

Sibling Jealousy and Jealousy in Romantic Relationships

Matthew Webb, Andrea Toscano, James Seaborn, Eliana Huffman, Olivia Adams
James Madison University

Abstract

We hypothesised that a relationship exists between a history of sibling jealousy and the likelihood to evoke jealousy in romantic relationships. A link to an online questionnaire was bulk-emailed to a stratified sample of 5,000 college students, with an expected 20% response rate. The survey contained 34 questions in total spread across three sections: the first consisting of demographic questions, the second concerning sibling jealousy experience, and the third consisting of several statements on a Likert-type scale relating to romantic jealousy evocation. Only participants who fit the study's eligibility requirements were asked to move on and complete sections two and three. We intended to use the data gathered from this survey will demonstrate what kind of relationship exists between sibling jealousy and romantic jealousy.

Introduction

The sibling relationship has been shown to exert a great amount of influence on behavioral patterns later in life, and can itself be heavily shaped by instances of jealousy, envy and rivalry through childhood well into adult years. This study will examine if a relationship exists between a history of sibling jealousy and a tendency to evoke jealousy in romantic relationships. Jealousy is as complex as it is common. Occurring when an individual feels threatened in the face of potentially losing something of personal value, it is often looked at as a composite of emotions such as anger, helplessness and disgust₁. A great deal of this research backs up commonly-held societal beliefs that jealousy is related to negative relational outcomes; dissatisfaction, conflict, aggression, break-up and violence are among them. Despite this, many individuals still make the choice to attempt to induce jealousy in their romantic partners, through various methods and for varying reasons₁.



<http://www.livingwellspendingless.com/2014/06/27/get-your-kids-to-stop-fighting/>

Methods and Materials

A total of 290 college students were recruited for participation in this study, in exchange for course credit. Because participants were required to have at least one sibling as well as prior relationship experience in order to participate fully in the study, not all who started the survey were prompted to complete it. The number of fully eligible respondents who chose to participate fully amounted to 254. The average age of respondents was 18.69 with standard deviation 1.48.

The independent variable, sibling jealousy experience, was measured using Strom & Aune's (2008) measure of frequency of sibling jealousy₂. This set of questions asked participants to reflect on recent instances of jealousy, envy and rivalry with a sibling of their choice₂. The dependent variable, romantic jealousy evocation, was measured using Cayanus & Booth-Butterfield's (2003) Evoking Jealousy Scale₃. This instrument consisted of a set of Likert scale-type prompts, in which participants were given a specific behavior and asked to what degree they had engaged in the behavior with a romantic partner, from 1 (meaning they never engaged in a behavior) to 7 (meaning they always did). This measure produced reliability of 0.93₃.

Participants were directed to the online survey database Qualtrics and given a consent form. If consent was not given or the participant in question was not eligible to partake in the study, the respondent was sent to the end of the survey and thanked for their participation. After consenting, eligible participants were first asked some demographic questions concerning age, gender and year in college. Following this they were directed to the Sibling Jealousy Experience measure, and asked to briefly provide input regarding their experiences with jealousy, rivalry and envy with a given sibling. Finally, participants were directed to the Evoking Jealousy measure, and the 19 Likert scale-type prompts concerning romantic jealousy evocation.

Results

After running a regression test on the data collected it was found that there was no significant relation to sibling jealousy and romantic jealousy. Within sibling jealousy, however, it was found that jealousy and rivalry were approaching significance at .080. Consequently, we reject the alternative hypothesis in light of evidence directed against it.

“My girlfriend was at the same party as me and while I was talking to my friends, some random guy walks up to my girlfriend and tries to make a move in front of me. I told him to get lost or I would break both of his arms and beat him with them.” -Anonymous Survey Respondent

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study was that the survey asked both qualitative and quantitative questions meaning we could not objectively compare the results of both sections. Additionally, there was a question that appeared to pose confusion to many students; we wanted students to answer numerically about how many times they had felt jealous in the past three years, however many answered with detailed descriptions of a previous jealous experience. The last limitation for this study is that the wording of the questions is only accurate for heterosexual couples.



<http://warpedwales.co.uk/2016/09/30/couple-share-facebook-account-reckon-dont-trust-issues/>

Discussion

While our initial hypothesis proved to be wrong, we were able to find other interesting data on sibling jealousy and romantic relationships. In the qualitative portion of our survey, it was found that siblings perceived to be more attractive, more athletic, more likely to receive attention/money from parents and more successful in romantic relationships were the source of major jealousy. In romantic relationships, qualitative data points towards tremendous jealousy as well towards partners, especially when other people are involved. However, people reported numerically that they were less jealous than average in romantic relationships, average 2.4/7 rather than a hypothetical average of 3.5/7. This calls for further research, particularly regarding gender and jealousy, and self-perceived jealousy compared to actual averages for jealousy.

Conclusions

The relationship between jealousy and rivalry approaches significance but other factors did not demonstrate significant relationships. People on average reported themselves as very jealous. More research is needed to determine the relationship between sibling jealousy and relationship jealousy.

“My sister is older, more beautiful, way more outgoing, very successful, and generally pretty perfect.” -Anonymous Survey Respondent

References

1. Fleischmann, A. A. (2005). Ticking the monster: Jealousy induction in relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(1), 49-73. doi:10.1177/0265407505049321
2. Strom, R., & Aune, K. (2008, January). *Cognitive goals and communicative responses associated with jealousy, envy, and rivalry among adult siblings*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference, Honolulu, HI. Retrieved from Communication and Mass Media Complete database.
3. Yoshimura, C. (2010). The experience and communication of envy among siblings, siblings-in-law, and spouses. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(8), 1075-1088. doi:10.1177/0265407510382244
4. Cayanus, J. L., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (2003, May 23). Relationship orientation, jealousy, and equity: An examination of jealousy evoking and positive communicative responses. *Communication Quarterly*, 52(3), 237-250. doi:10.1080/01463370409370195

