



PERSONALITY, BIRTH ORDER AND ATTACHMENT STYLES AS RELATED TO VARIOUS TYPES OF JEALOUSY

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Summary—The relationships between jealousy, personality, attachment styles and birth order were examined in a sample of 100 Dutch men and 100 Dutch women. Three types of jealousy were examined: reactive jealousy (a negative response to the emotional or sexual involvement of the partner with someone else), preventive jealousy (efforts to prevent intimate contact of the partner with a third person), and anxious jealousy (obsessive anxiety, upset, and worrying about the possibility of infidelity of the partner). The three types of jealousy were not at all related to egoism and dominance, but significantly correlated with neuroticism, social anxiety, rigidity and hostility. Only among women was a low self-esteem correlated with jealousy. On all three jealousy measures, those with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style were more jealous than those with an avoidant style, with those with a secure attachment style being the least jealous. Attachment style was strongly related to most personality dimensions, but the effects of attachment style upon jealousy stayed virtually the same when controlling for personality factors. The most important finding in the present study was that laterborns were more jealous according to all three measures than firstborns, a finding that was not due to personality differences between first- and laterborns, nor to differences in attachment style, gender or occupational level of the father. Because some evidence was found that only borns were slightly less jealous than firstborns, it is suggested that the experience of exclusive love and attention in one's childhood, leads to a lower level of jealousy among firstborns. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

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INTRODUCTION

Jealousy has since long been linked to personality characteristics such as insecurity and low self-esteem (e.g. Mead, 1977; Sullivan, 1953). Nevertheless, although jealousy in close relationships has attracted considerable attention from social and personality psychologists over the past decades (for a recent overview, see Salovey, 1991), systematic research on the personality variables related to jealousy is still relatively scarce. A number of authors have reviewed the empirical evidence concerning personality correlates of jealousy (e.g. Bringle & Buunk, 1985; Bringle, 1991; Mathes, 1992). These reviews show that self-esteem has been the most widely examined personality variable in jealousy research. However, the findings on the link between jealousy and low self-esteem are rather inconsistent. In a number of studies, jealousy and self-esteem appeared to be negatively correlated (e.g. Bringle, 1981; Jaremko & Lindsey, 1979), whereas in other studies no correlation between the two variables was found (e.g. Buunk, 1982, Study 1; Mathes & Severa, 1981; White, 1981). In addition, in some studies jealousy was related to self-esteem only among men (e.g. Buunk, 1986), and in other studies only among women (Buunk, 1982; Hansen, 1985). There is more consistent evidence for a negative association of jealousy with neuroticism and anxiety (e.g. Bringle, 1991; Buunk, 1981; De Moja, 1986; Mathes, Roter & Joerger, 1982). Although a few studies have examined individual difference characteristics such as dogmatism and locus of control (e.g. Mathes, 1992), few data are available on the association between jealousy and central personality variables such as dominance, extraversion, hostility and egoism.

The present examined the relationship between jealousy and personality by employing the widely used and well-established Dutch personality questionnaire described by Luteyn, Starren and van Dijk (1985). But through which processes would personality variables be related to jealousy? Why would, for instance, neurotic individuals be more jealous? One possibility is that personality is related to specific individual differences in attitudes towards close relationships that make the

occurrence of jealousy more likely. A relevant characteristic in this context seems attachment style. In recent years an increasing number of studies in social psychology, clinical psychology, and psychiatry, have applied the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969) to adult close relationships (e.g. Carnelley, Pietromonaco & Jaffe, 1994; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Senchak & Leonard, 1992). This field of research was particularly stimulated by the pioneering study by Hazan and Shaver (1987), in which a relatively simple self-report method attachment styles was developed to assess attachment styles. There is evidence that individuals with insecure attachment styles, i.e. those characterized by avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachment, report more jealousy than those with a secure attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The present research examines if personality variables affect jealousy primarily through attachment style.

There is an additional variable concerning experiences in the family of origin that is important to consider when examining the impact of personality variables on jealousy, i.e. birth order. There is substantial evidence that birth order is related to personality (Sulloway, 1995), and a number of authors have suggested that sibling rivalry would be a precursor to adult jealousy (e.g. Clanton & Kosins, 1991). However, it seems at first sight difficult to predict whether firstborns or laterborns would be the most jealous. One could argue that for a firstborn the experience of having to share the love and attention from one's parents with younger siblings after having had the exclusive attention of one's parents may lead to a lower threshold for jealousy. In contrast, however, from an evolutionary perspective it has been suggested that parents often invest their material and immaterial resources more in firstborns (see for example Betzig, 1997), which implies that, more so than firstborns, laterborns have throughout their childhood had to compete for the resources (including love and attention) of their parents. This might have installed in laterborns more than in firstborns the expectation that one will always have to struggle to obtain and keep the love of another person. It must be noted, however, that the literature on birth order effects upon psychological functioning is contradictory. There is even some evidence that firstborn children are more negatively treated by their parents (e.g. Baskett, 1984; Cohen, Adler, Beck & Irwin, 1986), and that firstborn adults have a lower well-being (e.g. Fullerton, Ursano & Wetzler, 1989). However, there is also evidence that firstborn children are lower in depression (Gates, Lineberger & Crockett, 1988). The present research examines if birth order has an effect upon jealousy, and whether or not such an effect is mediated by personality characteristics or attachment style.

The present research employs a multidimensional measure of jealousy. Jealousy has been defined as a negative response to the actual, imagined or expected emotional or sexual involvement of the partner with someone else (Buunk & Bringle, 1987). In line with this assumption, many researchers have operationalized jealousy by asking individuals how upset they would respond when their partner would engage in certain intimate behaviors with a third person (e.g. Buunk, 1982; Bringle, 1991; Hansen, 1991). This type of operationalization of jealousy will be labelled here *reactive* jealousy (Buunk, 1991, 1995; see also emotional jealousy as distinguished by Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). Clinicians such as Hoaken (1976) refer to this type of jealousy as provoked. In the present research, two other types of jealousy were examined as well. The first of these is *preventive* jealousy, in which the person responds overly reactive to even slight indications of interest of the partner in a third person, and goes to considerable efforts to prevent intimate contact of the partner with a third person. For example, husbands may resort to violence in an effort to limit the autonomy of their wives as the result of their insecurity about the mere possibility of their wife being unfaithful (Daly, Wilson & Weghorst, 1982), and there is some suggestive evidence that the existence and persistence of agoraphobia among women may be related to extreme jealousy among their husbands (Hafner, 1979). Similar phenomena as preventive jealousy have been labelled suspicious jealousy by Bringle (1991), behavioral jealousy by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989), and unprovoked jealousy by Hoaken (1976). A focus upon the possibility of the possible sexual and emotional involvement of the partner with someone else, may also take the form of the more inner-directed *anxious* jealousy. This experience implies an active cognitive process of the individual, in which the individual generates images of the partner becoming involved with someone else, which leads to more or less obsessive anxiety, upset, suspiciousness and worrying (cf. cognitive jealousy as distinguished by Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989, and neurotic jealousy as distinguished by Mathes *et al.*, 1982; see also Guerrero, Eloy, Jorgensen & Andersen, 1993).

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