

CURRENT RESEARCH IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Volume 5, Number 17
Submitted: July 25, 2000
Resubmitted: August 4, 2000
Accepted: August 25, 2000
Publication date: August 25, 2000

ON PREDICTING RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION FROM JEALOUSY: THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF LOVE

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ABSTRACT

Researchers in the interdisciplinary research area of close relationships have recently had a renewed interest in relationship satisfaction and its causes. In some of the several recent studies that have looked at the determinants of relationship satisfaction, a positive link between jealousy and relationship satisfaction has, somewhat counterintuitively, been found. Other studies have likewise shown a negative relationship between jealousy and relationship satisfaction such that as one's level of jealousy increases, his or her satisfaction decreases. In an effort to clarify this seemingly conflicting evidence, data was collected from a sample of 134 currently dating heterosexual participants. The participants completed self-report measures of relationship satisfaction, jealousy, and love. Moderated multiple regression analyses were conducted on the data. It was found that level of jealousy alone is a fair predictor of relationship satisfaction. However, this relationship is qualified by a significant interaction between jealousy and love. In other words, jealousy can predict relationship satisfaction, but this relationship depends on how much one loves his or her partner. Implications of the results and potential problems with the study are discussed.

[254]

[255]

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, researchers in the interdisciplinary field of close relationships have increasingly focused their attention on satisfaction in romantic relationships and its causes (Hendrick and Hendrick 1989; Rusbult 1980 1983; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus 1991; Wess and Hyman 1990; Yovetich and Rusbult 1994). In most cases, satisfaction can be defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of a relationship.

Jealousy

Another area of the close relationships field that has been increasingly explored in recent years is

that of jealousy. Some hot topics under this general heading include: jealousy and self-esteem (Bringle 1991); jealousy and attachment style (Radecki-Bush, et al. 1993); gender differences in jealousy (Aune and Comstock 1991; Guerrero, et al. 1993); and jealousy and violence (Mullen 1996). More pertinent to the present study are the studies concerning jealousy and its effects on relationship status. Research findings on the association between relationship satisfaction and jealousy, relationship status or length of relationship have been somewhat conflicting. Many studies report that jealousy increases at the point where a developing relationship becomes serious or exclusive (Braiker-Stambul 1975; Wright 1999). Of particular interest to the present study is a study by Eugene Mathes (1986), which found that higher jealousy scores were correlated with general relationship satisfaction and the continuation of relationships over a 7-year period. Mathes (1986) examined the long-term effects of jealousy on romantic relationships in a longitudinal study of 20 women and 19 men involved in relationships. Participants completed a dispositional jealousy scale in 1978 and were asked about the statuses of their relationships in 1985. Successful (engaged, living together, or married) participants had a higher mean jealousy score than unsuccessful (relationship ended) participants. According to Mathes, results indicate a positive relation between jealousy and romantic love, suggesting that jealousy preserves and promotes love. (Mathes 1986, p. 885). Mathes and his colleagues (Mathes 1984, 1986; Mathes and Severa 1981) have been at the forefront of the growing consensus in interpersonal relationships that "jealousy can be good". They have repeatedly found evidence that suggests a positive correlation between jealousy and overall relationship satisfaction. The hypothesis of the current study is based on these findings. It was hypothesized that relationship satisfaction in the current sample could be predicted from jealousy, but with certain qualifications. It was further hypothesized that this relationship would be moderated by how much the respondent loves his or her partner [operationalized as one's score on Rubin's (1970) love scale]. This qualification was, in part, designed to at least somewhat account for the conflicting findings that jealousy correlates negatively with relationship satisfaction (Braiker-Stambul 1975; Wright 1999). An interaction between the jealousy and love variables in this context would imply that if one does not love his or her partner very much, but is highly jealous, they will not be satisfied with their relationship, but if one does love his or her partner and is jealous, he or she will be satisfied with their relationship. If evidence for a significant interaction between level of jealousy and level of love could be shown, it could potentially lessen some of the inconclusiveness concerning romantic jealousy and satisfaction in the close relationships literature. This point will be elaborated upon in the discussion.

