

4-1988

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**An Exploratory Analysis On The  
Situational Determinants of Jealousy**

**by  
Renee Jean Baldwin**

**Honors Thesis  
in  
Department of Psychology  
University of Richmond  
Richmond, Virginia**

**April 29, 1988**

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Situational Determinants of Jealousy

Renee Baldwin

University of Richmond

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to transcend the trait and affective boundaries in order to account for the situational and cognitive variables which provoke the responses elicited by jealous emotion. The focus of the study is comprised of two major objectives: (1). To discover and define the structural dimensions associated with people's conceptions of jealous situations and (2) to determine whether there are gender differences in the interpretation and conceptualization of jealous emotion. Thirty-one undergraduate psychology students participated in the study. A cluster analysis was performed on the co-occurrence of situations. Five major categories of the situational determinants of jealousy were identified and labeled. An analysis of variance on the frequency of contact with each particular situation revealed an interaction effect between gender and category. Socialization factors which may contribute to the differences between males and females in the conceptualization and expression of human emotion, are discussed. Future research in this area is encouraged.

## An Exploratory Analysis On The Situational Determinants of Jealousy

Jealousy, a prevalent human emotion, is considered to be a psychological phenomenon. White's theory of jealousy (1981) proposes that jealous emotion involves a series of situational, cognitive, affective, and behavioral events. Most research conducted on jealousy, to date, has consistently tried to discover and define common emotional and behavioral states associated with jealous emotion. Little attention has been directed toward the identification and interpretation of situational variables linked to the inducement of jealousy.

Past research has defined jealousy as a negative physiological, emotional, and mental state resulting from the suspicion that a highly valued possession or affection is in danger of being lost (Salovey & Rodin, 1986; Mathes, Adams & Davies, 1985). It is believed that low self-esteem, lack of personal identity, and feelings of insecurity further accentuate the feelings and behavior induced by jealous emotion (Mathes, Philips, Skowran, & Dick, 1982; Mathes & Severa, 1981). However, a complex

psychological construct such as jealous emotion should not be defined solely by affective, behavioral and trait components. It is important to transcend the trait and affective boundaries in order to account for the situational and cognitive variables which provoke the responses elicited by jealous feelings.

A social psychological perspective on jealousy attempts to combine and analyze all possible domains associated with jealous emotion. Although this approach does not deny the importance of individual traits, characteristics, and dispositions, it does suggest that human emotions, such as jealousy, also possess and are influenced by socially based components (Pines & Aronson, 1983). Individuals are often not aware of their own feelings or their reasons behind behavioral acts. Thus, it is vital to first discover and examine antecedent conditions that provoke jealous emotion before attempting to define different feeling states that individuals may not be readily to distinguish (Salovey & Rodin, 1986).

It is apparent that there are individual differences in the affective and behavioral responses to jealousy. Thus, it may be more effective to view

jealousy in terms of the situation which provokes the emotional response rather than the nature of the emotional response itself (Bringle, 1981). An analysis of what defines a jealousy-evoking event provides a primary understanding of how jealousy actually operates. As in other areas of social perception, individuals selectively attend to all information in which they come into contact. Therefore, it is often the perception of the situation, and the degree of anticipated threat that induces the affective states associated with jealous emotion (Bringle, 1981; Salovey & Rodin, 1986).

Past research has specified two major categories of situations related to the jealous construct (Salovey & Rodin, 1986; Bers & Rodin, 1984). The first, social comparison jealousy, results from a challenge to an individual's superiority or equality. The second, social relations jealousy, occurs when an individual's exclusivity in a relationship is threatened. Social relations jealousy is often referred to as romantic jealousy (Bers & Rodin, 1984). The affective outcomes will vary accordingly to the specific situations encountered.

Individuals actively engage in and use social comparison as a measure in which to evaluate self-worth and self-concept. The impact of information perceived about the self in relation to others is tremendous. Thus, jealous emotion often results in self-examination and introspection. This self-focused attention usually is aversive because it involves the comparison of an individual to a particular social standard. The greater the discrepancy between an individual's behavior or appearance to the standard, the greater the discomfort and negative affect experienced (Bringle, 1981). Thus, given a situation in which self-concept is violated or threatened, feelings of jealous emotion will occur.

