

# Relations between Different Types of Jealousy and Self and Partner Perceptions of Relationship Quality

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The present paper examines the relationships between relationship quality and three different types of jealousy, including both partners' levels of jealousy and perceptions of relationship quality. It was expected that jealousy in response to a direct threat to the relationship—that is, reactive jealousy—would be positively related to relationship quality, whereas forms of jealousy that may also be triggered in the absence of such a threat would be negatively related to relationship quality. Three studies were conducted among large community samples of heterosexual married and cohabiting couples (a total of 961 couples), using three different operationalizations of relationship quality. In all three studies both partners' levels of reactive jealousy related positively to relationship quality, whereas in all three studies, both partners' levels of anxious jealousy were negatively related to relationship quality. Findings and clinical implications are discussed. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## INTRODUCTION

Jealousy is generated by a threat to, or the actual loss of, a valued relationship with another person, due to an actual or imagined rival for one's partner's attention (e.g., Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004; Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998). In general, jealousy is associated with a host of negative relational outcomes, such as relationship conflict, domestic violence and divorce (e.g. Barnett, Martinez, & Bluestein, 1995; Buss, 2000; Puente & Cohen, 2003). Several authors have therefore argued that jealousy is a primarily negative relationship phenomenon that is likely to be accompanied by low relationship quality. Jealousy may not only contribute to relationship insecurity and conflict, but also cause the non-jealous partner to feel mis-

trusted and controlled. In addition, relationship quality may be negatively related to jealousy because unhappy individuals are more likely to have extra-dyadic affairs and, as a consequence, have more jealous partners (e.g., Banfield & McCabe, 2001; White, 1981). Negative associations between jealousy and relationship quality have indeed been reported by, for instance, Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg (1995), Barnett et al. (1995), Buunk (1991) and Shackelford and Buss (2000).

Others (e.g. Barelids & Dijkstra, 2006; Buss, 2000), however, consider jealousy, at least partially, to be a positive relationship phenomenon. They argue that jealousy signals that romantic partners care for each other and value their relationship enough to protect it. Following this line of reasoning, jealousy should be *positively* related to relationship quality. Support for this assumption was found by, for instance, Mathes (1985), who found that individuals who reported relatively high jealousy scores had more stable and successful relationships than individuals who reported relatively low jealousy

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scores (see also Hansen, 1983). In a similar vein, Rydell, McConnell, and Bringle (2004) found that individuals in committed relationships experienced higher levels of jealousy than individuals in less-committed relationships.

Because support for both a negative and positive association between jealousy and relationship quality has been found, the relationship between jealousy and relationship quality remains puzzling: is jealousy related positively or negatively to relationship quality, or perhaps both? This question is the more relevant since jealousy is often an important issue in relationship therapy (e.g., Buunk & Dijkstra, 2001). More specifically, a study by Sprenkle and Weis (1978) showed that in 26% of marriage counselling cases, (potential) extra-dyadic sex and the jealousy that resulted from it were major issues. In order to effectively enhance relationship satisfaction and to adequately deal with the negative consequences of jealousy, therapists first need to know if and how jealousy is exactly related to relationship quality.

### Types of Jealousy

A possible explanation for the mixed findings with regard to the association between relationship quality and jealousy is that jealousy may be related differently to relationship quality depending on the specific nature of the jealousy response (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2006; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006). Jealousy is often conceptualized as multidimensional (e.g., White & Mullen, 1989), and various typologies of jealousy have been proposed. Beginning with the work of Freud (1950), a distinction has been made between normal or rational jealousy stemming from a realistic threat to the relationship, and abnormal, pathological or morbid jealousy that is aroused in the absence of such a threat. In a related vein, Parrott (1991, 2001) makes a distinction between jealousy in response to a potential relationship threat ('suspicious jealousy') and jealousy in response to a partner's extra-dyadic sex that has already occurred ('*fait accompli* jealousy'). Furthermore, various authors have distinguished 'state jealousy', that is those feelings that are evoked by a jealousy event, from 'dispositional jealousy', that is the individual's propensity to respond in a jealous manner (e.g., Bringle & Evenbeck, 1979; Rich, 1991). More recently, scholars have emphasized the importance of communication between the jealous person and his or her partner, distinguishing between the experience

and the expression of jealousy (e.g., Afifi & Reichert, 1996; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001). According to these authors, the experience of jealousy comprises cognitions and emotions that in turn affect how people express their jealousy. In contrast, the expression of jealousy consists of behavioural and communicative reactions to jealousy. Another frequently used typology was introduced by Buss, Larsen, Westen, and Semmelroth (1992) and distinguishes between jealousy in response to a mate's emotional infidelity and jealousy in response to a mate's sexual infidelity.