[255]

[256]

METHOD

Participants

Data was collected for 136 participants at the University of Texas at Arlington. Participants completed a battery of relationship measures in the context of a separate study on the characteristics of partners in heterosexual dating relationships. At least one member of each couple was enrolled in Introductory Psychology at The University of Texas at Arlington and received partial course credit for his or her participation. Only members of heterosexual couples were used as participants in this experiment. The experiment was conducted as one in a

series of experiments that was designed to explore the influence of different variables on the satisfaction and/or stability of heterosexual romantic relationships. Commitment seems to operate somewhat differently in homosexual and heterosexual relationships (Taylor, Peplau, and Sears 1997; Wright 1999). This difference is most evident when comparing heterosexual married couples and homosexual couples and is most likely due to barriers to separation (cost of divorce, responsibility of children, for example) that exist in heterosexual married relationships (Kurdek and Schmitt 1986). For this reason, only heterosexual couples were used in all of the studies in this series including the present one.

Demographic Characteristics of the Couples

The racial and ethnic composition of the sample reflected the general composition of The University of Texas at Arlington. There were 13 Hispanic participants, 11 African Americans, 28 Asians, 84 Whites, and 2 people who listed their ethnicity as Other. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 years. Their mean age was 19.4 years, with a standard deviation of 1.9 years. The average length of their relationships was 16.9 months, with a standard deviation of 1.4 months. With regard to their dating status, there were 6 participants who said that they were dating both their current partners and others. In contrast, 108 people reported that they were dating their current partner and no one else, and 24 participants reported that they were engaged.

Procedure and Data Collection

Participants were separated and asked to complete a large battery of self-report measures in private cubicles. The questionnaires they were asked to complete inquired about various aspects of their dating relationship. They were assured that their partner would not be allowed to see their answers, and they were exhorted to answer each question as accurately and honestly as possible. These measures included the measures of interest to this project: Rubin's (1970) Love Scale, Hendrick and Hendrick's (1989) Satisfaction Scale, and Ickes, Simpson and Blackstone's (1995) Dispositional Jealousy Scale.

[256]

[257]

RESULTS

Psychometric Properties of the Self-Report Measures

The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the various self-report measures was computed to assess their reliability. Each of the measures had adequate internal consistency. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.77 For Rubin's (1970) love scale. For Simpson, Ickes, and Blackstone's (1995) Dispositional jealousy scale, the alpha coefficient was 0.70. Finally, for Hendrick and Hendrick's (1989) Satisfaction Scale, the alpha coefficient was 0.85.

Correlational Analyses

Next, scale scores for each of the three measures were obtained. Because earlier confirmatory factor analyses of the various measures (Dugosh 1998; Hendrick and Hendrick 1989; Rubin 1970; Simpson, Ickes, and Blackstone 1995) have confirmed the legitimacy of these measures as single-factor, they were retained as such in the current study.

After obtaining scale scores for each of the participants on the three measures, a correlation matrix was computed (see table 1).

Table 1. Correlation matrix with correlations between satisfaction, love, and jealousy.

	Satisfaction	Love	Jealousy
Satisfaction	1.00	0.23	0.48
Love	0.23	1.00	-0.28
Jealousy	0.48	-0.28	1.00

All $p < .05$

[257]

[258]

Tests of Gender Differences

Next, analyses of variance were conducted to test for gender differences in the three variables in the study (jealousy, satisfaction, and love). There were no differences in the reported relationship satisfaction of male and female participants [M's = 42.15 and 40.9, respectively; SD's = 6.14 and 7.8, respectively; $F(1,133) = 1.07, p > .05, n.s.$] Likewise, there were no gender differences in reported love [M's = 65.18 and 65.15 respectively; SD's = 11.3 and 14.3, respectively; $F(1, 134) = 0.00, p > .05, n.s.$], and jealousy [M's = 28.41 and 27.79, respectively, SD's = 20.54 and 19.84, respectively; $F(1,134) = 0.03, p > .05, n.s.$]. These findings were as expected.

Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses

A form of hierarchical multiple regression, moderated multiple regression uses a hierarchical entry of the predictor variables to determine if the relation between one predictor variable and a criterion variable is influenced by a third (moderating) variable (Nunally and Bernstein 1994). Moderated multiple regression analysis procedures were followed, as outlined in Nunally and Bernstein (1994). Using satisfaction as the criterion variable, the jealousy variable was entered into the equation in the first step. Next, the love variable was added. Finally, an interaction term computed as a cross-product of predictors in the previous step (love x jealousy) was entered into the regression equation.

