

Impact of jealousy on relationships



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Jealousy has crucial and far-reaching implications for persons who are involved in romantic relationships. According to Harris (2009), individuals in a romantic relationship, do at some point experience the feeling of jealousy. Among most definitions of jealousy, it is usually defined as an emotional response to the real or imagined threat of losing something of value from a romantic relationship (Salovey & Rodin, 1985; White & Mullen, 1989). Some researchers for example Anderson et al. (1995) view romantic jealousy as a positive experience. Having a jealous partner, can cause someone to become careful and avoid other relationships formation and thereby do not longer take his or her current partner for granted. Harris and Darby (2010) supported this conclusion by saying that “ it alerts one to relationship threats and can motivate behaviors that protect the relationship” (p. 547).

Taking into consideration that the experience of jealousy may protect romantic relationships against potential threat, it is seen to coincide with evolutionary psychological perspective on relationships. From this approach, Buss (2000) argues that romantic jealousy is an adaptive emotion that helps those who are at the risk of losing their partner to a third party and thus must act to hinder the potential loss of the sexual reproductive benefits they gain from their partner. Thus in a way, jealousy may forestall a partner’s unfaithfulness and is therefore fundamental to relationship bettering goals of mate guarding and mate retention. Evolutionary psychology also predicted who is more prone to be jealous. In most couples, a partner may be more physically attractive, having good health and resources. They thus have the power to attract possible replacement partners than the other partner, which is known as the “ fluctuating asymmetry” (Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997). The

less attractive partner experiencing jealousy in this context is believed to be adaptive in order to protect their relationship from being threatened by a rival and breaking. The study done by Brown and Moore (2003) is in line with this argument.

Despite of its good side, there are several evidence for the dark side of jealousy. Barelds and Dijkstra (2006) said that in Western culture jealousy has a negative significance and is frequently seen as a socially undesirable emotion. Many of the empirical studies done in the past have also found that the common person tends to describe jealousy as a negative and bad emotion. For instance the study done by Sharpsteen in 1993 reveals that during the study when people were asked to determine the characteristics of jealousy, their answers were ‘ hurt’, ‘ threatened’, ‘ bad thoughts about other man and woman’. In other words they identified the features of jealousy as negative only.

According some researchers for example Hendrick and Hendrick (1983), the feeling of jealousy is not healthy and it is an evidence of deficit. Other researchers have associated jealousy with low self-esteem (Bingle, 1981), low self confidence (Bunk, 1997), low generalized trust (Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000), low empathy for others (Radecki Bush, Farrell, & Bush, 1993), loneliness (Rotenberg, Schewchuk & Kimberley, 2001), a need for approval (Salovey & Rodin, 1985, 1989), neuroticism (Stieger, Preyss & Voracek, 2012), depression (TARRIER, Beckett, Harwood & Ahmed, 1989) and generalized hostility (Thomas, Miller & Warner, 1988).

On attachment basis, it was found that individuals who display insecure attachment style are more likely to feel jealous about their partner than those who have a secure attachment style (White Millen, 1989, Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997, Guerrero, 1998, Harris 2009). The worst side of jealousy is that it can cause someone to become aggressive and violent towards romantic rivals. (DeSteno et al. 2006; Paul et al. 1993; Chiffrieller & Hennessy, 2007; Harris, 2003; Mullen 1995).

All the studies cited above, under the definition of jealousy gives us evidence for the good and bad sides of romantic jealousy. However, most researchers now are in the favor of a multidimensional approach in order to clearly understand how jealousy is conceptualized and experienced. (Bevan & Samter, 2004; Buunk, 1991, 1997; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006; Harris, 2009; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989; Salovey, 1991; Sharpsteen, 1991). Bringle et al. (2007) put forward the transactional model of jealousy, which is a multidimensional approach that defines two types of jealousy. First the ‘suspicious’ type and second the ‘reactive’ type. Suspicious type of jealousy comprises of feelings, behaviors and thoughts that are experienced when major cases that would usually arouse jealousy are absent. In addition, someone experiencing features like high levels of anxiety, insecurity about their relationship and doubt describes suspicious jealousy. The ‘reactive’ type is however different from the ‘suspicious’ type of jealousy. This kind of jealousy occurs when one partner has learned that his partner has betrayed him or her. Suspicious jealousy is referred to internal individual factors like low self-confidence and insecurity, while reactive jealousy is related to exogenous factors that come from the relationship and society. Scholars