Although all of these typologies are dichotomies, two typologies have been proposed that distinguish between three types of jealousy. First, Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) make a distinction between emotional, cognitive and behavioural jealousy. In a related vein, Buunk (1991, 1997) and Buunk and Dijkstra (2001, 2006) distinguishes between reactive, anxious and possessive jealousy. *Reactive* jealousy is the degree to which individuals experience negative emotions, such as anger and upset, when their mate is or has been emotionally or sexually unfaithful. For instance, individuals may become angry or feel hurt when their mate is flirting or kissing with someone else. *Possessive* jealousy refers to the considerable effort jealous individuals can go to to prevent contact of their partner with individuals of the opposite sex. For example, possessively jealous individuals may find it not acceptable that their mate has opposite-sex friends and/or forbid their mate to socialize with others. As an extreme consequence, they may even resort to violence or stalking in an effort to limit the autonomy of their mate (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & de Vries, 2004). Finally, *anxious* jealousy refers to a process in which the individual ruminates about and cognitively generates images of a mate's infidelity, and experiences feelings of anxiety, suspicion, worry and distrust. It is important to note that, in contrast to reactive jealousy, both possessive and anxious jealousy may not only be triggered in response to a partner's actual extra-dyadic involvement but also in the absence of an actual rival (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2001, 2006).

On the face of it, Buunk's categorization of jealousy seems similar to Pfeiffer and Wong's (1989) typology. However, although the two typologies do resemble each other, they are certainly not similar. Whereas Pfeiffer and Wong's typology refers primarily to three different *dimensions*—emotions, cognitions and behaviours—of jealousy, Buunk's typology refers to three qualitatively

different *types* of jealousy. In addition, although reactive jealousy contains a strong emotional component, anxious jealousy a strong cognitive component and possessive jealousy a strong behavioural component, reactive, anxious and possessive jealousy all, to some extent, include emotional, cognitive and behavioural components of jealousy (Buunk & Dijkstra, forthcoming).

### *Resolving Mixed Findings*

As noted before, mixed research findings on the association between relationship quality and jealousy may be explained by the fact that previous research has failed to distinguish between different types of jealousy. The scarce studies that did examine the relationship between relationship quality and different types of jealousy have primarily used the categorization between emotional and cognitive jealousy (as a specification of the jealousy experience) or Pfeiffer and Wong's categorization. Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) found emotional jealousy to be positively and cognitive jealousy to be negatively related to love. Guerrero and Eloy (1992) found all three types of jealousy to be inversely related to marital satisfaction, with cognitive jealousy showing the strongest negative association with marital satisfaction, followed by behavioural and emotional jealousy. In distinguishing between cognitive and emotional jealousy, Andersen et al. (1995) found that cognitive jealousy had a stronger negative relation with relational satisfaction than emotional jealousy. With regard to relationship intimacy, Knobloch et al. (2001) uncovered a curvilinear relationship between emotional jealousy and intimacy, such that emotional jealousy peaked at moderate levels of intimacy. In addition, they found cognitive jealousy to make people insecure about their relationships, regardless of the level of intimacy they experienced in their relationship.

These studies certainly shed some light on the relation between different types of jealousy and relationship quality. However, because of the different outcome measures—e.g., love in Pfeiffer and Wong's study, intimacy in Knobloch et al.'s study and marital satisfaction in Guerrero and Eloy's study—and the different results that these studies have generated the question if and how different types of jealousy are associated with relationship quality is still not definitely answered. The present studies therefore aimed to clarify this issue.

### *Partner Jealousy*

Because perceptions of relationship quality arise in the dynamic interaction between two mates, it seems highly likely that relationship quality is not only related to an individual's own level of jealousy but also to their partners' level of jealousy. For instance, jealousy expressed by an individual's partner in the absence of a realistic relationship threat may cause an individual to feel mistrusted and controlled, and negatively influence his or her perceptions of relationship quality. The most plausible way individuals' jealousy may be related to their partners' perceptions of relationship quality is by means of a couple's communication. In general, jealousy does not only affect the content of the communication between partners (*what* they communicate) but also the type of communication they engage in (*how* they communicate). Guerrero, Trost, and Yoshimura (2005), for instance, found that jealousy may be accompanied by denial on the part of the jealous partner (e.g., 'I wasn't jealous!'), integrative communication (talking about what happened and why), and violent communication, such as threatening one's partner. Individuals may even, on purpose, evoke feelings of jealousy in their partner in order to enhance their perceptions of relationship security (and consequently quality). For instance, by flirting with someone else, they may make their partner believe that they are desirable and that their partner should better keep his/her commitment (e.g., Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss, 2000).

Surprisingly, however, to date, no study has assessed jealousy and relationship quality in *both* partners and related individuals' jealousy ratings to their *partners'* perception of relationship quality. The present studies aimed to fill this important gap in the research literature on jealousy by assessing levels of relationship quality and jealousy in *both* partners.

### *Jealousy and Its Potentially Problematic Nature*

The present paper used Buunk's typology of jealousy to investigate the relationship between relationship quality and jealousy. One of the reasons we chose to use Buunk's typology is that, in contrast to Pfeiffer and Wong's typology, Buunk's typology takes into account the possibility that jealousy may not only occur in response to an actual relationship threat but also in the absence of such a threat (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006).

