

Are we still jealous? Infidelity in the age of social media

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When men and women find social media messages indicating that their partner has been cheating on them, they show the same type of jealousy behaviour as finding offline evidence that their partner has been unfaithful. This is according to Michael Dunn and Gemma Billett of Cardiff Metropolitan University in the UK, who investigated how jealousy manifests between the sexes when people find compromising messages on their partner's social media accounts. The findings are published in Springer's journal *Evolutionary Psychological Science*.

As part of the study, 21 male and 23 female undergraduate students were shown imaginary Facebook messages in a Facebook format, revealing that their partners had been either emotionally or sexually unfaithful. Eight short messages along the lines of: "You must be my soulmate! Feel so bloody connected to you, even though we haven't slept together," (Emotional infidelity) and "You must be the best one-night stand I've ever had. Last night was out of this world sexy bum!" (Sexual infidelity) were shown to participants. The so-called "discovered" message was either composed and sent by the participant's [partner](#), or came from someone else. Participants had to rate how distressed they would have felt if they had come across such messages while accessing their partner's Facebook messaging service without permission.

Men felt more distressed when they read social [media](#) messages that revealed their partners' sexual rather than [emotional infidelity](#). However, women were more upset than men in response to emotional messages. The researchers also found that women were significantly more upset when a potential rival had written the message, compared to when it was composed by their own partners. For men, the opposite seemed to be true and they appeared to be more upset by imagining their partner sending rather than receiving an infidelity-revealing message. Irrespective of the contents,

women overall were more upset than men when they had to imagine discovering an infidelity-related message.

The study supports evolutionarily derived theories that hold that there are differences in what triggers [jealousy](#) among men and [women](#), and in how they subsequently direct such feelings towards the cheating partner or the potential rival.

According to the researchers, it is important to understand the mechanisms underlying jealousy, and how it plays out in the digital age. Real or suspected partner infidelity that causes sexual or emotional jealousy is often given as the reason for domestic abuse and violence.

"Applying an evolutionary perspective to understanding the manifestation of jealous behaviour and how [infidelity](#)-related anger can trigger partner dissolution and domestic abuse may help counteract inevitable rises in such behaviours in an age where clandestine extra-marital relationships are facilitated by modern forms of media technology," explains Dunn.

More information: Dunn, M.J. & Billett, G. (2017). Jealousy levels in response to infidelity revealing Facebook messages depends on sex, type of message and message composer: Support for the evolutionary psychological perspective, *Evolutionary Psychological Science*, [DOI: 10.1007/s40806-017-0110-z](#)

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