“You Had Sex With Who?”: Males’ Expression of Counter-Jealousy in Heterosexual and Homosexual Relationships

Hannah Brown
Cory Conzelman
Samantha Deacon
Ariana Famouri
Chelsey Hanle
Chapman University
Abstract

Although we would like to believe that every relationship is perfect, that two people who find each other and want to be together will never cheat, lie, or stray away from their partner, this is not the case. Our lives are filled with relationships, some that benefit us greatly, and some that hurt us. In some relationships, infidelity occurs, an act that can destroy a relationship, lead to negative emotions, and induce strong jealous feelings. Infidelity can be homosexual or heterosexual, for the person can cheat with someone of the same sex as their partner or someone of a different sex. This paper hypothesized that males would be more jealous following heterosexual infidelity than homosexual infidelity. It predicted that they would use a common type of jealousy, called counter-jealousy, which involves flirting or involving oneself with another partner in order to create jealous feelings in one’s partner. The results of this study were inconclusive due to a limited number of participants. The hypothesis was not supported, but the research found that there was not a significant difference between the amount of jealousy used following homosexual and heterosexual infidelity.
Some form of jealousy can be found in many relationships, regardless of the commitment, stability, or sexual orientation of the couple. Jealousy can be a natural response to infidelity in romantic relationships due to the feelings of betrayal and distrust that can arise. If unfaithfulness occurs, jealousy is evoked due to the break of basic trust that bonded the two individuals together. This can lead to arguments, separation, and/or the eventual termination of the relationship. Jealousy is a significant and recurring issue for many couples, as it arises in 87% of romantic relationships (Brainerd, Hunter, Moore, & Thompson, 1996). In relationships, “jealousy is generated by a threat to, or the actual loss of, a valued relationship with another person, due to an actual or imagined rival for one’s partner’s attention” (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkestra, 2007, p. 176). Jealousy is expressed in a variety of ways, and can be detrimental to relationships depending upon the strategy used by the particular individual.

There is a great deal of research with regarding to how couples communicate jealousy and how it is expressed between romantic partners. This study aims to focus on the phenomenon of counter-jealousy, and the likelihood of its use as a communication method to cope with the unpleasant feelings of jealousy. Guerrero, Hannawa, and Babin (2011) defined counter-jealousy as flirting or talking to another person in order to evoke jealousy from the partner, trying to force the partner to experience similar feelings of jealousy, or expressing interest in another person. It is an attempt to make one’s partner experience the same feelings of jealousy felt by the other following an act of infidelity. Although communication scholars have thoroughly researched the effects of jealousy in relationships and how it is expressed, there is little to no research on the use
of counter-jealousy following an act of infidelity. This study aims to explore the frequency of males’ usage of counter-jealousy as a way of communicating his or her feelings of betrayal caused by their partner and his or her infidelity.

**Review of Literature**

Jealousy is a feeling that can be either positive or negative. Romantic jealousy can be defined as a variety of “thoughts, feelings, and actions which follow threats to self-esteem and/or threats to the existence or quality of the relationship, when those threats are generated by the perception of a real or potential attraction between one's partner and a (perhaps imaginary) rival” (White, 1981, p. 24). White also found people commit infidelity for a variety of reasons such as dissatisfaction, commitment issues from their partner, or attraction to someone else. This study found that men were most likely to think that their partner cheated due to a perceive lack of commitment in the relationship. On the other hand, according to White (1981), females viewed sex as the biggest reason why infidelity occurs. Females commonly believe that their unfaithful partner desired more sex than he was getting from the relationship, and therefore sought it elsewhere. While women commit infidelity because of dissatisfaction in the relationship as a whole, men tend to venture out of their committed relationships due to lack of sexual satisfaction with their partner (White, 1981).

