THE DARK SIDE OF COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY:
MESSAGES THAT HURT

by

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Bose Distein stechen sehr,bose Zunge stechen mehr.

German Proverb

Nasty thistles hurt a great deal, but nasty words hurt more.

English Translation
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ABSTRACT

Constructivist research has accrued considerable evidence indicating that, compared to persons exhibiting lower levels of cognitive complexity, high complexity individuals "read" social situations and people more deeply and make more accurate conclusions concerning others' intentions and affective states. In turn, this enhanced retrieval and cognitive handling of social information enables complex individuals to generate messages that are tailored to the unique characteristics of the communicative situation and interactant. Because they are so interactant- and situation-specific, these "sophisticated" message strategies tend to be judged by naïve actors as more functionally effective in a variety of contexts than less adapted messages that stress role expectations and culturally shared definitions of the situation.

Unfortunately, our understanding of such individual differences in message production is severely limited because they have been examined solely within pro-social communicative domains (e.g., emotional support). The purpose of the current study was to extend Constructivist research concerning communication skill to include "darker" relational contexts typically not addressed in interpersonal communication literature. More specifically, the project was designed to explore the possibility that in emotionally painful situations, cognitively complex individuals produce messages that are perceived
as more sophisticated and, therefore, more effective at hurting relationship partners than messages generated by individuals with lower levels of complexity.

The current study provides tentative evidence that in situations where the communicative objective is to hurt one's romantic partner, cognitively complex individuals generate messages that are evaluated by naïve actors as being more hurtful and more sophisticated than those generated by relatively less complex persons. These findings suggest that scholars, researchers, and therapists alike might benefit from an expansion of what it means to be a "skilled" communicator. However, the results of this study also indicate that the relationship between complexity and the production of hurtful messages is not as straightforward as application of the basic tenets of Constructivist theory might suggest. More research is needed to flesh out the relationship between cognitive complexity and message production in hurtful situations.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite the maxim, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," it is unlikely that anyone could deny having suffered painful wounds at the hand of a few ill-spoken, albeit well-chosen, words. Nevertheless, comparatively little scholarship in the communication discipline, in general (and research concerning personal relationships, in particular) has focused its attention on this "dark side" of interpersonal communication. Rather, researchers have assembled an impressive body of literature delineating the nature of and outcomes associated with "functional" communication in what are depicted as normal, "healthy" interpersonal relationships. Although some scholars have adjusted their research agendas to include queries concerning the "negative" side of communicating and relating (e.g., rejection, relationship dissatisfaction, unmanageable conflict, and loneliness), such issues tend to be portrayed as mistakes, rather than as fundamental elements of relationships (Duck, 1994a). In an attempt to broaden the scope of communication research to include both the positive and negative components of relating, the study presented here examined a "dark side" of communication within romantic relationships. Specifically, it employed the cognitive approach of Constructivism to ascertain if individuals with advanced social cognitive abilities (which are typically associated with skilled, pro-social communication)
generate messages that are more proficient at hurting a romantic partner than those produced by persons with less ability. Descriptions of the significance of the problem, the theoretical framework of Constructivism, and the focus of the current study follow.

**The Significance of the Problem**

As Vangelisti (1994) asserts, "Regardless of intentionality, context, or source, feelings of hurt are evoked by and expressed through communication" (p. 54). Loosely defined, hurt refers to emotions experienced as unpleasant, negative feelings which people associate with agony, anguish, and suffering (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O’Connor, 1987; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Although not as widely researched as guilt, hurt is commonly conceptualized as resulting from feeling emotionally injured or wounded by another individual (Folkes, 1982; L’Abate, 1977). Moreover, recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that feelings of hurt are most often elicited through social and communicative interactions within the context of a relatively intimate relationship, and these feelings typically concern interpersonal issues (Anderson & Guerrero, 1998; Jones, Kugler, & Adams, 1995). For instance, when asked to describe interactions in which their feelings were hurt, people more frequently recalled situations centering on romantic partners, family members, and friends (than interactions involving acquaintances and strangers) and topics emphasizing relational events such as rejecting a relationship partner, disregarding another's desire for affiliation, or ridiculing the importance of a relationship. Clearly, people feel hurt because of something they perceive someone else said, did, or thought. And as Vangelisti and Sprague (1998)
contend, "As a consequence, communication—whether accurately or inaccurately interpreted—is required to evoke hurt feelings" (p. 125). Nevertheless, relatively little research has been devoted to the exploration of the communicative processes used to evoke such negative feelings. Perhaps the reason for this is ideological in nature.

