



# A Narrative Review of Jealousy in Intimate Friendship and Romantic Relationship

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**Abstract.** Jealousy is a general emotion in our life. People can hardly avoid being jealous when they get in touch with the world. Friendship and romantic relationship envy refers to a series of negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, anxiety, etc., when an individual feel that his close relationship with his friends is threatened by a third party, which has a negative impact on the individual's mental health and interpersonal relationships. Unsafe attached people are sensitive to changes in interpersonal relationships and alert to threat information. When threats from third parties appear in friendship relationships, they are more likely to have friendship jealousy. In view of this, on the basis of summarizing the existing relevant literature, this study focuses on the regulatory effects of cognitive reappraisal and expression inhibition strategies on friendship jealousy, and how they have different effects in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance groups.

**Keywords:** Jealousy · Intimate · Friendship · Romantic relationship

## 1 Introduction

Jealousy is one of the most common emotions in our daily life. It is generally defined as a feeling of insecurity, fear, anger, and concern. The existing related research on jealousy have shown that the complex nature of jealousy is not completely understood yet, though people often regard the concept of jealousy as end of a relationship. Valued relationships, such as friendship and romantic relationships, are main intimate relationships in daily life. It is known that jealousy is multidimensional from prior research, The complex emotion is a combination of various emotions, including disgust, betrayal, resentment, sadness, threat and anger, and envy [1–6]. In addition, jealousy is suggested that it includes some change happens to an individual's mind. This means if someone suspects that his or her partner is cheating, hate or distrust towards the loved ones might grow. Also, jealousy is unpredictable. In fact, it appears with various reactions due to different causes. For example, whether the relationship is stable and of high quality may be influenced by violence and thoughts and actions [7, 8].

As mentioned above, jealousy emotion among lovers is quite common in life. Another relationship that could cause significant jealousy is romantic relationship. Romantic jealousy is often developed by potential threat like “rivals” and it would cause some consequences. This type of jealousy is probably the most popular type of jealousy for

researchers to study. Romantic jealousy is quite complex and it might threaten the quality and stability of a romantic relationship [9, 10]. In that case, the emotion is usually unpleasant and insecure because the desire is to maintain the valued relationship with the partner.

Another relationship that could cause significant jealousy is friendship. It happens almost in any situation, and it usually comes with a mixture of various strong emotions, such as uncomfortableness and insecurity. The reason why jealousy friendship is particularly complex to study is suggested that jealousy shows our dependency on partner. In the meantime, researchers seem to be more fascinated by jealousy in this area than others [11–13].

Romantic relationships are attractive to science because of their importance to personal and family happiness. But research often fails to view romantic quality as an emotional, social, or sexual interaction that exists within a relationship and is unique to each spouse. Psychological testing methods used to assess the quality of romantic relationships usually have only one dimension and focus only on relationship quality and fulfillment. This has led researchers to use a variety of scales to address the various factors that affect the quality of romantic relationships [14–16].

In addition, because romantic relationships are a combination of multiple elements, relationship satisfaction, well-being, fitness, and quality should all be considered as distinct theoretical entities. Although these two words are often substituted or seen as duplicates, and common sense tells people that there is a strong relationship between them, it ignores those high-quality factors (such as depression or perfectionism) [17–20].

The purpose of this paper is to test a new condensed quality of Romantic Relationships Scale (QUALity of Romantic RELationships Scale); QUARRELS) psychometric traits that rate relationship quality as individuals distinct from relationship happiness, fit, and satisfaction. The aim of this study was to evaluate various quality-related subscales, as they have been repeatedly shown to be sensitive to relational satisfaction.

