12 Social Networking and Romantic Relationships: A Review of Jealousy and Related Emotions

Abstract: Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook are centered on interpersonal connections; providing both personal information and user generated content, along with the members of their social circles. This format facilitates relationship formation and maintenance. As a result, use of these sites can affect offline interpersonal relationships. In this chapter, we review contemporary research examining the use of SNSs and the resulting impact on jealousy and related emotions in the context of romantic relationships. Specifically, we review research on partner surveillance and monitoring, the way couples utilize their social media profiles (e.g., whether or not they share couple-specific information), individual differences, such as gender differences in the experience of jealousy, and the role of social media use on actual relationship outcomes.

12.1 Social Networking and Romantic Relationships:

12.1.1 A Review of Jealousy and Related Emotions

The following is an excerpt from the David Fincher’s 2010 film, The Social Network:

Christy Lee: Why does your status say „single“ on your Facebook page?
Eduardo Saverin: What?
Christy Lee: Why does your relationship status say „single“ on your Facebook page?!
Eduardo Saverin: I was single when I set up the page.
Christy Lee: And you somehow never bothered to change it?
Eduardo Saverin: I –
Christy Lee: [looks at him sternly] What?
Eduardo Saverin: I don’t know how.
Christy Lee: Do I look stupid to you?
Eduardo Saverin: No. Calm down.

Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter have become extremely popular worldwide. Through these sites, individuals can fulfill relational needs, such as forming new friendships and maintaining existing relationships, including
romantic ones. While SNS use facilitates positive experiences, such as feeling connected and decreasing loneliness (Deters & Mehl, 2012) as well as the ability keep in touch with friends, family and romantic partners, it has also been associated with negative experiences, including declines in subjective well-being (Kross et al, 2013). As in the film example above, one potential consequence for couples that use SNSs is that the choices individuals make when creating and later updating their SNS profile may elicit partner jealousy resulting in turmoil within their romantic relationship. Indeed, research demonstrates that the content of one’s SNS profile can cause jealousy within romantic relationships (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009).

In this chapter, we review research focused on social networking use and the impact that partner choices have on their romantic relationships. Specifically, we demonstrate how psychological factors can explain why and how certain SNS usage patterns can lead to jealousy and other negative emotions. Further, we discuss the potential behavioral and relational consequences.

12.2 Overview of the Chapter

We discuss SNS use and romantic jealousy within three main domains: 1) SNS attributes, 2) Individual differences, and 3) Behavioral and relationship outcomes. Specifically, we demonstrate that the attributes of SNSs themselves may contribute to the experience of romantic jealousy. That is, attributes such as publicity, allow individuals access to information that they may otherwise not have had about their partner. This has implications for partner monitoring behaviors, which influence jealousy and negative emotions. Second, we discuss individual differences, or characteristics unique to individuals (e.g., personality, gender, ethnic background, age), that can influence how susceptible different people are to experiencing jealousy. We discuss individual difference characteristics such as sex, attachment style, self-esteem, and interpersonal trust levels as they relate to SNS-related jealousy. Finally, we conclude with a discussion about how SNS-related jealousy may influence subsequent behavioral outcomes such as relationship satisfaction and duration.

12.2.1 Key Definitions

The social science literature accepts the following definition of jealousy:

“Jealousy...may be said to occur when a person either fears losing or has already lost an important relationship with another person to a rival. Jealousy may be experienced in a number of ways, but typically these are thought to include fear of loss, anger of betrayal, and insecurity (Hupka, 1984; Mathes, Adams, & Davies, 1985)” (Parrott, 1991, p. 4).
Jealousy is often confused with envy, which is characterized by a desire for the possessions, achievements, or qualities of another individual (Sagarin & Guadagno, 2004). Other related emotions typically examined in the literature on jealousy are disgust, hurt, and anger (Becker, Sagarin, Guadagno, Nicastle, & Millevoi, 2004; Sagarin, Becker, Guadagno, Wilkinson, & Nicastle, 2003). Depending on the context that invokes a jealous response, these related emotions may or may not show similar patterns of results as jealousy (Sagarin et al., 2012).

