

JEALOUSY BETWEEN PARTNERS SOCIAL NETWORKS: A CAUSE OF INFIDELITY IN COUPLES

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Abstract: *Jealousy is a universal notion, quite often found in the discussions of people who will make their presence felt both in the case of adults and children. In this study I will consider the sociological analysis of adult jealousy, through a quantitative research based on a questionnaire. I chose this research topic in order to find out how jealousy (as the main aspect), but also stalking and conflicts in the couple (secondary aspect) highlight infidelity between partners, as well as the separation between them. Given that the Internet is present in the main daily, professional and social activities, I consider it interesting to find out how the Internet can contribute, as a communication tool.*

Key words: *infidelity, couple, jealousy, family.*

1. Introduction

I chose to study this topic because I believe that the phenomenon of jealousy is an important factor in strengthening a couple's relationship. The subject is of particular importance in sociological research because the phenomenon of jealousy represents a fact that removes social order and is an important factor in the destruction of families, but also in their strengthening in society.

In other words, if we refer to the use of social networks, regardless of whether the partners live together in the same house, the same city or are far away, we can identify another type of jealousy based on the attention that one partner has regarding the behavior of the other (here I mean the surveillance of the phone or computer, of conversations on social networks, but also the physical stalking of a person in different places - behavior called in English "stalker"). Stalking is a form of abuse; the most common typology of stalkers consists of intimate partners, current or former.

In fact, infidelity may exist on the level of social networks, but it is realized through a physical meeting. Thus, a relationship hidden in a virtual way can be more difficult to be identified by those around if the conversations are deleted, but changes in behavior

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intended to show the relational changes in the couple can be noticed. "Jealousy...may or may not be the reason for a breakup?" We can find various answers to this question depending on each part of the couple and how they live together. On the one hand, jealousy can occur at the level of some members of the couple who live in the same place; we assume that proximity may or may not help in better communication, without suspicion. On the other hand, when one of the partners is far from the other, communication problems can arise.

The aspects that I consider relevant in the research are: the behavior of the partners in the relationship, their way of communication, the proximity of the couple and the methods of negotiation and conflict in the face of infidelity. These elements are used in the methodology, in the formation of the research tool, an online questionnaire based on 15 questions, during which the themes mentioned above are found.

I appreciate that these aspects can constitute research hypotheses: (1) the longer couples live together, the higher the degree of trust between partners; (2) if partners are distant, then jealousy manifests itself in a lack of communication and suspicion.

We can identify a research question designed to seek relevant answers for the described topic: "Do social networks have the role of helping unite a couple or to separate them, in the case of distance between them?"

Also, I chose as the research method, the sociological survey based on a questionnaire, having the non-probability sampling technique of the "snowball" with the help of which the study can start from a small population of individuals, and the sample can be expanded, by asking initial participants to identify or provide other contacts of individuals who fit the study's selection criteria.

2. Conceptual delimitations – Jealousy: between normality and abnormality in society

The phenomenon of jealousy represented an interesting topic of research, after the 70s, when the emotionality/affective states associated with the couple (anger, hatred, love, mistrust/trust, etc.) began to be analyzed simultaneously with the development of the couple. Thus, from a scientific point of view, many definitions of the notion of "jealousy" have been discussed, as follows:

Dr. Sigmund Freud (1922) defined jealousy as "consisting of pain, the pain being caused by the thought of losing the loved object, and the narcissistic wound, in so far as this can be distinguished from the other wound, further by feelings of competition against a successful rival, and a greater or lesser amount of self-criticism, which tries to hold the subject's own ego responsible for his loss. Jealousy is described as an emotion or a mixture of emotions. Freud includes feelings of pain and adversity." (Freud, S., 1922, as cited in Mihai, A., 2016, p. 189).

