

**NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

Jealousy and Its Effects

**A Thesis Submitted to the**

**University Honors Program**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree**

**With Upper Division Honors**

**Department Of**

Allied Health and Communicative Disorders

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May 14, 2011

University Honors Program

Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type)

Jealousy and its Effects

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Date of Approval (print or type) 5/4/2011

## HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

Jealousy is a commonly felt emotion but is not very well understood. Studies of jealousy are limited. It is important to understand more about this emotion because of the effects it has. Jealousy negatively effects relationships and is a leading cause of partner-directed violence and homicide. This article will look at the current research in depth, to outline a definition, causes, and possibly treatment and future research directions.

**HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT  
THESIS SUBMISSION FORM**

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THESIS TITLE: Jealousy and its Effects

ADVISOR: Nancy Caste, Ph.D.

ADVISOR'S DEPARTMENT: Allied Health & Communicative Disorders

DISCIPLINE:

YEAR: 2011

PAGE LENGTH: 14

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Yes

ILLUSTRATED:

PUBLISHED (YES OR NO): No

LIST PUBLICATION:

COPIES AVAILABLE (HARD COPY, MICROFILM, DISKETTE):

ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

Jealousy is a universal emotion. Although it is an emotion that is experienced across people and cultures, it is a complex emotion that is difficult to define because it is subjective. Jealousy continues to present a challenge for both psychological and psychiatric research. It is a heterogeneous condition ranging from normality to pathology with different degrees of intensity, persistence, and insight (Marazziti et. al., 2003). Ideas about jealousy have also changed throughout history. A century ago, jealousy was considered to be socially acceptable, while nowadays, it is perceived as an embarrassing emotion (Marazziti et. al., 2003). This paper will provide an operational definition of jealousy while reviewing important aspects of jealousy such as causes, gender differences, its presence in children and mental disorders, treatment options, and ideas for future research.

Jealousy as a construct has been studied and theorized about for many years. In 1922, Freud described three types of jealousy as competitive, projected, and delusional (Hoaken, 1976). Jealousy today is defined as a state of thinking and feeling characterized by resentment directed toward another person or area of interest because of known or suspected rivalry in a triadic relationship involving a subject, object, and rival. The object is viewed with conscious ambivalence, the positive aspect of which is usually not an altruistic love but a possessive desire. The rival need not be human; it can be an object which the subject does not share and resents because it takes too much of the object's interest (Hoaken, 1976). Envy is a term used as a synonym for jealousy, but they are, in fact, different emotions. In contrast, envy may involve only two person situations, and this feeling comprises the wish to have another person's possession, success, and/or the wish that the other person did not possess this desired

characteristics or object (Bauminger, 2008). Jealousy exists on a spectrum. Normal jealousy, which runs a natural course, is experienced in relation to a blow to self-esteem which raises doubts that may have had their origin in earlier experiences (Hoaken, 1976). Provoked excessive jealousy, sometimes referred to as “neurotic”, is different from normal jealousy only in degree. Most cases of neurotic jealousy occur because of repeated or prolonged provocation (Hoaken, 1976). Unprovoked jealousy is called morbid or pathological jealousy. Unprovoked implies that there is really no other rival in the triad, but that the jealous individual still perceives that there is a threat (Hoaken, 1976). Individuals diagnosed with morbid jealousy experience delusional or irrational jealousy. They often make unwarranted or unverified accusations about their romantic partner’s infidelity. Their jealousy is activated at a much lower threshold than for normal individuals (Easton & Shackelford, 2009). Unprovoked, or morbid, jealousy is broken down into three types based on the cause: a personality trait, an obsessive suspicion, and a welcomed suspicion/fixed delusion (Hoaken, 1976). Although all people may share a general concern about protecting their object from potential rivals, there is significant variability among people in the extent to which they think and worry about potential infidelity, experienced heightened emotional reactions to possibly infidelity, and perform guarding behaviors. (Miller & Maner, 2009). For example, individuals high in chronic jealousy tend to believe that their relationships are vulnerable to potential threats, and thus these individuals may be most likely to display psychological processes aimed at dealing with the most damaging of these threats (Miller & Maner, 2009).