Jealousy has a very negative connotation in today’s society. Some unfortunate results associated with jealousy in relationships include low self-esteem, impulsive and irrational thoughts, depression, termination of relationship, and abuse (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2006). The research study of Yates (2000) found that men experience more jealousy because of their uncertainty in what is expected of them in their relationships and their roles in the world. Men strive to be masculine, protective, and an essential part of their partner’s life. If their partner
cheats on them, placing them in a subordinate role, they feel they have not met their goals, and
will therefore become jealous. However, jealousy is not necessarily always a negative emotion,
and at times is even found to benefit relationships. Although jealousy can often lead to the
aforementioned negative results, it can also “signal that romantic partners care for each other and
value their relationship enough to protect it” (Barelnds and Dijkstra, 2006, p. 185). Many
associate jealousy with low relationship satisfaction; however, studies like those by Barelds and
Dijkstra have also shown that jealousy can, in fact, add to the stability of a relationship.
Nevertheless, research has yet to determine if jealousy is the cause of a stable relationship, or if it
can be the destruction of one. Jealousy’s role in a relationship is determined both by how it is
portrayed and how it is responded to by both partners involved.

Although jealousy can often destroy a relationship, this is not always the intention.
Sheets, Fredendall, and Claypool (1997) found that those who cheat are not necessarily looking
to find another mate or to terminate their current relationship with their partner. Instead, in many
cases they are simply attempting to regain their partner’s attention. However, the study does not
confirm whether these tactics are effective or if they actually induce the desired behavior. Even if
it is not the partner’s intention to cause problems, they often do. Knox, Breed, and Zuesman
(2007) found that men who are cheated on feel a loss of control in their relationship. After
surveying almost 300 undergraduates through the use of a questionnaire, these researchers found
that males often turn to alcohol or drugs in times of despair that follow a partner’s infidelity.
Almost half of the men surveyed admitted to using drugs or alcohol when they felt jealous in a
relationship. These inhibitors affect their rational thinking and therefore can lead to the use of
reactive jealousy or rash actions. In agreement with Knox et al. (2007), Sheets et al. (1997)
contributed the idea that men who feel like they have less power than their partner in the
MALES’ EXPRESSION OF COUNTER JEALOUSY

relationship are much more likely to express jealousy. They think this expression will help establish equality and lead to overall relationship satisfaction. In fact, the majority of men surveyed think that jealousy can be seen as an expression of love to their partner. This supports the idea that jealousy can be seen as a positive emotion and does not always lead to negative results.

Types of Jealousy

Researchers have divided the idea of jealousy into several categories, determined by both why the jealousy occurs and what the person does to show it. Barends and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007) found three types of jealousy commonly expressed in relationships. These types of jealousy can occur due to infidelity, but can also be present in other aspects of the relationship as well. The three types are reactive, possessive, and anxious jealousy. Reactive jealousy is defined as a partner intentionally seeking another for sex or flirtation. Possessive jealousy occurs when one partner wants to keep the other to him or herself, not allowing the partner to meet others of the opposite sex. Anxious jealousy, when the partner continually pictures the infidelity and thinks about their partner with another, results in great distress and paranoia. Anxious jealousy can occur following actual infidelity, but can also occur simply in the partner’s mind as they imagine infidelity that is not even taking place. The study found that of the three distinct types of jealousy, anxious jealousy is most likely to ruin a relationship. In contrast, when reactive jealousy was present the relationship benefited. The participants saw this type of jealousy as a positive action, for it showed that their partner was desirable and they therefore should appreciate the relationship they had currently. Overall, reactive jealousy leads to positive results and strengthens the relationship. On the other hand, there was no clear evidence as to what possessive jealousy did to a relationship. Ultimately, the study found that both genders admitted
to using all three types of jealousy in their past or present relationships. Women reported higher usage of both reactive and anxious jealousy, but the level of possessive jealousy was equal for both genders. Research agrees that jealousy can be harmful or beneficial to a relationship. But the way in which the jealousy is expressed ultimately determines the outcome.

