Perceptions of Jealousy through Nonverbal Communication within Romantic Relationships

Introduction

A woman and her boyfriend are walking down the street when she notices that he is looking at another woman. She releases his hand, and tightly folds her arms across her chest, and has an angry scowl on her face. These are all different forms of a girl expressing that she is jealous through non-verbal communication. But does her boyfriend actually know that she is jealous by her displaying those mannerisms?

Jealousy is a common emotion exhibited within relationships. It is important to be able to recognize when someone is conveying an emotion through various forms of nonverbal communication, especially when your significant other is. According to Rowley (2012), jealousy can come in two forms: either reactive, which is when one partner feels an actual threat to the relationship; and suspicious, which is when the fears within the relationship do not match the actual facts. Jealousy gone unnoticed can be detrimental to the success of a relationship. Currently, no research has been conducted that examines romantic relationships and jealousy through non-verbal communication. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to research what effect women’s nonverbal cues have on men’s understanding of jealousy. Specifically, we plan to explain the males perceptions of jealousy within a college committed relationship. We will also examine the girlfriends of the men and analyze the nonverbal cues that they believe they use when displaying jealousy to the men within their relationship. We plan to focus on men and women who are in non-distant relationships.
Is Jealousy a Good Thing?

It has been said that jealousy can be thought of as a positive and a negative for a relationship. Krischer (2014) determined that a little bit of jealousy can reignite the relationship, and remind both partners that their significant other is attractive and that they are lucky to have them. This will ultimately stimulate them to be nicer and friendlier to each other. In a sense, jealousy in small doses can be beneficial to relationships. On the other hand, Lauren Papp, Ph. D (2014) says chronic jealousy is a negative sign of the relationship. Saltz (2006) inferred that jealousy can lead to control within a relationship and that when there is too much control, it can lead to a partner feeling smothered, which ultimately will push them away.

Olver (2014) analyzes that the causes of jealousy are closely related to insecurity, past experiences, thinking that you own your partner, and believing that things should never change. A traumatic experience from one’s childhood can sincerely influence how they perceive a relationship. When a partner is stuck on past experiences they should remind themselves that they want to improve the relationship and that they must move forward to do so.

Kenneth Levi (Thompson, 2010), who is a psychologist at Penn State University gathered that there are two types of attachment within relationships; dismissive and secure. A person who is said to have dismissive attachment "doesn't see the value in their relationships." These individuals only value their independence, to the exclusion of relationships. Their relationship with their partner is not viewed as a priority. On the contrary, those with secure attachments see the value in relationships. If an individual comes from a broken family, or has bad experiences from their childhood, it is more likely that they will have dismissive attachment; they will perceive the relationship not as a priority. This can leave a partner who may have secure attachments, feeling jealous or inadequate and can lead to controlling behavior. Through
examining college relationships we will gain insight on the effects of jealousy in romantic relationships.

How Does He Know She’s Jealous?

Attribution theory is the idea of finding reasons behind actions and reactions. In relation to romantic relationships and jealousy attributions can be due to emotional and motivational causes. Julia Wood (2013), explains that attribution theory is when something happens one finds out why it happened or one finds out why a person expressed a certain behavior. The different causes for why something occurs fit into two categories, internal or external attribution. Internal attribution is when a person may do something because of their personality traits (Julia Wood, 2013). For example if someone is usually jealous and they get mad and walk away when they see their partner hugging a friend, then their reaction can be explained by them being a jealous person normally. External attribution is when a person may do something because of their current situation (Julia Wood, 2013). For example if a boy is not usually protective but and he sees his girlfriend walking to class with her ex-boyfriend and he surprising hits the wall, then is behavior can be explained as him being jealous because of the situation.

