

THE CONTEMPORARY COUPLE: JEALOUSY, TRUST AND VIRTUAL LIFE

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Abstract: *This highlighted sociological research analyzes the way in which current couples manifest jealousy as a cause of separations from the couple. I also want to discuss stalking, but also about how a person develops from the jealousy of a child to that of an adult. Jealousy is an interesting phenomenon, seen from two angles (normal/abnormal), but the behaviors through which jealousy is manifested are many: it can start from simple ideas, accusations, words, up to a revenge plan, acts of aggression (physical/verbal), crimes, obsessive following of the partner (former or current – stalking) in the worst case. There are not few cases when many couples broke up because of jealousy. Jealousy can or cannot be the reason for a breakup?" We can find various answers to this question depending on each couple and how they live with each other. The problems arise when, due to an exaggeration of the use of a social network, one of the partners begins to create a "virtual life", to be captured by the attention of another partner met on the Internet. The sociological side can be identified by the simple fact that such problems lead to a social disorganization, a permanent fear of the pursued person, to carry out their daily activities. The deviant side of this phenomenon, if we analyze stalking on social networks, for example, can be as dangerous as that based on physical pursuit.*

Keywords: family, trust, jealousy, virtual life.

1. Introduction

I consider it necessary to analyze this phenomenon (jealousy) and to identify the forms and causes that can generate some deviant behavior in the couple relationship, such as suspicions, lack of trust, breakups, infidelity and violence in the couple because all these elements "...are significant parts of the conceptual core of the social psychology of the couple and the family. (Turliuc, 2009), aspects that lead to incompatibility with existing social norms at the level of society. On the one hand, jealousy can appear at the level of some members of the couple who live in the same place; we assume that proximity may or may not help in better communication, without suspicion. On the other hand, when one of the partners is far from each other, communication problems can arise.

On the one hand, each individual is different, having perceptions of what it's like to "be jealous": from the analysis of the "Oedipus complex" formulated by Sigmund Freud, as a form of possessiveness of the child over the parent of the opposite sex, to live an episode of infidelity through an own experience, at the age of maturity.

On the other hand, social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram) are some of the communication methods often used in everyday life, and couples use them to discuss and convey their impressions about various aspects when one is not present. next to the other. Social networks can be tools conducive to the emergence of jealousy in couples.

2. Conceptual delimitations

Moreover, considering the current study, I intend to position the concept of "jealousy" in relation to adulthood in order to follow the phenomenological course regarding the consequences of this phenomenon. At the same time, theories regarding the development of adults help to better understand jealousy by identifying patterns of thought, emotion or behavior.

The author Ursula Șchiopu states that "jealousy is an affective state that is always defined by the desire to lose what you possess, love or power, but also by the exaggerated attention given to the rival or the rivalry situation" (Șchiopu, 1997)

Adrian Nuță defines jealousy as "a set of emotional experiences, thoughts and actions that appear and develop when a significant relationship is perceived as being threatened by a rival. To be jealous you have to have someone (something), in the sense of having the feeling that that something (someone) belongs to you. Another person threatens to deprive you of that something/someone. Jealousy is distinctly different from envy, which is about what another has and you don't." (Nuță, 2005)

Analyzing this case, we identify feelings of loss or abandonment, the pain of losing a loved one, and jealousy expresses an accumulation of emotional feelings, but I believe that envy can be related to jealousy by the simple fact that the existence of a rival brings with it a state of anxiety, inability to be calm in the relationship because you can feel inferior to people of the same sex who could play the role of a rival. It is true that envy, most of the time, involves a material component (what you have, I don't have), but it is also possible to associate it in the case of couple relationships (the desire to couple with someone else's partner).

3. Jealousy as an effect of childhood disappointments – Oedipus complex

Acts of "jealousy" can have their beginnings during childhood, jealousy presenting another facet in addition to the one previously mentioned. More precisely, most of the time, a child can become jealous, involuntarily, of one of the parents, and later, in adulthood, of colleagues, friends, the loved one depending on the environment of origin, family, care from the parents, the feeling of "envy" being noted. Of course, jealousy is manifested by the fact that the individual believes that the partner belongs to him in one way or another. Referring to jealousy, "envy" implies, on the one hand, the aspiration for a certain good (the material part), on the other hand, the desire to know a person in a relationship with another.