Diana Ştefăneţ (2018) claims that "...a jealous person demonstrates the desire for possession of the other beyond the objective observation of a third party in the relationship. It involves a subject (jealous), an object of desire and a rival subject. For Freud, love is always ambivalent. What we often call love always contains hate, one of the functions of love is to make hate harmless. According to Freud, in individuals who do

not show jealousy, in fact, it exists in their unconscious psychic life, being subject to repression." (Stefăneț, 2018, p. 308)

In the work "Forms of Jealousy", the author Baumgart Hildegard claims that "jealousy is... the multiple determined symptom of a life system with its history or especially within one or more life systems - in processed cases, almost exclusively of the family system, which cannot be imagined otherwise than framed in various influential contexts, such as culture and religion, forms of state, professional groups, circles of friends and many others" (Hildegard, 2008, p. 520)

The inner experiences induced by jealousy lead to negative states that can harm both the persons themselves by involuntarily imposing some psychological barriers, a lack of socialization that removes those around him; relationships of collegiality, kinship and friendship can be altered over time if the cause is not identified or specialized help (psychologist) is not sought, as well as the couple because many of these experiences turn into "traumas" that later, can lead to the separation of the two partners, aggression seen in any form, stalking or infidelity.

Lazar stated that "Jealous living involves both intense frustration and envy of the rival as well as hurting one's own love...Dr. Florin Tudose says that «...even if the relationship has its flaws, the endorphin produced by the warmth, trust, stability, friendship and affection within the couple keeps the partners in a close bond. The older a couple is, the more likely they are to stay together. And the characteristic of trusting a partner is acquired through learning. »" (Tudose, F, 2004, as cited in Lazar, C., 2011, p. 168).

3. Research Methodology

In the study, I set out to analyze empirically how the Internet can contribute to the emergence of jealousy as a social phenomenon, by the simple fact that it is possible to identify behaviors classified as social deviance: violent behaviors, stalking, conflicts, and separations of couples. In the current study, deviance means deviation from social norms, norms on the basis of which people build a social reality that is comfortable for their own lives. Deviant behaviors may have infidelity as a reason and jealousy as an initial feeling, but individuals present, within their own couple relationships, different particularities that I consider relevant in finding out if the Internet is a source of jealousy. Being an exploratory study, I focused on a heterogeneous profile of respondents, made up of women and men because I consider it interesting to see how these aspects are perceived depending on gender.

The respondents are either single or in a couple, a fact that helps me to find out opinions about the phenomenon of jealousy from several social settings, how the couple is seen at present and how the forms of infidelity can be identified online. I chose the research method of the sociological survey, having the online questionnaire as a study tool. I thought it was suitable because I can distribute the questions in an easy way to respondents. Internet content (usage practices and social networks) can contribute to the emergence of jealousy. This aspect aims to analyze the perception of people who are alone or in a relationship, who live together or separately, both men and women, in

order to capture many opinions, pros and cons, about the dynamics of Internet use in personal life.

Following the answers received from the respondents, I expect to obtain relevant perceptions regarding the previously mentioned issues. At the same time, we also had two secondary objectives relevant to the study: on the one hand, identifying the causes that determine the appearance of the feeling of jealousy and how it manifests itself at the level of the couple in a world based on online discussions; on the other hand, identifying the factors favoring infidelity and, implicitly, the appearance of deviant behaviors: suspicions, break-ups, violence, etc.

The questionnaire consists of 15 questions, built online on Google Forms and sent to respondents in the form of an access link. We appealed to people from different professions, mostly young people, between the ages of 23 and 51. The questionnaire was distributed through Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp social networks. 102 respondents participated, and of these, 20 people are in a long-distance couple, and 68 people live with their partner in the same house; these aspects help me compare how distance or closeness can help a couple relationship, trying to answer after the analysis of the results, the research question: "Social networks have the role of helping unite a couple or separate them, in the case of distance between them?" The research took place between October 1 and December 31, 2022. The questions to which I want to find answers following the results of the study are:

Considering the socio-demographic questions, 84.3% women and 15.7% men participated in the research. The questionnaire was initially distributed to some people who we found to be suitable for the study based on their age and the fact that they had long-distance relationships. During the research, through the snowball sampling technique, I was able to establish several contacts with various people based on the first people investigated. Thus, we reached a number of 102 people participating in the sociological study.

