Chapter 6

Clothes make the man

Subliminal priming with high and low status rivals
Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.  
- Mark Twain

Given the importance of pair bonding to human reproductive success, and given the costs one incurs when a mate refrains from the relationship, it is to be expected that humans will expend considerable effort to retain their partners. For human males there is always a risk of being cuckolded by his partner - that is, the risk that he will invest resources in offspring genetically unrelated to him. Male jealousy is hypothesized to have evolved as an anti-cuckoldry adaptation and to function primarily to prevent a mate’s (sexual) infidelity (Buss et al., 1992; Daly et al., 1982). Female jealousy on the other hand is hypothesized to prevent emotional infidelity, since a mate who abandons the relationship and divert his time, resources and commitment to a rival woman and her offspring is most threatening to a woman’s reproductive success (Buss et al., 1992). To solve the adaptive problem of fending off intrasexual competition and preventing one’s mate’s infidelity, men and women have a number of mate guarding behaviors to their disposal. Previous research (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Daly et al., 1982) has shown that male mate guarding behaviors range from tracking a partner’s whereabouts to preventing a mate from spending time with individuals of the opposite sex. Buunk (1997) calls this type of mate guarding possessive jealousy, and designed a questionnaire to measure individual differences in the degree to which one is inclined to prevent even innocent, superficial contact between one’s partner and members of the opposite sex. In the present chapter, that focuses on male jealousy, this questionnaire was included in Study 6.2 to examine the influence of this kind of mate guarding on the effect a rival has on jealousy. It is expected that males who score high on this measure will report higher levels of jealousy after being exposed to a rival, but especially when the rival has a high status - i.e. we expect a moderating influence of possessive jealousy on the relationship between threatening rival characteristics and possessive jealousy.
Male status

In the same way that physical attractiveness is considered to be central to a woman’s mate value, status adds to a man’s value as a (long-term) partner. Multiple studies (e.g. Buss, 1989; Geary, 2000) have shown that a man’s mate value is determined largely by his social status, or by characteristics that point to his ability to acquire status in the future. Indeed, in modern-day America, males with higher incomes report greater frequency of sex and have more biological children (Hopcroft, 2006). Women’s preferences for high status men are assumed to reflect a desire for a mate who can provide them and their offspring with sufficient resources (Buss, 1989; Kenrick et al., 1990). A classic study by Townsend and Levy (1990a) shows that women’s willingness to enter a relationship with a man is determined more by his socio-economic status than by his level of physical attractiveness.

Indeed, when judging male models with differing levels of physical attractiveness and social status, females thought the unattractive but high status model was a more desirable mate than the attractive but medium status model. In a second study, these same authors (Townsend & Levy, 1990b) showed that a man’s clothes can be an indicator of a man’s status. In this study, women rated men of varying levels of attractiveness who were either wearing the costume of a Burger King employee, or a high-class business suit and a Rolex watch. The results showed that women preferred the high status model, irrespective of his attractiveness, for all levels of relations (ranging from having coffee with someone to marrying him). However, women’s clothing style, and thus status, had no impact on men’s desire to enter a (sexual) relationship with them. Thus, it seems Mark Twain was right after all: Clothes do make the man – but not the woman.

The findings from the research reported above suggest that high-income, high status men not only are desirable mates for women, but would also make formidable rivals to other men. This assumption has been confirmed in several studies (Massar et al., 2008; Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002, 1998), which show that a rival’s status and social dominance are the characteristics that evoke most jealousy in men. In the study by Dijkstra and Buunk (2002) mentioned above, male college students responded with significantly more jealousy than women to rival characteristics like ‘has more authority’, ‘is more assertive’ and ‘earns more money’ (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2002). In light of the centrality of the jealousy-evoking effect of a rival’s status and social dominance for men, we decided to focus on these aspects
in our next study. We suggest that without one’s conscious awareness of the presence of a rival, mere exposure to high status rivals will be sufficient to trigger jealous feelings in men. Since male status in the Townsend and Levy (1990b) study was successfully manipulated using different clothing styles, we decided to adopt a similar manipulation for the present study. We exposed men and women subliminally to a photograph of a rival wearing either high-status clothes (e.g. a business suit) or low-status clothes (e.g. a maid’s uniform or a builder’s costume). However, to prevent any confounding effects of facial attractiveness, the heads of the individuals in the pictures will be removed. We predicted that, overall; men will react with more jealousy after being exposed to the high-status rival than after being exposed to the low-status rival, whereas we did not expect a rival’s status to affect women’s jealousy.

