Chapter 8

SALVAGING THE SELF AND ROMANTIC JEALOUSY RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to assess how individuals salvage and restore their sense of self when faced with relationship threatening situations. Symbolic interactionism and the self-evaluation maintenance model were used to frame resulting jealous behaviors which act to restore the self. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with 38 jealousy-prone individuals (all currently in long-term dating relationships). Participants were asked to describe a recent jealous episode with their partners and their subsequent reactions. Qualitative analyses using multiple readings of interview transcripts were used to derive emergent themes. Findings showed four themes linked to the self salvage. *Scene Exit* was noted by efforts to leave the setting where the jealousy event occurred. *Reality Anchoring* focused on "getting in touch" with the self through introspection and social support seeking. *Fantasy Control* was noted by participants deriving fantasies about physically abusing the interloper or taking some type of controlling action. A final theme, *Causal Explanations*, showed individuals reassigning responsibility for their jealousy. These findings lend support to existing theoretical considerations that jealousy is the result of self threat, and that jealous reactions may be interpreted as salvage and restoration efforts.

Romantic jealousy is a common and recurring theme in relationships (Pines, 1992b). In literature, jealousy and related behaviors have been illustrated throughout the centuries (e.g., Shakespeare's *Othello* and his beloved Desdemona), and popular literature notes its prevalence in contemporary romantic relationships (cf., Friday, 1985; Pines, 1992a).

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Empirical research on jealousy and the "jealousy complex" (i.e., the "complex of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" associated with jealousy; White, 1981, p. 296; see also Pfeiffer and Wong, 1989) has produced a wealth of findings on the basic principles associated with romantic jealousy, including its underlying causes, coping strategies, and clinical applications (Berscheid, 1994; Buss, 2000; White and Mullen, 1989).

The purpose of this investigation is to evaluate romantic jealousy responses as a form of *self salvaging*. Although jealousy has typically been defined as the negative emotional reaction that occurs as a result of a partner's extradyadic relationship that is real, imagined, or considered likely to occur (Bringle and Buunk, 1985; Clanton and Smith, 1986), jealousy has been shown to be better understood as an emotion associated with self-definition threat (Salovey, 1991). According to DeSteno and Salovey (1996), "Jealousy . . . is the negative emotion that results from threats to self-evaluation engendered in a specified type of triadic relationship." (p. 920). Thus, jealousy may be viewed through the lens of a *self-evaluation maintenance* (SEM) process (Tesser, 1988). Given this self-evaluation maintenance framework, we suggest that jealous reactions must therefore function as a form of self restoration and salvage.

Within the symbolic interactionism framework, Ellis and Weinstein (1986) outline the topography of how self threat leads to jealousy. Individuals derive self meaning and definition from their partners – in other words, the self is grounded on information received from the partner. Therefore, individuals conceptualize themselves through reflections offered by others within their social networks (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Ellis and Weinstein note that subsequent partner loss (real or perceived) leaves the self vulnerable and unprotected. Hence, if an individual perceives a threat to the existing relationship dyad, the dyad is viewed in jeopardy and the self is left unprotected. As stated by Ellis and Weinstein, ". . . diffusion from partner to the third party weakens the sense of partner as a refuge for one's self and results in the sense of a loss of freedom because one now is hesitant to escape into the self of the other . . . Our ability to control the resources, including our identity, that flow through the bond are called into question." (pp. 346-347) Thus, as the dyad is perceived at risk through partners' preference for another, the self is subsequently perceived at risk, and self rejection is experienced (see Reis, 1985).

Self rejection, when experienced as the end result of a partners' perceived preference for another, leads to negative affect typically labeled as jealousy (White and Mullen, 1989). This view agrees with broader research on emotion and jealousy, which suggests jealousy is a "blend" of negative affective states (Plutchik, 1980; Sharpsteen, 1991; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor, 1987), including anxiety (Mathes, Adams, and Davies, 1985; Parrott, 1991). As noted by Horney (1937), anxiety arises from threats to the security of the perceived self, and it is this anxiety and related affect which are subsequently labeled as jealousy.

Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model has theoretical ties to symbolic interactionism, yet suggests that individuals play a more active role in their self definition. Social identity is negotiated through one's partner and/or social network, which allows for negotiated social identity and "complementary identities" with those in the network. As Tesser notes, "The agreement would serve to validate one another's view of self while enhancing one's own view of self" (p. 205). Within the SEM model, both reflective and comparative processes are utilized. Although these two processes are interrelated, of import here is how comparison processes are activated to affect the self. Self-evaluations (i.e., how the self is envisioned) are enhanced when the self is viewed positively through social

comparisons, and diminished when the self is viewed discrepant. Applied to jealousy, discrepant self-evaluations through social companions with rivals (e.g., "doing poorly on a dimension that was relevant to their self-definition," Tesser, 1988, p. 210) would generate greater levels of negative affect associated with jealousy (DeSteno and Salovey, 1996; Salovey and Rothman, 1991).

When self-image is in jeopardy, and the social networks which define and validate reality and the self are lacking, individuals must alter their constructions in order to salvage the self (Snow and Anderson, 1992). We argue this is especially true when relationships are threatened, and the self is left unprotected. When jealousy is experienced, individuals often are faced with social situations contrary to their expectations. Given the opportunity to "clarify" the meanings of these situations, jealous individuals often question their partners in order to make sense of the realities facing them (Bryson, 1991; Guerrero, Andersen, Jorgensen, Spitzberg, and Eloy, 1995) in an attempt to maintain their relationships and hence anchor the self.

Yet, if not given the opportunity to clarify the situations, individuals must reconstruct these situations in such a way as to rescue the self. In essence, individuals are in a "this cannot be happening" situation, and therefore "who I am" is threatened. When faced with such situations and limited in clarification opportunities, individuals will enact various strategies to restore the self. One prime example of salvaging is offered by Snow and Anderson (1992), who note such agency in their research on the homeless. In their observations and interviews with homeless individuals facing daily situational realities, they note how this population makes sense and reinterprets their realities in order to salvage the self. For example, for the homeless, causal accounts of their situations were generated to provide context for their plight. Reality escape was also used through alcohol or psychological constructions (i.e., mental illness). Fictive storytelling of the future was utilized to offer hope (see Snow and Anderson for their complete analysis).

We suggest such salvaging practices are prevalent in jealous individuals and the actions they take. As noted earlier, perceived loss of one's partner due to an interloper leaves the self unprotected and vulnerable. Hence, jealousy is experienced, and it is the subsequent responses which act to salvage the self. Although a detailed body of research exists on communicative responses to jealousy (for an excellent review and on-going research, see Guerrero et al., 1995), and jealousy responses framed as coping strategies (e.g., see Buunk, 1982; Buunk and Bringle, 1987), no research to date has looked directly at responses from the standpoint of the self. In addition, with few exceptions (e.g., Ellis and Weinstein, 1986), detailed interviews and qualitative analyses have rarely been used to investigate jealousy or jealous responses.

Through in-depth interviews from 38 jealousy-prone individuals (all currently in dating relationships), jealous responses were investigated as a form of self salvaging. Participants were asked to provide detailed information regarding a past jealous episode. A qualitative analysis using multiple readings of transcripts (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was utilized to investigate emergent themes from the interviews.

METHOD

Participants

Study participants were 38 residents of Southern California. Participants were recruited for study participation through E-mail requests made on a multidisciplinary graduate student distribution list at a private academic institution in Southern California, or through posted flyers announcing the study at the a public college institution. Maximum variation sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was used with participating subjects meeting specific study requirements. These requirements included (a) current involvement in a dating relationship of four months or more (not engaged or married), (b) being between the ages of 21 to 30, and (c) having experienced romantic jealousy in their current relationship.

