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An Investigation of the Relationship Between Communication Competence and Interactive Strategies for Coping with Romantic Jealousy

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An Investigation of the Relationship Between
Communication Competence and Interactive Strategies
for Coping with Romantic Jealousy

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Communication
and the
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of the Requirements for the Degree
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by
Amy J. Bull
May, 1997
THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated the relationship between communication competence and interactive jealousy coping strategies. Two hypotheses were proposed and tested utilizing the Interactive Reactions to Jealousy Scale and a subscale of Wiemann’s Communication Competence Scale. Results indicated a significant positive relationship exists between the level of communication competence and the use of integrative communication, which is considered a positive and helpful coping strategy. However, no significant relationships were found between the level of communication competence and the use of potentially destructive coping strategies. Discussion and interpretation of results and general future areas for research on jealousy and communication competence are proposed.
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This thesis is dedicated in memory of my mother, Sandra K. Bull.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Most everyone knows that relationships are important in life, and that happiness depends on relationships more than anything else (Duck, 1991). According to Ginsberg, et al. (1986), relational difficulties lead to such problems as depression, suicide, family violence, and alcoholism (cited in Duck, 1991). Unfortunately, research indicates that many people are not good at maintaining close relationships, which is reflected by the rising divorce rate, the increase in single parenting, and the alleged increase in loneliness (Duck, 1991). Of the many problems that contribute to relational deterioration, romantic jealousy is among the most challenging to manage.

Several definitions and theories and a great deal of research regarding jealousy exist. A majority of the literature agrees that the relationship between the partners has to be valued in order for jealousy to occur. Furthermore, a partner needs to perceive a threat, real or imagined, to the relationship. Whether jealousy is beneficial or detrimental to a relationship depends on how the partners cope with the emotion. Although jealousy is considered a normal feeling, it becomes unhealthy when it is not dealt with in a rational way or when it is harmful to one or both partners in the relationship. According to the literature, one of the most promising approaches to managing jealousy is the partners' use of open and effective communication (Buunk, 1982).

Even under the best conditions, communicating effectively in relationships can be difficult (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992). In fact, communication is the lifeblood of relationships. The fact that Western society acts as if relationships do not need to be paid attention to or do not need maintenance is partly why problems in relationships occur (Duck, 1991). Research indicates that relational
problems can be prevented if properly taken care of. Communication competence is a construct which refers to open and effective communication.

People who are highly communicatively competent communicate differently in their relationships than less communicatively competent people (McCroskey, 1984). In healthy relationships, communicatively competent partners focus their attention on and adapt their communication to the relationship. A highly competent person's attentional focus is aimed at all aspects of the interaction or relationship, not just at himself or herself. Therefore, when it comes to managing jealousy through communication, people who are highly competent are likely to use different and perhaps more effective strategies when coping with jealousy than people who have low competence.

The primary purpose of this study is to determine if high communicatively competent people cope with jealousy differently than people who are less communicatively competent, and if so, what unique communication strategies these individuals use. The first section of this thesis reviews the literature on jealousy and communication competence. The literature review concludes with some specific research hypotheses focusing on the relationship between communication competence and strategies for coping with jealousy. A study designed to test these hypotheses is then described. Finally, the results of the study are reported and discussed in relation to previous research.

JEALOUSY

According to Brink and Bringle (1987), jealousy is one of the most prevalent and potentially destructive emotions in a love relationship. Researchers seem to generally agree on the conceptualization of jealousy but disagree on the perspectives of jealousy. Regardless of the theoretical explanations for jealousy,
it is an emotion that is present in a majority of relationships and needs to be coped with effectively. This section will examine the conceptual definitions of jealousy, theoretical explanations for jealousy, gender differences in jealousy, and helpful and destructive coping strategies.

**Conceptualizing Jealousy**

The controversy surrounding the conceptualization of jealousy does not focus on the definition itself, but the confusion about the difference between jealousy and envy. The terms "jealousy" and "envy" are frequently used interchangeably or as synonyms for each other (Farber, 1973; Klein, 1957; Mazur, 1973; Riviere, 1932; Silver & Sabini, 1978; Spielman, 1971, cited in Barrel & Richards, 1982). "Even the same color, green, is associated with both emotions, as in the popular phrase 'green with envy' and in Shakespeare's Othello: jealousy the green-eyed monster" (Spielman, 1971, p. 59, cited in Barrel & Richards, 1982).

According to van Sommers (1988), jealousy is not easily distinguished from envy in psychological terms. However, traditionally, a distinction has been made (Salovey & Rodin, 1988). The word "jealous" is derived from the same Greek root as the root for "zealous." Zealousness indicates a fervent devotion to the promotion of some person or object. "Jealousy refers to the belief or suspicion that what has been promoted is in danger of being lost" (Salovey & Rodin, 1989, p. 222). On the other hand, envy is derived from the Latin word "invidere" meaning to look upon with malice. Envy indicates a discontent with and desire for the possessions or attributes of another person (Bryson, 1977, cited in Salovey & Rodin, 1989). van Sommers' (1988) definitions also make the distinction: envy refers to what a person would like to have but does not
possess, whereas jealousy refers to what a person has but does not want to lose. According to Foster (1972), jealousy is conceptually distinct from envy which is the negative feeling that arises when someone else has something we want (cited in Hansen 1982). When experiencing envy, the individual is unhappy that someone else possesses something that he or she wants and feels inferior because he or she does not have it (Speilman, 1971, cited in Salovey & Rodin, 1989).

Although definitions of envy and jealousy have differed, both envy-provoking and jealousy-eliciting situations generate similar affective reactions (Salovey & Rodin, 1989). These reactions include anger, sadness, and some anxiety or embarrassment. The differences between feelings caused by envy or jealousy may be determined by the intensity of the emotions rather than as categorically different emotions. For example, Salovey & Rodin (1989) found that the same emotions of anger, sadness, anxiousness, and embarrassment were indicated for envy- and jealousy-provoking situations. However, more intense emotions were reported when referring to jealousy.

Parrott and Smith (1987) argued that the intensity difference between envy and jealousy may serve to obscure real differences in the quality of these two feelings (cited in Salovey & Rodin, 1989). Envy elicited more feelings of shame, longing, guilt, denial, and a sense of inferiority. Jealousy, on the other hand, was characterized by a sense of feeling suspicious, uncertain, afraid, betrayed, and lonely. According to Smith, Kim, and Parrot (1988), envy was more often characterized by feelings of inferiority, longing, wishfulness, self-criticism, dissatisfaction, and self-awareness (cited in Salovey & Rodin, 1989). Jealousy produced greater feelings of malice, spite, resentment, rejection, hostility, anger, hurt, and desire to get even.
According to Hansen (1982), jealousy involves a person defining a partner's actual or imagined behavior as conflicting with his or her definition of the relationship. Furthermore, the person must value the relationship. Both factors must be present in order for jealousy to be present as reflected in Table I. It is important to state that the partner's actual or imagined behavior does not need to be sexual because jealousy can also arise from one's partner being involved in non-sexual relationships, such as those with a child, co-worker, family or even solitary activities. Furthermore, a person does not experience jealousy when the exclusivity of relationships which are not important to him or her are threatened (Salovey & Rodin, 1989). Only when the relationship is valued can jealousy occur.

In summary, there is a fair amount of agreement in the literature regarding the definition of jealousy. In order for jealousy to be present, the relationship must be valued, and the partner must perceive a threat, either real or imagined, to the relationship. There is less consensus, however, regarding theoretical explanations for jealousy. These explanations will be discussed in the next section.

**TABLE I**

**Various Definitions of Jealousy**

Jealousy is "the emotion attached to holding onto something or someone, involving fear of loss and anger or grief at its prospect" (Stearns, 1989, p. 12).

Jealousy is "possessiveness or a sense of ownership about a person, event, or object in the face of a perceived real or unreal threat" (Bernhard, 1986, p. 23).

Jealousy is "an aversive emotional reaction evoked by a relationship involving one's current or former partner and a third person. This relationship may be real, imagined, or expected, or may have occurred in the past" (Buunk & Bringle, 1987, p. 124).