As stated earlier, in some relationships jealousy can be seen as positive. However, other research has found that those who express their emotions in the form of counter-jealousy can be doing so in a negative and revengeful way. Counter-jealousy is similar and can be used interchangeably with reactive jealousy, one of the three types defined by Barends and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007). Counter-jealousy can also be called an attempt at manipulation, when one “tries to make the partner jealous or induce guilt” (Guererro et al., 2011, p. 226). The use of counter-jealousy differs based upon the person’s gender. Aylor and Dainton (2001) found sex to be the strongest predictor of the jealousy communication style used. Males will more commonly use this strategy as an attempt to maintain their masculinity.

**Males and Jealousy**

Males experience both heterosexual and homosexual infidelity. However, studies have shown that heterosexual males will be more jealous if their partner cheats with another male than with a female. Weiderman and LaMar (1998) conducted three separate studies that surveyed college students about hypothetical situations of infidelity with someone they are committed to. These researchers used the word “upset” in place of “jealous,” in order to not prime thoughts of jealousy within the respondents. The study found that heterosexual males would be less upset with their partners engaging in same gender infidelity primarily because of the possibility of conception and questioning of paternity. This relates to what researchers are referring to as evolutionary theory. Because women are able to conceive another man's child, this forces her
male partner to question his masculinity and power in the relationship should she have sexual relations with another man. Genetically, men are determined to create offspring in order to pass along their genes and carry on their family name. They therefore tend to feel jealous when they are forced to question whether or not they have created a child. If they are unsure whether or not a child belongs to them, this can lead to both shame and embarrassment. Confer and Cloud (2011) found that while men feared issues of fatherhood of a possible child, women feared abandonment, an emotion that was not mentioned at all by the men who participated in the survey. Weiderman and LaMar’s (1998) study also found that female-to-female interaction is widely seen as acceptable because of the stereotypical eroticism connected with the act. Men would prefer to picture their female partner with another woman, a thought more appealing than picturing her with another man. Men see homosexual cheating as less threatening, and thus causes men less stress and in turn results in less jealousy.

Expression of Jealousy

There is also research regarding the expressions of jealousy that follow their partner’s infidelity. Paul and Galloway (1994) surveyed university students on the responses they would have following unfaithfulness. Students listed five categories of responses: “response to rival, response to partner, actions to maintain relationship, actions to prevent again, and responses to attract someone else” (Paul and Galloway, 1994, p. 207). Most men stated they would not feel anger toward the rival; most of them stated they would never seek interaction with the rival, and would in fact do nothing in that category. Instead, men who had been cheated would direct their anger toward their own partner. They would attempt to release their frustration and inform their partner of their anger and disappointment. The men would do little to prevent it from happening again and agreed that they would not become more possessive of their partner following the
infidelity. Instead, the majority of men stated that in response to their anger, they would actively seek out another partner. In order to do this, 62% of men claimed they would go to a club or social venue to find another woman. In addition, 52% of male participants claimed they would make an effort to look more attractive on a regular basis in order to obtain the attention of others.

Conclusively, the majority of men in this study agreed that if they were cheated on they would feel betrayed and angry at their partner. In order to even the score, and keep themselves available to new relationships, they admitted they were likely to partake in reactive or counter jealous acts.

A common aim of jealousy is the desire to reconcile with the partner who committed infidelity. This person could feel betrayed, experience a loss of trust, and want to invoke a similar emotional experience on their partner. However, this is not the only reason jealousy occurs. The six jealousy goals include “maintaining the primary relationship, preserving self-esteem, reducing uncertainty about the primary relationship, reducing uncertainty about the rival relationship, reassessing the primary relationship, and equity restoration through retaliation” (Aylor and Dainton, 2001, p 373). The gender of the person experiencing the jealousy is not the sole predictor of what type of jealousy is used or what goal is attempting to be accomplished. Jealousy varies based upon the relationship status, the individual personalities of the partners, their cultural backgrounds, and personal relationship expectations (Aylor & Dainton, 2001). This study found that the gender of the individual was not a predicting factor of the goals he or she wanted to accomplish but instead argues that the goals are similar for both sexes in the relationship.
Rationale

