New Research Published in CNS Spectrums Explains How the Brains of Stalkers Function

Hardwired for jealousy: stalkers’ brains could be programmed for obsession, new research published in the journal CNS Spectrums shows.

New York, NY, USA (PRWEB) December 19, 2012 -- The brains of the obsessively jealous are specially programmed to generate their out of control behavior, says a new study. Understanding how the brains of stalkers function could lead to medication to control extreme forms of jealous behavior.

A team of researchers from the University of Pisa Medical School, Departments of Psychiatry and Neuroscience claim they have discovered the areas of the brain responsible for making us jealous and of triggering the kind of delusional jealousy that drives stalkers – also known as Othello’s syndrome after the Shakespeare character who kills his wife due to jealousy.

The researchers are keen to widen their research to examine the areas of the brain associated with being in love to see how these connect to the jealousy centers.

In a new article in the journal CNS Spectrums, which is published by Cambridge University Press, the researchers examined MRI brain scans and trawled through research into neurological and psychiatric disorders that are accompanied by delusional jealousy to reach their conclusions.

While acknowledging that jealousy is a fundamental of human experience, the authors sought to pinpoint what is happening in the brain when jealousy turns into a dangerous obsession that may result in extremely aggressive behavior, such as stalking, suicide, or murder.

The neural roots of jealousy are located in the area of the brain called the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is found roughly just above the forehead. In this region we process emotions and reflect on ourselves and others. Here we process thoughts and feelings of the one we love and predict scenarios of how we would feel about his or her possible loss.

The obsessively jealous brain appears to have three characteristics: it is prone to believe the relationship with the loved one is the only thing of any importance; it misinterprets innocent behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of the loved one; and it feels the potential loss of the loved one as a life-shattering catastrophe. This in turn can prompt extreme reactions like stalking or even murder.

The researchers believe that, in some people, this process may become ingrained, leading to a destructive ‘habit’ of jealousy becoming hardwired in the brain. They want to do more research on this aspect and also investigate how medication can help.

The brain dimension could also explain why extreme delusional forms of jealousy are common in psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and alcoholism, and also in neurological disorders such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

Team researcher Donatella Marazziti said the study of jealousy is just beginning: “Jealousy has long attracted the interest of both psychiatrists and psychologists, but it is only recently that it has captured the attention of
neuroscience – the science of the nervous system including the brain. It has also been ‘hidden’ in wider classifications of disorders such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder or paranoia. Our research shows that it really deserves a category of its own – especially in its extreme forms when it provokes terrifying behaviors such as stalking or drives people to suicide or murder.”

Marazziti continued, “The study of the roots of jealousy in the brain is just beginning. Ultimately we would like to be able to understand it well enough to be able to control its more extreme forms. However, much more work needs to be done to understand the biological roots of this emotion that still represents a great mystery of human nature.”

For the full article, please visit http://journals.cambridge.org/CNSjealousy

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CNS Spectrums
The journal brings clinical research and information to 50,000 psychiatrists and neurologists. Launched in 1996 and relaunched in 2012 with a new Editor-in-Chief, Stephen M. Stahl, and an entirely new editorial board, CNS Spectrums reaches more physicians than any other peer-reviewed neuropsychiatric journal in the world. The journal’s goal is to serve as a resource to psychiatrists and neurologists seeking to understand and treat disturbances of cognition, emotion, and behavior as a direct consequence of central nervous system disease, illness, or trauma.

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