Jealousy is "a protective reaction to a perceived threat to a valued relationship" (Clanton, 1981, p. 260).
Perspectives of Jealousy

Theories which examine the complex nature of jealousy are numerous and diverse. However, these theories have been organized into five broad types of perspectives: the evolutionary perspectives, the personality perspectives, the social psychological perspectives, the socio-cultural perspectives, and the basic emotion perspectives (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994).

The evolutionary perspectives of jealousy rely on biology for their theoretical suppositions (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). "They attempt to explain behavior with reference to genetic predispositions of one type or another" (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994, p. 220). The basic principle of evolutionary theories is that people's behavior should be viewed with reference to their adaptive significance and that jealousy is an inherited psychological tendency that aids in survival. A person is jealous when the possibility of the loss of his or her mate to a rival is salient. Evolutionary theories are criticized because it is not clear what types of behavioral tendencies in humans are the result of inheritance (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). It is difficult, if not impossible, to prove genetic factors, rather than other social or psychological variables, actually represent the source of ultimate causation.

Research focused on jealousy by personality theorists and researchers is relatively sparse (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Personality perspectives begin with the assumption that certain people may be more prone to jealousy than others; that this predisposition may be partially due to a stable, inherent personality trait; and that trait jealousy is experienced and expressed differently by different people. One personality theory, the psychoanalytical model, explicitly discusses the causes and experiences of jealousy. The psychoanalytical theory of jealousy is rooted in Freud's belief that jealousy is a
normal emotional state, accompanied by psychic reactions and pain that are not completely rational or controlled (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994).

The social psychological models of jealousy are based on the most traditional topics within the field of social psychology: interpersonal processes and the self-system (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). These perspectives indicate the important role self-evaluation plays in the experience of jealousy and largely explains why individuals may react with jealousy in some situations but not others. Under this model, jealousy is best conceived as a label given to specific configurations of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Research about situations that threaten an individual's self-esteem may help in the understanding of jealousy.

According to Hupka (1991), the socio-cultural perspective views jealousy as a socially constructed phenomenon (cited in DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Jealousy is built according to an individual's experiences with the surrounding social environment rather than biologically based (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Hupka (1991) created a model of jealousy as a social construction where humans' genetic endowments allow them to experience the phenomenological aspects of jealousy, but reactions are learned (cited in DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). The main criticism of the socio-cultural perspective focuses on the universality of jealousy (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). According to Daly, Wilson, and Weghorst (1982), people in most cultures seem to experience some type of jealousy (cited in DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Therefore, a society's social structures could not be the ultimate cause of jealousy. Instead, "the source of jealousy may lie in personality dispositions or biological mechanisms from whence it is modified by the social environment" (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994, p. 239).
Lastly, the emotion perspectives on jealousy are focused on the phenomenological experience of jealousy as an emotional event rather than originating from biology (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Emotion theories share the belief that cognitive processes used to categorize the situation are needed for an emotion to be felt. As stated earlier, jealousy results from the fear of losing a relationship to a rival which is either real or imagined. The defining factor is the rival. If an individual loses a relationship but there is no rival, many negative emotions may happen, but probably not jealousy (Parrott, 1991, cited in DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Jealousy is considered to be a distinct emotion by itself or a combination of basic emotions (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). However, researchers have not been able to isolate jealousy in its own right and the question still exists of whether basic emotions even act as building blocks for other types of emotional responses such as jealousy.

To summarize, many different theories may be used to explain jealousy. Although each of these perspectives cite different causes for jealousy, they all agree that its phenomenology is experienced as an aversive emotional state characterized by feelings of anger, sadness, and fear, induced by the threat or actual loss of a relationship with another person to a real or imagined rival (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). The definitions and theories of jealousy are useful for delineating the nature of jealousy in personal relationships. However, the definitions and theories do not address the ways different types of people experience and cope with jealousy, the distinction between healthy and unhealthy jealousy, and strategies for coping with jealousy.
COPING WITH JEALOUSY

Gender and Jealousy

There exists considerable disagreement about the question of which sex is the more jealous (Buunk, 1986). Some of the confusion is probably the result of not making the distinction between the experience and the expression of jealousy. According to Hupka (1981), there seem to be many more studies of jealousy exhibited by husbands than of jealousy exhibited by wives in anthropological and ethnographic literature (cited in Buunk, 1986). This could suggest that males tend to be more jealous than females. Alternatively, it could indicate that females are just as jealous as males but are not as free to express and act upon it. Some authors argue that women are less likely than men to express jealousy because of their subordinate societal positions (Buunk, 1986). Males have more support to express their jealousy in an aggressive, dominant, or violent way. In fact, male jealousy is one of the most important factors associated with wife beating. A survey conducted of agencies treating men who batter their wives revealed that intense jealousy was the second most common trait (after alcoholism) of such men (Simpson Feazell, Sanchez Mayers & Dechesner, 1984, cited in Bunnk, 1986). Furthermore, there is evidence that male jealousy is more likely to lead to murder or attempted murder than female jealousy (Buunk, 1986).

Although males and females may have the same feelings of jealousy, their responses to their feelings differ (Bernhard, 1986). "Males perceive jealousy as a competitiveness between the rival and themselves; a loss of status as well as the loss of their partner" (Bernhard, 1986, p. 24). In contrast, females tend to find a rival a threat to a relationship and not actually a threat to themselves. Furthermore, some research suggests that males tend to view jealousy as an
infringement on autonomy, whereas females tend to view jealousy as an expression of love (Stearns, 1989; DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). However, such generalizations do not apply to all males and females. Experiences of jealousy can vary from individual to individual (Bernhard, 1986).

There is still no clear-cut answer to the question of who is the more jealous sex (Buunk, 1986). The available evidence suggest that when jealous, males will focus more on the sexual aspects of their partners' behavior, whereas females focus more on the consequences for the relationship. Further, men behave in more dominating, controlling, and aggressive ways than women when jealous (Buunk, 1986). However, there is no evidence that men are plagued by more fears and delusions concerning their spouses' infidelity or become more upset when infidelity happens. Although jealous men appear to react to infidelity in more violent and controlling ways, they are not more likely than women to became irrational and obsessive in their experiences of jealousy. The next section looks more closely at the distinction between healthy and unhealthy jealousy.

**Healthy vs. Unhealthy Jealousy**

Historically, a certain amount of jealousy was viewed as normal, passionate, and as a validation of romantic love (Bernhard, 1986). In fact, jealousy may actually intensify certain relationships, helping partners decide that attraction is really love, and could be a love worth changing into a more stable relationship (Stearns, 1989). On the other hand, romantic visions of perfect love create an illusion that an ideal relationship should be free of jealousy (Bernhard, 1986). This view suggests that jealousy contradicts love, runs against proper emotional management, and reflects a damaged self-worth (Stearns, 1989).
The question arises of when jealousy becomes harmful to oneself, one's partner, and the relationship. Although jealousy is a normal feeling, it becomes pathological when it is not dealt with in a rational way (Bernhard, 1986). Normal jealousy follows the "appraisal of a real threat and involves some degree of emotional upset, as well as protective behaviors designed to maintain the relationship in the face of threat" (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989, p. 185). Bernhard (1986) described normal jealousy as jealous behaviors that can be controlled by the individual and are not harmful to self or others. However, when a person begins to feel out of control, unreasonable, overwhelmed, or obsessed with thoughts of his or her partner with another person, jealousy may become pathological.

Reactions resulting from jealousy are diverse but are uniformly unpleasant (van Sommers, 1988). However, experiences of jealousy can vary from person to person and from situation to situation (Bernhard, 1986). Americans report different reactions to jealousy depending on views about self (Steams, 1989). Usually, individuals who are most dependent, insecure, and support total togetherness in a relationship are more likely to find jealousy a common experience (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992).

Although some degree of jealousy may benefit a relationship by indicating care and concern, it may also lead to unhealthy responses (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992). As stated earlier, jealousy is a common and normal feeling, however, it becomes pathological when a person refuses to deal with it rationally. Feeling jealous is normal until acted upon in an irrational way (Bernhard, 1986). The next section considers the range of strategies people use when coping with jealousy in their relationships.
Strategies for Coping with Jealousy

According to McIntosh and Tangri (1989), coping behaviors dealing with jealousy are divided into two types, direct and indirect. Direct behaviors refer to more confrontational behaviors such as confronting a partner about an event which provoked jealousy. Indirect behaviors involve less confrontational behavior such as giving the partner the "silent treatment."