Central to Buunk's typology is the assumption that different types of jealousy differ in the extent to which they are potentially problematic or 'unhealthy' (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2006; Buunk, 1997). Because reactive jealousy constitutes a direct response to an actual relationship threat, as is the case, for instance, when one's partner is flirting or having sex with someone else, reactive jealousy can be considered relatively 'healthy' or 'rational'. Both possessive and anxious jealousy, however, may, for several reasons, become problematic or pathological in nature. First, both possessive and anxious jealousy may also be triggered in response to an imagined rather than a real rival and therefore become delusional in nature. In addition, the way in which anxious and possessive jealousy are expressed may become problematic in nature, regardless of whether the rival is imagined or real. In general, the rumination of thoughts, as is characteristic of anxious jealousy, has been found to be a counterproductive way of dealing with stressful life events (e.g., Garnefski, Teerds, Kraaij, Legerstee, & Van den Kommer, 2004). As a consequence, anxiously jealous individuals are likely to feel depressed and experience low self-worth, and may experience relationship distress as a consequence. Previous studies indeed show that especially experiences resembling anxious jealousy are characteristic of morbidly jealous individuals who, in general, struggle with major relationship problems (e.g., Carson & Cupach, 2000; Dolan & Bishay, 1996). Possessive jealousy may become problematic when it is aimed at controlling one's partner and when it results in obsessive relational intrusion and stalking (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Although both possessive and anxious jealousy may become problematic in nature, in contrast to anxious jealousy, possessive jealousy may also be expressed more positively. Buss and Shackelford (1997), for instance, found that individuals may use positive so-called 'mate retention tactics' to prevent their mate from becoming unfaithful, such as the enhancement of their appearance and the display of resources, that may enhance relationship quality.

In sum, it can be argued that reactive, possessive and anxious jealousy constitute a continuum ranging from more 'healthy' to more 'problematic' experiences (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2006; Buunk, 1997). On this scale, reactive jealousy can be placed at the relatively healthy side and anxious and possessive jealousy on the relatively problematic side, with anxious jealousy potentially constituting a somewhat more problematic type of jealousy than possessive jealousy.

### *The Present Studies*

The present studies examined the associations between different types of jealousy, as distinguished by Buunk's typology, and different measures of relationship quality. We argue that the relation between jealousy and relationship quality depends on the type of jealousy under investigation. Whereas jealousy in response to an actual relationship threat may show that spouses care for each other, jealousy in the absence of an actual relationship threat and/or jealousy that is expressed in a destructive way may cause relationship problems and prove detrimental to the relationship (Guerrero & Eloy, 1992). More specifically, we therefore expected relationship quality to be positively related to reactive jealousy, but negatively to anxious and possessive jealousy, although less strongly to possessive than to anxious jealousy (hypothesis 1). In a similar vein, we hypothesize that relationship quality will be positively related to a partner's level of reactive jealousy, and negatively to a partner's levels of possessive and anxious jealousy, although less strongly to a partner's level of possessive jealousy than to his or her level of anxious jealousy (hypothesis 2).

Previous studies on relationship quality have operationalized the concept of 'relationship quality' in numerous ways. Some studies have used measures of 'relationship quality', others of 'relationship satisfaction', 'relationship happiness' or 'relationship adjustment'. All refer, however, to approximately the same underlying phenomenon, namely relationship quality and differ mainly with regard to their level of measurement, that is multidimensional (as is the case in relationship adjustment) versus one dimensional (as is the case in relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness; e.g., Barelds, 2003; Fincham, 1997; Kluwer, 2001). In order to take into account and control for possible differences in operationalizations, three studies were conducted to examine the relations between reactive, possessive and anxious jealousy on the one hand and three different operationalizations of relationship quality on the other hand. In study 1, relationship quality was operationalized as 'relationship adjustment', in study 2 as 'relationship satisfaction' and in study 3 as 'relationship quality'. To enhance the generalizability of the results, all three studies were conducted among large heterosexual community samples of married and cohabiting couples.

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### *Participants and Procedure*

A total of 392 married or cohabiting community volunteers, or 196 heterosexual couples, participated in study 1. Participants were recruited through postal mail surveys, using randomly selected names from telephone directories. The selected individuals received a covering letter in which the purpose of the study was stated and confidentiality was emphasized. A criterion for participation was that the potential respondent was married or cohabiting. Participants willing to participate could return an enclosed pre-addressed response card. On this card they could also indicate if their partner was willing to participate. To all individuals indicating that they were willing to participate, a set of questionnaires was sent by mail. Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaires without consulting one another and to return the questionnaires separately in the enclosed pre-addressed stamped envelopes. All questionnaires were pre-coded in order to be able to determine which participants formed a couple (every successive combination of an odd and even number represented a couple).

If only one partner participated, he or she was removed from the sample. In addition, homosexual couples were removed from the sample. The mean age of the resulting sample of 392 heterosexual participants was 47 years (Standard Deviation [SD] = 13 years, range = 20–81). Eighty-seven per cent were married and 13% were cohabiting. The mean length of the relationship was 22 years (SD = 14 years, range = 1–55). Educational level was scored on a four-point scale (1 = primary school, 5 = higher educational level),  $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ , with a score of 3 corresponding with a higher grade elementary school level.

