

# Infidelity as a Predictor of Jealousy in Mexican Couples

*Angelica Romero-Palencia, PhD*

Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo, Mexico

*Cinthia Cruz-Del Castillo, PhD*

Iberoamerican University, Mexico

*Arturo Del Castillo-Arreola, PhD*

Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo, Mexico

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## Abstract

Suspicion of infidelity in couples elicits jealousy in men and women (Bendixen, Kennair & Buss, 2015; Buss, 2014; Buss & Abrams, 2017). It is also known that, in many people, a reaction to a partner's infidelity consists of intense and aggressive jealousy (Buss, 2000; Shakelford, LeBlanc & Drass, 2000; Wilson & Daly, 1992). However, there is scant literature on the subject of infidelity itself. In other words, there are no relevant data on whether actual infidelity, and even the urge to commit infidelity, evoke jealousy toward one's partner. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine whether unfaithful behavior, the motives imputed to infidelity, the concept of infidelity, and the consequences associated with it are predictors of jealousy in men and women involved in couple relationships in Mexico. We applied the Multidimensional Infidelity Inventory and the Jealousy Scale to 302 adult volunteers in couple relationships in central Mexico. Multiple regression in stages found that infidelity is a reliable predictor for jealousy, more in men than in women. The working hypothesis was proved. The results are discussed from the theory of attribution.

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**Keywords:** Jealousy, infidelity, couple, attribution, sexuality.

## Introduction

Suspicion of infidelity elicits jealousy in men and women (Bendixen, Kennair & Buss, 2015; Buss, 2014; Buss & Abrams, 2017; Buss & Shakelford, 1997; Daly & Wilson, 1988). It is also known that jealousy occurs, even among individuals with a liberal sexual lifestyle, emerging when an affair or romance is discovered or divulged (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000).

Jealousy evoked by a partner's real or imagined infidelity may have fatal consequences; for example, it is the leading cause of spousal abuse and

femicide (Daly, Wilson & Weghorst, 1982; Wilson & Daly, 1992), and is also responsible for multiple violent or disruptive behaviors in both genders (Buss, 2000; Shakelford, LeBlanc & Drass, 2000). Consequently, infidelity of one member of a couple, and even the thought of such possible infidelity, can evoke jealousy in many people.

Jealousy will be evoked, particularly, when an external or collateral relationship, which is one conducted in parallel to the formal relationship, touches areas pertaining to the primary relationship which are considered unique and special. However, jealousy is especially likely to grow when the external relationship has potential or real sexual content, because sexual relationships are highly sensitive to insecurity and competition (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004; Harris, 2003).

A large part of research to date has focused on jealousy (Salovey, 1991; White & Mullen, 1989) as a response to a partner's infidelity. Many components of emotional reactions to a partner's imaginary infidelity have been identified by Shackelford, LeBlanc & Drass, (2000). Those authors found gender-based differences in the experience of some emotions. Based on their results, in emotional reactions to infidelity, women scored higher than men on anger and pain, whereas men scored higher than women on freedom/content, homicide/suicide, happiness and sexually exciting (Shakelford, Le Blanc & Drass, 2000).

In Mexico, Rivera et al. (2010) have found that jealousy is associated with the feeling of belonging [with] or possession of the partner, and therefore it is irrelevant whether the danger of losing him or her is real or imaginary. The same authors have described jealousy as an emotional response with a strong obsessive component (Rivera 2010 in Castillo, 2017).

Research on this topic in Mexico has found that the principal emotions and behaviors related to this emotion are: obsession, pain, anger, and mistrust, accompanied by behaviors of control and intrigue (Diaz Loving, Rivera Aragon & Flores Galaz, 1986; Diaz-Loving, Rivera & Flores, 1989; Rivera, Diaz-Loving, Flores & Montero, 2010).

In general, events which evoke jealousy, and in particular extramarital infidelity, cause the partner immediate problems in the relationship (Fincham & May, 2017; Rivera Aragon, Diaz Loving, Villanueva & Montero, 2011) and may also negatively affect a person's self-esteem (Buunk, 1997; Stieger, Preyss & Voracek, 2012).