Social comparison jealousy is most manifest when individuals are confronted with situations which provide negative feedback of self, and which involve the presence of a similar, successful rival (Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Bers & Rodin, 1984). Jealous emotion will increase self-focus, and the salience of the jealousy-related information will be processed faster and recalled easier than information which is not self-referent (Bringle, 1981). The affective outcomes and resultant behavior will greatly depend



then, on the situation itself, the interpretation of information generated by the situation, the comparison level and the comparison level of alternatives.

The labeling and evaluation of the antecedent situations of jealous emotion may help determine and further define the subsequent affective and behavioral reactions resulting from the emotional experience. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to conduct an exploratory analysis of the situational determinants of jealousy. Whereas past research has merely accounted for two major situational domains of jealousy, this study recognizes the variety of situational conditions that potentially induce diverse outcomes of jealous emotion, and attempts to further categorize them into more specific areas.

The focus of the study is comprised of two major objectives:

- (1). To discover and define the structural dimensions associated with people's conceptions of jealous situations. The study attempts to answer whether individuals sort similar jealousy-provoking situations into broader categories from which they interpret and react. Thus, the discovery of

specific categories beyond the stated social comparison and social relations, may indicate similar behavioral and affective responses associated with each.

(2). To examine the frequency in which an individual is confronted with a specific jealousy-provoking event. Special attention will be directed toward the discovery and interpretation of differences between men and women relative to the recurrence of jealous emotion reported by each. It is expected that objective (1) will generate categories consisting of related jealousy-provoking events which may be defined and labeled as the situational determinants of jealous emotion. Thus, analysis of the frequency data may indicate that men and women interpret jealousy-provoking events differently, and therefore, feelings of jealous emotion may be dependent upon the type of situational conditions that men and women encounter.

## Method

### Subjects

Twenty-two men and nine women enrolled in an introductory

psychology course at a small, private, southeastern university, participated in the study. Subjects volunteered to be part of the study and received credit toward their introductory psychology course requirements.

### Materials

The jealousy-provoking situations distributed to subjects for categorical placement were situations generated by subjects in the Salovey and Rodin study (1986). Twenty-seven, of the fifty-three jealous situations listed, were randomly selected. The decision to distribute only twenty-seven of the situations was made for the following two reasons:

(1). Fifty-three situations is an overwhelming amount to distribute to students for categorical placement. It was expected that students would lose their concentration on the sorting task. Thus, a task involving twenty-seven situations may be more accurately performed.

(2). Twenty-seven jealous situations would simplify data analysis. The generation of a 53 X 53 co-occurrence matrix to use as input into a cluster analysis is too complex and intricate.

The twenty-seven situations were randomly selected and appeared to

be representative of diverse conditions. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the reduction of situations would not significantly effect the expected results.

### Procedure

Subjects were run in four different groups by a female experimenter. Each subject was placed in a different section of a large classroom so that each subject was provided with adequate space in which to work.

A consent form which outlined the requirements of the study was distributed to each subject. Subjects were told that the experimenter was attempting to categorize and define situations which provoke similar affective responses to jealousy.

An instruction sheet and twenty-seven index cards each containing a jealousy-provoking situation were then distributed to each subject. The situations were described as ones confronted by young adults such as themselves.

The subjects were first instructed to read each situation carefully. While viewing each situation for the first time, subjects were asked to rate

each situation, on a scale from zero to eight, "according to how often you find yourself in this situation." (zero = never, eight = very often). Subjects were asked to tally these ratings on the paper provided to them.

The second step involved the subjects reading over the situations once again very carefully. Subjects were advised to look for similarities across situations. Subjects were then informed to place similar situations into separate piles "according to which situations you think go best together." No time limit was placed on the task, and subjects were told that there were no restrictions on the amount of piles which could be accumulated.

After subjects had completed the sorting task, a blank sheet of paper was distributed to each. Subjects were asked to write down the situations that appeared in each pile.

### Predicted Results

The formation of situational subcategories were inferred from the results of a cluster analysis based on pairwise measures of similarity for the situations within each category.