The current research
In the present chapter we first of all describe a study in which the stimuli used in our subliminal priming experiment were pre-tested (Study 6.1). Next, we describe a subliminal priming experiment (Study 6.2) in which Buunk’s (1997) measure of possessive jealousy was also included. In this study, we first of all expect a main effect for possessive jealousy, i.e. we expect participants with a high possessive jealousy score to report more jealousy than participants with a low possessive jealousy score. Furthermore, we expect a moderating influence of possessive jealousy on the effect a rival has on participants’ jealousy. More specifically, we expect that men with a strong tendency to keep their partners away from people of the opposite sex (i.e. men who have a high possessive jealousy score) will react with more jealousy after subliminal exposure to a high status rival than after exposure to a low status rival. Although we do not expect any effect of a rival’s status on women’s jealousy scores, we do expect to find an effect of possessive jealousy on female participants’ jealous reactions after exposure to a rival. Since participants who have a high possessive jealousy score are hypothesized to react with more jealousy to any rival, in the present experiment we expect a main effect of possessive jealousy for women, independent of the rival they are exposed to. In addition to measuring participants’ jealousy with the jealousy slider, for exploratory purposes we will assess jealousy related emotions.
(threat and anger) that in previous research have been found to be related to jealousy, specifically for men.

Study 6.1

Method

Participants
Five men and fifteen women (mean age = 21.75) from the University of Groningen participated voluntarily in this study.

Materials and procedure
Four pictures were downloaded from the internet: two photographs of males in either a blue-collar outfit or a business suit, and two photographs of women in either a cleaner’s outfit or a business suit. To prevent any confounding effects of facial attractiveness, the heads of the individuals in the pictures were removed so the focus would be on their clothes. Body posture and body size was similar for both the high status and the low status pictures.

After filling in general questions such as sex, age and relationship status, participants evaluated the four stimulus photographs. Participants evaluated the low status male, the low status female, the high status male and the low status female respectively. They consecutively indicated for each picture on a seven-point Likert-type scale ([1] = not at all, [7] = very much) how attractive, dominant, and old they thought the person in the picture was, and how high their status was. We also asked how threatened participants would feel if the person in the picture would flirt with their partner. However, this question was not answered by females when evaluating the male pictures and the males did not answer this question when evaluating the female pictures.
Results and discussion

Male stimuli
A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic attractiveness with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed a main effect of the factor: Participants indicated they thought the individual in the high status male picture was significantly more attractive than the individual in the low status male condition: $F(1,18) = 39.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .69; M = 5.10$ and $M = 2.90$ respectively. There was also a main effect of participant sex: women considered both pictures to be more attractive than men did: $F(1,18) = 5.63, p < .05, \eta^2 = .24, M = 4.34$ and $M = 3.00$ respectively. There was no interaction between participant sex and the factor ($F(1,18) = .16, ns$).

A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic dominant with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed a main effect of the factor: Participants indicated they thought the individual in the high status male picture was significantly more dominant than the individual in the low status male condition: $F(1,18) = 9.75, p < .01, \eta^2 = .35; M = 4.55$ and $M = 3.40$ respectively. There was a main effect of participant sex, with women judging both photographs as more dominant than men: $M = 4.27$ and $M = 3.10$ respectively, $F(1,18) = 7.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .28$. Again, there was no interaction between the within-subjects factor and participant sex ($F(1,18) = .18, ns$).

