

Jealousy and Control

By Peppermint
2003-2006
Unpublished Manuscript

www.pepperminty.com
Please send any comments to:
pepomint@gmail.com

Jealousy presents an intractable problem for relationships, both monogamous and nonmonogamous. It is often a point of strife within relationships. It is also a frequent cause for breakups. It provides a convenient excuse for abusive partners. There is a persistent association of jealousy with violence. The stress, strain, and violence surrounding jealousy are hints that jealousy is a significant point of interpersonal power transfer.

This essay is an attempt to dismantle the jealousy mechanism, describe its underlying power structure, unearth its relationship to culture, and suggest methods of personal resistance.

The Construction of Jealousy

Jealousy is on its face a relation between three people. Specifically, it describes the feelings of one person towards a relationship between two other people, one of whom may be connected to the first in some way. It is one of the few words we have for describing a three-person romantic situation, and it carries a negative connotation. The dictionary defines jealousy as “fear of rivalry”, but that really does not do the term justice. In our competitive culture, jealousy is not just a fear of displacement, but it is also a gut-level emotion, a social narrative, and an interpersonal power mechanism.

Jealousy is considered to be an unavoidable, natural reaction. It is ostensibly based in the body, like most other social relationship mechanisms. This grounding of jealousy in the body happens in two places. The first is the idea that jealousy is a reaction to the physical behavior of a partner, which is woven into all of our jealous narratives. The second is the jealous person’s own physical reaction to the strong emotions involved. People who get jealous usually reflect this bodily grounding in some way: they will imagine their lover having sex with other people, or react particularly strongly to seeing their partner touched by someone else, or feel insecure in their own bodies as a result of their jealousy, or have physical symptoms similar to fear reactions. Social reactions incited by jealousy typically include a physical component, such as rules around the partner’s physical interactions, concerns about space, or physical violence.

Jealousy is given a certain license due to its status as an emotion. We construct emotions as natural, unavoidable, and to a certain degree positive. People rarely imagine that they can suppress their jealousy. Few recognize that jealousy can be learned or unlearned. We consider a person’s jealousy to be a natural and unchanging part of their emotional or physical being. In our culture, there is a distinct failure to understand that jealousy is dependent on a particular dynamic between two people. **Jealousy is essentialized: we imagine that jealousy is an inevitable physical reaction to a personal set of trigger circumstances.**

Jealousy is by definition a fear, of some certain situation that is either threatening or already occurring. This feared situation is conceptually necessary to jealousy. Because jealousy is a fear, we can say that the action of being jealous always expresses the

existence of a problem. In other words, jealousy in a relationship always constitutes a problem. The problem may be internal (the fear itself) or it may be external (the situation that one is afraid of), but there is always a problem. I use the term “negative emotions” to describe emotions such as jealousy which are considered to always signal a problem of some sort. Other negative emotions are fear, anger, and depression.

The big question in any analysis of a particular jealousy is, “whose problem is it?” If the problem is internal, then the jealous person is being somehow irrational and should try to change. If the problem is external, then the situation should be changed to fit their needs. Mainstream culture almost always considers jealousy to represent an external problem. Jealousy differs from the other negative emotions in this treatment: the other emotions are more likely to be considered an internal problem. In our culture, jealousy is usually considered to be the expression of an external problem, namely the potential situation that is making the jealous person afraid.

The person who expresses jealousy is making an implicit request. They are requesting that the frightening situation not happen. They are making this request of a person, and they consider themselves to have some sort of connection with this person, usually a relationship of some sort. The request is against some relationship between the jealous object and a third party. In other words, jealousy constitutes an implicit request by the jealous person made to the another person to curtail, avoid, or end their relationship with a third person. Note that jealousy often works in the realm of the potential, and so the relationship to be avoided could be imagined, nonsexual, or incidental.

Because jealousy is a request, and it is a problem, we can say that jealousy always includes some sort of pressure on the person who is in a relationship with the jealous person. This pressure is a control mechanism, whereby the jealous person seeks to change the behavior of someone else towards one or more third parties. People who talk about their jealousy will often frame it directly in terms of control, and discuss strategies for controlling the jealous object’s social contacts, their physical location, and their mental or emotional states. **Jealousy, once expressed, operates as an interpersonal control mechanism.**

This basic aspect of jealousy as an attempt at control holds true under all circumstances, because it is woven into our conceptualization of jealousy itself. Even if the jealous attempt is unsuccessful, it still is an attempt at control. Even if the person expressing the jealousy does not desire or ask for control, the request is implicit in the jealousy itself. Even if the jealous reaction is involuntary or unplanned, the jealousy itself still constitutes an attempt for control. (This forms an odd situation where the jealous reaction itself is trying to control both parties, in different ways.) Jealousy is conceptually tainted with control.