The age range of the respondents is 23-51 years. Age is relevant because I wanted to observe how the questionnaire questions are approached, taking into account that the topic has a personal side. I have observed that young people are aware of some repercussions of using social networks, such as the lack of attention to their partner, physical contact with their loved one and the idea of infidelity online.

Do social networks have the role of helping make a couple whole or separate them, in the case of distance between them?

What is the public's perception of jealousy in couples, taking into account the use of social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram - means of discussion with other partners, but also of identifying the partner's infidelity)? The assumptions on the basis of which the research is carried out are: (1) the longer couples live together, the greater the degree of trust between partners. (2) if partners are at a distance, then jealousy manifests itself through a lack of communication and suspicion. The sampling technique chosen is non-probability, the "snowball" one, with the help of which the study can start from a small population of individuals, and the sample can be expanded, by asking the initial participants to identify or provide other contacts of some individuals who fit the selection criteria of the respective study. I chose this type of sampling because the

subjects of the study were difficult to identify and I intended to send this questionnaire mostly to people who were either married or in a long distance relationship; of different ages, willing to express a point of view regarding a sensitive subject (couple relationships) that is not addressed very often.

4. Research results and Data Analysis

I will continue to present the results according to the data collected in the research, more precisely some perceptions about jealousy in a couple, if it is caused by infidelity or mistrust and how it manifests itself online, ending in a breakup. The questionnaire along with the actual diagrams can be found in the "Appendices" chapter, and below I will briefly discuss the respondents' answers given in the research.

Data analysis at the level of the actual questions of the questionnaire:

Question number 1. "What do you think about couple relationships in 2022, compared to 10 years ago?", 44.1% of respondents participating in the study have a good opinion about current couple relationships compared to previous years, while 6.9% do not have a good opinion.

Question number 2. "What are the differences that have appeared in the case of current couples?", the participants had to answer in an open way, with no answer options. Thus, interesting answers were identified which I will analyze as follows:

One respondent considered that a major difference is the ambition of women to get out of their comfort zone, by the fact that they have a stable job. "Today's women have evolved a lot, they are independent and have much greater self-confidence compared to previous years. Women no longer accept being humiliated or undervalued. Recently, I have noticed more and more women taking this proving a great ability and insight of women in any field, and this is due to a much better bonded couple relationship, women are more appreciated by men because they have come out of the comfort zone." Thus, the relationship becomes stable, the man respects the woman and considers her at his level from a professional point of view. Nowadays, women have jobs similar to those of men, management positions. That is precisely why common topics of discussion appear.

Another respondent considered that social networks would represent an impediment in consolidating a relationship, more precisely, many people tend to associate with various people whose identity is not known with certainty, but is highlighted only on the Internet. "Today people compare their relationships with what they see on social media. They don't look at the big picture and don't realize that what they see is actually only a small part. We have come to believe that letting go, doing things for the person we love, and making compromises is a sign of weakness, so we give up the things that our partner likes and want everything to be fixed according to our wishes. In reality, even if we are compatible with the person next to us, we will still have to get involved, build and work to be able to have a fulfilling relationship, where both partners are satisfied and happy."

It is interesting to see how important it is for the individual to keep his reason in front of a virtual life from the simple fact that the social identity of any of us materializes face to face. Partners in a couple can build love relationships based on the lack of knowledge

of identity, through the idea that each individual chooses to expose an image or herself depending on the online conversations induced by: certain words, gestures, the use of emoticons (emoticons) and exposure or not of the notion of corporeality mentioned by Goffman (sending each other some photos, discussions using a web camera through which they can see each other in real time, phone conversations through the Facebook account or other social networks, etc.)

