

**WHAT DO
YOU NEED
TO**
#MAKEITGOOD?

Insight Topic 10: **JEALOUSY**

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June 2016



INTRODUCTION

NHS Tayside and partners want to adopt a positive approach to young people's sexual health. An insight gathering project has engaged young people in discussion of what they need to make relationships good. The purpose of the insight process is to bring detail to consideration of future services, particularly the possible use of social marketing or broader communication messages targeting young people.

This paper is one of a number of topic chapters published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org Each topic chapter presents:

- Insight from young people.
- Insight from other research, resources or services.
- A summary and discussion points.

For more about the insight gathering process please refer to '**About the Insight Gathering project**' also published at www.makeitgoodtayside.org

1. INSIGHT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

In the initial focus groups, the topic of **JEALOUSY** was raised and discussed by 6 of the 16 groups. In terms of online engagement, responses to the **JEALOUSY** online survey came from 55 young people as follows:

Online engagement by Local Authority:

| | Number of online submissions |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Angus | 6 |
| Dundee | 41 |
| Perth and Kinross | 5 |
| Other area | 3 |
| Total by method | 55 |

Online engagement by gender:

| | Male | Female | Other gender identity |
|------------------------|------|--------|-----------------------|
| Number of participants | 19 | 36 | - |

Online engagement by age:

| | Under 16 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21+ |
|------------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Number of participants | 31 | 13 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

In addition to discussion in focus groups, young people completing the **JEALOUSY** survey provided a response to the request: *Tell us about your experience of jealousy when it comes to sex or relationships*. Insight from young people points to several themes.

Impact on the individual

Young people have talked about the negative feelings and personal impact of jealousy. It has been recognised as something they do not want to feel, but perhaps do not feel they control. Responding to the prompt *tell us about your experience of jealousy when it comes to sex or relationships* young people said:

Most horrible feeling ever. (17/Angus/Male)

Angry, upset, pissed off. (16/Dundee/Female)

Feeling left out, hate, resentment. (18/PK/Male)

I get jealous a lot and I hate it. It's not fair on my boyfriend as when I get jealous I take it out on him and it's not his fault. (18/PK/Female)

Where someone dislikes a person for a reason they can't control.
(16/Dundee/Male)

Feeling uneasy/ annoyed because of others, wanting something they have or protecting something from others e.g. girlfriend/boyfriend. (16/Dundee/Female)

Jealousy as worry and feeling insecure

Jealousy has been commented on in terms of associations with feeling worried and insecure in a relationship.

He used to talk to girl he found attractive all the time and it made me worried.
(16/Angus/Female)

I can get a little insecure sometimes and it can be pretty upsetting to both me and my partners. (17/Dundee/Female)

Hurtful, nasty and lack of trust. (16/Dundee/Female)

Overprotective, lack of trust, hurtful. (16/Dundee/Female)

When you feel someone could be a threat. (17/Angus/Female)

What causes arguments? Jealousy. If you like someone's photo on Facebook. Or maybe it's their insecurity. (Focus group 13/Dundee)

I get really jealous when my boyfriend speaks to other girls. (16/Dundee/Female)

Jealousy then is a reflection of little or deteriorating trust in a relationship.

An extremely crippling feeling that ruins trust between people and relationships; a disproportionate amount of focus goes into small things that are leading to large but false conclusions, i.e. that one's partner is cheating upon them.
(17/Dundee/Male)

Impact in relationships

In terms of its impact on relationships the experience of jealousy is negative, it is central to many arguments and undermines the experience of the relationship.

Jealousy is a big thing in relationships and it's a main cause of a lot of arguments. (20/PK/Male)

Always end up arguing with partners to the point of splitting up.
(21+/Dundee/Female)

Can cause you to do stupid things. (16/Dundee/Male)

Can be annoying and can make you say things you don't mean and lose friends. (16/Dundee/Male)

I am quite a jealous person and so are most of the people I go out with so it can be quite explosive. Sometimes I wouldn't be allowed to speak to other boys, and so I would be angry if the person I was seeing spoke to other girls. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Is it ever ok?

While young people's insight reflects a shared view of the destructive nature of jealousy, there was some reflection that it can be somewhat justified, depending on circumstances.

It's not healthy. A wee bit ok. It's natural. It reflects how you feel about the person. (19/Dundee/Female)

Jealousy can cause rifts in relationships though sometimes can be justified. (16/Dundee/Female)

Jealousy is sometimes reasonable, like if your boyfriend is talking to another girl more than you. But it does cause conflict because it creates grudges and can destroy friendships. (16/Dundee/Female)

Jealousy and 'exes'

A particular point of conflict where jealousy is seen to play a part is at the end of a relationship.

Jealousy is a huge problem! Like if your ex gets all jealous and that then they will probably spread rumours and try and turn people against you. (Focus group 3/Angus)

YP 1: Some people just don't want you to be happy, even if they split up with you. Like they will go out of their way to keep you from getting into another relationship or whatever.

YP 2: You have to just be really civil when that happens 'cos it's really emotional for people, like they don't act normally. So it's just about being fair and honest. If they continue to be jealous then you have to speak to them. It's not easy and it totally depends on the situation and the people involved.

