



# The downside of being sexually restricted: The effects of sociosexual orientation on relationships between jealousy, rejection, and anger



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## ABSTRACT

Why do some people become more jealous than others? Some people require emotional closeness before sexual intercourse, whereas others are less restricted sexually. Because restricted people may invest more in relationships, they may feel greater rejection and anger when jealous. We tested this hypothesis in a daily diary study of 50 heterosexual dating couples. Participants completed a sociosexual orientation questionnaire to measure sexual restriction. Daily partner-related feelings of rejection, jealousy, and anger were assessed for 30 days. The more jealousy participants experienced, the greater their feelings of rejection and anger; this relationship was strongest for sexually restricted participants. These findings suggest that sexual restriction may increase risk of feelings of rejection and anger in the wake of jealousy.

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## 1. Introduction

Jealousy is a specific emotional response to a perceived relationship threat with a number of proposed functions (DeSteno, Valdesolo, & Bartlett, 2006; Harmon-Jones, Peterson, & Harris, 2009). Although jealousy may function adaptively to motivate behaviors to maintain one's relationship (Harris, 2003), jealousy can also increase anger and intimate partner violence (Daly & Wilson, 1988; DeSteno et al., 2006). Understanding the factors that predict the intensity of this jealousy–anger link may be crucial to reducing the negative impact of jealousy-related behaviors on society.

Jealousy is closely linked to the experience of social exclusion or rejection (DeSteno et al., 2006; Harmon-Jones et al., 2009). Rejection occurs with the perception that others do not want to include you in their relationships and interactions. Considerable research has demonstrated the potential for experiences of rejection to increase anger and aggression (e.g. Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Individuals may detect a potential threat to their relationships (such as their partner flirting with someone else), interpret that as a sign of disinterest or rejection, and then become angry. Although this chain of emotions both fits prior research and intuitively makes sense, it is worth considering what types of individuals might

not experience the same progression. By definition, individuals who experience jealousy perceive a potential threat to their relationship or some aspect of it; however, the strength of their reaction may depend on how much they invest themselves in their relationship. Individual differences, especially those dictating approaches to relationships and sex, may affect these interpretations. People who invest more in their relationships emotionally may become vulnerable to their experiences of jealousy, which may relate to greater rejection sensitivity and anger.

Sociosexual orientation refers to how much emotional closeness a person requires before engaging in sexual intercourse (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986). A *restricted* sociosexual orientation indicates a strong need for emotional closeness prior to sexual intercourse, which often manifests itself as a desire to engage in sexual behavior in the context of a committed, loving relationship. In contrast, an *unrestricted* sociosexual orientation indicates a lower need for emotional closeness prior to intercourse and an interest in sexual activity outside of relationships. Restricted sociosexual orientation is associated with lower sexual permissiveness and interest in impersonal sex (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), lower frequency of sexual intercourse and reduced sex drive (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004), less focus on physical and sexual attractiveness in mate selection (Simpson & Gangestad, 1992; Swami & Allum, 2011; Swami, Miller, Furnham, & Penke, 2008; Wilbur & Campbell, 2010), lower willingness to pursue multiple partners (Seal, Agostinelli, & Hannett, 1994), and lower likelihood of infidelity and higher levels of commitment in intimate relationships (Mattingly et al., 2011).

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What drawbacks might accompany a sexually restricted orientation? Although numerous studies have investigated factors contributing to the existence of variability in sociosexual orientation and its relationship to sexual and romantic relationship strategies, relatively little work has explored how differences in sociosexual orientation affect emotional functioning within relationships. While a previous study hypothesized that sexually restricted people showed greater sexual and romantic jealousy, no associations between sociosexual orientation and jealous responses to an experimental situation evoking sexual and romantic jealousy were found (Russell & Harton, 2005). This lack of a relationship may be due to a more complex relationship between these constructs. Because jealousy relates to numerous negative outcomes, such as rejection and anger, sociosexual orientation could moderate the effect of jealousy on other affective experiences, even if it does not impact the extent to which individuals experience jealousy. Sexually restricted people show greater investment in their romantic relationships and may see their partner's attraction to others as a reflection on their relationship's status, leaving them vulnerable to stronger secondary reactions to jealousy, such as rejection and anger. In contrast, sexually unrestricted people, who do not require emotional connection and commitment for sexual activity, may be less likely to assume that their partner's attraction to others also represents decreased commitment to the relationship. For these individuals, the experience of jealousy may therefore be less evocative of the pain of social rejection and produce fewer associated negative outcomes, such as anger.