## 2 Method and Materials

### 2.1 Scheme

The first is to conduct psychological tests on QUARRELS to evaluate its reliability and the utility of each factor. During the analysis, we employed two methods to determine the credibility factor of an argument. Principal component analysis (rotated maximum variance) was performed on the first half of the sample ( $N = 370$ ). Next, the factor structure generated from PCA was tested (maximum likelihood) using the second half ( $N = 370$ ). The second experiment, a related study, aimed to examine the relationship between interpersonal anxiety, avoidance emotion and personal factors, and the composite score of QUARRELS in adults. This will test whether the quality of romantic relationships measured by QUARRELS has the same similarity. This will help us find that the scales converge well and expand the existing literature on relationship-measures in adults.

## 2.2 Participants

A total of 740 people (562 women and 178 men) participated in this survey, with an average age of 28.1 years ( $SD = 4.6$ ). In the second study, 210 Chinese adults (160 women and 50 men) participated in the survey. Their mean age was 27.9 years ( $SD 3.9$ ). Participants in both experiments, completed through social media or SurveyMonkey, were in a previous or current relationship.

## 2.3 Materials

After a comprehensive review of the existing literature on romantic relationships, nineteen mental health scientists were informed of the objectives of the study and discussed in groups, after which forty items were found to describe the qualities of romantic relationships. The forty items were then examined in detail by two independent psychologists, who were asked to look for items that did not effectively capture (specific) respondents. After this procedure, twenty-four items with good face validity were preserved. Additionally, in Study 2, QUARRELS was used together with the final version of the Intimacy Experience Scale (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Vogel (2007). The 12 ECR-S, derived from the original Intimacy Experience Scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), a study of adult relationship tendencies in anxiety and avoidance. Of the 12 ECR-S programs, 6 were dependent-avoidant (e.g., “I want to be close to my significant other, but I’m always afraid to approach him.”) and 6 items are dependency anxiety (e.g.: “I long for a very intimate longing, which sometimes scares people away.”). Like QUARRELS, this program also uses 7-level Likert-scale rating, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), and each subscale item is scored so that higher scores indicate higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety.

## 3 Results

Using the method of odd and even numbers, the two groups of data are divided into two groups according to a certain ratio. On the first set ( $N = 370$ ), 5 factors of 4 factors were obtained by calculating Keizer’s criterion and Cattell’s screenshot. The above factors can explain 76% and 64% of the difference. The overall Cronbach’s alpha shows good internal consistency with  $\alpha = .94$ . The factor loadings for each item are shown in Table 1. Between 0.71–0.94, the reliability of the subscales all exceeded .70. The overall correlations of the revised indicators are all greater than the critical point of thirty.

The results showed that: (1) conscious emotion regulation strategies had a significant impact on friendship jealousy of insecure attachment individuals; (2) there was an interaction between conscious emotion regulation strategies and insecure attachment types on friendship jealousy. (3) Unconscious emotion regulation strategies have a significant impact on the friendship jealousy of insecure attachment individuals; (4) There is interaction between unconscious emotion regulation strategies and unsafe attachment types [21].

According to the above research results, the following conclusions are drawn: (1) for the complex emotion of friendship jealousy, both conscious and unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategies and expression inhibition strategies have a good regulatory

**Table 1.** Factor Loadings and Corrected Item-Total Correlations of QUARRELS Items [Owner-draw]

QUARRELS Items (.94)	Loadings	Item- Total R
Factor 1 (S): Support (.94)		
S1. We are there for each other.	, 804	, 78
S2. We can count on one another in times of need.	, 789	, 74
S3. We support each other.	, 750	, 77
S4. We take good care of each other.	, 747	, 76
Factor 2 (E): Emotional Intimacy (.93)		
E1. We enjoy being affectionate to one another.	, 834	, 64
E2. We say loving things to each other.	, 824	, 66
E3. We enjoy physical expressions of affection (e. g. hugs, kisses etc.).	, 803	, 71
E4. Our relationship is not characterized by emotional intimacy. (r)	, 789	, 75
Factor 4 (R): Rapport (.89)		
R1. We have fun when we hang out.	, 682	, 78
R2. We can be ourselves with each other.	, 608	, 60
R3. We enjoy spending time together.	, 589	, 75
R4. We rarely seek each other's company. (r)	, 547	, 79
Factor 5 (P): Pacifism (.71)		
P1. Our relationship can get very competitive. (r)	, 801	, 43
P2. We hold grudges. (r)	, 770	, 48
P3. We engage in power games. (r)	, 664	, 49
P4. We exclusively fight over things of great importance.	, 527	, 40
Factor 6 (T): Trust (.85)		
T1. Infidelity has never been an issue for us.	, 820	, 34
T2. We trust each other blindly.	, 789	, 63
T3. There is an atmosphere of absolute trust between us.	, 735	, 70
T4. We get jealous and possessive. (r)	, 704	, 49

