

Chapter 1

Introduction

*On how we answer these questions turn all our practices of
child-rearing*

—Bowlby, 1973, p. 4

Jealousy is a universal experience that can be bitter, even violent. Though richly addressed by theologians, philosophers, artists and writers, the topic is often missing within volumes on emotion or temperament, and until recently, virtually absent in the literature on development. When it has received the attention of behavioral scientists, work has drawn on disparate traditions and approaches, leading to disconnected bodies of work. Thus, the topic has been addressed in fragments, like pieces of a puzzle so disconnected from each other it is unclear whether they even belong inside the same puzzle box. Clinicians have studied jealousy to glean insight into aggressive behavior, psychopathology and treatment. Psychoanalytic theorists have sought an empirical basis for substantiating concepts such as the Oedipus complex. For social and personality psychologists, jealousy has been addressed for its potential to yield understanding of romantic, interpersonal relationships. Cultural and evolutionary psychologists have probed jealousy for evidence of universal features of human nature, adaptiveness, and fitness consequences. In this brief we will discuss the nature of jealousy in its most rudimentary form—during infancy. We do so in hopes of offering information of use to scientists from each of these areas, information that may even serve as a key piece of the puzzle that is jealousy.

Background

The current era of interest in jealousy grew from the influence of psychoanalytic theorists. Freud's (1922/1955) notions concerning the Oedipus complex focused on jealousy within the triangle comprised of a child and her caregivers, where the rival was a parent. Although it was his view that the complex did not come into force until the child was around 5 years of age, Klein (1957, 2002) and others who

had adopted methods involving direct observation argued that it was manifested by the age of 9 months. This school of thought has led to considerable misgivings, especially for its emphasis on sexuality. Yet much of its content has not been dismissed. Some have argued that even though they do not compete for sexual access to mother, boys do compete with fathers for mothers' time and resources (Daly and Wilson 1990). Ideas that jealousy exists and is an important phenomenon during early childhood have endured (Hobson 2010).

Following an abundance of anecdotal accounts of jealousy being sparked by a rival who is an adult, empirical research (Cummings et al. 1981) yielded evidence that, in fact, jealousy can be triggered in young children, and even infants as young as 10 months, by a rival who is a parent. Cummings and associates reported that infants and young children displayed jealousy when they witnessed their parents directing affection toward each other. Findings such as these substantiate notions about the young child's capacity for exhibiting jealousy. They also add credence to the work of Klein's esteemed colleague, Winnicott (1964, 1977, 2002), a pediatrician and psychoanalyst who was especially well known in the field of object relations theory. His work includes numerous references to young children's jealousy in contexts that included the child's mother, including a detailed account of Piggie (1977), a young girl who received treatment due to suffering from serious disturbance upon the birth of a young sibling. The current popularity of his writings, some still in print after several decades, speaks to the salience of the topic, if not to researchers then at least to a wide audience of parents, clinicians, and theorists.

Increasingly, early 20th century writers recognized instances of jealousy in children within settings where the interloper was a child rather than a parent. In a section entitled "infant jealousy—birth to 6 years of age", Gesell (1906, p. 453) described acute reactions to these situations among infants as young as 3½ months. Jealousy was depicted as entailing demonstrations of whining, sulking, screaming, crying, destructiveness, and physical aggression. In particular, he noted that "early and violent outbreaks of jealousy" were more prevalent on occasions that involved a newborn sibling. This point was illustrated by Helen Keller whose autobiography includes the confession, "for a long time I regarded my little sister as an intruder. I knew that I now ceased to be my mother's only darling, and the thought filled me with jealousy" (Keller 1903/1995, p. 21). Keller then went on to tell of an instance where she almost murdered her baby sister Mildred by thrusting her from her cradle.

By the 1920s outbursts of this nature came to be commonly known, not as jealousy, but as "rivalry". This term had not reached prominence until the mid-1920s. Why there was a need for new terminology is unclear but the reframing may have helped obviate connotations with sexuality stemming from analytic traditions. Following Gesell (1906), psychologists (Adler 1931; Buhler 1930; Foster 1927; Levy 1934, 1937; McFarland 1938; Oberndorf 1929; Ross 1931; Sewall 1930; Sokoloff 1947) undertook investigations using questionnaires, social agencies' clinical case reports of problem children, and observations of children in home and nursery school settings. These led to works that popularized concerns, and even raised alarm,

through warnings such as Levy's pronouncement "the coming of a new baby creates a crisis, which affects all of the child's relationships—with the family and the world at large" (Levy 1934, p. 233). Admonitions of this nature spawned growing numbers of parenting experts, many of whom continued to spread apprehension among parents. These types of premonitions have shown few signs of subsiding (Volling 2012; Volling et al. 2010). Even today, contemporary pediatricians and parenting experts, such as Spock (1985), Brazelton (1992), and Sears (Sears et al. 2013), continue to dedicate special attention to sibling rivalry.

Adding to the influence of academics and practitioners were changes in family dynamics. Birth rates were declining, and the number of extended, multi-generational households decreased. The nuclear family was a setting that harbored relationships that were less numerous, but more intense. Historians and sociologists have explained that this change helped encourage parental investment in childrearing. This was manifested by heightened concern not only for children's health, but also their mental health. Thus, the innovation of the formal concept of sibling rivalry gained traction (Stearns 2010). Still today, it is the case that when jealousy in children is being studied it is usually addressed within triads where the rival is a sibling. Notably, this is the case regardless of whether work is conducted by individuals in the traditions of psychoanalytic (Blevis 2006; Edward 2013; Winnicott 1977) or developmental psychology (Hart 2012; Meunier et al. 2013).

Notwithstanding mounting interest in jealousy as an intra-familial phenomenon involving parents and siblings, it can be argued that the accounts of child jealousy which ultimately proved to be of greatest influence were those which involved extra-familial relationships. These accounts arose from observations of situations where jealousy had been precipitated by a child who was a *non*-sibling and where caregivers were *not* parents. Rather than taking place within home settings, these reports were based on events that took place in institutions, such as orphanages and hospitals where children underwent long term care (Bridges 1932; Bowlby 1969/1983, 1973; Freud and Dann 1947; Gesell 1906).

In what became a classic work on the ontogenesis of emotions, Bridges (1932) reported on emotionality, including jealousy, among young children living in an orphanage in Canada. She observed that among 18-month-olds, some children "showed depressed, and others angry, jealousy when another child received the coveted attention" of a caregiver (1932, p. 340). She attributed similar responses in slightly younger children to "the beginning of jealousy" (1932, p. 332). Her account is remarkable for several reasons. By referring to jealousy as having a "beginning", she implicated the role of a developmental process that might account for differences in the way jealousy is experienced or expressed as children mature. The account is also exceptional for applying the term jealousy not only in instances where emotionality was expressed through the affect of anger, but also in cases where affect was marked by sadness. This observation is particularly astute given the degree to which most reports emphasized dramatic presentations, entailing violent and murderous outbursts, more in line with anger than sadness.

The most significant contributions to interest in young children's jealousy were accounts co-authored by Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's youngest daughter. She and

Dorothy Burlingham (Burlingham and Freud 1942, 1944) detailed the development of children residing at the Hampstead War Nurseries after having been left homeless during World War II. After the war, Freud and Sophie Dann (1947) gave an account of six German-Jewish orphans' development during their residence at Bulldog Banks following their liberation from Tereszin concentration camp. These young refugees were of particular interest for having withstood severe deprivation from early infancy until they were approximately 4 years of age. During this period they received care by being passed around among a series of inmates, and so they had been deprived of stable adult relationships during their entire infancy. During a period known for a number of exceptionally influential works on institutionalized children (Spitz 1949; Spitz and Wolf 1946), Anna Freud's works stood out for their rich detail and for covering development across extended periods of time.

These accounts later afforded insights into the effects of what Bowlby (1969/1983) referred to as "maternal deprivation". Bowlby's quest to document young children's responses to separation from mother led to his noting reactions marked by protest, despair and detachment. Interestingly, though, the volume *Separation* (Bowlby 1973) opened with an account that pertained to jealousy. Drawing on reports that institutionalized children "became strongly possessive of their nurse and acutely jealous whenever she gave attention to another child", Bowlby questioned "why, it may be asked should these children have become so strongly possessive of their nurse" (Bowlby 1973, p. 3). He then conjectured whether jealousy could have arisen in these children due to the fact that they had been spoiled by having received too much attention or, to the contrary and in line with his theory of attachment, whether jealousy was an outcome of the fact that the children had suffered from having received too little attention from a stable mother-figure. It is following these questions pertaining to jealousy's origins that Bowlby proclaimed, "on how we answer these questions turn all our practices of child-rearing" (Bowlby 1973, p. 4).

Unfortunately, this starting point, with its strong emphasis on jealousy, was followed by lesser attention to issues pertaining to exclusivity. As he ventured further from his early training in object-relations, which had been under Melanie Klein, his focus on oedipal jealousies rooted in the infant-mother-father triad were supplanted by focus on the infant-mother dyad. In parallel, the importance of sexual intimacy was superseded by emotional intimacy (Selby 1993; Bradley 2010). Thus, loss of maternal caregiving became an issue that gained prominence while interest in loss of *exclusivity* in maternal caregiving waned. This transition in Bowlby's thinking was illustrated, for example, by the fact that the sentence "there is strong bias for attachment behavior to become directed mainly toward one particular person and for a child to become strongly possessive of that person" which appeared in the first edition of *Attachment* (Bowlby 1969, p. 308) was later revised. In the second edition (Bowlby 1983, p. 308) the sentence was retained, but without the final reference to jealousy.

Overall, the questions that Bowlby raised with regard to jealousy have remained untreated and unanswered. Still, we owe him credit for calling attention to the phenomenon of jealousy in young children, for raising questions with respect to its origins as a function of the child-caregiver relationship, and for projecting its

prominent role in determining child outcomes. Eventually, interest in these sorts of issues helped shape the notion that jealousy is a topic worthy of investigative attention, a view that, in turn, prompted empirical treatments using experimental approaches and laboratory procedures. Certainly, it inspired our own studies on jealousy in infants. Using laboratory techniques and experimental methodology, we and a few other groups have undertaken studies that have only begun to answer the questions posed by Bowlby. They do, however, point to some important clues toward unraveling jealousy in its earliest form. These are addressed in the chapters that follow.

Jealousy in Infants

Laboratory Research on Differential Treatment

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