SNSs are a type of social media—broadly defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 221, boyd and Ellison, 2007). “Social media” is often used synonymously with social networking or SNS. Because much of the research on romantic jealousy has focused on sites like Facebook, we will use the term “social networking site” or “SNS” throughout the chapter. While the specifics of the various SNSs vary by time (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Guadagno et al., 2013), culture (Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011), purpose (LinkedIn vs. FB), and population (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013), they all have the above characteristics. Current research indicates that while 73% of all people online use social media, young adults (i.e., 18-29 years old) are the most prevalent users – 90% of this age group is online in the Western world (Pew Research Internet Project, 2013). Thus, a majority of the research we discuss next is particularly relevant to this age group.

### 12.3 Attributes of Social Networking Sites

We suggest that the nature of SNSs and the way individuals use them (i.e., purely for recreation, social interaction vs. purely for one’s occupation) vary on two general attributes (or affordances) that are relevant to romantic jealousy: publicity and permanence. Publicity refers to the transparency of information about an individual – depending on his/her privacy settings, personal information will be accessible to a few others or potentially hundreds of others. Permanence refers to the way in which shared information and traces of online social behavior are available for long periods of time (i.e., many researchers [including us] argue that nothing on the Internet is ever deleted). Many SNSs are designed to encourage people to disclose much of their personal information to a broad audience and this information stays online indefinitely, sometimes even after a person has passed away. Thus, as a result, interpersonal relationships on SNSs such as Facebook are typically visible to many people and persist far longer than most imagine (Church, 2013). This can result in a loss of privacy within interpersonal relationships. Hence, the way SNS users interact with, or attempt to control certain attributes of their social media presence also has potential consequences for interpersonal relationships. We next discuss how these attributes and user-specific settings can lead to the experience of jealousy and also partner monitoring behaviors.
12.3.1 User Specific Settings

While publicity and permanence characterize many of the core controversies on SNSs and the Internet more broadly, it is also possible that the way in which privacy settings are configured -- specifically what types of information users choose to share (or conceal) may elicit negative emotions within romantic relationships. For instance, if an individual shares (or omits) couple-specific information (e.g., his/her relationship status, photos with his/her romantic partner), this may impact the relationship and their SNS experience.

In one such study, Muscanell, Guadagno, Rice, and Murphy (2013) examined these issues in relation to jealousy in romantic relationships on Facebook. Participants were asked to imagine one of several scenarios in which they happened to view their romantic partner’s Facebook profile still logged on and displaying a photograph of their partner tagged with an unknown person of the opposite sex. The number of photos of the participant with his/her romantic partner was also varied by condition as 1) none, 2) a few, 3) or many. Second, the privacy settings of the couple photo(s) were manipulated by asking participants to imagine that their partner’s privacy settings were set to: completely viewable by all Facebook users, only viewable by Facebook friends, or completely private. Following the vignette, participants reported their level of jealousy, anger, disgust, and hurt in response to the passage. Results indicated that privacy settings and the availability of couple-specific photographs influenced jealousy and related emotions such that women reported more intense jealousy, anger, and hurt relative to men in response to the scenario. Further, when participants imagined their partner’s profile was set to private and displayed few relationship photos, women reported the most intense jealousy. For men, this was only the case when the profile was set to private and there were many couple photos.

These results suggest that the content and privacy settings of one’s romantic partner’s Facebook profile affect the extent to which people experience SNS-related jealousy and related negative emotions (Muscanell et al., 2013). The researchers speculated that the gender differences found in the different levels of privacy may be related to concerns about online infidelity (see Guadagno & Sagarin, 2010). Importantly, the results provide clear evidence that SNSs are yet another context in which relationship dynamics play out for individuals. Given this, it is unsurprising to learn that “Facebook stalking” a behavior in which individuals seek out evidence to confirm or disconfirm infidelity also occurs on Facebook, particularly during relationship termination, and primarily from the partner that did not want to terminate the relationship (Tong, 2013).