Note: (r) = items to be reversed prior to analysis. Factors were abbreviated: S = Support, E = Emotional Intimacy, R = Rapport, P = Pacifism and T = Trust

effect. (2) Unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy and expression inhibition strategy have different effects on friendship jealousy of adult romantic relationships and intimate friendship with different attachment styles [22]. Specifically, for attachment anxiety adult romantic relationships and intimate friendship, unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy has a significant impact on reducing their friendship jealousy, and its improvement effect is better than conscious expression inhibition strategy; For attachment avoidance

adult romantic relationships and intimate friendship, both unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy and unconscious expression inhibition strategy can effectively regulate their jealousy. At the same time, compared with unconscious expression inhibition strategy, unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy has a more significant regulatory effect on friendship jealousy. (3) Unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy and expression inhibition strategy have different effects on friendship jealousy of adult romantic relationships and intimate friendship with different attachment styles [23–25]. Specifically, for attachment anxiety adult romantic relationships and intimate friendship, unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy has a significant impact on reducing their friendship jealousy, and its improvement effect is better than conscious expression inhibition strategy; For attachment avoidance college students, both unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy and unconscious expression inhibition strategy can effectively regulate their jealousy. At the same time, compared with unconscious expression inhibition strategy, unconscious cognitive reappraisal strategy has a more significant regulatory effect on friendship jealousy [26].

## 4 Discussion

PCA and CFA analyzes confirmed the following characteristics of love and close friendships: support, emotional intimacy, harmony; general qualities of love, including love and trust in love. The reliability of these factors is high, and the two-factor model can fit the data well. In addition, this scale showed a negative correlation with the expected adult relational dimension of affect, indicating the validity of the construct, but its other psychometric characteristics (such as retest stability) still need further research [20, 23].

Using methods such as QUARRELS, it is possible to multi-dimensionally evaluate various characteristics between men and women without affecting the overall quality of love. This method is simple and economical, and has broad application prospects in future research, and is also expected to be used in the treatment of couples [20].

When someone's in a relationship, jealousy can hardly be avoided. However, it may be surprised to know that jealousy in romantic relationships is not completely an emotion. It is even more difficult to understand than complex emotions since it is quite different between individuals [27]. For example, a person with low self-esteem would be lack of energy and depressed when he or she is aware of the existence of a potential rival, while another person would show his or her anger straightforwardly. In addition, in different situation, the cause of jealousy might not be the same, as well as the behavior. The behavior varies as factors changes. For instance, someone who is jealous of their partner might make as much effort as they could to make the partner appreciate them. They want to know if their partner would leave them in this way, and the behavior shows great insecurity.

Though most research is based on romantic relationships, there are some studies on jealousy among friends because of interest in peer friendship jealousy [10, 12]. To further explain jealousy in friendship, the complicated emotion will be divided into three parts in total. They respectively are cause of jealousy, behavior of jealousy and adjustment of jealousy [8–10]. The statement will be made clearly by providing an example of jealousy friendship in young adolescents. Nowadays, the new generation have much