#### *Measures*

*Relationship Adjustment.* The Dutch version of the Maudsley Marital Questionnaire (MMQ; Arrindell, Boelens, & Lambert, 1983) was used to assess the quality of the intimate relationship. The MMQ is a 20-item questionnaire that consists of three subscales, measuring marital adjustment (10 items), sexual adjustment (5 items) and general life adjustment (5 items). Examples of items are 'Do you get enough warmth and attention from your partner', 'Do you enjoy sexual contact with your partner' and 'Do you have a satisfying social life'. The three

scales can be summed to obtain a total MMQ score. In the present study, only the total MMQ score will be used. The internal consistency of the total MMQ in the present study (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.90. Men and women did not differ in their total MMQ score ( $M = 84.0$  versus  $M = 82.8$ ,  $t = 1.15$ ,  $p = ns$ ).

*Jealousy.* Jealousy was measured by the Revised Anticipated Sexual Jealousy Scale (Buunk, 1997), a scale consisting of 15 items; 5 items for each type of jealousy—reactive, anxious and possessive. The items of the *reactive jealousy* scale asked participants how upset they would feel if their partner would engage in various extra-dyadic intimate and sexual behaviours, such as having sexual contact with someone else or flirting with someone else. These five items were assessed on a five-point scale, ranging from 1, 'not at all upset', to 5, 'extremely upset'. *Possessive jealousy* was assessed by items such as 'I don't want my partner to meet too many people of the opposite sex' and 'It is not acceptable for me if my partner sees people of the opposite sex on a friendly basis'. For each item, the five possible answers ranged from 1, 'not applicable', to 5, 'very much applicable'. *Anxious jealousy* was assessed by items such as 'I am concerned about my partner finding someone else more attractive than me' and 'I worry about the idea that my partner could have a sexual relationship with someone else'. Items could be scored on five-point scales, ranging from 1, 'never', to 5, 'very often'. In study 1, although men and women reported equal intensities of possessive jealousy ( $M = 6.96$  versus  $M = 7.37$ ,  $t = -1.30$ ,  $p = ns$ ), women reported higher levels of both reactive ( $M = 16.53$  versus  $M = 17.93$ ,  $t = -2.49$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and anxious jealousy ( $M = 6.38$  versus  $M = 7.74$ ,  $t = -5.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales were: reactive jealousy alpha = 0.64; possessive jealousy alpha = 0.78; and anxious jealousy alpha = 0.87. Correlations between the three subscales were 0.31 (reactive–possessive), 0.16 (reactive–anxious) and 0.42 (possessive–anxious;  $ps < 0.01$ ).

### Results

The present study examined couples, not merely individuals. Data obtained from couples are, however, not independent (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Because non-independence of data can increase both type I and type II errors (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, 1988), the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kashy, Campbell, & Harris, 2006) was used to examine the

associations between jealousy of both partners and relationship quality. The APIM is an excellent dyadic data analytic approach that allows researchers to calculate the effect of an independent variable on both the individual's dependent variable (the *actor* effect) and his or her partner's dependent variable (the *partner* effect). As a result, the effect of an individual's jealousy on his or her relationship adjustment and on that of his or her partner's relationship adjustment can be calculated. The latter effect can also be interpreted as the effect of an individual's partner's jealousy on the individual's own relationship adjustment.

First, however, to assess the degree of non-independence between the couples' jealousy and relationship adjustment scores, Pearson correlations were computed between the partners' jealousy scores and MMQ scores (within-dyad correlations). It was found that there was a high degree of correspondence between the partners' MMQ scores:  $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Furthermore, significant correlations were found between the partners' reactive jealousy and possessive jealousy scores:  $r$ s are 0.29 and 0.14, respectively,  $ps < 0.01$ . These results indicate that, as could be expected, the dyadic data are not independent, especially with regard to relationship adjustment.

The central components of the APIM can be estimated by conducting two regression analyses: one within dyads and one between dyads. The actor and partner effects can be computed by combining the  $b$ -weights from these regression analyses. The actor and partner effects of jealousy on relationship adjustment are listed in Table 1.

The results in Table 1 show that, consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2, especially anxious jealousy of both partners was a strong predictor of relationship adjustment: individuals high in anxious jealousy showed lower relationship adjustment, as did individuals with partners high in anxious jealousy. In addition, also consistent with our hypotheses, a

positive effect on relationship adjustment was found for both partners' reactive jealousy. As individuals felt more reactively jealous, they showed higher relationship adjustment, as did individuals with partners high in reactive jealousy. Finally, in contrast to hypotheses 1 and 2, a significant, positive relation was found between a partner's possessive jealousy and relationship adjustment. No significant actor effect of possessive jealousy on relationship adjustment was found.