Subjects' sortings were transformed into a 27 X 27 co-occurrence

matrix in order to determine the taxonomy of situations related to jealous emotion. Each entry in the matrix reflected the number of times that two situations were sorted together in the same pile. Thus, high numbers suggested that subjects perceived a high degree of similarity between two situations: low entries indicated very little perceived similarity.

The numbers produced by the 27 X 27 co-occurrence matrix of jealousy-evoking situations were then used as input into a hierarchical cluster analysis utilizing a SPSSX software package. The CLUSTER command links together cases based on some measure of association or similarity. Methods of linkage result from a stepwise amalgamating process. This process yields a hierarchy of cluster solutions, ranging from one overall cluster to as many clusters as there are cases. Within each level, clusters are disjoint, meaning that a single item belongs to only one cluster.

A dendrogram displaying the cluster patterns and specific jealousy-evoking situations is shown in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Visual inspection of the cluster patterns indicate five major categories of the situational determinants of jealousy. After careful analysis of the situations included within each, the categories have been labeled accordingly: romantic jealousy, jealous of others' social acceptance, jealous of others' undeserved accomplishments, jealous of others' traits and jealous of others' happiness. The jealousy-provoking situations sorted by subjects into the five categories are listed in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The data reported by each of the thirty-one subjects concerning how often each one experienced a specific jealousy-evoking event were input into a data file. The ratings for each event were summed by category and sex. Frequencies for females and males were calculated across all

categories. Table 2 displays the mean frequency rating for each sex on the five categories of the situational determinants of jealousy.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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A univariate test of significance (ANOVA) was then computed for sex by category (2 X 5). Analysis of the results revealed a marginally significant main effect for gender ( $F(1) = 3.424, p = .0745$ ). Review of the mean frequency table suggests that across all situations, females report experiencing jealous emotion induced by jealousy-evoking situations ( $M = 4.10$ ) more often than males ( $M = 3.36$ ). A highly significant main effect was revealed for category ( $F(4) = 5.304, p < .001$ ).

The most meaningful finding, however, was the highly significant interaction effect between sex and category ( $F(4) = 4.053, p < .05$ ). Figure 2 provides a graphic display of this interaction.



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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Thus, analysis of the data suggest that the conceptualization and interpretation of the jealousy-evoking event which instigates feelings of jealous emotion differs significantly between males and females.

The next step in the analysis was to perform a simple effects test in order to determine which categories males and females interpret as most prevalent in the induction of their jealous response. Analysis of the results indicated a marginally significant effect between the frequency males and females experience jealousy-inducing situations involving others' traits and social acceptance (  $F(1) = 3.790, p = .054$  and  $F(1) = 3.679, p = .058$  respectively) with females reporting instances more often across both conditional domains. Category four, labeled as jealous of others' happiness, was a significant predictor of jealous emotion for females (  $F(1) = 10.062, p = .002$ ).

Review of Table 2 indicates that women report and experience

feelings of jealous emotions associated with each of these three categories more often than men. The situational category defined as *romantic jealousy* was the only category in which the mean frequency rating was higher for males than females ( $\bar{M} = 3.14$  and  $\bar{M} = 2.56$ , respectively,  $p > .10$ ). Thus, analysis of the interaction effect suggests that the definition of jealous emotion generated by men and women may be dependent upon the interpretation and conceptualization of the characteristics associated with the event rather than the nature of the emotional experience itself.

### Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the structural dimensions associated with people's conceptions of jealous situations extends beyond the traditional classifications of social relations and social comparison jealousy. The discovery of additional dimensions suggests that human emotions, such as jealousy, possess and are influenced by socially based components. Individuals group jealousy-provoking situations according to the similarity of affective and behavioral responses that each one instigates.

Affective states associated with human emotion are difficult to measure and predict simply because of the social, cognitive, and/or biological determinants which encompass the emotional experience. Thus, it is evident that there will be individual differences in the affective and behavioral responses to jealousy-provoking situations. The variability across individuals in responding to a specific situation is a function of how each individual labels the situation and the individual's arousability (Bringle & Williams, 1979). A variety of feelings may be experienced by an individual when confronted with jealous emotion that can range from depression and shame in one instance to extreme arousal and anger in another. Therefore, the labeling and evaluation of the antecedent situations of jealous emotion (as provided in this study) may help determine and further define the subsequent affective and behavioral reactions resulting from the emotional experience.