As Parks (1982) asserts, "The point at which observations meet value systems is inherently problematic for the communication scientist. Values may be used to stimulate new research and theory or they may give rise to ideologies which ultimately limit and distort our search for scientific understanding" (p. 79). While research in the field of interpersonal communication has been fruitful, the majority of scholarship (especially in personal relationships research) seems to be dominated by what one might term an ideology of benevolence: a pollyannaish and decontextualized view of relating which excludes many of the problematic elements fundamental to human experience and thus, severely limits any true understanding of the lives and relationships of normal, everyday people. Indeed, standard interpersonal communication textbooks (e.g., Devito, 1998; Trenholm & Jensen, 1995) are crammed with topics such as intimacy, self-disclosure, empathy, supportiveness, openness, active-listening, and constructive "win-win" conflict orientations. Similarly, journals are littered with studies concerning such "nice" relational topics as social support, intimacy and closeness, comforting, relationship quality and satisfaction, facework, and conflict resolution. As Duck (1994a) posits,

In the bulk of personal relationships research, the underlying assumption is not only that relationships should be nice but also that people are nice: They set out constructively to develop relationships, help others in need, provide support to their friends, do nice things to maintain their relationships, occasionally use cute and funny little strategies to test out commitment, follow rules of relating, or act
in playful and amusing manners to sustain and develop the human community of which relationships play so important (and so nice) a part. (p. 5)

As virtually anyone can attest, however, relationships are not the "splendid dyadic islands" research would have one believe them to be; rather, relational life occurs within social and cultural contexts and is "richly entwined with begrudging, vengeful, hostile, conflictive tensions and struggles" (Duck, 1994a, p. 6). For instance, while romantic relationships can be quite nurturing and fulfilling, they are also often marred by violence (Deal & Wampler, 1986; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989) and can end in rather painful and unpleasant ways (Duck, 1982; Orbuch, 1992). While friendships do provide bonding experiences that are fundamental to the social nature of human beings, they also contain binds (Wiseman, 1986) such as the demanding and wearing obligation to provide emotional support (La Gaipa, 1990; Rook, 1984). Likewise, though marriage can be a rewarding union, it can also be filled with "miscommunication" and conflict and sometimes may even end in divorce (Gottman, 1979).

Clearly, several scholars have dedicated valuable research time to exploring the "darker" sides of communicating and relating and, in the process, challenged the ideology of benevolence. For instance, Stafford and Dainton (1994) took a less benevolent look at the dynamics of "normal" families and discovered that they "routinely fight with each other, ignore each other, disconfirm each other, criticize each other, are rude to each other, and generally treat each other in a manner as heartless as anything experienced in the outside world" (p. 275). Such observations led Stafford and Dainton to conclude that research concerning family communication must reconceptualize "normalcy" as it relates
to the routine interactions in which family members engage. Likewise, Sillars and Weisberg (1987) have called for a recasting of the social skill metaphor as it relates to conflict management. Their work indicates that, contrary to popular thought, conflict is sometimes better managed through avoidance, can produce positive outcomes (e.g., problem solving), and may even serve as the basis for satisfying relationships—particularly in intimate partnerships among non-European-Americans. Cupach, Spitzberg, and their colleagues (see Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, in press) have devoted two entire volumes to research concerning the "dark side" of interpersonal communication. Some of the topics in these volumes are the invasiveness of parents in the privacy of their children (see Petronio, 1994), relational transgressions (see Metts, 1994), and deception (see O'Hair & Cody, 1994). Lastly, in an attempt to diversify research to include some of the more problematic features of communication within personal relationships, Vangelisti (1994; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1997; Vangelisti & Young, 1998) has begun to explore the characteristics that make certain messages more hurtful than others. In the process, she has isolated several factors that influence the impact of hurtful messages on relationships, as well as developed a preliminary category scheme to describe the acts of speech that characterize hurtful messages.

