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Romantic Jealousy and Relationship Satisfaction: The Costs of Rumination

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The experience of romantic jealousy and its influence on relationship outcomes is unclear. Romantic jealousy is often associated with damaging effects; on the other hand, jealousy is linked to positive relationship outcomes such as increased commitment. In this study, we aimed to address inconsistencies in previous research by proposing rumination as a mediator between romantic jealousy (cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors) and relationship dissatisfaction. We also aimed to extend our understanding of behavioral responses to jealousy, and in particular, partner surveillance and its link to relational dissatisfaction by proposing a research question. Overall, there were two paths to relationship dissatisfaction: Cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors were associated with relationship dissatisfaction via rumination, and cognitive jealousy was also directly associated with relationship dissatisfaction. Interestingly, surveillance behaviors were directly associated with relationship satisfaction. From these results, rumination is highlighted as a factor in explaining the link between romantic jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction. Clinical implications are discussed.

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Jealousy in romantic relationships is often referred to as the 'green-eyed monster'. Research supports this negative view of jealousy, given its reported frequent presence in romantic relationships (e.g., Marazziti et al., 2003) and the destructive paths it can follow. Specifically, jealousy has been found to be a factor behind many negative relationship experiences such as intimate violence (Babcock, Costa, Green, & Eckhardt, 2004), verbal and physical aggression (Barnett, Martinez, & Bluestein, 1995; Wigman, Graham-Kevan, & Archer, 2008),

and relational dissatisfaction and uncertainty (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007; Bevan, 2004; Guerrero & Eloy, 1992).

Other literature, however, has linked jealousy to positive relationship outcomes, such as higher relational satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Mathes, 1986; Rydell, McConnell, & Bringle, 2004). Feeling jealous from time to time can remind a person of the importance of the partner and the relationship; for example, experiencing jealousy may provide a signal to stop taking the partner for granted (Pines, 1992). Taken together, the research reviewed above raises important questions about links between romantic jealousy and relational outcomes. These paths are particularly relevant for clinicians in the context of individual and couple therapy.

We aimed to further understand these links by proposing several paths to relational dissatisfaction. Drawing on Guerrero and Andersen's (1998) componential model of jealousy experience and expression and research regarding rumination (Carson & Cupach, 2000), the aim of the present study was to clarify the links among actual experiences and expressions of jealousy and relational dissatisfaction by studying rumination as a mediator. We extended previous work in two main ways. First, we addressed inconsistent findings in the literature regarding the links between romantic jealousy and relational dissatisfaction. Second, we provided additional insights into the role of jealousy-related surveillance behaviors.

Dimensions of Romantic Jealousy and Negative Relationship Outcomes

There is general consensus that romantic jealousy is a multidimensional construct, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (e.g., Guerrero & Andersen, 1998; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). Cognitive jealousy generally refers to negative thoughts that focus on partner behaviors, emotional jealousy reflects related emotions such as anger and fear (e.g., Yoshimura, 2004), while behavioral jealousy may be expressed in many ways, such as surveillance behaviors designed to monitor a relationship partner and/or aggressiveness towards a partner.

Overall, considerable attention has been given to the associations between dimensions of romantic jealousy and relationship outcomes such as relational quality, uncertainty, and satisfaction (e.g., Afifi & Reichert, 1996; Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra,

2007; Elphinston & Noller, 2011). However, researchers have yet to form any robust conclusions regarding the links between jealous thoughts and behaviors and relationship evaluations, and the causal nature of these associations remains unclear. The componential model of jealousy (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how an individual's experience and expression of jealousy is linked to relationship outcomes. This descriptive model outlines links between jealous cognition and

emotion, relational goals, behavioral responses, and relationship outcomes. In line with part of this model, we propose that jealous cognitions and surveillance behaviors influence a common relationship outcome (relationship satisfaction); however, we suggest that an individual's experience of cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors may occur simultaneously as documented by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989); this notion will be investigated by testing alternative models.