Buunk's (1982) study focused on jealousy coping styles in relation to extramarital affairs and revealed three coping strategies: avoidance of spouse, reappraisal of the situation, and communication. Subjects mentioned communication as the coping strategy used most frequently. Nearly all the respondents indicated that they tried to have open and frank discussions about the extramarital affair.

The two most frequently used modes of coping with jealousy in Pines and Aronsons' (1983) study were: 1) using the occasion for thinking through one's role in the situation and processing what one stands for or fears to lose (reported by 80 percent of the respondents); and 2) rational discussion (70 percent).

Although communication about jealousy was the generally preferred coping strategy, it was even more pronounced in relatively satisfactory marriages. According to Buunk and Niskens (1980), this finding should not be surprising when one realizes that in the contemporary marriage, open and direct communication seems to be a very important aspect of marital satisfaction. Communication occurred more often among people with high marital satisfaction (Buunk, 1982).

Similarly, Rusbult and Buunk (1993) stated that effective jealousy management is one key to maintaining committed, interdependent relationships. In fact, jealousy expression accounts for significantly more variance in relational
satisfaction than jealousy experienced alone (Andersen, et al., 1995). Therefore, jealousy is not always the culprit but rather how jealousy is communicated that appears to have the most significant effects in relationships (Guerrero, et al., 1995). A communicative response to jealousy is defined as "a behavioral reaction to jealousy that carries communicative value and has the potential to fulfill individual and/or relational goals" (Guerrero, et al., 1995, p. 272).

Communicative responses to jealousy serve three critical functions in interpersonal relationships (Guerrero, et al., 1995). First, communication can help jealous individuals reduce uncertainty about the relationship (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). Second, communication can be an effective tool for maintaining or repairing the relationship after jealousy has been experienced (Guerrero, et al., 1995). Last, it can aid the jealous person in saving face and restoring self-esteem (Guerrero, et al., 1995).

Both communication and jealousy have been found to be related to relational satisfaction, stability, and permanence, with communication associated positively and jealousy associated negatively (Andersen, et al., 1995). The ways in which partners communicate with each other when they are jealous is likely to influence relational quality.

Guerrero et al. (1995) identified six responses to jealousy that directly involved engaging in or avoiding interaction: 1) integrative communication, 2) distributive communication, 3) active distancing, 4) expression of negative affect, 5) general avoidance/denial, and 6) violent communication/threats. (See Table II)

**Integrative communication** was defined as direct, nonaggressive communication about jealousy with the partner (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995),
and the expression of internal thoughts and feelings without placing blame on the partner (Andersen, et al., 1995). An example of integrative communication would be disclosing jealous feelings to the partner. Integrative responses are usually viewed as positive or neutral.

**Distributive communication** includes negatively valenced responses such as argumentative statements or accusations (Andersen, et al., 1995). According to Guerrero and Andersen (1995), it includes direct, aggressive communication about jealousy with the partner. An example of distributive communication would be accusing the partner of being unfaithful or bringing up the issue over and over again.

**Active distancing** tends to be valenced negatively and is an indirect aggressive means of communicating jealous feelings to the partner (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). An example of active distancing would be giving a partner the "silent treatment". The partner intentionally uses avoidance as a way of showing disapproval or anger (Andersen, et al., 1995).

**Negative Affect Expression** is nonverbal expressions of jealousy related-affect, such as anger or depression, that the partner can see (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). An example would be venting frustrations to a partner or crying or sulking in front of a partner.

**Avoidance/denial** involves a partner pretending not to be jealous and/or denying his or her feelings of jealousy (Andersen, et al, 1995). A partner who gets quiet and does not say much when jealous is using avoidance or denial.

Lastly, **violent communication/threats** involves threatening or actually engaging in physical violence against the partner as a response to jealousy. One example would be threatening to harm the partner if he or she continues to see the "rival" or scaring the partner by pretending to hit him or her.
The way romantic partners communicate jealousy to one another is likely to be associated with relational quality, especially since relational satisfaction, relational stability, love, and communication are highly interdependent (Baxter, 1988, Hendrick, 1988, cited in Andersen, et al., 1995). According to Andersen, et al. (1995), numerous studies demonstrate that more integrative communication, less distributive communication, and generally, less avoidant communication are experienced as more satisfying in a relationship. The ability to communicate well appears to be crucial to coping with jealousy in close relationships.

**TABLE II**

**INTERACTIVE RESPONSES TO JEALOUSY**

1. **INTEGRATIVE COMMUNICATION:** Direct, nonaggressive communication about jealousy with the partner  
   **Examples:** disclosing jealous feelings to the partner, asking the partner probing questions, trying to reach an understanding with the partner; reassuring the partner that we can "work it out"

2. **DISTRIBUTIVE COMMUNICATION:** Direct, aggressive communication about jealousy with the partner  
   **Examples:** accusing the partner of being unfaithful, being sarcastic or rude toward the partner, arguing with the partner, bringing up the issue over and over again to "bombard" the partner

3. **ACTIVE DISTANCING:** Indirect, aggressive means of communicating jealousy to the partner  
   **Examples:** giving the partner the "silent treatment," storming out of the room, giving the partner cold or dirty looks, withdrawing affection and sexual favors.

4. **NEGATIVE AFFECT EXPRESSION:** Nonverbal expressions of jealousy-related affect that the partner can see  
   **Examples:** acting anxious when with the partner and rival, appearing hurt, wearing "displeasure" on my face; crying in front of the partner

5. **AVOIDANCE/DENIAL:** Indirect, nonaggressive communication that focuses on avoiding the jealousy-invoking issue, situation, or partner  
   **Examples:** denying jealous feelings when confronted by the partner, pretending to be unaffected by the situation, decreasing contact with the partner, avoiding jealousy-invoking situations.
6. VIOLENT COMMUNICATION/THREATS: Threatening or actually engaging in physical violence against the partner

Examples: threatening to harm the partner if he or she continues to see the rival, scaring the partner by acting as if he was about to hit her and vice versa, roughly pulling him or her away from the rival, pushing or slapping him or her (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995, p. 40)

In sum, this literature review has discussed the varying definitions of jealousy, conceptualization of jealousy, and the experiences and coping strategies of partners who are jealous. A fair amount of agreement in the literature exists regarding the definition of jealousy, however, there is less agreement regarding theoretical explanations for jealousy. Jealousy is a common and normal feeling for both men and women, but becomes pathological when a person copes with it in unhealthy ways.

Jealousy has been identified as one of the most prevalent and potentially destructive emotions within a love relationship (Brink & Bringle, 1987). Although jealousy can vary from person to person and situation to situation (Bernhard, 1986), feelings of jealousy are uniformly unpleasant. The research literature regarding strategies for coping with jealousy suggests that the use of effective and appropriate communication between partners about jealousy is crucial to close relationships (Andersen, et al., 1995). Since being communicatively competent entails having the knowledge, motivation, and skill to communicate effectively and appropriately (Canary & Cody, 1994), this is one area where jealousy and communication competence may be linked.

The next section explores the conceptual definitions and dimensions of communication competence and ways of operationalizing communication competence.
COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

*Conceptualizing Communication Competence*

Communication competence means different things to different scholars (McCroskey, 1984). One reason the communication discipline has experienced so much confusion is that competence is confused with excellence -- where an individual is expected to be better than others. Instead of being just "competent," they are expected to excel from the average. Furthermore, the conceptual confusion of competence is partially caused by the extreme diversity of specializations in the field of communication (McCroskey, 1984). Some specializations include public relations, advertising, speech communication, journalism, and speech pathology. Even though students and scholars may see themselves as being in *communication*, they see that field "through blinders of [their] specializations" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 63). Frequently, researchers use the same terms to represent different concepts and use different terms to represent the same concepts (see Table III) (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Some examples of terms that refer to communication competence include interpersonal communication competence, communicative competence, social competence, social skills, relational competence, and effectiveness.

