhibit openness to others' ideas and possess a tolerance for the unknown and unexpected (Kashdan et al. 2020) are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and greater work engagement. The ability to tolerate stress also enables individuals to reshape their work in innovative and creative ways, ultimately leading to enhanced well-being (Kashdan et al. 2020). Moreover, showing interest in others' ideas fosters healthy work relationships and satisfaction (Kashdan et al. 2018). In summary, embracing higher levels of curiosity is likely to cultivate personal resources that allow employees to experience positive affect more frequently in their work environments.

### 2.5. *The Dark Triad*

The dark triad is a concept that encompasses three malevolent personality traits, namely psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (Paulhus and Williams 2002). These traits are known to be socially undesirable and, when combined, have a profoundly detrimental and destructive impact on both the individuals who possess them and those in their vicinity. Machiavellianism is founded upon three interconnected values: (1) the conviction that only through the manipulation of others can one achieve success; (2) a cynical outlook on the nature of humanity; and (3) an amoral standpoint that places convenience above ethical principles (Forsyth et al. 2012). Psychopathy is characterized by impulsive behavior and is associated with the suppression of personal needs by individuals (Cleckley 1976; Hare 1999). They exhibit a constant pursuit of excitement, display low levels of empathy and anxiety (Spain et al. 2014), and hold a belief in their own superiority that leads to tendencies of self-promotion (LeBreton et al. 2006; Lynam and Widiger 2007). Finally, narcissism is distinguished by an inflated perception of self that encompasses notions of success, control, and self-esteem. Individuals with narcissistic traits continuously seek validation and recognition from others as a means of bolstering their own self-worth (Forsyth et al. 2012).

The impact of the DT on well-being appears to be complex (Junça-Silva and Silva 2023). Diverse researchers have claimed that narcissism is positively related to different forms of well-being and, as such, may be viewed as the “bright side” of the DT (Aghababaei and Błachnio 2015). The dark personality has been consistently demonstrated to negatively predict both forms of well-being, both psychological and subjective (Jonason et al. 2015). For instance, while individuals who score highly on psychopathy or Machiavellianism traits do not live a particularly long and happy life, high scorers on narcissism often report higher levels of self-esteem and subjective well-being (Egan et al. 2014; Zajenkowski and Czarna 2015).

### 2.6. *The Moderated Mediation Model*

The potential interaction between the dark triad and curiosity regarding well-being is intricate and multifaceted. It may vary depending on the context and the immediate gratification perceived by the individuals exhibiting dark personality traits. This notion is substantiated by the trait activation theory, proposed by Tett and Guterman (2000), which posits that specific behaviors associated with a particular trait are activated based on the interpretation of the situation and the inherent benefits derived from it. Within the dark triad, this activation process could result in an escalated ambition to achieve success and establish a favorable social standing (Jones and Figueredo 2012). Furthermore, the exploratory nature of curiosity impels individuals to engage in further endeavors, actively seeking answers and problem-solving, which can evoke feelings of joy during the process of exploration.

The concept that individuals with pronounced dark triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) might show a weaker link between curiosity and overall well-being demands further exploration. Studies by Judge et al. (2006) and Zettler and Solga (2013) provided a foundation for this idea. The diminished association can be understood by considering the nature of the curiosity exhibited by individuals with high levels of these dark traits. Typically, curiosity is viewed as a positive trait that drives individuals to explore, learn, and grow. However, in the context of the dark triad, the nature and orientation of this curiosity may differ significantly. For individuals with strong dark triad traits, their curiosity might be channeled towards goals that are inherently self-serving or manipulative, as suggested by Wisse et al. (2015). This means that their inquisitive nature is not directed towards conventional learning or the pursuit of knowledge for personal growth or the betterment of others. Instead, their curiosity may be aimed at understanding how to manipulate, control, or exploit situations and people for personal gain. The presence of these malevolent traits can lead to a diversion of resources and efforts.

Rather than using their curiosity to engage in healthy and enriching explorations that contribute to personal and societal well-being, these individuals might focus on activities that reinforce their narcissistic, Machiavellian, or psychopathic tendencies. This could involve strategizing ways to dominate others, seeking methods to deceitfully achieve personal goals, or indulging in risk-taking behaviors without regard for the consequences. This misdirection of curiosity can have implications for their overall well-being. While they may achieve certain short-term gains or satisfactions, these are unlikely to lead to long-term fulfillment or a sense of contentment. Traditional pathways to well-being often involve positive social interactions, empathetic engagements, and activities that promote a sense of community and belonging. However, the pursuits aligned with dark triad traits are often at odds with these pathways, potentially leading to a sense of isolation, a lack of genuine social connections, and, ultimately, a diminished sense of well-being. Furthermore, this focus on malevolent goals can lead to environments or situations that are fraught with conflict, mistrust, and negative emotions, further eroding their potential for experiencing true well-being. In essence, the very traits that drive their curiosity might also be the barriers that prevent them from achieving a state of well-being that is more holistic and fulfilling.

Despite the acknowledged significance of personal characteristics regarding well-being (e.g., Diener et al. 2009), only a limited number of studies have investigated the connection between curiosity, the dark triad, and well-being, yielding conflicting and inconclusive results. Therefore, to enhance our understanding of the potential interplay between curiosity and the dark triad about their impact on well-being, we formulated the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 3.** *The DT traits, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily uplifts on COVID-19 stress via positive affect becomes weaker when the individuals' levels of DT, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism are high.*

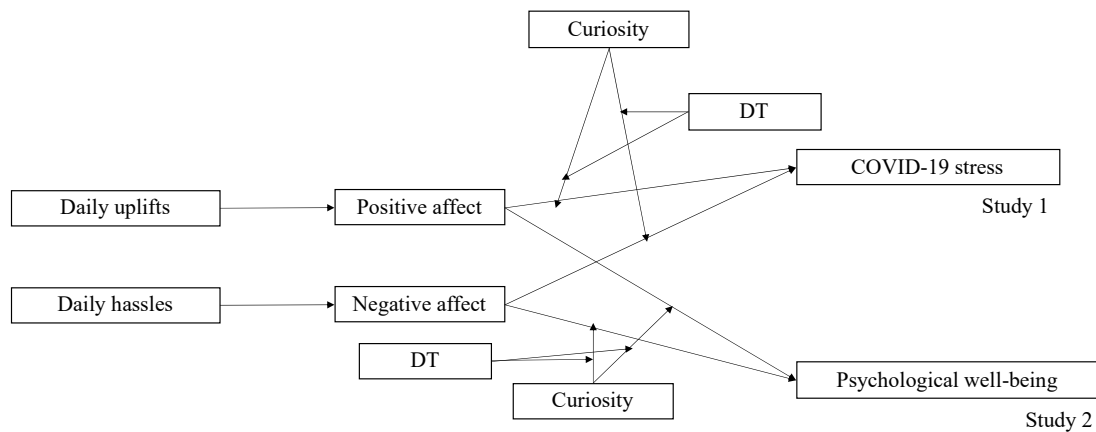
**Hypothesis 4.** *The DT traits, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily hassles on COVID-19 stress via negative affect becomes stronger when the individual' levels of DT, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism are high.*

**Hypothesis 5.** *The DT traits, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily uplifts on psychological well-being via positive affect becomes weaker when the individuals' levels of DT, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism are high.*

**Hypothesis 6.** *The DT traits, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily hassles on psychological well-being via negative affect becomes stronger when the individual' levels of DT, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism are high.*

### 3. Overview of Studies

We examined our hypotheses with two studies. Study one analyzed the moderated mediation model regarding COVID-19 stress, and study two ( $n = 653$ ) analyzed the model with psychological well-being (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The moderated mediation model regarding COVID-19 stress.