Historically, Sophocles created in the 5th century, one of the most interesting mythological legends of all time, "the story of Oedipus". The dramatic story of Oedipus and his relatives has been the source of inspiration for many representative Greek literary works over the centuries.

The tragic events that mark the path of Oedipus' life, emerge from the predictions of the oracle who told him that he will kill his father and marry his own mother. This whole story is highlighted by Sophocles in a bivalent way: of the drama in all the power of the word, but also of the inner pain of the hero who cannot change his painful destiny.

In fact, the field of psychoanalysis seized the subject when Sigmund Freud analyzed the mythological facts of Oedipus as part of the behavior of children, in full development. Freud mentions, in this sense, in his book entitled "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1899), the notion of the "Oedipus complex" as the manifestation of the child (aged between two and seven years) to unconsciously reject his parent of the same sex with him, due to an emotional closeness to the parent of the opposite sex.

In the work of the historian Cătălin Stănculescu entitled, "The myth of Oedipus and the complex of Oedipus in mythology" we learned that Freud considered that these manifestations have a transitory character, and that these phases disappear with the passing of the years, through the idea that both girls and boys they tend to imitate their same-sex parents after the age of six, when they begin to become aware of their existence and spend more time participating in various common activities.

The "Oedipus complex" includes a child's possessiveness towards the parent of the opposite sex, which turns the other parent into a rival; an example that I consider significant is that of the child's jealousy when he sees his parents holding hands. This type of jealousy manifests quite aggressively at the level of the age range mentioned above and it is important that the erotic connection of the child created with the parent of the opposite sex is also analyzed after the age of seven, because, at maturity, the individual to be able to integrate socially, not to remain with some feelings of guilt, of insecurity in front of family relationships, friendship and, why not, in front of a couple relationship.

4. Analysis of theories about adult development

Moreover, considering the current study, I intend to position the concept of "jealousy" in relation to adulthood in order to follow the phenomenological course regarding the consequences of this phenomenon. At the same time, theories regarding the development of adults help to better understand jealousy by identifying patterns of thought, emotion or behavior.

4.1 The theory of adult development

Alex Ayres (2022) presents us with the fact that "Theory of Adult Development" encompasses stages of growth in which individuals begin to become aware of the world from a multidimensional perspective and gain a more complex understanding of themselves and others around them.

Adulthood is more than physical maturation, but is defined by stages of adult development. There are three stages of adulthood, including early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood, in which major physical, cognitive, and social changes occur.

Early adulthood is the period from age 18 to mid-30s. This is when people are healthy and physically fit. Young adults will complete their education and begin a career. Cognitive development in early adulthood is characterized by impulsive behavior and increasing epistemic understanding. Sometimes people will get married and start a family during this time.

Mid-30s to mid-60s is considered middle adulthood. During this time, aging becomes more visible with wrinkles, gray hair and health problems. At this stage, a person can fulfill their career goals and children will grow up.

Late adulthood or old age begins in the mid-60s until death. During this time, physical capacity declines and most individuals retire. Some people in this stage spend time with grandchildren, get involved in their hobbies and explore other interests. Mental health may decline during this period due to decreased social interactions and prejudices due to old age.

Alex Ayres (2022) stated that there are several theories that explain the unique stages of adult development and describe the physical, cognitive and social changes that occur. Four theories that explain the developmental stages of adulthood include the following:

Levinson's theory of adult development explains the stages of development described by structural life changes that occur throughout a person's life and a growing cognitive structure.

Vaillant's theory of adult development explains six developmental stages of self-discovery and the formation of a unique identity.

Neugarten's theory of adult development describes the Social Clock Theory, in which individuals achieve milestones according to societal norms.