The existence of various definitions poses a potential challenge for the researcher, who must decide how to conceptualize communication competence. Examining the issues of whether competence should be conceptualized as a trait or a state, and what the dimensions of communication competence should be, helps researchers understand why communication competence is no simple construct.
### TABLE III

**Various Definitions of Communication Competence**

Communication competence is "interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs" (Spitzberg, 1988, p. 68).

Communication competence, "in general terms... is defined as the ability of a person to interact effectively with other people" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, p. 1).

Communication competence is "the ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation" (Backlund, 1978, p. 24).

Communication competence is "an individual's ability to adapt effectively to the surrounding environment over time" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 35).

Communication competence is "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (White, 1959, p. 297).

Communication competence is "the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactions within the constraints of the situation" (Wiemann, 1977, p. 198).

Communication competence is "essentially found in relational contexts in which individuals have sufficient power over their own actions and the actions of others that they may set, pursue, and achieve the interpersonal objectives deemed necessary for a mutually satisfying exchange with their social environment" (Wiemann & Kelly, 1981, p. 292).

Communication competence is "the ability to formulate and achieve objectives, to collaborate effectively with others, to be interdependent; and the ability to adapt appropriately to situational and environmental variation" (Bochner & Kelly, 1974, p. 288).

**Trait versus State**

A controversy surrounds the study of competence on whether it should be considered a trait or state (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983; Parks, 1994; Rubin, 1990; Spitzberg, 1987; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Traits are viewed as cross-
contextual psychological dispositions, whereas states refer to psychological experiences of the moment (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983).

Trait measures of communication behavior have the advantage of providing general information (Spitzberg, 1987). They are considered to be relatively enduring over time (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Scores from valid trait measures will represent an individual's general communicative self-confidence across several episodes and may predict that individual's performance in future episodes (Spitzberg, 1987). Trait measures examine the personality factors that influence communication and as a result, perceptions of competence (Rubin, 1990). Most measures of interpersonal communication competence represent traits (Parks, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). In Spitzberg and Cupach's (1989) Handbook of Interpersonal Communication Research, nearly all of the 80 or so measures reviewed were trait-perspectives (cited in Parks, 1994).

Although frequently used, trait measures in general are criticized for lacking predictive precision (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). The possibility exists that competence is not a singular trait but is made up of several types of traits. Although some individuals may perform better interpersonally over time across contexts, it may be overly simplistic to assume that competence is a single, observable trait.

In contrast to traits, states are usually viewed as the result of the immediate situation factors (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). "Whether or not certain behaviors predict impressions of competence in certain types of contexts is an empirical question, and can only be investigated with episode-based measures" (Spitzberg, 1987, p. 11). Reliance on state measures does have its limitations. They have been criticized on the grounds that they lack generality (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). For example, whether a person's competence in one situation
generalizes beyond that situation is not known (Spitzberg, 1987). If it does not generalize beyond that situation, questions arise about whether it is because the measurement is invalid or because the person's behavior cross-contextually is inconsistent. To the extent that communicative behavior is situation-specific, the possibility of developing a general theory of competence is reduced.

To determine whether competence is general or specific, or trait or state based, ultimately depends on the type of assessment one wishes to make (Parks, 1994). Most measures of communication competence represent traits, which is consistent with the fact that many conceptualizations of competence have been trait oriented. If most conceptualizations of competence were state oriented, the opposite could be true. The basic issue is: "Is competence a disposition or cross-situational tendency, or is it an event or state that changes with the situation and can be altered by instruction?" (Rubin, 1990, p. 103). This controversial issue is made more prominent by the numerous measures used to assess communication competence. The most appropriate type of measure should be determined by the conceptualization the researcher selects and what assessment he or she wishes to make (Parks, 1994).

Dimensions of Communication Competence

The question of dimensions of communication competence is important because by naming each behavioral dimension, the researcher is saying that variations in behavior along this dimension are crucial to an individual's judgment of communicative behavior (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Many dimensions of communication competence have been proposed, discovered, and named, and these have sprung from various types of research efforts (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980).
Allen and Brown (1976) proposed five dimensions of communication competence including: 1) controlling; 2) feeling; 3) informing; 4) ritualizing; and 5) imagining. In order to be a competent communicator, an individual must be able to perform these dimensions, which can also be considered functions.

Wiemann (1977) also proposed a five dimension model of competence including: 1) affiliation/support; 2) empathy; 3) social relaxation; 4) behavioral flexibility; and 5) interaction management. The competent communicator is described as "empathic, affiliative and supportive, and relaxed while interacting; he is capable of adapting his behavior as the situation within the encounter changes and he moves from encounter to encounter" (Wiemann, 1977, p. 195).

Ruben (1976) proposed seven dimensions of communication competence which are important to successful cross-cultural training and as a result, cross-cultural adaptation. These dimensions include: 1) display of respect; 2) interaction posture; 3) orientation to knowledge; 4) empathy; 5) self (versus other) role-oriented behavior; 6) interaction management; and 7) tolerance for ambiguity.

Although there is variation among the cited dimensions of communication competence, there seems to be strong agreement on three dimensions: empathy, interaction management, and behavior flexibility. Empathy may be viewed as encompassing feeling, affiliation and support; interaction management indicates power, control, and general responsiveness to the other; and behavior flexibility is also referred to as adaptation.

Spitzberg and Hecht (1984) proposed a four component model of communication competence which cuts across the various dimensions of competence: 1) motivation; 2) knowledge; 3) skill; and 4) outcomes. Communication motivation is viewed as a function of perceived rewards and
costs in a given conversational context with a specific other. Knowledge about the specific contexts, specific other, and the specific topics discussed can assist an individual to act more competently. Skill is the successful performance of a communicative behavior. Finally, one of the most general yet conceptually developed outcomes of appropriate and effective communication is satisfaction.

The communication process is complex, and a wide variety of factors may influence the perception of communication competence (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). The basic knowledge of communication abilities is necessary for adequate functioning in society. The dimensions of communication competence serve as a basis for operational definitions of competence (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). The next section will discuss operationalizing communication competence.

**Operationalizing Communication Competence**

A dilemma that faces researchers is determining who is an appropriate or valid evaluator of a person's competence (Spitzberg, 1987). According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1989), there are three different types of data-gathering techniques used to measure competence: actor's self-report, partner's judgment of actor, and third-party observation. All of these perspectives are subject to limitations and none is inherently superior. Since a close relationship exists between the definition of communication competence and how it is measured, the type of measurement selected helps define the construct theoretically and operationally (Rubin, 1990).

First, self-report measures ask respondents to assess their own knowledge and abilities. These measurements focus on an individual's own assessment of how actively perceptive, responsive, and attentive he or she felt in
the situation (Rubin, 1990). Self-reports have advantages as well as disadvantages.

The most significant advantage of a self-report is that an individual knows more about him- or herself than does anyone else (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). An individual's knowledge of how the self behaves over time and across contexts is relatively comprehensive. Furthermore, the information a person has about the self is unique in nature in the regard that it is derived from social comparison as well as from reflected appraisals by others. The self possess a tremendous amount of idiosyncratic knowledge that no observer is likely to have (Spitzberg, 1987). According to Parks (1994), the most important judgments of competence and incompetence are the ones an individual makes for him- or herself because these judgments have a far-reaching impact.

Although self-reports may be beneficial in some aspects, they do entail an evaluative inference (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). These inferences are potentially based by evaluation apprehension, self-concept, and the need for social approval. However, the extent of such biases is difficult to detect since it varies from individual to individual. As a result, global self-reports of interpersonal communication competence may actually represent one's self-perceived confidence or social self-esteem (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986c, cited in Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). The self may also have self-serving and egocentric biases in perceiving his or her behavior (Spitzberg, 1987).

Second, a partner's evaluation of an actor is sometimes a more valid judge of an actor's competence than is the actor (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Since individuals tend to be outwardly focused, the partner is often a better observer of the actor's behavior. Furthermore, the partners are not susceptible to the self-serving bias which can be present with self-reports. However, other
biases exist. Ratings by significant others can be highly reactive and susceptible to several attributional biases (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). When actors get to know each other, they become more confident in their attributions about one another. As a consequence, they become less inclined to look for or even accept information that would disconfirm the knowledge they already possess.