#### 4. Study One: An Examination of the Affective Events Regarding COVID-19 Stress

##### 4.1. Method

###### Participants and Procedure

In total, 251 Portuguese working adults were involved in the study, with 78% being female. The average age of the participants was 40 years old, with a standard deviation of 10 years. Most of the participants, 66%, possessed a university degree, while 34% had a non-university degree. The average duration of employment within their organization was 11 years, with a standard deviation of 10 years, whereas the average duration of employment within their current function was 9 years, with a standard deviation of 9 years.

We reached out to individuals employed across diverse sectors of organizations, encompassing health (35%), education (32%), and services (33%). Eight organizations were contacted. Subsequently, the participants were approached through an internal email issued by their human resources director. The correspondence for recruitment elucidated the primary objectives of the investigation, namely, to analyze the apprehension of contamination during the pandemic. Confidentiality assurances were provided, emphasizing the anonymity of participants, and a hyperlink was furnished to facilitate their access to the online survey. Out of the 300 emails dispatched, a total of 251 valid responses were received, signifying an impressive response rate of 84%. The data were collected during the first peak of the COVID-19 outbreak, between April 2020 and June 2020.

##### 4.2. Measures

To measure the daily events, we used the daily hassles and uplifts at work [SDHUS; Junça-Silva et al. 2020) tool. This particular measure gauged the frequency of both positive events, referred to as uplifts, and negative events, known as hassles, experienced within the past 24 hours. The scale comprised eight items assessing uplifts (e.g., “Today, I received positive feedback on my performance”) and ten items assessing hassles (e.g., “Today, I had to deal with someone in a rotten mood”). Participants were required to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (four times or more). The reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88 for the daily uplift dimension and 0.87 for the daily hassle dimension.

In order to measure affect, we employed the 16-item multi-affect indicator (Warr et al. 2014), a tool that evaluated the occurrence rate of positive and negative emotional experiences within the workplace over the previous 24-h period (e.g., “enthusiastic” and “sad”). The respondents provided their answers using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The internal consistency reliability analysis yielded satisfactory results, with an  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.87 for positive affect and 0.95 for negative affect. To enhance the formality of the description, the language and terminology were adjusted accordingly.



To assess curiosity, the multidimensional workplace curiosity scale developed by Kashdan et al. (2020) was employed. We used 12 items that measured various dimensions of curiosity, namely joyous exploration, deprivation sensitivity, stress tolerance, and openness to people's ideas. For example, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as "I experience excitement when contemplating the exploration of different ideas" for joyous exploration, and "I demonstrate persistence in seeking answers to complex questions in my work" for deprivation sensitivity. Similarly, stress tolerance was assessed with items like "I actively confront unfamiliar and intimidating situations without hesitation," while openness to people's ideas was evaluated through statements such as "I value input from colleagues even if it diverges from my current thought process". The respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1—never" to "5—daily". Despite the scale being multidimensional, it was utilized as unidimensional, as other studies have already shown (Junça-Silva and Silva 2022). The internal consistency of the scale was deemed high ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

To measure the DT, we used the Dirty Dozen scale (Jonason and Webster 2010). This included 12 items that measured narcissism (e.g., "I tend to manipulate others to get what I want"), psychopathy (e.g., "Usually, I don't feel remorse"), and Machiavellianism (e.g., "I tend to look for status or prestige"). Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1-totally disagree; 5-totally agree). The overall scale showed an  $\alpha$  of 0.90.

To measure COVID-19 stress, we used the 7-item fear of COVID-19 scale (FCV-19S; Ahorsu et al. 2020). It measures two dimensions of COVID-19 fear, one regarding emotional fear reactions (four items, e.g., "It makes me uncomfortable to think about coronavirus-19"), and the other one regarding symptomatic expressions of fear (three items, e.g., "My hands become clammy when I think about the coronavirus"). Despite the scale being multidimensional, it was utilized as unidimensional, as other studies have already shown (Junça-Silva and Vilela 2023). The responses were provided using a 5-point Likert scale (1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"). The overall scale showed an  $\alpha$  of 0.85.

#### 4.3. Data Analysis

First, descriptive analyses, together with correlations and an inspection of the reliability of the measures, were performed in SPSS. To test hypotheses one and two, we used model four from PROCESS. To test hypotheses three and four, that is, the moderated mediation model, we used PROCESS macro model 18 (Hayes 2018). The products were mean-centered, and bootstrapping (5000 times) was used to provide the confidence intervals.

#### 4.4. Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities of the study variables. All the variables presented moderate associations among them, except for the curiosity trait which was not related to daily hassles and negative affect, and the DT traits which were not associated with both positive and negative affect.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables (study one).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Daily uplifts	2.26	1.06	(0.88)								
2. Daily hassles	1.33	0.91	0.26 **	(0.87)							
3. Positive affect	3.15	0.75	0.40 **	−0.19 **	(0.87)						
4. Negative affect	2.61	0.95	−0.16 *	0.34 **	−0.39 **	(0.95)					
5. Curiosity	3.63	0.77	0.21 **	0.03	0.22 **	0.04	(0.92)				
6. Machiavellianism	1.74	1.04	−0.05	0.20 **	0.02	0.07	0.04	(0.91)			
7. Psychopathy	1.67	0.86	−0.07	0.13 *	−0.03	0.10	−0.04	0.59 **	(0.79)		
8. Narcissism	2.31	1.05	0.02	0.16 **	0.05	0.07	0.15*	0.59 **	0.47 **	(0.89)	
9. COVID-19 stress	2.26	0.82	0.10	0.12	0.03	0.24 **	0.03	−0.20 **	−0.15 *	−0.09	(0.85)

**Notes:**  $N = 241$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Cronbach's  $\alpha$  are in brackets.

#### 4.5. Hypotheses Testing

The indirect effect of positive affect in the relationship between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress is explained herein. Hypothesis 1a expected that positive affect would mediate the relationship between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress. The indirect effect was non-significant (indirect effect = 0.00,  $p > 0.05$ , 95% CI [-0.04, 0.04]); hence, H1a was not supported.

The indirect effect of negative affect in the relationship between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress is explained herein. Hypothesis 1b assumed that negative affect would mediate the link between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress. The indirect effect was significant (0.07,  $p < 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.13]). The relationship between daily hassles and negative affect (a;  $B = 0.36$ ,  $p = .00$ ) and the relationship between negative affect and COVID-19 stress (b;  $B = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) were significant. The total effect (c;  $B = 0.10$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress was also significant. However, the relationship between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress ( $c'$ ;  $B = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.54$ ) after introducing negative affect was not significant, revealing a full mediation effect (Table 2). Thus, H1b was supported.

**Table 2.** The mediating effect of negative affect between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress (study one).

