
The Role of Jealousy in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a Novel by Zora Neale Hurston

Jealousy in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In her article “Listening to Jealousy,” Sara Eckel explains how jealousy can be a useful emotion that can bring a couple closer together if it is properly managed; however, if left unchecked it can lead to the demise of the relationship. Eckel uses the idea of “mate-retention” (np), and “mate-poaching” (np), as the explanation for why people become jealous and why we act the way we do when we are jealous. “[M]ate- retention” (Eckel np) is the idea that if a person is flirting with your partner it is in your best interest to stop them. If you do nothing your partner may leave you and go with the other person. The idea of “mate-poaching” (Eckel np), is attempting to take someone else's mate for your own. The article uses the example of putting your arm around your partner's shoulder at a party. The act of putting your arm around their shoulder serves two purposes. First, it tells other people at the party that this person is committed and is not available. In addition it lets your partner know that you care about keeping them; it tells them that you are willing to assert yourself in order to keep them. This seemingly says that jealousy is good because it keeps relationships strong; however, Eckel warns that the over abundance of this powerful emotion can ruin a relationship. The article uses Sandy and Katie, a couple who because of jealousy do things that they would never do in a normal state of mind, as an example of how jealousy when allowed to run rampant can wreak havoc. Sandy stole katie's laptop when she was on a date. In retaliation Katie ransacked his apartment. During this katie “had a moment of clarity” and “Her jealousy had turned her into someone she didn't know” (Eckel np). This shows how having too much jealousy can lead to a person doing something extremely irrational and out of character.

In chapter 15 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Hurston Nukie is flirting with Tea Cake and Tea cake's wife, Janie, becomes very jealous. After seeing Tea Cake struggling on the ground with Nunkie, Janie feels that Tea Cake will leave her for Nunkie. The narrator states “she began to be snappish a little.” (Huston 136) This shows the jealousy that Janie felt caused a change in her personality. After arguing about Nukie, Tea Cake and Janie “wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away” (Hurston 137) Janie, feeling jealousy toward Nukie, used sex as “mate-retention” because she felt that Nukie was attempting to “poach” Tea Cake from her. Janie knew that if she was able to give Tea Cake something that Nukie could not then he would not leave. In addition she also knew that arguing with him would only make him angry and increase the odds that he would leave her for Nukie. Janie noticed that her personality was changing due to jealousy and

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because of this uses “mate-retention” to use this emotion for good instead of allowing it to fester and grow.

Jealousy can be used for both good and bad however the way a person decides to go about focusing their emotions can make or break a relationship. Janie used sex as “mate-retention” the issue with this is that by having sex with Tea Cake she is merely delaying the underlying problem. She is doing the equivalent of putting a band-aid deep cut. It may help not but sooner or later it will bleed through and expose the wound. The sex will only last so long and after its over Tea Cake will still flirt with Nukie. If she had instead talked to Tea Cake she may have been able to solve the issue at its roots, but because she just delays the problem. When the sex is over Janie will still be jealous and even more so than before. If the problem is not stopped then it will amplify until the tipping point.

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