Previous research has shown that marital satisfaction is negatively related to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral jealousy (Guerrero & Eloy, 1992). Similarly, Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, and Spitzberg (1995) found that cognitive jealousy had a relatively strong inverse association with relational satisfaction. However, other research has yielded more mixed findings. Specifically, Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) studied three types of romantic jealousy (as outlined by Bringle, 1991; Buunk, 1997)—reactive, anxious, and possessive (or preventative). Reactive jealousy refers to the extent to which individuals feel jealousy-related emotions in response to an actual partner infidelity, while anxious jealousy is defined as an active cognitive process related to worries about partner behavior in the face of possible partner infidelity; possessive or preventative jealousy involves behaviors designed to prevent partner contact with a third party (again, in response to possible partner infidelity).

In their series of three studies of long-term cohabiting and married couples, Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) assessed relationship outcomes using three measures: relationship adjustment, satisfaction, and quality. The studies consistently showed that the three relationship outcomes were positively linked to reactive jealousy but negatively linked to anxious jealousy. Further, these researchers found that possessive jealousy was unrelated to relationship quality or adjustment, but was linked to relationship satisfaction.

Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) claimed that these types of jealousy are distinct from dimensions of jealousy, in that all three types involve, to some extent, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Buunk (1997) and other researchers (e.g., Rydell & Bringle, 2007), however, pointed out overlaps between types of jealousy and Pfeiffer and Wong's (1989) definitions of jealousy. Specifically, reactive and anxious jealousy resembles emotional and cognitive jealousy, respectively, while possessive jealousy can also include partner surveillance behaviors. If we extrapolate from their findings, it seems that anxious jealousy (similar to cognitive jealousy) can be considered a negative relationship phenomenon which results in relationship distress, while possessive jealousy and its links to relationship outcomes is less understood, and may be linked to relationship satisfaction.

Guerrero and Afifi (1999) found that individuals who were motivated to maintain their current relationship engaged in jealousy-related surveillance behaviors. Consistent with evolutionary theory, jealousy may not always be dysfunctional and serves an important function in relationship success (Buss, 2000). In this way, engaging in surveillance behaviors may signal to the person that they care about the relationship, and may provide a way of

understanding the status of the relationship compared to perceived rival relationships. Thus, engaging in surveillance behaviors may sometimes lead to more relationship security (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Hence, the role of surveillance behaviors in relationships plagued with thoughts of jealousy is a significant factor of interest.

Rumination as a Mediator

Given that questions have been raised regarding the links between dimensions of romantic jealousy and relational dissatisfaction, these links may be mediated by other personality and cognitive factors (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007). Rumination has been described as a stable individual difference variable (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001), involving conscious and recurrent thought processes that are intrusive in nature, persist over time, and result from threats to an individual or relationship (e.g., Martin & Tesser, 1996). Its maladaptive nature can involve brooding and dwelling on the details of a past experience and regrets when focused on repeatedly (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007). Research highlights rumination as a contributing factor to the experience of negative emotion, relationship problems such as lack of forgiveness, and depression (e.g., Ciesla & Roberts, 2007; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2007).

Carson and Cupach (2000) highlighted the role of rumination in the expression of romantic jealousy. In their study, relationship-specific rumination was linked to different types of behavioral jealousy, including surveillance behaviors. Whereas these researchers focused on the extent to which rumination may predispose individuals to communicative responses to jealousy, it is also likely that behavioral jealousy influences the degree to which people ruminate over jealousy events. For example, surveillance behaviors may sometimes confirm jealous suspicions and stimulate more rumination (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Bevan and Hale (2006) have also investigated rumination as a consequence of a partner's expression of jealousy. In this way, rumination may be considered a consequence of the experience and expression of jealousy. Hence, there may be a pathway from surveillance behaviors to relational dissatisfaction via rumination. Further, if an individual has jealous thoughts about their partner's behavior, the result may be more 'mulling over' the state of the relationship.