A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic status with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed only a main effect of the factor. The high status male photograph was judged higher in status than the low status male photograph: $M = 4.70$ and $M = 2.65$ respectively, $F (1,18) = 17.41, p < .01, \eta^2 = .49$. There was no main effect of participant sex; men ($M = 3.30$) and women ($M = 3.80$) did not differ in their judgment of the status of the males depicted in both photographs: $F(1,18) = 2.52, ns$. There was no interaction between the within-subjects factor and participant sex ($F(1,18) = 1.00, ns$).

Finally, the male participants were asked to judge how threatened they would feel if the person in the photograph would flirt with their partner. Although the N was very small
(N = 5), a paired samples t-test revealed that males would be significantly more threatened by the high status male’s flirtations (M = 3.60) than by the low status male’s flirtations (M = 1.80): \( t(4) = -3.67, p < .05 \).

From these analyses we concluded that the stimuli were suitable for our subliminal priming experiment. They were rated significantly differently in both status and dominance. Moreover, as was expected based on results of previous studies (e.g. this dissertation; Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998, 2002) male participants judged the high status male to be more of a threat to their relationship than the low status male.

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the attractiveness of both stimuli was not judged to be equal: the high status male was judged more attractive by both male and female participants. This can be explained by the fact that for men, attractiveness and status are highly correlated. A meta-analysis that examined findings of the experimental literature on the physical-attractiveness stereotype showed that physically attractive people are perceived as more dominant, sexually warm, mentally healthy, and intelligent than physically unattractive people (Feingold, 1992). Moreover, in research by Dijkstra and Buunk (1998) on rival characteristics and jealousy, the physically attractive rival was not only perceived as more physically attractive but also as more assertive, self-confident, extroverted, and influential than the physically unattractive rival. Thus, it appears that it would be very difficult to control for a stimulus’ attractiveness when manipulating dominance.

**Female stimuli**

A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic attractiveness with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed a main effect of the factor: Participants indicated they thought the individual in the high status female picture was significantly more attractive than the individual in the low status female condition: \( F(1,18) = 5.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .76 \); \( M = 3.80 \) and \( M = 2.25 \) respectively. There was no main effect of participant sex: \( F(1,18) = .006, ns \). There was however an interaction between participant sex and the factor: \( F(1,18) = 15.71, p < .01, \eta^2 = .47 \).
A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic *dominant* with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed only a main effect of the factor: Participants indicated they thought the individual in the high status female picture was significantly more dominant than the individual in the low status female condition: $F(1,18) = 11.48$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .39$; $M = 3.85$ and $M = 2.60$ respectively. There was no main effect of participant sex ($F(1,18) = 1.26$, *ns*) nor a significant interaction between the within-subjects factor and participant sex ($F(1,18) = .188$, *ns*).

A repeated measures ANOVA on the characteristic *status* with the status of the target as the within-subjects factor and participant sex as the between-subjects factor revealed only a main effect of the factor. The high status female photograph was judged higher in status than the low status female photograph: $M = 4.30$ and $M = 2.30$ respectively, $F(1,18) = 35.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .66$. There was no main effect of participant sex. Men ($M = 3.00$) and women ($M = 3.40$) did not differ in their judgment of the status of the females depicted in both photographs: $F(1,18) = 1.64$, *ns*. There was no interaction between the within-subjects factor and participant sex ($F(1,18) = .55$, *ns*).

Finally, the female participants were asked to judge how threatened they would feel if the person in the photograph would flirt with their partner. A paired samples t-test revealed that females would be significantly more threatened by the high status female’s flirtations ($M = 3.93$) than by the low status female’s flirtations ($M = 2.07$; $t(14) = -5.14$, $p < .001$).

From these analyses we concluded that the stimuli were suitable for our subliminal priming experiment. They were rated significantly differently in both status and dominance, although, as with the male stimuli, the high status female was judged to be more attractive than the low status female.
Study 6.2

Method

Participants and design

All stimuli and procedures were approved by the Ethical Committee of Psychology of the University of Groningen. Fifty-four men (mean age = 21.61 years, SD = 3.47) and 71 women (mean age = 20.72, SD = 1.86) at the University of Groningen took part in this study and received course credit for their participation. They were randomly assigned to either the high status prime condition or the low status prime condition.

