

# Jealousy, Monogamy, and Power

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What are we to make of jealousy? It is simultaneously a biological response, an emotion, a social reaction to particular situations, and a general term that can be applied to any sort of covetousness. Romantic jealousy is often a point of strife in relationships, when one person gets jealous or one person accuses another of jealousy. And yet, we largely consider jealousy to be an inevitable aspect of relationships.

Whenever nonmonogamy is addressed in popular culture, romantic jealousy is brought up as an overwhelming obstacle to any sort of successful nonmonogamy. Sometimes the author states that they themselves could never get past jealousy enough to be nonmonogamous. Other times, therapists are quoted as saying that nonmonogamy is impossible due to jealousy. We see quotes like “there is no getting around the ultimate problem of jealousy” (Coren 2005) and similar examples when polyamory is profiled in the media (DeDonato 2008; Jackson 2006; Lewis 2005; Marech 2001). This immediate conflation of nonmonogamy and jealousy hints at the cultural role jealousy plays in creating monogamous conformity - I will describe this role in detail below.

In contrast, polyamory literature tends to start discussions of jealousy by stating that it is in fact defeatable. This is done to counter mainstream culture’s sense that jealousy is inevitable in and fatal to nonmonogamous situations (Anapol 1997: 50-51; Benson 2008: 185; Easton and Hardy 1997: 136-137).

When our culture examines jealousy, we tend to fall back on biological imperative. Research has not been immune to this essentialization (for an overview, see Lucas 2007). Recent advances in DNA fingerprinting have revealed that sexual monogamy is pretty much nonexistent in the natural kingdom (Barash and Lipton 2001), and jealousy is generally understood in academic circles to be constructed by culture rather than a biological phenomenon (Sharpsteen 1993; Stenner and Rogers 1998; White and Mullen 1989: 66-75). However, this knowledge has not filtered through the public awareness, and jealousy and monogamy are generally considered to be biological and inevitable, as we see in journalism (e.g. Barash and Barash 2005; Martell 2003; Stephens 2007) and pop psychology (e.g. Barash and Lipton 2001: 30,120; Buss 2000; Espejo 2007: 29; Rodgers 2002: 8,11,123,346). The mainstream often considers jealousy situations to be a problem which should be addressed (as I describe below), but the jealous response itself is rarely questioned.

In our culture we rarely look to a person's underlying motivations for the source of jealousy, though people seem to understand these causes and will readily admit to deeper social or situational reasons when questioned: "I thought she would leave me for him" "I feel ugly compared to him" "I know he'll take the first chance he gets if I let him out of my sight" "I'm jealous because of how you acted around her" "You're just saying that because you're jealous". In short, jealousy is a strategy of personal power within

relationships, one that is useful and common enough that we are rarely willing to take a cold look at what we are actually using it for.

This essay is devoted to examining these power strategies that surround jealousy. For this analysis, I am relying on a Foucauldian notion of power (Foucault 1978: 92-102). In other words, I view jealousy as a social mechanism used for relationships among people, a mechanism that allows people to exert power on each other in various ways. My hope is to establish a framework for understanding the relationship between jealousy, power, and monogamy in romantic relationships.

I will reference various academic works on jealousy throughout this paper, but my primary source for this deconstruction is the shared knowledge of the polyamory community, and my own personal experience in polyamorous relationships, education, and organizing. Social activists are well aware that the people who understand a power dynamic best are those who are in a losing position when it comes to that form of power (for example, Harding 2003: 56-57). Indeed, polyamorous people are beset by the multitudinous mechanisms that enforce compulsory monogamy in our culture. And as we shall see, the power relations surrounding jealousy are prime enforcers of monogamy. Polyamorous people of necessity become experts at negotiating these power dynamics, to the point where some of the claims in this paper may already be obvious to my poly readers.

First, some disclaimers. I am only discussing the complex of romantic jealousy in this essay, and I am not addressing other forms of jealousy and envy such as sibling jealousy, coworker jealousy, and so on.