Goffman's work describes the meaning of the self (that we know or not) that can be known through a corporeality based on physical aspects, on face-to-face interaction, which helps us know that person, in addition to the actual verbal interaction, either for the purpose of a friendship or love relationship.

Question number 3. "To what extent do you consider the notion of infidelity to be a problem in our society?" the respondents considered to a large extent (45.1%) that infidelity represents a problem at the level of society. A percentage of 2.9% thought it would not be a problem.

People's perception of the concept of "infidelity", according to the data above, highlights an awareness of this phenomenon, as a problem at the level of society. Infidelity leads to instability in the couple and mistrust in the partner.

Question number 4. "How can jealousy affect a couple's relationship in today's society? the participants in the study had several answer options, that is why they chose the option that seemed appropriate to their perception. Below, we have summarized some interesting responses.

As it was a multiple-choice question, people were able to tick any of the answers favorable to their opinion. Precisely for this reason, 72.5% considered that jealousy can affect a couple's relationship in today's society, taking into account that infidelity can occur in a couple, and then the separation of the two partners. Also, 71.6% of the respondents considered that jealousy can affect couple relationships because this social phenomenon leads to the disorganization of the family, through the appearance of conflicts. 52.9% believed that jealousy can damage other social relationships, in addition to the partner/family (colleagues, friends, relatives, acquaintances, etc.).

Question number 5. "Do you consider the fact that some conflicts in the couple (manifested by adversarial discussions, insults or even violence) are caused by jealousy?", the participants had to answer in an open way, with no answer options. Thus, relevant answers were identified which I will analyze as follows:

One respondent claimed that "Jealousy is an important point that causes more nerves, but it is not the main reason and I think that if there is a quarrel in the couple it is because of several problems that have accumulated." Jealousy can be a reason for a dispute in a couple, but it is not considered the main reason, everyday problems being among the most important. Also, another stated that "Probably, in most cases, but not exclusively. If it's pathological jealousy, yes. If conflict of various kinds is referred to, it is not exclusively due to jealousy. In this case, there may be several sources that have determined the appearance of tensions, respectively, of conflicts in the couple."; jealousy is a problem if it has a pathological form because the conflicts generated can lead to violent behavior. Incidentally, this phenomenon is not the main reason for quarrels in couples, but it is quite an important one.

Question number 6. “Do you consider proximity (in this case, seen as the distance or immediate proximity, in space and time, between partners) to be the key factor in the emergence of conflict between partners?” the participants had to answer in an open way, without answer options. Thus, interesting answers were identified which I will analyze as follows:

The answers of the respondents gave perspectives worthy of attention, for example:

“In some cases, yes. Depending on other external factors (job, family/friendly environment, personal/professional goals, etc.), as well as internal factors (unresolved personal problems, not knowing one's own person from an emotional point of view, not knowing the types of reactions in certain contexts in relationship, etc.) it could be that proximity is only one of the reasons from which a conflict between partners can arise”.

“No, proximity is not a key factor in conflict.”

“Not. The key factor has been and will remain trust. Believing that your partner is the person who may or may not cheat on you. As trust erodes, distance (not physical) increases.” “I think the distance can increase the distrust of the partner and the jealousy of the partner.” The notion of „proximity” represents one of the essential factors in determining interpersonal relationships formed and developed face to face. Becker (2008, pp. 164-165) shows that geographical distance and, implicitly, spatial proximity play an important role in couple relationships. Online interactions can have a defining impact in bridging distance.

Also, the answers received highlight social distance as a sociological notion, defined as the distance between individuals from the point of view of social status, culture, perceptions and lifestyle. Taking into account the subject addressed in this paper, social distance can have an important impact, by associating proximity with the lifestyle of the partners. The distance has a physical form, because the partners are physically separated, but it is important to mention that this distance can be generated by the different opinions related to the professional and financial side, to the opinions regarding the foundation of a family and living together. Many partners choose to stay far from each other, simply because they found a better paying job in another country.