Kegan's theory of development explains the stages of cognitive growth in which individuals become aware of their own identity and sense of self.

4.2 Levinson's theory of adult development

Levinson published *The Seasons of Man's Life* in 1978, where he described the developmental stages of adulthood. Stages are described by life structures and cognitive growth. Levinson proposes that young adults perceive dreams of their future selves as motivation for their life choices of marriage, education, and career. Once these goals are achieved, they are modified based on how well they meet expectations.

Levinson's stages are punctuated by periods of transition lasting about five years and periods of stability lasting about seven years. He defines these stages according to specific age ranges described as follows:

The transition to early adulthood lasts from ages 17 to 22, when a person leaves home and family and establishes independence. During this time, people begin to make decisions about their careers and education. This stage is considered transitional from adolescence to adulthood.

Entry into the adult world occurs from 22 to 28 years. During this time, people begin to solidify their goals and decide on a career. People can start dating and form intimate relationships that lead to marriage.

The 30s transition occurs from 28 to 33 years of age and is defined as a period of reflection and reevaluation. People will reevaluate their choices and make decisions guided by their attitudes and perceptions toward their relationships and careers.

Settlement takes place from age 33 to 40, when people become more involved in the community. People will reinvest in their families and commit more to their careers.

The middle transition lasts from 40 to 45 years and is marked by a period of family and career reassessment. Sometimes people make sudden changes and express past regrets about pursuing their interests and talents. This time is marked by a sudden realization of one's mortality and results in a cognitive shift in which the meaning and purpose of life is evaluated. This is often referred to as a midlife crisis, where there is a desire to achieve or gain things that were previously desired.

Entry into middle adulthood occurs from 45 to 50 years of age. During this time, people commit to making decisions and act on the choices made based on the reflection period in the previous stage.

Late adulthood occurs from 60 to 85 years of age and is divided into two periods, the stable period and the transitional period.

4.3. Vaillant's theory of adult development

Vaillant's book, *Aging Well*, was published in 2002, where he describes six stages of adult development. In these stages, individuals achieve social and emotional growth defined by factors such as lifestyle and well-being. His studies were conducted over an extended period of 80 years, providing a more detailed insight into the aging process.

The six stages of adult development outlined in Vaillant's theory include the following:

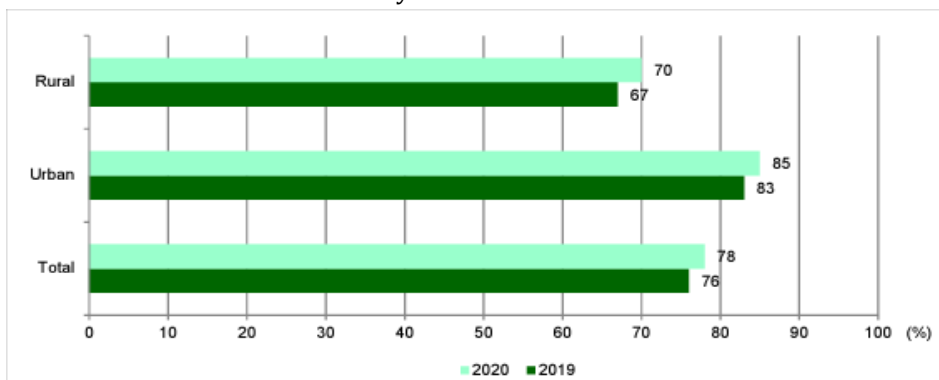
- Development of an identity - individuals establish their independence and begin to define themselves as an entity separate from their family, defining their values and beliefs.
- Development of intimacy - individuals develop intimate relationships in which they make lifelong commitments to another person and define themselves in their relationship
- Consolidation of the career - the identity of the individual is defined by the social context of one's career
- Generativity - individuals take on mentoring roles within the community and become more altruistic
- Becoming the keeper of meaning - individuals perceive their knowledge and expertise as contributing to society and become more aware of a wider social field in the transmission of knowledge and traditions
- Achieving wholeness - individuals find acceptance in their existence and their place in the universe.