Third-party observers sometimes are preferred to lessen the subjective biases associated with self-report and with a partner's judgment of an actor (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Observers may be more objective in the sense that they are not actively involved in the communication interaction or with the interactants, but of course this does not prevent other forms of bias (Spitzberg, 1987). Research indicates that many factors can bias third-party observations and ratings, such as an observer's gender and race.

In summary, disagreement exists regarding the most desirable qualities in a conceptual and operational definition of communication competence (Rubin, 1990). Researchers differ on whether communication competence should be considered a trait or state, what dimensions should be included, and whose viewpoint should be used. What may be the most important aspect to realize is that self, partner, and third-party measures of competence do not just reflect different perspectives of the same phenomenon (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Instead, they actually represent different variables with distinct meaning. Elements of these three perspectives are found in most conceptualizations of competence which adds to the murkiness of the concept (Parks, 1994). Since no perspective is inherently superior, the most appropriate perspective depends on: 1) the researcher's conceptualization of competence; 2) the researcher's purpose; and 3) the researcher's values regarding the benefits and drawbacks associated with each method (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).
**Rationale**

Jealousy has been a condemned emotion (Steams, 1989), and admitting to jealousy is commonly believed to indicate a failure in a relationship (Bernhard, 1986). Research also suggests that jealousy may evolve into pathological or harmful emotions if not dealt with in rational ways. Many feel that revealing their feelings of jealousy is counterproductive to the relationship (van Sommers, 1988). However, one recommendation for controlling jealousy is *direct, nonaggressive communication* (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Since being communicatively competent entails having the knowledge, motivation, and skill to communicate effectively and appropriately (Canary & Cody, 1994), the study of communication strategies for coping with jealousy is one area where communication competence and jealousy may be linked.

Individuals who are jealous typically use any of six types of communication responses to help themselves communicate and cope with their jealousy (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). These six interactive coping behaviors include: integrative communication, distributive communication, active distancing, negative affect expression, avoidance/denial, and violent communication/threats.

A solid body of literature shows that integrative communication is beneficial in several types of problematic relationships, including those affected by jealousy (Sillars, 1980, Spitzberg, et al., 1994, cited in Guerrero & Anderson, 1995). This type of coping strategy is effective because of the direct communication of internal thoughts and feelings without placing blame on the partner. Second, negative affect communication can be considered a potentially positive coping strategy because under some circumstances, this type of communication is relationally beneficial (Guerrero & Anderson, 1995). When
used in conjunction with integrative communication, this type of communication can promote positive, solution-oriented disclosure, and mutual problem solving. However, negative affect communication can be destructive when used in conjunction with other coping strategies such as distributive communication and/or active distancing. When used together, these coping strategies may intensify an already negative interaction.

Coping strategies that are likely to be destructive include distributive communication, avoidant strategies, violent communication/threats, and active distancing. Distributive communication, aside from violence, is the most negative set of communicative behaviors {Guerrero & Anderson, 1995} because of accusations made against the partner. Active distancing, such as ignoring the partner, may confuse the partner and reduce the opportunity for meaningful and effective communication. Avoidance/denial, such as pretending the jealousy does not exist, can also shut down the channels of communication between partners. The threat of violence tends to make the matters worse in the relationship. These four coping strategies are considered destructive because of the ineffective communication between partners.

The research literature regarding coping with jealousy suggests that the use of effective and appropriate communication between partners about jealousy is crucial to close relationships. Individuals who are more competent communicators are likely to cope with jealousy more constructively than individuals who are less competent. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the potential relationship between communication competence and communicative strategies for coping with jealousy. The following hypotheses are proposed:
**H1:** Highly competent communicators have a greater tendency to use integrative communication and/or a combination of negative affect and integrative communication than less competent communicators.

**H2:** Highly competent communicators have a lower tendency to use distributive communication, active distancing, avoidance/denial, violent communication/threats, and negative affect expression in combination with distributive communication or active distancing than less competent communicators.
Respondents

The sample included 203 individuals (131 females, 72 males) who were enrolled at a medium-sized, midwestern university. The majority of the participants are Caucasian (82 percent) and fell into the 19-24 year old age bracket (63 percent). Thirty-three percent were 25-39 years in age, and four percent were 40-54 years in age. Only those currently involved in a romantic relationship participated in this study. The levels of romantic relationships were as follows: casual dating, 17 percent (n=34); exclusive dating, 33 percent (n=66); cohabiting, 16 percent (n=32); married, 33 percent (n=66), and no response, 1 percent (n=5).

Procedures

Respondents completed a demographic questionnaire, the Interactive Response to Jealousy Scale (IRJ), and the “general competence” subscale of Wiemann’s (1977) Communicative Competence Scale during class time. The respondents were advised that the questionnaires would take about 10-15 minutes and that confidentiality was ensured.

Instrumentation

On the IRJ, subjects were instructed to: “Think about the times when you have felt jealousy in your relationship with your romantic partner. By jealousy, we mean feeling like your relationship is somehow threatened by a third party (sometimes called a ‘rival’). Keep these memories in mind when completing the questionnaire.” The IRJ measures how much the respondent agrees that he or
she uses certain behaviors in response to jealousy. The questionnaire items include examples of active distancing ("give my partner the 'silent treatment"); negative affect expression ("cry or sulk in front of my partner"); integrative communication ("explain my feelings to my partner"); distributive communication ("yell or curse at my partner"); avoidance/denial ("act like I don't care"); and violent communication/threats ("threaten to harm my partner"). Respondents indicated how much they agree that they use each behavior in response to jealousy on the following scale: 7 = agree strongly; 6 = agree; 5 = agree somewhat; 4 = neither agree or disagree; 3 = disagree somewhat; 2 = disagree; 1 = disagree strongly (see Appendix B).

The IRJ originally had 68 items measuring communicative responses to jealousy and was adapted for this study to include only questions regarding interactive communication, meaning communication that transpires in a face-to-face context and is partner based. According to Guerrero et al. (1995), the reliabilities for the interactive communication responses were as follows: Active Distancing .83; Negative Affect Expression .81; Integrative Communication, .82; Distributive Communication,.85; Avoidance/Denial, .77; and Violent Communication/Threats, .89. (See Table IV for a list of the items used to assess each coping strategy.) The adapted scale is a 31-item, 7-point Likert-type scale (see Appendix B).

Wiemann's Communicative Competence scale measures respondents' opinion of their communication competence. The "general competence" subscale used in this study contains seven items and uses a 5-point, Likert-type scale (see Appendix C). The directions were as follows: "Complete the following
### TABLE IV
Items Used to Assess Each Interactive Coping Strategy

#### Distributive Communication
- 4. quarrel or argue with my partner
- 7. make hurtful or abusive comments to my partner
- 11. yell or curse at my partner
- 21. act rude toward my partner
- 26. confront my partner

#### Violent Communication/Threats
- 20. push, shove, or hit my partner
- 23. use physical force with my partner
- 25. threaten to harm my partner
- 27. become physically violent

#### Integrative Communication
- 8. explain feelings to my partner
- 9. disclose my jealous feelings to my partner
- 29. discuss bothersome issues with my partner
- 30. try and talk to my partner and reach an understanding
- 31. calmly question my partner

#### Avoidance/Denial
- 12. get quiet and don’t say much
- 13. become silent
- 14. act like I don’t care
- 22. deny feeling jealousy
- 28. pretend nothing is wrong

#### Active Distancing
- 3. ignore my partner
- 5. give my partner the “silent treatment”
- 10. stop calling or initiating communication with partner
- 17. physically pull away from my partner
- 18. give my partner cold or dirty looks
- 19. decrease affection toward my partner

#### Negative Affect Expression
- 1. appear sad and depressed
- 2. cry or sulk in front of my partner
- 6. display insecurity to my partner
- 15. vent frustrations when with my partner
- 16. appear hurt in front of my partner
- 24. wear displeasure on my face so my partner can see
questionnaire/scale with yourself in mind. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by circling one of the following: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; ? = Undecided or Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree." The questionnaire includes such items as "I find it easy to get along with others" and "I do not mind meeting strangers".