Buunk (1991, 1997), White and Mullen (1989) identified three components of jealousy: Emotional Jealousy, Cognitive Jealousy and Behavioral Jealousy.

Emotional Jealousy

Series of studies have concentrated on the emotional component of jealousy.

Emotional jealousy comprises of an affective reaction to a real or an imagined threat to a valued relationship (Theiss & Solomon, 2006).

Emotional arousal embraces negative feelings such as anxiety, discomfort, anger, fear, insecurity, and upset (Guerrero, Eloy, Jorgensen, & Andersen, 1993; Sharpsteen, 1993; Sharpsteen

& Kirkpatrick, 1997). Depending on the situations, emotional jealousy may also include feelings of sadness, guilt and envy (Guerrero, Trost, & Yoshimura, 2005; White & Mullen, 1989). Emotional jealousy refers to how someone feels when his or her partner is flirting with someone else, kissing or hugging someone of the opposite sex or how that person feels when he or she learns that somebody else is dating his or her partner.

Cognitive jealousy

Several studies have analyzed the role of cognition in jealousy, which includes the appraisal of threat to a relationship (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993; Harris, 2003a; Nannini & Meyers, 2000). The repeated thoughts of anxiousness, doubts and suspicions someone has about his or her partner's potential infidelity and external relationships characterize cognitive jealousy (Theiss & Solomon, 2006). It involves someone who is obsessed by mistaken beliefs, worries and suspicions about rivals to a valued romantic relationship.

Cognitive jealousy implies the construction of elaborate cognitive scenarios that result in biases toward perceiving relational threats and misunderstanding of the partner's behavior (Rydell & Bringle, 2007).

Examples of cognitive jealousy include a person always imagining a romantic partner as disloyal, interpreting the way their partner interact with the opposite sex as flirting, or comparing oneself incessantly with a potential romantic rival.

Behavioral jealousy

Behavioral jealousy was defined by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) as the “detective/protective

measures a person takes when relationship rivals (real or imaginary) are perceived” (p. 184). Jealous behaviors may be expressed in many ways however; the purpose to either protect the relationship or notice potential threats to the relationship is what they have in common. The goal of someone who expresses behavioral jealousy is to ensure that intimacy does not take place between one's partner and a third party. Examples of behavioral jealousy include being inquisitive, checking up on one's partner, searching his or her belongings, mobile phones, making uncomplimentary statements about the rival, or trying to come in between the partner and rival when they are engaged in conversation. According to this definition, spying or surveillance of one's partner would consist of a more severe form of behavioral jealousy. White (1981) viewed such behaviors as ways to manage emotions, especially as jealousy is more probable to occur for individuals who are in committed relationships than for individuals who are in

an open relationships or singles (Pines & Aronson, 1983; White & Mullen, 1989).

A study done by Theresa Hurton (2011), who looks at the relationship between social network site Facebook and how it impacts college romantic relationships, found that there is a positive correlation between checking Facebook daily and presence of jealousy in romantic relationships. Other scholars for example Muise et al (2009) conducted a study that reveals a significant association between time spent on Facebook and jealousy related feelings and behaviors experienced on Facebook.

Nowadays Facebook is known to almost all people in the world, it is a new phenomenon and I think most people have a personal Facebook account, be it youngsters or adults. It has become one of the largest ‘procrastinating tools’ for almost everyone. Despite the good sides that Facebook has, one example is that it provides the ease of communication, it does bring along some notorious effects, and one of them is that it may put romantic relationships at risk of breaking by inducing jealousy feelings in couples according to the literature.