It is unclear what mechanisms actually cause an individual to become jealous, or at least to be more susceptible to feeling jealous. Freud's theory was that jealousy was caused by an individual repressing their thoughts, either homosexual or heterosexual in nature. More recent theories have favored a poor self-esteem model described as inferiority, social humiliation, and feeling unlovable (Hoaken, 1976). The feeling of being unlovable would then lead these individuals to perceive any other person as a rival for their mate's affection and would lead them to engage in mate-guarding behaviors more readily than others. The attachment theory is another more recent idea, specifically focusing on the types of betrayal that would cause a person to become jealous. Studies have demonstrated that the attachment styles of individuals are consistent with their self-reported relationship history (Levy & Kelly, 2010). Individuals with dismissing attachment attempt to minimize or constrict emotional experience, deny needs for intimacy, are highly invested in autonomy, and are more sexually promiscuous than individuals who have other attachment styles. This compulsive self-reliance is regarded as defensive and protective against unconscious feelings of vulnerability. In one study, dismissing women were 4 times more likely and dismissing men 50 times more likely than their secure counterparts to report greater sexual than emotional jealousy. Secure individuals tended to report emotional infidelity as more distressing than sexual infidelity (Levy & Kelly, 2010). The way that jealousy is triggered could, in fact, rely at least partially on an individual's attachment style.

Although most people agree that jealousy is experienced by everyone, some think that children are not capable of feeling or understanding such a complex emotion. Because of this, childhood jealousy is an overlooked area of study (Bauminger et. al.,

2008). Jealousy in children is slightly different than in adults though, because in children it revolves around child's fear of losing love and/or "formative or exclusive attention." Instead of jealousy revolving around the loss of a romantic partner, it instead revolves around the loss of one or both of the parents, or the parent's affection, to another rival. Studies have shown that jealousy is present in infancy through early childhood. Jealousy in infancy is defined as infant disturbance, such as negative affect (sadness or anger), negative vocalization, increased proximal contact with the mother, protest, and play inhibition. Behaviors of jealousy are also evident. For example, children have shown behaviors such as discontinuing work and focusing attention on the triad, frowning or gazing at the mother-rival interaction, and making attempts to maintain close proximity or to interfere with or enter into the parent-sibling interaction using attention-provoking verbalizations and behaviors when put into a jealousy provoking situation (Bauminger et al., 2008).

The area within jealousy where the most research has been conducted involves gender differences. Men and women seem to differ in their reactions to sexual infidelity (i.e. having one's long-term partner engage in sexual relations with someone else) versus emotional infidelity (i.e. having one's partner fall in love with someone else) (Miller & Maner, 2009). In a number of studies, men reported higher distress in their partner's sexual infidelity while women reported higher distress in their partner's emotional infidelity (Miller & Maner, 2009; Kuhle et al., 2009). The evolutionary perspective implies that men and women's jealousy responses evolved to help them deal with the somewhat different reproductive challenges faced by the two sexes throughout evolutionary history. From an adaptationist perspective, sexually differentiated



reactions to infidelity reflect innate jealousy modules designed to deal with sex-specific challenges related to paternity uncertainty (for men) and paternal investment (for women). The prospect of a woman's sexual infidelity may be particularly distressing for men because it can result in genetic cuckoldry, possibly leading to years of effort and resources devoted to raising another man's offspring. On the other hand, a man's emotional infidelity may be particularly distressing for his long-term partner because it can signal a high likelihood of him diverting resources to another woman and their offspring (Miller & Maner, 2009).