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1 This chapter focuses on research germane to heterosexual couples.
12.3.2 Partner Monitoring (Surveillance)

The public and permanent nature of SNSs can allow individuals in a romantic relationship access to information that they normally would not have (e.g., photographs of former romantic partners publically available). One implication then is that individuals can monitor or “Facebook stalk” their romantic partner for evidence of infidelity. The terms “partner monitoring” and “surveillance” are often used interchangeably in the subsequently discussed research. Thus, for simplicity, we will refer to it as “partner monitoring” or “partner monitoring behaviors”. Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) found just that: participants who spent more time on Facebook were also exposed to more information about their romantic partner. Similar to Muscanell et al. (2013), they argue that this information can often be ambiguous (e.g., a short nondescript message to one’s partner from an opposite sex SNS “friend”), and when individuals see information without context, this may result in increased feelings of jealousy given that a person may not be completely sure what the public information means. This can further fuel “stalking” or information searching behavior on Facebook, as ambiguous information may cause uncertainty, doubts about a partner’s commitment, and feelings of jealousy.

More recently, Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2013) further examined partner monitoring behaviors on Facebook. Across two studies, they found that partner monitoring was related to Facebook jealousy. In their first study, Muise et al. asked participants to view a mock Facebook profile page and imagine that it belonged to their romantic partner. This profile was also linked to another profile whose ownership was manipulated. Participants believed that the linked profile belonged to an unknown other, a mutual friend (of the couple), or their romantic partner’s cousin. Participants’ search time on the interactive mock profile was assessed. Results revealed that women were most jealous if the linked profile belonged to an unknown woman, whereas men were more jealous if the linked page belonged to a mutual (male) friend. Further, women spent more time searching in the unknown other condition. These findings suggest that, at least for women, jealousy and information seeking were related.

In their second study, the researchers examined daily Facebook use across 14 nights (Muise et al., 2013). Participants rated their daily experiences with jealousy, and partner monitoring. Similar to Study 1, they found that for women, higher levels of jealousy were related to increased partner monitoring. Other research similarly supports the relation between partner monitoring and jealousy, such that frequent Facebook users often report increased feelings of jealousy and admit to more monitoring of their romantic partner’s profile (Marshall, Bejanyan, Castro, & Lee, 2012).

Overall, research findings on the relation between jealousy and partner monitoring suggest that the attributes of SNSs, such as publicity and permanence, along with a person’s ability to control what they share, can result in jealousy and negative emotions such as anger, hurt, and disgust in response to their partners’
choices. When romantic couples use sites such as Facebook, they gain access to information about their partner that they might not have otherwise had access to, yet some of this information may be ambiguous (e.g., an unknown opposite-sex person leaving a nondescript public message), which may further fuel partner monitoring behaviors. However, while partner monitoring and jealousy are strongly related, it is also the case that some people are simply more prone to Facebook stalking and jealousy. Next, we explain how factors unique to an individual may make some people more susceptible to experiencing Facebook jealousy.

12.4 Individual Differences

While the attributes of SNSs play a significant role on whether or not individuals experience jealousy, personality and other individual differences should also be considered. A great number of researchers in social and personality psychology, and in psychology more generally, have demonstrated the importance of considering not only situational (context) factors, but also person-centered variables (and the interaction between the two) in regards to understanding and explaining a wide variety of behavioral outcomes (Allport, 1927; Fleeson, & Noftle, 2008; Kenrick, & Funder, 1988; Witkin, 2006). Thus, we believe it is important to consider person level characteristics and as such we highlight some of the individual difference characteristics that have been shown to influence partner monitoring behaviors and the experience of romantic jealousy on SNSs.

12.4.1 Sex Differences

Psychological research has long shown that there are sex differences in the experience of jealousy and related emotions (Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelrogth, 1992; Sagarin et al., 2003; Sagarin & Guadagno, 2004). Specifically, women tend to experience more intense feelings of jealousy, hurt, anger, and disgust as compared to men in response to infidelity. Sagarin and Guadagno (2004) examined sex differences in the intensity of jealousy hypothesizing that it stems from relationship maintenance orientation. In their first study, men and women were asked to provide an example of an instance when they felt extremely jealous. They found that women, relative to men, were far more likely to provide relational exemplars – primarily focused on their romantic relationships. In a second study, the researchers found that when both men and women were instructed to focus on relational jealousy by modifying the measure of jealousy to specifically indicate jealousy in a romantic relationship, men and women did not differ in their reported jealousy. Thus, this greater tendency to focus on relationship maintenance may make women more sensitive to threats of infidelity as compared to men.
Research on SNS use shows that some sex differences may generalize to the experience of jealousy on Facebook. For example, as reviewed above, Muscanell et al. (2013) demonstrated that women experienced more intense feelings of jealousy, hurt, anger, and disgust relative to men when imagining a jealousy-provoking Facebook scenario. Muise et al. (2009) also found similar evidence of gender differences in jealousy resulting from SNS use. And, in their previously discussed 2013 study, the authors found that women were more likely than men to engage in partner monitoring behaviors in addition to reporting higher amounts of Facebook jealousy. In their 2013 study, Muise et al. also found that women with high attachment anxiety (women who hold insecurities and are generally anxious about their relationships) were likely to be jealous and reported increased partner monitoring. Another potential explanation then, is that women (especially those with relationship insecurities) may be more prone to experiencing jealousy because of their insecurities and they are more likely to engage in partner monitoring behaviors on Facebook.