Despite the efforts of these and other scholars, however, the bulk of research in this field remains true to the ideology of benevolence in that the negative aspects of relating are "typically depicted as 'occasional problems' ... that may be due to human error or faulty functioning or simple misunderstanding, or to curable loneliness, understandable jealousy, minor family distress, or other difficulties experienced by very
nice people in relationships that are also essentially pleasant, rewarding, and to-be-sought-for" (Duck, 1994a, p. 5). Indeed, as Burleson and Denton (1997) note, a popular assumption among theorists, researchers, and therapists alike (e.g., Burger & Jacobson, 1979; Cahn, 1990; Halford, Hahlweg, & Dunne, 1990; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Markman & Floyd, 1980; O’Donohue & Crouch, 1996; Okun, 1987; Shandish, Mongomery, Wilson, Wilson, Bright, & Okwumabua, 1993) is that interpersonal difficulties and relationship dissatisfaction are functions of deficiencies in the communication skills of relationship partners. In particular, conflict is often conceptualized as emanating from and being aggravated by a lack of skills on the part of relationship partners (e.g., Burger & Jacobson, 1979; Cahn, 1990; Markman & Floyd, 1980). Likewise, behavioral marital therapy—the most researched clinical intervention for the treatment of marital distress (Shandish et al., 1993)—contends that in distressed relationships, lack of communication skills on the part of marital partners is the primary reason for the scarcity of positive outcomes. Finally, while some theorists view interspousal abuse and violence (physical, psychological, and sexual) as stemming from biological factors (e.g., McKenry, Julian, & Gavazzi, 1995) or a deeply-rooted social patriarchy (e.g., Johnson, 1995), Whitchurch and Pace's (1993) review of communication literature concerning this topic discovered that "the majority of writers on communication and interspousal violence conceptualize interspousal violence as a function of deficiencies in individual spouses' communication skills" (p. 96).

While there is an intuitive reasonableness to these assertions, the evidence to support them is mixed. For example, in a recent study, Burleson and Denton (1997)
assessed the communication skills of distressed versus non-distressed couples. On skills such as predictive accuracy (i.e., the extent to which individuals correctly predicted how their spouses would feel after an exchange of messages), perceptual accuracy or decoding ability (i.e., the extent to which individuals' actual feelings after a message exchange matched what they thought their spouses wanted them to feel), and communication effectiveness (i.e., the extent to which individuals' feelings after a message exchange matched what their spouses actually wanted them to feel), distressed wives and husbands were found to be no less skilled than their non-distressed counterparts. Such findings call into question some of the core assumptions of the skills-deficit model of negative relational outcomes.

One of the fundamental limitations of traditional skills-deficit research, and other scholarship dominated by the ideology of benevolence, is that it presupposes communication is exercised (more or less competently) in a global, generic, pro-social relational context, rather than in particular settings and circumstances involving individual interpretations, intentions, and motivations. Any true understanding of the connection between communication and negative relational outcomes, however, "depends on discerning how features of the context typically affect the use of certain skills and the outcomes yielded by those skills" (Burleson & Denton, 1997, p. 5). For instance, a person's intentions or communicative objectives may mediate the relationship between communication skill and relational outcomes. Indeed, Burleson and Denton (1997) discovered that although distressed and non-distressed couples did not differ in communication skill, distressed couples "did express significantly more negative
intentions toward each other than the nondistressed couples" (p. 14). Specifically, when asked to rate how they intended their partners to feel while discussing a marital problem, distressed couples made significantly more negative ratings than did nondistressed couples. In other words, the feelings that distressed couples aspired to evoke in their spouses were more negative than those intended by nondistressed spouses. This suggests that negative relationship events, issues, and problems (e.g., unmanageable conflict, dissatisfaction, and hurt feelings) may stem more from ill will than from poor communication skills.

The possibility that negative relational experiences may be due to an ill-motivated use of skill, rather than a lack thereof, has some significant implications. On a practical level, therapeutic interventions designed to teach "proper" communication skills would have to shift their focus to helping relational partners work through and change their motives toward one another, especially since individuals typically become relationally involved with others who exhibit the same level of communication skill (Burleson & Denton, 1997). On a theoretical level, it calls into question much of the research conducted in the field of interpersonal communication. As Duck (1994a) contends,

It is not sufficient merely to nod in the direction of negative experiences without actually trying to include them in the general theory of relating. Simply to regard them as no more than the negative side of an otherwise positive and interpretable life is to denigrate something that may play a much stronger role in the human processes of relating that can widen the vision of the fuller enterprise ... If the positive and negative sides of relationships are managed in the same ways, then the theories do not need modification, although it would be a good idea to demonstrate that similarity before assuming it. If they are managed in different ways, then some sort of theoretical explanation is needed for the differences; one is needed that can still tie into the general human enterprise in a theoretically meaningful way. (pp. 11-12)
This study proposed to answer Duck's call to action by utilizing the theoretical approach of Constructivism to explore the connections among social cognitive skill and hurtful (i.e., emotionally damaging) messages. Within this perspective, more developed social cognitive abilities are postulated to facilitate the representation of communication-relevant features of persons and situations and, thus, enable individuals to produce functionally-effective messages that "reflect an awareness of and an adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts" (Burleson & Caplan, in press, p. 22). Based on an integration of Bernstein's (1975) sociolinguistic theory and Piaget's (1926) and Werner's (1957; Werner & Kaplan, 1963) cognitive developmental theories, the ability to produce and effectively use this type of message is considered a reflection of communication skill.