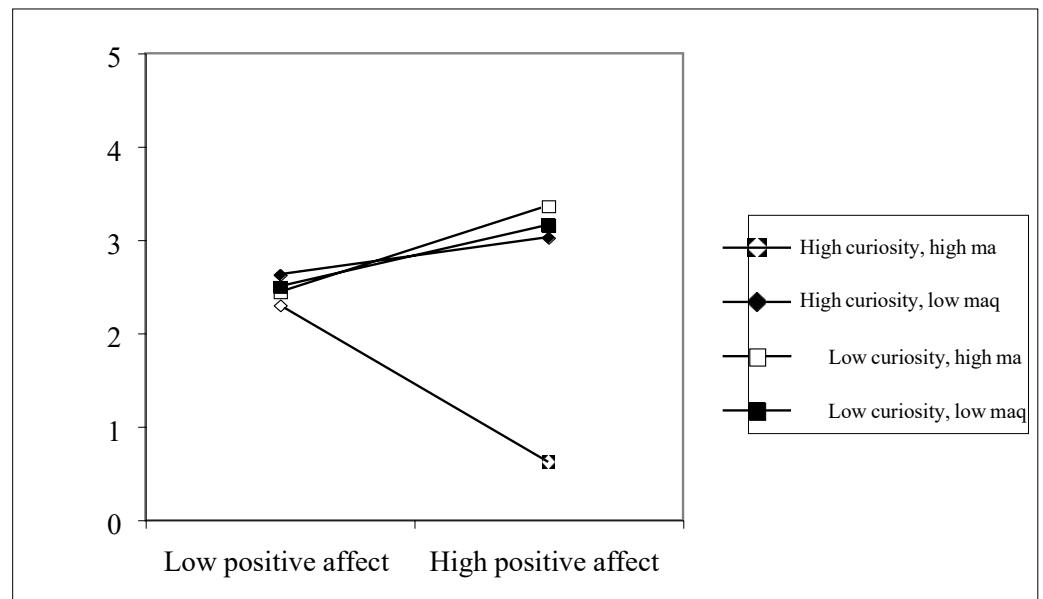
	Negative Affect	COVID-19 Stress
Daily hassles	0.36 **, $R^2 = 0.12$	0.04
Negative affect		0.19
$R^2$	0.06 $F_{(2, 230)} = 6.70$ , $p = 0.00$	

Notes:  $N = 241$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Hypothesis 3. These hypotheses were simultaneously tested using the moderated mediation approach suggested by Hayes (2018). Hypotheses 3a–c expected that the DT traits (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism would moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily uplifts on COVID-19 stress via positive affect would be weaker for higher levels of DT, (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism.

**Machiavellianism.** The results demonstrated that the index of the moderated mediation was significant at  $-0.06$  with a CI of 95% [-0.15, -0.01]. Moreover, we found a significant three-way interaction effect between positive affect, curiosity, and Machiavellianism on COVID-19 stress ( $B = -0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which uniquely accounted for 10% of the variance ( $F_{(224)} = 3.019$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

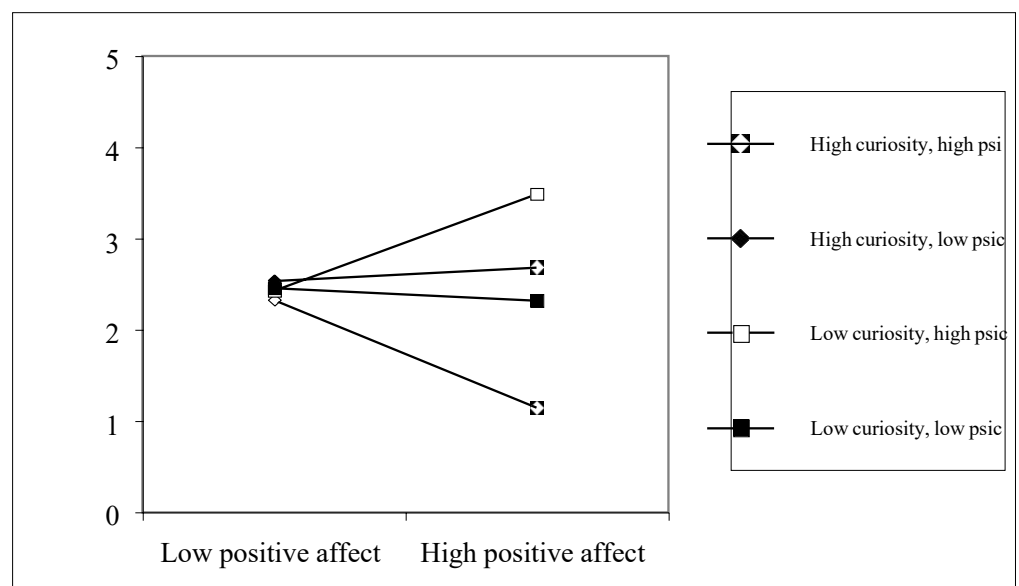
Based on the moderated mediation procedures suggested by Hayes (2018), we looked at the slopes, and we found that the indirect effect of daily uplifts on COVID-19 stress via positive affect was only significant for high levels of both curiosity and Machiavellianism ( $B = -0.12$ , CI 95% [-0.23, -0.03]). That is, COVID-19 stress decreased when positive affect increased for individuals who scored higher on the curiosity and Machiavellianism scales (Figure 2). Thus, the results, even though they support h3a, demonstrated a different pattern than what was expected.



**Figure 2.** The three-way interaction between positive affect, curiosity, and Machiavellianism predicting COVID-19 stress. Note: Maq: Machiavellianism.

**Psychopathy.** The results demonstrated a significant moderated mediation index ( $-0.07$ , CI 95%  $[-0.13, -0.01]$ ). Moreover, we found a significant three-way interaction effect between positive affect, curiosity, and psychopathy on COVID-19 stress ( $B = -0.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which uniquely accounted for 7% of the variance ( $F_{(224)} = 1.989$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

The slope analyses showed that the indirect effect of daily uplifts on COVID-19 stress via positive affect was only significant for low levels of curiosity and high levels of psychopathy ( $B = 0.07$ , CI 95%  $[0.01, 0.17]$ ). That is, COVID-19 stress increased even when positive affect increased for individuals who scored lower on curiosity and higher on psychopathy (Figure 3). Thus, we found support for H3b, but with a different pattern than was expected.



**Figure 3.** The three-way interaction between positive affect, curiosity, and psychopathy predicting psychological well-being.

**Narcissism:** the results demonstrated that the index associated with the moderated mediation was not significant ( $-0.02$ , CI 95%  $[-0.07, 0.04]$ ), thus h3c was not supported.

Hypothesis 4: hypotheses 4a–c expected that the DT traits (a) Machiavellianism, (b) psychopathy, and (c) narcissism would moderate the moderated mediation model such that the moderating effect of curiosity on the indirect effect of daily hassles on COVID-19 stress via negative affect would be stronger for higher levels of the DT traits.

**Machiavellianism:** the results showed that the index associated with the moderated mediation was not significant ( $-0.02$ , CI 95%  $[-0.06, 0.06]$ ). Thus, h4a did not receive support.

