



It's known for breaking hearts and starting wars, but does jealousy really deserve its bad reputation? *Stylist* explores one of our most complex emotions

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It's the way he looks at her that hurts the most. Because it's the way he used to look at you.

And as your ex leaves the party with his new girlfriend, familiar symptoms flush through your body: a physical tightness in your chest, the sinking feeling in your gut, shortness of breath. Outwardly, you try to look normal, devil-may-care even, but inside you're reeling. Poisonous thoughts crash about; you want to tell everyone she's a witch with terrible hair and bad shoes, and he's a secret misogynist who doesn't care about anyone but himself, but deep down you know none of this is true. It's just so hard to see him happy with someone else. Shakespeare got it right when he coined this most destructive of emotions "the green-eyed monster", because jealousy really does bring out the vilest creature in all of us.

Tradition tells us that letting jealousy (fearing something we already 'possess' will be taken away by another) and its corrosive bedfellow envy (coveting what someone else has) find a way into our minds will end in disaster. It's in every Shakespearean tragedy, at the root of classic works of literature (*Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*) and sparked, we're told, the Trojan War.

Yet, no matter how evil it may be, the fact remains that from our very first breath to our very last, our lives are interwoven with episodes of untameable, toxic jealousy. Whether it's losing your closest friend to the girl with the best Clarks shoes in the playground, or your partner striking up an uncomfortably familiar friendship with that girl from work (because she just *loves* that obscure electro band you can't bear). We encounter it in the office, within friendship groups, among families and in our romantic relationships. It makes us stressed, scheming and, in the worst cases, lethal (jealousy is often ranked among the top three motives for murder). It has a negative impact on us in the long-term, too. People disposed to jealousy are also more prone to high blood pressure, and a recent study carried out at the University

WHEN GREEN EYES MAKE GREAT ART

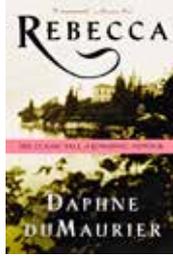
Some brilliant works have been inspired by jealousy



Othello by William Shakespeare, 1603
"Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on," warns Iago when Othello kills his wife.



Psycho, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1960
In this twisted tale, motel owner Norman Bates becomes so enraged with jealousy when he finds his mother with a new lover, he bumps them both off.



Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier, 1938
The author called her novel 'a study in jealousy', with her unnamed narrator haunted by the belief that her new husband is still in love with his late wife.



Mr Brightside, The Killers, 2004
Singer Brandon Flowers reportedly wrote this song – a meditation on how jealousy and insecurity can ruin a relationship – about his ex-girlfriend.

of Gothenburg even suggests that women who suffer from jealousy are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's in old age as they may feel stress more keenly, which can take its toll on the brain.

PERFECT LIVES

Now, new research suggests we're becoming more jealous than ever. Thanks, in part, to the invention of one thing: social media. In a recent poll carried out by Scope, of around 1,500 social media users, 60% said sites such as Facebook and Twitter make them feel jealous of other people. So where exactly does this

'demon' jealousy stem from, and how can we use it to our advantage?

The simple truth is, we *all* experience some level of envy and jealousy – while flicking through pictures of a colleague's wedding to which you weren't invited, while coveting your boss's new leather jacket you'll never be able to afford, or while following your cousin's incredible Instagram shots of her holiday in Africa. And we shouldn't necessarily be ashamed of it. "One of the biggest sources of jealousy is constantly comparing yourself to people you see as better off than you,

a process known as 'upward social comparison,'" says chartered clinical psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd. "But comparing ourselves to others is human nature; it's ingrained in us as part of our 'survival of the fittest' psyche."

In fact, most living entities from infants to birds suffer from jealousy, with experts suggesting that animals – including cows, horses, goats, elephants, camels and crocodiles – feel it too. Recent studies carried out by the University of California, San Diego reveal that dogs, in particular, experience the emotion strongly. Researchers monitored 36 dogs, whose owners were asked to pet both a stuffed dog and a bucket. The dogs were twice as likely to push or touch their owners when they showed affection to the stuffed dog rather than the bucket, believing the toy to be real. So think before you pet that cute labradoodle puppy while walking your Heinz 57 mutt. He's not immune to the green-eyed monster either. Poor thing.

In terms of humans, though, jealousy is so deep-seated that it dates back to our Stone Age ancestors. "Jealousy, like other emotions, was born of necessity," says Peter Toohey, professor of classics at Canada's University of Calgary and author of *Jealousy*. "Humans experience it because the emotion has helped the species to survive." Evolutionary psychologists (Darwin included) believe that jealousy, and the rage often associated with it, warns of danger to a sexual relationship that could otherwise successfully lead to offspring. Put simply, a man does not want his partner to bear someone else's child because he wants *his* genes to prosper. Equally, a woman does not want to lose her partner to emotional infidelity because a female rival represents a threat to the much-needed resources and protection that a committed male partner would provide. "As odd as it may seem," says Toohey, "jealousy is the glue that holds the sexes together."