In this way, experiencing cognitive jealousy also seems to increase the likelihood of rumination. Cognitive jealousy involves unhelpful thoughts and suspicions about a partner's behaviors and desires, while rumination reflects the repetitive 'process' of dwelling on negative thoughts, to which some individuals may be more predisposed than others. Although cognitive jealousy and rumination share common features (e.g., both focus on negative thoughts and can arise from relationship threats), experiences of cognitive jealousy may stimulate more mulling=ruminating over the state of a person's relationship. Similarly, engaging in partner surveillance may also promote rumination. In short, we proposed that

rumination acts as a mediator by which actual experiences of cognitive jealousy and engaging in surveillance behaviors exacerbate relational dissatisfaction.

The Present Study

Previous research generally supports relationship dissatisfaction as an outcome of jealousy in romantic relationships (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007; Elphinston & Noller, 2011). In the present study, we aimed to extend previous work by clarifying the links between cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors as measures of romantic jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction, by suggesting rumination as a mediator in this link. We proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): jealous thoughts would be positively associated with rumination;

Hypothesis 2 (H2): surveillance behaviors would be positively associated with rumination;

Hypothesis 3 (H3): rumination would be related to relational dissatisfaction; Hypothesis 4 (H4): cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors would be indirectly linked to relationship dissatisfaction, via rumination; and,

Hypothesis 5 (H5): cognitive jealousy would also be directly linked to relationship dissatisfaction. That is, people who experience negative jealousy-related thoughts and engage in monitoring of their partner are more likely to ruminate over their suspicions and experience relationship dissatisfaction.

Given mixed evidence regarding the links between behavioral responses to jealousy and relationship outcomes, we also proposed an exploratory Research Question (RQ1): In what way are surveillance behaviors directly associated with relationship dissatisfaction?

Material and Method

Participants

One hundred and ninety-nine participants (121 females, 78 males), all of whom were in a romantic relationship from two to 402 months' duration ($M \bar{x} = 49.40$, $SD \bar{s} = 69.82$), participated in the study. Participants were recruited from 1st-year psychology classes and via television and radio advertising followed by mail-out of questionnaires. Respondents'

mean age was 27.6 years (SD $\frac{1}{4}$ 9.87); ages ranged from 17.66 to 60 years. Most respondents were dating (56.3%); 24.6% were cohabitating and 19.1% were married.

Measures

Romantic jealousy

Jealous thoughts and surveillance behaviors in the current relationship were assessed by validated short-form cognitive and behavioral subscales of the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Elphinston, Feeney, & Noller, 2011). Participants indicated how frequently they experienced thoughts regarding their partner on the five-item cognitive subscale (α $\frac{1}{4}$.87), from 1 (never) to 7 (all the time). A sample item is, 'I suspect that X may be attracted to someone else.' On the six-item behavioral subscale (α $\frac{1}{4}$.81), participants reported how often they participated in specific surveillance behaviors; responses ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (all the time). A sample item is, 'I call X unexpectedly, just to see if he or she is there.' For each subscale, items were summed. Higher scores indicate greater levels of romantic jealousy.

Rumination

The repetitive thought processes associated with an individual's current relationship were assessed using the 10-item Relationship-Specific Rumination Scale (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Participants were asked to consider their current romantic relationship and respond to statements such as, 'I wonder how close my partner feels towards me.' A 5-point response format, from 1 (never) to 5 (always or almost always) was employed. On further inspection of items, Item 6 (I suspect that my partner is secretly seeing someone else) and Item 8 (I am concerned that my partner is attracted to other people) were removed from the scale due to overlap with items measuring cognitive jealousy. Cronbach's alpha for the eight-item measure was .86 and higher scores indicate greater tendency to engage in rumination.