But, the idea that all women are more distressed by emotional infidelity and all men are more distressed by sexual infidelity is not necessarily a universal truth. In some studies, there were notable within sex differences. For example, the majority of Chinese, Dutch, and German men found emotional infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity in one study, where American men were also equally divided (Levy & Kelly, 2010). Men and women also share some similarities. Both men and women reported feeling more disgust and anger, but less hurt over sexual infidelity as compared with emotional infidelity (Guadagno & Sagarin, 2010). Also, both men and women are likely to engage in mate-guarding behaviors in response to relationship threats (Miller & Maner, 2009). The types of mate-guarding behaviors they engage in is where they begin to differ again. Women are more likely to perform behaviors that enhance their own appearance. Men are more likely than women to conceal their partner from potential rivals and to use violence to deter partner infidelity (Easton & Shackelford, 2009). Studies have shown that men are especially likely to guard their partner when their partner is near ovulation and, therefore, risk of conception is highest

(Maner & Shackelford, 2009). Women are more vigilant to the potentially relationship-threatening presence of attractive same-sex competitors. Men, in contrast, were not as attuned to other attractive men. This finding was consistent with evidence that men tend to compete with one another on the basis of traits other than physical appearance, such as social dominance, rather than physical attractiveness (Maner & Shackelford, 2008). If non-violent mate retention behaviors are ineffective at deterring partner infidelity, men may resort to using violence against their partner in order to limit partner's freedom, and their opportunities for infidelity (Easton & Shackelford, 2009). Partner-directed violence is usually expected to be delivered by hands or blunt objects, which inflict violence at a close range, because it is an intimate type of violence. If partner-directed violence does not deter partner infidelity or defection, a man may resort to homicide. Mate-killing may be a last resort to prevent other men from gaining sexual access to their partner. It can also repair a man's reputation; in some cultures, cuckolded men are viewed as emasculated and killing an unfaithful partner may be the only way a man can repair his reputation. Jealousy is a predictor of partner homicide in men, but not in women. Women are less likely to kill their partner, and when they do, it is usually in self-defense (Easton & Shackelford, 2009). Since partner-directed violence is one of the many unfortunate events caused by jealousy, it is important to know the possible causes and treatments to prevent it from happening.

One of the potential causes for jealousy is psychological disorders. Delusional jealousy can be found in many psychiatric disorders and is a major motive of both suicide and homicide. Prevalence of delusional jealousy is reported in 1.1% of psychiatric inpatients and 7% of patients with neurobiological mental disorders (Tsai,

1997). Morbid jealousy can also be a symptom of several disorders, including pre-senile dementia, paranoid schizophrenia, and major depressive disorder (Hoaken, 1976). Also, initial clinical symptoms of Alzheimer's disease commonly include irrational jealousy of one's spouse, which was later followed by other symptoms of dementia (Tsai, 1997). Substance abuse is also a common factor in jealousy. It has been found that patients with a jealousy personality tended to be male alcohol abusers with a family history of jealousy. Alcohol abuse by the patient with the jealous personality usually brings out jealous attitudes, probably because of its disinhibiting effect of the central nervous system (Hoaken, 1976). For jealousy linked to mental disorders, it usually subsides after the treatment for that particular disorder is started.

If a mental disorder is not the cause, another treatment plan needs to be enacted. Following the idea that inadequate attachment has a hand in jealousy, it has been suggested that reducing and preventing sexual jealousy in both men and women could occur through promoting secure attachment relationships (Levy & Kelly, 2010). A problem with the research currently being conducted on jealousy is with the methods used. Evolutionary researchers and their critics have evaluated jealousy primarily using self-report measures. Most of these measures include forced-choice questions, continuous rating scales, and hypothetical indices of how one thinks one would feel in certain jealousy-evoking scenarios. Measurement issues such as the appropriateness of forced-choice paradigms have been a recurring debate in literature. Continued reliance on these kinds of self-report measures limits the progress of jealousy-related theory and research (Maner & Shackelford, 2008). Different types of self-report measures sometimes yield different patterns of findings. Participant's self-reported

responses to scenarios are often affected, in part, by how questions are asked and by social desirability considerations when answering. A greater focus needs to be placed on basic cognitive processes associated with jealousy will add an important conceptual and empirical dimension that could help move forward the debate about jealousy, especially gender differences (Maner & Shackelford, 2008). More research on jealousy in children is also required to get a better understanding of the emotion, universally.

Jealousy is a complex emotion that is difficult to study. It has many potential causes, including attachment issues, evolutionary perspective, and mental disorders. Currently, the field has done well in the area of gender differences, but some changes in methodology could add to the literature significantly. Overall, the study of jealousy has come a long way since Freud first attempted to define it, but still has a long way to go.

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