

## Abstract

Past research has demonstrated a relationship between romantic relational aggression and jealousy, particularly among women; however, additional research is needed to more fully understand the nature of this relationship. The present study examined relationship satisfaction as a potential moderator of the predicted relationship between the cognitive component of jealousy (i.e., how one perceives real or imagined attraction between one's partner and a romantic rival) and romantic relational aggression among college women ( $N = 315$ ). Participants completed self-report measures of romantic relational aggression, jealousy, and relationship satisfaction as part of a larger online survey. A simple moderation model was tested using the PROCESS macro Hayes (2013) developed for SPSS. Cognitive jealousy and relationship satisfaction predicted romantic relational aggression, and relationship satisfaction moderated the relationship between cognitive jealousy and romantic relational aggression. Specifically, the relationship between cognitive jealousy and romantic relational aggression was stronger when participants were more satisfied with their relationships.

## Introduction

Relational aggression (i.e., behavior aimed at harming others' relationships, reputation/status, and/or sense of belonging) can be disruptive to college students' emotional well-being (e.g., Bagner, Storch, & Preston, 2007; Dahlen, Czar, Bullock, & Nicholson, 2011; Werner & Crick, 1999). Romantic jealousy has been shown to predict relational aggression among women (Wright, 2017); however, it is likely that other factors may be relevant in understanding the nature of this relationship.

Relationship satisfaction is one variable that might be expected to affect the strength of the relationship between jealousy and relational aggression. At low levels of relationship satisfaction, there may be a relatively weak relationship between jealousy and relational aggression because investment in the relationship is minimal. At high levels of relationship satisfaction, investment in the relationship is greater, jealousy is likely to be experienced as being more adverse, and one could be expected to take more drastic measures to minimize it (e.g., resorting to relationally aggressive behaviors).

Although there is some evidence that relationship satisfaction moderates the relationship between jealousy and romantic relational aggression (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007), little research has been conducted in this area with college students. The present study predicted that the cognitive component of romantic jealousy (i.e., how one perceives real or imagined attraction between one's partner and a rival) would be positively related to romantic relational aggression and that level of relationship satisfaction would moderate this relationship. Specifically, it was expected that the relationship between jealousy and relational aggression would be stronger at higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Table 1

Romantic Relational Aggression Predicted by Cognitive Jealousy and Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
Jealousy*	.13	< .001	.07	.20
Relationship Satisfaction*	-.90	.03	-1.70	-.11
Jealousy x Relationship Satisfaction*	.06	.01	.02	.11