Materials and procedure

After answering general questions (age, sex, educational level etc.) and before starting with the subliminal priming task, participants filled in the Possessive Jealousy scale (Buunk, 1997). Participants rated on a 5-point scale (1 = not applicable at all, 5 = very much applicable) how much each of the following items applied to them: ‘I don’t want my partner to meet too many people of the opposite sex’, ‘It is not acceptable to me if my partner sees people of the opposite sex on a friendly basis’, ‘I demand from my partner that he/she does not look at other women/men’, ‘I am quite possessive with respect to my partner’, and ‘I find it hard to let my partner go his/her own way’. Men and women reported equal intensities (t(123) = -0.89, ns) of possessive jealousy: M = 1.85, SD = .81 versus M = 1.98, SD = .81. Reliability for this scale was very good and could not be raised by omitting an item: α = .86.

Next, participants completed the parfoveal priming task. This task was identical to the one used in Study 6.1 (this chapter), except for the priming stimuli. The stimuli used in the present study were downloaded from the internet and consisted of, for males, a man wearing in a workers’ costume (the low status prime) and a man dressed in a business suit (the high status prime). For women, there was a woman dressed in a cleaner’s uniform (the low status prime) and a woman dressed in a business suit (the high status prime). We removed the heads of these men and women so the focus would be on their clothes. All stimuli were pre-rated (see Study 5.3, this chapter) and were considered to be sufficiently different in status and dominance.
The priming stimuli were flashed in 15 of the 60 experimental trials. In the practice trials and in the remainder of the 45 experimental trials participants were exposed to geometrical shapes (circles, triangles and squares), which also were presented for 60 ms. These shapes were of the same size as the priming stimuli and consisted of black line drawings on a white background.

After completing the parafoveal priming task, participants read a shortened version of the scenario developed by Dijkstra and Buunk (1998). Participants were told to visualize the situation described in the vignette before continuing with the experiment. The male version reads as follows:

You are at a party with your girlfriend and you see an unfamiliar man walk up to her. He starts flirting with her. She seems to like it, and starts flirting back.

The next part of the experiment consisted of the jealousy slider, on which participants could indicate how jealous they would feel if the situation described in the scenario would happen to them. The slider had endpoints 0 (not jealous at all) and 100 (extremely jealous). Participants could use the mouse to slide a knob to the position on the scale that best indicated their feelings. Moreover, participants rated how jealous, threatened, and angry they would be if the situation described in the scenario would happen to them. These adjectives were rated on a five-point scale with 1 = not at all and 5 = very strong.

Finally, participants' awareness of the subliminal primes was assessed. In a funneled debriefing procedure (Bargh et al., 1996) they were asked what they thought the purpose of the study was, whether they thought any tasks in the study were related, whether anything in the study seemed strange or suspicious to them, and what they thought the content of the flashes had been. Participants indicated they had they had only seen the two neutral words on the screen and had not been aware of the purpose of the study or the content of the flashes.
Results

Jealousy slider
A regression analysis with participant sex (male vs. female), prime (high vs low status) and possessive jealousy (standardized) as predictors, and the jealousy slider as the dependent variable was conducted. All two-way and three-way interactions were included in the analysis (N = 125). The overall model was significant: $R^2 = .29, F(7,117) = 6.73, p < .001$. There were no main effects of participant sex or prime ($Bs < 1.71, ts < 1.14, ns$). As predicted, there was a main effect of possessive jealousy, $B = 9.40, t (117) = 6.11, p < .001$. No other two-way interactions were significant, but there was a significant three-way interaction between participant sex, prime and possessive jealousy: $B = -3.95, t (117) = -2.57, p = .01$.