Wiemann's original instrument contained separate subscales for interaction management, affiliative support, social relaxation, behavioral flexibility, and empathy, in addition to general communication competence. Initially, 57 Likert-type items were written and pretested; those showing the greatest between-treatment discrimination were retained. In a post hoc analysis of the revised instrument, its reliability was estimated at .96 using Cronbach's alpha. The general competence subscale used in this study contains items representing the other five subscales and can be viewed as a brief version of the larger measure.

Statistical Analysis
Several statistical methods were used. First, frequencies were used to determine the demographic information of the sample including age, gender, race, and relational status. Second, internal reliabilities were estimated by Cronbach's alpha for the communication competence scale and each of the six interactive coping strategies of the IRJ. These reliabilities were assessed to determine if any items could be deleted to increase each scale's overall reliability. Third, factor analysis was utilized to examine whether the six interactive coping strategies would be reflected in the factor structure in this study. Fourth, communication competence was stratified into three levels: low, moderate, and high. To test whether high communicatively competent
individuals utilize the various strategies for coping with jealousy significantly more than low or moderate communicatively competent persons, one-way analyses of variance were used. When an ANOVA was significant, a post hoc analysis, using the Scheffe Procedure, was used to assess the differences among means.

Finally, to examine negative affect expression in combination with the other strategies, three new dichotomous (yes/no) dependent variables were created: 1) negative affect/integrative communication; 2) negative affect/distributive communication; and 3) negative affect/active distancing. The distribution of scores for each of the four original coping strategies was examined. The respondent's use of each combination strategy was indicated only when the responses on both original strategies that composed the combination were above the mean. Chi Square Analysis was used to test whether respondents who differed in level of communication competence, reported different frequencies in their use of the three combination strategies.
Chapter 3

RESULTS

Internal reliability for the Interactive Responses to Jealousy Scale (IRJ) and the subscale of Wiemann’s Communicative Competence Scale were calculated using Cronbach’s alpha and are reported in Table V. The reliabilities of the six coping strategies of the IRJ are also included. Both scales and the six coping strategies had acceptable reliability of .70 or higher (Nunnally, 1967). The reliabilities obtained in this study for the IRJ are generally similar to those reported in previous research, excluding Negative Affect Expression. Guerrero et al. (1995) reported the reliability of Negative Affect Expression at .81. This study reports a reliability of .71. For the IRJ, its strategy subscales, and the communication competence scale, removing any item from the analysis did not increase the reliability estimate. Therefore, all items were retained in the subsequent analyses.

Factor analysis with a varimax rotation and a specification of six-factor solution was used to determine whether the factor structure found in previous studies would emerge in this study. All six factors extracted by this procedure had an eigenvalue of 1.0 or greater. A .60/.40 strength/purity standard was used as a criterion for determining item loadings on the factors. In general, the IRJ items loaded as previous research would predict (see Table VI). The five items that did not load as expected include: item 15, vent frustrations when with my partner; item 17, physically pulling away from my partner; item 18, give my partner cold or dirty looks; item 19, decrease affection toward my partner; and item 24, wear displeasure on my face so my partner can see. Item 7, make hurtful or abusive comments to my partner, had a loading of .57 on the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Reliability using Cronbach’s alpha</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Interactive Responses to Jealousy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Active Distancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance/Denial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distributive Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Affect Expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violent Communication/Threats</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Communicative Competence Scale</em></td>
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### TABLE VI
Factor Loading and Eigenvalues Associated with the Principle Components of Interactive Responses to Jealousy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
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<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>quarrel or argue with my partner</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>make hurtful or abusive comments to my partner</td>
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<td>yell or curse at my partner</td>
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<td>.22</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>vent frustrations when with my partner</td>
<td>.68*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>physically pull away from my partner</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>give my partner the cold or dirty looks</td>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<td>decrease affection toward my partner</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td>act rude toward my partner</td>
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<td>.27</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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<td>-.11</td>
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<td>wear displeasure on my face so my partner can see</td>
<td>.60*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>confront my partner in an accusatory manner</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<td>push, shove, or hit my partner</td>
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<td>.87</td>
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<td>use physical force with my partner</td>
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<td>threaten to harm my partner</td>
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<td>become physically violent</td>
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<td>explain feelings to my partner</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.15</td>
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<td>disclose my jealous feelings to my partner</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.44</td>
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<td>discuss bothersome issues with my partner</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>-.23</td>
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<td>calmly question my partner</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td>get quiet and don't say much</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.59</td>
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<td>.28</td>
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<td>become silent</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.54</td>
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<td>act like I don't care</td>
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<td>.76</td>
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<td>deny feeling jealousy</td>
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<td>pretend nothing is wrong</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.72</td>
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<td>ignore my partner</td>
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<td>give my partner the &quot;silent treatment&quot;</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<td>.71</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>stop calling or initiating communication with partner</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>appear sad and depressed</td>
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<td>-.19</td>
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<td>cry or sulk in front of my partner</td>
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<td>display insecurity to my partner</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Accounted For</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Factor loadings, eigenvalues, and percentages of variance are based upon the rotated factor structure. Primary loadings are in bold. Items that did not load as predicted are indicated with an *.
Distribution Communication factor, just under the criterion of .60. However, its loading was below .37 on each of the other factors, indicating a difference of at least .20. Four other items which loaded as expected but did not meet the .60/.40 strength/purity standard include: item 9, disclose my jealous feelings to my partner; item 12, get quiet and don’t say much; item 13, become silent; and item 22, deny feeling jealousy. However, the factor structure of the IRJ approximated the results obtained in previous work, and the items composing the coping strategies as originally defined showed acceptable levels of internal consistency. Based on these results, subsequent analyses were performed using all the items of the six coping strategies as defined in previous research. This decision enabled the results in the present study to be compared meaningfully to prior results.

The relationship between communication competence and the use of integrative communication was examined. A one-way analysis of variance was computed on the level of communication competence and the use of integrative communication. The result \[ F(2, 196) = 4.72, p = .00 \] indicated that the level of communication competence was significantly associated with integrative communication. A post hoc analysis of the differences among means, using the Scheffe Procedure, indicated that highly competent communicators were significantly more likely to use the integrative communication strategy for coping with jealousy than moderate or low competent communicators. However, moderate and low competent communicators did not differ significantly from each other (see Table VII).

The relationship between communication competence and the use of a combination of negative affect expression and integrative communication was also examined. A new, dichotomous (yes/no) dependent variable was created
(negative affect/integrative communication). A Chi Square Analysis indicated that the level of communication competence was not significantly associated with the use of the combination strategy, $\chi^2(2) = .35, p = .84$. Of the 120 subjects who were included in the analysis, 74 indicated they utilize this combination strategy. Of the 47 subjects who had low communication competence, 59.6 percent (n=28) said they use the negative affect/integrative communication strategy. Of the 38 subjects who had moderate communication competence, 60.5 percent (n=23) indicated use of the negative affect expression/integrative communication combination strategy. Finally, of the 35 subjects who had high communication competence, 65.7 percent (n=23) said they used the strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheffe Procedure for Integrative Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Competence Level</th>
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<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>25.46*</td>
<td>23.48</td>
<td>22.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant difference at the .05 level

Hypothesis 2 predicted a relationship between communication competence and the use of interactive coping strategies which were considered potentially destructive: distributive communication, active distancing, avoidance/denial, violent communication/threats, and negative affect expression in combination with each of two other strategies. A one-way analysis of variance was computed on the subjects' level of communication competence and the use of four of these coping strategies. No statistically significant relationship was found: distributive communication [$F(2, 199) = .33, p = .72$]; active distancing [$F$...
Chi Square Analysis was used to test the influence of communication competence on the utilization of negative affect expression in combination with distributive communication or active distancing. The results indicate that a significant relationship does not exist: negative affect/distributive communication $\chi^2(2) = .06, p = .97$; negative affect/active distancing, $\chi^2(2) = 2.16, p = .34$. Forty-eight of the 182 subjects included in this analysis indicated that they use the negative affect/distributive communication coping strategy. Of the 66 low communicatively competent subjects, 25.8 percent (n=17) indicated use of the strategy. Of the 58 moderate communicatively competent subjects, 27.6 percent (n=16) used the strategy. Lastly, of the 58 high communicatively competent subjects, 25.9 percent (n=15) indicated use of the strategy. Thus, the negative affect/distributive communication strategy was disbursed fairly evenly over the three levels of competence.