Stage 1 of the moderated hierarchical regression used jealousy to predict relationship satisfaction. Variance accounted for by this initial model was moderate ($R^2 = 0.2416$), indicating that jealousy alone is not a fair predictor of satisfaction. Stage 2 involved using both the hypothesized main predictor (jealousy) and a moderator (love). The incremental increase in r-square for this model ($R^2 = 0.1418$) was significant, $F(1, 123) = 15.76, p < .0001$, revealing that the addition of love increases the predictive power of the model. The final stage of the regression involved adding the interaction term to the model. The incremental increase in r-square for this ($R^2 = 0.1623$) was also significant, $F(1,123) = 23.18, p < .0001$, indicating a strong trend for the slope of the regression line predicting satisfaction from jealousy to vary with amount of love. It indicates that satisfaction depends upon the interaction of jealousy and love (see table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses for effects of jealousy, love, and an interaction term on relationship satisfaction.

Possible Moderator	Controlling For:	R ²	Change in R ²	Error <i>df</i>
Jealousy	--	0.24	--	--
Love	Jealousy	0.38	0.14	132
Jealousy X Love	Love, Jealousy	0.55	0.16	131

Note: All numerator *df* = 1. All F's < .0001.

[258]

[259]

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that adding the love X jealousy interaction to the regression equation significantly increases the amount of explained variance. This suggests that relationship satisfaction can be predicted if you know how jealous a person is, with qualifications. This relationship between satisfaction and jealousy is moderated by how much one loves his or her romantic partner.

This effect is interesting because it can potentially accommodate the somewhat conflicting previous research concerning jealousy and satisfaction. First, the effect of jealousy on satisfaction in the regression model, as well as the zero-order correlation between the two variables suggests that the "jealousy is good" statement may be accurate. The sign of the zero-order correlation and the beta-weight in the regression model indicate that as level of jealousy rises, level of relationship satisfaction also rises. This is completely compatible with the finding of Mathes and his colleagues (Mathes 1984, 1986; Mathes and Severa 1981) that posit a positive link between jealousy and satisfaction and other relational outcomes.

The positive effect for the interaction between jealousy and love extends these findings and makes them more consistent with the opposing point of view as well. As mentioned above, many researchers have also found a negative relationship between jealousy and relationship satisfaction. For example, Barnett, Martinez, and Bluestein (1995) found that in their sample of maritally violent men, "jealousy correlated negatively with marital satisfaction" (p.473). Findings such as these can possibly be explained by the interaction effect that was found. In the sample of Barnett, et al. (1995), the participants were maritally-violent physically abusive men. It is possible that, in this sample, participants might have lower amounts of love for their partners overall than would a non-abusive sample. If so, the results of the current study would account for these findings. They would suggest that if the participants in the Barnett et al. sample have low love scores and high jealousy scores that they would not be high in relationship satisfaction.

Alternative Explanations and Problems

Other explanations for the obtained results are possible. First, although the satisfaction scale and

the love scale are established measures, the jealousy scale of Simpson, et al. is a less established measure that has been used in very few studies to date (Simpson, Ickes, and Blackstone 1995; Simpson, Ickes, and Grich, in press; Dugosh 1998). Although its internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$) is not very low, it is not as high as the alpha coefficients that were found for the other two scales in the study. More importantly, the Simpson, et al. scale may measure a construct that is theoretically too general.

[259]

[260]

Many jealousy researchers hold that the general term "jealousy" can be split into two different categories. These categories have been alternatively labeled as cognitive and behavioral jealousy (Guerrero and Eloy 1992), or jealousy expression and jealousy experience (Anderson, et al. 1998). The Simpson, et al. (1995) scale does not differentiate between the two forms of jealousy. Using separate measures of the two different types of jealousy in a questionnaire study with 346 dating or married participants, Andersen and his colleagues (Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, and Spitzberg 1998) found that "cognitive jealousy is a more potent predictor of relational satisfaction than emotional jealousy" (p.77).

Despite these potential problems, the results of the current study do shed some light on the nature of the relationship between jealousy and satisfaction. The results reported here suggest that we can indeed predict how satisfied a person will be with his or her relationship if we know how jealous he or she is. However this relationship between satisfaction and jealousy will differ in nature depending on how much the person loves his or her partner.

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[263]