I will be addressing the culturally hegemonic system of compulsory monogamy in this piece. Nothing in this essay should be taken as critical of the practice of monogamy or of people who get jealous: monogamy, especially when practiced in a conscious manner, is a rewarding path for many people. Also, deconstructing jealousy (a key component of the conceptual apparatus of compulsory monogamy) will inevitably be read as privileging nonmonogamy. Nonmonogamy is not magically free of interpersonal power, and any particular variety will have its own power mechanisms, which I am not examining here.

Also, this paper is a critique of mainstream United States culture specifically, which means that its applicability is limited in scope to that mainstream (mostly white, middle-class, male-dominated, etc) culture. While the power structures described here may apply to some extent to other cultures and U.S. subcultures, some of the conclusions will not hold as the cultural distance increases.

Indeed, people who are heavily invested in nonmonogamy may find themselves disagreeing with many of the statements I make here about the mainstream mechanism of jealousy. This is unsurprising, as the process of investing in nonmonogamy tends to require that one find ways to disempower the various power mechanisms of jealousy

described here, and the resulting reconceptualization is typically incompatible with the mainstream ideology of jealousy.

### **The Power Mechanisms of Jealousy**

Jealousy is one of the few concepts we have that describes a romantic situation among three people, and like most of the others it is a negative description. The people in question are: the person who is jealous, a romantic partner of that person, and some third party who is viewed by the jealous person as a romantic rival (White and Mullen 1989: 9-11). The jealous person's fear is typically that the romantic rival will somehow attract the attentions of their partner, either impeding or ending the partner's relationship with the jealous person.

Jealousy generally has an air of the problematic about it. The very existence of an episode of jealousy is viewed as a problem, or at least indicative of one (Stenner and Rogers 1998; White and Mullen 1989: 1-3). As jealousy is conceptualized around threats to the relationship, the initial problem is understood to be some sort of relationship transgression, often involving a third party. If there were no such transgression (even an imagined one) in play, we assume that there would be no jealousy and no problem. Jealousy creates an additional problem for the person feeling jealous, because they are potentially very distraught on top of facing a relationship threat. Jealousy is also a problem for the their partner, in that they are assumed to have done something to cause the jealousy, or at the very least they need to be able to address or assuage it. Jealousy is a problem for the overall relationship as well, in that jealousy is generally assumed to only appear when there is a threat to the relationship. It is this problematic cast to jealousy that makes it easy to describe jealousy as an undesirable trait (though still common and inevitable), as described below.

If the existence of jealousy is considered a problem, then it is begging a solution. The generally accepted solution to a person's jealousy is for the other partner to change their behavior or make amends in some way. Or, sometimes the third party is expected to apologize for or alter their actions. In other words, a non-jealous person is considered responsible for the jealousy itself, both for its creation and for its attenuation. It is possible to make someone jealous, and this making is seen as an inevitable cause/effect relationship – jealousy as a reflex response to a certain sort of situation. As a culture we conveniently fail to define exactly what sort of situation, which gives us a wide range of possible jealous triggers, as I describe in the next section.

Jealousy occupies a somewhat odd position as a first-class emotion that at the same time places its responsibility on another person. This becomes apparent when we compare jealousy to other negative feelings. On the one side, we have anger, which like jealousy is a strongly felt emotion but which is somewhat less culturally acceptable than jealousy. For example, public displays of anger are looked down upon more than public displays of jealousy. While anger is typically a response to a situation, we do not automatically locate the source of anger externally the way we do for jealousy. If a person is often angry, we send them to anger management classes, but there are no jealousy management

classes outside of nonmonogamous communities, because the way to solve jealousy is to alter one's situation. On the other side, feelings like hurt and betrayal are socially sanctioned because they are defined responsively, but they do not have the force of full-on emotions – a betrayed person may have various emotional responses, including anger and jealousy. Jealousy sits in a charmed space between these two types of feelings, as we grant it the strength and immediacy of an internally felt emotion while still giving it the deference of an emotional response to an external situation.