When one of the members of a couple discovers that some exclusive rewards of the relationship are provided by a rival, the exclusive nature of the relationship is violated and its value diminishes (Buunk, Zurriaga, Gonzalez-Navarro & Monzani, 2016; Dijkstra & Buunk, 1998). Buunk (1997) also found that such effects interact with gender, for example, men are three times more

likely to end a relationship due to their partners' infidelities than their own, whereas women are not.

As regards suspicious jealousy, some authors hypothesize that, in its more extreme forms, suspicious jealousy may be associated with paranoid personality disorder and even foment the appearance of the phenomenon known as the "self-fulfilling prophecy," in which, in response to pressure, the partner ends up actually committing an act of infidelity (Buunk et al., 2016; Buunk & Van Driel, 1989; De Almeida, & Schlösser, 2014).

But apparently, this emotional reaction called jealousy is the product of generations and generations of socialization, given that infidelity has always been present throughout history and in the context of human society (Fisher, 1992).

In fact, evolutionary theory identifies infidelity as part of our evolutionary strategies, by affirming that sexual relationships outside the couple relationship are often a secondary and complementary component of our mixed mating tactics (Fisher, 1992).

From this perspective, the dynamic, established through socialization, of experiencing jealousy in response to possible infidelity has been developed as a strategy which, in the case of men, may reduce the reproductive costs of female adultery and in the case of women, may safeguard them from other risks such as contracting sexually transmitted infections which can lead to infertility, sharing the partner's resources with another woman, or eventual loss of the partner and his resources (Baker, 1996; Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992).

Extensive study has been devoted to the reaction of jealousy in response to possible infidelity, (Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Lim, Hasegawa et al., 1999; Canto Ortiz, Garcia Leiva & Gomez Jacinto, 2009; Harris, 2003; Leiva, Jacinto & Ortiz, 2001) or the jealous personality which is always suspicious (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Buunk et al., 2016; Buunk & Van Driel, 1989; De Almeida & Schlösser, 2014), but there is scant literature which objectively enquires how unfaithful behavior may be related to jealousy toward a partner (Browne, 2015).

According to theories of attribution (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973), the attribution a person gives to an act may have significant consequences in their interaction with others. Furthermore, attribution to an act of infidelity may even determine the degree of conflict or forgiveness seen in the couple after the act is discovered (Bradbury & Fincham 1990; Hall & Finchman, 2006).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine if unfaithful behavior, attribution of motives of infidelity, beliefs associated with infidelity, and its perceived consequences are predictors of jealousy in men and women who are in a couple relationship.

## Method

*Participants* Three hundred and two (302) volunteers participated through non-probabilistic sampling, 151 men and 151 women. Their age ranged from 18 to 46 years (average 30 years), their educational level was high school, all the participants were involved in a heterosexual couple relationship, and 81% reported themselves as married. The mean time in relationship was 14.6 years ( $S.D. = 9.8$ ). The number of persons with whom they had had sexual relations in the last year was from 0 to 5 ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $S.D. = 0.73$ ). Of the total sample, 83% of men and 33% of women reported having been unfaithful in their current relationship; 8% of men and 46% of women reported that their partner was unfaithful; 4% of men and 16% of women reported that both they and their partners were unfaithful; and 5% of the sample did not respond which member had been unfaithful in the relationship.

*Measures* The short versions of the Multidimensional Infidelity Inventory (Romero, Rivera & Diaz-Loving, 2007) were used, made up by four sub-scales: - *Sub-scale motivation for infidelity*: consisting of 35 questions which measure the different reasons for which someone might engage in an act of infidelity. The *Sub-scale beliefs about infidelity*: consisting of 30 questions which measure the connotation individuals attribute to infidelity. The *Sub-scale perceived consequences of infidelity*, with 10 questions which measure perception of negative consequences and positive consequences of infidelity. The *Sub-scale unfaithful behavior*, with 20 questions which measure unfaithful emotional and sexual behavior, and desire for it. All the sub-scales have high levels of internal consistency and validity of construct.

Jealousy Scale (Rivera, Diaz Loving, Flores & Montero, 2010), made up of 12 factors which, based on their conceptual content, were divided in two dimensions, the first six factors were grouped in the area entitled emotions and feelings and the next six factors in the dimension cognitions and styles. All the sub-scales have high levels of internal consistency and validity of construct too.