It is this relationship to control that makes jealousy such an issue for people, even those who do not desire control or who are attempting nonmonogamy. It is of course possible to be jealous without desiring or getting any control over another person, but an effort must be made to avoid or neutralize the taint of control. The historical and current

cultural constructions of jealousy are interwoven with interpersonal control, so the default social reactions to an episode of jealousy are reactions to an attempt at control. Control not only taints jealousy itself, but it also taints the social dynamic that surrounds jealousy.

Jealousy is constructed as the primary three-party relationship control mechanism. This is evidenced in the way the term can be used to apply to third parties that are not people. You can be jealous of a person's job, their time alone, their interests, and so on. Also, the relationship that the jealousy is based on can be incidental or completely imagined by the jealous person. Jealousy therefore does not require an exact set of circumstances. Rather, it is a flexible conceptual tool that can be used for a wide range of situations and desires. Therefore, jealousy stands alone as the relationship word (and conceptual apparatus) that describes the desire to control another's interactions with the outside world. **Jealousy is not just one control mechanism among any; conceptually, it is a primary interpersonal control mechanism in relationship contexts.**

The Jealous Dynamic

Though cheating is not required for jealousy, and jealousy is not required for cheating, they are still intimately linked at a conceptual level. Cheating is our negative situational term for a three-person situation, and jealousy is the corresponding negative emotional term for a three-person romance. Notably, they refer to different parts of the relationship V-structure: jealousy is part of a relationship with the original partner, and cheating describes the new relationship.

Jealousy forms its own set of interpersonal power dynamics within a relationship. These dynamics are similar to the dynamics around cheating, and the two tend to occur simultaneously or feed off of each other. However, because it is possible to have one without the other, the two dynamics are independent, though related. The actors in the jealousy narrative are the jealous person, the person the jealousy is about, and the (possibly imaginary) encroaching third party. Each role in this play provides opportunities for interpersonal power and pleasure. These opportunities encourage people to buy into the narrative itself.

The jealous person can get the other person to do things, or not do things, by expressing jealousy. Or, they can show the depth of their love by getting jealous, or add sexual excitement via an eroticized jealousy. The person the jealousy is directed towards can acquiesce to the jealousy, gaining the pleasures of surrender or the ability to demand things in turn. Or they can refuse the jealousy or play games with it, using the jealous person's own distress to control them. If the third party actually exists as a person, they gain a preferred power position (similar to the cheater's other lover, but less well-named) that gives them a measure of control over the relationship between the other two.

Jealousy is not simply a repressive or controlling mechanism. It also functions as a positive force, used to build and maintain relationships. Most of this is through the (often

false) sense of security that jealousy (or more specifically, acquiescence to jealousy) can bring about. However, the expression of jealousy itself can be used to reaffirm a person's love: the jealousy is seen as evidence of a strong emotional attachment. Through a constant back-and-forth play of jealousy interactions, a couple (or group) can provide frequent reaffirmation of love and attraction.

In a similar manner, jealousy is used to reaffirm a partner's sexual attractiveness. Worry about a partner being stolen is used as evidence of that partner's erotic potential, and specifically, as evidence of the jealous person's erotic feelings towards them. This mechanism is one part of the eroticisation of jealousy. The other part is a direct eroticisation of the control aspect of jealousy. Together, these two mechanisms use jealousy to create sexuality.

However, the manner in which jealousy is used to build relationships and sexuality does not remove the taint of control. If anything, it makes the control more pernicious. When jealousy is built into erotic dynamics and relationship structures, it becomes impossible to imagine them without it, and without the control it brings with it. Jealousy acts as a gateway to bring control into relationships and sexuality, and as a force that prevents people in relationships from releasing up control over their partner(s).

I have been discussing jealousy by itself, but really it is inseparable from the system of monogamy. They need each other. Jealousy pushes a relationship towards monogamy. Monogamy creates the possibility of jealousy by providing the (often false) expectation of sexual fidelity. The assumed control of monogamy is often backed up by the active control of jealousy. **Jealousy, monogamy, and cheating are all part of the same system of social relations, which I call the monogamy complex.**

In a different essay, I described how the cheating dynamic is used as an enforcement arm of monogamy. Jealousy forms the second major enforcement tool. Cheating operates in the social arena, forcing behavior through social pressure. Jealousy operates inside relationships, forcing behavior through direct pressure from one partner against another. Of the two, jealousy is much more effective, and its elasticity provides access to much greater levels (and more varied forms) of control, and to stronger bonds of monogamy.