To recap, we consistently locate both the source of and solution to jealousy in an external party. This externality of jealousy is demanded by the cultural script we have for it, namely: a person takes or allows an action towards a third party, which threatens the relationship and triggers jealousy in the person's partner. Jealousy is primarily seen as the legitimate response to a real relationship threat (Stenner and Rogers 1998; White and Mullen 1989: 9-11). Indeed, jealousy is understood as part and parcel of the threat itself, nothing more than the emotional flipside of being the aggrieved party. However, putting the responsibility for an emotion on someone other than the person feeling the emotion necessarily creates multiple power dynamics, and I will describe three of them below. Here I am focusing on power between the jealous person and their partner and leaving aside dynamics between the jealous person and the third party, though there is a parallel and somewhat weaker set of power relations between those parties.

First, jealousy itself demands some sort of response from the other partner, influencing them. Because the conceptual domain of jealousy is the partner's interactions with third parties, being jealous produces influence over the partner's relations with specific third parties or even their social life in general. If someone gets jealous because their partner flirts, then the implied demand is that their partner stop flirting. If someone is jealous because their partner is friendly with a particular person, they are effectively demanding that their partner stop being friends with that person. Further, feeling jealous gives a person a certain degree of social license and emotional cover to take various malicious actions, such as reading their partner's email or trying to manipulate their partner's social contacts (White and Mullen: 183-185, 223-227).

These direct power mechanisms remain in effect even when jealousy is not contrived or strategic, though it may be either of these. Because jealousy is a felt emotion, it is difficult to discern any actual causality between the feeling and the power dynamic. Is a person jealous for the associated power effects, or are they gaining the power effects because they are jealous? Their actual motivation is not particularly relevant to the power outcomes, which flow from the conceptualization of jealousy itself.

This power mechanism of jealousy is direct, in that it is a largely unavoidable effect of jealousy itself. Indeed, we can read the influence of jealousy over a partner as the conceptual purpose of jealousy itself. If jealousy is an emotional response to a relationship threat, then the desired effect of jealousy would in theory be to protect the relationship. There is of course no guarantee that any particular jealous episode will be protective or destructive towards a relationship, but our cultural logic defines jealousy as an appropriate defensive response.

Because our culture generally recognizes the association of jealousy with control of a partner, there is a secondary power dynamic produced, where a person accuses someone of being jealous for personal gain. We enable this accusation by categorizing jealousy into reasonable and unreasonable varieties, generally judged by the severity of the jealous person's actions (Lucas 2007; Stenner and Rogers 1998). For example, complaining to one's partner about their behavior might be reasonable, but demanding that they not socialize with coworkers might seem overly controlling. Of course, we are again conveniently vague about where the line between reasonable and unreasonable jealousy falls, making this a flexible power dynamic. Depending on the situation and the person making the judgment, acts of jealous violence might be reasonable, or the mere feeling of jealousy itself might be unreasonable (as in the interview by Stenner 1993). "You're being too jealous" is therefore the inverse power relation to the direct power effects of jealousy, providing a counterbalancing effect: one person makes demands via jealousy, and their partner resists those by claiming that the jealousy is unreasonable. While either power dynamic can exist in a particular relationship without the other, this inverse power mechanism is a proper Foucauldian method of resistance to the direct jealousy mechanism described above, as its existence requires recognizing the possibilities of control associated with jealousy (Foucault 1978: 95-96).

This back and forth power struggle means that the act of admitting jealousy is somewhat fraught, opening a person up to accusations of being unreasonably jealous, along with carrying an implicit admission that there may be a real threat to the relationship. Also, jealousy is generally considered to be a negative trait by counseling professionals (White and Mullen 1989: 173-217).