*Procedure* Participants were contacted at various places like public squares, parks, healthcare centers, and social centers, and were invited to participate in the investigation, explaining its objectives and asking them to sign an informed consent form. Then they were asked to answer the scales as clearly and sincerely as possible, indicating that the questionnaire is part of an investigation whose aim was to identify characteristics of couple relationships. Also, we stressed the anonymity of the answers and informed subjects that their answers would not be catalogued as good or bad, right or wrong, to guarantee participants' honesty.

## Results

After applying the instruments to the sample and given the large number of factors in the jealousy scale, we conducted a second order factor analysis including all the factors in the scale. The factor analysis of principal components with orthogonal rotation produced a factor for self-esteem greater than one, which explained the 61.62% variance (See Table 1). The factors Confidence-Lack of confidence, Confidence, and Pain were eliminated because they had very low factorial weights (below 0.30).

Table 1  
*Second order factorial structure of the Jealousy Scale*

FACTOR	JEALOUSY
Fear	<b>.888</b>
Frustration	<b>.866</b>
Emotional responses produced by jealousy.	<b>.835</b>
Control	<b>.814</b>
Lack of confidence	<b>.814</b>
Obsession	<b>.800</b>
Anger	<b>.798</b>
Negative attitude	<b>.769</b>
Suspicion-intrigue	<b>.747</b>
Confidence-Lack of confidence	.234
Confidence	-.125
Pain	.175
Cronbach's Alpha	.937
% of Variance Explained	61.62
Mean	2.40
S.D.	0.69

Next, descriptive results from the sample were obtained by gender and we observed that on the scale Unfaithful behavior scores were medium to low, with desire for infidelity emotional highest among participants. As regards attribution of infidelity, the scores obtained were also medium to low, with dissatisfaction with the primary relationship highest. In beliefs associated with infidelity, medium scores were found; in men, the strongest beliefs were those associated with infidelity as an act of passion, whereas in women, the strongest beliefs were those which associated with infidelity with a transgression of the relationship. In general, the sample perceived more negative than positive consequences for the act of infidelity and the level of jealousy the sample reported was medium to low, for both men and women (See Table 2).

Table 2  
*Descriptive results from the sample*

	Men		Women	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
<i>Unfaithful behavior</i>				
Sexual infidelity	1.65	0.94	1.23	0.60
Desire for emotional infidelity	2.24	0.96	1.71	0.75
Desire for sexual infidelity	2.11	1.02	1.44	0.74
Emotional infidelity	1.78	0.84	1.30	0.59
<i>Attribution of Infidelity</i>				
Dissatisfaction with the primary relationship	2.98	1.34	2.86	1.42
Sexuality	2.32	1.11	1.83	1.03
Emotional and social instability	2.02	0.91	2.03	0.95
Ideology and norms	2.17	0.92	1.93	0.88
Impulsiveness	2.27	1.02	1.99	0.90
Apathy	2.46	1.09	2.44	1.16
Aggression	2.04	1.11	2.02	1.11
Transgression of the relationship	3.58	1.24	3.82	1.31
Feeling of loss	3.11	1.24	3.13	1.24
Dissatisfaction	3.37	1.41	3.46	1.14
Passion	3.80	0.97	3.16	1.32
Insecurity	3.00	1.21	3.31	1.19
Love for another	2.48	1.46	1.83	1.29
<i>Perceived consequences</i>				
Negative consequences	2.39	1.39	2.25	1.14
Positive consequences	2.29	1.11	2.09	0.85
<i>Jealousy</i>				
	2.34	0.64	2.46	0.74

Note: Theoretical mean for all scales is 3.

Finally, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted, to detect which factors in the Multidimensional Infidelity Inventory are predictors of jealousy in men and women in the sample; the results are described below.

As we can see in Table 3, in the case of men, in the first step the variable Ideology and Norms was included as a predictor of jealousy. The regression was significant and reliably predicts the behavior of jealousy ( $F(1,148) = 27.41, p = .000$ ), explaining 33.7 % of the variance. In the second step of the analysis, the factor emotional infidelity was included in the equation; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(2,147) = 19.28, p = .000$ ). In the third step of the analysis the variable insecurity was included as a predictor; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(3,146) = 19.63, p = .000$ ). In the fourth step the variable desire for emotional infidelity was included as a predictor, and the variable emotional infidelity ceased to be a reliable predictor; however, the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(4,145) = 18.02, p = .000$ ). In the fifth step, the variable emotional infidelity was eliminated; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change

in F ( $F(3,146) = 23.63, p = .000$ ). In the sixth step, the variable dissatisfaction was included; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(4,145) = 20.02, p = .000$ ), forming the final model.

