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# A Synergistic Review of Romantic Jealousy

Romantic jealousy is one of the most pervasive and important emotions that humans possess. At a glance, it may seem like a valuable, albeit benign, emotion--helping us to deal with signs of unfaithfulness in our partner. However, considering some recent data, it has been found to be one of the top five motives for homicide, along the likes of armed robberies and altercations over money (Gaulin & McBurney, 2001, p. 275). An emotion so powerful as to often take human lives is, obviously, an emotion worth studying. What are the sex differences in jealousy? How did jealousy arise in the first place? What do the various disciplines of psychology have to say, and do they agree? In this literary review, these and other similar questions will be considered.

## Sex Differences in Jealousy: The Controversy

There is little choice as to where to begin. In 1992, Buss, Larsen, Westen, and Semmelroth came to the conclusion that men experience greater jealousy in the face of sexual infidelity by their partner, whereas females are more jealous when it comes to emotional infidelity. The claim seemed to fit evolutionary predictions: men must guard against cuckoldry (which is very plausible when his partner has extramarital sex), and women cannot afford to lose parental investment (which could result if the man was spending time on another emotional relationship). Critically, the authors used a forced-choice paradigm, asking men and women which type of infidelity would upset them more, and it is this seemingly dubious methodology which we shall return to shortly.

## Strengthening Buss' Evolutionary Approach: Functional Asymmetry and Same-Sex Partners

First, let us consider some studies which complement Buss' work, beginning with a study of the differences between the left and right sides of subjects, known as functional asymmetry (FA) (Brown & Moore, 2003). Briefly, it is theorized that more symmetrical people were subject to less developmental problems, and that, throughout their lifetimes, they were better equipped to deal with disease-inducing agents like pathogens. Obviously, these qualities are beneficial to pass on to offspring, and so will be sought after in mates. With that as a backdrop, these authors had essentially two premises to work with. First, those of low FA are found to have more sexual partners, and so those of high FA must guard against their mate similarly cheating on them. Second, those women who have high FA mates may opt to locate and receive genetic contributions from a man with higher symmetry (in effect, cuckolding her low symmetry mate). Wouldn't low symmetrical people, therefore, be more jealous, since they have more to worry about in a relationship? This is, to the evolutionists delight, exactly what the authors found.

Similar evidence is legion. Obviously, males can't be cuckolded if their female partner has an extramarital affair with another female, and females cannot lose their partner's resources to the children of another woman if their mate has a relationship with another man. Doesn't this make jealousy spurious in these situations? In fact it does, as concurred by Sagarin, Vaughn Becker, Guadagno, Nicastle and Millevoi (2003) who found the sex difference disappears when in the context of same-sex affairs. Incidentally, they also found that jealousy is somewhat of a facultative process, lowering its activation threshold

when prior jealousy has been experienced and, apparently, becomes more likely to occur again.

## The Golden Ratio

Let us now investigate one further piece of evidence supporting Buss' view: how do waist-to-hip ratios (WHR) and shoulder-to-hip ratios (SHR) affect jealousy? Collapsing over gender, rivals with low WHR's were found to be more socially dominant and attractive (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001). Similarly, when same-sex rivals had high SHR's, they were perceived to be more physically and socially dominant, and also more attractive in the case of men. Coupling these statements with the fact that low WHR's in women signal greater fertility and we have the crux of the author's claim: threatening, legitimate rivals (high-mate quality) evoke more jealousy than non-threatening ones (lower quality). By now, it should not be surprising that these results were obtained as expected.

## Opening the Floor: Cognitivists and Social Psychologists

It is now time to branch out to other areas of psychology and see how well the evolutionist approach fares. Let us first sample the malleable field of attribution theory and attempt a connection to the above data. Cognitive psychologists have demonstrated for decades that a person's thoughts have pervasive effects on his actions, behaviors and perceptions (for example, see Beck & Emery, 1985, which typifies this view applied to anxiety disorders). Obviously, it is plausible to believe that people may be more or less jealous, depending how they view the act of jealousy. Bauerle, Amirkhan and Hupka (2002) studied several factors salient in the theory of attributing causes, and found some general and consistent results. For instance, subjects were not as jealous when their partner had an uncontrollable experience with a rival (for example, having to put their arm around a rival who was about to fall). Jealousy was also quelled when other factors were present to make the jealousy more understandable (perhaps comforting someone because they are crying), or when the act was committed due to negligence, and not intent. This can, for the most part, be understood in an evolutionary sense. For example, if a mate has no control over the situation, and therefore presumably meant no harm by it, jealousy would not evolutionarily make sense. In other words, for something a partner is not at fault for, why would one risk his reproductive benefits due to unwarranted jealousy? The factor of negligence is an interesting one because, realizing what he is doing or not, he may be taking something away from the relationship (time, genes, etc.). It might seem at the outset that a strict evolutionary module would not be sensitive to intent, however, what if negligent acts occur less frequently once reprimanded? Perhaps, then, a study could be devised to determine if the "forgivingness" of negligence decreases with the number of such acts.

In a social psychological study (Broemer & Diehl, 2003), similarity among rivals was posited as being the litigating factor for jealousy. In more detail, people are usually happy when they have some qualities or skills that are unique and not found in other people. As well, people want their mates to have positive feelings about themselves (high self-

esteem). Therefore, when seeing similarly attractive rivals, jealousy may be evoked--if for no other reason than the fact that their partner may equally like these similar people. It is this last point which nicely calls on evolutionary theory, especially in males: if a mate found person A of good quality, and person B is of similar quality, why not defect on person A to get genetic benefits from B?

## Future Directions: Opening the Flood Gates

At this point, we are finally confronted by some very contrasting evidence to the evolutionary view which we have been discussing. First, consider a study by Pietrzak, Laird, Stevens and Thompson (2002). Essentially, these authors sought to refute the claim that the sex difference in jealousy only arose in the fixed-choice paradigm that Buss had used more than ten years ago. The authors found that the accusation did not appear to be valid: the sex difference was found in a continuous-rating system, as well as in physiological responses to the two types of infidelity. In sharp contrast, however, DeStino, Bartlett, Baverman, and Salovey (2002) launched an all-out attack on the evolutionary description, concluding that the sex difference was only found in Buss' original paradigm. Perhaps more importantly, they found that the sex difference also disappeared when the subjects were forced to answer jealousy-related questions under cognitive constraint. Evolutionarily speaking, adaptive modules, they argue, should operate outside of consciousness, and not be affected by cognitive load.

It is unclear at this point why exactly the conflict between the previous two studies arose. Is romantic jealousy really not an evolutionarily adapted process? This seems unlikely, as the prior mass of data provided ample evidence for such a mechanism. Does it have to do with the two groups of authors unknowingly measuring two separate constructs? Is there a lurking variable that one or both authors neglected to control for? These questions will have to wait for future studies. At the very least, we should not hesitate at this point to favor the evolutionary approach, and assert that, in fact, jealousy does serve an adaptive role to ensure an intelligent distribution of resources.

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