To interpret the three-way interaction, simple effect analyses were performed. These showed that men high and low in possessive jealousy who were exposed to the high status rival did not differ in their jealousy: $M = 75.73$ and $M = 71.11$ respectively, $B = 2.31, t (117) = .81, ns$. However, when they were exposed to a low status rival, men high and low in possessive jealousy did differ in their jealousy. Men high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more jealousy ($M = 93.01$) than men low in possessive jealousy ($M = 65.28$): $B = 13.87, t (117) = 3.70, p < .001$. For an illustration of these effects, see Figure 1. Among women, there was no difference between the responses to the low and the high status rival. The only effect found among women was that of possessive jealousy. When exposed to a high status rival, women high and low in possessive jealousy reported significantly different levels of jealousy: $M = 84.74$ and $M = 59.07$ respectively, $B = 12.83, t (117) = 4.77, p < .001$. This same pattern of results was found for women exposed to a low status rival: women high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more jealousy than women low in possessive jealousy: $M = 81.59$ and $M = 64.43$ respectively, $B = 8.58, t (117) = 2.94, p < .01$ (see Figure 2).
Figure 1. Jealousy scores for men high and low in possessive jealousy after subliminal priming with a high status or low status rival.

Figure 2. Jealousy scores for women high and low in possessive jealousy after subliminal priming with a high status or low status rival.
Adjectives

Jealous. A regression analysis with participant sex (male vs. female), prime (high vs low status) and possessive jealousy (standardized) as predictors, and the adjective ‘jealous’ as the dependent variable was conducted. All two-way and three-way interactions were included in the analysis (N = 125). The overall model was significant: $R^2 = .38$, $F(7, 117) = 10.35$, $p < .001$. There were no main effects of participant sex or prime ($B_s < -.08$, $t_s < -.99$, $ns$), but there was a main effect of possessive jealousy: $B = .65$, $t(117) = 7.67$, $p < .001$. There was a significant two-way interaction between prime and possessive jealousy: $B = -.26$, $t(117) = -2.78$, $p < .01$. No other two-way interactions were significant, but there was a highly significant three-way interaction between participant sex, rival characteristics and possessive jealousy: $B = -.24$, $t(117) = -2.81$, $p < .01$.

To interpret the three-way interaction, simple effect analyses were performed. The results were similar to those for the jealousy slider. That is, men high and low in possessive jealousy who were exposed to the high status rival did not differ in their jealousy: $M = 3.57$ and $M = 3.26$ respectively, $B = .15$, $t(117) = .97$, $ns$. However, men high and low in possessive jealousy did differ in jealousy when they were exposed to a low status rival. Men high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more jealousy ($M = 4.84$) than men low in possessive jealousy ($M = 2.64$): $B = 1.10$, $t(117) = 5.32$, $p < .001$. When exposed to a high status rival, women high and low in possessive jealousy reported significantly different levels of jealousy: $M = 4.47$ and $M = 3.12$ respectively, $B = .68$, $t(117) = 4.57$, $p < .001$. The same pattern of results was also found for women exposed to a low status rival: women high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more jealousy than women low in possessive jealousy: $M = 4.36$ and $M = 3.01$ respectively, $B = .67$, $t(117) = 4.20$, $p < .001$. For an overview of all means, see Table 1.
Table 1. Mean scores for men and women high and low in possessive jealousy on the adjectives jealous, threatened and angry (Study 5.4) after priming with a high status or low status rival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive jealousy</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jealous</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High status rival</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low status rival</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>2.64</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Threatened</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High status rival</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low status rival</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>2.23</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Angry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High status rival</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low status rival</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Threatened. A regression analysis with participant sex (male vs. female), prime (high vs low status) and possessive jealousy (standardized) as predictors, and the adjective ‘threatened’ as the dependent variable was conducted. All two-way and three-way interactions were included in the analysis (N = 125). The overall model was significant: $R^2 = .17$, $F(7,117) = 3.47$, $p < .01$. There were no main effects of participant sex or prime ($B_s < .02$, $t_s < -.27$, $ns$). As predicted, there was a main effect of possessive jealousy, $B = .36$, $t (117) = 3.91$, $p < .001$. The interaction between participant sex and prime was significant: $B = -.18$, $t (117) = -1.97$, $p = .05$. The other two-way interactions were not significant, but there was a significant three-way interaction between participant sex, rival characteristics and possessive jealousy: $B = -.24$, $t (117) = -2.57$, $p = .01$.