In the present study, we explored these associations using a daily diary methodology. We hypothesized that daily feelings of jealousy would relate to greater simultaneous feelings of rejection and anger. More specifically, we predicted that sociosexual orientation would moderate this effect. We anticipated that sexually restricted participants would show a stronger association between jealousy and rejection, which would in turn relate to greater feelings of anger. Given the numerous previous findings demonstrating greater effects of sociosexual orientation in males than females, we also explored potential gender differences.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 51 undergraduate heterosexual romantic couples (102 individuals) who had been in committed relationships for at least one month. The average relationship length was 20.55 months ( $SD = 17.80$ ). Participants were 84.3% white and an average age of 18.76 years ( $SD = 1.17$ ). One member of each couple volunteered to take part in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an introductory psychology course, as well as monetary payment, and the other member participated in exchange for monetary payment. One couple broke up before the end of the study. Data from 50 couples (100 individuals) were left for final analysis.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Sociosexual orientation

Sociosexual orientation was assessed with the Sociosexual Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). This scale assesses how much emotional closeness people require prior to intercourse and willingness to engage in sex outside of a committed relationship. Participants were asked to respond to three open-ended, overt behavioral items such as "With how many different partners have you had sex with in the past year?" and one covert behavioral item, "How often do you fantasize about having sex with someone other than your current partner?" The covert item was answered

on an 8-point scale from 1, never, to 8, at least once a day. Three items assessed attitudes about sexual behavior on a 9-point scale (1 = I strongly disagree, to 9 = I strongly agree). An example is "Sex without love is OK." The composite was scored by first unit-weighting the five components of the SOI (i.e., transforming each component into z scores) and then aggregating the z's (i.e., taking the mean) (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Higher scores on the aggregated scale indicate a less restricted sociosexual orientation. The SOI demonstrated adequate consistency in the present sample ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

#### 2.2.2. Trait jealousy

The Multi-Dimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989) is a 24-item scale assessing emotional, cognitive and behavioral components of jealousy in the context of a monogamous relationship, asking the participant either how often they engage in thoughts or behaviors or how specific situations would make them feel. Example items include "I suspect that my partner may be attracted to someone else" (cognitive), "I say something nasty about someone of the opposite sex if my partner shows an interest in that person" (behavioral), and "My partner is flirting with a member of the opposite sex" (emotional). Participants were asked to rate their experiences of jealousy on a 7-point scale (for cognitive and behavior items, 1 = never, to 7 = all the time; for emotional items, 1 = very pleased, to 7 = very upset). Higher scores indicate greater tendency toward jealousy. A total score was used to assess overall trait jealousy in the present study; this scale demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

#### 2.2.3. Daily feelings of rejection by partner

Daily rejection by partner was assessed with two items that asked how much, over a 24-h period, did participants experience partner rejection, relative to other days. The first item asked how much the participants felt rejected by their partner, and the second item asked how much they felt excluded by their partner. Participants were asked to rate these items on a 9-point scale (−4 = Far less than usual, 0 = Typical for me, and +4 = Far more than usual). A composite measure of daily partner rejection was then computed by averaging responses across the two items. Higher numbers indicate greater feelings of partner rejection.

#### 2.2.4. Daily jealousy toward partner

Daily partner jealousy was assessed with three items that asked how much, over a 24-h period, did participants experience jealousy, suspicion, or distrust of their partner, relative to other days. Participants were asked to rate these items on a 9-point scale (−4 = Far less than usual, 0 = Typical for me, and +4 = Far more than usual). A composite measure of daily partner jealousy was then computed by averaging responses across the three items. Higher numbers indicate greater feelings of partner jealousy.

#### 2.2.5. Daily anger toward partner

Daily anger toward partner was assessed with a single item asking how much, over a 24-h period, participants felt anger toward their partner, relative to other days. Participants rated this item on a 9-point scale (−4 = Far less than usual, 0 = Typical for me, and +4 = Far more than usual).

### 2.3. Procedure

This study is part of a larger investigation regarding relationship wellbeing and intimate partner violence among college students. At an initial session, both members of each couple completed the demographic items, the SOI, and several other trait measures unrelated to the current investigation. To ensure privacy, members of each couple were placed in separate rooms and completed the

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