The upshot of all this is that people are remarkably loathe to admit that they are jealous (White and Mullen 1989: 55), because making that admission sets them at a disadvantage. Which makes for an odd situation: on the one hand, a person might feel entirely justified in acting on their jealousy, but on the other hand, they typically seek to hide the jealousy itself. A quick trip to the relationship self-help section of the bookstore confirms this: few of the books present actually approve of or mention jealousy, but quite a number of them license jealous feelings and controlling behavior under the rubric of protecting one's relationship from cheating or recovering from an affair (e.g. Block and Neumann 2009: 55-75; Copeland and Louis 2000: 363-364; DeLorenzo et al 2009; Neuman 2008: 34-62; Spring 1996: 148-160). Indeed, it is common polyamorous wisdom that an initial difficult step in dealing with jealousy is getting the jealous person to acknowledge their feelings (e.g. Anapol 1997: 57-58; Easton and Hardy 1997: 138-139).

It is well-understood that power dynamics seek to hide their own operation, because doing so makes them more effective (Foucault 1978: 86). We can view this tendency to disavow jealousy as another tactic in this vein. Individuals make better use of jealousy by hiding their personal motivations, and this tendency for jealousy to remain a private matter means that knowledge on how to handle jealousy is not distributed through social networks.

simultaneously making the direct mechanism of jealousy more effective for the individual by hiding their motivations, and at the same time increasing the culture-wide efficacy of jealousy by making it omnipresent yet invisible.

The third power dynamic associated with jealousy is purposefully inducing jealousy in one's partner for some sort of leverage (White 1980). Whereas the above mechanisms depend on jealousy being the responsibility of the jealous person's partner, this mechanism depends on the partner's actions being the source of jealousy. The desired outcome is the jealous emotion itself, either using its unpleasantness as a motivator or as proof of love. Alternatively, as suggested by the preceding paragraph, inducing jealousy may produce various advantages by exposing a partner's jealousy. In short, if jealousy is a response to a relationship threat, this mechanism is manufacturing a relationship threat to prove a point. The inducement mechanism depends on the ubiquity and inevitability of jealousy itself, as the easiest way to block it would be to simply not get jealous. This power mechanism is again a form of resistance per Foucault, since its utility is a side effect of one's partner having access to the direct mechanism.

Certainly, these power mechanisms associated with jealousy are not the only power dynamics within relationships, or even the most powerful ones. However, the domain of jealous power is interactions with outside parties, which lends it a wide scope. Also, the mechanisms of jealousy can elastically expand in any particular relationship to the point where jealousy is the defining factor in either intra-relationship or external dynamics.

### **The Scope of Jealous Power**

Let us now take a look at the scope of the direct power mechanism of jealousy, where a jealous person causes their partner to act or not act via expressions of jealousy.

Jealousy is essentialized as biological in popular culture (e.g. Buss 2000), so it is generally unassailable: you can accuse a person of being unreasonably jealous, but it is much more difficult to decry their jealousy as fabricated, strategic, or conditioned, though it may well be any of these. In other words, a person with a jealous response does not need to justify it, beyond pointing out their partner's actions that make the jealousy reasonable. The jealous reaction itself is thought of as inevitable, and indeed people who do not experience jealousy are doubted, or considered to be deficient in some way (Taormino 2008: 155,176).

Even though jealousy is firmly grounded in biology as an emotion, as a culture we are remarkably vague about forms jealousy actually takes. There are no direct physical symptoms associated with jealousy, in contrast to the red face of anger or the tears of sadness. "Turning green with jealousy" does not actually describe a solid physical response. This convenient obscurity means that jealousy can be experienced as a host of emotional responses such as fear, anger, betrayal, sadness, or insecurity, and it may or may not include a variety of physical symptoms (Easton 2010; Sharpsteen 1993; White and Mullen 1989: 9-11). This confusion around the jealous experience increases its

flexibility as a tool of interpersonal power. For example, a person could claim to be jealous when they are not, or when they feel threatened, depressed, or even controlling. Or a person could take actions motivated by jealousy while denying that they are jealous, chalking their behavior up to these other emotions.

We accept a wide range of triggers for jealousy. Jealousy is supposed to be the worst when one's partner has sex with someone else (unsurprisingly, the very thing that makes a person not monogamous), but it can also be triggered when one's partner looks at someone else the wrong way, flirts with someone else, spends too much time with someone else, or spends too much time away from the jealous person, among other things. These infractions are widespread enough and vague enough that they can be basically fabricated in the mind of the beholder, or jealousy can be triggered due to a suspicion instead of a direct action. In other words, jealousy needs no actual trigger: an imagined one is good enough (Benson 2008: 185; White and Mullen 1989: 187-194).