An attempt was made to equate gender participation, and an original sample of 40 participants was obtained (23 females and 17 males). A $30 incentive was also offered for completion of the interviews. Although all participants originally classified themselves as meeting the study requirements, two female participants were removed (during the interviews, they disclosed not being in a dating relationship). The overall sample size was therefore reduced to 38 cases (21 females and 17 males). The mean relationship length of the 38 study participants was 20.8 months (SD = 16.4, median = 12.5). Participants' age ranged from 21 to 30 years, with a mean age of 24.1 years (SD = 2.3). Race/ethnicity of the participants consisted of 52.6% White, 21.1% Latino, 13.2% Asian, 2.6% African-American, and 10.5% "Other." None of the dating partners of the participants were in the study.

Procedure and Materials

Individuals interested in participating in the study contacted the researcher, and a brief enrollment interview over the telephone was undertaken to verify the participants met study criteria. Participants were then scheduled for a one-on-one interview session. At the interview session, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form outlining issues of confidentiality. After consent was obtained, participants were offered the $30 incentive (two of the participants declined the offer). All interviews were audio taped and transcribed, and followed a structured script with response probes.

Participants were asked a series of closed- and open-ended questions. Closed-ended items were presented in a brief "Interpersonal Relationship" questionnaire which addressed information on relationship commitment, relationship investment, and demographics (see Marelich, 1998, for analyses of these issues). In addition to these items, participants were asked a series of open-ended items addressing their experience of romantic jealousy. These items included, "I'd like you to think back for a moment about the last time you experienced jealousy with your partner. What happened? Please describe the event to me in detail." Probes after this question included: "What led up to the event?"; "What occurred during the event?"; "What happened after?"; and "Why did you have that reaction – why did this event trouble you?" The open-ended interviews took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Analysis

Qualitative analyses were conducted using multiple readings of transcripts to identify major ideas or themes in the participants' descriptions of their situations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As new themes emerged from each transcript, the previously analyzed transcripts were reevaluated for the new themes. Frequently mentioned themes (i.e., first level codes) were then further grouped into sub-codes. The subsequent results of the qualitative analyses reflect emergent categories.

RESULTS

Four themes emerged across the 38 interviews that can broadly be described as jealous actions and sense-making to salvage the self. These were labeled Scene Exit, Reality Anchoring, Fantasy Control, and Causal Explanations. Overall, 76% of participants reported at least one of these themes. *Scene Exit* was noted by behaviors to exit the setting when jealousy was experienced (e.g., leaving the room). Some participants utilized *Reality Anchoring*, focusing on "getting in touch" with the self through various means (subthemes include *introspection* and *social support seeking*). *Fantasy Control* showed participants deriving fictive scenarios about controlling the interlopers. A final theme showed the use of *Causal Explanations*, evidenced by participants explaining their negative affect on issues beyond the self (subthemes include *personal history* and *event powerlessness*).

None of these themes, except for the subtheme "event powerlessness," evidenced gender differences (assessed using Fisher's Exact test, two-tailed), or race-ethnicity differences (assessed through chi-square). Event powerlessness did show a gender difference (Fisher's Exact test, $p = .043$, two-tailed), indicating a greater tendency for women to report this subtheme than men. No age/theme associations were noted using Pearson correlations.

Scene Exit: "So I grabbed my keys and walked out"

Of the 38 case reports, 18% noted jealous reactions whereby individuals exited the scene, thus removing the self from the threatening context. This removal allows individuals to maintain the self, reducing the immediate threat experienced. In most cases, individuals can be described as aggressively leaving the scene (i.e., storming out, grabbing car keys), and sometimes preempted by yelling. For example, a 24 year-old male reported, ". . . I was studying, and I believed that night she said 'No, I have things to do,' and she couldn't study with me. But later when I was studying in the dorms, she came in with another guy – studying, just studying, right -- but that really got me mad. So, I couldn't concentrate, I had to storm out." In another example, a 24-year-old female reports her response to an interaction with her boyfriend's coworker:

> I went into his work, and there's a [female] bartender there. . . and she was friends with his ex-girlfriend, so I know she has loyalty to this other girl. . . [his ex-girlfriend] is attractive, and she's got. . . implants. . . and she's very flirtatious. . . I walked in and she [calls out in a sarcastic tone], '[Name], your friend is here,' and it made me angry. And also it made me feel

like maybe he didn't tell her that he'd been dating me for three years, and it just. . . I just got really upset. . . I got that bad feeling, that heart pounding and all that, and I didn't know what to do, and I didn't want to act like an idiot, so I grabbed my keys and just walked out. . . I just left.