Jealousy is a natural outgrowth of monogamy, and there are echoes of monogamy in any instance of jealousy. It is crucial that we understand jealousy and cheating as part of the conceptual fabric of monogamy, if we wish to alter or reform them.

Jealousy and Culture

Jealousy is heavily legitimized throughout our culture. On the media level, it is almost universally portrayed as a positive or reasonable force, protecting relationships from outside threats. Try to think of a movie or television program where a character was jealous and their jealousy was unfounded. I can only come up with a handful. Indeed,

the entire suspense genre is built around jealousy, and it depicts jealousy as almost always justified by actual cheating or a violent threat to the relationship. Notably, jealousy is almost always used to trigger violence in these depictions. **Our media constructs jealous fears as righteous, required, violent, and above all justified.**

On the personal level, people do actually judge jealousy situations, but that judgement seems to miss the act of being jealous itself, instead focusing on the reasons behind the jealousy. Typically, people will divide jealous reactions into reasonable and unreasonable episodes. However, they are not judging the jealous reaction itself. Rather, they are doing an evaluation of the reasons behind the jealousy, both the potential situation feared by the jealous person and the implicit request or demand carried within the jealousy. There is rarely any judgement of the extent or the severity of the jealous person's behavior. There is almost never any discussion on the validity or usefulness of jealousy itself. The emotion of jealousy is implicitly accepted.

If the reasons behind the jealousy are acceptable to social group observers, then there are few judgements on what form the jealous behavior takes. Actions that are usually considered unreasonable suddenly start sounding reasonable, for example: rudeness, emotional outbursts, stalking, breaking up, and of course actual physical violence. Our culture gives a large amount of license to people in the throes of a jealous fit. This license stems directly from the highly legitimized place of jealousy within the culture.

To illustrate, let us compare jealousy to anger. These two emotions have a lot in common. Both are gut-wrenchingly strong emotions. Both are entirely appropriate (and useful) in certain select situations, but inappropriate in the most situations. Both constitute a problem, in the manner discussed above. Both can be excuses for violence. The two emotions are similar in operation. Indeed, it is often impossible to tell the difference between them simply from the emoting person's behavior. The primary differences between these two emotions reside in their social construction, and our cultural reactions to them.

Displays of anger make people afraid. Displays of jealousy do not, unless they are accompanied by anger or violence. Anger is generally socially unacceptable, especially in public or entertaining settings. Jealousy is socially acceptable. Anger is something that we expect people to manage internally, as evidenced by the existence of anger-management courses. There are no jealousy-management courses, outside of poly circles. Jealousy is not something to be managed; it is something to be obeyed, both by the jealous person and the person the jealousy is aimed at. In short, our culture recognizes anger itself as a problem. In short, our culture recognizes anger itself as a problem. The emotion of jealousy is not itself recognized as a problem, though it is seen as stemming from a problem, as discussed above.

This brings us back to our central question: "Whose problem is it?" According to our culture, it is not the problem of the jealous person. It is the problem of the person that the jealousy is directed towards. A significant amount of personal and social license is created this way, especially if we remember that the relationship between the two people

could be entirely imagined by the jealous person. Typically this social license lies unused, or it is used in the positive ways discussed earlier. However, it is often used to coerce, influence, intimidate, batter, and control. The extreme flexibility of the construction of jealousy allows it to be applicable to many sorts of situation, making it possible to bring these sanctions in almost any relationship and sometimes even outside of relationships. The social construction of jealousy is a hole in our culture's general proscription against violence: social, emotional, and physical. **Jealousy permits violence.**

This connection between jealousy and violence is a major concern. One hundred years ago, domestic violence was generally acceptable, to the point where a pre-existing relationship could be used as a defense in the courtroom. It is still somewhat acceptable today, though illegal. Our social construction of jealousy is a remnant of the time when it was perfectly reasonable and proper to beat your woman. Jealousy is one of the central ways modern domestic violence is justified, though it is rarely the actual reason for the violence. Control is almost always the reason for violence of any sort. Jealousy merely provides the excuse. Due to the legitimization of jealous violence, jealousy is sometimes not just an emotional attempt at control, but also a physical one.