Similarly, while I have been discussing jealousy as if it only existed in committed romantic relationships, the relationship in question may also be imagined. People can and do get jealous when they are infatuated, whether or not the object of their affections feels the same way (White and Mullen 1989: 10).

People who are jealous have few limits on their actions. Because we consider jealousy to be a strong emotion, we license all sort of normally antisocial behavior to jealous people. Jealous people can furtively look through their partner's clothes or email, they can follow their partner, they can make public scenes, they can take reprisals against the third party, they can break up with their partner, and so on (see also Sharpsteen 1993 for similar reactions).

Even violence, while generally considered unreasonable or unacceptable, is a perfectly *understandable* course of action when jealous (Sharpsteen 1993). Researchers are well aware that jealousy is a major factor in domestic violence and homicide (Babcock et al 2004; Barash and Lipton 2001: 55; White and Mullen 1989: 218-222), and it is typically not difficult to find instances of jealous violence in one's own life or in the media (e.g. within a three-day span: Goodman 2010; Morrison 2010; Sanchez 2010). While they may be looked down on, jealous violence and other extreme jealous behaviors are conceivable, or "intelligible" in Butler's framework (Butler 1990). Because these behaviors are conceptually available, they are licensed to some extent, even though they may be viewed as destructive or irrational.

Notably, jealous violence is overwhelmingly inflicted on the jealous person's partner, rather than on the rival (White and Mullen 1989: 218-219). While this may seem initially illogical, it makes sense if we remember that the direct mechanism of jealousy is a tool of power between romantic partners: the escalation of that power to violence therefore also occurs between partners. In other words, jealous violence is the end resort of a person who is using jealousy's direct mechanism for control.

Indeed, jealous violence committed against one's partner or the third party is often excused by the courts and sympathetic juries, either through acquittal or the reduction of murder to manslaughter (White and Mullen, 1989: 231-235). Due to jealousy being viewed as relationship defense, laws have been passed that excuse killing a rival: into the 1970s it was legal in Georgia and Texas for a man to kill his wife's lover if he could catch them in the act (Miller 2002: 57-60). While these days the law might take reprisals against someone who commits violence while jealous, no one will be particularly surprised that they did it.

In addition, jealousy is often eroticized. Sometimes jealousy is seen as direct evidence of a person's love. Other times, someone will have sex with a third party specifically to make their partner jealous, fueling the sex with someone else's potential jealousy. Jealousy is consensually mined for erotic potential in BDSM play and in cuckolding scenes (White and Mullen 1989: 237-242), and jealousy is used by swingers to tease and arouse their primary partners (McDonald 2010). Power dynamics that are commonly eroticized are typically those dynamics that shape people's lives in a culturally ubiquitous manner: violence, gender, race, and so on. So jealousy's ready availability for eroticization points to its strength as a hegemonic power dynamic.

To recap, the triggers for jealousy vary widely and can be imagined, the relationship in question can be imagined, the jealous response itself is thought of as biological and inevitable while remaining conveniently vague, and the behavior associated with jealousy ranges from the entirely reasonable all the way up to stalking and homicide. In other words, jealousy is an extremely elastic power mechanism, available in pretty most relationships and licensing escalating reprisals. This is not to say that the direct mechanism of jealousy is all-powerful: jealous triggers and actions must fit into the conceptual framework of defending one's sexual or romantic interest against third parties. For example, this makes it difficult (though notably, not impossible) to claim jealousy when one's partner is spending too much time with a person of a gender they are not attracted to.

Note that the inverse mechanism of jealousy is not elastic to this extent. For example, one generally cannot conceive of violence against one's partner because they got jealous. Similarly, the inducement mechanism does not license violence: one does not commit violence in order to make one's partner jealous. The strongest actions available to either of these resistance forms are effectively either cheating or leaving the relationship.