Another female (age 23) reports a similar experience where a public confrontation takes place, and ending in her taking the car keys (which had been thrown toward her) and leaving:

. . . we went to a bar, and we went downstairs, and he started talking to some people he knew, and I kind of poked him and asked him to introduce me, and he basically said 'hold-on, hold-on,' and [I] couldn't really hear what he said, but he didn't introduce me within 30-seconds, and so I started yelling and marched up the stairs and said 'I'm leaving,' and started screaming at him. And he threw keys at my feet because he had my car keys (because I asked for the car keys), and he threw the keys at my feet, and I took off.

In another example, a male (age 28) describes his exiting behavior, again in a public setting although in this case no formal confrontation with his partner is noted:

And we went out to a bar. . .and we were carded as we entered the bar. So, I was carded and I put my ID away and started to walk in . . .When I turned back, I looked and she was engaged in a very animated conversation with the bouncer. . . he was a moderately attractive guy and they seemed to be hitting it off very well . . . So, I went upstairs and joined everyone else and stewed and brewed up there for a while.

In all of these situations, a perceived interloper was noted, and the individual exited the scene. Exiting the scene allows individuals to leave the context in which the threatening event is embedded, thus salvaging the self. As individuals directly face a threat to their relationship, loss of self is faced as well. Therefore, exiting removes individuals from the noxious situation, reducing threat and thereby allows the self to be restored.

Reality Anchoring

Another theme regards how individuals salvage the self through various grounding efforts in an effort to "get in touch" or anchor the self in something beyond their partners. Here, individuals used introspection and social support seeking to maintain their sense of self.

Introspection: "Why am I here?" One form of anchoring includes introspection, and was noted in seven cases (18%). Here, as the self is threatened, individuals question their relationship involvement or emotional reactions. Perceived partner and interloper behaviors do not fit with the individuals' relationship norms or expectations. This acts negatively upon the self, and thus individuals must anchor the self in introspection to salvage who they are. For example, one female (age 26) notes that after hearing her boyfriend was taking an interest in someone else, ". . . that was when I had that sort of panic feeling like, [asking myself] 'What am I doing? I need to get out of this. Why am I here?'" In another example, a female (age 25) explains her reaction after hearing a woman (her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend)

purchased a concert ticket for him, and that he was going to go to the concert with the ex-girlfriend:

> . . . but when I got home and I was thinking . . . I have done nothing wrong . . . why should I be the one that feels like this? I have nothing to make me feel like bad. I don't deserve this. I am just good to him, and I don't deserve to feel this badly. And that is when it turned to anger, and that is when I got angry at him for making me feel like this . . .

A 23 year-old female reports:

> Well, he wasn't here [in California] for New Year's Eve . . . because he is at home in New Jersey, and one of his old friends who is a female called him and wanted to do something with her alone at her house . . . I couldn't think of anything else but that [situation], and I made up a million scenarios of how she would seduce him into being with her . . . it ruined my whole week just knowing that he would be with her for New Year's Eve, and would he kiss her? And I knew they would be drinking [alcohol], which would make things worse . . . it was terrible . . . On actual New Year's Eve day I was fine . . . I [was] just like 'okay,' you know, he would be coming back to California. And he wouldn't be there forever, and he is coming back to me and she is just an old friend …

Social support seeking: "[I] was kind of just lashing out . . .telling them . . ." Another form of anchoring includes social support seeking, where individuals seek out others to help establish their worth and existence. Four cases reported such behaviors (11%). For example, a 24-year-old male reported his reaction to his girlfriend studying with another male, ". . . I went to my friends'. . . apartment, and then was kind of just lashing out and . . . telling them . . . about the guy. So, I was just . . . very mad." In another example, a 22-year-old female reports her experience at a bar with her boyfriend and other friends, and was upset by her boyfriend's behavior toward some women she didn't know:

> . . . we were putting our names down because we wanted to actually eat so we wanted a table (it was a very crowded place) . . . and then, I guess while I was doing that, they ran into some people they knew. And I turned around, and I wanted my boyfriend to introduce me, and he didn't, and I'd asked him to, and my best friend was there. . . and she dates my boyfriend's best friend, and she was like, 'I can't believe they're doing this'. . . and I of course was agreeing and saying [imitating], 'I can't believe this. He should be introducing us right away, both of them. . . they're awful' . . .