**Psychopathy:** the results showed that the index associated with the moderated mediation was not significant ( $0.01$ , CI 95%  $[-0.05, 0.11]$ ). Thus, h4b was not supported.

**Narcissism.** The results showed that the index associated with the moderated mediation was not significant ( $-0.00$ , CI 95%  $[-0.04, 0.06]$ ). Thus, h4c did not receive support.

## 5. Summary of the Results

The results demonstrate that: (1) daily uplifts at work trigger positive affect, but this does not decrease COVID-19-related stress, and (2) the indirect effect appears to be conditional on curiosity and the levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Specifically, COVID-19 stress increases even when positive affect is higher for individuals who score low on curiosity but high on Machiavellianism and psychopathy. On the opposite side, COVID-19 stress decreases when positive affect is higher for individuals who score higher on both curiosity and Machiavellianism and psychopathy. The three-way interaction is not significant for narcissism.

Second, the results support the mediating path between daily hassles, negative affect, and COVID-19 stress, but this is not conditional on individuals' traits. That is, COVID-19 stress appears to be volatile to daily hassles and to the resulting negative affective reactions. These results indicate that daily hassles boost negative affect, which in turn, increase COVID-19 stress. This relation does not depend on the trait level of curiosity and DT. On the other hand, COVID-19 stress appears to be less sensitive to daily uplifts and positive affect. However, it increases in less curious individuals with higher levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

Study one allowed for some confidence in the relationship between daily micro-events, affect, and COVID-19 stress, and the moderating role of curiosity and the DT traits. Complementarily, study two assessed whether these relationships are significant regarding psychological well-being.

## 6. Study Two: The Moderated Mediating Model Regarding Psychological Well-Being

This second study aimed to test the three-way interaction between the three DT traits, curiosity, and affect regarding psychological well-being.

### 6.1. Participants and Procedure

Overall, 650 working adults from diverse sectors (finance, 42%; services, 28%; health, 19%; and education, 11%) took part in this study. On average, the participants' age was 34 years old ( $SD = 11$ ), and the majority identified as female (58%). A significant proportion of them possessed a university degree (69%), while others had completed secondary education (31%). The mean duration of their employment within their organization was 8 years ( $SD = 10$ ), and their average weekly working hours amounted to 38 h ( $SD = 13$ ).

We used the same procedure from study one, however 11 organizations were contacted this time. From the 800 emails sent, there were 650 valid responses, which meant an 82% response rate. The data were collected from January 2021 to May 2021.

### 6.2. Measures

To measure the daily micro-events, affect, curiosity, and DT traits, we used the same scales from study one.

To measure the psychological well-being, we used the Ryff scales of psychological well-being (Ryff 1989). We used six items that evaluated their psychological well-being (e.g., “I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself”). The participants answered via a 5-point Likert scale (1: totally disagree; 5: totally agree).

### 6.3. Results

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities of the study variables. As we can see in Table 3, all the variables were significantly related to each other except for curiosity, which was not related to negative affect, and psychopathy, which was not correlated to curiosity.

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables (study two).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Daily uplifts	3.02	0.94	(0.87)								
2. Daily hassles	1.90	1.10	0.32 **	(0.90)							
3. Positive affect	3.34	0.71	0.53 **	−0.02	(0.88)						
4. Negative affect	2.58	0.78	−0.11 **	0.45 **	−0.27 **	(0.92)					
5. Curiosity	3.73	0.68	0.41 **	0.20 **	0.43 **	0.02	(0.92)				
6. Machiavellianism	1.87	0.80	−0.08 *	0.21 **	0.04	0.22 **	−0.03	(0.82)			
7. Psychopathy	1.92	0.80	0.01	0.16 **	0.18 **	0.19 **	0.01	0.47 **	(0.65)		
8. Narcissism	2.76	0.92	0.11 *	0.27 **	0.15 **	0.18 **	0.25 **	0.47 **	0.31 **	(0.80)	
9. Psysc. well-being	3.99	0.68	0.41 **	−0.00	0.49 **	−0.16 **	0.45 **	0.08 *	0.07	0.12 *	(0.82)

Notes: N = 650; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The indirect effect of positive affect in the relationship between daily uplifts and psychological well-being. Hypothesis 2a posited that the relationship between daily uplifts and psychological well-being would be mediated by employees’ positive affect. The results showed a significant indirect effect (0.15,  $p < 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.20]). Moreover, both the associations between daily uplifts and psychological well-being (a;  $B = 0.40$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) and positive affect and psychological well-being (b;  $B = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) were found to be significant. Additionally, the total effect between daily uplifts and psychological well-being (c;  $B = 0.30$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), as well as the relationship after introducing positive affect (c’;  $B = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), were both significant, indicating a partial mediation effect (see Table 4). Consequently, the findings provided support for Hypothesis 2a.

**Table 4.** The mediating effect of positive affect between daily uplifts and psychological well-being (study two).

	Positive Affect	Psychological Well-Being
Daily uplifts	0.40 **, $R^2 = 0.28$	0.15 **
Positive affect		0.36 **
$R^2 = 0.27$ $F(2, 637) = 118.55$ , $p = 0.00$		

Notes: N = 650; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The indirect effect of negative affect in the relationship between daily hassles and psychological well-being. The indirect effect was significant (−0.05,  $p < 0.01$ , 95% CI [−0.08, −0.02]). The relationship between daily hassles and negative affect (a;  $B = 0.32$ ,  $p = .00$ ) and between negative affect and psychological well-being (b;  $B = −0.17$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) were significant. The total effect (c;  $B = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) between daily hassles and COVID-19 stress was also significant. However, the relationship between daily hassles and psychological well-being (c’;  $B = −0.00$ ,  $p = 0.94$ ) after introducing negative affect was not significant, revealing a full mediation effect (Table 5). Thus, H2b was supported.

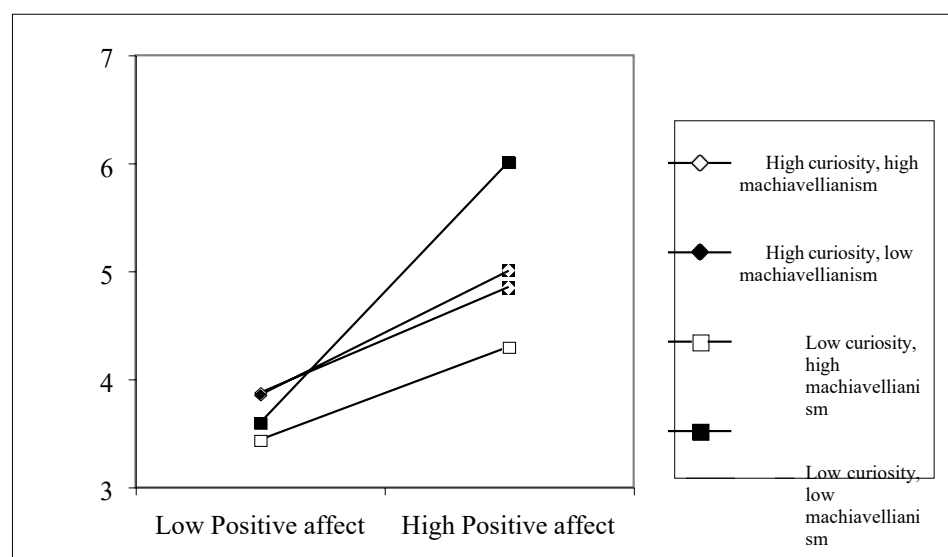
**Table 5.** The mediating effect of negative affect between daily hassles and psychological well-being (study two).