It should be noted that a desire for power is not the only reason that people get jealous. For many people, jealousy is a conditioned and generally unavoidable response. For example, we see this in nonmonogamous subcultures, where people get jealous even when jealousy is a serious liability to their situation – more on this below.

### **Jealousy and Gender**

While the above mechanisms are available regardless of gender, jealousy is somewhat gendered. Interestingly, there is a gender reversal between the ideology and practice of

jealousy. Jealousy is generally considered to be an emotion that women are more likely to feel, even though men and women self-report feelings of jealousy at similar levels (Hansen 1985). At the same time men are much more likely to escalate the direct mechanism of jealousy to controlling behavior or violence. When feeling jealous, women are more likely to blame themselves and men are more likely to blame others. (Buunk and Dijkstra 2004)

This gender dissonance starts making sense if we remember that hiding or disavowing one's jealousy actually makes one's use of jealous power more effective, by blocking the "you're too jealous" inverse mechanism. By considering women to be more jealous, which is to say by exposing the jealousy of women, our culture effectively hampers women's ability to use the direct form of jealous power.

On average, men are the winners in jealous power dynamics and women lose big. As described above, men are seen as less jealous by the culture, but are more likely to blame others when they get jealous, and then escalate that jealousy into influence, control, or violence. Women are more likely to be discredited as overly jealous, but tend to blame themselves for jealousy and have less ability to escalate jealous feelings into power.

There is an exception: women are somewhat more likely to use the inducement mechanism, where a person specifically encourages jealousy in their partner to gain an advantage (White 1980). This would seem to contradict the hypothesis that jealousy on average augments the power of men over women, until we recall that the inducement mechanism is a form of resistance to the more powerful direct mechanism of jealousy. In other words, women make more effective use of jealousy inducement specifically because the men they are with are provided more effective use of jealousy itself. Women's higher propensity to engage in a resistance tactic is therefore evidence of this gendered power split, not an argument against it.

Given a long history in U.S. culture of women being restricted by monogamy much more than men, it is no surprise that the power arrangements of jealousy profit men more than women, even though jealous power is generally available across gender. Men are able to draw upon both this history and current gender inequalities in order to get an upper hand in jealousy dynamics within relationships.

We can expect that other forms of power imbalance within relationships (race, class, cisgender versus transgender, and so on) will also lead to unequal access to jealous power within relationships, though there may not be the same clear markers associating these forms of power with jealousy in the popular imagination, and very little research has been done on these intersections.

### **Jealousy and Monogamy**

Our culture's vision of monogamy is a competitive one. Hearts can be taken, lovers can be stolen, and all's fair in love and war. There is a certain relationship game here, predicated on assumptions of scarcity and a supposed hierarchy of desirability, where the

goal is to pair up with the best person possible before time runs out. Monogamy is of course the source of this scarcity: once someone is spoken for, they are off the market. But once in a relationship, a person's committed monogamy is also seen as the bulwark against the danger that their partner will take off with someone else.

In this competitive vision of monogamy, jealousy is a rational personal strategy: the emotional response to a threat to one's investment in a scarce commodity. In many ways, we view jealousy the same as the emotional response to a threat to one's house or job, only we notably do not have specific words for these other responses.

This threat-response definition of jealousy shows up in attempts to define jealousy for research purposes (Hansen 1985; White and Mullen 1989: 9-11). Also, Stenner and Rogers (1998) ran an empirical study of jealousy conceptualization which found that out of ten primary factors, eight were responses to a threat to one's romantic interest from rivals, including the four most common.

The inducement mechanism of jealousy in particular exposes the centrality of threat to our conception of jealousy. This power mechanism can actually be read as not involving jealousy at all: one partner purposefully develops a threat to the relationship (say, by expressing attraction to someone else) and the other partner responds by changing their behavior (White 1980). But because there is a threat in the form of a third party, we describe this as "making the partner jealous", because jealousy is our understanding of the response to such a threat.