In the cases above, participants sought social support. Hence, what is perceived as a threat to the self is verified, and the social support acts to anchor the self.

Fantasy Control: "I'm just going to smash him"

Participants (16%) reported fantasies about taking actions against the interlopers. By fictively controlling the interloper, the perceived relationship dyad is stabilized (as opposed to being weakened), and the sense of self is subsequently maintained. For the six individuals reporting fantasy control, all but two cases (who reported a fictive verbal confrontation with

the interloper) reported outward aggression toward the interlopers. For example, one female (age 24) shared the following aggressive thoughts toward another woman who hugs and kisses her boyfriend:

> We were at a bar at home in Santa Barbara, hanging out with some of our friends playing darts . . . And this girl who had always been interested in him before (and they'd sort of had something) . . . she spotted him, and came running up and she's like [imitative], 'Oh, hi [name]!' And [she] gives him this big hug and a kiss on the cheek, and , 'How are you?,' and la dee da. And I was just kind of going, 'Grrrr!. . . Should I smack her? Is that socially acceptable? There [are] too many witnesses around!'

In another example, a 23-year-old male reported:

> We have a friend that's a group friend who is always talking to my girlfriend . . . always talking to her. We hug a lot (we are all from Argentina. . . we kiss on the cheek, it is a common thing), and he is always right next to her, close to her and stuff. And it just seems like he is always talking to her when I am not around . . . I was out with some friends [and her] . . . at the bar. And I could see from far away that he was just talking to her and dancing and dancing . . . and I just got so frustrated and I told her brother actually if I go down there I am just going to smash him . . .

In this final example, a 24-year-old male reported a fantasy that involved shooting at the interloper and his girlfriend:

> It was a weekday night . . . and I talked to her on the phone, and we might have even had dinner together that night. And then I told her, 'let's go study' (. . . we both lived in apartments, different apartments), and I told her 'let's go study,' and she told me that she was very busy that night. I said 'okay, that is fine.' I ended up going to the dorms [to study] . . . with a guy friend (a really close friend of mine), and we were studying in the dorms, and about a little bit later that night, she came in with another guy (who is also my friend) . . . and so, at that point I think my emotions of happiness or whatever was just shut out, shut down, and . . . frustration was building up, really a lot. I couldn't even concentrate on studying . . . so, I wanted to get my mind off of things. So, I went downstairs to the arcade and I was playing ironically . . . [a] shooting game, with lethal weapons and stuff, a cop game . . . I [was] kind of imagining [them] when I was shooting at the guys.

Causal Explanations

The fourth emergent theme concerns individuals' explanations of their jealousy as byproducts of issues beyond the self. Here, the self is salvaged through identifying causal explanations for their feelings (e.g., parent abandonment, broken trusts in past romances, immature behaviors of partners, and events beyond their control). Individuals need to make sense out of their experienced jealousy, and instead of self-blame which is indicative of performance failure (and therefore leads to negative affect, Tesser, 1988), other causal explanations are adopted thus enhancing the self.