	Negative Affect	Psychological Well-Being
Daily hassles	0.32 **, $R^2 = 0.20$	0.05 *
Negative affect		-0.17 **
$R^2$	0.03 $F_{(2, 638)} = 9.91, p = 0.00$	

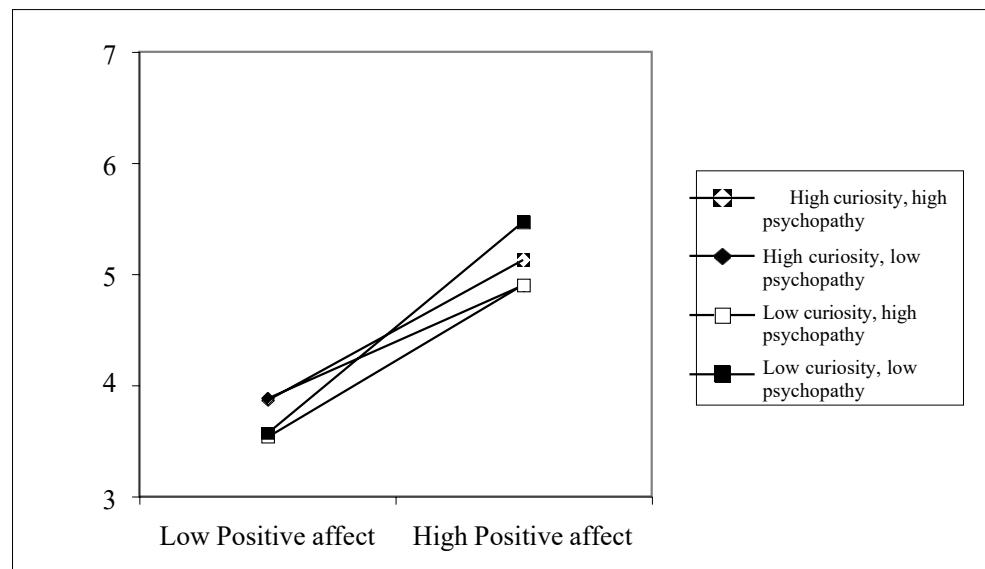
Notes:  $N = 650$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Hypotheses 4. Machiavellianism. The results showed that the index of the moderated mediation was significant (0.05, CI 95% [0.01, 0.09]). Moreover, we found a three-way interaction effect between positive affect, curiosity, and Machiavellianism on psychological well-being ( $B = 0.13, p < 0.01$ ), which accounted for 35% of the variance  $F_{(635)} = 42.215, p < 0.01$ .

Then, we looked at the slopes, and we found that the indirect effect of daily uplifts on psychological well-being via positive affect was significant for all levels of both curiosity and Machiavellianism (see Figure 4 for the interaction patterns). However, the indirect effect was stronger when individuals scored lower both on curiosity and Machiavellianism scales ( $B = 0.19, CI 95\% [0.12, 0.25]$ ) and weaker for individuals with lower levels of curiosity but higher levels of Machiavellianism ( $B = 0.07, CI 95\% [0.02, 0.13]$ ). In other words, psychological well-being increased after increases in positive affect for those low on curiosity and Machiavellianism. Thus, the results provided support for H5a.

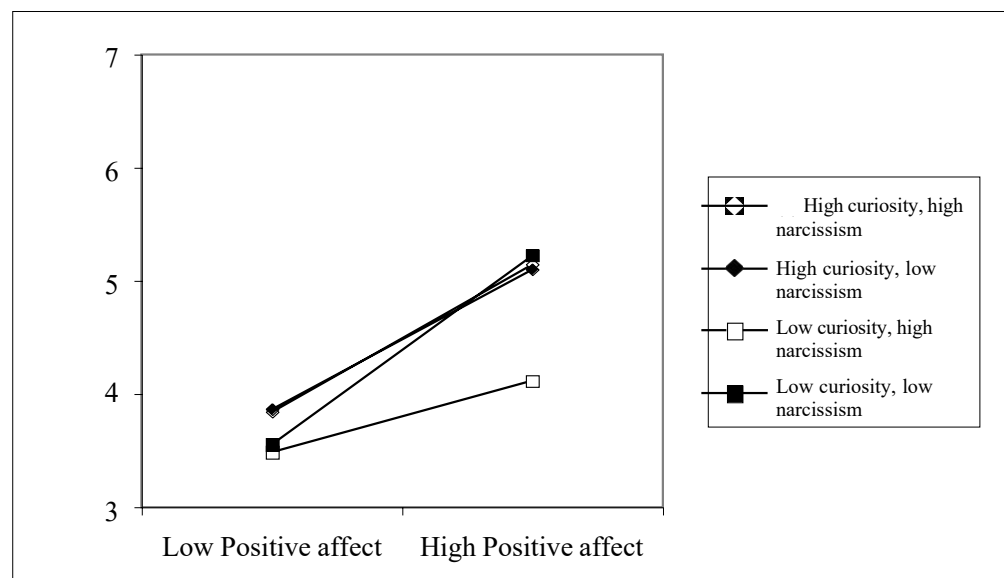
**Figure 4.** The three-way interaction between positive affect, curiosity, and Machiavellianism predicting psychological well-being.

Psychopathy. The results showed that the index of the moderated mediation was significant (0.03, CI 95% [0.00, 0.06]). Moreover, we found a three-way interaction effect between positive affect, curiosity, and psychopathy on psychological well-being ( $B = 0.07, p < 0.05$ ), which accounted for 34% of the variance  $F_{(635)} = 39.841, p < 0.01$ . The slope analyses demonstrated that the indirect effect of daily uplifts on psychological well-being via positive affect was significant for all levels of both curiosity and psychopathy (see Figure 5 for interaction patterns). However, the indirect effect was stronger when individuals scored lower both on curiosity and psychopathy scales ( $B = 0.15, CI 95\% [0.07, 0.22]$ ). In other words, psychological well-being increased after increases in positive affect for those low on curiosity and psychopathy, thus, H5b was supported.



**Figure 5.** The three-way interaction between positive affect, curiosity, and psychopathy predicting psychological well-being.