The differences apparent between male and female interpretation and conceptualization of specific jealousy-evoking situations, and thus perhaps, differences in the subsequent affective and behavioral responses

experienced, may suggest that there are gender differences in the emotional expression and recognition of human emotion. Brody (1985) in a review of the research addressing gender differences in emotional development argues that the variation of emotional experience reported across sexes is a function of different familial, sociocultural, and interpersonal roles. Thus, it may be inferred that these three factors are primarily responsible for the differences which exist in the interpretation of and response patterns to human emotion between males and females.

Research indicates that there are gender differences in several areas of emotional functioning: specifically in nonverbal sensitivity, expressiveness, self-reports of anger, fear, and sadness, the quality of defensives and coping strategies as well as cognitive correlates of recognition ability (Brody, 1985; Bringle & Williams, 1979). Analysis of the interaction effect present in this study, reveals that women, in comparison to men, report significantly more instances of jealous emotion provoked by situations involving others' traits, social acceptance, and happiness.

Brody (1985) attributes the gender differences in emotional

development to the socialization of emotion. For instance, males increasingly inhibit the expression and attribution of all emotions, whereas females increasingly inhibit the expression and recognition of socially unacceptable emotions such as anger. Society encourages males to think analytically about feelings while females are encouraged to interpret their feelings intuitively.

The differences reflected then, between males and females across the categories defined as jealous of others' traits, social acceptance, and happiness may be attributed to these socialization factors. Males may report less feelings of jealous emotion across these three situational domains simply because it is socially unacceptable for them to experience or express feelings of jealous emotion provoked by these specific situations. The only situational category in which males admitted a higher encounter rate than females, was defined as *romantic jealousy*. Perhaps, a stigma of machoism is attached to romanticism, and thus it is more socially acceptable for males to express feelings of displeasure and arousability when they feel that their exclusivity in a relationship is threatened. It is

possible then that the cultural norms as dictated by society regarding the interpretation and expression of human emotion may force males to deny the quality of their emotional experiences. Thus, the denial may create an inaccurate perception of the emotional experience which in turn may produce inadequate and maladaptive affective and behavioral responses to the situation itself.

Social comparison jealousy promotes comparison of one to a particular social standard. Thus, social comparison jealousy often results in self-examination and introspection. The gender differences obtained from this study support the preceding contentions. Females reported significantly more experiences of jealous emotion when confronted with situations involving social comparison than when confronted with situations involving social relations. This finding may be attributed to societal pressures placed on females to continually compare themselves to others. These societal pressures are conveyed through such channels as the media sector (fashion magazines, articles which address "thin is in", "how to please your man", and "you can look like this too", television

shows /commercials, and billboards), the educational system and the familial unit. Social comparison to such high standards often result in feelings of inadequacy and frustration. Whether women are afflicted with feelings of inadequacy more often than men may not be true simply because societal norms dictate that it is only acceptable for women to recognize and express these feelings.

Gould (1987) in a study which addresses the gender differences on self-consciousness variables, found that women score higher than men on measures of public self-consciousness (the degree to which one is aware of oneself as a social object) and social anxiety (the degree of chronic discomfort felt by the individual in the presence of others). Thus, womens' conceptualization of self as social objects may encourage social comparison behavior. It is possible, then, that women rely more heavily than men on the uses of social standards in order to determine self-worth and self-concept.

The use of social comparison as a standard for the determination of self-worth and self-concept may be debilitating. Research argues that

women experience depression more often than men (Brody, 1985; Bringle & Williams, 1975). Feelings of depression may be a result of an individual's perception of self as compared to a social standard. The greater the discrepancy between an individual's behavior or appearance to the standard, the greater the discomfort and negative affect experienced. Perhaps then, women are more often confronted with situations in which they perceive that their self-concept is in danger of being violated or threatened. These perceptions of fear and inadequacy create and accentuate feelings associated with depression. An area of future research may investigate whether there is a correlation between the experience of depression and the experience of jealous emotion as reported by both sexes. It is possible that a cause and effect relationship is existent between depression and jealous emotion, and thus one may be a significant predictor of the other.

