



Jealousy and Relationships

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Opinion

Jealousy is an emotion that people may experience from early childhood throughout the rest of their lives. Interest in jealousy derives from its association with violence and from its frequency as a problem in relationship therapy. Jealousy is a complex social emotion that studied mostly by social psychologists within the context of adult romantic relationships. We may understand Jealousy better when it defined with reference to its social context. It occurs in the context of a social triangle. The triangle may not always involve a third person, "What is always true is that jealousy involves a triangle of relations" [1]. White and Mullen [2] have referred to the "interpersonal jealousy system" to describe the system of relationships between the three participants of the social triangle. There are three dyadic relationships within the triangle in addition to the triadic relationship system:

- i. The relationship between the jealous individual and the beloved (the primary or jealous relationship),
- ii. The relationship between the beloved and the rival (the secondary or rival relationship) and
- iii. The relationship between the jealous individual and the rival (the adverse relationship).

Any three people randomly grouped together will not elicit jealousy. For this reason, a second condition is that the relationship between the jealous person and the beloved must be a valued close relationship. This relationship need not be a love relationship, but often the most powerful jealousy reactions are observed when a love relationship is involved [3]. Third, jealousy is triggered by the real or perceived loss of this relationship to a rival. The feelings arising from the loss of a love relationship due to death or separation would not constitute jealousy. Forth and lastly, it is not simply the loss of love that produces jealousy, because jealousy can occur in nonromantic relationships. Tov-Ruach [4] claims it is the loss of formative attention (i.e., the attention that sustains one's self-concept) from the beloved to a rival that is similar across all forms of jealousy. Jealousy and envy need to clarify; Parrott (1991) [1] noted that envy and jealousy bring forth "greater variations in the conditions that elicit them and in the ways that people experience them" (p. 3) than do emotions such as fear and sadness. The complexity of the emotions of envy and jealousy increases the challenge of clarifying them. Adding to the challenge of differentiating feelings is that jealousy may accompanied by envy, and the opposite is not necessarily true. Parrott and Smith [5] reported on two experiments that empirically investigated the difference between envy and jealousy: Envy characterized by feelings of inferiority, longing, resentment, and disapproval of the emotion. Jealousy characterized by fear of loss, distrust, anxiety, and anger. (p. 906). Parrott and Smith (1993) [5] also noted that envy occurs when a person desires a quality, possession, or achievement of another person. Jealousy is present when the person fears losing a salient relationship to another person who is seen as a rival. According to these definitions, envy involves two people; jealousy involves three people. I think envy includes either the disappearance of what is with the envied or the disappearance of what is with the envied and the envious's acquisition of it.

White and Mullen [2] define jealousy as "... Jealousy is neither an emotion, nor merely a state of mind, still less a way of behaving. Rather, we believe it is more useful to think of jealousy as particular patterns of emotions, thoughts, and actions that emerge in particular social and psychological situations." Jealousy, then, is an organized complex of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors following the threat to or loss of a beloved relationship to a rival. For example, one complex may include a cognitive appraisal of potentially losing the relationship to another, the emotional expression of sadness, and behavioral withdrawal from the beloved; whereas another complex might include a cognitive appraisal of the partner's betrayal, the emotional expression of anger, and aggression against the partner as a behavioral response. Hupka [6] indicated that individuals in jealousy-inducing situations express a range of emotions including fear, anger, or even relief, depending on the individual's focus of attention with respect to the social triangle. If individuals focus on the loss of the relationship for instance, they may be report sadness; if they focus on the betrayal of their partner, they may feel anger; and they may feel anxiety or fear if the focus was "left alone". For that, Hupka [6] suggests that the term jealousy does not describe the emotional experience, but provides the explanation of the experience. As Hupka [6] notes, jealous people feel anger, but if asked, "Why are they angry?" the explanation given is because they are jealous.

Jealousy lies in the gray area between sanity and madness. Could jealousy be a reasonable and healthy emotion? Sometimes, some people rationalizes jealousy as signs of caring and devotion, rather than a possessiveness and insecurity. In our society, some jealous reactions accepted as part of care and protection. In addition, if a person does not show such reaction seems in some way not normal, for example, a spouse tells his/her partner "I do not like anyone to see you wearing tight cloth". Others seem so excessive and pathological. A classic example a spouse, who is suspicious of his/her loving and faithful partner that she/he constantly spies on him/her, listens in on phone conversations; spying on mobile's social media; records the mileage in the car for unexplained trips-and even with the repeatedly confirmed fidelity suspicions goes on and she/he suffer from a great jealousy. It is important to differentiate normal reaction from pathological jealousy reaction. Normal behavior has its basis in a real threat to the relationship; pathological reaction persists in spite of the absence of any real or even probable threat. People have some unresolved conflicts they carry from childhood. They experience these conflicts as vulnerabilities, insecurities, or fears. When they fall in love and their loved one reciprocated, these vulnerabilities, fears, and insecurities seem to vanish. The beloved shows love despite their imperfections. They feel whole, and safe. However, when this love is threatened, the fears and insecurities that they thought had gone forever come back in full force. If this person is going to leave for another, then there is no hope. They no longer feel secure. If jealousy is a secondary feeling, what is underneath it? Is it fear of loss? The question to a jealous person is (what is the most painful thought associated with your jealousy?) Once they have identified the focus of their jealousy, they need to figure out why they are reacting the way they do. Is it a result of their sensitivity to the subject, or a result of a real threat to the relationship? After they have clarified for themselves, what exactly they are experiencing and why, they can proceed to examine their different



options for coping. The question is could they react differently?

There are many treatment approaches for jealousy; I will discuss two of them. In the systems approach, jealousy is seen a result of the interactions in a specific relationship. The focus is the system and the circular process that maintains the jealousy. Give little attention to the unconscious roots of jealousy. The primary goal of systems therapy is to change the couple's destructive patterns that cause jealousy to emerge, reinforce, and maintain it. Jealousy serve a purpose in the couple system; both partners have something to gain by keeping the jealousy going. Even when one spouse seems to be "abnormally jealous," it is appropriate to ask the other partner what he or she is getting out of these jealous interactions? The partners may feel so much trapped. Systems therapists work to help both partners see the roles they play in maintaining the situation. Systems therapists engage the couple in learning new ways of communicating to build a positive relationship. A major criticism of the systems approach is that it ignores the possible role of intrapsychic processes in promoting jealousy [7].

The second approach is the social psychological approach. It views jealousy as determined by the social environment in which the culture defines what is valued and in need of protection. Anthropological reports of the ways in which different countries experience jealousy indicate that culture defines events that pose a threat to valued relationships and gives members of the culture certain options for responding when an event is defined as a threat. Jealousy is universal; but cultures differ greatly in the extent to which jealousy manifested. When the threat to survival is great and the individual depends greatly on a partner to face the threat, the potential for jealousy increases. A therapist using the social psychological approach will help clients look for situations that trigger jealous reactions. Help the labeled clients "jealous persons" to realize that their jealousy triggered more easily in some situations than in others. With couples,

the challenge is to identify what it is about particular relationships that make them jealous. The major contribution of this approach is to see that jealousy has social as well as psychological aspects. The criticism is that this perspective, "underestimates the importance of intrapsychic and couple specific processes in jealousy" [7]. Like most other difficult emotional experiences, jealousy, if treated correctly, can be a cause for growth. It can become the first step in increased self-awareness and greater understanding both, the relationship and the mate. Coming from a Polygamous society, jealousy seems inevitable.

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