Unfortunately, while Constructivist scholars have been quite successful at establishing a relationship between social-cognitive ability and advanced communicative functioning, their research has been dominated by the ideology of benevolence in that they have limited their analyses to rather pro-social communicative contexts (e.g., comforting). Again, the assumption seems to be that communication skill is necessarily reflected in the pursuit of pro-social goals. As Burleson and Denton (1997) conjecture, however, "Obviously, people may use their skills when pursuing socially desirable ends. But people also may skillfully and effectively seek to injure" (p. 4). This study sought to determine if more developed social cognitive skills are related to the ability to produce functionally effective, hurtful message strategies. Attention was focused on communication within romantic relationships, because there is a rich history of skills-
deficit research and therapeutic interventions associated with these relationships (see Burger & Jacobson, 1979; Cahn, 1990; Halford, Hahlweg, & Dunne, 1990; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Markman & Floyd, 1980; O'Donohue & Crouch, 1996; Okun, 1987; Shandish, Mongomery, Wilson, Wilson, Bright, & Okwumabua, 1993). Moreover, romantic relationships are one of the primary relationships in which college students (i.e., the sample population) engage (Duck, 1994b). In addition, as Miller (1997) contends, "the most hurtful interactions we are ever likely to have will probably be with those who say (or once said) they love us" (p. 13).

Constructivism

Developed within the communication discipline by Jesse Delia (see Delia, 1972; Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1974). Constructivism is an individual-difference approach to the study of communication skills and abilities. Specifically, this theoretical perspective is concerned with "the extent to which individual differences in social cognitive skills are related to individual differences in a variety of communication skills" (Burleson, 1987, p. 305). Within the Constructivist framework, social cognitive ability is indexed by an individual's level of interpersonal cognitive complexity (the level of differentiation, organization, and abstractness of one's system of interpersonal constructs), while skillful communication is reflected in one's use of person-centered communication. Descriptions of each of these concepts, as well as the relationship between them, follow.
Cognitive Complexity

Within Constructivism, social perception processes are thought to occur through the mediation of cognitive structures called *interpersonal constructs*. Conceptualized by Kelly (1955) as bipolar dimensions that a person "creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed," constructs are "transparent templates" through which individuals interpret, evaluate, anticipate, and understand the world around them (p. 9). Although similar in many ways to cognitive structures such as schema (see Sypher & Applegate, 1984), constructs are unique in that they are "conceptualized primarily as representational structures rather than the loci in which contents of memory reside" (Burleson & Caplan, in press, p. 17).

According to this perspective, individuals with more developed (i.e., differentiated, abstract, and organized) systems of interpersonal constructs should generate more *discriminating* and refined social perceptions. Likewise, the retrieval and cognitive manipulation of social information ought to be facilitated in more developed systems, such that cognitively complex individuals (i.e., persons with relatively developed systems of constructs) should (a) be more accurate at identifying others' emotional states, (b) make more sophisticated inferences concerning the dispositional qualities of others, (c) use situational information when making inferences about dispositions, and therefore, (d) be better able to take the perspective of others.

Analysis of Constructivist literature suggests that cognitively complex individuals do "read" social situations and people more deeply and make more accurate conclusions about others' intentions and affective states than do less complex persons. For instance,
Applegate, Burleson, and Delia (1992) and Burleson (1982) discovered that cognitively complex boys and girls performed better than less complex children on an affect recognition task, while Clark, Willihnganz, and O’Dell (1985) and O’Keefe, Murphy, Meyers, and Babrow (1989) found that individuals with high levels of cognitive complexity inferred multiple causes for and consequences of others’ actions. Moreover, Woods (1996) established a positive relationship between cognitive complexity and performance on a test of nonverbal decoding ability in which subjects attempted to discern the emotional states and intentions of others through nonverbal cues. Similarly, Wilson and Kang (1991) and Wilson, Cruz, and Kang (1992) observed that whereas cognitively complex individuals were responsive to information available within social situations and, therefore, made more flexible and situationally sensitive dispositional attributions, relatively noncomplex persons made less use of social information and were rather rigid in their attributions. Finally, several scholars (e.g., Beatty & Payne, 1984; Hale & Delia, 1976; Kline, Pelias, & Delia, 1991) have established a positive relationship between cognitive complexity and performance on Hale and Delia’s (1976) Social Perspectives Task, which measures perspective-taking ability.

