



Harold Pashler, Editor-in-Chief

ENCYCLOPEDIA of the

**MIND**

Volume  
TWO



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# ENCYCLOPEDIA of the **MIND**

Volume  
**TWO**

Editor-in-Chief

**Harold Pashler**

*University of California, San Diego*



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## JEALOUSY

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Jealousy is a subjectively unpleasant emotion that occurs when one perceives that an important aspect of one's relationship with another, or the relationship itself, is being threatened by a third person. Hence, jealousy requires the involvement of three individuals (a "love triangle"): the self, the loved one (partner), and the rival. Jealousy can occur in romantic relationships over acts such as infidelity. It also occurs in other forms of relationships such as when children feel upset over a parent showering attention on a new sibling, or when a person feels distress due to being excluded by friends who are socializing together. The proposed function of jealousy is to motivate behaviors that will protect or maintain the relationship between the self and the partner and reduce the threatening bond between the partner and rival.

Although jealousy may lead to desirable outcomes such as redirecting a loved one's attention to the self and reestablishing bonds, it can also have serious negative consequences. For example, jealousy is often implicated as a cause of spousal abuse and is the third or fourth most common motive in non-accidental homicides across cultures. This entry discusses theories of jealousy, including conceptual debates about its origin and definition, and presents research on the development of jealousy and individual differences in jealousy.

### Theories

Theorists agree that jealousy involves unpleasant feelings, but there is no unanimity on the precise nature of the distress. One possibility is that the feelings commonly referred to as jealousy may be a blend of other emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness. There are two routes by which this could occur: (1) People may simultaneously experience several emotions during a jealous episode, or (2) they may experience a series of different emotions over the course of a single jealousy episode. In the latter case, the emotion felt at any given moment would depend on the aspect of the situation on which the person focused. For example, contemplating the loss of the relationship might elicit sadness, whereas thinking about the partner's dishonesty might elicit anger. It is also possible that jealousy is a unique emotional state that produces its own distinct feelings and behaviors that differ from other emotions such as fear and anger.

### Development

Signs of jealousy have been found in children as young as 6 months when their mothers directed attention to what appeared to be another baby. This suggests that at least some primitive forms of jealousy can be elicited without complex thoughts. However, with cognitive development, the triggers for jealousy become more sophisticated. For example, one study found that 4-year-old children showed