When someone expresses jealousy without directly speaking about it they are using their non-verbal communication. There are several different types of nonverbal communication and some can be used to communicate jealousy. Wood (2013), describes kinesics and it is the body movements one uses such as facial expressions. Paralanguage are cues in the voice one uses such as yelling. Proxemics is the distance we put between ourselves and others. These forms of nonverbal communications sometimes go unnoticed but they are very important. Attribution theory and the constructs of nonverbal communication pertain to our research project because we
hope to discover how males analyze what nonverbal communication cues females are using in particular to convey their jealousy and what caused the jealous

**What the Experts Say:**

**Disadvantages to Jealousy within a Relationship**

Peretti and Pudowski (1996) surveyed men and women about how jealousy impacted their relationship. The males that participated in the study expressed that jealousy made them feel that their dating partner was losing interest in them, and that they no longer loved them. Also, the men thought that their partner had become indifferent towards the relationship, which could result in a strained relationship. The women who participated in the study associated jealousy with the feelings of anxiety, insecurity and low self-esteem.

Sommer & Vodanovich (2000) found that high levels of jealousy created greater scores on the vengeance scale, which is a survey. When a partner becomes jealous in a relationship they also feel the need to get revenge for feeling it. The study also found that when one has a high score on the vengeance scale they are less likely to forgive. Revenge and un-forgiveness are disadvantages of jealousy and negative aspects that create unhealthy relationships.

In conclusion the disadvantages to jealousy are significant because they impact the success of relationship. Studies support the idea of jealousy having a negative effect on relationships and cause disadvantages within relationships. Our research expands the study of relationships and jealousy because we are exploring nonverbal cues; which has not been explored. When expressions of jealousy within relationships occur it is important that they are addressed. Not doing so can result in experiencing the disadvantages of jealousy. Our research is aimed to fill this gap and identify nonverbal cues of communication that convey jealousy.

**What can Cause Jealousy?**
Goodboy, Horan, & Booth-Butterfield (2012) found that the amount of love and care one gives their partner effects the partner's use of jealous actions through a survey that the participants took. If a partner feels jealous, the more likely they are to act upon those emotions. An example would be a woman who is jealous, and then forbids her significant other from speaking with the one who she believes is affecting their relationship. Partners are said to also become jealous of what their partner does and the things that their partner possess.

According to a survey conducted by Worley (2014), women reported higher levels of negativity than the men did during scenarios that involved their partner having a close friend that was outside of the romantic relationship. It also indicated that the effect of the friendship scenario created sexual jealousy within the relationship. Relationship uncertainty, which is when someone within the relationship has doubts, is not confident about their partner or status within the relationship, also played a big role within the study.

In conclusion, there are many factors that can affect jealousy within a relationship; whether it is an outside relationship, which can be platonic, or if it the amount of affection that a partner feels or does not feel by their significant other. These factors are important to examine while looking at all of the different jealousy influences that can impact a relationship.

**Going Steady**

The amount of jealousy that a partner feels within a relationship can be associated with the status of the relationship; whether they are casually dating, openly dating or if they are committed to a monogamous relationship. According to an eight-item jealousy test conducted by Khanchandani and Durham (2009), they determined that women who had claimed to be in a
steady relationship were less likely to be jealous than the women that were casually dating, and not tied down to one specific partner.

Women who were happier in the relationship were reportedly less jealous in comparison to those who were worried and concerned about their status. Khanchandani and Durham (2009) reasoned that college women who expressed greater levels of unhappiness and are more distressed were most likely to be more jealous of their partner.

The status of the relationship is important when it comes to determining jealousy. In a survey led by Bevan (2004), she concluded that when a person in a relationship expressed jealousy in a negative way, it resulted in the other partner becoming less confident about the relationship. Even if a relationship is steady and committed, when jealousy is perceived in a negative way, it can create relationship uncertainty.

As Khanchandani and Durham (2009) determined, if the relationship starts to become too stressful for an individual, or they become too jealous of their partner, they begin to be less confident about their relationship status, which can create factors of relationship uncertainty. This can create a friction between the two partners, which can in turn, cause the relationship to dissolve. Relationship status can be an important aspect of a relationship. When partners are happy within a committed relationship, they are less likely to be jealous and are more likely to remain in their relationship. In conclusion, it is important to focus on a relationship’s status and partners happiness.