**Position- vs. Person-Centered Communication**

In addition to enhancing the retrieval and cognitive handling of social information, the differentiation and integration of an individual’s underlying interpersonal construct system is thought to enable that individual “to represent the relevant features of persons and communicative situations, and hence, to adapt to these features in the process of producing messages” (Burleson, 1987, p. 313). Indeed,
research has been quite successful at demonstrating a positive association between
cognitive complexity and the ability to produce and tendency to use communication
messages that focus on psychological and relational states. As Burleson and Caplan (in
press) note, such messages "tend to be more responsive to the aims and utterances of an
interactional partner, are tailored to the characteristics of the partner and situation, attend
to the identity-relevant features of communicative contexts, and may encourage reflection
about persons and social situations" (p. 22). Based on an integration of aspects of
Bernstein's (1975) sociolinguistic theory and Piaget's (1926) and Werner's (1957)
cognitive developmental theories, these messages are labeled person-centered and are
considered to be theoretically more sophisticated than position-centered messages.

Bernstein's (1975) sociolinguistic theory posits that individuals espouse either a
position-centered or a person-centered orientation to the social world around them.
Position-centered individuals tend to (a) regard others in terms of rather concrete
characteristics (e.g., socially defined roles, demographic classifications, physical
attributes), (b) assume they are psychologically similar to those persons with whom they
communicate, and (c) believe that social interactions and relationships are instituted and
managed through tacit rules of social behavior. As a result of these implicit assumptions,
such individuals tend to use a restricted code of communication: speech that stresses role
expectations, behavioral norms, and culturally shared definitions of social situations. As
Burleson (1987) notes, "Such speech is ‘restricted’ in reflecting the assumption that
meanings can be shared adequately in communication by simply indexing the preexistent,
culturally shared understandings appropriate for specific role relationships" (p. 312).
In contrast, individuals embracing a person-centered orientation tend to (a) regard others as having hidden feelings, intentions, and perspectives, (b) assume they are psychologically distant from those individuals with whom they interact, and (c) believe that social interactions and relationships are rooted in negotiated and coordinated understanding (Bernstein, 1975). Hence, person-centered individuals tend to employ an elaborated code of speech that articulates feelings, motives, perspectives, intentions, beliefs, and reasoning. As Burleson (1987) suggests, "These features of self and other receive relatively extensive elaboration in talk, since it is assumed that these covert psychological states are the essential qualities that characterize individuals, and thus must be mutually understood for interaction to be coordinated and efficacious" (p. 311).

The specific way in which person- and position-centered forms of communication are manifest depends upon the communicative situation. From a symbolic interactionist perspective (see Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1967), communication (whether employing an elaborated or a restricted code) is a strategic, instrumental activity aimed at the achievement of goals and influenced by the communicative context. As Burleson (1987) explains,

A person’s definition of the situation—his or her answer to the what, who, and why of a communicative encounter—calls forth general goals which shape the broad texture of the interaction and, further, inform the mobilization of specific communicative intentions. Both situational definitions and specific communicative intentions are shaped by features of the interactional context (p. 314).

Hence, both person-centered and position-centered forms of communication are exemplified differently according to the instrumental goal of an interaction.
For instance, in comforting contexts, highly person-centered messages attempt to improve the emotional state of the hurt individual by acknowledging, legitimizing, and elaborating his/her hurt feelings, rather than ignoring, minimizing, or challenging those feelings in the way that position-centered messages do (see Applegate, 1980; Burleson, 1983, 1984; Samter & Burleson, 1984). Person-centeredness in persuasion is reflected when the individual seeks to obtain compliance by accommodating the goals, interests, and needs of the persuadee; in contrast, individuals utilizing position-centered strategies focus on their own goals and needs, rather than on those of the persuadee (see Applegate, 1982; Clark & Delia, 1976, 1977; O'Keefe & Delia, 1979). When an individual attempts to resolve a conflict by offering solutions that respect the rights and interests of both of the adversaries (instead of trying to force concessions from the other individual), he/she is engaged in person-centered (instead of position-centered) communication (see Carroci, 1985; Saine, 1974; Samter & Ely, 1985). Rather than citing rules, threatening sanctions, or applying force to discipline or regulate behavior (as position-centered individuals would do), persons exhibiting person-centeredness try to encourage offenders to reason through their norm-violating behaviors and their consequences (see Applegate, 1980; Kline, 1991).