## STUDY 2

### Method

#### Participants and Procedure

A new sample of 264 married or cohabiting community volunteers, or 132 heterosexual couples, participated in study 2. Participants were recruited through postal mail surveys, using randomly selected names from telephone directories (the same procedure as was used in study 1). The mean age of the resulting sample of 264 heterosexual participants was 49 years ( $SD = 13$  years, range = 23–81). Participants were either married (89%) or cohabiting (11%). The mean length of the relationship was 24 years ( $SD = 14$  years, range = 2–55). Educational level was scored on a five-point scale (1 = primary school, 5 = higher educational level),  $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ , with a score of 3 corresponding with a higher grade elementary school level.

### Measures

**Relationship Satisfaction.** The Relational Interaction Satisfaction Scale (RISS; Buunk, 1990) was used to measure satisfaction with the interaction with the partner. Rather than measuring a global evaluation of the relationship, or assessing diverse aspects and determinants of relationship adjustment (as was used in study 1), the RISS measures the frequency with which interactions with a partner are experienced as rewarding. The RISS consists of seven items that are answered on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = very often). Examples of items are 'I feel happy when I'm with my partner' and 'We have quarrels'. In the present study, men and women did not differ on their total RISS score ( $M = 30.2$  versus  $M = 29.4$ ,  $t = 1.61$ ,  $p = ns$ ). Cronbach's alpha for the RISS in the present study was 0.86.

**Jealousy.** Jealousy was measured by Buunk's (1997) Revised Anticipated Sexual Jealousy Scale (RASJ; for a description, see study 1). Men and women

Table 1. Actor and partner effects of different types of jealousy on relationship adjustment

	Actor			Partner		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Reactive jealousy	0.27	3.86	<0.01	0.16	2.29	<0.05
Possessive jealousy	0.05	0.38	ns	0.31	2.38	<0.05
Anxious jealousy	-1.03	6.87	<0.01	-0.73	4.87	<0.01

reported equal intensities of possessive jealousy ( $M = 6.96$  versus  $M = 7.30$ ,  $t = -0.93$ ,  $p = \text{ns}$ ), but women reported higher levels of anxious jealousy ( $M = 6.32$  versus  $M = 7.61$ ,  $t = -3.94$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and marginally more reactive jealousy ( $M = 16.43$  versus  $M = 17.66$ ,  $t = -1.69$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ). Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales were: reactive jealousy alpha = 0.61; possessive jealousy alpha = 0.76; and anxious jealousy alpha = 0.89. Correlations between the three subscales were 0.33 (reactive–possessive), 0.14 (reactive–anxious) and 0.46 (possessive–anxious; all  $ps < 0.05$ ).

### Results

The degree of non-independence of the data was examined by computing Pearson correlations between both partners' RISS and jealousy scores (within-dyad correlations). A high degree of correspondence was found between the RISS-scores of both partners:  $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Furthermore, a significant correlation was found between both partners' reactive jealousy scores:  $r = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Next, the APIM (see study 1) was used to estimate the effect of both partners' jealousy scores (actor and partner effects) on relationship satisfaction as measured with the RISS (see Table 2).

Consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2 and study 1's findings, strong negative relations were found between levels of anxious jealousy of both partners and relationship satisfaction. That is, individuals high in anxious jealousy reported lower relationship satisfaction, as did individuals with partners high in anxious jealousy. Likewise, also consistent with our hypotheses and study 1's findings, significant positive relations between reactive jealousy and relationship satisfaction occurred. As individuals felt more reactively jealous, they reported higher relationship satisfaction, as did individuals with partners high in reactive jealousy.

Table 2. Actor and partner effect of different types of jealousy on relationship satisfaction

	Actor			Partner		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Reactive jealousy	0.27	3.86	<0.01	0.18	2.57	<0.05
Possessive jealousy	0.06	2.00	<0.05	0.03	1.00	ns
Anxious jealousy	-0.58	-9.67	<0.01	-0.42	-7.00	<0.01

The results for possessive jealousy were not consistent with our hypothesis, nor with study 1's findings: a significant positive actor effect of possessive jealousy on relationship satisfaction was observed. No significant partner effect of possessive jealousy on relationship satisfaction was found.

## STUDY 3

### Method

#### Participants and Procedure

A new sample of 1266 married or cohabiting community volunteers, or 633 heterosexual couples, participated in study 3. Participants were recruited through postal mail surveys, using randomly selected names from telephone directories (the same procedure as was used in studies 1 and 2). The mean age of the resulting sample of 1266 heterosexual participants was 46 years ( $SD = 14$  years, range = 18–86). Participants were either married (88%) or cohabiting (12%). The mean length of the relationship was 22 years ( $SD = 13$  years, range = 1–56). Educational level was scored on a five-point scale (1 = primary school, 5 = higher educational level),  $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ , with a score of 3 corresponding with a higher grade elementary school level.