My personal experience in nonmonogamous social circles is also that jealousy is a personal strategy of monogamy. I have a previously nonmonogamous friend who first felt jealous only after entering a monogamous relationship with a jealous partner. I have had various partners deploy jealousy as a tactic to shut down my other relationships in order to establish monogamy in their relationship with me. It is common polyamorous wisdom that we are conditioned to become jealous when faced with a romantic or sexual rival (that is, a threat to monogamy), and this continues even when a nonmonogamous arrangement means that rivals are not a factor (Anapol 1997: 49-51; Easton and Hardy 1997: 133-152; Taormino 2008: 153-156).

Compulsory monogamy's strategic positioning produces the power mechanisms of jealousy, by conceptualizing jealousy as a strategic response to a threat to one's monogamous relationship. In short, jealousy is an effect of monogamy, a personal strategy made profitable both by the micro-level effects of monogamous practice, and by the hegemonic regime of compulsory monogamy. Jealousy is not separable from monogamy, but rather is created by it.

Dominant cultural discourses would have us believe that biology produces jealousy, and we are monogamous because our natural jealousy forces us into monogamy. Jealousy is therefore the biological evidence of the naturalness of monogamy. But as is typical with essentialized power mechanisms, the actual cause and effect goes the other direction: we are jealous because we operate in a system of compulsory monogamy.

However, there is a grain of truth in these discourses: it can be quite difficult to be anything other than monogamous when jealousy is present. While the power mechanisms of jealousy can be used for various effects, most uses of jealous mechanisms tend to push people towards monogamy, because the prime strategic purpose of jealousy is to shut off one's partner from possible sex or romance with other people. In other words, the hegemonic concept of jealousy creates a framework of transgressions and socially sanctioned reprisals in order to produce conformity, and the conformity it produces is specifically monogamy. Even the inverse and inducement mechanisms of jealousy tend to assume that jealousy is always potentially present and generally unavoidable, driving home the idea that monogamy is inevitable.

As with any other conceptual power mechanism, jealousy has to be exercised to remain useful. Individuals will use jealousy strategically in their particular situations, which tends to reinforce the cultural hegemony of jealousy, which keeps jealousy available for strategic usage. This sort of micro/macro feedback is typical among cultural power mechanisms: for example, use of sexism for individual gain reproduces the culture-wide system of sexism, which it turn creates a situation where sexism is available to individuals.

By definition, nonmonogamy requires at least three people: one person involved with two other people. But of course, this is the archetypical situation that is supposed to trigger jealousy, with all its accompanying physical symptoms, strong emotions, potentially vicious reprisals, and cultural support. Because jealousy is culturally hegemonic and strongly conditioned in us, it is a rare person who can handle this situation without jealousy. Unless the two people at the ends of our basic nonmonogamous V can somehow quell or manage their jealousy, the V will fall apart and the nonmonogamy will effectively cease, reverting to de facto monogamy. And indeed, jealousy is cited as the primary difficulty in maintaining polyamorous or swinger relationships (Benson 2008: 185; De Visser and McDonald 2007; Easton and Hardy 1997: 133; Kaldera 2005: 38).

There are some exceptions, where the power mechanisms of jealousy can be used to fuel nonmonogamy. This can happen when jealousy is re-channeled via eroticization, as noted above, or when jealousy is used to fuel BDSM practice (Bauer 2010). But these are adaptive subversions of jealousy, and are relatively rare. In general, nonmonogamous subcultures are forced to deal with jealousy by deploying various personal and conceptual strategies to block or de-fang jealous power – to do otherwise is to revert to monogamy (Easton 2010; Mint 2010).