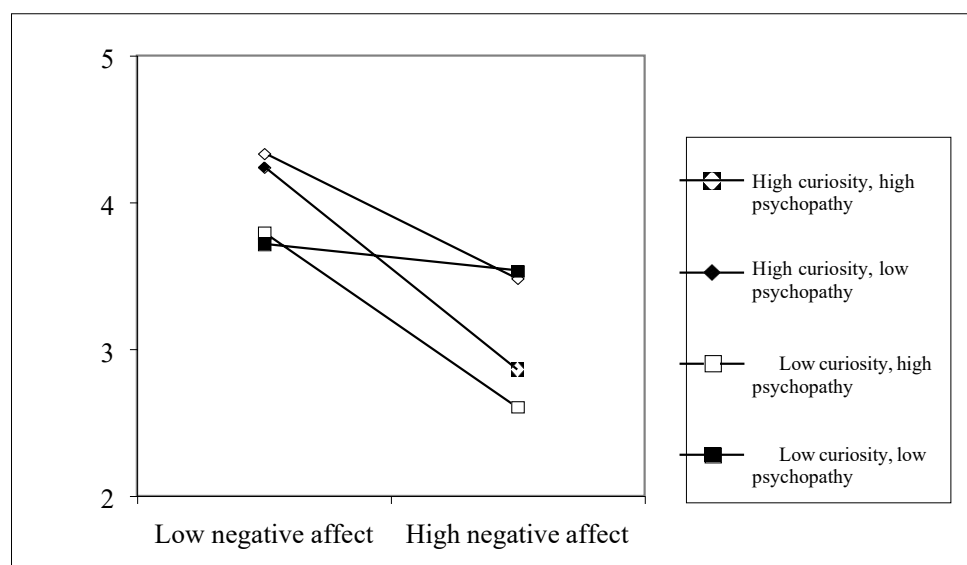
Narcissism. The results demonstrated a significant moderated mediation index (0.04 CI 95% [0.01, 0.06]). Moreover, we found a significant three-way interaction effect between positive affect, curiosity, and narcissism on psychological well-being ( $B = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which uniquely accounted for 35% of the variance,  $F_{(635)} = 41.798$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The slope analyses demonstrated that the indirect effect of daily uplifts on psychological well-being via positive affect was significant for all levels of both curiosity and narcissism, except for low levels of curiosity and high levels of narcissism (see Figure 6 for the interaction patterns). The indirect effect was stronger when individuals scored lower both on curiosity and narcissism scales ( $B = 0.14$  CI 95% [0.08, 0.19]) and weaker for individuals with higher levels of curiosity but lower levels of narcissism ( $B = 0.09$ , CI 95% [0.04, 0.16]). Thus, the results supported H5c.



**Figure 6.** The 3-way interaction between positive affect, curiosity, and narcissism predicting psychological well-being.

Hypotheses 6. Machiavellianism. The results demonstrated a non-significant moderated mediation index ( $-0.00$ , CI 95% [ $-0.03$ ,  $0.03$ ]). Thus, the results did not support H6a.

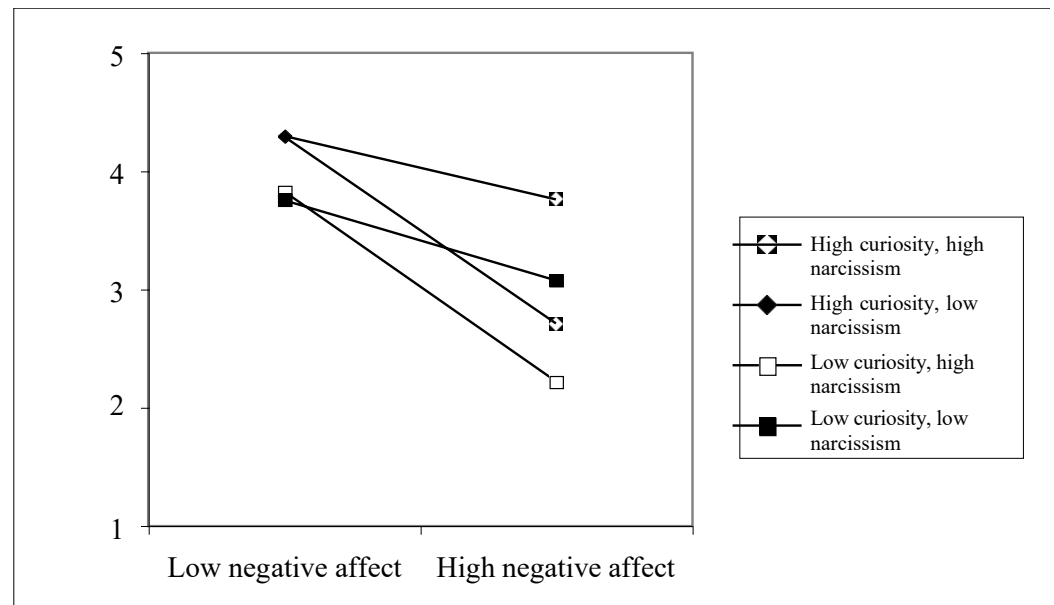
Psychopathy. The results demonstrated a significant moderated mediation index (0.05 CI 95% [0.00, 0.07]). Moreover, we found a significant three-way interaction effect between negative affect, curiosity, and psychopathy on psychological well-being ( $B = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which uniquely accounted for 27% of the variance  $F_{(635)} = 29.446$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . An inspection of the slopes demonstrated that the indirect effect of daily hassles on psychological well-being via negative affect was significant for all levels of curiosity and psychopathy (see Figure 7 for the interaction patterns), except for lower levels of curiosity and psychopathy ( $B = -0.01$  CI 95% [-0.09, .04]. The indirect effect was stronger when individuals scored higher on curiosity and lower on psychopathy scales ( $B = -0.09$  CI 95% [-0.12, -0.04]) and weaker for individuals with higher levels of curiosity and psychopathy ( $B = -0.05$ , CI 95% [-0.08, -0.02]). Thus, H6b was supported.



**Figure 7.** The three-way interaction between negative affect, curiosity, and psychopathy predicting psychological well-being.

Narcissism. The results demonstrated a significant moderated mediation index (0.06 CI 95% [0.02, 0.08]). Moreover, we found a significant three-way interaction effect between negative affect, curiosity, and narcissism on psychological well-being ( $B = .18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which uniquely accounted for 29% of the variance  $F_{(635)} = 32.680$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The slope analyses demonstrated that the indirect effect of daily hassles on psychological well-being via negative affect was significant for all levels of both curiosity and narcissism (see Figure 8 for the interaction patterns). The indirect effect was stronger when individuals scored lower on curiosity and higher on narcissism scales ( $B = -0.11$  CI 95% [-0.17, -0.05]) and weaker for individuals with higher levels of both curiosity and narcissism ( $B = -0.03$ , CI 95% [-0.06, -0.00]). Thus, the results supported H6c.





**Figure 8.** The three-way interaction between negative affect, curiosity, and narcissism predicting psychological well-being.

## 7. Summary of the Results

This study consolidates findings from study one by showing that daily micro-events (hassles and uplifts) influence psychological well-being via negative and positive affect, respectively. However, this mediation is shaped by the levels of curiosity and depends on the DT traits. Specifically, the findings show that psychological well-being tends to increase when positive affect is higher, and particularly when curiosity and the three DT traits are lower. On the other hand, when individuals experience more negative affect, less curious individuals with low psychopathy and narcissism appear to be equal regarding their psychological well-being, whereas more curious individuals with low traits of psychopathy and narcissism see their psychological well-being decrease while negative affect increases. The findings reveal no evidence for Machiavellians.

### 7.1. General Discussion

In the present research, we developed a framework to explain how and when daily micro-events influence quality-of-life indicators (i.e., psychological well-being and COVID-19 stress), conceiving affect as a mediator and individual differences (i.e., curiosity and the DT traits) as boundary conditions of the mediated relations.