Table 3

*Stepwise regression analysis for variables which predict jealousy in men*

Variables	B	EE	$\beta$	Confidence interval	
				Minimum	Maximum
Ideology and Norms	.166	.050	.239**	.066	.265
Insecurity	.246	.042	.469**	.164	.329
Desire for emotional infidelity	.198	.059	.298**	.081	.316
Dissatisfaction	-.103	.040	-.228*	-.183	-.023

Note:  $R^2 = .150$  for step 1 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .196$  for step 2 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .272$  for step 3 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .312$  for step 4 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .312$  for step 5 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .337$  for step 6 ( $p \leq .001$ ); \* significant values  $p \leq .05$ ; highly significant values \*\* $p \leq .01$

In the case of women, in the first step the variable positive consequences of infidelity, was included as a predictor of jealousy. The regression was significant and reliably predicts the behavior of jealousy ( $F(1,148) = 27.41, p = .000$ ), explaining the 17% variance. In the second step of the analysis, the factor impulsiveness was included in the equation; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(2,147) = 14.10, p = .000$ ) indicating that its contribution to the prediction of jealousy was relevant. In the third step of the analysis, the variable ideology and norms was included as a predictor; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(3,146) = 11.91, p = .000$ ). Finally, in the fourth step the variable sexual infidelity was included; the increase in R squared was significant, as was the change in F ( $F(4,145) = 10.35, p = .000$ ) (See Table 4).  
Table 4

*Stepwise regression analysis for variables which predict jealousy in women*

Variables	B	EE	$\beta$	Confidence interval	
				Minimum	Maximum
Positive consequences	.197	.062	.226*	.074	.320
Impulsiveness	.287	.080	.347***	.129	.445
Ideology and norms	-.198	.080	-.235*	-.356	-.040
Sexual infidelity	.198	.089	.159*	.023	.372

Note:  $R^2 = .087$  for step 1 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .126$  for step 2 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .153$  for step 3 ( $p \leq .001$ );  $R^2 = .189$  for step 4; \* significant values  $p \leq .05$ ; highly significant values \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

**Conclusion**

The working hypothesis was proved. The behavior of and desire for infidelity, its associated motives and consequences, and the perception that infidelity may have positive consequences for a person were reliable predictors of jealousy which individuals displayed toward their partners.



The model had greater predictive power for men, with constructs like ideology and norms (which refers to the individual's value system and ideology, derived from his education and environment), insecurity (where infidelity is conceived as an act derived from insecurity, confusion, cowardice, and egoism on the part of the individuals involved), the desire for emotional infidelity (which is the desire for a romantic bond with another person aside from the primary partner), and dissatisfaction with the primary relationship having the capacity to predict the appearance of jealousy in the couple relationship for men in the sample, practically explaining the 34% variance.

This may be because the actual experience of infidelity makes a man conscious of and vulnerable to his partner's possible infidelity, based on his own desire for infidelity and rooted in his own insecurities, dissatisfactions, and ideologies. In view of this condition, we can infer that in such individuals, the attribution given to their own infidelity may have a boomerang effect, eliciting suspicion of infidelity on the part of their partners.

This theory, starting from the observer's bias (Buunk, 1997; Hall & Fincham, 2006; Ross, 1977) indicates that the attribution to one's own behavior is made through explanations external to the act. Thus, external factors cause a behavior; in other words, if the person is convinced that circumstances beyond their control caused their infidelity, then their partner, under similar circumstances, could also be unfaithful.

This model does not aspire to be determinant, given the study's limitations. Our intention is to contribute to the understanding of jealousy in couple relationships, and the consequences of acts of infidelity therein.

Some of the study's most important limitations were the fact of working only with a small segment of the Mexican population. Men and women in Mexico City, with a high educational level for the average of the population and a mid-range socioeconomic level, who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Future investigations may add to our knowledge by addressing these variables with other equally important groups, such as younger couples, or in other areas of the country and more diverse sociodemographic contexts.

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