

POSTER

JEALOUSY, ANGER, AND AGGRESSION: TESTING THE WELFARE TRADEOFF RECALIBRATION HYPOTHESIS IN ROMANTIC CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Evolutionary Psychology proposes that emotions evolved as adaptive responses to recurrent challenges related to survival and reproduction. Jealousy is theorized to function as a defense against relationship threats, promoting mate retention behaviors, whereas anger operates as a recalibration mechanism triggered by violations in the welfare tradeoff ratio — that is, by perceived devaluation of one's well-being relative to another's interests. Influential theories have posited that, in romantic contexts, mate retention behaviors such as aggression result from jealousy. However, recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that aggression is primarily an outcome of the anger system. This study aims to investigate these contrasting views by analyzing emotional responses to relationship threats and partner devaluation. Participants will evaluate hypothetical scenarios involving extradyadic interactions that selectively manipulate cues of relational threat (jealousy), with or without devaluation (anger), through cost-benefit structures. Adults of both sexes will complete the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (short version), the Digital Jealousy Scale, and emotion-specific ratings for each scenario. Predictions are: (1) threats to relationship stability will more strongly predict jealousy than anger; (2) devaluation will be a stronger predictor of aggression than jealousy; (3) both emotions will be modulated by cost-benefit considerations, with anger being more sensitive to perceived unjust devaluation, and jealousy to relational threat. Although jealousy and anger may be coactivated, isolating their inputs is expected to clarify their distinct adaptive roles, particularly the role of anger in predicting aggressive behavior. Findings may inform theoretical models of emotion specialization and clinical strategies for addressing relational conflict.