Based on the past research on jealousy within relationships, many conclusions can be drawn. It is not uncommon for a man to express his jealousy following an act of infidelity. Although jealousy can lead to positive results, in many cases, using destructive forms of jealousy is more common and ruins relationships. Jealousy can be especially prevalent in a heterosexual relationship according to findings of the evolutionary theory and stress caused from losing control of the relationship and questions of paternity. Men express their jealousy in a variety of ways. A great deal of damage can be caused to a relationship when the male tries to evoke similar feelings of jealousy in his partner. This can be done through manipulative attempts, commonly labeled as reactive or counter-jealousy. The majority of men admit they have used counter-jealousy in response to a partner’s infidelity. This type of jealousy is predicted to occur more often following heterosexual infidelity due to the insecurity that it causes the male partner. Therefore, this study was enacted with the hope of discovering the prevalence of male usage of counter-jealousy in relationships.

H1: Males are more likely to use counter-jealousy to express jealousy if their partners engage in heterosexual infidelity than if their partners engage in homosexual infidelity.

Method

Participants

There were 36 total participants in this study, all of whom were male. Of these, 72.2% were Caucasian, 19.4% were Asian, 2.8% were Hispanic, 2.8% were Middle Eastern, and 2.8% were Black/African American. Seventy-five percent of participants had been in a romantic relationship in the past year, while 25% had not. When taking the survey, 41.7% stated they were
currently involved in a romantic relationship, whereas 58.3% were not. Participants currently involved in a relationship were asked how long (in months) their current relationships had lasted ($M = 61.80, SD = 106.47$). When asked if they had ever cheated on a romantic partner, 69.4% said they had never cheated on a romantic partner, and the other 30.6% said they had cheated on a romantic partner. Participants were also asked to describe, on a scale of one to seven, their current level of sexual experience and reported to be relatively experienced ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.82$). It was not stated whether or not the participants’ relationships were homosexual or heterosexual.

Participants were then asked if they had cheated on a romantic partner, was it with someone of the same-sex? Exactly 50% of respondents answered no, 2.8% answered yes, and 47.2% stated the question was not applicable to them. When asked if they had cheated on a romantic partner with someone of the opposite-sex, 27.8% responded yes, 25% responded no, and again, 47.2% responded that the question was not applicable to them. Next, participants were asked if a romantic partner had ever cheated on them; 44.4% said yes, 36.1% said no, and 19.4% stated they did not know. When asked if a romantic partner had cheated on them, was it with someone of the same sex, 2.8% responded yes, 58.3% responded no, 13.9% were not sure, and 25% stated the question was not applicable to them. Lastly, participants were asked if a partner had cheated on them, was it with someone of the opposite-sex. Nearly half of all respondents, 47.2%, said yes, 16.7% responded no, 11.1% responded they were not sure, and again 25% said the question was not applicable to them.

**Procedures**

In order to collect data, an anonymous IRB-approved, online survey was sent out via email to willing participants. In order to obtain these email addresses, requests were made to
MALES' EXPRESSION OF COUNTER JEALOUSY

classmates of the researchers, allowing participants to voluntarily give their email addresses. This constituted both volunteer and convenience sampling. In addition to emails being sent to participants, social media was also used to recruit participants. Each researcher posted on some form of social media (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) the survey link requesting the help and participation of their friends. The researchers also asked their friends to share the link, creating a form of a snowball sampling as well. Once an individual agreed to participate, they followed the link to a Survey Monkey survey where they gave informed consent before beginning the survey, stating that they were at least 18 years old. Once the survey began, a hypothetical situation regarding same-sex or opposite-sex infidelity was given. Then, a series of questions were asked on a numerical scale. The survey was available to participants for approximately three weeks and took about 10 minutes to complete. No participants were compensated for participating in the survey. In order to ensure that the data taken from this study was correct, a second survey will be created and sent to the same participants within one year. The answers on both surveys should be similar.

Measures

*Same-sex versus opposite-sex infidelity*

Of the two variables studied, same-sex versus opposite-sex infidelity was the independent variable. When taking the survey, participants were given a hypothetical situation adapted from Denes (2008) depicting either same-sex or opposite-sex infidelity of their partner. For example, one condition said:

“Tom is in a monogamous relationship with Anne. One night, Tom goes to a party without Anne and meets some people he knows from class. One guy, Bob, is flirting with Tom. A little while later, Tom and Bob decide to leave together. They go back to
Bob’s apartment and end up having sex.”