Finally, McAndrew and Shah (2013) also found that women reported more jealousy in response to Facebook use. Further, they assessed the extent to which participants thought their romantic partner was likely to experience jealousy resulting from Facebook use. When the researchers compared participant’s own ratings of jealousy to their predictions about their partners, women did not perceive themselves as being more jealous than their male partners. However, men did perceive and anticipate that their female partners would be more jealous than themselves. The authors suggested that misunderstandings between romantic partners regarding Facebook use may result from misperceptions about how partners will react to Facebook activity.

Overall, the evidence to date suggests that men and women may differ in their susceptibility and experience of jealousy resulting from SNS use. This may be in part due to social and cultural factors such as women’s greater tendency to focus on relationship maintenance, and/or misperceptions about how jealous one’s partner would feel in a jealousy-provoking situation. Further, as with jealousy in response to non-mediated contexts, women generally report higher levels of jealousy in their social networking lives.

12.4.2 Attachment Styles

As Muise et al. (2013) reported, attachment style is another relevant characteristic which differs between individuals. Research demonstrates that attachment style plays a significant role in people’s relationship outcomes (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Simpson, 1990). In general, individuals with more secure attachment styles (as opposed to those with high anxiety and insecurity) are not only more well adjusted, but have more positive relationship experiences, such as more commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).
Recent research has extended the examination of attachment style and its relation to romantic relationships and SNSs. For instance, Fox and Warber (2013) found that attachment style predicted partner monitoring on Facebook. Specifically, they found that individuals with a preoccupied (feeling unworthy) or fearful attachment (excessive worrying) style reported monitoring their partner’s Facebook behavior more often. Both preoccupied and fearful attachment styles are qualified by high relationship anxiety and may lead to increased partner monitoring. Specifically, for preoccupied individuals, partner monitoring may allow individuals to feel more control (and attempt to reduce their anxiety). For fearful individuals, partner monitoring on Facebook might allow these individuals to monitor their partner without direct confrontation.

Marshall, Bejanyan, Castro, and Lee (2013) found that anxious attachment was positively related to Facebook jealousy and partner monitoring. Further, trust and daily jealousy partially explained this relationship such that anxiously attached individuals reported less trust and more jealousy. This in turn predicted more partner monitoring behaviors. The authors explained that anxious individuals tend to feel unworthy or unloved and distrustful of their partners, which in turn may heighten jealousy and partner monitoring behaviors. Overall, anxiously attached individuals may thus be more prone to jealousy and monitoring behaviors due to their relationship insecurities. These individuals may be more prone to partner monitoring behaviors because their insecurities about their relationship may drive them to seek out evidence on SNS that either confirms or disconfirms their worries.

