Differences in Jealousy

Testing the Evolutionary Hypotheses with a Brazilian Validated Scale

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Results and Discussion

For women the mean of emotional jealousy was 3.87, and of sexual jealousy 3.38. This difference was statistically significant ($t(290) = 8.12, p < .001, d = .54$). For men the mean of emotional jealousy was 3.25 and of sexual jealousy 3.29. This difference was not significant ($t(173) = .61, p = .54, d = .04$). Women’s emotional jealousy was also significantly higher than men’s.

The reason as to why emotional jealousy appears to be as high as sexual jealousy in men may partly be traced to the uniqueness of the paternal investment in humans. Men’s high investment in their offspring is primarily parental, especially among those that live in multi-male, multi-female communities, considering that, in all, about only 5% of male mammals invest in their offspring (Clutton-Brock, 1991). For males, the cost of letting the female partner diversify her energy, attention and resources to others is positively correlated with the amount of investment the he provides, and the man in hunter gatherer bands contributed with the largest share of the caloric needs of the family (Wooders & van den Berg, 2001), sharing her food surplus with the female and the offspring instead of using it only for developing a sexually competitive body. So it would be expected that emotional jealousy would indeed play an adaptive role for human male ancestors, not only for women.

In the forced-choice questions, of those who marked sexual infidelity as more distressing or as harder to forgive in all four questions concomitantly, 67.8% were men. Of those who marked all four questions saying that emotional infidelity was worse, 78.9% were women. These results indicate a significant association between the participants’ sex and infidelity-type.

Forced-choice (dicotomous) questions, however, are not as precise as interval measures, since the smallest difference between the intensity of the two jealousy types is enough to produce discrete and extreme responses. Individuals throughout our phylogenetic history were not hard-wired to choose between infidelity types, they were probably actually selected to feel distressed over both types of infidelity, however in different intensities and in different situations.

Conclusion

The present results corroborate part of evolutionary psychologists’ studies regarding jealousy, with evidence that for women emotional jealousy is more intense than sexual jealousy. However it should be noted that no difference between the two types of jealousy was found for men with interval measures, and may be worth to think about the adaptive function that emotional jealousy may have played for men, as discussed above.

References