Relationship history: "It's just sort of a recurring theme in my life." Overall, 26% of participants reported various relationship issues for their jealous feelings. Jealous feelings are attributed to these relationship issues, and in many cases are noted as recurrent in the individuals' lives. For example, a 22-year-old male explains the jealousy experienced when his girlfriend appears to still be interested in an ex-boyfriend, ". . . and with past experiences it has happened to me before where that same thing, [that] same episode had happened, and it just didn't make me feel all that great when it seems like I am living my life all over. It's like 'rewind' and I am seeing that something happen with the relationship I am in now." For this participant, cues from past relationships are being noted in his current relationship. Hence, for him, jealousy is due to those past experiences. In another example, a 24-year-old female attributes her jealousy to past relationship issues, including abandonment by her father:

> I want to let him know because I want him to reassure me, but if I let him know he gets mad thinking I'm doubting him, which I am I guess . . . I am doubting him. It isn't really because of him, its because of my life in general, because my father left me, because boyfriends have done other things to me, so I just have a general sense that I can't trust people. So, I feel like if there's some kind of evidence there, and there's some woman whom I'm threatened by because she's attractive and there with him constantly, then. . . it just takes over . . . the jealousy takes over.

For some individuals, the newness of the relationship was blamed for the resulting jealousy. This explanation diverts self-blame, and places it on the relationship. For example, a 28- year-old male reports, "Yeah, you know . . . [the relationship] felt unstable, in some ways because there was the issue of both of us having been in relationships . . .or gotten out of relationships only months before – long-term relationships – and suddenly entering a new one and that was in part my own little red flag going off . . ." In another example, a 25-year-old female attributes her jealousy to both the relationship and to being hurt in past relationships:

> . . . the bottom line is that even though intellectually I know I trust him, I know he loves me, I know he would never hurt me, there's part of me that still feels very insecure about the relationship. And I think that just goes probably back to how our relationship started [not being committed for two years], but also probably back before I ever even knew he existed. It's just sort of a recurring theme in my life [being hurt relationships].

Beyond blaming past relationships or newness of relationship, some participants blamed their partners directly. In other words, participants' resulting jealousy is due directly to their partners personal dispositions. According to one male (age 25):

> . . . [We] had plans, [but] missed each other . . . she was out with another . . . it has to do with her personality and her insecurities. Her knowing that men are attracted to her and latching on to that…dropping plans because she finds it attractive to have people attracted to her. Her inability to separate, her inability to create friendships with other men . . . she tries to create friendships, but she only knows how to do it through people who have a romantic interest in her. That is why it is an irritation and not an anger . . . it is irritating because, I mean, I don't get angry with her because it is something that she is having trouble working through herself. I mean, there is no reason to get angry, but it is irritating because I think in my opinion [she] ought to grow-up a little.

Event powerlessness: ". . . they always try to talk to him." Some individuals noted they had no control over the evolving situations. The event "happens," and they are helpless to take action. Here, participants do not take responsibility for their feelings, and report being passive bystanders during the threatening events. Since performance failure (as a partner or boyfriend/girlfriend) compounded with social comparison leads to negative affect, the self is salvaged by the "release" of responsibility for the situation. Performance success or failure thereby is negated, and individuals simply adopt a witness role to the unfolding events. Overall, 37% of participants reported some form of event powerlessness.

One woman (age 21) reports her powerlessness over women she works with at a gym that flirt with her boyfriend when he comes in:

> They always talk to him. . . they always try to talk to him. They're like, 'Hi [name]. How are you?' They're like obvious, you know, they just jump up and down when he's there. And I told him, you know, not to talk to them. Sometimes I guess just to get me mad he does it, he talks to them. And, you know, it's like, I don't like it because I know the type of people they are. But he doesn't seem to understand what I'm trying to say . . . [The women act like he's]. . . a piece of gold or a diamond or something like when he comes [in]. . . and they even go out of their way to talk to him.

In this situation, even though she has spoken to the women about their behaviors, and to her boyfriend, the event continues to occur. In another example, one 26-year-old woman explains:

> [Name] and I both worked for [an adventure wilderness organization]. That's how we met and . . . we do wilderness trips where you're working with somebody really closely for like a month at a time, and you're having this really intense experience and sort of stressful things and all sorts of different issues come up. And I decided that I wanted to go back to school, so I stopped working for them . . . So, I was doing that [back in New York] and he was still working some courses [with the organization], and he was working down in Baja. So . . . we were totally out of touch for like months (just letters occasionally). And he was working with a woman down there, and so I was jealous mostly situationally that they got to be spending the kind of time together that I would have liked to be spending with him. And then the specific incident was that. . . one of the courses got canceled so he had like a two-week break. And I was like, 'Oh great! He's going to come to New York and see me!' And he ended up staying down there and they traveled around a little bit together. So I was jealous of that.

