

Jealousy in a romantic relationship can lead to alcohol problems

15 July 2015

People who depend on their relationship to make them feel good about themselves are more likely to drown their sorrows if they believe their partner is cheating, suggests new research. The study, published in *Addictive Behaviors*, links romantic jealousy, relationship-dependent self-esteem and alcohol problems for the first time.

The authors of the study, from the University of Houston, US, say understanding the link between these three factors could help identify people at risk of alcoholism more quickly.

Excessive [alcohol](#) use is the third leading cause of preventable death in the US, accounting for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults - around 88,000 deaths per year in the US, and 2.5 million deaths per year globally. Predicting [alcohol problems](#) means they can be prevented, and research has shown that using alcohol to cope with [negative emotions](#) is one of the strongest predictors.

"We all experience feelings of jealousy to some degree; many people are in relationships that are less than ideal, and use alcohol for different reasons," said Dr. Angelo DiBello, lead author of the study. "Romantic jealousy is a shared human experience, but very little work has looked at how it is related to alcohol use, misuse and associated problems. This research helps to highlight the associations between these factors and show how our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are related in potentially harmful ways."

Previous research has focused on the link between jealousy and alcohol use, and the link between jealousy and the quality of a relationship. This is the first study to look at three factors together - relationship-dependent self-esteem, jealousy and drinking - and provides an insight into how these factors affect the risk of alcohol problems.

For the new study, the researchers investigated how different types of jealousy affect the link

between depending on a romantic relationship for self-esteem and having alcohol-related problems. 277 people (87% female) at a large southern university answered questions about how dependent their self-esteem is on their romantic relationship, the satisfaction, commitment and closeness in their relationship, their jealousy and their alcohol use.

The results reveal that people whose self-esteem relies on their relationship turn to alcohol to cope because of jealousy. These findings were especially true for people who are less satisfied, less committed, and report feeling more disconnected from their partners.

When a person's self-worth is tied to their romantic relationship, the effect of negative events or emotions is magnified. The study shows that when this happens, believing their partner is cheating can lead people to use alcohol to cope.

"Given how common experiencing jealousy and being in [romantic relationships](#) are, this work helps to explain difference associations that may negatively impact an individual's drinking," said Dr. DiBello.

"I think it is important to understand the role romantic jealousy plays in the larger context of problem behaviors. Ultimately, I hope to use findings like these to support the development of prevention and intervention efforts among individuals who may struggle with alcohol, self-esteem and relationship issues," added Dr. DiBello.

More information: "The green eyed monster in the bottle: Relationship contingent self-esteem, romantic jealousy, and alcohol-related problems" by Angelo M. DiBello, Lindsey M. Rodriguez, Benjamin W. Hadden and Clayton Neighbors ([DOI: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.05.008](#)). The article appears in *Addictive Behaviors*, Volume 49

(October 2015)

Provided by Elsevier

APA citation: Jealousy in a romantic relationship can lead to alcohol problems (2015, July 15) retrieved 23 October 2021 from

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