#### Measures

**Relationship Quality.** The Dutch Relationship Questionnaire (DRQ; Barelds & Luteijn, 2003; Barelds, Luteijn, & Arrindell, 2003) was used to measure relationship quality. The DRQ is a multidimensional relationship questionnaire that measures five aspects of marital quality: Independence, Closeness, Identity, Conflict Resolution and Sexuality. These five scales can be summed to obtain a total relationship quality score. The DRQ consists of 80 'True-False' items. Examples of items are 'My partner tends to control me', 'I often tell my partner that I love him/her', 'I think I have little to offer to my partner', 'When we have an argument, we start yelling at each other' and 'I am content with our sex life'. In the present study, only the total DRQ score will be used.

Previous studies have demonstrated the DRQ to have adequate reliability and validity: test-retest  $rs$  of the total DRQ score in the general population vary between 0.81 and 0.92 (with a 2- to 3-month interval), median alpha of the total DRQ score (based on 12 samples) is 0.93, and relations

between the DRQ and several internationally used measures of marital quality or marital satisfaction support the validity of the DRQ. Moreover, the DRQ can be used to predict marital dissolution and therapy success and for marital therapy evaluation (Barelds et al., 2003). In the present study, men and women did not differ on their total DRQ score ( $M = 68.8$  versus  $M = 69.6$ ,  $t = -1.20$ ,  $p = ns$ ). Cronbach's alpha for the total DRQ in the present study was 0.93.

*Jealousy.* Jealousy was measured by Buunk's (1997) RASJ (see study 1). Women reported higher levels of possessive jealousy ( $M = 7.04$  versus  $M = 7.42$ ,  $t = -2.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), anxious jealousy ( $M = 6.81$  versus  $M = 7.56$ ,  $t = -4.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and reactive jealousy ( $M = 16.76$  versus  $M = 17.96$ ,  $t = -4.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales were: reactive jealousy alpha = 0.70; possessive jealousy alpha = 0.78; and anxious jealousy alpha = 0.87. Correlations between the three subscales were 0.36 (reactive–possessive), 0.17 (reactive–anxious) and 0.45 (possessive–anxious; all  $ps < 0.01$ ).

## Results

First, to assess the degree on non-independence, Pearson correlations were computed between both partners' relationship quality scores and levels of jealousy (within-dyad correlations). There was a high degree of correspondence between the partners' DRQ scores:  $r = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Furthermore, significant correlations were found between both partners' reactive jealousy scores ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), anxious jealousy scores ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and possessive jealousy scores ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Next, using the APIM (see study 1) the actor and partner effects of jealousy on relationship quality were estimated (see Table 3).

The results with regard to anxious and reactive jealousy are consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2 and study 1 and 2's findings: high levels of anxious jealousy of both partners related negatively to relationship quality, whereas high levels of reactive jealousy of both partners related positively to relationship quality. That is, as individuals felt more reactively jealous, they showed higher relationship quality, as did individuals with partners high in reactive jealousy. In contrast, as individuals felt more anxiously jealous, they showed lower relationship quality, as did individuals with partners high in reactive jealousy. There were no significant actor or partner effects of possessive jealousy.

Table 3. Actor and partner effects of different types of jealousy on relationship quality

	Actor			Partner		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Reactive jealousy	0.18	4.50	<0.01	0.11	2.75	<0.01
Possessive jealousy	-0.02	-0.29	ns	0.12	1.71	ns
Anxious jealousy	-0.84	-12.00	<0.01	-0.46	-6.57	<0.01

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Jealousy is an important issue in romantic relationships: it is rated among the top three of the most frequent problems experienced in intimate relationships (Zusman & Knox, 1998). The present paper investigated the relationship between different operationalizations of relationship quality and three types of jealousy—reactive, anxious and possessive—in both partners. We expected that the two potentially problematic types of jealousy—reactive and possessive—would bear negative relationships with relationship quality, whereas reactive jealousy would positively relate to relationship quality. Although somewhat depending on the precise operationalization of relationship quality, in general, for two of the three types of jealousy our prediction was supported. In all three studies, both individuals' own and their partner's levels of anxious jealousy were negatively related to relationship quality. Anxious jealousy therefore seems to constitute a negative relationship phenomenon. Our findings on anxious jealousy are consistent with clinical studies that show that ruminating about and cognitively generating images of one's mate becoming involved with someone else and feeling anxious and worried about this possibility, is especially characteristic of pathologically jealous individuals who, in general, experience great relationship distress (e.g., Dolan & Bishay, 1996; Ellis, 1996).

In contrast, our studies found positive associations between relationship quality and reactive jealousy. Reactive jealousy therefore seems to constitute a primarily positive relationship phenomenon. As noted before, reactive jealousy is likely to be interpreted by the partner as a token of love and caring. Individuals may even strategically induce reactive jealousy in their mate for the purpose of enhancing their relationship. As noted before, studies show that especially women are inclined to



engage in jealousy-evoking behaviours, such as flirting with someone else, to make their partner believe that they are desirable and that they better keep their commitments (e.g., Buss, 2000; Buss & Shackelford, 1997).

