

Sharing food with others can lead to jealousy

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

When is lunch not just lunch? When someone in a romantic relationship shares a meal with an ex-lover, finds two Cornell studies that looked at jealousy and shared meals. The studies find that people who are part of couples tend to think that sharing food with others might lead to shared intimacy.

As reported in *PLoS ONE* July 11, postdoctoral researcher Kevin Kniffin

and Professor Brian Wansink of Cornell's Food and Brand Lab polled 79 undergraduates to rate how jealous they would be if their romantic partner were contacted by an old flame and subsequently engaged in an array of food and drink-based activities. An additional 74 students were questioned about how they thought their best friend would react to the same scenarios.

In both cases, meeting up for coffee and other interactions such as email correspondence or phone conversations elicited less jealousy than going out to eat together, they found.

"It becomes clear that people think that the practice of eating together might have functional significance beyond the concurrent consumption of calories," Kniffin said.

Kniffin also noted that there was no pattern of gender differences among responses. Previous studies have shown patterns in which men appear to become more jealous about physical cheating, and women tend to be more jealous about emotional cheating.

"We focused on eating and drinking since those are regular, daily activities," Kniffin said. "Our paper also introduces the phrase 'extra-pair commensality' as a playful contrast with past studies that have looked at reactions to more dramatic kinds of extra-pair behavior."

While the new studies have a specific focus on romantic pairs, the general findings have relevance for understanding and facilitating cooperation within a broad array of groups, including co-workers, Kniffin said.

"It's key to remember, from your spouse's perspective, it's not 'just lunch,'" Wansink added. "While meals can strengthen social relationships, encourage cooperation and community building, they can

also destroy these."

Provided by Cornell University

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