Relational satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was measured using the relevant component of the questionnaire assessing Investment Model constructs (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). A five-item scale assessing current relational satisfaction was completed, with responses ranging from 0 (do not agree at all) to 8 (agree completely). A sample item is, 'I feel satisfied with our relationship.' Higher scores indicate high satisfaction (α $\frac{1}{4}$.94).

Procedure

Participants completed questionnaires individually, either alone or in small groups. The questionnaires were counterbalanced in order to reduce order effects. Participants were debriefed following completion of the study and thanked for their anonymous participation.

Results

Univariate and multivariate checks were performed prior to data analysis to assess accuracy of data entry, missing data, and distributional characteristics. Since no more than 5 percent of data were missing for each variable, missing data were managed by mean substitution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Structural Models

First, the model outlined above (Model 1) was tested using AMOS Version 6. In order to reduce the complexity of the measurement models and ensure more stable parameter estimates, multiple indicators (each consisting of >2 single scale items) were created for each latent variable in the model using the partial disaggregation approach (see Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002; Sass & Smith, 2006). Subsets of items were formed and averaged (see Table 1) to create three indicators for relational dissatisfaction, and two indicators each for cognitive jealousy, surveillance behaviors, and rumination. Cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors were also correlated in the model, based on past research suggesting a positive association (e.g., Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989).

Model 1 provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(14, N = 199) = 14.55, p = .41, \chi^2/df = 1.04$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .01; SRMR = .02. In line with hypotheses, cognitive jealousy (H1) was positively related to rumination, surveillance behaviors were also linked to rumination (H2), and rumination was linked to relationship dissatisfaction (H3). See Figure 1. Both cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors were associated with relationship dissatisfaction via rumination (H4). Further, consistent with H5, cognitive jealousy was associated with relationship dissatisfaction. Finally, in relation to RQ1, surveillance behaviors were positively linked to relationship satisfaction. See Table 2 for the decomposition analysis.

As a final step, we tested an alternative model based on Guerrero and Andersen's (1998) componential model identifying cognitions as influencing communicative responses to jealousy. Specifically, we tested a model in which cognitive jealousy would be directly associated with surveillance behaviors, which would in turn be linked to rumination, and finally, satisfaction. The alternative model provided a good fit for the data (CFI \diamond .95). The Akaike information criterion (AIC) also assisted in model comparison (Akaike, 1987). The AIC has no conventional cutoff, but smaller

values indicate that a model is more parsimonious and provides better fit. The alternative model had an AIC of 85.38. Hence, the data favored our final model (Model 1; AIC $\frac{1}{4}$ 74.55).

Discussion

For the majority of individuals, jealousy can create challenges in their relationships. Questions remain, however, regarding the impact of jealousy on relationship outcomes such as dissatisfaction, with inconsistencies in the literature complicating this picture. We aimed to address this research gap by proposing rumination as a mediator between romantic jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction. We also aimed to further our understanding of the direct role of jealousy-related surveillance behaviors.

In line with previous research documenting a negative link between romantic jealousy and relational satisfaction (e.g., Guerrero & Eloy, 1992), our results highlight several paths to relational dissatisfaction. In line with H1–H3, cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors were both related to rumination, and rumination was associated with relationship dissatisfaction. Further, consistent with H4, both cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviors were linked to dissatisfaction via rumination. An additional pathway involved a direct link between cognitive jealousy and dissatisfaction (H5).

Overall, our results highlight the negative consequences of rumination and extend past research (e.g., Carson & Cupach, 2000). By definition, rumination suggests that the person is caught in an unhelpful cognitive-emotional experience that is difficult to control. Once rumination is under way, the likelihood of jealousy being functional is reduced. These processes set the scene for negative outcomes such as relationship dissatisfaction, as the individual is unable to manage the intensity and duration of emotion. Intense thoughts and indirect expressions of jealousy may destroy the relationship over time, if a partner becomes aware of these feelings and/or has difficulty dealing with such behavior on an ongoing basis (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Further, ongoing rumination over jealousy-related worries and partner surveillance is likely to result in relationship dissatisfaction.