First, the results support that daily uplifts are an antecedent of positive affect, which increases psychological well-being. However, it does not decrease COVID-19 stress. The results do not support the mediation effect of positive affect on the link between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress. It is important to delve deeper into the unique nature of the stressors associated with the pandemic. COVID-19 stress is multifaceted, encompassing fears like contamination and death. These fears are profound and deeply rooted, stemming from a primal survival instinct (Taylor et al. 2020a). In the face of such intense fears, the transient and often mild nature of daily uplifts may not be powerful enough to significantly alter the overall stress experience. Furthermore, this lack of mediation could be attributed to the overwhelming and pervasive nature of the pandemic. The constant media coverage, the daily updates on infection rates and fatalities, and the visible impact on communities create a continuous and inescapable backdrop of stress and anxiety (Kimhi et al. 2020). In such a scenario, even positive daily experiences might seem trivial or fleeting in comparison to the overarching threat posed by the pandemic (Junça-Silva and Vilela 2023). It is like trying to counter a tidal wave with a series of small ripples. Additionally, the context of these strange and uncertain times amplifies the impact of COVID-19 stress

(Junça-Silva and Caetano 2024). People are not only dealing with the fear of contracting the virus themselves but are also facing the reality of frequent and unexpected loss (Junça-Silva and Pinto 2024). The death of loved ones and acquaintances has become a common experience, disrupting the normal grieving process, and creating a pervasive sense of vulnerability and sadness. This continuous exposure to loss and the associated grief can create a kind of emotional numbness or fatigue, wherein positive experiences no longer hold the same power to uplift or provide relief. Further, this study was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 first peak, in which lockdowns, social distancing, and other preventive measures led to a sense of isolation and disruption of routines. The social support systems that individuals typically relied upon for stress relief were altered or became inaccessible (Alyami et al. 2022). The lack of social interaction and support can render it harder for positive daily events to penetrate the thick cloud of pandemic-related anxiety and stress (Breslau et al. 2023). As such, for example, “dealing with someone in a good mood”, or “taking a break in a task at hand” may not be sufficient to decrease the fear of COVID-19. All in all, the inability of positive affect to mediate the relationship between daily uplifts and COVID-19 stress can be seen as a reflection of the unprecedented and all-consuming nature of the pandemic. The scale and severity of the stressors associated with COVID-19 are such that they overshadow the typically beneficial effects of positive daily experiences, underscoring the need for more robust and targeted strategies to address the mental health challenges posed by this global crisis (Lo Destro and Gasparini 2021).

Surprisingly, and although the simple mediation is non-significant, it becomes significant when interacting with personality traits, i.e., curiosity, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Even more surprising is the pattern of results; individuals with high levels of curiosity combined with high levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy see their levels of COVID-19 stress decrease when positive affect increases. This finding presents a nuanced perspective that warrants exploration and contradicts established empirical studies, such as the work of Aghababaei and Błachnio (2015), which indicated that the dark triad traits are typically linked to lower well-being and heightened stress levels. It also negates the findings of Noser et al. (2014), who demonstrated that individuals with elevated psychopathy levels tend to exhibit increased reactivity to stress. One possible interpretation of this unexpected result is that, for individuals with this unique combination of traits, positive affect may function as a mitigating factor in the context of COVID-19 stress. The conventional understanding of the dark triad traits is associated with manipulative and self-serving behaviors, potentially leading to negative consequences for personal and social well-being (Junça-Silva and Silva 2023). However, in the presence of heightened curiosity, positive affect might serve as a counterbalance, contributing to a temporary reduction in stress related to the pandemic (Walker et al. 2023). It is crucial to recognize that the interplay between curiosity and the dark triad traits is complex and multifaceted. While the dark triad traits are generally associated with negative outcomes, the presence of curiosity might introduce a divergent element. Curiosity, when directed toward constructive and positive pursuits, can contribute to personal growth and resilience. In this specific context, individuals with a propensity for curiosity might be leveraging this trait to engage in activities or adopt perspectives that positively influence their emotional states during a time of heightened stress (Junça-Silva and Silva 2022). Additionally, the contrasting findings may underscore the importance of considering the specific nature of stressors. COVID-19 stress is a unique and pervasive global challenge, and its impact on individuals may differ from stressors examined in previous studies. The adaptive or maladaptive nature of curiosity, combined with the dark triad traits, could be context-dependent, leading to varying responses to stressors. Moreover, curiosity—the motivation to explore novel information and experiences that demand one’s attention (Kashdan et al. 2018)—is associated with feeling joy when exploring and stress tolerance to novel things. Maybe the interaction of Machiavellianism and psychopathy with curiosity triggers the driver to explore novel things, leading these individuals to be more tolerant of stress, which may explain why COVID-19 decreases. Moreover, by being open to

novel and challenging events and people, curious individuals may expand their knowledge and skills, and thus feel better about themselves and their lives as a whole (e.g., Ainley et al. 2005). Openness to new experiences, including the willingness to engage with others and explore different viewpoints and activities, can be a source of joy and fulfillment. This trait might act as a counterbalance to the more negative aspects of dark personality traits, such as self-centeredness or manipulateness. The excitement and positive emotions derived from new experiences can lead to a broader perspective and a focus away from the self-serving tendencies often associated with darker traits. Thus, this openness to others, which triggers joy when exploring new things, may buffer the individuals' dark side, and as such, the experience of positive affect, leading them to feel less COVID-19 stress. It further suggests a complex interplay between personality traits, emotional responses, and the unique stressors presented by the pandemic.

On the other hand, the combination of more positive affect, low curiosity, and high Machiavellianism and psychopathy appears to enhance COVID-19 stress. This suggests that these dark traits, when higher than curiosity, buffer its positive side, increasing COVID-19 stress. One justification may lie in the low levels of stress tolerance, which is a dimension of curiosity; thus, by being less curious, individuals may become more volatile to stress. In addition, there is evidence that the DT leads to xenophobic attitudes (e.g., Kocaturk and Bozdag 2020). Moreover, the results also evidence that individuals with low curiosity, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy appear to experience similar levels of COVID-19 stress, even when positive affect is higher. This may mean that these individuals are, somehow, "immune" to positive affect. By being less curious, they are not so open to learning and exploring, which, combined with low dark traits, renders them less attentive to their environment. So, positive affective experiences may not be strong enough to "pull the trigger" in these individuals, as they appear to be like a "sleeping beauty".

Additionally, narcissism does not interact with curiosity and affect regarding COVID-19 stress. Narcissists may be divided into grandiose ones—those who are characterized by immodesty, self-promotional, disagreeability, and self-enhancing behaviors (Paulhus and Williams 2002)—or vulnerable narcissists—those who are self-absorbed, entitled, distrustful of others, and with a tendency for distress and fragility (Martinez et al. 2008). The literature suggests that vulnerable narcissism is more common (Miller and Campbell 2008) than grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable narcissists tend to experience frequent psychological distress (Martinez et al. 2008), which may justify the non-significant moderating effect and, as such, less sensitivity to situational factors, such as daily micro-events and subsequent affective reactions.