To interpret the three-way interaction, simple effect analyses were performed. These showed that men high and low in possessive jealousy who were exposed to the high status rival did not differ in their feelings of being threatened: $M = 2.66$ and $M = 2.32$ respectively, $B = .17$, $t (117) = .97$, $ns$. However, men high and low in possessive jealousy did differ in jealousy when they were exposed to a low status rival. Men high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more jealousy ($M = 3.92$) than men low in possessive jealousy ($M = 2.23$): $B = .85$, $t (117) = 3.74$, $p < .001$. When exposed to a high status rival,
women high and low in possessive jealousy reported significantly different levels of threat: $M = 3.25$ and $M = 2.54$ respectively, $B = .36$, $t(117) = 2.21$, $p < .05$. However, women high and low in possessive jealousy reported equal levels of threat after exposure to a low status rival: $M = 2.85$ and $M = 2.69$ respectively, $B = .08$, $t(117) = .46$, ns. See table 1 for an overview of all means.

**Angry.** A regression analysis with participant sex (male vs. female), prime (high vs low status) and possessive jealousy (standardized) as predictors, and the adjective ‘angry’ as the dependent variable was conducted. All two-way and three-way interactions were included in the analysis ($N = 125$). The overall model was significant: $R^2 = .21$, $F(7,117) = 4.48$, $p < .001$. There were no main effects of prime or participant sex ($B < -.06$, $t < -.54$, ns). There was a main effect of possessive jealousy, $B = .43$, $t(117) = 3.39$, $p < .001$. The interaction between prime and possessive jealousy was significant: $B = -.23$, $t(117) = -2.12$, $p < .05$. The other two-way interactions were not significant, but there was a significant three-way interaction between participant sex, rival characteristics and possessive jealousy: $B = -.26$, $t(117) = -2.36$, $p < .05$.

To interpret the three-way interaction, simple effect analyses were performed. These showed that men high and low in possessive jealousy who were exposed to the high status rival did not differ in their anger: $M = 2.61$ and $M = 3.07$ respectively, $B = -.23$, $t(117) = -1.14$, ns. Men high and low in possessive jealousy did differ in anger when they were exposed to a low status rival, however. Men high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more anger ($M = 3.82$) than men low in possessive jealousy ($M = 2.31$): $B = .76$, $t(117) = 2.82$, $p < .01$. Women high and low in possessive jealousy reported significantly different levels of anger when exposed to a high status rival: $M = 3.89$ and $M = 2.63$ respectively, $B = .63$, $t(117) = 3.27$, $p < .01$. This same pattern of results was found for women exposed to a low status rival: women high in possessive jealousy reported significantly more anger than women low in possessive jealousy: $M = 3.85$ and $M = 2.69$ respectively, $B = .58$, $t(117) = 2.77$, $p < .01$. See table 1 for an overview of all means.
Discussion

In Study 6.2, we subliminally primed participants with photographs of men and women wearing either high status clothing or low status clothing. To prevent confounds with attractiveness, the faces of the stimuli pictures were removed. As predicted, women were not affected by their rival’s status - we did not find any significant results of the subliminal primes for women. However, we did find the expected main effect of possessive jealousy for women, with women scoring high on this measure indicating more jealousy, feelings of threat and anger than women who were low in possessive jealousy. Thus, we conclude that, as would be expected, women who often engage in (extreme) mate guarding, also experience more negative feelings following a jealousy evoking situation.

For men, the results tell a different story. Although there was no main effect of our experimental primes, possessive jealousy had a moderating effect on men’s jealousy after exposure to a high or a low status rival. Surprisingly, and contrary to our expectations, men high in possessive jealousy reacted with most jealousy to a low status rival. Since this pattern of results was found not only for our main dependent variable but also for the adjectives jealous, threatened, and angry, we can assume it is a robust pattern. But since the literature on rivals and jealousy so far has consistently found that men are most jealous and threatened when their rival is high in status and social dominance (e.g. Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998, 2002), this pattern of results raises a question. Why would men who are possessively jealous become most jealous when they are confronted with a rival who is low in status?

The most straightforward explanation of our results is that although the stimuli were pre-rated on ‘dominance’ (see Study 6.1, this chapter), with the high status male scoring higher on this construct, in this case dominance could have been primarily interpreted as social dominance by our raters, whereas in the subliminal priming the biggest influence was exerted by the primes’ physical dominance and masculinity. Thus, although previous research (Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998, 2002) has repeatedly found that men reported more jealousy after a confrontation with a rival possessing characteristics indicative of high status and social dominance, it is very well possible that physical features have a bigger impact on one’s jealousy when exposure to a rival is of very short duration. Moreover, for women,
there are reproductive benefits of mating with muscular, physically dominant men, the
most documented one being securing access to superior (‘good’) genes (Gangestad &
Simpson, 2000). Indeed, recent research by Frederick and Haselton (2007) showed that
muscular men reported having more short-term partners, and reported having more
partners who were already mated to someone else. Moreover, the women in these studies
indicated that their short-term partners were more muscular than their other sex partners,
and that they waited for a shorter period of time before having sex with them (1 week vs. 12
weeks). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that men exhibiting cues to good genes, i.e.
muscular, physically dominant men, would represent formidable rivals to other men. Since
exposure to the rival in our paradigm is of extremely short duration, it is possible the
participants in Study 6.2 only judged the general outline of the rival. It is possible that the
low status rival is considered to be more muscular and physically dominant than the high
status male. Thus, if the low status rival in the present experiment was indeed judged to be
higher in physical dominance - and thus representative of a ‘good-genes’ man - than the
high status rival, it is understandable that men were threatened by him more than by the
high status man. Future studies should examine this possibility and have stimuli rated for
both physical and social dominance.

Another explanation of our results centers on the characteristics of highly
possessively jealous individuals. Possessive jealousy can be considered as a form of
introsexual competition which expresses itself in an extreme form of mate guarding, such as
tracking the whereabouts of one’s partner and keeping him or her away from the opposite
sex (Buunk, 1997; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Individuals scoring high on this measure
tend to become jealous about any contacts of their partner with members of the opposite
sex, which is why they engage in heavy mate-guarding. One should therefore expect this
measure to be associated with questionnaires measuring intrasexual competition. Indeed, in
the present study a measure of intrasexual competition (Buunk & Fisher, in press) was
included as part of another study, and correlational analyses show that possessive jealousy is
positively associated with intrasexual competition: $r = .35$, $p < .001$. Jealousy in individuals
who are possessively jealous of their mates would of course arise by their partner’s contacts
with highly attractive, high status males. But, as one can imagine, it would be even more
devastating to one’s self-esteem if one’s partner is flirting with a male who is clearly low in
status. This explanation fits in with results reported by Townsend and Levy (1990a), who reported that low income professionals – i.e. individuals who had a high occupational status but a low income – were rated by women as less desirable partners than low income laborers – i.e. individuals who had a low occupation status and a low income. Extending this result to the present study on jealousy and rivals, we can hypothesize that since low income professionals were rated as less desirable partners, they may also evoke less jealousy in men when presented as rivals – especially when the low income laborer is judged to be higher in physical dominance. However, to fully investigate the effect of a low status rival on participants’ self-esteem, future studies should include self-evaluative measures both before and after the priming.

Conclusion
To conclude, in the present chapter we again found clear sex differences in the jealousy evoking effect of rival characteristics. It seems that participants are able to make fast and frugal first impressions of a rival using their social status (Study 6.2) as a cue to determine the threat this person would pose to their relationship. Moreover, we found that one’s tendency to engage in possessive mate guarding moderates the relationship between exposure to rivals and subsequent jealousy. We conclude that rivals need not be evaluated consciously for jealousy and a number of other negative emotions to arise – their threat to one’s relationship can be assessed literally in the blink of an eye. In our opinion, the present research constitutes a valuable addition to the existing literature on the role of rival characteristics in jealousy.