The opposite-sex condition is identical, except the male character “Bob” is replaced with a female named “Kelly,” therefore creating heterosexual infidelity. Of the 36 participants, 44.4% received the opposite-sex infidelity condition and 55.6% received the same-sex infidelity condition. Participants were then asked to rate on a scale of one to seven the realism of the situations ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.47$), as well as the frequency of the scenario occurring ($M = 1.51, SD = 1.11$), and the similarity of the scenario to their own experiences ($M = 2.22, SD = 2.05$). While the situation was moderately realistic to participants, it was neither frequent nor similar to what participants had experienced in their own lives.

**Counter-jealousy induction**

Counter-jealousy induction is based on a scale created by Guerrero et al. (2011) measured with three jealousy-inducing action items. One example of counter-jealousy is flirting with or talking about others to make their partner jealous. This scale was found to be realistic ($\alpha = .85$). On a scale of one to seven, counter-jealousy was moderately used ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.05$) by participants following an act of infidelity.

**Results**

We hypothesized that males would be more likely to use counter-jealousy if their partners engaged in opposite-sex infidelity than if their partners engaged in same-sex infidelity. An univariate analysis of variance comparing same-sex or opposite-sex infidelity to counter-jealousy was performed. The reported usage of counter-jealousy differed slightly among the groups ($F = .92, p = .35$). Specifically, same-sex infidelity ($M = 4.40, SD = .81$) reported only slightly higher levels of counter-jealousy than opposite-sex infidelity ($M = 4.06, SD = 1.29$). Our hypothesis was not supported, nor were the results found to be significant.
Discussion

This study evaluated the level of male usage of counter-jealousy in today’s relationships following an act of infidelity. The Guerrero et al. (2011) definition of counter-jealousy describes this type of jealousy as a manipulation attempt where the partner flirts or talks to other people, tries to induce jealousy in their partner, or acts like they are interested in another person. We hypothesized that this type of jealousy would be used more commonly following heterosexual infidelity than after homosexual infidelity. Our results were inconclusive and unfortunately, our hypothesis was not supported. Despite this, we found many surprising results based upon our data and have formed ideas about our study’s limitations and suggestions for future research.

This study is inconsistent with previous research done on this subject. Researchers Weiderman and LaMar (1998) found that males would be more upset following heterosexual infidelity, a conclusion stemming from their concerns about the uncertainty of paternity if conception occurs. However, our research found opposite results. Our data shows that although there was not a significant difference between the amount of jealousy used in homosexual and heterosexual infidelity, it found that males would be slightly more inclined to use counter-jealousy should their partner commit homosexual infidelity.

This study also found that following any act of infidelity, males are likely to use counter-jealousy. These results are consistent with research completed by Paul and Galloway (1994) that surveyed men and found that the majority of them would go to a club or social venue in order to interact with new people. They also stated they would attempt to look more attractive regularly to keep their options open. Overall, these researchers found that men are prone to using counter-jealousy following any form of infidelity. This is data that our study supported as well. Our study confirmed that if men choose to use one form of counter-jealousy (e.g. flirting with others) they
are also very likely to choose to use the other two examples, trying to force the partner to
experience similar feelings of jealousy, or expressing interest in another person.

**Implications**

Our findings were not significantly conclusive, meaning they can not be applied to
further research or to the general population. However, we did discover useful information that
can potentially be explored in the future. As noted earlier, jealousy is prevalent in the majority of
relationships. It is useful to study the types and amount of jealousy used by each gender in order
to better understand modern relationships and to determine the type of communication that leads
to effective relationships. Our data supports the idea that counter-jealousy is commonly
expressed following an act of infidelity. On a Likert scale of 1 to 7, our participants stated they
would use this type of jealousy at a level of 4.25, which is more than 50% of the time.