And it's an emotion that's ingrained from birth too. Toohey claims that jealousy arises during our formative years as children, when we learn



👁️ complex social interactions. "Jealousy is a response to the frustrations and negotiations necessary for life in society, for getting and relinquishing what we want and need," he says. It can actually be identified in infants as young as four months. Studies by scientists at Portsmouth University have found that, just like dogs, they become agitated when they are excluded from dialogue between their mother and another party reacting with forceful vocalisations or intense interest. Similarly, researchers at Texas Tech University found that infants as young as six months displayed greater negative facial expressions (furled eyebrows, downturned lips) when their mothers interacted with a baby doll. Thanks to our ancestors, infantile jealousy functions as a means of attracting and maintaining the attention of adults and protectors when we feel we may be in a position of neglect.

THE PLUS SIDE

But jealousy doesn't have to be all bad, and some experts argue that it can actually be positive. "When handled correctly, the positives associated with jealousy can be huge," says psychologist Emma Kenny. "Not least because it can help us establish what we truly want from life."

Seeing others achieve what we want to achieve (a colleague getting a promotion, an acquaintance successfully setting up their own business)

or obtaining what we want to obtain (a beautiful flat you've spent the last six months coveting on RightMove) may incite that familiar burning needle of jealousy, but what it should really be doing is encouraging us to reflect on our aspirations.

"When you feel jealous, see it as a tool for self-reflection and learn from it," Kenny explains. "If used as a motivator it can help you plot your next goal. Until you experience that unsettling twinge, you are not completely aware of what you really want. The balance is not to allow this to become bitterness (or wanting others to lose as we gain); if you turn jealousy into curiosity it can spark interest and enhance learning."

In fact, a recent study

carried out by polling company Censuswide revealed that over 65% of Britons say that being jealous of a friend has spurred them on in life, with 14% of women admitting it pushed them to make the most of every opportunity.

Take sexual jealousy, for example. Years of Glenn Close bunny-boiler references tell us that this is negative, but actually, psychologists believe that a small amount of jealousy can be the sign of a strong relationship because it indicates worth and value. "In relationships when

you feel the pangs of jealousy, turn this into a sense of gratitude," says Kenny. "You feel jealous because you fear losing what you have gained." Arguably it's a positive sign that we believe we have something worth fighting for (it is evolutionarily ingrained in us to keep hold of our mate, after all). So if you find yourself bristling when your partner tells you he's going out with his work colleague this Friday, give yourself a break. You're only human.

Similarly, familial jealousy is something that most of us will have experienced. That vicious sideswipe that sent you headfirst off the sofa when your sister preferred *your* Christmas present; the golf club around

the shins when, aged eight, you miraculously won at crazy golf. The combative nature of siblings is drilled into us, in a primordial sense, to demand the most attention from those who care for us. It's a natural part of our survival instinct and helps us find our place within the family unit. This competitiveness, which stems from the desire to possess our parents' full attention, often carries on well into adulthood, and we start to vie for material things such as property and money. But while it might seem like a malignant and separating

force, research from the University of Cambridge Centre for Family Research found that sibling rivalry actually boosts mental and emotional development, increase maturity and enhance social skills. And that learning to resolve our differences after an envy-induced spat is one of the most progressive lessons we can learn, putting us in good stead for heated negotiations at work or navigating arguments with our spouses as adults.

The office, too, is a heady breeding ground for little green-eyed monsters. You might catch yourself glaring enviously over the top of your computer at a colleague who is celebrating landing new business from an important client, or furiously typing an 'it's not fair' email after the announcement that your peer is being promoted above you. But it's important to remember that most jealousy at work is borne out of a perceived threat to what you do to make a living. And that can actually be positive. "Jealousy and envy in the workplace make you scrutinise your peers, rank your own abilities and aspire to the power and potency of your boss," says Toohey. Can there be a better motivational tool?

So, yes it can be ugly, and yes, at times it's unfounded and inappropriate, but next time you feel that fiery dagger slice through your insides, embrace it. And try not to be (too) afraid of the green-eyed monster.

“WHEN YOU FEEL JEALOUS, SEE IT AS A TOOL FOR SELF-REFLECTION AND LEARN FROM IT”

HOW TO TAME THE MONSTER

If, on occasion, jealousy gets too much to handle, psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd offers these tips

CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS

Your thoughts aren't facts – they're just your biased mind's opinions, which can be challenged. The next time you think something like, 'She's so good at everything', question it: Is she really? Is it just that she has a different approach to life to you? Seek a more balanced view.

REMEMBER YOUR GOOD QUALITIES

It's easy to dwell on what you believe you lack – a state that breeds jealousy. Write down three of your best qualities or things you're good at, anything from being loyal to a great cook. Acknowledging your best bits will make you less inclined to covet what others have.

TAKE DEEP BREATHS

Jealousy can trigger fight or flight mode. A breathing exercise will calm you. Place one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen. Breathe slowly through your nose. As you inhale push your abdomen against your hand, feeling it rise. Hold for two seconds. Exhale and feel your stomach deflate. Repeat five times.

SAY NO TO JEALOUSY

When you feel the emotion surfacing, name it: 'Here's jealousy again'. This helps you feel in control. Picture yourself on a platform with jealousy as a train coming into the station. Ask yourself if you want to step on board. No? Then let the train leave without you. The emotion will pass naturally if you don't engage with it.