Question number 7. “Can social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram) represent a tool or a channel of communication in the relationship with the partner?”, the participants had to answer in an open way, without answer options. Thus, interesting answers were identified which I will analyze as follows:

The participants had different opinions regarding the usefulness of social networks as a means of communication between partners. One of them specified „I think they are especially effective for long-distance relationships”, another “No, only making an exception, when you are far away and you see your partner on camera.” People who are at a distance from their partner consider that the mentioned social networks are a help for communication between the two. Some couple relationships can go through moments of difficulty because of the distance, and social networks can relieve certain tensions through the quick discussions that can take place on their platforms.

Question number 8.

“How do you see the use of social networks in the couple relationship?”.

As it was a multiple-choice question, people were able to tick any of the answers favorable to their opinion. In a percentage of 65.7%, some respondents considered that social networks represent a way to communicate and maintain a good relationship from a distance with their partner, day by day. While, in a percentage of 32.4%, some respondents claimed that social networks can generate a problem if the other partner finds another online, defending infidelity.

According to the answers received from these people, we understand that social networks are useful ways to communicate with your life partner, especially if the couple is at a distance for various reasons. Of course, we also identify a disadvantage, the fact that some people consider that social networks can be the starting point for relationships outside the couple.

Question number 9. “Do you think that in 10 years’ time, the phenomena of infidelity and jealousy will manifest themselves more or less within couples, taking into account the evolution of digital communication practices?” Participants had to answer in an open way, without answer options. Thus, interesting answers were identified which I will analyze as follows:

“I believe these networks will be even more dangerous and can lead to the separation of couples even after a longer time together.” The separation of the couple represents another theme of this study by the simple fact that we analyzed the divorce rate at the level of couples in Romania, and it increased in the case of young people. Also, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (2021), 2.4% of divorces were caused by marital infidelity; a higher percentage than other causes, such as violence or alcoholism.

Question number 10. “In your opinion, what might be the consequences of identifying your partner's infidelity?” As it was a multiple-choice question, people were able to tick any of the answers favorable to their opinion. In a percentage of 67.6%, some respondents considered that the main consequence after identifying the partner's infidelity is separation or divorce, without possible disputes. Moreover, 8.8% considered that they would accept the situation by repeating the same act on the unfaithful partner.

On the one hand, it is true, the majority considered that infidelity cannot be overlooked, so they would choose separation, without developing a conflict. On the other hand, there are people who would repeat their partner's act and accept the situation. People's personalities are different, and opinions about infidelity are often contradictory to those of the groups we belong to: family, friends or workplace.

5. Conclusions

Therefore, I believe that following the application of the questionnaire I have identified interesting perceptions regarding the notion of jealousy and how it is present in people's lives, through the use of social networks in daily activities. Analyzing the respondents' perceptions, the majority consider that jealousy depends on the personality of each person and that each relationship is different. Some may consider jealousy a way of proving them that they are appreciated, that the partner has an interest in their person. On the other hand, others argue that the way in which jealousy is shown denotes repercussions or not. More precisely, pathological jealousy can

generate negative behaviors that precisely lead to tense moments, violence, stalking, breakups, and the suffering of the people around.

After analyzing the data, we found that the research hypothesis „if partners are distant, then jealousy manifests itself through lack of communication and suspicion” is validated. Some of the respondents considered that the distance between them leads to suspicion, jealousy and separation.

Trust in the couple is an important indicator in the smooth running of a relationship. Many respondents felt that both distance and excessive use of social media in their couple can lead to conflict and mistrust between partners. Thus, the hypothesis according to which „the longer couples live together, the higher the degree of trust between partners” is validated by the answers received.

The reality is often different, especially if we focus on long-distance couple relationships. The aspect related to the distance between partners and according to their statements, many appreciate that social networks have saved their relationships, that they are in permanent contact with their partners and that they feel comfortable that they can see and hear them at any time. The distance can be removed through social networks, that represent help in front of it.

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