In contrast to what we predicted, we did not find possessive jealousy to be consistently related to relationship quality. A possible explanation for this finding lies in the ambivalent nature of possessive jealousy. That is, the association between relationship quality and possessive jealousy may depend heavily on the way in which possessive jealousy is expressed. For instance, when a possessively jealous partner buys flowers or jewellery to keep his or her mate interested, possessive jealousy may be positively associated with relationship quality. In contrast, when a possessively jealous partner resorts to violence or debasement to prevent his or her mate from becoming unfaithful, possessive jealousy is likely to be associated negatively to relationship quality.

Another possibility is that possessive jealousy is not as much a qualitatively different type of jealousy, but rather a consequence or (weakened) manifestation of anxious jealousy. For instance, anxious rumination and/or imagined infidelity may lead individuals to adopt attitudes or behaviours that aim to restrict a mate's contact with members of the opposite sex and prevent a mate from becoming unfaithful. If this should be the case, it is possible that the negative association between jealousy and relationship quality is captured in the relationship between anxious jealousy and relationship quality, leaving a non-significant relationship between possessive jealousy and relationship.

If possessive jealousy is indeed merely an extension of anxious jealousy, a two-factor model of jealousy—distinguishing between reactive and anxious jealousy (including possessive jealousy)—would be more appropriate than Buunk's three-factor model. A similar two-factor model has been proposed by Parrott (1991), who distinguishes between '*fait-accompl*' jealousy, i.e., feelings of anger and betrayal to a mate's extra-dyadic affair, and 'suspicious jealousy', i.e., feelings of anxiety and insecurity concerning a mate's possible extra-dyadic sexual involvement. In a similar vein, Buunk and Dijkstra (2004) found participants' jealousy in response to vignettes of a partner's sexual respectively emotional infidelity to be clustered into two types of jealousy, i.e., 'angry jealousy', following a partner's sexual infidelity, and 'threat jealousy', following a partner's emotional infidelity. Two-factor models such as these suggest

that situational cues, or at least the perception of those cues, are defining factors when distinguishing between different types of jealousy. Whereas one type of jealousy is evoked in response to a mate's *actual* infidelity, the other type of jealousy is evoked when individuals are concerned that their partner *may* or *will* become unfaithful and refers to a type of jealousy that is aroused in response to a mate's *possible* infidelity.

In addition to the relationship between jealousy and relationship quality, individuals' jealousy responses also affected those of their mate. As individuals were more reactively jealous, their mates were too. The same was found for anxious jealousy. Apparently, jealousy is not only triggered by jealousy-evoking situations, such as a mate kissing or flirting with someone else, but also by a mate's inclination to express jealousy. A possible explanation is that individuals generally feel attracted to others who share their attitudes and opinions (e.g., Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002, p. 83). As a consequence, individuals may unconsciously select mates who respond with similar levels of reactive and/or anxious jealousy to jealousy-evoking situations. Another possibility is that reciprocity concerns with regard to a mate's jealousy play a role. By comparing their own jealousy response to the one their mate has exhibited in the past, couples may set implicit rules about how to respond if one of them engages in extra-dyadic sexual or emotional involvement. For instance, an individual may feel justified to respond with intense anxious and/or reactive jealousy when his or her mate has done so in the past.

### *Clinical Implications*

In general, the treatment of jealousy occurs in one of three contexts: (a) in global relationship therapy; (b) in the counseling after extramarital sex; or (c) in individual or relationship therapy that focuses on morbid or pathological jealousy (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2001). In the treatment of jealousy, nowadays, therapists mostly rely on counselling that includes behavioural and cognitive components and that emphasizes communication between the partners.

Our study suggests that educating clients about jealousy is of utmost importance. In Western culture, jealousy has a negative connotation and is often looked upon as a socially undesirable emotion (de Weerth & Kalma, 1993). Many clients and their partners who seek help for jealousy or who, in the course of global relationship therapy, deal with the issue of jealousy will therefore be

likely to label their experience as wrong, a moralistic determination that can complicate the discussion and management of jealousy. Learning that jealousy also has a positive side may ease the shame and encourage clients to work on their problem. Thus, educating clients about the different types of jealousy, what they consist of, and how they are related to relationship quality seems to be one of the first steps in treating couples who struggle with jealousy issues. For both clients and therapist it should be clear what type of jealousy should be disputed and what type should not, and/or even be cherished.

The present studies also help nail down the conditions under which certain (cognitive-behavioural) techniques and interventions are effective in the treatment of jealousy. For instance, cognitive therapists often use the technique of positive relabelling. That is, the therapist reformulates jealousy as a positive feature in the couple's life (i.e., DeSilva & Marks, 1994). For example, therapists may label jealousy as a source of excitement in a relationship that has become boring and stale. Our studies suggest that positive relabelling should not be indiscriminately used. When a client primarily suffers from anxious jealousy, positive relabelling may have adverse effects. Incorrectly reframing anxious jealousy as a sign of love may, for instance, lead to the tacit acceptance of jealousy-related conflict or jealous demanding or nagging (Puente & Cohen, 2003). In contrast, positive relabelling may be a helpful technique in the treatment of couples dealing with the aftermath of infidelity. These couples may benefit from learning that reactive jealousy does not negatively affect the quality of their relationship, but instead can be seen as a sign of emotional involvement from the part of the jealous partner and as a sign that not all love is lost.