(Focus group 6/Dundee)

2. INSIGHT FROM RESEARCH, RESOURCES OR SERVICES

The purpose of identifying insight from other sources is to help locate young people's perceptions and lived experience in a broader context, and where possible to provide further evidence to support the stress which young people have given to an issue, in this section regarding JEALOUSY.

As the young people's insight has shown jealousy in relationships can be understood to be **an emotional reaction to a perceived threat** to a relationship, such as a partner's infidelity, but might also be **a negative trait which sees the individual try to control a partner**; guidance for NHS staffⁱ on domestic abuse describes a potential characteristic of an abusers behaviour as 'possessiveness and jealousy'.

Jealously might also be based on **feelings of anxiety or worry about the quality of the relationship** and so how much a partner might be trusted. As young people have indicated earlier, jealousy can have a significant impact on relationships and personal wellbeing. For these reasons, although the topic of jealousy might not initially be perceived of as a topic of interest for sexual health services, the insight gathering process gives value to extending an interest to matters that impact on the quality of young people's intimate and romantic relationships.

Agencies with an interest in promoting healthy relationships have an interest in **support for people/couples where jealousy has become problematic**. Relateⁱⁱ provide information online about the issue. NHS Choicesⁱⁱⁱ and NHS GGC Sandyford^{iv} services also highlight the issue and encourage individuals and couples to seek support. There are also a range of individuals and agencies offering services, including commercial operations such as Badass Young Men^v. Women's magazines like Cosmopolitan^{vi} regularly address the issue. And there is always Oprah^{vii}.

This insight gathering process has highlighted **the role of social media** in young people's lives. Sonia Utz and Camiel Beukeboom^{viii} have published work in the Netherlands on social network sites (such as Facebook) and the impact these have on romantic relationships – in essence this can be positive, enhancing relationship happiness through things like expressing publicly one's feelings for a partner, or negative and in particular foster jealousy, for example reacting badly to a partner posting a comment on another person's Facebook wall. In this research **jealousy is connected to the individual's self-esteem**, so that a person with low self-esteem may react with more negativity or anxiety to a worry about their partners behaviour ('jealousy-inducing events') especially online.

A further insight chapter in this series on SOCIAL MEDIA will confirm that the constant availability of information about friends and partners can contribute to feeling insecure. Again, another chapter on TRUST will confirm that it is a feeling of trust that protects against jealousy.

3. JEALOUSY: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

When it comes to the insight offered by young people and other sources several important themes and issues have been highlighted. These are summarised below and discussion points are highlighted. Again, some attention is given to the use of insight from this project in terms of the use of social marketing to promote positive sexual health for young people.

Jealousy as insecurity and unhappiness

Young people recognise jealousy as an overwhelming, negative experience, but nonetheless a common one. They also understand that jealousy is destructive and a result of feeling insecure or being treated poorly by a partner. In other insight chapters' young people have recognised the importance of being happy, trusting a partner and learning to communicate feelings. It would seem that in both services and in the communication of key messages to young people it is the promotion of positive characterises and opportunities to talk about and reflect on negative experiences that will support them nurture the good relationships they want. In social marketing terms (as has already been identified in other chapters) this points to the need to help more young people *exchange* current ways of behaving (in the real world or online) which are non-communicative or undermine trust and understand the benefits of behaving differently.

Protecting against jealousy

Coping with strong negative emotions such as jealousy is one thing, but like all factors which undermine the quality and experience of relationships it is helpful to focus on prevention and building resilience and protective factors. Other insight chapters (for example FRIENDS + FAMILY) have identified the importance of building resilience and communication skills in childhood and early adolescence. Other chapters (for example BODY IMAGE + CONFIDENCE) have explored how to support young people build confidence through a sense of self-efficacy and optimism. In terms of this insight gathering process and possible social marketing responses, young people might benefit greatly from explicit attention being paid to these personal positive attributes.

References

ⁱ 'Domestic Abuse: What health workers need to know about gender-based violence' NHS Health Scotland http://www.gbv.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/GBV_Domestic-Abuse-A4-61.pdf

ⁱⁱ 'Is jealousy ruining your relationship?' Relate <http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-relationships/trust/jealousy-ruining-your-relationship>

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Overcoming Jealousy' NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/emotionalhealth/Pages/Overcomingjealousy.aspx>

^{iv} Jealousy <http://www2.sandyford.org/do-you-want-information-on-sexual,-emotional-health-and-relationships/relationships/jealousy.aspx>

^v Badass Young Men <http://www.badassyoungmen.com/causes-of-jealousy.html>

^{vi} '8 ways to get over your jealousy and save your relationship' Cosmopolitan May 6th 2015 <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/news/a40110/ways-to-get-over-your-jealousy-and-save-your-relationship/>

^{vii} Jealousy – The Monster <http://www.oprah.com/relationships/Understanding-Jealousy-Helen-Fisher-PhD-on-Relationships>

^{viii} 'The Role of Social Network Sites in Romantic Relationships: Effects on Jealousy and Relationship Happiness' Sonia Utz and Camiel Beukeboom (2011) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01552.x/full>