

Jealousy Differences among Men and Women

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Jealousy is often a problem in romantic relationships. When severe enough, it can lead to arguments, abuse, and physical fights between couples. The hypothesis for the present study was there will be measurable differences between men and women in how they respond to hypothetical situations designed to induce jealousy. The Lindenwood Participant Pool was used to recruit 46 undergraduate students for the study. Participants completed the Hypothetical Reactions Survey based off of the Are You the Jealousy Type tests provided on the Psychology Today website, in order to find possible sex differences in jealousy scores. An independent t-test revealed significant sex differences in how participants rated the jealousy inducing scenarios. Women were more jealous than men according to the findings. The evidence gained in this study could be beneficial for preventing minor disputes as well as violence in romantic relationships. The findings could also be applied in couple's therapy in order to make partners aware of situations that cause jealousy, which may result in better communication between the partners and less arguments.

Jealousy can be found dwelling in every human, no matter how laid back some appear to be. It affects every individual in a variety of ways. Jealousy cannot be simply defined as a type of emotion or a particular thought; to better explain, it is an intricate framework of emotions, thoughts, and actions. People often feel hurt, anger, distress, and anxiety when experiencing jealousy (Carson & Cupach, 2000). These troubling feelings and thoughts are often the

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antecedent to domestic abuse and murder; this behavior is usually carried out by men (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). However, men are not the only ones to blame. Women have confessed more than men that they have tried to cause a significant other to feel jealous (Pines & Aronson, 1983). This manipulative behavior will most likely lead to conflict between the couple. The potential problem of domestic abuse is the driving force behind searching for measurable differences between men and women in how they react when experiencing jealousy. It may lead to predictions and prevention of abuse, physical fights, and possibly even arguments. Past researchers have examined what types of infidelity produces jealous reactions in men and in women. It was found that men were distressed by sexual infidelity while women are most upset by emotional infidelity; this is thought to have developed from adaptive problems experienced in the beginnings of the human race (Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996). The early adaptive problem men were often plagued with was the possibility of his mate having offspring that were fathered by someone else. If this unfortunate event occurred, the man's efforts spent in courting the woman and mating would be lost; he also may have wasted years raising children that were not his (Buunk et al., 1996). Women feared infidelity for different reasons. The loss of protection, commitment, and a partner that will help raise the offspring were the major concerns for a woman if her mate fell in love with someone else (Buunk et al., 1996). These findings provide convincing evidence that sexual infidelity is more problematic for men and emotional infidelity is more damaging for women. However, a recent study produced evidence contradictory to this information. Russell and Harton's (2005) research among college students found that both men and women were more disturbed when thinking about sexual infidelity as opposed to emotional infidelity (2005). It is important to remember that emotional and sexual infidelities are both upsetting to most people and this may be why there is inconsistency among

findings. This information inspires more research on this topic in order to discover other attributes that might influence how men and women act when experiencing jealousy.

Stages in a relationship have been taken into consideration with how they affect the jealousy of an individual. Lower levels of jealousy are reported by women when they are in a steady, committed relationship and are satisfied with their partners while higher levels of jealousy are conveyed by women who are in unstable relationships and are unhappy with their partners (Khanchandani & Durham, 2009). This evidence also compares to a study that concluded the more in love a couple is, the less jealous feelings and behaviors were exhibited (Russell & Harton, 2005). These findings suggest that the less in love a couple is, the more jealousy they experience. It can also be hypothesized that jealousy continually declines the longer a couple has been together. However, other researchers have discovered a quite different finding according to the length of a relationship. The longer the couple has been together and the greater the intensity of the bond shared between the two partners often results in an increase of jealous behavior (Aune & Comstock, 1997). This surprising increase in jealousy can be explained by the partners feeling it is appropriate to express jealousy since they have a lot of time and effort invested in the relationship (Aune & Comstock, 1997). Another interesting piece of information is that men were much more bothered by sexual infidelity if they had been or are currently in a committed sexual relationship than men who had not experienced this kind of relationship (Buss et al., 1992). It would be beneficial to learn how jealous reactions differ according to how long people have been in a relationship or if they are not currently in one. Researchers have also been interested in what kinds of scenarios are the most likely to produce jealousy in an individual. The findings from one particular study provided rather interesting results. Participants reported feeling the most jealous when imagining a partner having a sexual

relationship with someone they were envious of, but were not as jealous if the affair was with someone they did not know personally (Pines & Aronson, 1983). This evidence suggests that people may become more protective over his or her significant other when in the presence of an envied person. It would be interesting to discover what exactly made this envied person so “special” in the eyes of the jealous individual. The findings could point to possible insecurities and low self-esteem in the jealous person. People who exhibit low self-confidence often have higher levels of jealousy and are more likely to believe there is a threat to the relationship (Melamed, 1991). It could even be hypothesized that these people are more envious of others. Alternative scenarios that triggered jealous reactions were other people knowing about an affair a significant other was having, if the significant other was paying more attention or flirting with another person, and if the significant other has close, single friends of the opposite sex (Pines & Aronson, 1983).