5. Statistics regarding access to the Internet and social networks analyzing separations at the couple level

5.1 Internet use at the level of 2020.

The researchers of the National Institute of Statistics, started an analysis in 2021 in which they analyzed information technology by using the Internet as an integral part of social life. A first indicator through which the degree of internet usage was analyzed is the socio-demographic variable of the residence environments, according to figure no. 1 (see below).

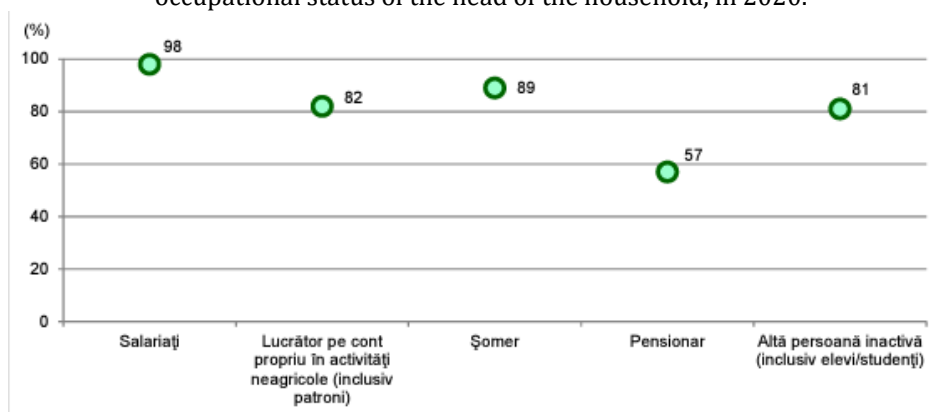
Figure no. 1 The percentages of households that have access to the Internet, by residence, in the years 2019 and 2020.



Source: National Institute of Statistics. Survey on access to information and communication technology in households - 2021

Thus, at the level of the years 2019-2020, it was demonstrated that the Internet is used predominantly in the urban environment in a percentage of 85%, compared to the rural environment which presents a percentage of 70%.

Figure no. 2 The percentage of households that have access to the Internet, according to the occupational status of the head of the household, in 2020.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Survey on access to information and communication technology in households - 2021.

From a statistical point of view, the frequency of Internet access within households is higher in the case of the young population (99% - 16-24 years and 95% - 25-34 years). Also, for the year 2020, we learn that 86% of individuals between the ages of 16-74 who used the Internet are men, and 83% of users are women.

Therefore, the data highlighted above show the fact that people with access to the Internet are predominantly young people who have the highest percentage of its use.

5.2 The number of divorces for the year 2021

In 2021, according to figure no. 3 (see below), we understand that "the number of divorces pronounced by final court decisions or by administrative means was 27,024, an increase of 4,239 divorces compared to 2020. The divorce rate increased from 1.03 divorces to

1000 inhabitants in 2020, to 1.23 divorces per 1000 inhabitants in 2021." (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

Figure no. 3 The number of divorces and divorce rates by residence, in 2021 compared to 2020

	Divorțuri			Rata divorțialității ²⁵ (divorțuri la 1000 locuitori)	
	2020	2021	Diferențe (±) 2021 față de 2020	2020	2021
Total	22785	27024	4239	1,03	1,23
Urban	14734	16809	2075	1,18	1,35
Rural	8051	10215	2164	0,83	1,06

Source: National Institute of Statistics. Demographic events in 2021.

To the same extent, according to the analysis of the National Institute of Statistics (2021), the separations that take place at the level of couples present an impressive percentage if we take into account the socio-demographic variable of the residence environments. More precisely, in 2021, the number of divorces in urban areas was 1.6 times higher than in rural areas.