Human emotion, and specifically jealous emotion, is difficult to measure because of the individual differences which exist across the affective, behavioral and trait components. Thus, it is imperative to



transcend the trait and affective boundaries in order to account for the situational and cognitive variables which provoke the responses elicited by jealous feelings. Once the antecedent situations of jealous emotion have been evaluated and labeled, it may facilitate the determination of the subsequent affective and behavioral reactions resulting from the emotional experience.

Therefore, it is encouraged that future research attempt to discover and define the emotions and behaviors elicited by individuals in response to these five situational domains. Focus should also be directed toward the effect that dispositional and personality factors have on the variability of generated responses. Gender differences need to be investigated further, and it is encouraged that in replication of this study, a more even distribution of males and females be used as participants.

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**Figure Caption**

**Figure 1. The five categories of the situational determinants of jealousy**

DISTANCE

5

10

15

20

25

13

14

2

12

18

9

15

21

5

26

16

17

4

25

19

24

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27

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7

22

1

23

SECTION 2  
CATEGORY 3  
CATEGORY 4  
CATEGORY 5

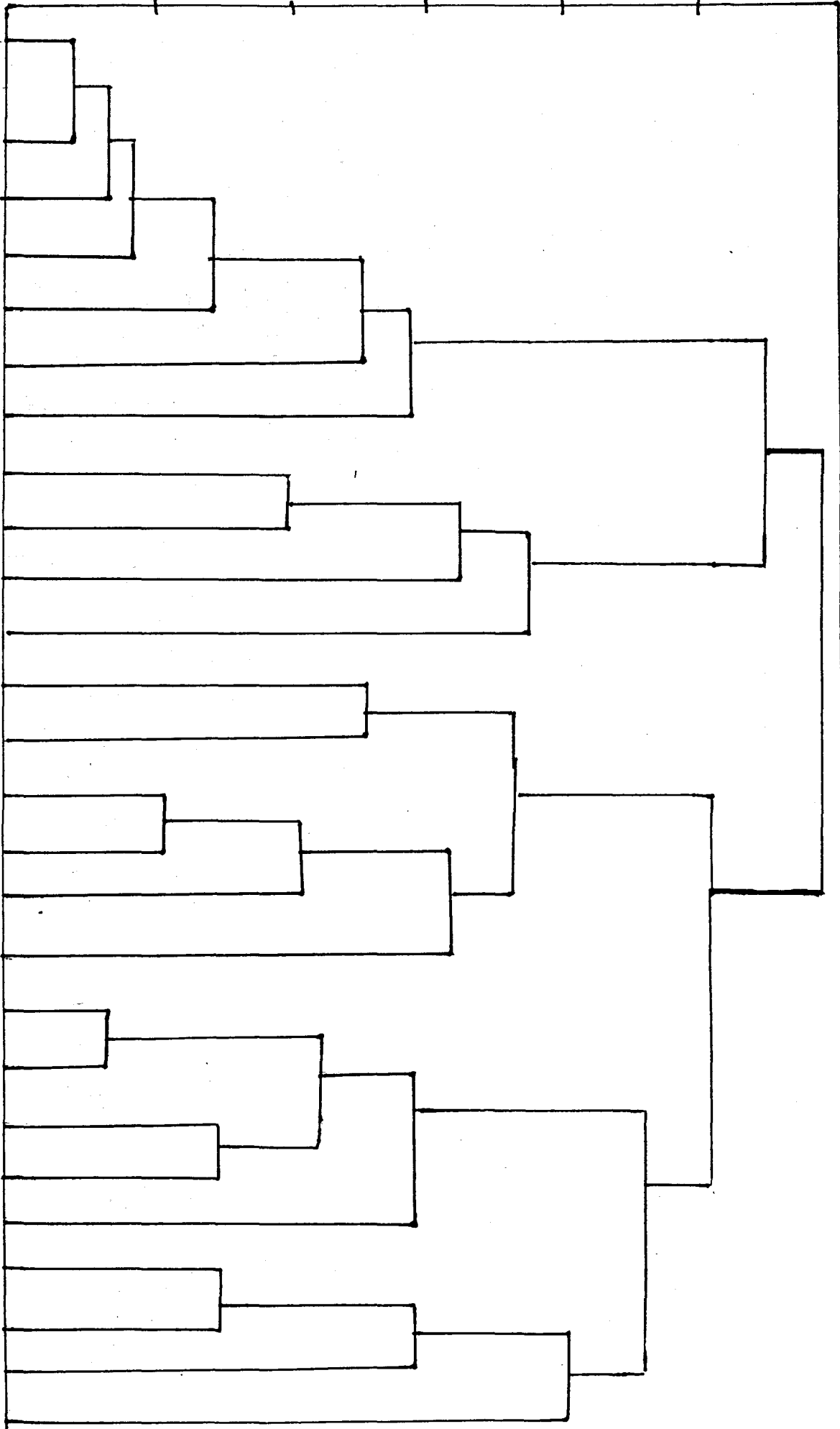


Table 1

**The Situational Determinants of Jealousy: The Five Major****Categories and Jealousy-evoking Situations Associated with Each****CATEGORY ONE: ROMANTIC JEALOUSY**

13. Your boy/girlfriend wants to see other people.
