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Jealousy in adolescents' daily lives: How does it relate to interpersonal context and well-being?



Hannah K. Lennarz ^{a,*}, Anna Lichtwarck-Aschoff ^a, Catrin Finkenauer ^{b,c},
Isabela Granic ^a

^a Radboud University, Behavioural Science Institute, Montessorilaan 3, 6525 HR, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

^b Youth Studies, Interdisciplinary Center, Utrecht University, PO Box 80140, 3508 TC, Utrecht, The Netherlands

^c Biological Psychology, Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, Free University Amsterdam, Van der Boerhorststraat 1, 1081 BT, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Past studies have shown that jealousy peaks in adolescence. However, little is known about how and when adolescents experience jealousy in their daily lives. The current study aimed to examine the relation between state jealousy, the more general propensity to feel jealous, the interpersonal contexts in which jealousy arises, and different forms of social comparison. The impact of jealousy on perceptions of well-being was also explored. We used an experience sampling method during two weekends with 68 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 13.94$; 64.70% girls). Jealousy was common: On average, 90% of our sample experienced jealousy in 20% of the assessments. Adolescents reported more jealousy with peers than with family. Additionally, they experienced more jealousy when in online contexts than when in face-to-face peer contexts. The normative nature of jealousy, its developmental function and relation with well-being, and implications for understanding jealousy triggered in (highly social) online contexts are discussed.

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Jealousy is a powerful emotion defined as a negative feeling that arises when an individual perceives a threat from someone else to a valued relationship (Salovey & Rodin, 1988). It can be seen as an adaptive and useful emotion because it can help to maintain relationships (Buss, 1995), but it may also lead to problematic behaviors such as aggression or rumination that contribute to psychopathology (Culotta & Goldstein, 2008; Lavallee & Parker, 2009; Parker, Kruse, & Aikins, 2010; Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005). Often, jealousy is associated with romantic relationships; however, it can arise in any close relationship (e.g., friends, family; DeSteno, Valdesolo, & Bartlett, 2006).

During adolescence, major developments take place in the interpersonal domain that may be particularly relevant to the study of jealousy. In general, peers become more important than parents (Collins & Laursen, 2004a, 2004b) and romantic relationships start to develop (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009), which make adolescents especially vulnerable to experiencing jealousy. Additionally, adolescents become vigilant to their peers' evaluations (Somerville, 2013; Steinberg, 2011) and jealousy seems to increase in adolescence as compared to childhood (Pines & Aronson, 1983). Given these interpersonal

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: h.lennarz@pwo.ru.nl (H.K. Lennarz), a.lichtwarck-aschoff@pwo.ru.nl (A. Lichtwarck-Aschoff), c.finkenauer@vu.nl (C. Finkenauer), i.granic@pwo.ru.nl (I. Granic).

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developmental changes, studies on jealousy in adolescence are surprisingly scarce (see Parker and colleagues' work for exception; Lavalley & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2005, 2010). We know almost nothing about the everyday experiences of jealousy in adolescence: How prevalent, frequent, and intense is jealousy in adolescents' daily lives, in which contexts do they most frequently feel jealous, and how do individual differences shape adolescents' experiences of jealousy? The present study aimed to address these questions.

Past research using questionnaire methods has revealed individual differences in jealousy and showed that some individuals are generally more prone to experience jealousy than others (Bringle, Renner, Terry, & Davis, 1983; Parker et al., 2010). However, like other emotions (e.g., guilt, happiness, sadness), jealousy is likely to fluctuate over time and across different interpersonal contexts (Baumeister, Reis, & Delespaul, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003; Larson, 1990; Schneiders et al., 2007; van Roekel et al., 2014). Although we do expect that propensity to feel jealous and state levels of jealousy are related, they are clearly not the same. For instance, an adolescent who describes herself as generally not a jealous person may still respond with extreme jealousy under certain rare circumstances. The current study was designed to investigate the conditions that trigger instances of state jealousy in adolescents' everyday lives. We paid special attention to contexts in which jealousy emerged (family, peers, alone, and online) and social comparison (evaluation in comparison to others and general tendency to compare oneself).

1. Contexts of jealousy

Jealousy is characterized as a basic social emotion (DeSteno et al., 2006) and is likely to fluctuate depending on the nature of the interpersonal context. This might be especially salient in adolescence as developmental changes trigger reorganizations in adolescents' interpersonal relationships (Arnett, 1999). Time spent with family decreases (Larson & Richards, 1991) and negative emotionality and conflict with parents increases (Laursen, 1993). However, most family relationships remain intimate and close and provide an important source of support during early and middle adolescence (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Despite close emotional bonds (or perhaps because of them), family relationships remain a context in which feelings of jealousy can arise (especially among siblings; Volling, Kennedy, & Jackey, 2010).

Although parents remain important in the lives of adolescents, the relative importance and influence of peers increase (Collins & Laursen, 2004a, 2004b). In fact, a crucial developmental task during adolescence is to find a peer group among whom adolescents feel comfortable and supported; positive peer relationships are critical for adolescents' well-being (e.g., B. B. Brown & Larson, 2009). These peer relationships become more complex because adolescents need to restructure their peer networks due to normative changes such as the transition to high school (B. B. Brown, 1990). Adolescents are confronted with navigating a new peer environment, finding new friends and defining their position in the new peer group, and, at the same time, adolescents may want to maintain their established friendships. This reorganization of their friendship and peer networks can give rise to situations that elicit jealousy because social exclusion and bullying increase (Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2007). Another important facet of these emerging peer interactions are romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000). Romantic relationships are a normative part of adolescent development and become common during middle adolescence (Collins et al., 2009). They can be a source of jealousy, either because one's romantic partner develops interest for someone else or because one feels neglected due to a friend spending more time with his/her romantic partner (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). Therefore, we expected that adolescents feel most jealous when they are with peers compared to with family or alone.

Finally, the context in which these relationships are experienced seems important to consider. Interpersonal contact is not limited to face-to-face interactions but also can happen in a virtual environment. Online spaces have become an important context in which adolescents socialize with peers (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). These contacts can range from chatting and playing with peers and friends they already know offline to meeting new friends in these online spaces. Jealousy has rarely been studied in these online contexts, but one study investigating the relation between jealousy and Facebook use in young adults showed that increased use of Facebook was associated with more jealousy in romantic relationships (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009).

Online contexts such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter may be especially likely to elicit jealousy because they provide a ubiquitous lens through which young people can and do compare themselves socially to their peers (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). These online contexts are particularly compelling contexts for jealousy to emerge (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014), because people tend to post pictures, videos, and updates of their "ideal selves" or the best parts of their lives, omitting a great deal of the boring, mundane or negative features of these same lives (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Turkle, 2011). Social media sites are also continually accessible, providing ongoing opportunities for comparisons to same-aged peers. Unlike generations before that did not have smartphones and 24-h access to the internet, the current generation of adolescents, many of whom grow up sleeping with their phones (Hysing et al., 2015), have almost non-stop opportunities for social comparisons. Thus, we hypothesized that adolescents feel most jealousy when in online contexts.

2. Quality of social comparison

Peer contexts are hypothesized to elicit higher intensity and more frequent occurrences of jealousy than when adolescents are alone or with their family. However, not all peer relationships are equal in quality. Given that jealousy arises when one perceives a threat to a valued relationship (Salovey & Rodin, 1988), it is likely that jealousy is triggered towards someone who

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