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# Sexual Jealousy as a Facultative Trait: Evidence From the Pattern of Sex Differences in Adults From China and the United States

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Across two studies, 716 and 308 undergraduate students from the United States and mainland China, respectively, were administered a series of measures on jealousy, emotional responses to partner infidelity, family background, and personality. Across both studies for the U.S. and Chinese samples, a higher proportion of males than females reported more distress to a partner's imagined sexual infidelity than to emotional infidelity, whereas a higher proportion of females than males reported more distress to a partner's emotional infidelity than to sexual infidelity, consistent with theoretical expectations and previous empirical research. However, a much higher proportion of U.S. males and females reported more distress to sexual infidelity than their same-sex Chinese peers, suggesting that the tendency toward sexual jealousy might be facultatively influenced by sexual permissiveness in the general culture. The overall pattern of results is considered in terms of individual and contextual differences in the expression of jealousy, as well as in terms of the emotional and behavioral responses associated with jealousy reactions.

**KEY WORDS:** Sexual jealousy; Sexual selection; Sex differences; Cross-national comparisons.

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**T**he principles of natural and sexual selection have provided a useful framework for the development of models of human social behavior and cognition (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Cosmides 1989; Daly and Wilson 1983; Shepard 1994). One area of active research concerns the potential influence of sexual selection on the reproductive strategies of males and females, and any associated sex differences in mate preferences, jealousy, and sexual activity (Buss, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Daly et al. 1982; Feingold 1992). Trivers (1972) argued that differences between male and female level of investment in offspring "governs the operation of sexual selection" (p. 141) and, as such, is the ultimate cause of any associated sex difference in reproductive

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strategies. The model predicts that the sex that invests the least in offspring will show, among other things, less discriminant mating and more intrasexual competition over access to the higher-investing sex. The higher-investing sex, in contrast, is expected to be much more discriminating in terms of choosing sexual partners, with discrimination focusing on potential partner's physical characteristics or behaviors that might benefit future offspring.

In most mammalian species, the male typically invests less in offspring than does the female (Trivers 1972). This is because males have the potential to reproduce with minimal levels of parental investment, whereas females do not have this option, due to internal fertilization and gestation. Trivers' (1992) theoretical model easily accommodates these and an array of associated sex differences across many species. Trivers' model also appears to be consistent with human sex differences in, among other things, sexual activity and preferences (e.g., preferred number of partners), attitudes toward casual sex, levels of aggression and violence, as well as levels of parental investment (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Daly and Wilson 1983; Draper 1989; Oliver and Hyde 1993; Symons 1979; Wilson and Daly 1985).

Despite the option for reproduction with minimal levels of parental investment, many human males do not or cannot exercise this option in their relationship with some females. In fact, many human males do make long-term investments in offspring, and it might in fact be in their best interest to do so (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Symons 1979). However, in order for a long-term mating strategy to be a viable option for males, the male must be certain that he is in fact the biological father of any resulting offspring; that is, paternity certainty should, and appears to be, a central concern of males in long-term heterosexual relationships. Indeed, the implicit male concern for certainty of paternity likely underlies pan-cultural male attempts to control the sexual behavior of females through persuasion, coercion, or violence (Betzig 1989; Daly and Wilson 1983, 1988; Flinn 1988; Mesquita and Frijda 1992). The ultimate reasons for the male concern for controlling the sexual behavior of females are implicit and likely reflect the fact that males with this concern almost certainly produced more offspring than their less vigilant competitors, who incurred the risk of being cuckolded (Symons 1979).

For females, in contrast, a central concern associated with a long-term mating strategy involves identifying and retaining a male who is willing and able to make a long-term investment in her and her future offspring (Betzig 1989; Symons 1979). Such a concern might have evolved for females because, given the protracted development of human children, females who were able to elicit male investment in offspring were likely to have more surviving offspring than females who did not demand such an investment (Feingold 1992; Lovejoy 1981; Smuts and Gubernick 1992). This is because throughout human evolution males likely controlled and in fact continue to control important material resources in most societies (Daly and Wilson 1983). Access to material resources, in turn, is linearly and positively related to reductions in the morbidity and mortality of all family members (Adler et al. 1994).

Jealousy is one psychological mechanism that appears to have evolved in

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