**Methodology**

For our research, we are going to be using qualitative research to find our results. We will be using surveys and interviews as a way to find results about jealousy between heterosexual
couples in college. We will interview the couples one at a time, and ask our participants open ended questions to allow them to explain their detailed responses. We decided to explore the concept of jealousy between heterosexual couples because jealousy can affect the dynamics of a relationship. Emotions between partner are very important when trying to develop a healthy relationship. We hope that through these quantitative research methods that we will be able to better comprehend how men understand women’s non-verbal communication cues of jealousy.

RQ1: What do men do to prevent jealousy from occurring in the future?

This is important because after the man understand that his partner is jealous, it is essential to know what he does to make sure that it does not happen again, but studies show that jealousy can create a bad connection between two individuals, causing stress for both the man and the woman.

RQ2: How do men react when their partner communicates jealousy to them?

This is important because how the man reacts to his partner’s jealousy can affect the relationship in the future. If he brushes it off and continues to do things to make her jealous, then it can cause emotional turmoil. But if he takes into consideration about her feelings and tries to understand where she is coming from, then both parties will be happy with the end result.

RQ3: At which stage in the relationship is jealousy most likely to occur?

If a couple has been together for a long time and is in a steady, committed relationship, then there is probably a certain comfortability level that both individuals have and are open to expressing jealousy within the relationship at any point. If both are new to a relationship, there may be an “unspoken time” that could be too early to express any type of jealousy in fear that it would lead to one partner feeling uncomfortable.
Participants

The participants of this study are going to be college students who are in relationships. Our main audience will be Longwood University students. These students who participate in our interviews must be in a committed relationship. We define a committed relationship as being together six months are more. We plan on interviewing between three and five couples.

Procedure

We will be using interviews to conduct our research. As defined by our book, a field interview is semi directed form of discourse or conversation with the goal of uncovering the participant’s point of view (Keyton, 2011). We plan to use open-ended questions as a way to ensure our participants are comfortable enough to answer our questions as honestly as possible.

Conclusion

Jealousy is a part of every relationship, not just in romantic relationships. Research supports that jealousy can be an asset to the relationship, as well as detrimental. Nonverbal communication is another way of expressing our emotions without just words, and when it comes to jealousy or unhappiness within a relationship, it is important to understand those nonverbal cues. Our research gap focuses on the nonverbal communication within a relationship, because most of the research that has been conducted only studies the verbal communication between couples. The types of communication we are focusing on are proxemics, paralanguage, and kinesics. Through conducting interviews hopefully we will gain research that will help explain how men perceive and identify their partner’s jealousy through their nonverbal communication cues.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Interview Questions

Women
1. **What type of body language do you use when you are expressing jealousy to your partner?**
   a. Body language is a popular form of nonverbal communication, and it is important to understand how the woman in the relationship portrays her unhappiness to her partner when she is jealous.

2. **What does your voice usually sound like/ what tone do you speak when you become jealous and you talk to your boyfriend?**
   a. Voice fluctuations and voice tone are another way of expressing how one is feeling. If we were mainly focusing on when she is yelling or what she says when she is talking to her partner, then there would be no research gap to explore, since we are focusing on the nonverbal aspect of communication.

3. **Do you ever use distance as a way of expressing jealousy to your partner?**
   a. Proxemics is considered an interesting way of communicating. It has been shown that women use distance as a way to show her displeasure with her partner, and we are interested in seeing how often this type of communication occurs within a relationship.

Men
1. **Are there certain expressions that you recognize when your girlfriend is unhappy or unsatisfied?**
   a. Facial expressions, like body language, can be an obvious form of nonverbal communication. If the woman in the relationship has a scowl on her face, she is clearly unhappy and we are interested in seeing what type of facials they use to convey their jealousy to their partner.

2. **What does your girlfriend’s voice/tone usually sound like when she becomes jealous?**
   a. Our gap is that there is no research provided for nonverbal communication, so it is important for us to research the different types of ways that women convey their jealousy through to their partner through nonverbal cues, such as voice tones.

3. **When your girlfriend usually becomes jealous does she touch you in a positive romantic/loving gesture?**
   a. Haptics (touch) are important to look into for nonverbal communication because it will help us understand what type of gestures women use to express their jealousy to their partner.