At the same time, "...the distribution by age group and gender of people who divorced in 2021 shows the following aspects: • on average, divorce occurs with the highest frequency among men in the 40-44 age group (19.5% of divorces) and in the case of women in the 30-34 age group (18.2% of divorces), followed by men in the 45-49 age group (16.7% of divorces) and in the case of women, age group 40-44 years (18.0% of divorces). (National Institute of Statistics, 2021)

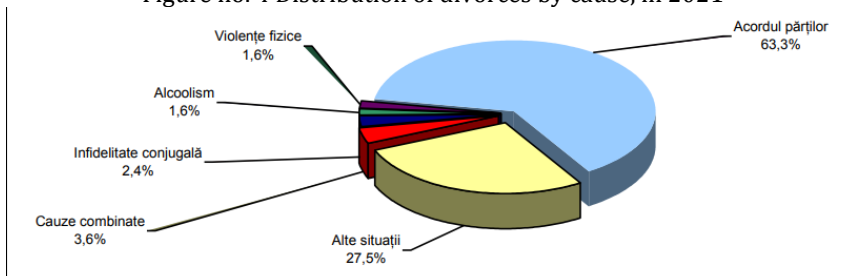
From the two topics analyzed in point I and point II, respectively, we understand that the Internet is used by young people between the ages of 16-34, and couples from cities have a higher number of divorces. What is interesting is the fact that young people are leading in terms of Internet use, but also in the case of divorces - young women (age between 30-34 years) present a higher percentage of separation.

For the purposes of the research, the connection between the two mentioned demographic events (the use of information technology and divorce at the level of the years 2020 - 2021) is of interest for the current research because they can deduce a refutation of one of the hypotheses of this study, "the more couples live together on a longer duration, the more the degree of trust between the partners increases".

From a statistical point of view, we found out that the two phenomena coincide, the use of the Internet is predominant in the case of young people, and also the number of divorces is often found among young people. Therefore, it is interesting that couples in cities present a large number of divorces, a distrust towards their partner, taking into account that the opportunities to meet, to discuss on the Internet are much wider than in the countryside.

It turns out that the residential environment represented the culmination point for one of the hypotheses to be disproved: we assume that the urban environment offers more financial opportunities, the degree of internet usage is higher, there are more ways to spend free time, proximity is a advantage for some couples, the neighborhoods being adjacent to the countryside, where in some cases it is a longer journey to the city, if one member of the couple lives there. Of course, there are couples who live in the countryside and have an amazing couple relationship, but the opportunities in the urban environment would have represented an opportunity for the separations to be diminished.

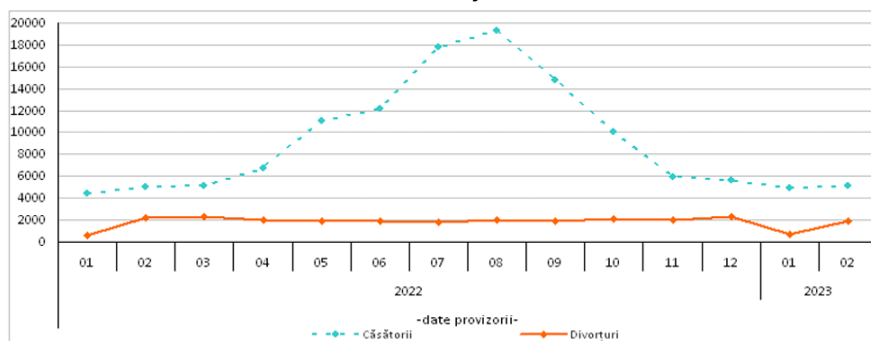
Figure no. 4 Distribution of divorces by cause, in 2021



Source: National Institute of Statistics. *Demographic events in 2021.*

According to figure no. 4 (see above), in addition to three other causes that are the basis of divorces in 2021, "marital infidelity" presents a percentage of 2.4% in addition to alcoholism and physical violence. We would have expected the last two to have a higher percentage, but infidelity has been gaining ground in recent years.

Figure no. 5 Evolution of the number of marriages and divorces, between January 2022 and February 2023.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, *Natural population movement in February 2023*

On another note, there is an evolution in the number of divorces currently, analyzing figure no. 5 (see above); especially, in February 2023, it was found that the number of divorces decreased, and that of marriages increased.