14. Your boy/girlfriend would rather be with his/her friends than with you.
2. Your boy/girlfriend talks about an old lover.
12. Your date dances with someone else at a dance.
18. Your boy/girlfriend seems less sexually attracted to you than before.
9. You phone your boy/girlfriend and a voice you haven't heard before answers.
15. You hear that an old lover of yours has found a new lover.
21. Your boy/girlfriend goes on a long trip without you.

**CATEGORY TWO: SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE**

5. Someone ignores you while talking to a friend of yours.
26. An opposite sex friend gives another friend a compliment but not you.
16. You listen to someone tell a story about things they did without you.
17. Someone you hate is liked by everyone else.

**CATEGORY THREE: UNDESERVED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- 4. A less intelligent person gets better grades than you do.
- 25. Someone else gets a job that you want.
- 19. Someone else gets credit for what you've done.
- 24. Someone gets things through manipulation while you try to work for them.
- 20. Someone has gotten someplace because of his/her parents' money or status.
- 3. Someone is better off than you are but doesn't appreciate it.

**CATEGORY FOUR: TRAIT**

- 10. Someone is more outgoing and self-confident than you.
- 11. Someone is better looking than you.
- 8. You meet someone with a more impressive resume than yours.
- 27. Someone is more intelligent than you.
- 6. Someone has a very attractive and intelligent boy/girlfriend.

**CATEGORY FIVE: HAPPINESS OF OTHERS**

- 7. Someone has more freetime than you.
- 22. You have to work while your roommate is out partying.
- 1. You see someone who is happy when you are unhappy.
- 23. Your sibling is praised by one of your parents.