Predicting a person’s level of jealousy may also depend on what kind of personality characteristics him or her display. Low self-esteem, high neuroticism, anxiety, insecurities, and self criticism are some of the qualities found in highly jealous individuals (Melamed, 1991). Unfortunately, these individual’s jealousy can turn extreme. Morbid jealousy can be observed in people who are so convinced that their significant other is cheating that his or her thoughts on the topic are delusional (Harris, 2003). A person who has morbid jealousy can completely destroy the relationship they are in as well as possibly doing physical harm to the partner. The jealous person is fueled by anger, distress, and the constant, obsessive need to check in on his or her partner; this behavior can be described as a form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, which happens to be more common in men (Harris, 2003). This evidence is another way to connect domestic abuse committed by men to high levels of jealousy.

Aside from all the negative outcomes jealousy can evoke, relationships can actually benefit when communicating jealousy in mild forms. When partners use what is called integrative communication, they provide disclosure, reassurance, and create feelings of joy and desirability for each other (Yoshimura, 2004). Displays of affection, romantic feelings, and satisfaction are also increased when couple's effectively communicate jealousy to each other. A person may feel inspired to become a better romantic partner after jealous feelings have been appropriately communicated (Yoshimura, 2004). It is beneficial for people to learn how to manage their jealousy so they can improve and solidify their romantic relationships instead of destroying them.

The above research has inspired the purpose of this study, which is to determine whether there are measurable differences between men and women according to how they react when responding to scenarios that trigger jealous feelings. As mentioned above, sexual and emotional infidelities were the supposed causes for jealousy differences in men and women, but this is not always the case. It would be beneficial to discover if particular situations trigger jealousy in men but not women and vice versa. Relationship stages are also likely to play a part in how jealous a person may be. Verifying certain stages that contribute to jealous feelings and actions in relationships could help predict when jealousy is the strongest and most detrimental to the couple. The couple could also prepare themselves and learn how to communicate jealous feelings appropriately in order to avoid arguments or abuse.

The present study was designed to examine jealousy in men and women related to particular scenarios and relationship stages. Participants were recruited from the Lindenwood Participant Pool and were asked to rate their level of jealousy for a variety of jealousy inducing scenarios. A short demographic survey was also used to collect participant information about

sex, age, whether the participant had ever been romantically involved, the length of romantic relationship, and the frequency of arguments between the participant and his or her significant other that were triggered by jealousy.

Method

Participants

Forty-six undergraduate students were recruited from the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP) located on the campus of Lindenwood University. The LPP guidelines were followed in order to avoid coercing people to participate and to ensure the participants receive compensation for his or her time and effort spent in the study. Compensation consisted of bonus points for participants who were currently taking a general education class in anthropology, psychology, or sociology.

All of the participants were recruited from the LPP and were at least 18 years of age. No participants were excluded from the study. Seventeen men and twenty-nine women participated in the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 30 years of age with 19 being the average age. All but three of the participants reported being romantically involved with another person at least once in his or her life. Information about the length of past or current relationship was also obtained. Participants reported lengths ranging from one month to eight years with an average of one year. The majority of participants rated arguments in his or her relationships caused by jealousy to rarely occur.

Materials

Signup Sheet B was posted on the designated LPP board in order to recruit participants for the study. Signup Sheet B was chosen to allow participants to sign up for specific times the experimenter made available. Participants could also refer back to the signup sheet to remember

what time they signed up for and where the study will be located. Once the participants arrived at the study, they were asked to read over and sign two consent forms; one for the researcher and one for the participant to keep.

The Hypothetical Scenario Reactions survey (see Appendix A) was then administered for the participants to complete. This survey includes items such as you see your significant other flirting with another man or women and you discover your significant other talking/texting a man or women on the phone, how jealous would you feel? A few demographic questions were also included at the end of the survey. The Hypothetical Scenario Reactions survey was based off of the Are You the Jealous Type tests (PsychologyToday.com).

Five scenarios were taken from the fifty-two scenarios the test provided in order to shorten the length for participants. The scenarios were altered so that heterosexual and homosexual men and women could all use the same survey. For example, one of the original scenarios was worded as if you and your boyfriend/husband were to break up and he found someone almost immediately (within a month) how jealous would you be? This scenario was altered by changing boyfriend/husband to significant other and the word he to he/she in order to account for both homosexual and heterosexual men and women answering the question. To answer the original question, a person has to circle an option such as I would be extremely jealous, I would be fairly jealous, etc. To make answering easier for the participants, a five-point rating scale ranging from no jealousy to extreme jealousy was added to each scenario. Feedback letters were given to the participants in order to inform them of the purpose of the study and to gain the researcher's information in case the participants have any questions or concerns (see Appendix B). Lastly, the participants were given a receipt to turn into the LPP so they could obtain bonus points for taking the time to come to the study.

