

Relationship Between Jealousy and Subjective Happiness Among University Students: Moderating Role of Self-Esteem

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The main aim of present study is to test the associations between perceived jealousy, subjective happiness, and self-esteem. Moreover, it also aimed to test the role of self-esteem as a moderator between jealousy and subjective happiness. Our sample comprised of 200 university students using purposive convenient sampling technique including 100 male and 100 female students. For data collection we used Perceived Jealousy Scale (Iqbal, Fazaldad, & Hassan, 2019), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Findings indicate a significant negative relationship between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness ($r = -.32, p < .001$), and a positive relationship between subjective happiness and self-esteem. Furthermore, self-esteem acts as a moderator between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness. This study is beneficial in finding ways to enhance the self-esteem of students so that they can deal with negative emotions of jealousy and can experience positive emotions of happiness.

Keywords. Jealousy, self-esteem, subjective happiness

One of the important aspects of human life is to lead a happy and contented life, thus, there are several empirically informed variables contributing in positive psychological outcomes. These may include general positive and negative affectivity, lifestyle, wealth, success, academic achievement, and established career to name a few. Diener (2000) has defined well-being as an individual's affective and cognitive evaluation of their life. Accordingly, there are some character traits that contribute to the experience and perception of happiness among individuals including self-concept, and satisfaction

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with life. Conversely, there may be some factors that hold back the individual to be happy, such may include lower self-esteem, feeling of inadequacy and jealousy. In order to better understand the subjective happiness and self-esteem among individuals one must therefore take into account their evaluation of negative traits such as jealousy to gain better understanding of the subjective experience of happiness (Hill & Davis, 2000; Marazziti et al., 2010; Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005). Therefore, the current study is designed to investigate the relationship between perceived jealousy, self-esteem, and subjective happiness.

In western literature jealousy is viewed as a standout amongst the most negative feelings people may have towards their associated beings (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2008). In general, it is related to a large number of negative social outcomes, for example, abusive behavior, bullying, aggression, relationship conflicts, and generalized hostility (Barnett, Martinez, & Bluestein, 1995; Buss, 2000; Puente & Cohen, 2003).

Conventionally, roots to defining and describing jealousy are traced back to Sigmund Freud. Freud described jealousy as an irrational emotion a person experiences as a result of early unpleasant childhood experiences (Klein, 2013; Ogden, 1983). It needs to identify the sources of jealousy and learning ways to manage such negative emotions to avoid any negative psychological outcomes. The most common source of jealousy is a feeling when individuals recognize that they can't have all what they need thus resulting in a feeling of pain and agony associated with losing a 'person' or 'object' they value. It is a negative emotion that individuals experience when they fail to have a certain quality, accomplishment, or ownership that others ought to have (Bringle & Buunk, 1991; Buunk, Goor, & Solano, 2010; Kolak, & Volling, 2011; Miller & Perlman, 2010; Mullen & Martin, 1994; Volling, McElwain, & Miller, 2002).

Most past research has studied jealousy in romantic relationships (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Mathes, 1986), however quite a few have studied the significance of jealousy at a workplace (Ahmed, 2016). Nevertheless, the emotion of experiencing jealousy is not limited to only working individuals or among romantic/married couples, rather, young people pursuing their education also exhibit stronger feelings of jealousy towards their fellow students (Knox, Zusman, Mabon, & Shriver, 1999). It is therefore crucial to understand the feelings of jealousy from the perspective of students within academic institutes. An academic achievement is found to have strong associations with a successful career afterward. Therefore, students experience a constant sense of competition among themselves that put students at a greater

risk to develop a feeling of deprivation and a threatened sense of self (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). A maladaptive solution to such feelings gives rise to maladaptive character traits and negative psychopathological outcomes such as envy and jealousy towards their peers who are sounder academically and higher achievers (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011). Consequently, students experience lost sense of purpose in life, procrastination, aggression towards peers, feeling of inadequacy and lost sense of self and may contribute in developing negative coping mechanisms (Anderson, 2002; Parker et al., 2005).

Therefore, it is imperative to examine jealousy in relation with positive coping mechanisms. One of the associated constructs of coping with jealousy is self-esteem (Baumeister, 1998; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007).

A jealous individual is expected to have a lower self-esteem (White & Mullen, 1989). Self-esteem is generally categorized into explicit self-esteem, which refers to the conscious awareness of self-worth, and intrinsic self-esteem, which is unconscious; a contrast between these two sorts of self-esteem results in discrepant self-esteem (Kernis & Paradise, 2002). An individual experiencing jealousy perceives the circumstances as a threat to self-confidence and self-esteem (Lazarus, 1999).

Self-esteem is generally measured encompassing four domains. Including secure self-esteem i.e., one's freely communicated positive self-respect is compatible with secretly held emotions toward oneself. Second, it is steady i.e., one's self-esteem does not fluctuate and is persistent over time. Third, it is compatible i.e., explicit self-esteem is consistent with implicit feelings. Last and most imperative for our motivations is self-esteem is unconditional i.e., it doesn't rely upon specific results or ideal social correlates (Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2003; Mruk, 2013). Considering these four dimensions of self-esteem, a counter defense mechanism against jealousy can be established through promoting these positive dimensions of self-esteem and feelings of happiness among students.

Self-esteem is thus often considered as a guide of general joy or prosperity (Hewitt, 1998; Ryff, 1989). In previous research, it is proposed that there is a direct association between the self-esteem and happiness (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Yue, Liu, Jiang, & Hiranandani, 2014). Happiness is characterized as the psychological condition of positive feelings including satisfaction with life and delight (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi 2002). However, happiness is a vague construct which can mean different things to different individuals. Most significant constituents of happiness in empirical research are

satisfaction with life (Simsek, 2009) well-being, quality of life, and success (Diener, 2000; Diener & Oishi, 2000). Similarly, Diener, Lucas, and Scollan (2009) propose that happiness is related to people's assessments and emotional understanding of their own lives. Essentially, happiness depends upon the person's subjective appraisal of his/her life (Lu & Argyle, 1991).

Due to this adaptive function of happiness we aim to test the associations between jealousy and subjective happiness. Consistently, Zimmerman (2000) concludes that subjective well-being is associated with high self-esteem. Whereas, low self-esteem inculcates feeling of inferiority, unhappiness and anxiety thus people with lower self-esteem are more prone to jealousy. Individuals having high self-esteem and happiness take great responsibility and duties and have forgiving and positive attitude. These findings indicate that although feelings of jealousy are inevitable to experience, self-esteem serves as an adaptive coping mechanism to avoid any harmful effect of jealousy. Therefore, in present research we aim to explore the moderating role of self-esteem in dealing with feelings of jealousy.

Moreover, in present study we are also interested in examining gender differences between males and females on jealousy. For example, an investigation found that women who are happier and have high self-esteem exhibit lower signs of jealousy in their emotional relationship. In comparison women who indicate stress and unhappiness in relationship demonstrate significantly more jealous emotions and feeling of insecurity. Khanchandani and Durham (2009) found that female students who show happier attitude and have a higher self-esteem exhibit lower jealousy in their relations than students who demonstrated stress and despondency, which urge them to demonstrate much heightened feelings of jealousy towards their peers. Therefore, it may be of interest to study the gender differences in the levels of jealousy, self-esteem and happiness among males and females.

Jealousy is one of the most commonly experienced negative emotions and a major contributor in relationship problems. Therefore, it is imperative to study people experiencing pathological jealousy as people with heightened feelings of jealousy towards others create obstacles, hindrances, and difficulties for their partners and peers. More specifically in the academic intuitions there is a constant competition among students to obtain higher grades and excel academically (Khanchandani & Durham, 2009). Such a competitive environment is beneficial at one hand as it motivates students to achieve the most expected of them. Nevertheless, such a growing competition put students at a greater risk of developing feelings of

jealousy when they fail to do so. Therefore, there is a need to explore the construct more generally in an academic setting among students rather than testing it into only in intimate relationships. Present study is therefore designed to meet this very objective to examine jealousy among a sample drawn from students and its associations with self-esteem and happiness among students.

Consequently, managing feelings of jealousy is imperative in understanding one's weaknesses, acknowledging them and overcoming these through increased self-management to lead a healthier and satisfied life. Therefore, in present study we conceptualized self-esteem as a moderating mechanism between jealousy that people experience and their experiences of subjective happiness.

As mentioned previously past research has mainly concentrated upon the understanding and exploring the phenomenon of jealousy among romantic couple relationships (Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). We aim to extend this work and explore jealousy among student population. Due to a growing competition and materialistic standards of the society, young people experience a strong and consistent sense of competition with each other. Failure to meet up the standard set by others results in a greater feeling of jealousy towards others resulting in lower self-esteem. More specifically, individuals react with jealousy when their self-esteem is threatened by a potential loss or when their self-worth is threatened by comparing their situation with that of someone enjoying better circumstances (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001).

We argue that exploring jealousy is useful in understanding the experience of jealousy among students in educational settings. In particular, we emphasize self-esteem and happiness as two main indicators of a healthy relationship that would enable students to combat any harmful effects of jealousy as a negative emotion. Assessing the different dimensions of jealousy will thus allow exploring how jealousy relates in different ways to self-esteem and lower levels of happiness among young students (Salovey & Rodin, 1989; Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

The outcomes of the present study will also be useful for further refining the more general conceptualization of jealousy other than focusing on romantic relationship only. Therefore, this study will investigate the relationship between jealousy, self-esteem, and subjective happiness and to present useful information for predicting subjective happiness among young adults specifically among university students.

Method

Sample

A purposive convenience sample comprising of 200 students (male=100, female=100) of undergraduate and postgraduate level was recruited for the study. The age range of participants was 18 to 35 years ($M = 67.97$, $SD = 6.23$). Minimum qualification was 12 years of education. Participants belonged to different public and private universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Instruments

Jealousy Scale. Jealousy Scale (Iqbal et al., 2019) is a 15 items instrument consisting of 3 factors. Factor 1, Arrogance is comprised of 9 items, factor II, Viciousness consisted of 3 items while the third factor, Hatred includes 2 items. Cronbach alpha of subscales ranged from .88, .43 and .75 respectively. Jealousy Scale responses are recorded on a 4-point rating scale ranging from 1 =Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree. No reverse coded item is present in the scale. The scores ranged from 15 to 60 where high scores indicating higher feelings of jealousy.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. A 10-item scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be unidimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A higher score indicates higher self-esteem among respondents.

Subjective Happiness Scale. Subjective Happiness Scale developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) a 4-item scale is designed to measure subjective happiness. Each item is completed by choosing one of the 7 options that finish a given sentence fragment. The options are different for each of the four questions.

Procedure

After obtaining the informed consent, the researcher collected the data by administering the scale to the respondents. The respondents were instructed to complete the scale as honestly as possible and make sure to give response on every item. There was no time limit for the completion of scale as they were allowed to complete the scale at their ease. Respondents were assured about the confidentiality of the information they were providing. After getting data, scoring and analysis was done and results were computed to test the hypotheses.

Results

In order to meet the objectives of the study and to test the formulated hypotheses a series of statistical analyses were carried out that are reported below.

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation, Alpha Coefficients and Correlations Between Perceived Jealousy, Self-Esteem Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale (N=200)

Scales	<i>k</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	JS	RBSES	SHS
JS	14	.84	23.46	7.4	-	-.32**	-.19**
RBSES	10	.64	2.8	0.42		-	.34**
SHS	4	.42	4.43	1.48			-

Note. JS= Jealousy Scale; RBSES= Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; SHS= Subjective Happiness Scale.

Table 1 indicates the alpha reliability coefficients of the Jealousy Scale, Self-esteem Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for these scales indicate that the scale are internally consistent and are reliable measures to assess the underlying constructs. Correlation coefficient indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and happiness while these variables are negatively related to jealousy.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis on Predicting Self-Esteem Through Perceived Jealousy and Subjective Happiness (N=200)

	Self-Esteem			95% CI	
	<i>B</i>	S.E	<i>β</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Step I					
Constant	32.33	.94	-	30.46	34.20
Jealousy	-.18	.03	-.32***	-.07	-.01
<i>R</i> = .32; <i>R</i> ² = .10, <i>F</i> (1,198) = 22.90, <i>p</i> < .001					
Step II					
Constant	27.93	1.35	-	25.27	30.60
Jealousy	-.15	.03	-.26***	-.22	-.07
Subjective Happiness	.20	.25	.31***	.11	.29

R = .42; *R*² = .18, $\Delta R^2 = .08$; *F*(2,197) = 22.08, *p* < .001.

** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001.

The first model in Table 2 indicates that jealousy is a significant negative predictor for self-esteem and accounts for 10% variance in self-esteem. Moreover, at the second step we added subjective happiness as an additional predictor for self-esteem that positive perceived subjective happiness and accounted for 8% additional variance into predicting self-esteem. Both predictors accounted for 18% of variance in predicting self-esteem.

Furthermore, value of Tolerance (.89) which is greater than 0.2 and VIF (1.11) which is less than 10 indicating that multicollinearity does not exist among variables. Significant value of Durbin Watson (1.89) indicated that errors are independent and are not correlated.

Moderation Analysis

Table 3

Self-Esteem as Moderator Between Perceived Jealousy and Subjective Happiness (N=200)

	<i>b</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	12.31	1.04	1.04	.001		
Perceived Jealousy (centered)	0.76	0.047	16.30	.001	.67	.85
Subjective Happiness (centered)	1.47	.66	2.22	.026	.16	2.78
Self-Esteem Jealousy	-.05	.02	2.42	.016	-.10	-.01

PROCESS Macro was used to carry out moderation analysis.

Main effect of the predictor. At the mean value of self-esteem there was a significant positive relationship between subjective happiness and perceived jealousy $b = 1.47$, $t = 2.22$, $p = .027$, 95% BCa CI [.16, 2.78].

Main effect of the moderator. At the mean value of perceived jealousy, there was a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and subjective happiness, $b = .52$, $t = 1.18$, $p < .001$, 95% BCa CI [-.34, 1.39].

Interaction. There is a significant interaction between self-esteem and jealousy that negatively predicts subjective happiness, $b = -.05$, $t = 2.42$, $p < .01$, 95% BC a CI [-.10, -.01]. This indicates that the relationship between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness and is conditional upon person's self-esteem.

Slope Analysis for Moderation. A slope analysis indicates that when self-esteem is low (-1SD), there is a non-significant relationship between perceived jealous and subjective happiness, $b = .06$, $t = .57$, $p = .569$, 95% BCa CI [-.16, .29]. Moreover, at the mean of self-

esteem, there is a significant negative relationship between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness $b = -.16, t = -.185, p = .026, 95\%$ BCa CI $[-.34, -.41]$. Additionally, at the higher level of self-esteem (+1SD), there is a significant negative relationship between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness, $b = -.39, t = 2.74, p < .001, 95\%$ BCa CI $[-.67, -.11]$. Therefore, we can conclude that self-esteem significantly moderates the relationship between jealousy and subjective happiness, whilst students with high self-esteem have lower jealousy and experience greater happiness. Following mod graph visually demonstrates this moderating role of self-esteem.

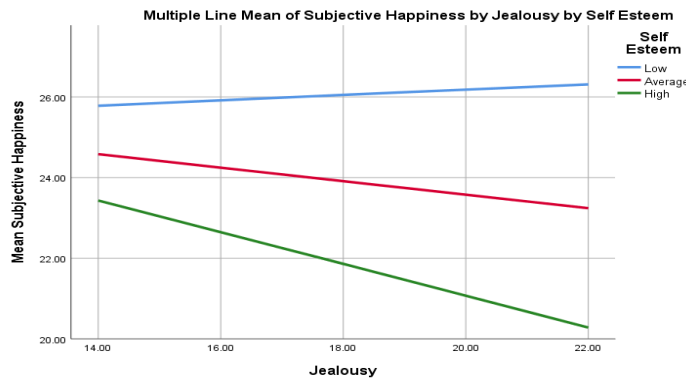


Figure 1. Role of self-esteem in moderating the relationship between perceived jealousy and subjective happiness.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, *t*-Values and Cohen’s *d* of Scores of the Male ($n=100$) and Female University Students ($n=100$) on Jealousy Scale, Self-Esteem Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale ($N = 200$)

Variable	Male ($n=100$)		Feale ($n=100$)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen’s <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
JS	23.15	7.13	23.75	7.69	.58	.562	-2.68	1.46	-
RBSES	28.15	4.32	27.88	4.17	.45	.654	-.915	1.46	-
SHS	18.02	4.23	17.43	7.23	.70	.482	-1.06	2.24	-

Note. JS= Jealousy Scale; RBSES= Rosen Bergh Self-Esteem Scale; SHS= Subjective Happiness Scale; LL= Lower limit; UL= Upper Limit; CI= Confidence Interval.

Results of Table 4 indicate the mean differences between male ($n=100$) and female ($n=100$) university students on Jealousy Scale, Self-Esteem Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale. Results indicate that there are non-significant gender differences on jealousy, self-esteem and subjective happiness.

Discussion

Jealousy is a universally experienced negative emotion and needs addressing through using and inculcating adaptive psychological functions. Present study therefore designed to test the associations between jealousy, self-esteem and happiness. Results for each of the hypothesis are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

We hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between self-esteem and subjective happiness among university students. Results of the study are consistent with the expected relationship and indicate that self-esteem and subjective happiness are significantly positively related with each other. It reveals that if an individual has inflated self-esteem, he is able to enjoy each and every aspect of life and have higher level of happiness. These results are in line with some previous studies highlighting that happiness is positively related to selflessness, social skills (Demir, Jaafar, Bilyk, & Mohd Ariff, 2012), and self-esteem (Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010; Sato & Yuki, 2014). Likewise, Garaigordobil (2015) also submitted that adolescents with positive self-concept and higher level of self-esteem have greater feelings of happiness and accomplish great supportive and cooperative tasks.

The results also suggest that jealousy is negatively related with subjective happiness and self-esteem. This implies that individuals having elevated feelings of jealousy exhibit low self-esteem and unable to enjoy their lives at their fullest. These results are consistent with the expected hypothesis anticipating that participants with higher jealousy will exhibit lower levels of self-esteem and happiness. These findings were also consistent with past research which recommended that self-esteem supports to gauge status in social relations (DeSteno, Valdesolo, & Bartlett, 2006), and that higher feelings of jealousy were consistently linked with low overall self-esteem (Salovey & Rodin, 1991). Moreover, young individuals with higher level of happiness had very few undesirable social skills like impulsivity, jealousy and withdrawal and those psychopathological symptoms were rarely found in happy individuals (Agbaria, Ronen, & Hamama, 2012; Bartels, 2015). Tov-Ruach (1980) also concludes that jealousy reinforces self-concept, so that the threat of loss of the relationships will lead to the threat of loss of the self.

Furthermore, the study also hypothesized that happiness and jealousy are predictors of self-esteem. The study data confirmed the hypothesis indicating that jealousy negatively whereas subjective happiness positively predicts self-esteem. These results ratified the

theoretical models that have identified self-esteem as an aspect of happiness, along with this, results were endorsed by the studies which identified the predictive power of the capability of social relations (Easterlin, 2006; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Lehto, 2013), self-identity and self-esteem (Garaigordobil & Bernarás, 2009).

Likewise, the study outcomes also established a role of self-esteem as a moderator in a relationship between jealousy and happiness among university students. The results of the current study are consistent with the previous studies that identified the adaptive role of self-esteem in the relationship between psychopathological symptoms like self-concept, jealousy and happiness (Garaigordobil, 2015). Similarly, Firestone (2011) suggested that low self-esteem plays an important role in developing feelings of jealousy, as the person has no or little self-worth, they feel that they are not worthy for the person they are with and are always insecure about losing what they have, this feeling of insecurity in turn makes them to act out jealous. He also suggested that jealous individuals can't tolerate others to enjoy life as they are unable to enjoy these blessings of life by themselves and experience greater level of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

Lastly, study sightsee a non-significant relationship between gender, jealousy, level of self-esteem and happiness. Both male and female equally involve in experiencing jealousy towards others and in having distorted self-esteem. As well as being jealous with others and having inflated self-esteem equally affects their feelings of being happy. These results are in line with the previous studies as findings of Cooley (2006) study indicated that gender doesn't play a significant role to become jealous and upon self-esteem. Kato (2014) also proposed non-significant gender differences between males and females.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study suggest that people experiencing more jealousy usually have low self-esteem and feel unhappy in most of the situations. Hence individuals and mental health professionals must focus upon enhancement of self-esteem among people to deal with and adapt to any negative emotions caused by jealousy. This will aid in experiencing happiness and satisfaction in life and overall wellbeing of individuals.

Limitations and Suggestions

A feeling of jealousy or happiness can be very subjective and use of self-report measures such as the one used in present study might not

capture and measure these constructs in breadth. Therefore, we suggest using open ended questions in jealousy questionnaire so that more accurate and in-depth information could be obtained. A more representative sample would contribute in generalizability of study findings to a wider population.

Implications

This study would be beneficial in understanding how jealousy effects the academic achievement of students experiencing heightened levels of jealousy towards their peers and how the interpersonal relations get disturbed due to the feelings of jealousy. Whilst, gaining insight about feelings of jealousy among students it would be beneficial to explore and address bully and aggressive behavior in educational setups. Moreover, this study is imperative in understanding that jealousy is not only harmful to the victims rather takes a great toll on the mental health of the individual experiencing jealousy. Thus, this study would also help to understand that jealousy is a maladaptive and pathological condition having negative impact on person's psychological well-being, vitality, happiness and lower levels of self-esteem that requires clinical consideration.

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