\* $p \leq .05$

Table 1

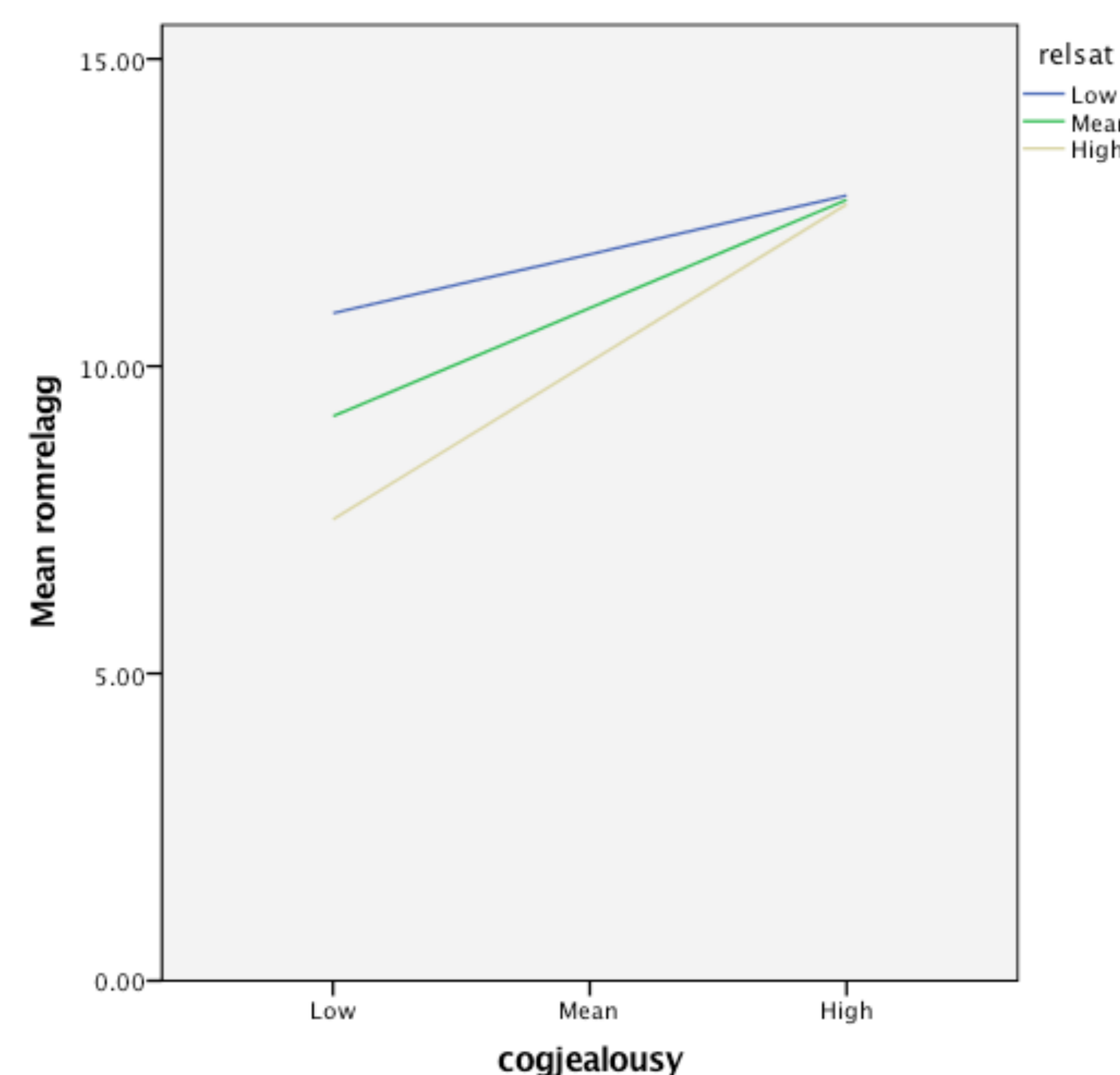


Figure 1

## Methods

This project was a secondary data analysis of a previously collected all-female sample of college student volunteers ( $N = 315$ ) recruited through the web-based research system used by the Department of Psychology at the University of Southern Mississippi. Participants were undergraduate psychology majors and were compensated with extra credit points toward a class of their choice. The sample was largely comprised of traditional age college students ( $M = 21$ ) who identified as White (63%) and Black (32%).

After providing informed consent, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire followed by questionnaires assessing different forms of jealousy, relational aggression, and relationship satisfaction. To assess romantic relational aggression the Self-Report Measure of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM; Morales & Crick, 1998) was used. Cognitive jealousy was assessed using the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). This measure consists of three sub-scales assessing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral jealousy. Cognitive jealousy was isolated for this analysis, as it demonstrated significantly better psychometrics than the other forms of jealousy. Finally, relationship satisfaction was assessed using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAC; Hendrick, 1988).

## Results and Discussion

Key findings include:

- Cognitive jealousy was positively correlated with romantic relational aggression ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ).
- The relationship between cognitive jealousy and romantic relational aggression was moderated by relationship satisfaction, as seen in Table 1.
- A simple slopes analysis found that the relationship between cognitive jealousy and romantic relational aggression was stronger when relationship satisfaction was one standard deviation above the mean,  $b = .1953, 95\% \text{ CI } [ .1027, .2880], t = 4.15, p < .001$ , compared to mean levels,  $b = .1342, 95\% \text{ CI } [ .0687, .1997], t = 4.03, p < .001$ , and one standard deviation below the mean,  $b = .0730, 95\% \text{ CI } [ .0103, .1357], t = 2.29, p = .02$ .

It was not surprising that cognitive jealousy was positively related to romantic relational aggression, as jealousy it is likely to be one motive for engaging in relationally aggressive behaviors in the context of one's romantic relationships. However, the finding that relationship satisfaction moderated this relationship suggests that the relationship between jealousy and romantic relational aggression is likely more complex.

The MJS (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989) conceptualizes jealousy with three factors; cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. This analysis used only the cognitive factor of jealousy, which should be considered when interpreting the results. Other limitations of this study include the reliance on self-report measures, the use of a sample from a single University, sampling only students listed as Psychology majors or minors, and the use of an all-female sample.