

Morbid jealousy as a function of fitness-related life-cycle dimensions

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Abstract: We suggest that morbid jealousy falls on the extreme end of a jealousy continuum. Thus, many features associated with normal jealousy will be present in individuals diagnosed with morbid jealousy. We apply Boyer & Liénard's (B&L's) prediction one (P1; target article, sect. 7.1) to morbid jealousy, suggesting that fitness-related life-cycle dimensions predict sensitivity to cues, and frequency, intensity, and content of intrusive thoughts of partner infidelity.

Jealousy is a universally experienced emotion proposed to be serving the adaptive purpose of preventing costly partner infidelity (Buss 2003). Jealousy mechanisms may exist on a normally distributed continuum, ranging from extreme hyposensitivity to extreme hypersensitivity (Buss 2000; Easton et al., in press). Individuals diagnosed with Delusional Disorder, Jealous Type (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*; American Psychiatric Association 2000) or "morbid jealousy" display this perceptual hypersensitivity and tend to exhibit extreme behaviors. These individuals incessantly accuse their partner of infidelity and often without actual verification (Kingham & Gordon 2004; Shepherd 1961). They monitor their partner's whereabouts by calling them incessantly, following their partner everywhere, and spying on their partner (Enoch & Trethowan 1979; Vauhkonen 1968). They show up unexpectedly at their partner's workplace or home. They use non-physical and physical abuse against their partner and may attempt to murder or actually murder their partner as a result of these intense and persistent feelings of jealousy (Buss 2000; Kingham & Gordon 2004; Mowat 1966).

If morbid jealousy is on an extreme end of a jealousy continuum, we hypothesize that individuals with normal jealousy and individuals diagnosed with morbid jealousy may experience many of the same intrusive thoughts and behaviors. As Boyer & Liénard (B&L) note, an important distinction lies not in the thought content but in the appraisal of those thoughts. Consistent with B&L's Precaution System Model, hypersensitive jealousy mechanisms may not be dysfunctional in all cases; in fact, by over-interpreting specific cues to partner infidelity, the mechanisms may serve the adaptive purpose of preventing partner infidelity. The perception, interpretation, and reaction to cues to partner infidelity may depend on specific contextual factors. We argue that the position of an individual along fitness-related life-cycle dimensions will predict the sensitivity to cues to partner infidelity and the frequency, intensity, and contents of intrusive thoughts of partner infidelity. These fitness-related life-cycle dimensions are experienced in a number of different ways.

It has been shown that men more than women are upset when asked to imagine their partner engaging in sexual intercourse with someone else, whereas women more than men are upset when asked to imagine their partner falling in love with someone else (Buss et al. 1992; Buss et al. 1999). Thus, men are more apt to display sexual jealousy whereas women are more apt to display emotional jealousy. We expect to find the same pattern in individuals diagnosed with morbid jealousy, such that a greater percentage of men than women diagnosed with morbid jealousy will focus on a partner's sexual infidelity, and that a greater percentage of women than men diagnosed with morbid jealousy will focus on a partner's emotional infidelity. Furthermore, we expect that men diagnosed with morbid jealousy will obsess on the details of a partner's sexual contact with other men and that women diagnosed

with morbid jealousy will obsess on the details of a partner's emotional contact with other women.

Research has also shown that men more than women report a potential rival's social status/wealth as a jealousy eliciting characteristic and that women more than men report physical attractiveness/youth as a jealousy eliciting characteristic in a potential rival (Brase et al. 2004; Buss et al. 2000). We expect to find the same thought pattern in men and women diagnosed with morbid jealousy. In fact, the intensity and frequency of these thoughts may vary as a function of fitness-related life-cycle dimensions. For example, a young man with few resources may be especially likely to focus on a rival's social status/wealth. An aging woman may be particularly attuned to the attractiveness/youth of potential rivals.

We also expect shifts in mate value in one partner relative to the other partner to predict sensitivity to cues of infidelity, and the intensity and frequency of jealous thoughts and feelings. Individual mate value can increase. One partner may experience sudden financial success, career advancement, or social status enhancement, or perhaps increased physical attractiveness through exercise, dieting, or cosmetic surgery. Individual mate value can also decrease. One partner may physically age faster than the other, become seriously ill, handicapped, or infertile. A career setback or a loss in social status may also decrease mate value. The individual with the newly acquired lower mate value may feel less attractive, sexually inadequate, or unworthy as a partner; and may now be perceived by their partner as an unworthy mate (Buss 2000). It may benefit those individuals with the lower mate value to attend to this discrepancy and to be more vigilant in their mate guarding efforts, including experiencing frequent and intense feelings of jealousy, increasing their sensitivity to cues of partner infidelity, and behaving accordingly to prevent partner infidelity.

Finally, we expect rates of actual partner infidelity to reflect the sensitivity to and the frequency, intensity, and contents of intrusive thoughts of partner infidelity. A diagnosis of morbid jealousy requires that the individual's partner is not or has not been unfaithful. However, if jealousy mechanisms are designed to perceive cues to partner infidelity, it is possible that these hypersensitive jealousy mechanisms are functioning as designed, that is, accurately detecting partner infidelity. Perhaps these persistent and obtrusive feelings of jealousy are grounded in reality. By not considering the functionality of jealousy mechanisms, clinicians may be too quick to dismiss the perception of their patients.

A complete understanding of morbid jealousy may come from examining morbid jealousy in relation to normal jealousy. We concur with B&L's Precaution System Model proposal that intrusive thoughts are generally not dysfunctional; and we offer that an examination of the individual context through fitness-related life-cycle dimensions may predict sensitivity to cues to partner infidelity, and the frequency, intensity, and content of intrusive thoughts of partner infidelity. The application of this model to morbid jealousy may help researchers and clinicians enrich their understanding of the disorder and thereby improve treatment of individuals diagnosed with morbid jealousy.

Critical developmental periods of increased plasticity program ritualized behavior

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Abstract: The consideration of humans going through sensitive periods of life, such as childhood and the early postpartum, may be helpful in understanding the cognitive and evolutionary puzzle of human rituals. During such periods, certain brain systems may mediate an increased susceptibility to learn new behaviors, rational or irrational.