12.4.3 Self-esteem, Need for Popularity, and Trait Jealousy

Other research has extended the research on individual differences and SNS-related jealousy by examining factors such as self-esteem, need for popularity, and trait jealousy (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Interestingly, they found that SNS users reported more SNS-related happiness relative to SNS jealousy. However, the individual difference variables did moderate the relation between SNS use and the experience of jealousy. Overall, low self-esteem individuals reported more SNS-related jealousy. In addition, for these individuals with low self-esteem, need for popularity, trait jealousy, and partner monitoring behaviors all predicted SNS-related jealousy. More simply, for low self-esteem individuals, higher need for popularity and trait jealousy, along with higher amounts of partner monitoring, predicted more SNS-related jealousy. For those with high self-esteem, only partner monitoring and self-reported use of the SNS for grooming (maintaining social contacts) positively predicted SNS-related jealousy. The authors suggested that low self-esteem individuals, especially those with a high need for popularity, may be more sensitive to negative cues or potential threats to their romantic relationship, and thus making them more prone to SNS jealousy. In the case of individuals with
high self-esteem, the authors suggest that these individuals may be exposed to more relationship threatening information given their inclination to use SNS for grooming or maintaining social contacts. That is, these individuals should look at their connections’ profiles more often and may consequently be exposed to more relationship related information, and this could predict SNS jealousy. Finally, for both low and high self-esteem individuals, partner monitoring positively predicted jealousy. One implication is that frequently monitoring a partner’s behavior on SNSs may lead to SNS-related jealousy more generally, regardless of one’s self-confidence.

Overall, the existing evidence suggests that individual difference characteristics as well as relational factors such as intimacy and commitment play a significant role in influencing the level of jealousy experienced by SNS users. Furthermore, women and people with certain dispositions, such as those with anxious attachment styles or low self-esteem, may particularly be more sensitive to relationship threats and SNS-related jealousy.

12.5 Behavioral Responses and Relational Outcomes

As reviewed above, there is strong support for the idea that SNS usage can lead to the experience of jealousy and other related emotions for individuals in romantic relationships. But what is less clear is what the short and long term behavioral consequences of SNS-related jealousy are. For instance, while we know about self-reported partner monitoring, what do we know about how people behave (in the moment) when exposed to jealousy provoking scenarios and what are the effects on relationship outcomes?

12.5.1 Behavioral Intentions

To our knowledge, there is little to no research examining behavioral responses to jealousy-evoking SNS scenarios. However, in one recent study, we assessed open-ended responses from participants who imagined their partner’s profile on Facebook displaying a photo of their partner with an unknown other that, depending on condition, varied with respect to privacy settings and quantity of partner photos (Muscanell et al., 2013). Here we present previously unreported coded descriptive data on participants’ reported response to the scenario described above in which we examined the role of partner photos and privacy settings on relational jealousy. Two independent raters (93% - 100% agreement) categorized participants’ written responses into several different categories including: confronting their partner, confronting the unknown person, ending the relationship, passive aggressive behavior (e.g., commenting on the photo, tagging one’s partner in new photos),
and asking their partner to take action (i.e., remove the offending photo or defriend the unknown person). Overall, the most frequent behavioral response reported by participants (59.4%) was that they would confront their partner about the situation. Many of these responses specifically revealed intentions to find out more about the situation and about the unknown person via discussion with their partner, and to give their partner a chance to clarify the situation. Only a small number of participants reported that they would take more extreme measures: 8.3% of participants reported that they would end the relationship, 1.3% reported that they would engage in partner monitoring behaviors, and 6.6% reported that they would engage in some form of aggressive behavior (e.g., screaming, physical confrontation, and/or destruction of property). Also, 6.6% reported that they would engage in some form of passive aggressive behavior (e.g., tagging their partner in a photo with themselves). Finally, 9.6% of participants reported that they would directly ask their partner to take action (i.e., removing the photo or defriending the unknown person). In addition, individuals did not anticipate that they would directly end their relationship.2

These findings provide a preliminary glimpse into the behavioral implications of SNS-related jealousy and other negative emotions. In general, participants largely reported that in a scenario in which they find somewhat ambiguous information on their partner’s SNS profile, they would directly confront him/her about. This suggests that ambiguous content may lead to confrontation, discussion, and/or arguments. What is less clear is how often incidents like these actually occur and whether more blatant situations would result in more severe relationship outcomes such as physical confrontations and relationship termination. Future research should longitudinally examine couples to better understand how often instances of SNS-related jealousy occur (and under what contexts), and how SNS use impacts the relationship over time.

12.5.2 Relationship Satisfaction

Other research has examined the impact of SNS-related jealousy on relationship outcomes. For example, Elphinston and Noller (2011) explored the relation between Facebook intrusion, romantic jealousy, and relationship satisfaction among Facebook users. The authors defined Facebook intrusion as being characterized by an excessive attachment to Facebook that it interferes with everyday activities. They found that jealous cognitions (suspicious thoughts about one’s partner) and partner monitoring behaviors explained the relationship between Facebook intrusion (“excessive attachment to Facebook which interferes with day-to-day activities and relationship functioning”, p. 631, Elphinston & Noller, 2011) and relationship satisfaction.