Our results showed that infidelity had a surprisingly low level of occurrence in our
participants’ lives. However, if infidelity did occur, we found that counter-jealousy was often
used. This could be a problem because this type of jealousy is not considered healthy and will
not serve to benefit or mend the relationship. To better one’s interpersonal relationships, it is
important to remember that although counter-jealousy may initially seem to be the most
satisfying expression, it will not help the situation. There are more positive and successful ways
to communicate jealousy and the negative emotions that result from infidelity.

**Limitations**

A major limitation of this study was the sample size. Our survey was only completed by
36 participants, a number far too small to create any form of conclusive results. The choice to
focus our research on only males limited the amount of data we could have potentially collected.
However, because our population was mostly centered on communication majors at Chapman
University, 36 males could be considered a fair representation of the population available. Still, our choice to hypothesize about only males limited our data and did not allow for conclusive results. As research has shown, different genders feel jealousy for different reasons, and display it in different forms. Allowing females to answer the survey would have given us more variety in our answers and would have given us a better idea of the use of counter-jealousy as a whole.

A second limitation was the survey used for the study. Multiple participants expressed their confusion and frustration with the survey, stating it was too long, very repetitive, and highly confusing. Many did not even complete the survey, and we found inconsistent answers for various participants, indicating their confusion and lack of attention. Also, although the Likert scale was beneficial for parts of the survey, a simple yes or no answer would have sufficed for a few of the questions. This is something that caused confusion and led to unclear answers.

Our subject of choice is not extremely applicable to life. Even though our participants found the situation to be realistic, it was hard for them to hypothetically place themselves in the situation and understand how they would feel should it happen to them. The reported frequency of the scenario occurring was low. Therefore, it was difficult for the participants to accurately assess their feelings following a situation they have never experienced. Finally, past research has shown that participants are likely to understate their traumatic experiences and are unlikely to open up about something that caused severely negative emotions. Therefore, some participants may find it difficult to report about a ruined relationship due to infidelity because they may have been distracted by resurfaced emotions brought on by the survey questions.
Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

Little research has been done in the area of counter-jealousy or the ways in which individuals express their jealousy. Even though our results were inconclusive, we found that there was little difference between the uses of counter-jealousy following either heterosexual or homosexual infidelity. Further research can use this data to create more significant results and discover the prevalence of counter-jealousy in relationships.

The first suggestion for further research would be to use more participants, specifically more homosexual men. Stereotypically, the homosexual community is more open in their relationships and is more likely to commit infidelity if this stereotype holds true. Homosexuals may not see cheating as wrong if they are just doing it to fit into society by “acting heterosexual.” Therefore, it can be believed that they are more likely to admit to cheating in the survey and provide more honest answers. This would allow for more detailed results and a better understanding of infidelity.

Secondly, we concluded that people in fact did use counter-jealousy in their relationships, and may not find anything wrong with expressing their emotions in this way. We suggest that future researchers should attempt to uncover why people use counter-jealousy and if it has been effective for those who have used it. Past research shows that jealousy can be seen as a positive attribute, but only in specific situations. Further research can determine if using counter-jealousy benefited the relationships and why it is thought of as a popular and acceptable expression of jealousy.

Our lives are filled with interpersonal relationships. We are constantly interacting with many types of people and forming many different types of relationships, many of us hoping to
find the right person to share our lives with. As humans we thrive off of these close relationships and depend on committed, honest communication with others. Jealousy is a natural expression and will likely be present at some point in our relationships, especially in a romantic context. Counter-jealousy is often expressed after infidelity occurs. Therefore it is important to understand and to further research the expression of jealousy in order to form and maintain fulfilling relationships. The use of counter-jealousy often leads to negative results, such as further or more extreme jealousy, regret, or even the end to a relationship. The use of this type of jealousy is unlikely to mend a strain in a relationship. The ability to recognize this type of emotion will benefit any individual and hopefully lead to stronger interpersonal relationships.
References


Paul, L., & Galloway, J. (1994). Sexual jealousy: Gender differences in response to partner and