By implanting jealousy (effective anti-nonmonogamy) into individuals in particular relationships, the culture creates micro-level enforcement of compulsory monogamy, where people in a couple push each other towards monogamy via their jealousy. Indeed, making one's partner the enforcer of one's monogamy is perhaps the most effective point of cultural enforcement, better than self-enforcement or enforcement by the social milieu. Self-enforcement tends to be ineffective because people have a remarkable ability to revise their own conceptual apparatus when faced with a personally restrictive system

like compulsory monogamy. The social milieu can be ineffective because it is too easy to create private arrangements or countercultures that go against the cultural grain. The lesbian feminist subculture of the 70's and 80's is one example of a subculture that tried to promote nonmonogamy as a legitimate option: compulsory monogamy was seen as a tool of the patriarchy, and nonmonogamy was promoted as a way of building connections (Rosa 1994; Stelboun 1999; Vera 1999).

This may all seem quite circular, and indeed it is. Jealousy is present because it is personally strategic within a culture-wide system of compulsory monogamy. But at the same time, individual uses of jealousy (backed up by heavy conditioning) create partner-level enforcement of monogamy, which in turn maintains the hegemony of monogamy.

In other words, compulsory monogamy is a system of power that is self-propagating in particular ways, and one of those ways is jealousy. This sort of self-propagation mechanism is typical for culture-wide systems of conformity (per Foucault 1978: 99-100). According to a strict deconstructionist stance, there can be no current biological source for jealousy or monogamy, so the current source of this monogamy/jealousy complex is in fact its self-propagation, and the original source is the slow historical shift of cultural power mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

Jealousy is a crucial enforcement and propagation mechanism of modern monogamy, to the point where if jealousy did not exist, we could expect that monogamous people would swiftly invent something very similar. As mentioned in the introduction, we generally see jealousy posited as the biological cause of monogamy, but in fact the causality is reversed and jealousy is required by monogamy.

In jealousy, we see a particular example of the manner in which socially prescribed power mechanisms maintain themselves via a feedback loop between cultural ideology and personal actions. The hegemony of monogamy makes jealous power dynamics available for personal use, but at the same time the act of jealousy itself reinforces its prevalence in the culture, and requires a certain level of personal investment which can then translate into public advocacy for jealousy. We can expect that jealousy is not the only relationship dynamic that propagates monogamy. As I have described previously, the conceptual apparatus of infidelity is another (Mint 2004).

Examining the possibilities for power that surround jealousy also enables us to shed light on its contradictions. Jealousy can be either advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on the situation. It is both condoned and derided in the therapist's office, sometimes depending on the particular forms it takes. Jealousy is considered natural, ubiquitous, healthy, loving, and erotic, but at the same time people deny and hide their own jealousy. It is distressingly difficult to pin down exactly where jealousy ends and begins, or to draw lines between good and bad jealousy. All of these minor paradoxes increase the utility of jealousy as a channel for interpersonal power.

Of course, the same things that make jealousy useful also create a situation where it is dangerous. Jealousy is elastic in form, tends to hide itself, and is licensed to escalate to abuse, controlling behavior, and violence. As a result it is a significant factor in the nastier relationship dynamics, including domestic violence and stalking. In addition, jealousy plays into gendered relationship power dynamics that maintain male dominance in romantic relationships. The culture generally recognizes this dangerous aspect of jealousy, and perhaps this is the source of our ambivalence towards the emotion. But again there is paradox, in the largely unbroken wall of acceptance and licensing of jealousy in the media. Perhaps as a culture we do understand the abusive and violent outcomes of jealousy, but jealousy is just too *useful* for us to consider the possibility that it might be jettisoned.

The exception of course is nonmonogamous subcultures, where jealousy at the very least must be managed, and is often delegitimized, deconstructed, deprogrammed, or eroticized in order to hamstring the power dynamics packaged with its emotional content. Negotiated nonmonogamy requires that a certain truce be established, where all sides refrain from engaging in jealous power. We can expect that the ongoing innovations around jealousy in nonmonogamous communities (e.g. Mint 2010) will be exported for their utility back into monogamous relationships, and indeed this is already happening (e.g. May 2010; Nelson 2010). The counseling and research communities should look to nonmonogamous practitioners for jealousy techniques that can aid both monogamous and nonmonogamous relationships. Perhaps together we can create a more authentic version of monogamy, one which is predicated more on conscious intent and less on interpersonal struggle.

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