Though nothing in Bernstein's analysis of sociolinguistic codes indicates that person-centered communication is in any way superior to position-centered forms of speech, aspects of the cognitive developmental theories proffered by Piaget (1926) and Werner (1957; Werner & Kaplan, 1963) suggest that person-centered communication is best regarded as a developmental achievement. Piaget conceptualized communicative
development as marked by a progression from relatively egocentric forms of speech to increasingly socialized forms. Similar to the distinction between position- and person-centered communication, egocentric speech is comprised of utterances that do not consider and/or adapt to others' perspectives, while socialized speech actively accommodates the needs and desires of listeners. Similarly, Werner and Kaplan (1963) argued that the course of communicative development involves an advancement toward progressively autonomous speech which enables one to "communicate adequately with an audience psychologically quite distant from the addressor" (p. 49). Consistent with these lines of reasoning, Constructivist scholars have come to view position- and person-centered communication as two poles on a continuum along which messages representing various levels of development are arrayed, with more theoretically sophisticated and skillful strategies falling toward the person-centered end (Burleson, 1987).

In addition to being seen as theoretically more sophisticated than position-centered strategies, person-centered messages tend to be judged by naïve actors as more skillful and effective at accomplishing instrumental and relational goals (see Adams & Shepherd, 1996; Burleson, Applegate, Burke, Clark, Delia, & Kline, 1986; Burleson & Samter, 1985; O'Keefe & McCormack, 1987; Samter, Burleson, & Murphy, 1987). For example, Burleson & Samter (1985) asked participants to evaluate comforting strategies derived from the Constructivist coding hierarchy. They found that subjects rated person-centered messages as significantly more sensitive and effective than position-centered strategies. Burleson and Samter's results also indicated that when asked to judge messages in terms of their overall quality, individuals rank ordered preformulated
strategies in a manner highly consistent with the Constructivist hierarchy. In other words, the most person-centered messages received the highest ranking, while the most position-centered messages were given the lowest rankings.

Similar results have been obtained in studies investigating the processes through which cognitive structures are accessed and used in subsequent message production. O'Keefe and McComack (1987) have identified three types of message design logics that reflect people's "implicit theories of the ways in which verbal action can be shaped to serve as a means to their ends" (p. 71). These include (a) an expressive design logic (reflecting a view of communication in which expression is not systematically altered in service of achieving effects), (b) a conventional design logic (based on a view of communication as a game played cooperatively according to conventional rules and procedures), and (c) a rhetorical design logic (in which communication is seen as the creation and negotiation of social selves and situations). In their study of regulative communication, O'Keefe and McComack found that rhetorical design logics—which represent the reasoning that underlies the use of person-centered message strategies—were perceived to be more competent, more motivating, and more satisfying to the message target than either expressive or conventional design logics.

Finally, in addition to studies suggesting that person-centered forms of reasoning and communication are viewed favorably by naïve actors, there is also some evidence that individuals who actually utilize these strategies are seen in a more positive light than those who do not. For example, in a study of spontaneous comforting behavior, Samter and Burleson (1983) found that independent observers rated women who attempted to
alleviate a confederate’s distress in highly person-centered ways as more sensitive, empathic, caring, and effective than women who employed more position-centered messages. Thus, person-centered communication strategies can be thought of as being both theoretically and practically more skillful than position-centered forms of speech.