Nonsignificant results also were obtained for the negative affect/active distancing coping strategy, $\chi^2(2) = 2.16, p = .34$. Fifty-nine of the 147 subjects who were included in the Chi Square analysis indicated use of the potentially destructive coping strategy of negative affect expression and active distancing. Of the 52 low communicatively competent subjects, 48.1 percent (n=25) indicated use of the strategy. Of the 46 moderate communicatively competent subjects, 37.0 percent (n=17) indicated use of the strategy. Finally, of the 49 high communicatively competent subjects, 34.7 percent (n=17) indicated use of negative affect/active distancing.

A post hoc analysis was conducted to determine if a possible difference between males and females may have masked significant relationships between
communication competence and the various strategies for coping with jealousy. A 3(competence) x 2(gender) ANOVA was conducted for each of the six jealousy coping strategies. Although no significant interaction effects were found for any of the coping strategies, a significant main effect for gender was found for the following coping strategies: Active Distancing, \( F(1, 201) = 6.11, p = .04 \); Negative Affect Expression, \( F(1, 202) = 8.44, p = .00 \); and Distributive Communication, \( F(1, 201) = 6.64, p = .01 \). These results indicate that females were more likely to use Active Distancing (\( \overline{M} = 24.67 \)) and Distributive Communication (\( \overline{M} = 17.50 \)), which are considered potentially destructive coping strategies, more than males (Active Distancing, \( \overline{M} = 21.64 \); Distributive Communication, \( \overline{M} = 14.86 \)). Females (\( \overline{M} = 22.46 \)) were also more likely to use Negative Affect Expression than males (\( \overline{M} = 19.58 \)). A significant main effect for communication competence also was found for integrative communication \( F(3, 198) = 3.49, p = .02 \), confirming the prior results of the one way analysis.
Chapter 4
Discussion

This research was conducted to understand more about individuals' interactive coping strategies when experiencing jealousy. Although the results supported the relationship between high communication competence and the integrative communication coping strategy, no other significant relationships were found. The relationship between communication competence and jealousy coping strategies has not yet been thoroughly researched as the literature review indicated. Since jealousy is so prevalent in romantic and non-romantic relationships, it still remains an important area to investigate.

The first hypothesis which predicted highly communicatively competent persons would use integrative communication and negative affect/integrative communication significantly more than less communicatively competent persons was partially supported. Persons who rated themselves high on communicative competence, reported greater use of integrative communication than persons who view themselves as less communicatively competent. This finding is consistent with previous research, which indicates that integrative communication is beneficial in relationships affected by jealousy (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). This coping strategy is effective because of the direct communication of feelings and thoughts with the partner without placing blame on the partner. Research literature regarding jealousy suggests that the use of effective and appropriate communication between partners about jealousy is crucial to relationships. Therefore, integrative communication appears to be one of the helpful and positive coping strategies used by highly competent communicators.

No significant difference was found between persons who rated themselves moderate or low on communicative competence in regard to their
use of integrative communication. Integrative communication includes disclosing feelings to the partner, asking the partner probing questions, trying to reach an understanding with the partner, and reassuring the partner that “we can work it out”. It appears that using the integrative coping strategy requires recognizing and valuing the partner’s feelings and making an effort to actively communicate about both partners’ thoughts and concerns. Possibly, only those who are highly communicatively competent can utilize such a positive, partner-based coping strategy with great frequency, and therefore, no difference between persons of moderate and low communication competence were found.

Hypothesis 1 also predicted that highly competent communicators would use integrative communication in combination with negative affect expression significantly more than less communicatively competent persons. The lack of a significant relationship found for this combination strategy was inconsistent with previous research (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Previous work suggested that negative affect expression can be considered either helpful or potentially destructive when in combination with other coping strategies (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Negative affect expression used in conjunction with integrative communication was predicted to be helpful to relationships, while negative affect expression used in conjunction with distributive communication or active distancing was predicted to be detrimental. One reason a significant relationship was not found could be that negative affect/integrative communication could not be directly measured. In order to measure negative affect/integrative communication, a new, dichotomous (yes/no) dependent variable had to be created. Furthermore, negative affect expression had a relatively low reliability of .71, which was the lowest of all the coping strategies. This may be another
indicator that negative affect expression might be more effectively measured by other means.

Alternatively, the combination strategy of integrative communication and negative affect expression may not necessarily be used more often by highly competent communicators. Negative affect expression involves nonverbal expressions of jealousy-related affect that the partner can see such as appearing hurt or crying in front of the partner. A highly competent communicator may determine that using these nonverbal expressions of jealousy undermines the more direct, partner-based approach of integrative communication which involves openly discussing jealous feelings with the partner. Although negative affect expression may communicate with the partner, its indirect, nonverbal method may be ambiguous and easily misunderstood.

Hypothesis 2, which predicted a significant relationship between communication competence and distributive communication, active distancing, avoidance/denial, violent communication/threats, and negative affect expression in combination with distributive communication or active distancing, was not supported. The predictions of Hypothesis 2 were based primarily on the assumption that a person who perceived him- or herself as a highly competent communicator would be less likely to utilize potentially destructive coping strategies significantly than low communicatively competent individuals. There are several possible explanations for why this hypothesis was not supported.

One possible explanation for the nonsignificant results is that the measurement used to assess communication competence was too broad. A subscale of Wiemann's communication competence scale was used rather than the entire 57-item original scale. The reliability of the original scale was estimated at .96 using Cronbach's alpha (Wiemann, 1977). The present study
reported the reliability of the subscale at only .74. More importantly, the original scale measured communication competence as a multidimensional variable and contained separate subscales for affiliative support, social relaxation, behavior flexibility, empathy, and interaction management. The seven items used in this study measured only general communication competence, including only one or two items to tap the various dimensions of competence. This question of communication competence dimensions is important because variations in behavior along this dimension can be crucial to an individual's judgment of communicative behavior (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). To summarize, one reason why a significant relationship between high communication competence and the potentially negative coping strategies was not found could be the lack of exploring multiple dimensions of competence.

The possibility also exists that communication competence is not related to the use of negative coping strategies. Jealousy is one of the most prevalent and potentially destructive emotions in love relationships (Brink & Bringle, 1987) and may become pathological (Bernhard, 1986). It can cause a person to feel out of control, unreasonable, overwhelmed, or obsessed with thoughts of his or her partner with another person. Jealousy in its "darkest" form can co-occur with possessiveness, control, and violence (Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). In fact, a survey of men who batter their wives revealed that intense jealousy was the second most common trait of such men (Simpson Feazell, Sanchez Mayers & Dechesner, 1984, cited in Buunk, 1986). Furthermore, people who expect and value sexual exclusivity in a romantic relationship are likely to feel intense jealousy if their partners violate or even are perceived to violate this expectation (White, 1981b, cited in Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Although a person may be highly communicatively competent in most situations, jealousy may be such a
strong and potentially destructive emotion that even he or she cannot cope with it in positive ways.

Another possible explanation for the nonsignificant results can be explained by social desirability. According to Hunter (1988), most subjects would avoid admitting use of aversive strategies which would be predicted by adhering to social norms. Respondents participating in the study may not have been comfortable admitting their use of the destructive coping strategies. Since most people may know that utilizing destructive strategies to cope with jealousy, such as violent communication and threats, is not "socially acceptable", they may have refrained from indicating their use of these strategies.