Unlike the previous example, this woman did not discuss her dissatisfaction with her partner. Further, due to the long distance nature of their relationship at the time, there was little she could do to stop her boyfriend from traveling with the other woman.

In another example, a woman (age 23) reports her powerlessness when a mutual friend jumps on her boyfriend who is sleeping in bed, ". . . well, a friend of both of ours actually was visiting . . . this was someone that he worked with before in the Peace Corps program. . . She came out (we were at my house), and he was sleeping in the other room, so she went in there and she just jumped on him and attacked him, and you know, 'Oh, hi!' you know, and started kissing him. . . and not like kissing him on the mouth or anything, but like you know, because that's like the way she is, but, its kind of like, 'Well, what are you doing?'. . ." This woman noted later in the interview that she did not speak to either her boyfriend or the mutual friend

about the incident. In a similar example of surprise intimacy from a friend, a male (age 23) relayed the following story about a longtime male friend of his girlfriend coming for a visit the day before the participant was going out of town:

> As soon as he sees [my girlfriend], he tackles her, literally tackles her, and said, 'Oh my god, it has been so long.' And they were really intimate and grabbing and hugging each other and kissing on the cheek, just talking about old times. . . Literally, I was not even in the room. If I was in the room or not in the room, it would have not made a difference. It was the night before I was suppose to [go away]. It was suppose to be just me and [my girlfriend], watching a movie with a couple of my friends down the hall, and after the movie we were going to get together and go to a late dinner. It would be the last night that we were together. I was forgotten. I could have said, 'Hi, hello?' - I could have flown with flags and just flag her down - no idea that I was there, try[ing] to get her attention. It was, 'Hold on, honey, I am trying to talk to [my male friend].' Literally they're whispering to each other's ear . . .[and] someone had a camera, so the pictures that they were taking in there were really like pictures that aren't taken between friends (let's put it that way). Of course I was jealous . . . the guy is attractive, smart, he is funny, and well he is big [laughs] - he is a big boy - and there wasn't a damn thing that I was going to do about it. . . I figured that my girlfriend had enough to say [imitative], 'My boyfriend is here. We are trying to spend a little time together before Christmas. It is the last time that we are going to see each other until January 5th. Three weeks is a long damn time. I would like to spend a little time with my boyfriend.' None of that was ever mentioned. As a matter of fact, they left together back to [her female friend's] room, back in the other dorm.

In this longer example, the male participant is a passive bystander to the event. Unable and unwilling to interject, he observes his partner interacting closely with her male friend. He has chosen to be powerless here, watching the interactions instead of being an active part of the event.

CONCLUSIONS

Although there has been a substantial amount of empirically-based literature on romantic jealousy (Bersheid and Reis, 1998; Salovey, 1991), only a few investigations have approached the issue from a symbolic interactionist's standpoint (e.g., Ellis and Weinstein, 1986). This is surprising given that romantic jealousy (a) appears to be culturally bound (Hupka, 1981, 1991; Pines, 1992b), (b) is affected by the negotiated consensual rules and norms in romantic relationships (Denfeld, 1974), and (c) is associated with resource exchange (Ellis and Weinstein, 1986; see also White, 1981). In applying such a framework to understand jealousy, we believe the current study successfully illustrates how individuals salvage the self when faced with threats to their romantic relationships.

As the dyad is assumed threatened, the self is left exposed and unprotected. According to Ellis and Weinstein (1986, pg. 346), "After the intrusive episode, we see 'us' shift to 'you and me'. We are reminded of our separateness from our partner. . .We can no longer take for granted the central contextual feature of our partner's attachment to us. This undercuts key premises on which our sense of self has been grounded. Our identity, so intertwined with the other, is now unprotected." Facing the loss of the romantic dyad leads to loss of the self, and

therefore actions are taken to make sense of the events and situations, which ultimately acts to protect the self.