Our study also suggests that, depending on the type of jealousy, different techniques and/or types of counselling are needed to manage the *intensity* of the jealousy experience. The intensity of the reactive jealousy experience may best be dealt with by working through feelings of hurt and anger that are the result of a partner's transgression. In addition, in the beginning of therapy, reactively jealous individuals may be helped to *decide* to forgive their partner for their infidelity, so-called decision-based forgiveness. Decision-based forgiveness is defined as the cognitive letting go of resentment, bitterness and need for vengeance. Most clients who decide to forgive their partner for their infidelity report a significant reduction in negative emotions after deciding to forgive. Clients discover that they need

not be victims of their feelings but can decide to move forward. Despite the hurt, they feel more empowered to tackle the problems in their relationship (DiBlasio, 2000). Importantly to note is that, when clients are willing to forgive their partner for his or her infidelity, it is highly likely that they will also be less inclined to develop feelings of paranoia and distrust, i.e., anxious jealousy, in response to the infidelity that has occurred. Recently, Baucom, Gordon, Snyder, Atkins, and Christensen (2006) developed an infidelity-specific, couple-based intervention programme that incorporates interventions from cognitive-behavioural, insight-oriented, trauma-based and forgiveness approaches to working with couples.

In contrast, the intensity of the anxious jealousy experience may best be managed by addressing irrational beliefs of paranoia, insecurity and distrust that form the core of the anxious jealousy experience. In particular, cognitive-behavioural techniques, such as identifying and disputing *irrational beliefs* (such as 'I always have to be loved'), fixed role playing (play for a week someone who is not unreasonably jealous) and desensitization, have proved their effectiveness in the treatment of unfounded jealousy (DeSilva & Marks, 1994; Ellis, 1996; Ridley, 1996). Therapies that include one or more of these components are cognitive-behavioural marital therapy (e.g., Baucom & Epstein, 1990), cognitive therapy for couples (Dolan & Bishay, 1996) and rational emotive behaviour therapy (Ellis, 1996). In contrast, dealing with reactive jealousy in this way, i.e., by rationalizing the intensity of feelings of hurt and anger in response to a partner's actual infidelity, may deteriorate rather than improve relationship functioning.

### Strengths and Limitations

An important strength of the present studies is the fact that *both* partners' jealousy responses and perceptions of relationship quality were assessed. As a consequence, it was possible to relate individuals' jealousy scores to their partners' perception of relationship quality and *vice versa*. This relationship has not been examined before and, in so doing, our studies make a significant contribution to the research literature on jealousy. In addition, the present studies help clear the inconsistency with regard to the relation between relationship quality and jealousy by showing that different types of jealousy relate differently to (both partners') perceptions of relationship quality. Finally, by conducting our studies in large samples of

married and cohabitating couples, compared to, for instance, small samples of clinical cases or student samples, as is often the case in jealousy research, we enhanced the generalizability of our results.

A limitation of the present studies is that the causal connections between different types of jealousy and relationship quality remain unclear. Do, for instance, high levels of reactive jealousy lead to higher relationship quality or does higher relationship quality lead to increased levels of reactive jealousy? Another limitation of our study is that we cannot, with certainty, conclude what exactly makes high levels of anxious jealousy so problematic. Is it because anxious jealousy may be delusional in nature (i.e., one feels anxiously jealous when there is not reason to) or because it constitutes an aversive way of coping with relationship stress? Neither did we assess *how* exactly individuals' levels of jealousy are related to their partners' perceptions of relationship quality.

The present study suggests several avenues for future research. First, future research may investigate the processes that underlie the relationships we found in our study and identify the variables that mediate and/or moderate the relationship between jealousy and relationship quality. It may help answer questions such as: why is anxious jealousy related to poorer relationship quality and reactive jealousy to higher relationship quality? How does anxious respectively reactive jealousy affect the communication between couples? Future research may also help explain our non-significant findings with regard to possessive jealousy. Why is possessive jealousy not (directly) related to relationship quality? To what extent is possessive jealousy an extension of anxious jealousy? In addition, in order to help therapists develop more effective jealousy interventions, research may examine what variables may compensate the negative relationship between anxious jealousy and relationship quality.

## CONCLUSION

The present studies examined both partners' jealousy responses and perceptions of relationship quality and showed that different types of jealousy were related differently to both partners' perceptions of relationship quality. More specifically, whereas individuals' levels of reactive jealousy were positively related to their perceptions of relationship quality and those of their partners, individuals' levels of anxious jealousy were negatively

related to their perceptions of relationship quality and those of their partners. In contrast, ratings of possessive jealousy were not found to be consistently related to individuals' own or their partners' perceptions of relationship quality. Our studies' findings show that distinguishing between different types of jealousy is not only a fruitful approach, but also a necessary one if one aims to uncover the complex role of jealousy in intimate relationships.

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