Procedure

Participants signed up for specific times offered on signup sheet B posted on the LPP board. Once a participant arrived to the designated room for the study, they were greeted by the experimenter and were handed two consent forms as well as a pen. The participant was instructed to read over and sign both forms, one copy was for the experimenter and the other copy for the participant's own records. The Hypothetical Reactions Survey (PsychologyToday.com) was then given to the participant and he or she was informed to sit wherever felt comfortable. Once the participant had completed what he or she wanted to of the survey it was handed back to the experimenter. The experimenter placed the survey in her data folder and gave the participant a feedback letter and a participant receipt. The experimenter explained that the feedback letter would inform him or her about the purpose of the survey and that it contained the experimenter's contact information if the participant had any questions. The experimenter told the participant to fill the top part of the receipt out and to turn it in to Y407 for his or her bonus points. The participant was then thanked. This whole process was repeated with every participant.

Results

The hypothesis of the present study stated that measurable differences will be found between men and women according to how they respond when exposed to hypothetical situations designed to induce jealousy. After the data were collected, an independent t-test with pooled variance was conducted in order to find any significant differences between men and women according to the jealousy scores. Pooled variance was used in the independent t-test due to an unequal number of men and women.

The results of the independent t-test revealed a significant sex difference, $t(44) = -2.427$, $p = .019$. Women's average scores of jealousy ($M = 17.38$, $SD = 2.85$) were significantly higher than men's average score of jealousy ($M = 14.94$, $SD = 3.94$).

Discussion

Measurable differences were found among men and women in how they respond when exposed to hypothetical situations designed to induce jealousy. The findings of women scoring higher in jealousy than men could have been attributed to the large amount of female participants in the study. Another speculation could be that men may not have found the scenarios provided in the survey to produce feelings of jealousy. This possibility could be related to the findings that suggested men were more distressed when thinking a significant other was being sexually unfaithful (Buunk et al., 1996). The jealousy inducing scenarios included in the survey were not sexual in content and instead focused on a significant other flirting with, talking with, smiling at, or dating another person. This may be why men scored lower on jealousy scores than women. One of the main limitations of the study was that mostly women signed up and participated. More accurate results could have been obtained if more men had participated. Another limitation was recruiting people from the LPP. The participants were only from Lindenwood University, which provided a threat to the external validity. Most of the participants were around the same age range, were not likely married, and had short-term relationship lengths of a few years. If I would have recruited elsewhere, I could have obtained a wide variety of men and women with differing ages, marital status, and relationship lengths. This would have strengthened the external validity of the study and the findings could have been generalized to more of the population. The present study could benefit from several adjustments or add-ons. Administering personality inventories to the participants along with the original survey could provide evidence on what

kinds of personalities are the most jealous. The personality inventory could also be a way to assess people's honesty on the jealousy surveys, since characteristics such as high neuroticism often results in high levels of jealousy as mentioned in the research Melamed (1991) conducted. More statistical analyses could have been conducted on the data to figure out what situations caused the most jealousy among the participants, if relationship length affected the level of jealousy, and if the level of jealousy affected the frequency of arguments.

The evidence gained from this study could be beneficial in finding ways to predict and possibly prevent arguments, abuse, and physical fights for couples. If people realize what kinds of situations make them feel jealous, they could work on decreasing the amounts of anger and distress felt when the situation arises. This could be accomplished by the jealous person remembering that they are important to their significant other and by their significant other reassuring the partner that they are invested in the relationship. Couple's therapy could help partners work on and overcome problems caused by jealousy. People suffering from jealousy could also benefit by learning how to communicate with the significant other about the unsettling feelings and thoughts they are having. Once proper communication is learned, the effects of jealousy in a relationship will provide more positive outcomes.

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Appendix A

Hypothetical Reactions Survey

(Based off of Are You the Jealous Type test from PsychologyToday.com)

Instructions: Imagine yourself being in the following scenarios and rate how jealous you would feel by circling a number on the scales below each question. (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous). When imagining the scenarios, use the person in the parenthesis that you feel is the most threatening to the relationship.

1. You see your significant other flirting with an attractive (man/ woman). How jealous would you feel? (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

2. You discover your significant other talking or texting a (man/woman) on the phone. How jealous would you feel? (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

3. A friend mentions they saw your significant other having lunch with an ex girlfriend/boyfriend. How jealous would you feel? (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

4. If you and your significant other were to break up and he/she found someone else almost immediately (within a month) how jealous would you feel? (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

5. An attractive (man/woman) smiles and says hello to your significant other. Your significant other smiles and says hello back. How jealous would this make you feel? (1 as being not jealous and 5 as being extremely jealous)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

6. Are you MALE FEMALE?

7. Age (In Years)_____

8. Have you ever been romantically involved with someone (If yes, continue to the following questions)?

9. How long have you and your significant other been together?

10. How often do you and your significant other argue over scenarios similar to the above questions? (1 as being never and 5 as being always)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Appendix B

Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The survey examining reactions to jealousy inducing scenarios and the demographic survey were used in order to determine whether there were any differences in reactions between men and women, which may be beneficial in preventing arguments, abuse, and physical fights, and be useful in couples counseling.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the results of a large group of participants, of which you are now a part of. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to bring them up now or in the future. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the findings of this study at a later date, please contact me and I will make it available to you at the completion of this project.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

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