Most people who get jealous do not commit physical violence, of course. However, we can place jealous people on a spectrum, with one extreme being people who get jealous but internalize it or otherwise render it harmless, and the other extreme being people who commit violence in the name of jealousy, either against their partners, against unrequited loves, or against third parties. Really, we are judging jealous reactions here, not jealous people, so it is possible for people to move up or down the spectrum or to act at different points in the spectrum in different situations.

Women bear the brunt of jealousy-associated violence. This is not because men are more likely to get jealous than women. It is because tools of social control are generally only used along pre-existing lines of power. Men in our culture have greater conceptual access to violence. They have greater financial resources and greater social recognition at all levels. Also, the history and cultural understanding of domestic violence is gendered: men are understood to inflict it, and women are understood to be its victims. (Note that this construction is flexible enough to easily allow for same-gender domestic violence, because only one of the two gender conditions needs to be satisfied.)

Jealousy itself is gendered, though it is considered to reside in both men and women. However, our cultural understanding of jealousy differs depending on the gender of the person getting jealous. In the case of women, we understand jealousy to be an outgrowth of the general competition between women for men. In the case of men, jealousy becomes an aspect of ownership. This means that men and women tend to experience jealousy differently. Men are more likely to experience jealousy as a need for personal control or social recognition. Women are more likely to experience jealousy as insecurity, need, or self-abnegation. Notably, the construction of women's jealousy includes pain on the part of the woman. Of course there is a lot of crossover, and in many cases it goes exactly the opposite way, simply because gender construction is more

fluid than even gender identification (which is already pretty fluid). However, these certain types of jealousy take on a gendering of their own. Consider the connotation of the phrases “the jealous girlfriend” and “the jealous boyfriend”, and the difference should become apparent.

Jealousy is anti-feminist on two different levels. The gendered construction of jealousy is negative towards women, whether they are on the giving or receiving end. More importantly, jealousy is a primary excuse for violence against women. This is not to say that individual women do not get anything out of jealousy. As described above, they have myriad opportunities for power, pleasure, and control within the monogamy/cheating/jealousy complex. **It is the overall cultural construction and experience of jealousy that hurts women as a class.**

The problem of women and jealousy mirrors a larger problem of control within relationships. Control is woven throughout our culture, but it particularly strong within sexual relationships. This is for a number of reasons. First, the construction of relationships in our culture can be described as obsessive-compulsive, where each partner in the relationship constantly considers and plays off of the other. Second, the sheer amount of time partners spend with each other inevitably leads to a large amount of influence between partners. Third, relationships form a basic unit of control within the culture, a relic of the time when relationships were really little kingdoms, each one ruled by the husband. Fourth, relationships are one of the primary sites for larger system of cultural control that focuses on the mind/body overlap of sexuality. Jealousy is one of the primary mechanisms for social control in these relationships, as the strongest enforcement piece of the monogamy complex. It forms the basis for much of the influence that flows between partners in relationships.

Our strong mixture of control and relationships is damaging on a number of levels. In addition to simply restricting freedom and aiding violence, true control is typically in opposition to the practice of actual love. (Note that the voluntarily ceded control of BDSM is not true control in this sense. Control over someone who wants to be controlled is very different from control over someone who would rather not be controlled.) Control and caring do not go well together, nor do control and sharing. Heavy power dynamics destabilize relationships, for the simple reason that they are not fun, at least for the person on the wrong end of the dynamic. There is irony here: **jealousy is deeply wound into our cultural constructions of love, but our relationships can be limited and damaged by the taint of control implicit to jealousy. In this way, we are set up for failure and pain.**

We need to look for solutions to the problem of jealousy. Polyamorous people have already undertaken the project of dealing with jealousy at a personal level. However, there is a larger project of dealing with jealousy at a cultural level. We need to expose its problematic nature, draw a link between jealousy and control and another link between jealousy and violence, and work against the strong legitimization of jealousy by providing a counterpoint to the constant refrain of jealous righteousness. The goal here is

to reduce jealousy to the level of other emotions, not necessarily to eliminate it or pathologize it.

Unfortunately, we can expect that the wholesale excavation of jealousy will begin only when jealousy has become inconvenient for people to continue. We can already see this happening in poly circles and other nonmonogamous movements, which provide examples of the ways in which people dismantle jealous control when they have a strong incentive to do so. These examples provide reformulations of jealousy, which can be applied to all relationships.