5.3 Statistics of social networks for Romania - January 2022

The use of social networks has an important impact on the behavior of people everywhere. According to Kepios data (2022) "...in January 2022, there were over 13 million social network users in Romania. Their number was equivalent to 69.7% of the total population. Kepios analysis reveals that social network users in Romania increased by 1.3 million (10.8%) between 2021 and 2022." (Baselinker & Kepios, 2022).

5.3.1 Facebook users in Romania - January 2022

At the gender level, at the beginning of 2022, 50.5% of Facebook's audience in Romania was made up of women, while 49.5% were men. These data indicate that Facebook had 9.90 million users in Romania at that time, according to Kepios (2022). Instagram users from Romania - January 2022

Also, in the case of Instagram, statistical data indicate that at the beginning of 2022, there were 5.40 million users in Romania. To the same extent, it should be mentioned that in 2022, 51.9% of the Instagram audience in Romania was female, while 48.1% were male.

Therefore, analyzing the statistics, we understand that women use the two social networks in a greater proportion compared to men.

6. Stalking: following the intimate partner

Stalking is a form of abuse, through which a person obsessively follows their intimate partner, past or present. The people in question have an obsessive, persistent behavior that we can compare to harassment in a couple. This behavior manifests itself by stalking someone, sending unwanted messages, gifts, or actually following them to their home or workplace. According to Michele Galietta, a clinician and professor of psychology at the City University of New York, "there is no standard typology of stalker." (Galietta, 2018). Christine Ro (2018) stated that "stalking behavior falls under the umbrella of symptoms for various disorders. According to a 2012 study published in the journal "Aggression and Violent Behavior," «motivations for stalking include an illusory belief in romantic destiny, a desire to save a relationship, a sadistic drive to torment the victim, or a psychotic over-identification with the victim and the desire to replace her. » And stalkers can receive many types of diagnosis, including psychotic disorders, personality disorders such as narcissistic personality disorder, delusional disorders, etc." (Christine Ro, 2018)

From the results of the study entitled "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Tracking and Victimization of Intimate Partner Violence - National Survey on Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence, United States, 2011" we can identify interesting elements regarding the abusive acts that take place between partners who have broken up or still together. We also found out that approximately 60.8% of the women who participated in the research claimed that they had a relationship with a harasser. And research highlights the fact that up to 80% of people in abusive relationships eventually start stalking the person in the relationship.

Furthermore, "The results presented in this report indicate that a significant number and proportion of US female and male adults have experienced sexual violence, stalking, or intimate partner violence during their lifetime or in the 12 months prior to the survey of 2011. Because of the wide range of short- and long-term consequences associated with these forms of violence, the public health burden of sexual, stalking, and intimate partner violence is substantial." (Matthew J. Breiding & al., 2014)

Stalking is a phenomenon that deserves to be discussed in a framework whose starting point is jealousy in couples. This type of harassment can be manifested both physically and online, so that the injured person can suffer.

7. Conclusions

Also, stalking your partner on the Internet reflects a harsh reality of today's couple relationships. Mistrust in the couple makes its presence felt. We also identified the fact that, currently, social networks highlight some limits that appear in front of a couple relationship: for example, the virtual identity is not always the real one; people tend to choose a certain identity for fear of being rejected or because they don't feel comfortable in their own relationship (divorce). In another vein, the previously found elements related to infidelity are perpetuated in today's society. Jealousy is a common phenomenon in today's families, infidelity being the first cause.

According to the data presented in the chapter "Statistics regarding access to the Internet and social networks analyzing separations at the couple level", we found that the hypothesis "the longer couples live together, the higher the degree of trust between partners." was refuted because the connection between the two demographic events mentioned in that chapter (the use of information technology and divorce at the level of the years 2020 - 2021) is close from a statistical point of view. The use of the Internet is predominant in the case of young people, and also the number of divorces is common among young people. Therefore, it is

interesting that couples in cities present a large number of divorces, a distrust of their partner, taking into account that the opportunities to meet.

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