**Focus of Current Study**

As was previously noted, research has been quite successful at establishing an association between more developed social cognitive skills and the ability to produce and inclination to use person-centered communication strategies. Specifically, individual differences in levels of cognitive complexity have been shown to be associated with the use of person-centered communication in situations where individuals wish to: (a) provide emotional support and comfort (e.g., Burleson, 1983, 1984; Samter & Burleson, 1984), (b) persuade (e.g., Applegate, 1982; Clark & Delia, 1977; Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979; Leichty & Applegate, 1991; O’Keefe & Delia, 1979; O’Keefe et al., 1989; Piche & Roen, 1987; Shepherd & Condra, 1988; Sypher, Witt, & Sypher, 1986), (c) resist persuasion (e.g., Kline & Hennen-Floyd, 1990), (d) manage conflict (e.g., Carroci, 1985; Saine, 1974), (e) discipline others (e.g., Applegate, Burke, Burleson, Delia, & Kline, 1985; Applegate, Coyle, Seibert, & Church, 1989; Hale, 1986; Kline, 1988, 1991; Woods, 1996), and (f) convey information (e.g., Hale, 1980, 1982). Moreover, as Burleson and Caplan (in press) note, the relationship between cognitive complexity and the production of person-centered messages has been found to hold across: (a) various subject populations (e.g., college students, children, teachers,
mothers, police officers, etc.), (b) diverse aspects of communication (e.g., message quality, message variety, breadth of messages, etc.), (c) assorted methods for procuring samples of message strategies (e.g., real world circumstances, hypothetical situations, experimental conditions), (d) various measures of interpersonal construct system development (e.g., abstractness, integration, differentiation), and (e) different modes of assessing construct system development and communication (i.e., written vs. oral modes).

What has not been nearly as robust, though, is the association between person-centered communication skills and positive relational outcomes. If, as previously noted, person-centered communication strategies are considered instrumentally and relationally superior to others, one would expect individuals with high levels of person-centered skills to experience more positive outcomes than those with less developed (i.e., position-centered) skills. At best, however, only moderate support has been obtained for this argument. On the positive end of the spectrum, as noted earlier, Samter and Burleson (1983) did find some significant relationships between communication skill and peer judgments of sensitivity and liking in their study of comforting behaviors among women. Similarly, Burleson, Delia, and Applegate (1992) observed that children who use person-centered skills to provide emotional support were better liked by peers and enjoyed a greater number of reciprocated friendships with classmates than those who used position-centered skills.

On the negative side of the spectrum, however, Samter (1992) discovered something quite different when she conducted a sociometric study of young adults living
She hypothesized that individuals skilled in the areas of comforting, ego support, and conflict management would be well liked by their peers and, therefore, experience lower levels of loneliness than individuals who lacked ability in these domains. Contrary to expectations, though, Samter's results indicated few significant relationships among levels of communication skill, peer group acceptance, and loneliness. In other words, individuals who produced person-centered message strategies were neither better liked nor less lonely than individuals who produced position-centered strategies. In a related vein, there is growing evidence that similarity in partners' levels of communication skill better predicts relational satisfaction than the absolute level of skill either person exhibits. Studies of same-sex and cross-sex friends, dating partners, and spouses show that dyads with similarly low levels of communication skill are just as satisfied as those with similarly high levels (for reviews of this literature, see Burleson & Samter, 1997; Samter & Burleson, 1998). Such findings challenge the idea that more person-centered forms of communication are associated with more positive relational outcomes than position-centered forms.

One reason for this mixed evidence may be that, contrary to popular scholarly opinion, communication skill is not necessarily reflected in the quest of positive, pro-social, relationship-enhancing objectives. As Burleson and Denton (1997) assert, "In the course of communicating, a person may try to help or hurt another: an individual may seek to convey either support and acceptance or contempt and rejection" (p. 4). It is possible that the same highly developed interpersonal construct systems which allow individuals to produce messages skilled at achieving positive, pro-social ends, may also
be employed to produce messages that are skilled at actualizing negative, anti-social ends. In other words, the ability to cognitively represent the relevant features of persons and communicative situations may enable an individual to create messages that adapt to those features, regardless of the nature of the communicative objective. Thus, perhaps one reason why complex individuals do not experience more positive relational outcomes than relatively noncomplex persons may be that they are using their skills toward negative ends, rather than positive. Such a possibility has not been explored, perhaps in part because of a tacit subscription to the ideology of benevolence by Constructivist scholars.

As was previously noted, Constructivist research concerning the relationship between cognitive complexity and subsequent message production has only examined how position- versus person-centeredness is manifest in communicative contexts where the primary instrumental objectives are fundamentally pro-social in nature (e.g., comforting, ego support, persuasion). Moreover, even those situations that are not characteristically pro-social tend to be framed by researchers in terms of innocuous instrumental ends. For instance, in studies concerning conflict (e.g., Samter & Ely, 1985), the communicative objective specified by researchers is typically resolution of the argument: Subjects are provided with a description of a problematic situation and then asked what they would say to try to resolve the issue. While such methodological choices are certainly not wrong given the particular research questions of the scholars making them, the resulting paradigmatic assumptions have ultimately limited and
distorted our understanding of the relationship between cognitive complexity and subsequent message production.