The post hoc analysis indicated that females were more likely to use Active Distancing, Negative Affect Expression, and Distributive Communication coping strategies than males. First, Active Distancing is an indirect, aggressive means of communicating jealousy to the partner such as storming out of the room, giving the partner the "silent treatment", and withdrawing affection and sexual favors. Since women have less support than men to express jealousy is a dominant way (Buunk, 1986), they may feel more comfortable using an indirect coping strategy such as Active Distancing. Second, Negative Affect Expression is nonverbal expressions of jealousy, such as crying or sulking in front of a partner. Since females tend to express their feelings more openly and freely than males, they may find this nonverbal means of expressing jealousy easy to use. Last, finding that women tend to use Distributive Communication significantly more than men was surprising since men tend to behave in more dominating, controlling, and aggressive ways than women when jealous (Buunk, 1986). One possible explanation is that since women tend to find a rival a threat
to the relationship rather than to themselves, they may bring up the issue over and over again to assure themselves that the relationship is still intact.

Limitations of the Study

The generalizability of this study is limited by two factors. First, the sample consisted of college students who were 82 percent Caucasian. Furthermore, 63 percent fell into the 19-24 year old age bracket. Having a more varied sample of respondents would allow this study to be more easily applied to other cultures and ages.

The second limitation of this study in regard to generalizability is that jealousy is relationally contextualized. Only subjects who were currently involved in a romantic relationship were asked to participate. As discussed earlier, jealousy can vary from relationship to relationship. Jealous feelings can arise from a partner being involved in non-sexual relationships such as those with a child, co-worker, family, or even solitary activities. This study only addressed coping with jealousy in romantic relationships. Possibly, a person who is highly communicatively competent may utilize different coping strategies depending on the relationship. Therefore, jealousy coping strategies and communication competence should be evaluated in various relational contexts.

Two additional limitations of this study involve measurement. First, even though the majority of communication competence instruments represent traits, the possibility exists that communication competence is not a singular trait but made up of several types of traits. Although some people communicate more effectively over time across relational contexts, it may be oversimplistic to assume that competence is a single, observable trait. This controversial issue has been intensified by the numerous measures used to assess communication
competence, but fails to bring researchers closer to an agreement. Furthermore, some researchers claim that communication competence should be situationally defined and therefore, measured as a state variable rather than a trait variable.

The final limitation involves the limited range of strategies for coping with jealousy included in this study. Research has indicated that jealousy is a unique emotion because it is connected to a cluster of emotions (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993; Sharpsteen, 1993, cited in Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Jealous individuals report being angry, sad, hurt, upset, threatened, betrayed, invaded, pressured, confused, insecure, helpless, threatened, betrayed, invaded, rejected, and frustrated when experiencing jealousy (Bryson, 1976, 1977; Sharpsteen, 1993; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1995, cited in Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Since jealousy is such a unique emotion, perhaps consisting of a combination of many emotions, examining only one “type” of response (i.e. interaction with partner) may be too narrow.

**Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest several areas for future research. First, the initial prediction that general communication competence and jealousy coping strategies are significantly related, for the most part, was not supported in this study. This is not to say that no relationship exists between the two variables, but that how the variables are measured might need to be more sophisticated. Further research using multifaceted measures of communication competence and tapping a wider range of jealousy coping strategies is needed. For example, Guerrero and Anderson (1995) discussed interactive, affective, and general responses to jealousy. Perhaps since the jealousy scale tapped only interactive
(face-to-face and partner based) coping strategies, it did not fully portray how the respondents cope with jealousy.

Second, although jealousy is prevalent and potentially destructive to most relationships, researchers know little about how people communicate about jealousy in various types of relationships. Studies should compare differences in level of communication competence and coping strategies in non-sexual relationships such as with a child or co-worker. According to White (1981b), people in sexual relationships who value sexual exclusivity are likely to feel intense jealousy if their partners violate or even are perceived to violate this expectation (cited in Guerrero & Andersen, 1995). Since sexual exclusivity is not a factor in non-sexual relationships, different feelings and coping strategies may characterize jealousy in these relationships. Additional studies should investigate communication competence and coping with jealousy in non-sexual relationships.

Third, further investigation into communication competence and jealousy as separate constructs is needed. Researchers need to examine how different aspects of these variables affect relational outcomes. Many dimensions of communication competence have been proposed and named, and these have sprung from various types of research (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Since the communication process is complex and a wide variety of factors may influence the perception of communication competence, further investigation should focus on how the multiple dimensions affect how the construct is measured. In regard to jealousy, there are numerous theories which examine its complex nature, and each of these perspectives cite different causes for jealousy (DeSteno & Salovey, 1994). Although the perspectives agree that jealousy is an aversive
emotional state, further research should investigate how these different “causes” may influence how jealousy is coped with in the relationship.

Fourth, researchers should examine how both partners cope and respond when experiencing romantic jealousy and how these responses, either individual or relational, could be compared. As previous research has indicated, males and females may have the same feelings of jealousy, but their responses to these feelings differ (Bernhard, 1986). Males may tend to perceive jealousy as a competition between themselves and the rival and tend to express jealousy in more aggressive or violent ways. Females may tend to find the rival a threat to the relationship not actually a threat to themselves. Since a difference may exist, future studies should focus on how males and females cope and respond when feeling jealous and how these different responses can affect a romantic relationship.

Lastly, since admitting to jealousy is commonly believed to indicate a failure in a relationship (Bernhard, 1986) and that revealing feelings of jealousy is counterproductive to a relationship (van Sommers, 1988), people may deny feelings of jealousy or may be uncomfortable admitting feelings of jealousy. Furthermore, since most people may know that utilizing destructive coping strategies to cope with jealousy, such as violent communication and threats, is “socially unacceptable”, they may hesitate to indicate using these strategies. For these reasons, future research may want to include an instrument to control for social desirability.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

Please mark the appropriate answer.

1. AGE
   ____ 19-24  ____ 40-54
   ____ 25-39  ____ 55 and older

2. GENDER
   ____ male  ____ female

3. RACE/ETHNICITY
   ____ African American  ____ Hispanic
   ____ Asian/Pacific Islander  ____ Native American/Alaska Native
   ____ Caucasian (White, Non-Hispanic)
   ____ Other

4. RELATIONAL STATUS
   ____ Casual dating
   ____ Exclusive dating
   ____ Cohabitating  (living with romantic partner, not married)
   ____ Married
   ____ Not currently involved in a romantic relationship
   (Please do not continue with this study. Please feel free to read through the questionnaires but do not answer any of the questions. Thank you)
APPENDIX B
INTERACTIVE RESPONSE TO JEALOUSY SCALE

Think about the times you have felt jealousy in your relationship with your romantic partner. By jealousy, I mean feeling like your relationship is somehow threatened by a third party (sometimes called a "rival"). Keep these memories in mind while completing this questionnaire. All your answers are anonymous so please be as honest as possible when answering all questions.

Please circle the following codes to indicate how much you agree that you use the following behaviors in response to jealousy: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree or disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree.

WHEN I FEEL JEALOUS, I TEND TO . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. appear sad and depressed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. cry or sulk in front of my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ignore my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. quarrel or argue with my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. give my partner the &quot;silent treatment&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. display insecurity to my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. make hurtful or abusive comments to my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. explain my feelings to my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. disclose my jealous feelings to my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. stop calling or initiating communication with my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. yell or curse at my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. get quiet and don't say much</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. become silent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. act like I don't care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree or disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>vent my frustrations when with my partner</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>appear hurt in front of my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>physically pull away from my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>give my partner cold or dirty looks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>decrease affection toward my partner</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>push, shove, or hit my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>act rude toward my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>deny feeling jealous</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>use physical force with my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>wear displeasure on my face my partner to see</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>threaten to harm my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>confront my partner in accusatory manner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>become physically violent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>pretend nothing is wrong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>discuss bothersome issues with my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>try and talk to my partner and reach an understanding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>calmly question my partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Complete the following questionnaire/scale with yourself in mind. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by circling one of the following: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; ? = undecided or neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

1. I find it easy to get along with others. SD D ? A SA
2. I am "rewarding" to talk to. SD D ? A SA
3. I can deal with others effectively. SD D ? A SA
4. I am easy to talk to. SD D ? A SA
5. I usually do not make unusual demands on my friends. SD D ? A SA
6. I do not mind meeting strangers. SD D ? A SA
7. I generally say the right thing at the right time. SD D ? A SA

Adapted from: