



## Jealousy and the Male (Im)Potency: Psychodynamic Reading from a Gender Perspective

Maisa Campos Guimarães  & Valeska Zanello 

*Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brasil*

**ABSTRACT** – Subjective experiences of jealousy are crossed by cultural and gender dimensions. From a perspective of masculinity studies, this article aims to offer a hermeneutic analysis of how cisgender men understand, designate, and experience this affection, through qualitative research containing narrative interviews and content analysis. The participants were 8 subjects in heterosexual relationships with complaints about feeling and/or receiving jealousy. The received jealousy is analyzed under the category “jealous women, strengthened men”. The feeling of jealousy is discussed through three categories: “feeling jealous amid the narcissistic issues of (im)potency”; “noticing and avoiding: the ambivalences of jealous affection”; “a disguised jealousy that demands submission from women”. A gendered reading of emotional and narcissistic issues showed how experiences of male jealousy are linked to the efficacy dispositif.

**KEYWORDS:** jealousy, gender, masculinities, efficacy dispositif

## Ciúmes e Anseios de (Im)Potência Masculina: Leitura Psicológica sob uma Ótica de Gênero

**RESUMO** – Vivências subjetivas do ciúme são atravessadas por dimensões culturais e de gênero. Na perspectiva dos estudos das masculinidades, objetiva-se uma análise hermenêutica de como homens cisgênero entendem, nomeiam e experienciam esse afeto. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa com entrevistas narrativas e análise de conteúdo. Participaram do estudo 8 sujeitos em relacionamentos heteroafetivos com queixas sobre sentir e/ou receber ciúmes. Na categoria “elas ciumentas, eles fortalecidos”, analisa-se o ciúme recebido. Discute-se sobre o ciúme sentido em três categorias: “enciumar-se em meio às questões narcísicas da (im)potência”; “perceber e se esquivar: das ambivalências do afeto ciumento”; “um ciúme disfarçado, mas que exige delas submissão”. Uma leitura gendrada das questões emocionais e narcísicas evidenciaram como experiências ciumentas masculinas se articulam ao dispositivo da eficácia.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** ciúme, gênero, masculinidades, dispositivo da eficácia

The traditional stories about jealousy in Western culture have a common point in their plots: from the biblical story of Cain to the Shakespearean classic Othello, reaching the conflict between Bentinho, Capitu, and Escobar in the 1900 book *Dom Casmurro*, by the Brazilian author Machado de Assis, the jealous characters are men. The parallel between the works of Shakespeare and Machado Assis is not only mentioned by literary critics but also by the narrator of *Dom Casmurro*: Santiago refers to himself as Othello, although he emphasizes a fundamental difference between the stories, since he understands that his Desdemona (in this case, Capitu) is guilty (Assis, 2020; Caldwell, 2008).

Would *Dom Casmurro* be the story about Bentinho’s loving disappointment because of the betrayal he suffered from his beloved Capitu, or would it be a story about his excessive jealousy operating in an almost delusional logic that convinces both the narrator and his readers of his wife’s infidelity, after all? If this debate resonates in literary analysis today, it is due to the critical and investigative work carried out by Helen Caldwell (2008) who, in 1960, aimed to reflect upon such a verdict after noticing that “practically three generations – at least of critics – considered Capitu guilty” (p. 100), without a proper discussion about the jealous behavior of Bentinho.

From this scenario, it becomes clear how, traditionally, there is a strong association between male jealousy and suffering for love in tragic plots. The high numbers of femicides in Brazil also show how much male jealous behavior is present in situations of violence committed against women (Ávila et al., 2020; Fernandes et al., 2018).

Is it possible – and urgent – to question what kinds of assumptions support such dynamics? Since feeling jealousy is not a uniquely male experience, why are tragic jealous outcomes predominantly male? Is jealousy experienced differently in men and women, after all? Or, as questioned in a previous study: “Would there be any particularity in men, or this place, that made them feel so affected by the relationship to the point of producing such aggressive jealousy for themselves and others?” (Reis, 2015, p. 43).

For Psychoanalysis, jealousy needs to be understood as a matter of libidinal economy and not of psychic structuring. As Freud (1922/2019b) explains, this affection “is by no means rational, that is, originating from current ties, or proportional to the actual circumstances and entirely dominated by the conscious Ego, because it is deeply rooted in the Unconscious” (p. 193).

The psychoanalytic discussion about jealousy is essentially related to the narcissistic dynamics involving both the perception of oneself as a lacking and limited subject, and the desire towards the other that is driven by this lack, and at the same time seeks ways to deny or supplant it (Brasil, 2009; Lachaud, 2001; Quinet, 2009). By bringing this affection closer to anguish, “jealousy is, therefore, the other side of desire – it is the sign of the subject’s incompleteness” (Quinet, 2009, p. 135). Thus, jealousy is understood as one of

the ways of symbolizing helplessness. The jealous person clearly says: Do not love anyone besides me; without your love, I die — helplessness reversed and transformed into an insatiable desire for omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. The jealous person wants everything from their object of love and wishes to be their only source of joy, knowing everything about them and being present all the time. In a word, they want total power over their beloved target (Belo, 2015, p. 66).

If the jealous demand for a unique and majestic place for the other can be read as a narcissistic claim (Brasil, 2009), the frustration of this idealization (of oneself, of the other, and of love itself) triggers a process of narcissistic mourning (Lachaud, 2001), by bringing up questions related to castration and the undoubted impossibility of the subject’s total substitution (for oneself and the other). At this point, psychoanalytic understanding differentiates the directions taken by men and women concerning the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, and, consequently, the phallic relationship of perceiving oneself – more or less – lacking or potent (Freud, 2006, 2019a). Femininity would then be associated with lack, while masculinity would be closer to the logic of Law and power.

It would be problematic, however, “to consider the construction of the feminine and the masculine as eternalized, *a priori* universal and a-historicized concepts. They are constructions of almost mythical categories because they are founding and constitute the ‘unthought’ of gender differences” (Machado, 1998, p. 18). Therefore, we argue for the importance of understanding the subjective resolutions for the castration anxiety circumscribed by the cultural and historical dimensions that cross the processes of subjectivation. After all, as Zanello (2018) highlights, in sexist cultures, becoming a person/subject is inseparable from the performances and cultural scripts that conform to the becoming of a man or a woman. From this perspective, what is proposed is a gendered reading of both the concept of narcissism and the concept of masculinity.

A basic premise in the debate about masculinity is that it is not a mere reflection of a mythical or innate essence, nor a manifestation of a biological nature, but it is a social, historical, and symbolic construct that delimits the definitions of masculinity and gender relations (Colling & Tedeschi, 2019; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013; Kimmel, 1998; Zanello, 2018). Thus, although a plurality of masculinities is evident, they are organized in a hierarchical way amongst themselves and with women.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity engenders a pattern of attitudes, values, and ideals concerning which subjects seek/need to position themselves to be reckoned as men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013). These configurations of social practices regarding the masculine are entangled in power relations that establish normative and ideological dynamics about becoming a man – above all, becoming an honorable, legitimized, and positively valued man.

A historical analysis of Western culture allows us to identify how there is socialization of men focused on the exercise of power (Saffioti, 2011), in which

the cultural construction of categories of the masculine is taking place in a minefield, where several different identifications are entangled, mixed, and merged, including being the bearer of the symbolic law (and, therefore, also submitted to it); being an arbitrary producer of the law (and, therefore, without the need of being submitted to it); being an agent of power; and being an agent of violence. These are the pitfalls of the conceptions of masculinity (Machado, 2004, p.72)

Additionally, there is the constant need to prove their masculinity, especially in front of other men – because they are the ones who evaluate and legitimize themselves (Kimmel, 1998). The idea of needing to prove oneself as a man demonstrates how contradictory the logic of potency attributed to the masculine can be, since this need to constantly reaffirm oneself also reveals a permanent risk of loss of power and status (Colling & Tedeschi, 2019), which is subjectively experienced as an identity interpellation by rescuing narcissistic demands about perceiving oneself as a subject/man (Zanello, 2018).

As demonstrated by Zanello (2018), in Brazilian culture, the processes of male subjectivation are guided by the efficacy dispositif: identity injunctions about being a man are structured from demands on sexual and labor virility. Being sexually potent and having labor/financial power are affirmation parameters about masculinity that are organized in parallel to a negative order: opposing something that might identify them or bring them closer to what could be seen as feminine – sensitivity, fragility, passivity, care, love.

Thus, it is evident how there is an interpellation for an affective brutalization of men, in which values of virility and domination are associated with “an exercise of oneself, not only by controlling one’s actions but also a control of the emotions” (Zanello, 2018, p. 178). It is, therefore, a discussion that involves both cultural and political dimensions regarding gender identity and male socialization, and the apprehension of emotions as a social and symbolic phenomenon.

Studies in the field of Anthropology of Emotions show how sensory perceptions, emotional repercussions of a given experience, and the possibilities of expressing affection reflect collective (more or less) implicit norms, translating, within singular circumstances of each subject, a symbolically and

culturally constructed intelligibility about each feeling (Le Breton, 2019).

A contextual analysis allows us to identify how emotional experiences are crossed by moral conceptions, by subjective positions demarcated in power relationships, and by processes of learning and social identification (Rezende & Coelho, 2010). As Le Breton (2019) points out, “the triggering of emotions is necessarily a cultural given woven in the heart of social bonding and nurtured through the entire history of the subject. It shows others a personal way of seeing the world and being affected by it (p. 146).

In this perspective, this research seeks to understand jealousy as an emotion inscribed (and prescribed) in a cultural grammar that is expressed by a diversity of meanings that take shape inside an individual history, but also in the collective pacts that sustain masculinities. Thus, two fundamental points are explored in this article: how the phenomenon of jealousy is configured in subjective experiences and how it intersects with gender issues. The objective is to undertake a hermeneutic analysis of how cisgender men (male people who identify as men) understand, designate, and experience jealousy.

## METHOD

This qualitative research seeks a “congruence between the theoretical paradigms (which underlie the definition of the object and the formulation of the problem) and the methods and techniques employed (to approach the empirical reality)” (Fontanella et al., 2008, p. 19). Therefore, there were some constant challenges: the understanding of the research universe, the strategy to access the selected sample, and the methodological ways to listen to the subjects.

Considering the intimate and private dimension of the object of study, the selection of the research sample through the snowball method (Vinuto, 2016) proved to be promising in identifying possible subjects interested in participating in the research. To do so, a text about the research was prepared and disseminated in different contact networks, inviting people to participate in the research and requesting them to forward the message to their networks.

The invitation informed people that it was a research project in Psychology that aimed to understand jealousy in the love experience and that it followed all due ethical care. The invitation for an individual interview was directed at men who were committed to heterosexual relationships and who identified jealousy as an impacting factor in their personal love experiences. A link to a virtual form was also made available for those interested to inform contact details; age; family income; racial self-identification; and their demands concerning jealousy.

Monitoring responses to the form represented a methodological step. Most of them took place in the first days after the publicization of the form. With the decrease in the response rate, the initial sample was closed. A first

analysis of the 76 responses to the form was carried out, adopting as exclusion criteria: entries with incomplete information, duplicate responses, or responses outside the stipulated profile. From this procedure, a spectrum of 67 subjects interested in the research was defined.

In the next step, it was identified that 46.3% of the subjects declared to be affected by the jealousy that a partner (or ex) felt towards them; 14.9% were affected by the jealousy they felt towards a partner; 22.4% were affected by both contexts; and 16.1% filled in the option “other”, detailing diverse situations, from feeling “no jealousy” to “only moderate” jealousy. This initial sample also proved to be diverse in terms of age, racial identification, and family income.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the focus on understanding and interpreting the research problem, and the proposal to carry out in-depth interviews, we opted for an intentionally limited sample of subjects, using theoretical saturation as criteria, in eight subjects to be interviewed (Fontanella & Júnior, 2012; Minayo, 2012). The essential attributes in this sampling delimitation were defined to guarantee both ethnic-racial<sup>1</sup> and age diversity; as well as a variety in terms of how the jealousy dilemmas<sup>2</sup> were presented in their experiences.

1 Classified from the open question: “How do you identify in terms of color/race?”.

2 For the closed question “In general, how does jealousy affect you the most?”, the following possibilities of answers were presented: because you feel very jealous; because of the jealousy that a partner (or ex) feels towards you; because of both: the jealousy you feel, and your partner (or ex) feels; or others (with a respective field open for specification).

A descriptive overview of the responses to the survey by the subjects is as follows: two identified as being very jealous (Marcelo<sup>3</sup>, 42 years old, black; and Luciano, 22, black); three complained about the jealousy of their partners (Martin, 54, black; Vicente, 22, black; and Alfredo, 25, black); two pointed out jealousy dilemmas in both situations (Felipe, 28, white; and Ronaldo, 25, white); and one of them filled in the option “others”, describing that he had moderate jealousy (Joel, 55, black).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to conduct the interviews remotely through videoconferences. The Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE) was done as an online form and sent by e-mail to all participants. The interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes and were recorded in audio and video, to be later fully transcribed.

The narrative interview technique was employed, given its proposal to “generate stories” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2002, p. 105). The conversation was marked by a non-directive posture by the researcher, without a structured script and with openness for the subject to approach his experiences with his own pace and language.

The interviews began with an invitation for the participants to freely report their stories related to jealousy and, only after they indicated the end of their reports, the researcher explored certain themes that had previously been defined in the research as relevant to this study. At this point, the subjects were questioned about how they compared their experiences of feeling and receiving jealousy; and how (if)

they perceived any association between racial issues and their jealousy and/or love experiences.

In the dialogue with the research subjects, the researcher adopted an active posture of questioning, interpreting, and establishing a critical perspective, in fieldwork whose results are constructed and not merely collected or contemplated (Minayo, 2012). Similarly, there is an understanding that the “classification movement that privileges the meaning of the field material should not seek an essentialist truth in it, but the meaning that the interviewees express” (Minayo, 2012, p. 624).

After transcribing the interviews, the content analysis technique was employed. (Bardin, 2011). In this perspective, in the first step, the two researchers read the interviews separately, seeking to identify the most frequent and relevant themes in the narratives. Subsequently, discussions were held between them to compare points of view, identify transversal themes to the transcribed material, list the categories of analysis, and establish a dialogue between the theoretical foundations and the listening of the subjects. The presentation and discussion of the results below are oriented to

build a report composed of personal testimonies and subjective views of the interlocutors, in which the speeches of some are added to those of others and are composed with or opposed to the observations ... [to] weave a story or a collective narrative, from which experiences stand out with their richness and contradictions (Minayo, 2012, p. 623).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering that emotions permeate subjective experiences and that the focus of this research was to understand how they are configured and are (re)signified, the categories of analysis will be presented based on a differentiation between feeling jealousy toward a partner and receiving jealousy from a partner. Reflections about received jealousy will be presented in a single category of analysis named “jealous women, strengthened men”; the experiences of feeling jealous will be discussed in three different categories: “feeling jealous amid the narcissistic issues of (im)potency”; “noticing and avoiding: the ambivalences of jealous affection”; “a disguised jealousy that demands submission from women”.

These two dimensions were approached by the subjects based on reports that varied both in terms of the directionality of jealousy and its circumscription in different love relationships established by them. Half of the sample, for example, reported that their jealousy experiences were restricted to a single love relationship (Vicente, Joel, Luciano, Marcelo), while the rest addressed situations in different

relationships where they felt and received jealousy (Alfredo, Ronaldo, Felipe, Martin). Only two narratives exclusively emphasized receiving jealousy from a partner, with the subjects (Martin and Vicente) affirming that jealousy was something very unusual in their lives; and just one subject (Luciano) solely addressed his jealousy, noting that his girlfriend did not feel such affection. In the other interviews, the stories and reflections permeated experiences of both feeling and receiving jealousy.

### Received jealousy: jealous women, strengthened men

Regarding the experience of perceiving themselves as the object of a partner’s jealousy, it was common for the subjects to interpret it as something beneficial for them, because it was linked to “her love and her care for the family”<sup>4</sup> (Marcelo); and to “being loved, and having

<sup>3</sup> All names mentioned are fictitious and were randomly defined by the researcher.

<sup>4</sup> The speeches of the participants were transcribed literally, following APA citation rules, but respecting the language style and common pauses in spoken language. They were later translated to English by the author for the purposes of this article, following the same parameters.

someone who cares about you, and who does not want to lose you” (Felipe). Even in the case in which the subject (Luciano) only reported experiences of his jealousy, emphasizing that his girlfriend did not feel or show such affection, it was possible to identify a similarity with such interpretations, given that her absence of jealousy would raise doubts about whether she, in fact, liked him.

This positive evaluation of the received jealousy was mentioned in a confessional tone marked by an ambivalent logic that involved realizing that the partner was uncomfortable and feeling pleasure with the situation, even though they also complained about her jealousy. Ronaldo’s speech about how he feels when he notices the jealousy of his current girlfriend expresses this context:

I feel bad because I know she is not doing very well. Because she does not feel well, right? Oh, but, at the same time, I like knowing that she cares enough like this. There is this thing, right? Deep, deep down... maybe inside a secret box in my brain, I feel a bit relieved by the fact that she feels jealous.

The experience of receiving jealousy shows, on the one hand, how they evaluate it from the subjective repercussions for themselves (Felipe: “I dare say that it is even good for self-esteem, you know?”). On the other hand, it shows how they judge their partner as insecure or immature because of that affection.

These two dimensions, however, reinforce each other to bring some empowerment to men in their love relationships, as even one of the participants states: “But that is where the issue comes in because she has always been insecure and I would feel strong, loved, comfortable” (Alfredo).

Theoretical studies from a gender perspective analyze how heterosexual relationships are marked by unequal social and subjective positions between men and women. As Lagarde (2001) discusses, falling in love brings a power of self-esteem to men as, culturally, women are expected to seek and dedicate themselves to the benefit and improvement of their partner so that he can then love her. Zanello (2018), in turn, shows how men profit from women’s love dispositif: since, for them, being chosen and loved plays a central role in their identity processes, this contributes to the male place/desire for power as the ones that choose and, consequently, legitimize women’s narcissistic experiences of love.

However, despite this initial assessment of jealousy as positive, interviewees spoke of a threshold from which they consider jealousy excessive. The factor that would most influence this parameter is the partner’s attempt to control their lives. Common reports brought to exemplify this excessive stance were looking at their cell phone, reading their messages, questioning their actions on social media, and asking them who they talked to. In general, these attitudes were understood as something “annoying”, which irritated them and bothered them because it represented an invasion of their privacy.

Although such situations were mentioned as upsetting and annoying, it is interesting to notice how much they emphasized that they did not give in to such attempts of control. This so-called resistance appears in the narratives in different contexts, sometimes through an attitude of affirmation of their desires and singularities (Vicente: “I did not do it to provoke her, you know, the things I did that she didn’t like, I did them because it was a pleasure of mine”); sometimes seeking to disqualify her demand (Alfredo when he refused to cancel a friendship on social media: “I will not do that, because it makes no sense! I believe that I am free, and you are also free”); sometimes facing the situation with sarcasm (Martin said that he “mocked and sulked: I made a point of not saying something that I knew she wanted to know”).

These examples indicate how an assertion of independence and non-subjugation to the demands made by women are central to the way men deal with the jealousy of their partners, above all because they are basic points of male identity processes. Not occupying a subordinate position is presented as a parameter of manhood (Kimmel, 1998), which reveals both the desire and seek to legitimize oneself in a dominant position regarding others, and a self-centered movement made by men in romantic relationships (Zanello, 2018). It is possible to identify, moreover, that this possibility of defining a limit to what seemed excessive jealousy to them was not experienced as a concern or risk of suffering abusive or aggressive reactions from the partner, which differs in many aspects from the experiences of women with jealous partners (Guimarães & Zanello, 2022).

Another issue that stood out in the narratives is the perception of a valid reason for jealousy since the subjects considered their partners’ jealousy to be unjustified if there was no infidelity. Even so, we noticed that even in situations where they reported not being faithful, such acknowledgment was not admitted to the partner and did not minimize their complaints about them. Ronaldo, when complaining about a jealous ex-girlfriend:

Anything, it became almost paranoia, like that, right? I think. Anything was, it was me falling in love with someone, you know? And it was directed at a specific person. And then that eventually broke our relationship, it really ended the relationship. Due to this jealousy, right? Because there wasn’t, there wasn’t anymore... It was no longer worth it for me, you know, let’s say, being with her.

However, at a later point in the interview, he ponders that “the annoying thing is that, in fact, she had reasons to be jealous, right?”, referring to the fact that, at the time, he fell in love with another woman (the same one mentioned by her partner). Although, in the interview, there is such recognition, he admits that he always denied any interest or infidelity to his partner, insisting in his discourse that the problem in the relationship had been her excessive jealousy and emotional instability.

What interests us here is not a moral discussion about the particularities of Ronaldo's desire for love, but to discuss critically how there is a management of the partner's jealousy dilemmas aimed at trying to delegitimize the complaints of his partner using psychological manipulation strategies. This phenomenon, described in the literature as gaslighting (Abramson, 2014), also appeared in other narratives, presenting itself through the intentionality of the subjects in using these strategies to disqualify women and, at the same time, preserve themselves in a place of knowledge/power over the other. At this point, it is important to name these practices as psychological violence that seriously affects the mental health of those who suffer gaslighting situations.

Finally, it was possible to see how discourses about jealousy can easily reinforce gender stereotypes to maintain/establish an unequal power relationship, in which it would be up to women to remain silent about their annoyances as a way of not bringing disharmony to the family or discomfort to their partners, who enjoy the privilege of being the ones who choose and decide about their love bond (Zanella, 2018).

## Feeling jealous

**Feeling jealous amid the narcissistic issues of (im)potency.** The experience of feeling jealous revolves around 3 dimensions: the subject himself, the loved one, and the one seen as a rival. Although the association of jealousy with the fear of a partner's infidelity is common, the narratives of this research revealed that this link does not necessarily dominate men's jealousy experiences.

When mentioning the contexts in which they perceived themselves as jealous, their discomfort was portrayed as being more directed at other people than at the partner herself. Felipe evaluates: "That's why I say that I think I trust her, that the problem is not that I don't trust her, you know. It is always thinking about other's intentions, not hers". Ronaldo tries to translate his discomfort: "It's a matter, sometimes, of knowing, for example, if the guy is very handsome, if he's very intelligent. It depends, right? I don't know, if he's successful [laughs], right? I keep thinking how interesting she would find this guy, you know?". Meanwhile, Alfredo highlights: "I think the matter of jealousy is what that person is, what that person represents, and what feelings that person is awakening in the person I love, right?".

These excerpts should be analyzed from two angles. On one side, there is a focus on the other being "more attractive or more requested – all the girls were interested in him, wanted to kiss him" (Luciano); or the other person being "very strong, or tall, or able to provide, or very smart, or successful" (Ronaldo). From a logic of comparison, we see an identity interpellation of the subject related to potency: what if I am not as potent as the other? What if that other man is more powerful than me? In other words, the questions raised are specifically related to the efficacy dispositif, which guides male subjectivation: if the other is more powerful,

will he be more of a man than me? Will I be delegitimized as a man/subject? (Zanella, 2018).

On the other side, this supposed threat is put to the test when the subject questions himself about how the partner sees and treats others. At this point, a simple look, "something inevitable in any relationship, insofar as it reveals the presence of the other, a third party, exposing lack and difference" (Arreguy, 2004, p. 118) is interpreted as a deviation – a form of looking away or misconduct – from the woman. The following statement illustrates how that made Alfredo feel inferior and/or excluded:

What was I threatened by? It was the way it all happened, you know. Her wanting to take a picture of him, her taking the initiative to go and talk to him, her saying the sentence 'Oh, our eyes met each other'. That sounded romantic, right? Like the way she said it, you know? It made me feel like that because it's about how much they're talking, and what kind of conversation they're having. What are they talking about that made her not miss me? Where do I get in this conversation, understand?

As explained in the example above, the fear of the partner having an affair becomes secondary when the subject is faced with the possibility of her discovering in another person something attractive to her that he does not have or cannot supply. Perceiving oneself as a lacking subject reveals narcissistic dilemmas that are at the center of jealousy (Brasil, 2009; Lachaud, 2001). However, it is crucial to understand how the psychic experience of a narcissistic collapse is set up from a gendering process that poses distinct identity issues for men and women.

For a man, the castration anxiety is resumed through jealous experiences when he realizes it is impossible to be a complete subject (as idealized by himself) who can fully supply the object of his affection. When faced with the narcissistic impossibility of being a whole, there is the question: how is she able to experience jouissance without me? As Lachaud (2001) argues, "to be jealous means to be jealous of the WHOLE. Jealousy is a claim for the WHOLE. It means to invest, in an imaginary way, a supposed WHOLE position. To be jealous is to say no to the lack" (p. 81).

At this point, when the partner's desires are not met by him or when her interests are not directed towards his interests, they are perceived as a threat, triggering a jealous logic. That was the case of Marcelo, who felt jealous when he noticed his wife was more understanding with her employees than with him; or when Felipe found out his partner told something personal to a friend before telling him; or when Luciano complained about his girlfriend's sympathy and smiling. As a matter of fact, in different narratives, jealousy was associated with the time their partners dedicated to family members (especially parents and siblings), revealing that any event or person who receives the woman's affective investment can be perceived as an embarrassment or a disregard for themselves.

Hence, although the concern with love affairs is not predominant in the narratives, we cannot completely discard the problem of betrayal, since the subject feels betrayed for not receiving everything from his partner – a smile or a look, time, understating, and desire. In this narcissistic appeal of an unresolved castration, not receiving everything from the other is understood not as a characteristic of human subjectivation itself, but as an insult made by the woman who did not fulfill the romantic promise of total surrender, or as a humiliation caused by a rival who steals his partner's desire (Brasil, 2009).

Indeed, how men refer to their so-called rivals reveals discomfort, but above all, reveals an admiration for them. After all, as Psychoanalysis reminds us, this discomfort is directly related to such admiration, since the frustrated experience of an ideal ego establishes the search for an ego ideal that seems unattainable, in the same proportion as it seems achieved by others (Freud, 2006). As Lachaud (2001) highlights, "If jealousy affects narcissism, it is perhaps less because 'I am not as good as the other' than because the other has, in my imagination, what I do not have" (p. 35).

This psychic experience of a narcissistic collapse is subjectively experienced in a particularity that is necessarily circumscribed in a historical and cultural context and, for this very reason, needs to be read from this context. At this point, the parameters of this idealization of oneself and the rival connect with hegemonic masculinity. According to this concept, there is a spectrum of actions and postures that subjects should adopt to set themselves in a place of legitimacy and power as a man in front of other men and women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013).

The historical frame of hegemonic masculinity in a sexist and patriarchal culture as is the case of Brazil (Chauí, 2003) promises a privileged place for men (in the family and society) as representatives of the Law (Machado, 2004), who benefit from women's care and dedication (Zanello, 2018). These privileges, however, are linked to a hierarchical logic that involves both a dispute between men (dominant x subordinate masculinities) and a subjugation of women.

Thus, it is not a mere coincidence that feelings of betrayal of the promise/desire to be "almighty" are evident in the narratives about jealousy, alongside attempts to demean other men and disqualify women. Such dynamics will be addressed in the following sections, which discuss the interpretations made by the subjects about their experiences of jealousy and how they handle them.

**Noticing and avoiding: the ambivalences of jealous affection.** When talking about their jealousy, most participants mentioned feeling insecure, not confident, and/or having low self-esteem. To Luciano, his problems in the past with excessive jealousy were related to "a matter of low self-esteem and self-confidence", highlighting the direct impact of being a fat man on these feelings. Many of the interviewees identified feeling jealous as a problem because it was an experience

that made them vulnerable. Alfredo, for example, recognizes that he feels "impotent", and Felipe stresses the fact that it is something that emotionally destabilizes him: "It's something that challenges my logic a little bit, you know? Because I don't want to feel that, I don't understand why it happens, and I obviously think it's a bad feeling, a harmful thing".

It was evident, however, that the subjects resisted going deeper into this issue: even when they mentioned the discomfort, the speech was soon directed to statements such as "if you are not jealous, I think the relationship is not going very well" (Joel) or "because if you feel love, you are jealous, right?" (Alfredo). In some cases, such as Joel's, such discomfort was not even admitted, under the justification that "it's normal to feel jealousy" – despite having declared interest to be a participant in the research and reporting several episodes in which jealousy had bothered him.

There is an ambivalence around noticing/admitting the jealous discomfort, mostly because this affection makes a narcissistic interpellation to the subject and questions his masculinity. In other words, jealousy raises questions about the places where each person positions oneself (or desires) within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, unfolding anxieties of subaltern positions such as the ones of black men in racist contexts. Luciano, for example, recognizes that the racial issue (he identifies as black) plays a "significant role" in his self-esteem. However, his speech reveals a dual logic: he associates his jealousy with low self-esteem and associates his self-esteem with his racial experience. However, when questioned about the connections between feeling jealous and his experiences as a black man, he denies a relation between them.

Nevertheless, it was possible to identify different defense mechanisms frequently used by the research subjects as a way of preserving themselves (or preserving their legitimate status as men): rationalization, denial, and isolation. In the rationalization process, there is an attempt to avoid contact with anxieties, dissociating affection from the lived experience, while a new narrative is elaborated (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2011). The previous examples show such dynamics: as soon as the discomfort of experiencing jealousy is mentioned, the discourse is covered with affirmations that it is a "normal" feeling or a commonplace situation. In other circumstances, the denial of that affection and an attempt to replace it with another reading of the situation stood out: "This is not jealousy, it's just care for her (Joel); I didn't do it out of jealousy, I did it out of concern" (Marcelo).

It is interesting to see how much these unconscious mechanisms are anchored in discourses and cultural practices that have a high legitimacy in society and, for that very reason, end up being endorsed in this dialectic practice. In this sense, it is possible to visualize how the speeches of the subjects are traversed by a pedagogy of affections that reveals a sociability based on the romanticization of jealousy and the ideology of romantic love. That also has

repercussions on women who, to a certain extent, romanticize or normalize the jealousy they receive from their partners (Guimarães & Zanello, 2022). If the ideals of romantic love praise a total surrender to the relationship, the idealization of the other, and the suffering inherent to the fear of loss (Freire Costa, 1998), it is worth problematizing, however, how such scripts demarcate unequal expectations and are maintained from different performances addressed to men and women (Lagarde, 2001; Zanello, 2018).

Isolation, in turn, works similarly to rationalization insofar as it is also a strategy to prevent a raise of awareness about their anxiety. In this mechanism, what happens is a libidinal investment in a specific issue, to interrupt other associations and reflections about their experiences. Laplace and Pontalis (2011) emphasize how this is an “archaic defense against the drive” (p. 258).

Alfredo, for example, after mentioning all the discomfort he felt when his girlfriend looked at another man, took his picture, and talked to him, concludes that the problem was just that she did not introduce him to the man in question. The isolation mechanism can be seen not only through these simplistic and disconnected explanations but, above all, when this fact is apparently resolved even though the jealousy dilemmas persist, being quickly reorganized around another demand.

In the interview with Felipe, he recognizes that he was being “contradictory”: initially, he had attributed his jealousy to a friendship his partner had (of which he did not know); but later, when he met that friend, he would justify his discomfort by claiming that the two were talking on the phone at “odd” times. Felipe then realizes this dynamic and talks about it: “I get attached and try to bring elements that deep down make no sense. I know that, right. But I keep nitpicking over things to justify the jealousy, to justify what I’m feeling”.

These mechanisms are attempts to instrumentalize responses to the ambivalences intertwined with jealous affection. What is evident is how the doubt of the jealous person seems to be built in a way that there is no possible solution, as if it were a demand for verification that “no proof can ever satisfy. Finding what he seeks would not calm him down” (Lachaud, 2001, p. 118).

The issue of impotency reveals a narcissistic mourning of the subjects, but beyond that, it expresses a masculine demand for the maintenance of their privileges. Marcelo says he does not like to “use the word jealousy”, while Alfredo points out: “I don’t tell her [that I feel jealous]. Because I think she would take advantage of my weakness. I didn’t want to admit it to her, I didn’t want her to think I was weak, or that I was in her hands”. This excerpt reveals how the emotional manifestation of feelings such as jealousy is perceived as a threat to the idea of virility and, therefore, “they keep silent to prioritize their own needs and maintain a feeling of self-sufficiency” (Zanello, 2018, p. 119).

**Disguised jealousy that demands submission from women.** As previously discussed, the denial of jealousy as a defense mechanism occurs at an unconscious level, seeking to reject a given psychic reality and the consequent anxieties associated with it. However, it was possible to identify, in the interviews, another process of denial related to jealousy that is consciously established and unfolds through strategies built to respond to and manage the jealousy dilemmas in their relationships.

In this process, the subjects, despite recognizing and referring to their jealousy in the interviews, emphasized that they did not confess that affection to their partners. Although they did not designate it as such, the subjects expressed their discomfort by showing dissatisfaction with their partners’ attitudes. These complaints were mostly related to the style of clothing, time spent with their families, the way they talked to other people, their interactions on social media, friendly attitudes towards others, and/or friendships they maintained.

It becomes evident how gender stereotypes are reproduced in this dynamic: women as helpless, naive, and influential; and men as those who would have to command, teach, and/or protect women’s choices. Luciano complains that his partner was “friendly and naive” and did not realize that “many men approached her with second intentions”. Joel admits that once he “went beyond normal jealousy” when he noticed a man looking insistently at his wife:

the way the person looked at her, you know... I must tell you that I had a crazy physical reaction, which I had never thought about, right? Because the urge I had was to grab the guy and break him with a barbell from the gym, right?

Joel says that his wife had “not even” seen such a look, which, in his logic, reinforced the image of his wife as incapable of protecting herself without his presence. Marcelo, in turn, when complaining about his wife wearing tight or short clothes, emphasizes: “Being a married woman and wearing that kind of clothes... I don’t think it’s cool, because it provokes, it draws attention from other people. Anyway, I say ‘You have to take my opinion, preserve yourself’”.

Indeed, the subjects cover their jealousy with discourses about care, seeking to disguise their attempts of control under the motto of romanticism and/or concern. Marcelo, despite reporting several conflicts involving the clothes his wife wears, justifies: “I never said ‘take it off!’ I never said that, never. I’m like ‘This isn’t cool, it isn’t this cool, do you have any other clothes you can wear?’ Joel, on the other hand, comments: “I look like this and say ‘Look, go slowly, hold on there’. But I don’t stop her, understand? I don’t stop it from happening. My wife had liposuction, her breasts were touched, and so on, so I said to her, ‘Do you want to wear a blouse without a bra?’ [laughs]”.

These examples show that there is a desire/attitude to control the other, expressed in a way they consider



affectionate, which can be called oppression with affection (Zanello, 2018). Marcelo even points out several times in the interview that he notices a great improvement in him because instead of fighting, he tries to convince his partner that certain behaviors of hers would be wrong or inappropriate. When asked about his perception of how his wife perceived these changes or how she felt in situations of jealousy, Marcelo says that had never thought about it and is unable to speak about such matters.

As Machado (1998) explains, “Instead of investigating women’s desires, female behaviors are reduced, in male reports, to approaching or distancing from the ideal female behavior, which it is up to men to control” (p. 36). So, although some behavioral changes can be identified (for example, arguing instead of fighting), it is still difficult for men to recognize women’s otherness and autonomy, and they demand to assert themselves (and to be recognized) as the ones with authority to assess and evaluate women and their subjectivities.

Furthermore, they expect their partners to be the ones responsible for accepting and resolving their jealous discomforts. Thus, the responsibility is withdrawn from men and attributed to women, as shown in research about jealousy experiences in women’s lives (Guimarães & Zanello, 2022). According to Ronaldo:

sometimes I feel jealous, and I feel that talking to her will resolve this jealousy, you know? That it will pass. Then I talk to her, and I feel better. Perhaps it’s something easier for a man than a woman, I think. I don’t really know why I think that, but maybe it’s easier, I think, to put the burden of my jealousy on her, eh... it’s not to put my jealousy burden on her, but it’s like she can manage to relieve me of this load, right? Somehow. Yeah, yeah... she can do it, right?

