

The effect of romantic attachment style in romantic relationships on jealousy types and the difference in gender and relationship duration

İdil Kuruöz

Department of Psychology - İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

PSYC 206- 001 Instructor: Burcu Ayşen Ürgen

Abstract

This study explored the effects of romantic attachment styles (anxious/ambivalent, avoidant, securely) on jealousy types (reactive, suspicious) among couples. This study includes individuals as participants between 18-30 and who are not married or engaged. Furthermore, the study investigates four categories (1-6 months, 6-12 months, 12-24 months, 24 months, and more than 24 months) for the length of the relationship and individuals' genders to examine if these can affect the results. To measure romantic attachment styles, we used Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R); and to measure jealousy type, we used the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS: Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989), which are both Likert scales. For the results, it is observed that people who have anxious/ambivalent attachment styles are more likely to have suspicious jealousy, and this can interact with the length of the relationship such that anxious/ambivalently attached people who have a relationship that has been lasting less than six months may display more amount of suspicious jealousy. In general, men tend to show more suspicious jealousy than women regardless of their attachment style, and also individuals that are in a long-term relationship (longer than 12 months) tend to show less suspicious jealousy than

individuals that are in a short-term relationship (shorter than 12 months) regardless of attachment style, and gender.

Key words: romantic relationships, jealousy, suspicious, reactive, attachment, gender, duration of the relationship, anxious, secure, avoidant.

Introduction

1.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory queries how coaction between child and the parent influence development of self, personality. A child's attachment style is determined by the sort and strain of emotional and behavioural reactions she/he presents when the caregiver is separated from the child. According to this child can develop one of four attachment styles which are secure, avoidant, anxious and disorganized. The child that has a secure attachment style is adhered to by the caregiver but also secure to open to the world. So when the caregiver is absent securely attached is sad but when the caregiver is back he/she is happy. The child that has an avoidant attachment style chooses independence depending on their caregiver. So when the caregiver is gone and comes back again, avoiding the attached child for both situations doesn't show a change of mood. The child that has an ambivalent attachment style seeks attention but at the same time rejects the attention when proffered. So when the caregiver is gone, the ambivalently attached child seems concerned and when the caregiver is back show anger toward the caregiver. The child that has a disorganized attachment style has difficulties with coping with their emotions. The interactions children have with their caregiver that ends up in a specific attachment style lead to changes in older ages.

1.2 Romantic Attachment Styles

These initially encountered frameworks follow a negative-positive pattern in later times with intimate relationships for self and others. Some researchers claimed that adults also have an attachment style that has an impact on their romantic relationships which is similar to child and parent attachments. So the attachment theory started to be implemented in grown-up bonding. These romantic attachment styles are categorized into three subcategories as secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant which are characterized by the adult's self-report based on the insight of their thoughts, relations and others. The most conspicuous characteristic of the adults who have a secure attachment style is they perceive others in a good manner, are liked by others and have a foresight of the relationship's ups and downs which creates a flexible love perception for them. On the contrary, adults who have an anxious-ambivalent attachment style reported having concerns about others perceptions about them, being in love with ease and with a great amount of passion, self-distrust and in search of closer relationships. Adults with avoidant attachment style stated that they are their safe fortress and romantic relationships are short-lasting and hard to get. Attachment style is generally connected with fears like losing a partner and this can trigger jealousy in romantic relationships. Attachment styles are shaped by one's thoughts about himself/herself and others through his/her emotions and behaviours so it can have an impact on romantic relationships and answer the question of why jealousy among the individuals differ.

1.3 Romantic Jealousy

Romantic jealousy can be described as an undesirable emotional reaction to a real, fictitious or potential menace due to forfeiting the romantic partner or losing something valuable from the

intimate relationship. Jealousy is connected with one of the romantic partner's intercommunications with a real, imaginary or potential third person. The jealousy experience itself suggests both emotional and cognitive reactions while the act of jealousy indicates the behavioural phase. Jealousy is not considered a primary emotion by most theorists. Rather jealousy is based on multiple dimensions like the feature and set-up of the situation, the person and the romantic relationship itself. While most of the theorists argue over the negative impact of jealousy in romantic relationships, jealousy is observable and expected in most romantic relationships. Jealousy is one of the most common problems and reasons for arguments in a romantic relationship. Jealousy has a negative reflection of response to behaviour, such as yelling, blaming, distancing. Besides these jealousy also has physical responses like nausea and sleep disorders.