The resulting acts noted in this study, and ways in which individuals salvage the self, are a mix of active and passive thoughts/behaviors, yet all serve the purpose of protecting the self from potential loss. Although the intent here was to understand actions in response to actual threatening situations with a single close relationship partner (as recounted by study participants in detail), and ultimately how these actions are related to maintaining the sense of self, the findings are also in agreement with other studies summarizing typical jealous responses from individuals' personal histories (across multiple partners). For example, Bryson (1991) assessed college students' recollections of past jealousy experiences, and noted eight dimensions of responses, including emotional devastation, reactive retribution, arousal, need for social support, intropunitiveness, confrontation, anger, and impression management. Guerrero et al. (1995) also assessed college students' jealousy, but focused on how individuals communicate jealousy to their partners. Their study yielded 11 dimensions, including active distancing, negative affect expression, integrative communication, distributive communication, avoidance/denial, violent communication/threats, surveillance/restriction, compensatory restoration, manipulation attempts, rival contacts, and violent behavior. These past studies are indicative of how individuals in the long-term cope and express their jealousy. Although these studies show similarities to the current results, we believe the current study stands separate given that our findings focus on the immediate and person/event specific responses to relationship threat, thus linking reactions directly to self restoration and protection.

As noted earlier, DeSteno and Salovey (1996) successfully applied Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model to understanding the negative affect associated with jealousy. Their research, however, addressed part of Tesser's model, looking at antecedent conditions that lead to jealousy, the SEM process that is activated, and resulting negative affect. It did not address what individuals do when they are jealous (labeled "Behavioral Adjustment" by Tesser, 1988), which would complete the broader SEM model. We feel that to fully place jealousy within the SEM model, individuals must also exhibit actions by which self protection is initiated to reduce threat, thereby illustrating behavioral adjustment (i.e., "changes in relevance or performance or closeness in order to maintain self-evaluation"; Tesser, 1988, p. 210). Our approach, then, confirms that the SEM model is viable in its application to jealousy. The self is threatened by loss of one's partner to a rival, and therefore self maintenance actions are taken to restore, protect, and ultimately salvage the self.

There are a number of limitations to the current study that need to be mentioned. First, although 76% of the cases interviewed showed salvaging actions, 24% did not. During the interview process, questions were open-ended and probes were used to draw-out information, yet in some instances individuals' responses did not contain what we subsequently labeled salvaging actions. This is not to say that these individuals did not attempt to protect/maintain the self when faced with a jealous-evoking event – indeed, the simplest explanation is that the information was simply not recovered. Further, a handful of the 24% did report other themes applicable to salvaging, but the resulting response categories did not "swarm" across more than three cases and therefore could not be included in our final results as themes. A second caveat is that all of the study participants were associated with colleges and universities, and ranged in age from 21 to 30 years. It is possible that given a more professional and/or mature sample, results may have differed.

One main advantage of the current study is that, unlike most studies addressing jealousy which use paper/pencil methods and hypothetical situations to evoke jealousy, we utilized personal interviews and had individuals recount a recent jealous episode involving their current relationship partner. Using this approach allowed for a wide scope of information to be collected, provided the option of probing responses for additional information, and allowed participants to ask for question clarifications. Another advantage was that the current study focused directly on a group of self-reported jealous individuals. By only retaining individuals who currently experienced jealousy in their relationships, the resulting themes associated with the self and jealousy were more easily obtainable and clear.

Future investigations into the self and jealousy may want to focus away from individual experiences, and move toward a dyad perspective. Asking both relationship partners to describe a recent jealous episode and subsequent actions and reactions would be advantageous, and would provide a more detailed look into the relationship dynamic and how self is produced and sustained within the dyad (Blumstein, 1991). Although some work has been completed looking at how communication of jealousy affects relational uncertainty in one's partner (e.g., Bevan, 2004), dyad-based observations and research has yet to embraced in the examination of jealousy. Individuals act and react based on what their partners do, and capturing this dynamic may provide additional insight into jealousy.

AUTHOR NOTE

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