## CONCLUSIONS

This study showed how jealousy issues transit between individual dimensions and social repertoires, revealing different ways in which subjects are affected by certain situations and interpret them as threatening, exploring possibilities to experience different sensations and express uncomfortable emotions in their relationships. Thus, the understanding of this affection must include a contextualization of the cultural grammar that sets up an affective pedagogy, a critical look, and attentive listening to the emotional experiences of each subject.

From an anthropological perspective, it is possible to situate jealousy as a moral feeling able to reveal “a relationship intimately established between the subject and otherness” (Rezende & Coelho, 2010, p. 937). The analyses showed how sociability and morality in a sexist and patriarchal culture influence the way men deal with their emotions and recognize women’s particularities and desires.

Her care is understood here in the sense of submission to his demands, silencing her anxieties to guarantee her partner’s well-being and family harmony. From this cultural script, it appears that non-compliance with these gender performances triggers a punitive logic (Butler, 2019). Marcelo’s narrative illustrates this process well when he complains that his wife would be “difficult” (since “she does not accept my observations”) and then comments about his infidelity:

I had [extramarital] affairs inside my marriage. I met other people, she even found out about an affair. I pursued that because it involved a person who listened to me, and who understood me. In short, she was maybe more aligned with what I thought in that sense [jealousy]. So, maybe that was a way of punishing myself, having this attitude was a way of punishment... a way of punishing her. Yeah, maybe something along those lines, me wanting to give back something she gave me, in a way that left me unsatisfied.

As we can deduce from Márcio’s train of thought, his wife was responsible for his infidelity, as he sought extramarital relationships because he did not feel welcomed by her. In other words, the consequences for her not corresponding well enough to the script of an understanding and submissive wife would include the possibility of being betrayed or losing her married status.

In addition to this dynamic of trying to blame women for the attitudes of their partners, there is a flexibility to male (in)fideli ty standards. As defended by Lagarde (2001), it is possible to identify a certain consent, even social stimulus, for male sexual polygamy. Considering the privileged position of choosing and validating their love relationships and their partners, the issues involving jealousy and adultery start to present themselves as a power struggle and power assertion.

What is revealed in this process, in addition to the social dimension of emotions, is how masculinity patterns are entangled with narcissistic issues. Therefore, it is possible to see how male jealous experiences are translated from the perspective of the efficacy dispositif. Regarding feeling jealousy, for example, we can identify not recognizing/admitting such affection in order not to show weakness; disputing power with other men in a dominant x subordinate logic; and trying to control and subjugate women to receive dedication and obedience from them. When they perceive themselves as the object of a woman’s jealousy, what stands out is how they disqualify their partner’s jealous complaints, assigning them a place of female emotional fragility, and at the same time protesting/demanding male independence and superiority (sometimes, acting violently).

These two dimensions combine 1) the dynamics of not being responsible for their affections, hoping that women will

understand them and take responsibility for caring for them and their love relationship; 2) considering themselves in a place of authority as the one who has the knowledge-power to evaluate women, demanding control of their subjectivity. The “damned animal-honored man” dyad, analyzed by Machado (2004) when discussing masculinities, gender relations, and the relational codes of honor, is in line with such a theoretical analysis, since

the damned animal refers to the one who does not submit to the social law, to the one who can do anything: sheer potency. The honorable man refers to the one who submits to the social law, as long as it ensures his position to exercise control over others. It is not about men who can choose or be submitted to a position of damned animals and honorable men. It is the very conception of the masculine that inscribes this double position of power (Machado, 2004, p. 71).

In this article, we explored how emotions and processes of male subjectivation are entangled. We must point out, however, that gender markers alone are not enough to explain the experiences and identifications of the subjects, especially if we consider that the sexism of Brazilian culture is inseparable from racism (Gonzales, 2019; Zanella, 2018). Thus, the gender perspective on narcissism and masculinity discussed here must be articulated to a racial understanding of these same concepts.

This issue constitutes a clear limitation of this study, but it also provides a path for further research to explore this perspective. As Minayo (2012) points out, a work is never sufficiently done and it is crucial for us as writers to position ourselves within the “conditions and difficulties of interpretation, as they are part of the objectification of reality and [our] own objectification” (Minayo, 2012, p. 625).

Despite having investigated the intersection of racial issues in jealous experiences, this was not a fact that stood out during the interviews, since most respondents reported that they did not identify or understand such influences in their personal experiences. This situation was evaluated as a limitation of the research method and the complexity of addressing the repercussions of racism on affective relationships and marital dynamics (Schucman, 2018).

Finally, we point out that the methodological approach was defined from the focus on the experiences of jealousy for cis men in heterosexual relationships. The parameters of love contracts – monogamous or not – were not stipulated a priori as inclusion/exclusion criteria and did not show sufficient methodological consistency to be set as a category of analysis (even though some research subjects talked about their emotional experiences within different relational arrangements). These issues index the importance of undertaking new studies about jealousy that also encompass the multiplicity of meanings and possibilities of gender identities, love experiences, and emotionality.

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Mônica Medeiros Kother Macedo

**Corresponding author**

Maisa Campos Guimarães

Email: [maisa.c.guimaraes@gmail.com](mailto:maisa.c.guimaraes@gmail.com)

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