Jealousy and Polyamory

The de-legitimization of jealousy is already well underway in the polyamorous community. This is no surprise. Jealous control is a major enforcement mechanism of monogamy, and it is therefore the strongest blockade to nonmonogamous arrangements. Giving in to jealousy in a nonmonogamous situation often entails a return to de facto monogamy, or at least a step in that direction. Any project to significantly alter or escape monogamy will inevitably involve a significant alteration of the construction of jealousy, or its outright removal. We can expect that polyamorists will employ a number of creative tactics to defuse jealousy and its associated control.

The mechanisms that make jealousy effective for control form a chain, and if the chain is broken at any place, the overall jealousy mechanism falls apart. In order to operate effectively, jealousy needs to be seen as natural and inevitable, it needs to be legitimized, it needs to place the onus of responsibility on the person the jealousy is directed towards, it needs to remain inherently problematic, and it needs to grant jealous people wide license in their actions. So we can expect that tactics which seek to disempower jealous control will try to cast jealousy as avoidable, pathological, illegitimate, or unproblematic, or they will move the onus of responsibility onto the jealous person or the overall relationship, or they will remove jealous license. A particular anti-control tactic can be effective by addressing one of these areas. Because there are multiple points of weakness, poly people have developed a variety of approaches to the jealousy problem.

First off, poly people have created a new word, “compersion”. It is defined as the joy one feels at the interactions of a lover with another one of their lovers. Most poly people consider it to be the opposite of jealousy, because it describes a positive three-way relationship instead of a negative one. The creation and widespread usage of this word is important, because we have actually acknowledged that there is an alternative to experiencing a jealous reaction. This acknowledgement is unheard of in the mainstream culture. By making it, we are implicitly judging the existence of jealousy itself. By making it a positive word, we have implicitly judged jealousy to be negative.

There are many people in the poly community who have attempted to sidestep the problem of jealousy by changing the focus from the emotion to the relationship. They claim that jealousy is not negative or problematic, but is rather exposing a deeper problem in the relationship or in the jealous person’s attitude towards the relationship.

Like monogamous people, they are dividing jealousy into reasonable and unreasonable categories, and judging the reasons behind the jealousy instead of the jealousy itself. The answer to “whose problem is it” depends on what sort of problem it is. However, their relationship to jealousy is still fundamentally altered, because the eventual goal is to remove the jealousy, either by fixing the relationship or altering the person’s attitude. Towards this goal, the jealousy needs to be managed, understood, and debated, instead of simply placated. The onus of responsibility has changed from its location in monogamous jealousy, moving from the person the jealousy is directed towards to the relationship as a whole. There is also recognition of the fundamental impossibility of continuing the jealousy within the relationship over the long term. While this technique deals with jealousy directly instead of trying to hide or contain it, jealousy still retains much of its power to upset various relationships in this dynamic, so it can be a rocky road to travel.

The authors of *The Ethical Slut* go even further. That book and others recommend that poly people endeavor to “own their jealousy”, meaning that they should take full responsibility for their emotion and not expect others to behave differently to accommodate them. The eventual goal of owning your jealousy is to be rid of it entirely, by containing its effects until it is unlearned through experience. In some ways this is unrealistic, because there is no clear line between a person’s emotion and their interactions within relationships, so their emotions will always affect the behavior of others. Much as we would like to pretend otherwise, no one has perfect emotional control. People’s emotions are always visible to others to some degree, so an emotion will inevitably affect social interaction. However, the general intent of owning your jealousy is to move the onus of responsibility onto the jealous person, and move it off of the relationship itself and off of the other person or people within the relationship. This is effective for setting boundaries within the relationship, but does nothing to address the emotional or control needs underlying jealousy. If the jealous person cannot fully shed their jealousy on their own, it haunts the relationship.

Some poly people are taking the route of direct de-legitimization. Jealousy is seen as a direct enemy of successful relationships, to be avoided whenever possible. A person’s ability to successfully hold poly relationships is judged by the amount of jealousy they feel. Poly people will refuse to date (or break up with) people who exhibit jealousy or controlling behavior associated with jealousy. In many poly relationships and social contexts, jealousy ceases to be a legitimate motivator. Instead it is seen as irrational or pathological. Poly people will sometimes use the word “envy” to describe the negative feeling associated with a real slight or inequality, in order to jettison the word “jealousy” entirely. While this strategy does succeed in quickly motivating people away from jealousy (by turning it into pure liability), it can be personally brutal, it refuses to recognize and handle jealousy that does exist, and it tends to lead people to internalize jealousy or hide it behind other mechanisms of control.