2 These data did not differ by sex or experimental condition.
Specifically, high levels of Facebook intrusion produced more jealous cognitions and partner monitoring behaviors, and this in turn led to lower relationship satisfaction. The authors explained that because Facebook is a means for interpersonal interaction, individuals with high Facebook intrusion are also more likely to find romantic relationships to be important. Thus, an implication of this research is that these individuals are more sensitive to relationship threats and their excessive attachment to and use of Facebook exposes them to more potentially threatening information. This in turn can increase jealous thoughts and ultimately decrease relationship satisfaction.

While the previous study suggests that SNS use can lead to jealousy and ultimately less satisfaction with a romantic relationship, there is also some research that suggests there are positive relationship outcomes. For instance, in the previously discussed study by Utz and Beukeboom (2011) the authors found that low self-esteem individuals were more prone to SNS-related jealousy. However, they also examined relationship happiness and, in general, they found that individuals were more likely to experience relationship happiness as compared to SNS jealousy. They suggested that SNS use may offer individuals the opportunity for public demonstrations of affection and commitment, which can then lead to more relationship happiness and satisfaction.

Similarly, other research indicates that posting couple-related information relates to positive relationship outcomes. For example, across three studies, Saslow, Muise, Impett, and Dubin (2012) found that people who were more satisfied with their romantic relationships were more likely to post couple photos on Facebook. Similarly, Papp, Danielewicz, and Cayemberg (2012) examined dyadic picture sharing on Facebook. They found that participants whose profile photos were with their partners and whose relationship status was also shared publicly had higher relationship satisfaction. Further, women reported more relationship satisfaction when their male partners shared their relationship status on Facebook, whereas men felt more relationship satisfaction when their female partner shared dyadic profile pictures.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while Facebook use is related to jealousy and negative outcomes, such as lower relationship satisfaction and greater confrontations within the relationship, there is also the potential for positive outcomes depending on how people utilize and share information they post to Facebook. Specifically, while more partner monitoring is linked with jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction, individuals who use SNSs to publicly and jointly share details of their relationship may experience more relationship satisfaction and happiness. It may be that for individuals who are not characterized by anxious attachment or low self-esteem, SNSs offer the potential to provide positive relationship experiences. Future research is needed in order to determine which kinds of individuals and romantic couples are more likely to benefit from SNS use.
12.5.3 Relationship Duration

To our knowledge, little research has examined the direct impact of SNS use on relationship duration and termination. However, two recent studies do suggest that SNS use can lead to increased relationship conflict and ultimately termination of the relationship (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; Clayton, 2014). One study explored the relation between Facebook use and cheating (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013). They found that greater Facebook use was associated with negative relationship outcomes (cheating). Further, they found that relationship conflict – operationalized as the frequency of arguments with their partners resulting from Facebook use – explained this relationship. That is, using Facebook predicted increased conflict over Facebook activity/use, which then predicted an increased likelihood of cheating with a Facebook “friend”. The authors suggest an implication of these findings is that SNS-based conflict and resulting infidelity may predict relationship termination. A more recent study more directly examined SNS use and relationship termination (Clayton, 2014). This study examined Twitter use and negative relationship outcomes. Similar to the previously described study, it was found that Twitter use predicts relationship conflicts (arguments caused by Twitter use). This in turn predicts negative relationship outcomes such as infidelity, and breakup and divorce. Thus, this initial evidence suggests that SNS use can lead to less duration of the relationship (ultimately resulting in termination). However, what is less clear is the role that jealousy plays as these studies focused on SNS relationship conflict. Future research should further examine whether jealousy (in addition to relationship conflict) is directly related to infidelity and relationship duration and termination.