The findings also show that daily hassles increase the fear of COVID-19 through the experience of negative affect. Thus, daily hassles appear to enhance the negative side of the fear of COVID-19 by enhancing its related stress through the experience of negative affect. As such, we may conclude that COVID-19 stress is more vulnerable to negative situational factors than positive ones. The findings also show that this mediation is not conditional on individual differences, i.e., curiosity and the DT traits, which may rely on the fact that daily hassles—with their negative salience—are not so vulnerable to personality traits that influence negative outcomes, such as stress.

Additionally, the second study evidences some key points regarding psychological well-being. First, both mediations are significant, that is, daily uplifts trigger positive affect, which enhances psychological well-being. On the other hand, daily hassles decrease psychological well-being by arousing negative affect. This is theoretically supported by the AET and by other studies (e.g., Junça-Silva et al. 2021).

Second, both mediations are contingent upon the moderated moderation of curiosity and some dark traits. As we mentioned before, daily uplifts influence psychological well-being via positive affect; however, this is contingent upon the combination of curiosity with the DT traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism). This was the strongest condition in which psychological well-being increased. As we mentioned before, these individuals (with low curiosity and low DT), when experiencing daily hassles, are

vulnerable to it, as their COVID-19 stress significantly differs. On the other hand, when they experience positive affect, they significantly benefit from that, as their psychological well-being increases. Thus, by being less curious and simultaneously having lower levels of the three dark traits, daily uplifts are more needed to improve the psychological well-being of these individuals. That is, they need external stimuli to feel better; it is like the “awakening of the sleeping beauty: who was awakened by a kiss. So, we may consider that daily uplifts are like a “kiss” for such individuals. This may be explained in light of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson 2001). The theory suggests that the experience of positive emotions broadens an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoires, which, in turn, serve to build their enduring personal resources ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources. Accordingly, the experience of positive affect may facilitate an individual’s flourishing, which is related to one’s psychological well-being. Thus, positive affect is worth cultivating, not just as end states in themselves, but also to achieve psychological growth and improved well-being (Fredrickson 2001). Moreover, it may also mean that individuals with dark traits use their curiosity trends to one’s advantage.

On the other hand, psychological well-being is lower even when positive affect is higher for individuals with lower levels of curiosity but higher levels of DT traits. Thus, the three dark traits appear to buffer the positive side of curiosity and positive affect on psychological well-being. This demonstrates the negative salience of the DT when compared to the positive effects of curiosity.

Lastly, the findings also support the indirect effect of daily hassles on psychological well-being via negative affect and the moderated effect of individual differences for curiosity and its interaction with psychopathy and narcissism. Psychological well-being significantly decreases when negative affect is higher for individuals who score higher on curiosity and lower psychopathy and narcissism scores or for individuals with low curiosity but high psychopathy and narcissism. Thus, one trait without the other may imbalance the individual by turning this one more vulnerable to the negative side of daily hassles. On the other hand, higher curiosity interacting with higher psychopathy and narcissism appears to lead to nearly the same psychological well-being levels. This may be related to the fact that being curious may buffer the dark side of the individual’s DT; however, as mentioned earlier, this should be explored in the future.

## 7.2. Practical Implications

This research allows the conclusion that daily micro-events are an important variable for the prediction of affective states and workers’ life quality. Moreover, the relevance of personality traits on the identified relationships has important implications for organizational theories and applied purposes, such as personnel selection. The likelihood that a person will perform well and feel more enthusiastic and motivated at work may be assessed even in an indirect way, for example, through work-related curiosity. Moreover, the DT may also be a focus of assessment in recruitment and selection.

Given the importance associated with daily uplifts, managers can also benefit from acknowledging their relevance to their workers’ quality of life. Recognizing the importance of daily uplifts and incorporating strategies to enhance workers’ quality of life is a thoughtful approach for managers. Creating a positive and supportive work environment not only contributes to employee well-being but also overall productivity and job satisfaction. By actively promoting conditions that support daily uplifts, managers contribute to a positive workplace culture where employees feel valued, motivated, and fulfilled in both their professional and personal lives. This, in turn, can lead to increased employee retention, improved performance, and a more resilient and engaged workforce.

The idea of incorporating curiosity into training practices is intriguing and aligns with current perspectives on fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation within organizations. “Curiosity days” can indeed be a valuable initiative to encourage employees to explore, experiment, and expand their knowledge and skills. By integrating

curiosity into training practices, organizations can create an environment that values exploration, learning, and innovation, ultimately contributing to improved employee performance and organizational success.

The idea that stimulating curiosity can have positive effects even for individuals with “darker” personalities aligns with the notion that curiosity can be a powerful force for personal and organizational growth. It is interesting to explore how fostering curiosity might lead to more positive affect, even in individuals with traits traditionally associated with a darker personality. In the context of curiosity, organizations that actively promote a culture of learning, exploration, and curiosity may see benefits in terms of employee satisfaction, creativity, and overall organizational performance. The positive affect experienced by individuals, including those with darker personalities, can contribute to a more harmonious and effective work environment.

### *7.3. Limitations and Future Directions*

There are some limitations associated with both studies. First, the cross-sectional nature of both studies poses some limitations to understanding causal-effect relationships and also to the potential presence of common method bias in the data. Future studies should resort to a daily or longitudinal design to test these models and thus to capture the fleeting nature of micro-daily events and consequent affect. Second, the use of self-reported measures may also limit the results’ reliability as it may lead to common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2024). However, Conway and Lance (2010) suggested that self-reports are a suitable method to collect data from internal events and states, such as daily micro-events, affect, stress, and well-being.

Given that daily hassles showed a positive relationship with curiosity, future studies should explore which kind of daily hassles may stimulate curiosity. Moreover, these studies should rely on daily or longitudinal designs to capture the dynamics of daily events and affect. It would also be worthwhile to measure state curiosity, as we only considered trait-based curiosity in these two studies. Thus, analyzing the path of daily hassles, i.e., daily hassles, negative affect, and curiosity, would be relevant for identifying resultant work-related behaviors. In this sense, future studies might examine if “what kills the cat is curiosity or affect” or whether there is a feedback loop between curiosity and affect. That is, will curiosity stimulate affective responses, or will it be the resultant affect that leads individuals to become more curious, which then feeds back into future cycles through the affective process?

Additionally, the DT dimensions might have an impact on how people interpret daily micro-events; for example, if one has a narcissist and a psychopathic personality, what one might view as a hassle, the other might view it as an uplift or even consider it a neutral event. As such, future research should analyze the cognitive appraisals of Machiavellians, psychopaths, or narcissists regarding their daily micro-events and understand how those appraisals might shape the outcomes of the experienced micro-events.

## **8. Conclusions**

Overall, COVID-19 stress appears to be more sensitive to daily hassles than to daily uplifts. However, when considering daily uplifts, these ones stimulate positive affect that decrease COVID-19 stress, in particular for curious individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy. On the other hand, psychological well-being is more situational sensitive, as it is influenced by both forms of daily micro-events. Psychological well-being increases in positive situations for low curiosity and DT traits, and decreases, in negative situations, specifically for those with high curiosity but low psychopathy and narcissism. These decreases are not significant for more curious individuals when combined with stronger dark traits. Thus, the present research demonstrates that both psychological well-being and COVID-19 stress are influenced by the interaction of situational factors, individuals’ internal states, and individual differences.

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