These various anti-jealousy tactics can be divided into two separate classes. Some seek to eliminate or replace jealousy as an operating mechanism. Others seek a new answer to the question, “Whose problem is it?” This second mechanism moves the locus of

responsibility, effectively destroying the link between jealousy and control. In each tactic, the fundamental control aspect of jealousy is eliminated or weakened considerably. The central piece of control so affected is the control over a partner's sexual and relationship partners. However, jealousy is a very elastic mechanism, and the control it affords extends throughout the relationship and the social sphere. As the main enforcement tool of monogamy, jealousy is also responsible for the social control and cultural narratives associated with the monogamy complex.

Any successful attempt to disempower jealousy or to break the link between jealousy and control will necessarily unravel a significant portion of the control within relationships. We can think of jealousy as the linchpin in a whole spiderweb of control and meaning. Remove jealous control, and the whole web starts to unravel. Poly people who use these tactics are not just affecting jealous control. Rather, they are inescapably engaged in the larger project of removing control itself from relationships.

There is a deeper relationship between polyamory and control that we are uncovering here. Polyamory necessarily removes control from relationships, specifically at least some of the control around who a partner can sleep with. This is true even in the cases of polyfidelity or primaries with vetoes. Getting rid of this first form of control tends to have a domino effect as other related forms of control crumble, because they are based in the monogamy complex and enforced through jealousy. This loss of control can easily extend into any part of the relationship or into the social sphere. For example, poly people tend to have more personal control over their time, social lives, and finances. Polyamorous relationships tend to be less controlling than monogamous relationships, not just because the people in them are more liberal or open-minded, but because the loss of control is a direct result of the re-conceptualizations they perform in order to escape the strictures of jealousy. There are of course exceptions to this rule, and some poly relationships are more controlling than some monogamous relationships, but the general rule holds: **polyamory tends towards a loss of control.**

We should therefore not only think of polyamory as a movement to establish multiple relationships or multiple sex partners. It is also a movement to obtain freedom and give up control within relationships, or at least to replace the old forms of body-based control with new discursive mechanisms. These two goals are inextricably linked due to the current construction of monogamy and jealousy. Having multiple partners also means giving up other forms of control, and relationships that lack strong interpersonal control tend towards forms of non-control similar to those found in nonmonogamy, up to and including nonmonogamy itself.

There is a certain power vacuum created by this unraveling of the monogamy complex, and poly people have been emphasizing other forms of control in order to fill in the gap. Some of these new mechanisms are explicit negotiation, long-term rules of behavior, and an emphasis on honesty and disclosure. Notably, none of these mechanisms are embodied. In other words, there is no supposedly physical basis to these methods of control. Instead of belonging to the realm of physicality, they belong to the realm of discourse (interpersonal communication). **The move from body-based emotional**

control mechanisms to discursive control inside relationships is a revolution in itself, because it destroys a locus of mind/body power transfer.

Mind/body loci are very powerful tools of socialization and control, because they allow social power to be translated into physical reactions, which can then be used to produce or transmit forms of social power. Social power can therefore be spread through a person without their understanding or consent, and without giving them the power to stop it if they so choose. Sex is the mother of all mind/body control mechanisms in our culture, because it is simultaneously physical, emotional, and mental, and because we have been developing forms of explicitly sexual power for the last couple of centuries. This is why sex is everywhere in our culture, and why so many forms of power (including compulsory monogamy, sexism, and heterosexism) are supposedly based in sex or sexual physicality. Denying or destroying some piece of sex-based power is important because it simultaneously frees our sexuality from power and frees us from power transmitted through our sexuality. Polyamory is doing this by disempowering jealousy: it is giving us tools to manage, discuss, and negotiate our relationships instead of being forced into control situations by our own physical and emotional needs.

The strong poly reaction against jealous control is telling us a number of things about polyamory. Poly people have apparently recognized that a relationship with less control can be more fulfilling than a relationship with more control. They are taking apart jealous control as part of the project of dismantling monogamy itself, with the result that other forms of control are necessarily being removed or replaced as well. Polyamory itself is also necessarily challenging a major piece of mind/body social power by forcing people away from the physicality-centered arenas of monogamous power and jealous control, and it is moving towards a more discursive model of relationship dynamics.