12.6 Conclusion

Overall, there are a number of psychological factors that are related to SNS use and jealousy within romantic relationships. We argue that there are a combination of factors that may influence whether individuals are likely to experience SNS-related jealousy or related emotions such as anger, hurt, and disgust. These factors include SNS attributes, such as publicity and permanence, the way individuals utilize SNS specific settings, the type of content shared or observed, and individual differences. Overall, publicity and permanence, as well as the information that individuals choose to share in their SNS profiles, can affect relationship satisfaction and the experience of jealousy. In general, SNS use provides individuals with access to more information about their romantic partner’s past and current relationships with others who may be perceived as a threat to the relationship. Because SNSs tend to be platforms in which information is permanently stored and at least somewhat publicly (given that a user does not delete information and has SNS friends) available. This can lead to partner monitoring behaviors, which may further increase jealousy. Further, individuals may
be exposed to ambiguous pieces of information (i.e., seeing one’s partner tagged with an unknown other or seeing a nondescript message from another user posted publicly on one’s partner’s public message center such as the Facebook Wall). Findings so far suggest that individuals may interpret ambiguous information as being more threatening or potentially negative rather than responding with confidence in their romantic relationship. Thus, increased exposure to ambiguous information may also increase jealousy.

In addition to these situational factors that affect jealous-responding, individual difference factors affect relational jealousy as well. For instance, characteristics such as attachment style, self-esteem level, and gender are also related to relational jealousy. Individuals with anxious attachment styles and/or those with low self-esteem may experience more anxiety and insecurity regarding their relationships (and their overall self-image), which may make them more sensitive to potential relationship threats. Thus, these individuals may be more prone to experience SNS related jealousy, and their insecurities may further fuel partner monitoring behaviors in an attempt to reduce or control their relational anxiety by searching for more information about their partner. Further, women for cultural and social reasons may be more relational focused. For example, according to Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), women have traditionally been found to be more communally oriented, meaning that they focus more on relationship formation and maintenance as compared to men who tend to be agentic (independent and task focused). These differences in orientation can be understood to be resulting from differences in traditional social and cultural expectations for the behavior of men and women (i.e., traditionally men were the breadwinners and women took care of the house/family – although this does not necessarily hold true today). One consequence is that women, who tend to be more relationship oriented, may thus be more likely to be threatened by threats of infidelity, and may be more affected by the hyper-social context created by SNSs. Overall, these results suggest that in general, those who have the tendency to be more focused on relationships, more prone to relational anxiety or insecurity, and those with lower self-image may be particularly likely to experience SNS jealousy.

Finally, it is less clear what direct effect SNS-related jealousy has on behavioral responses and long-term relationship outcomes. Evidence is currently mixed, suggesting that SNS use can lead to jealousy and decreased relationship satisfaction; however, it can also lead to increases in relationship happiness and satisfaction for couples who display dyadic or couple specific information (i.e., relationship status and photos with one’s romantic partner which can be viewed publicly on the SNS profile). Future research is needed to further examine whether the positive consequences of using SNS outweigh the negative ones in the context of romantic relationships. With regard to behavioral outcomes, preliminary evidence suggests that, in the very least, SNS-related jealousy relates to direct conflict within the relationship. However, because this initial evidence relies on self-report methods, it is less clear how individuals would actually react in real time if they were to experience
jealousy-provoking scenarios in real life. Thus, more research that examines real life experiences of SNS-related jealousy and relationship outcomes is needed. It is worth noting that many of these studies rely on self-report methods of jealousy and/or related emotions, which is understandable given the difficult nature of systematically examining such constructs. Yet, there is still a need for research that uses methods that are less prone to self-report biases (e.g., actual behavior, observational, and physiological methods).

To conclude, SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter seem to be a double-edged sword for romantic couples who use them. SNS use may provide opportunities for experiencing relationship satisfaction and happiness and/or it may bring out the green-eyed monster in individuals, leading to jealousy and emotions such as hurt, anger, and disgust. While SNS-related jealousy is clearly something that a significant number of SNS users experience, the factors predicting it are complex in nature and are not easy to measure objectively—SNS attributes, situational/contextual factors, and person characteristics are all important predictors of whether or not, and to what extent, individuals experience SNS-related jealousy. As SNSs continue to change with time (as they frequently do), future research will need to keep in mind the specific attributes that SNSs offer at the given time, in addition to more clearly exploring the specific types of contextual information that are likely to be particularly jealousy-provoking, and who (at the person level) will be likely to be susceptible to feeling and responding jealously to such information.

References