more opportunities to meet new peers than any generation. However, this might mean greater chance of being affected by various factors. For instance, when the third individual joins a two-people friendship. Two distinct results could be found in this situation. On one hand, third parties might help strengthen their friendship. Because outsiders could solve problems within friendship in more direct ways. However, third parties can cause tension and conflict between friends as well. It might lead to competitions, inequities and betrayal in friendships. That means if teenagers take outsiders as threats to their friendships, feelings of jealousy will arise. After being caught by the emotion, individuals may be afraid of being abandoned or replaced by their friends. Jealousy can also bring out aggressive behaviors. For instance, such negative behaviors include exclusion, rumors and gossip [12]. In a study by Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck, the cause of jealousy is usually due to friends' higher social status [13]. Though they are aware that they wouldn't lose their friends, jealous individuals will be frustrated because of lower expectation of the friendship's quality. From the previous study, we have already known that jealousy is a strong and blended emotion which is mixed with anger, sadness, and some anxiety and embarrassment [14–17]. In addition, people with low self-esteem seem to have bigger problems dealing with negative jealousy emotion [18].

In this paragraph, comparison and connection between romantic jealousy and friendship jealousy will be discussed. As expected, there are certain implicit rules that govern romantic relationships and friendships. And they decide the level of independence and to what extent do people accept outside relationships [11]. Both the relationships mentioned above are necessary parts of daily life and they are common in jealousy issues. However, it is quite obvious that they are distinguishing in certain aspects. For loved ones, loyalty, trust and even strict personal schedule of one's daily life are significant rules [11]. In romantic relationships, individuals are more aggressive towards the third person and they tend to control their partners to strengthen their self-esteem [19]. But in friendships, they are more open and less jealous since the number of friends are usually more than that of lovers.

## 5 Conclusion

The present study aims to preliminary examine the psychometric properties of the QUALITY of Romantic RELATIONSHIPS Scale (QUARRELS). In the study involving a total of 950 individuals across China, it was revealed that the QUARRELS is a tool of good overall reliability ( $\alpha = .94$ ). It comprises of a set of 5 reliable factors (Support, Emotional Intimacy, Rapport, Pacifism & Trust) and a composite factor of a total quality of romantic relationship and intimate friendship score. Indications of construct validity were provided after revealing significant negative correlations between adult attachment dimensions from ( $-.18$  to  $-.53$ ) and both adult relationships anxiety and avoidance shared significant negative correlations with overall quality of romantic relationships ( $r = -.46$ ) and ( $r = -.59$ ). The QUARRELS has promising qualities which could be useful both in future research and in clinical settings.

This study found that for attachment anxiety people, neither conscious expression nor unconscious expression suppression strategies had a significant effect on their friendship jealousy mood [7]. Some foreign studies have found that expression suppression strategy

has no effect on reducing negative emotional experience, but also increase negative emotional experience. This result suggests that the modulatory effect of expression inhibition related not only to mood type, but also individual traits. Attachment-anxious individuals tend to exaggerate threat information, and this negative internal processing model has been automated and tends to express their emotions rather than suppress them, so that expression suppression strategies fail at both the conscious and unconscious levels [8–12]. This characteristic of individuals with attachment anxiety may confer implicit negative attitudes towards expression suppression strategies, and future studies can further explore the influence of implicit emotional attitudes in expression suppression strategies regulating negative emotions in individuals with attachment anxiety.

This study also found that for attachment avoidance people, both conscious expression and unconscious expression suppression strategies were able to significantly influence their friendship jealousy emotional responses [18]. This result further suggests that the regulatory effects of emotion regulation strategies are influenced by individual factors. Because the deactivation regulation strategy of the attachment avoidance population tends to suppress their own response, which is consistent with the expression suppression strategy, it can reduce the friendship jealousy emotional response [17]. This characteristic of attachment avoidance individuals may confer implicit positive attitudes towards expression suppression strategies, and future studies could further explore the influence of implicit emotional attitudes in expression suppression strategies regulating negative emotions in individuals with attachment avoidance [14].

Results suggest that jealousy as a complex emotion is still not completely studied and understood. It is mainly because the emotion is mysterious and changeable, and it varies when it comes to different people or even different situation.

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