Intervention strategies may be needed to assist in modifying appraisals related to perceived threats. Specifically, cognitive restructuring of negative beliefs may benefit individuals by challenging jealous thoughts and ongoing rumination (Clark & Beck, 1999). Jealousy can also

be reframed as a signal of the perceived worth of the partner and the relationship, and thus positive coping statements may be used. Clinicians working with individuals or couples can also assist them to explore their jealous thoughts, to reflect on what these thoughts mean for them and their relationship, and help the couple to work together to understand and manage perceptions of relationship threat in the light of a mutually valued relationship.

Partner surveillance can involve indirect, unobtrusive ways of managing jealous thoughts—and if individuals have a high tendency to ruminate, partner surveillance may be detrimental to relationships. Interestingly, our results also showed a direct link between engaging in surveillance behaviors (monitoring the partner's actions) and relational satisfaction (RQ1). Consistent with evolutionary perspectives on jealousy (e.g., Buss, 2000), surveillance strategies may be a sign that the individual cares deeply about maintaining the relationship, and if engaged in directly (without rumination), these behaviors may thus be linked to satisfaction with the relationship. In this way, surveillance behaviors could also promote self-regulation as a means of managing jealous thoughts. Overall, these results shed some light on previous mixed findings regarding the nature of behavioral (or possessive) jealousy (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007).

Thus partner surveillance appears to be of some immediate benefit to those experiencing jealous thoughts. If the relationship partner finds out about the individual's surveillance behaviors, it may then be the partner's response that becomes vital to the course of subsequent interaction. Specifically, if the partner responds with anger and hurt, this reaction may in itself threaten the relationship, and lead to more destructive communication exchanges and relationship dissatisfaction. In addition, it is possible that engaging in more direct and threatening expressions of jealousy (such as confronting a partner in an attacking way or contacting a rival) can lead to relational dissatisfaction. Longitudinal studies using couple data would be needed to test these hypotheses.

Overall, our results suggest that engaging in jealousy-related surveillance behaviors does not always impact negatively on relationship satisfaction. It could be that some individuals also engage in positive self-talk that centers on reassurance (for example, "s=he would never kiss someone else") that may counteract negative jealous thoughts. Evidence that indirectly supports this view comes from the clinical area. For example, research has pointed to more adaptive forms of rumination involving reflection (which involves actively turning inward, with thoughts centering around self-focus, problem-solving, and coping) that may not necessarily be problematic (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003; Watkins, 2004). In addition, some individuals may have a greater capacity for cognitive flexibility or for giving their full attention to the present moment (i.e., engaging in mindfulness), and these processes may buffer against negative emotions (e.g., Borders, Earleywine, & Jajodia, 2010). Future research could explore the link between surveillance behaviors and relational satisfaction with a focus on possible cognitive-process mediators, such as helpful cognitions and mindfulness approaches.

The use of structural equation modeling was a significant strength of the present research; however, our model is based on correlational data and is thus unable to establish conclusive causal relationships. In addition, the current study is limited to self-report data. Future research might use observational data to remove potential self-report biases, and longitudinal designs would enhance the robustness of the findings. Finally, further studies might investigate other factors that mediate the link between surveillance behaviors and relational satisfaction (e.g., helpful thinking patterns), and other relevant outcome measures such as relational uncertainty.

In terms of practical implications, this study provides suggestions for clinicians who work with individuals experiencing romantic jealousy. We know that romantic jealousy appears to be problematic when individuals experience jealous thoughts and surveillance behavior, along with rumination. These appear to be crucial factors to consider in the context of therapy for individuals and couples.

Note

[1] Although gender differences were not of primary interest to the present research, the overall model was also run with males and females separately, to test its robustness. In each case, the same pattern of results emerged, although for males ($N = 79$), two paths were trending towards significance: cognitive jealousy and rumination, and rumination and dissatisfaction. This result is likely because of the relatively low power in this analysis.

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