

Getting it together

Jealousy: a friendly emotion

Of all our human emotions, few have been as misunderstood and as mistrusted as jealousy. We've called it names like "The Green-Eyed Monster." We've seen it as a weakness in a person's character, a sign of insecurity and neurotic over-dependency. We've associated it with an immature form of love.

Sophisticated lovers have tried to rise above low, jealous feelings. They've showed them out of their educated minds, because they are too smart to be jealous. Using logic and reason, they have lashed themselves out of these troublesome emotions.

Proudly, non-jealous lovers have even experimented with open relationships which allow multiple intimacies. And if that painful, frightening green-eyed monster should show up, these brave new couples beat it down with catchy phrases and self-denial. Why has jealousy become such a feared emotional pest? Mainly because it is seen as a threat to individual freedom. Because of the intense discomfort that it causes, jealousy makes us feel compelled to control and possess the source of our fears: the person we love.

And we're smart enough to know that human beings don't like to be possessed and stifled, even for love. So blindly giving in to jealous feelings may end up destroying the very love relationship that prompted the feelings.

A perplexing state of affairs, and yet it's even more complicated than that.

LOVE, BY ITS VERY nature, car-

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ries an element of jealousy. To love a person means being open and non-defensive toward that person. It means becoming emotionally involved with your lover, mutually dependent and increasingly sensitive to each other. All of which makes us more vulnerable, more vulnerable to the loss of our love partner. We are far less safe and, like a tight-rope walker, we have very real reasons for feeling afraid.

In fact, the more emotionally involved we are, the more likely it is that we will feel that queasy, insecure ache that we have learned to label "jealousy."

That's right. Not only is jealousy an inevitable companion to love feelings, it is actually a logical, healthy component of such intense emotional involvements.

This is not to say that jealous feelings don't cause problems. They definitely do. But the problems come from our reaction to jealousy, not the feelings themselves.

IF WE REACT to jealousy by automatically trying to control our lover,

the price can be very high. Even if our partner allows such control for the moment, eventually this will cause trouble.

Possessed partners eventually feel resentment over their stifled freedom. They are likely to become bored and boring when that possession limits their horizons. And, if giving in to jealous feelings restricts a person to just one close friendship, the tendency is to rely too heavily on that one relationship.

On the other extreme, if we react to jealous feelings by trying to ignore them or stomp them out, we are building obstacles to some of the most important functions of being in love.

If love without jealousy means denying our real feelings, how can we truly feel intimately known by our lover? If it means rejecting our true nature, then how can we achieve the warmth of feeling accepted for just who we are?

FINALLY, IF WE react to jealousy by trying to minimize our vulnerability, we make the most de-

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structive mistake of all. Unfortunately, this is also the most common relationship of lovers in long-term relationships.

Believing, as almost all of us do, that discomfort is a signal that something is wrong, loving couples have learned to adjust the intensity of their love feelings to a more comfortable level.

By leading more separate lives they become less entangled with each other. By becoming more self-sufficient, they have reduced the amount of emotional inter-dependency.

By keeping more of their private feelings to themselves they have become less sensitive to the subtleties of each other's insides. By sweeping little hassles under the rug, they have avoided the rawness and vulnerability that accompanies complete honesty.

In short, the comfort-seeking couple has found how easy it is to numb those insecure aches that lead to troublesome jealousy. But they've simultaneously anesthetized their romance.

The National Bank of Detroit is coordinator of the program. Those interested bank women should call her at 227-7282. The NABW is an organization of women bank officers numbering more than 18,000 throughout the U.S. and Canada.

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