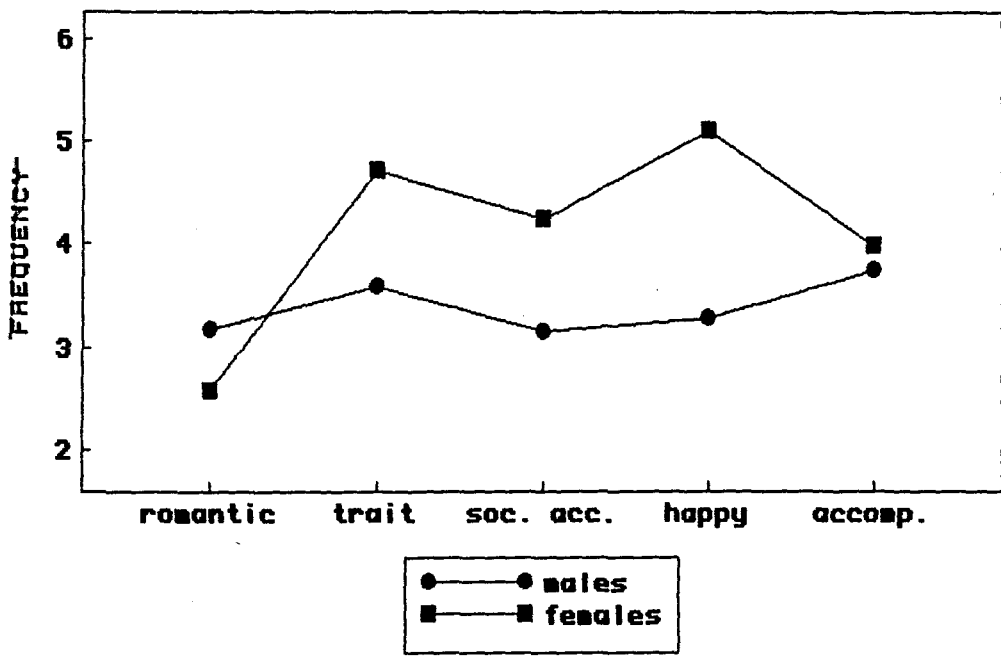
**Table 2**

**The Mean Frequency Ratings of Jealous Situations for Sex and Category**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Gender</b>	
		<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>Romantic</b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>2.56</b>
<b>Trait</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>4.69</b>
<b>Social Accep.</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>4.22</b>
<b>Happiness</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>5.08</b>
<b>Accomplish.</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>3.96</b>
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>4.10</b>



**Figure 2. The mean frequency ratings of jealous situations for sex and category.**



JEALOUSY EXPERIMENT  
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

1. I HAVE FREELY CONSENTED TO TAKE PART IN A PSYCHOLOGY STUDY BEING CONDUCTED BY RENEE BALDWIN AND DR. SCOTT ALLISON, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND.
2. THE STUDY HAS BEEN DESCRIBED TO ME. I UNDERSTAND THAT I WILL BE GIVEN A NUMBER OF JEALOUS SITUATIONS AND ASKED TO CATEGORIZE THEM.
3. I UNDERSTAND THAT I AM FREE TO DISCONTINUE MY PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY AT ANY TIME.
4. I UNDERSTAND THAT THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY WILL BE TREATED IN STRICT CONFIDENCE AND THAT I WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS. ALL MY RESPONSES WILL BE USED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY.
5. I UNDERSTAND THAT I WILL RECEIVE ONE HOUR CREDIT FOR MY PARTICIPATION.
6. I UNDERSTAND THAT, AT MY REQUEST, I CAN RECEIVE ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION OF THE STUDY AT ITS CONCLUSION.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

PSYCH. SECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

## INSTRUCTIONS

I AM INTERESTED IN THE CATEGORIZATION OF SITUATIONS WHICH PROVOKE SIMILAR RESPONSES TO JEALOUSY.

1. THE FOLLOWING CARDS CONTAIN JEALOUSY-PROVOKING SITUATIONS. THESE SITUATIONS ARE REFLECTIVE OF ONES CONFRONTED BY YOUNG ADULTS.
2. READ THROUGH ALL THE SITUATIONS CAREFULLY AND ON A SCALE FROM ZERO TO EIGHT RANK ORDER EACH SITUATION ACCORDING TO HOW OFTEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THIS SITUATION. (ZERO = NEVER, EIGHT = FREQUENTLY)
3. READ THROUGH ALL SITUATIONS AGAIN VERY CAREFULLY AND LOOK FOR SITUATIONS THAT YOU THINK ARE SIMILAR.
4. PLACE SIMILAR SITUATIONS INTO SEPARATE PILES ACCORDING TO WHICH SITUATIONS YOU THINK GO BEST TOGETHER.
5. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAYS TO SORT THE SITUATIONS.
6. YOU MAY SORT THE SITUATIONS INTO AS MANY PILES AS YOU WISH (ONE PILE CAN CONTAIN ONE SITUATION).
7. YOU HAVE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU NEED TO COMPLETE THE TASK.
8. AFTER YOU HAVE SORTED ALL SITUATIONS, WRITE DOWN THE SITUATIONS (BY THEIR NUMBERS) THAT APPEARED IN EACH PILE.

FILE 1

1, 24, 8, 12

FILE 2

21

DEBRIEF FORM

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO CONDUCT AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF JEALOUSY. I AM INTERESTED IN THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ABOUT JEALOUS SITUATIONS. CERTAIN SITUATIONS MAY INDUCE DIVERSE OUTCOMES OF JEALOUS EMOTION, AND THIS STUDY ATTEMPTS TO CATEGORIZE THESE SITUATIONS INTO SPECIFIC AREAS.