1.3.1 Romantic Jealousy Types

When examining indications of jealousy there are several selections. For Bringle and Buunk to define jealousy one dimension is a negative emotional response and that is sufficient. While Pfeiffer and Wong define jealousy in three dimensions: emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses. This study examines jealousy in romantic relationships according to the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale of Pfeiffer and Wong. Emotional jealousy is seen as a common response when a romantic relationship is valuable and there is a threat from the competitors. An example can be feeling jealous when the partner is hugging someone from the opposite sex. While behavioural and cognitive are not approved by an accurate understanding of the presence and pathological. Behavioral and cognitive jealousy are interrelated and occur when an imaginary or actual threat to the relationship is detected. An example can be eavesdropping on one partner's

phone calls. By the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale, this study investigates two types of jealousy type: Reactive and Suspicious jealousy. Reactive jealousy is emotional segments of jealousy and befalls when particular infractions have occurred that violate crucial perspectives of the relationship. Suspicious jealousy is cognitive and behavioural segments of jealousy and type comprises ideas, reactions, and feelings that happen when there are no substantial jealousy-evoking situations.

1.4 Gender Differences and Relationship Duration

For many researchers, jealousy type 's intensity and expression depend on various reasons. The most noticeable ones are both gender and relationship durations. Since there is no obvious and outnumbered research about gender difference and relationship duration's effect on one's romantic attachment style and romantic jealousy this study is focused on what is missing in the literature.

1.5 Literature Review

The importance of approaching the study of jealousy from a multidimensional perspective as opposed to from a unitary model of jealousy has been supported by several studies. (Dominguez-Pereira,2018) The biggest missing part in the literature about jealousy is to study jealousy in one dimension. One dimension theory shows only one aspect of jealousy and couldn't explain why jealousy differs in a romantic relationship. One may question whether the gender difference in jealousy is an artifact of the use of the forced-choice method in response to the hypothetical scenarios. (Güçlü et al., 2017) as stated another gap in the literature is the gender difference. Like many other subjects, gender makes a huge difference when questioning the impact of romantic attachment style on romantic jealousy. That is the reason why this study also investigates gender

differences. Another limitation of the present study was that a relationship-level analysis of jealousy was not measured. (Attridge, 2013) Since jealousy between partners can be observed in almost all relationships especially the type of romantic jealousy must be investigated to understand some perspective of romantic relationships. Also in general these types of studies participants are either married or engaged. Since cultural, external and domestic reasons can affect romantic relationships this study chooses its participants from the 18-30 age gap and who are not married or engaged to minimize the external factors that can affect the course of findings.

1.6 Hypothesis and Research Question

Over the last several years romantic attachment and romantic jealousy have been gaining increasing attention. However, little research was done on integrating these two related fields (Karabulut, 2001). As Karabulut said, although knowledge and relevance of romantic attachment and romantic jealousy are enhanced, little research is done in this area. Romantic attachment is significant because it sets light on the partner's distinct decisions, expressions and it provides an explanation as to why individual differences may occur in romantic relationships. Romantic jealousy, along with lack of commitment and communication, has been rated among the top three most frequent problems experienced in intimate relationships (Zusman & Knox, 1998) Since one of the most significant problems in romantic relationships is romantic jealousy it is important to investigate the romantic jealousy when considering the romantic attachment's impact on the relationships. Because romantic attachment style and romantic jealousy are interconnected and highly correlated with each other. Also, jealousy, by its nature, is joint with fear, anger and sadness so it can threaten both public health and the partners in a romantic relationship. It is also expected to have repercussions for theoretical advances in the study of this phenomenon within a

multidimensional approach and the development of effective interventions targeting this pervasive social and clinical problem. (Dominguez-Pereira,2018)

Led by the above reasons, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of romantic attachment style in romantic relationships on jealousy types and distinguish the difference in gender and relationship duration. Independent variables are as explained above romantic attachment style, gender, relationship duration and the dependent variable is jealousy type.

Everything described above has led to these hypotheses:

H1: In general, men tend to show more suspicious jealousy than women regardless of their attachment style and the duration of the relationship.

H2: In general, individuals that are in a long-term relationship (longer than 12 months) tend to show less suspicious jealousy than individuals that are in a short-term relationship (shorter than 12 months) regardless of attachment style and gender.

H3: People that have anxious/ambivalent attachment styles are more likely to have suspicious jealousy and this can interact with the length of the relationship.

H4: Women that have longer relationships than 6 months with a secure attachment style tend to show less suspicious jealousy compared to men.

H5: Men with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style in relationships longer than 2 years tend to show less reactive jealousy than men with shorter relationships.

Methods

This study includes individuals as participants between 18-30 who are currently in a romantic relationship and who are not married or engaged. Their current romantic relationship must be longer than one month to participate in this study. The study's sample size is 165, and 43 male and 122 female participants were included. The written informed consents were obtained from each participant, and the study was approved by the Ethics Committee. Participants are categorized according to their gender and the duration of their romantic relationships in this study. Duration of the relationships is categorized as N=63 for 1-6 months, N=30 for 6-12 months, N=21 for 12-24 months, and N=51 for more than 24 months. The participants did online survey work via Qualtrics, and data was anonymously collected. The survey consists of three parts. The first part was collecting demographic information about participants such as relationship status (Single, In A Relationship, Engaged, Married) and gender (Male, Female, Non-Binary). In order not to affect the accuracy of the study and the research subject, only the data of the participants who chose the "In A Relationship" option and called themselves "Male" or "Female" were used. The other parts are regarding attachment styles and jealousy types. Both of the scales used in these two parts are likert scales. Data collected from the participants and used in this study are collected as a self-report method of data collection. In the first part of the survey, the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) test is used to determine the participants' romantic attachment style. The ECR-R, as the name suggests, is a revision of Shaver, Brennan, and Clark's questionnaire Experiences In Close Relationships (ECR). The ECR-R survey asks respondents to state how much they agree or disagree with certain statements. This way measures participants' attachment anxiety and avoidance and how accessible and responsive they are to their partners (Fraley, 2005). In the ECR-R test, there are a total of 36 questions, and 18 of these questions

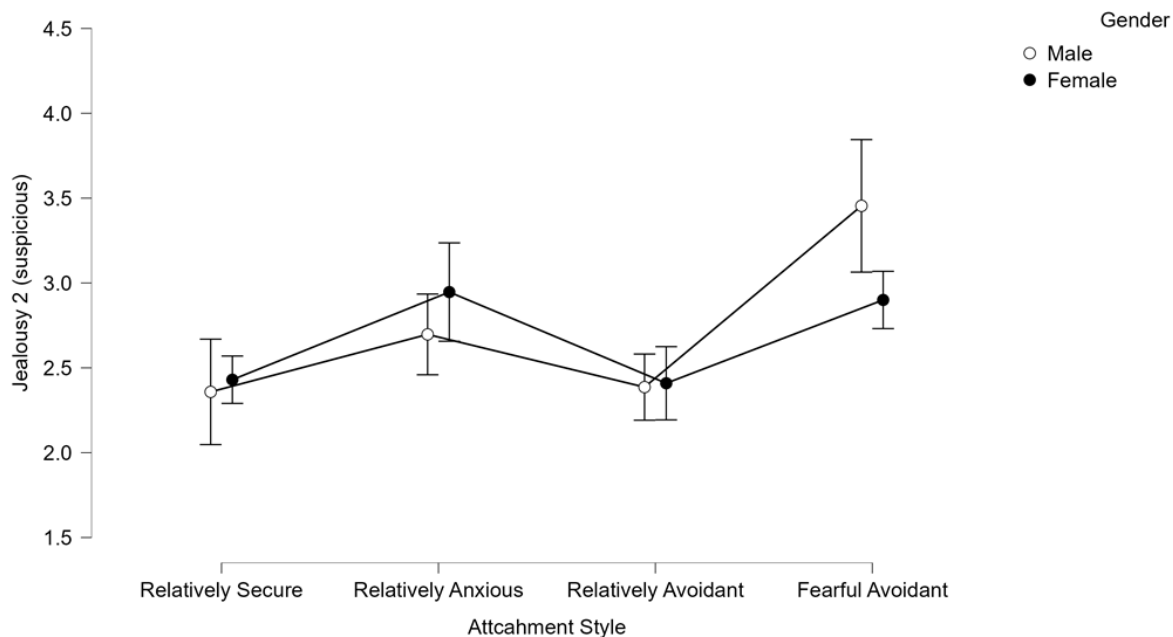
measure the participant's anxiety score (questions such as “I am afraid that I will lose my partner's love.”) in romantic relationships, while the other 18 questions measure the avoidance score (questions such as “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.”). Participants answered these questions by choosing how self-reflective they were, with one being the lowest and seven the highest option. The median(M) is calculated for both avoidant and anxious attachment styles' scores to determine participants' attachment style. If both attachment styles' scores are smaller than their medians, the participant is regarded as relatively secure. If both attachment styles' scores are bigger than their median, a participant is regarded as fearful-avoidant. In cases only one of the scores is above the median, the higher score determines the attachment style: Anxiety score below the median and avoidance score above the median show that the participant is relatively avoidant. In contrast, the opposite situation shows that the participant is relatively anxious. This method of categorizing the participants is one of the methods used by R. Chris Fraley, one of the professors who prepared the ECR-R, on his website to answer frequently asked questions about the ECR-R test. In the second part, the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS: Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989) is used for determining the participant's jealousy types' scores. The MJS measures jealousy in three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional. It consists of 24 questions, eight of the questions used to measure cognitive, eight behavioral, and eight emotional jealousy. Cognitive jealousy questions measure how often a person worries and has suspicions about their partner's possible interest in rivals. Emotional jealousy questions measure how upset a person is in situations that reveal jealousy. Behavioral jealousy questions measure how often a person engages in detective and protective behaviors. In the MJS, participants indicate how often they experience the thoughts in the given statements for questions that measure cognitive jealousy (by statements such as “I suspect that X is secretly seeing someone of the opposite sex”). For questions that measure

emotional jealousy, they indicate how much the given statement would make them sad or happy (by statements such as “X comments to you on how great looking a particular member of the opposite sex is”). For questions that measure behavioral jealousy, indicate how often they exhibit the behavior given in the statement (by statements such as “I look through X’s drawers, handbag, or pockets.”). For each question, the answers were selected, with one being the lowest and seven the highest values. While the scores they get from emotional jealousy questions create reactive jealousy scores, their scores from cognitive and behavioral jealousy questions create people’s suspicious jealousy scores.

Results

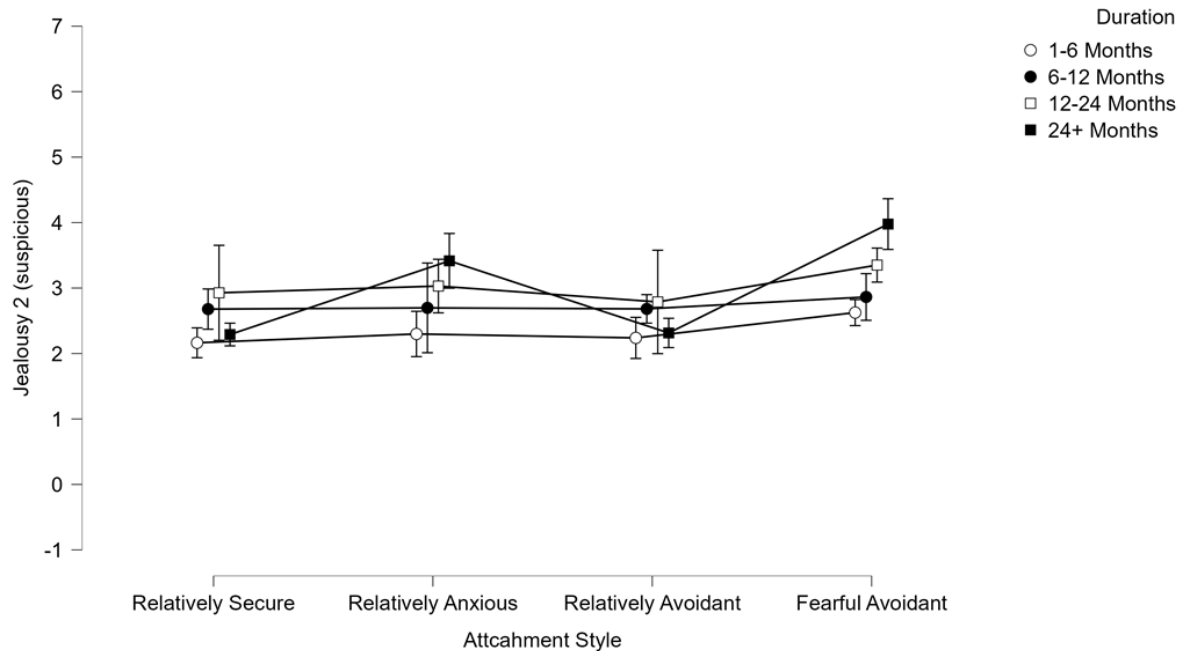
Before using the proper test for the study, GPower was used to determine the proper sample size to make the study statistically valid and eliminate the probability of problems caused by a small sample size. Then, since more than one independent variable and more than two variables are compared, ANOVA was used to interpret the collected data. Because of the limitation about the number of participants for each category, several two-way independent ANOVAs(4x4,4x4,4x2) are used. After ANOVA, a homogeneity test was used to determine whether the non-parametric test should be used or not, and for all of the ANOVA tests, p values for homogeneity are bigger than 0.05. Therefore, ANOVA can be used, and a non-parametric test was not used. There are three independent variables, which are gender, attachment styles, and duration of the romantic relationship. There are two dependent variables, which are suspicious and reactive jealousy. In case ANOVA is done for the effect of attachment styles and gender on reactive jealousy, there are no significant results for genders’ and attachment styles’ main effect on reactive jealousy. There is no interaction effect of attachment styles and gender on reactive jealousy($p>0.05$). However, for the effect of attachment style and gender on suspicious jealousy,

there is the main effect of attachment style on suspicious jealousy. In that case, a Post-Hoc test was done to determine which attachment styles there is a significant difference ($p=0.005$, $\eta^2=0.078$). Post-Hoc test illustrates that there is a significant difference between relatively secure and fearful-avoidant attachment styles on suspicious jealousy ($t= -3.335$, $p=0.006$), and there is a significant effect between relatively avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment styles on suspicious jealousy ($t= -2.710$, $p=0.045$). All other comparisons are insignificant for attachment styles' effect on suspicious jealousy ($p<0.05$).



ANOVA test for attachment style and duration on suspicious jealousy demonstrates that there is a main effect of both attachment style ($p=0.011$, $\eta^2=0.072$) and duration ($p=0.014$, $\eta^2=0.069$) on suspicious jealousy. However, there is no interaction between attachment styles and duration ($p>0.05$). According to Post-Hoc comparisons for attachment styles, there is a significant difference between relatively secure and fearful-avoidant attachment styles on suspicious jealousy ($t=-3.076$, $p=0.015$). As for other comparisons, there is no

significance($p>0.05$). For the duration, the only significant difference is between 1-6 months and more than 24 months groups($t= -3.0.16$, $p=0.0.18$).



ANOVA test for the effect of attachment style and duration indicates no main effect ($p=0.236$) on suspicious jealousy. However, in Post-Hoc, there are significant effects between 5 of the groups. According to Post-Hoc comparisons for both attachment styles and duration, firstly, there is a significant difference between individuals who have relatively secure attachments style and have a relationship duration between 1-6 months with individuals who has fearful-avoidant and has a relationship duration of more than 24 months on suspicious jealousy($t=-4.517$, $p=0.002$). Secondly, there is a significant difference between individuals who have relatively avoidant attachment styles and have a relationship duration between 1-6 months with individuals who have fearful-avoidant attachment styles and have a relationship duration of more than 24 months on suspicious jealousy($t=-3.675$, $p=0.040$). Thirdly, there is a significant difference between individuals who have a fearful-avoidant attachment style and a relationship duration between 1-6

months with individuals who have fearful-avoidant attachment style and more than 24 months ($t=-3.869$, $p=0.020$). Fourthly, there is a significant difference between individuals who have a relatively secure attachment style and have a relationship duration of more than 24 months with individuals who have a fearful-avoidant style and have a relationship duration of more than 24 months ($t=-4.498$, $p=0.002$). Finally, there is a significant difference between individuals who have relatively avoidant attachment style and have a relationship of more than 24 months with individuals who have fearful-avoidant attachment style and have a relationship duration of more than 24 months ($t=-3.844$, $p=0.021$)

Discussion

The current study aims to investigate the effect of romantic attachment style in romantic relationships on jealousy types and whether there is a difference in gender and relationship. Five hypotheses were presented before the data collection. Because of the limitations (which will be explained later), hypotheses intended to be tested couldn't be tested.

From the collected data it is observed that gender doesn't have a main effect on reactive jealousy. Also, it is observed that attachment style doesn't have a main effect on reactive jealousy too. Duration also doesn't have any effect on reactive jealousy.

However, attachment style does have a main effect on suspicious jealousy. From the Post Hoc test, which is used for determining which attachment style there is a significant difference, it is observed that there is a significant difference between fearful-avoidant and relatively secure attachment style on suspicious jealousy. This significant difference doesn't depend on gender. Both females and males that have a relatively secure attachment style tend to show less suspicious jealousy than females and males that have a fearful-avoidant attachment style. This is an expected

result because the romantic attachment style affects romantic relationships. Since individuals who have a secure attachment style tend to be more stable and loving in their romantic relationship it is expected that they show less suspicious jealousy. Also, it is observed that there is a significant difference between relatively avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment styles on suspicious jealousy. This is a surprising result because they are both subcategories of avoidant attachment style and share similar characteristics of this romantic attachment style but it reflects on the suspicious jealousy in a significantly different way. Duration also has a main effect on suspicious jealousy. There is a significant difference between groups that have 1-6 months long romantic relationships and groups that have 24 or more months-long romantic relationships. This is also an expected result because these categories begin and end categories of the romantic relationship duration period. Although there is a main effect for romantic attachment style and duration on suspicious jealousy, there isn't any interaction between them as expected. However when the Post Hoc test is done several significant results are obtained both for romantic attachment style and duration of the relationship among some categories. (1) On suspicious jealousy, there is a substantial difference between people who have a relatively secure attachment style and have been in a relationship for 1-6 months against people who have a fearful-avoidant attachment style and have been in a relationship for more than 24 months. (2) On suspicious jealousy, there is a substantial difference between people who have relatively avoidant attachment styles and have been in relationships for 1-6 months against people who have fearful-avoidant attachment styles and have been in relationships for more than 24 months. (3) Individuals with a fearful-avoidant attachment type and a related term of 1-6 months differ significantly from those with a fearful-avoidant attachment style and a relationship duration of more than 24 months. (4) Individuals with a relatively secure attachment type and a related term of more than 24 months have a substantial

difference from those with a fearful-avoidant attachment style and a relationship duration of more than 24 months. (5) There is a significant difference between the individuals that have relatively avoidant attachment style and fearful-avoidant attachment style, which both have more than 24 months duration of the relationship. The finding (3) is significant and surprising because as the duration of the relationship increases it is expected that the jealousy will decrease. Since as time increases it is expected that trust among each other increases so there should be a decrease in the jealousy rate, but the data tells the opposite. Also, finding (5) is significant too. Because the duration of the relationship and the attachment style is the same, the difference comes from the degree, frequency of the attachment style. From that, it can be understood that not only attachment style has an effect on suspicious jealousy but maybe the degree of the attachment style also has an effect.

In the four studies, despite different samples, different research methods, and different tools, the results were the same: There were no gender differences in reported jealousy. (Pines & Friedman, 2010) Although it is expected that gender difference would exist on jealousy results didn't support the hypothesis in the literature, as well as this study's hypothesis H1. How long the partners had known each other (duration of closeness) also was not correlated with any of the jealousy measures. (Attridge, 2013) Although it is expected the duration difference would exist on jealousy, the result didn't support that. Since spending time, creating a future together and knowing each other increases it is expected that both suspicious and reactive jealousy will decrease over time as hypothesised in H2 but the results show no significant result for reactive jealousy in the literature and this study. But this study determined a significant difference of duration on suspicious jealousy. This study has shown individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles

displayed greater suspicious jealousy (Rydell & Bringle, 2007). In this study, this is also observed as it is in the literature.

In the study, several limitations reasoned hypotheses intended to be tested couldn't be tested. The most significant one is the sample size. This study is conducted with 165 people and only 43 of the participants are male. For a study that has three independent and two dependent variables, 165 people are not sufficient to find significant and valid results. Also because the distribution of females and males are very different it affects the results in a biased way. The second issue is the time constraints since the time limit for collecting the data sample size can't reach the expected value. The third one is the method used. The self-report was used in the study which makes the responses honesty questionable and response bias can be present. The last of the limitations is the lack of prior research studies in the literature. About this study's research topic there aren't many sources in the literature.

The study determined that duration and attachment style affects suspicious jealousy. Considering the literature this study is significant for considering duration as an independent variable since there is not much research on it. Also although no significant results were found for reactive jealousy, investigating jealousy as reactive and suspicious is important because generally, the research considers jealousy as a whole but not in subcategories.

For further studies with more sample size, more equal distribution of female and male and also more equal distribution of the individuals according to their duration of a romantic relationship, many significant results can be obtained. Especially because of the lack of study in the literature, the duration being an independent variable, this study can be a source for further studies. Finding (3) can be searched on further studies because the effect of duration is found to

be the opposite of what was hypothesized first in this study. Also finding (5) can be inspired by further studies about subcategories of the romantic attachment style according to its degree.

References

Attridge, M. (2013). Jealousy and Relationship Closeness: Exploring the Good (Reactive) and Bad (Suspicious) Sides of Romantic Jealousy. *SAGE Open*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013476054>

Ayala M. Pines & Ariella Friedman (1998) Gender Differences in Romantic Jealousy, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 138:1, 54-71, DOI: 10.1080/00224549809600353

Dominguez-Pereira, G. (2018). *Attachment style, fear of intimacy, and romantic jealousy* (Order No. 10936446). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2118533331). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/attachment-style-fear-intimacy-romantic-jealousy/docview/2118533331/se-2?accountid=8623>

Fraley, C. R. (2005, July 23). *Information on the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Adult Attachment Questionnaire*. Retrieved December 30, 2021, from <http://labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/measures/ecrr.htm>

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511>

Karakurt, G. (2001). *The Impact of adult attachment styles on romantic jealousy* [M.S. - Master of Science]. Middle East Technical University.

Martinez-León, Nancy & Peña, Juan & Salazar, Hernán & García, Andrea & Sierra, Juan. (2017). A systematic review of romantic jealousy in relationships. *Terapia Psicológica*. 35. 203-212. 10.4067/s0718-48082017000200203.

Oya Güçlü, Ömer Şenormancı, Güliz Şenormancı & Füzün Köktürk (2017) Gender differences in romantic jealousy and attachment styles, *Psychiatry and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 27:4, 359-365, DOI: 10.1080/24750573.2017.1367554

Rydell, R. J., & Bringle, R. G. (2007). Differentiating reactive and suspicious jealousy. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 35(8), 1099-1114