For instance, O'Keefe and Delia (1982, 1985) argue that in addition to ministering to the instrumental conditions of communicative situations, cognitively complex individuals are more inclined to orient toward identity- and relationship-relevant features of these situations. Thus, cognitively complex individuals are thought to generate complex communicative goal sets that address relationship and identity concerns, as well as specific instrumental objectives. Moreover, as Burleson and Denton (1997) note, person-centered messages are more than just "adapted" utterances in that they are "sophisticated message structures that, depending on the circumstances, focus on psychological and relational states, address multiple aspects of what may be complicated social situations, engage the listener in reasoning about the situation, seek to manage or protect valued social identities, etc." (pp. 25-26). The notion that cognitively complex individuals naturally orient toward positive, relationship- and identity-enhancing subsidiary communicative objectives is embodied in most (if not all) Constructivist research. While perhaps somewhat justified given the way person-centeredness is defined by Constructivist scholars (see description earlier in this Chapter), this tacit assumption may, in fact, be an artifact of the methods employed by researchers rather than a fundamental characteristic of cognitively complex individuals.

If advanced social-cognitive skills enable an individual to produce messages that are tailored to the unique characteristics of communicative situations, but such skills are investigated only in contexts where the instrumental goals are pro-social in nature, one
would reasonably expect cognitively complex individuals to orient toward positive, relationship- and identity-enhancing objectives. However, there may be times when cognitively complex individuals do not orient toward such positive goals, and instead, seek to hurl, as in circumstances where established relational rules have been violated (e.g., infidelity), there is an act of betrayal (e.g., telling secrets), or public embarrassment. Moreover, if cognitive complexity enables a person to represent and adapt relevant features of individuals when formulating messages in pro-social situations, the same underlying processes ought to be represented in situations where a complex individual seeks to injure or hurt another person. In other words, the messages produced by complex individuals in such situations may be perceived as being extremely hurtful precisely because they are more sophisticated: they adapt to the characteristics and traits of the harmful situation and the interactant, attend to (i.e., attack) the identity-relevant features of the communicative context, and encourage negative reflection about persons and/or social situations.

In an effort to explore these possibilities, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: When presented with situations in which the goal is to hurt a romantic partner, do individuals with high levels of cognitive complexity produce messages that are judged to be more effective at hurting relationship partners than messages produced by individuals with lower levels of cognitive complexity?
RQ2: When presented with situations in which the goal is to hurt a romantic partner, do individuals with high levels of cognitive complexity produce messages that are judged to be more sophisticated (i.e., elaborating feelings and perceptions) than messages produced by individuals with lower levels of cognitive complexity?
Chaper 2

METHOD

Data for this study were collected in two waves utilizing separate samples of college students enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at the University of Delaware. Wave One was designed to generate messages from individuals of different levels of cognitive complexity. Wave Two was designed to test Research Questions One and Two by evaluating the effectiveness and sophistication of the messages produced by individuals in Wave One. A pilot study was conducted to develop the scenarios used to elicit messages from participants in Wave One. Descriptions of the pilot study and two respective waves of data collection follow.

Pilot Study

A questionnaire designed to help generate scenarios to be used in Wave One of this study was distributed to two sections of a communication course for undergraduate business majors at the University of Delaware. Participants were asked to describe a situation in which they were hurt or angered by their relationship partner and wanted to make him/her feel the same way (see APPENDIX A for survey). Based on frequency of appearance (i.e., the situation appeared more than twice) and adaptability (i.e., the situation could be developed into realistic descriptions of hurtful relationship scenarios),
five situations from the 41 returned surveys were selected and further developed for possible use in Wave One. These included: (1) romantic partner kisses someone else, (2) romantic partner overtly flirts with someone else, (3) romantic partner causes public embarrassment, (4) romantic partner cancels important dates, and (5) romantic partner maintains friendship and flirting relationship with ex-romantic partner.

In an effort to select two scenarios to be used in Wave One, a second pilot sample (N = 20) was presented with the five situation descriptions and asked to rank order them according to how hurt they would be if they encountered these situations in a romantic relationship. Participants were asked to place a one next to the scenario in which they would be most hurt and a five next to the scenario in which they would be least hurt (see APPENDIX B for survey). The two scenarios with the lowest mean rankings (i.e., those ranked most hurtful) were selected: (1) romantic partner kisses someone else (M = 1.5), and (2) romantic partner cancels important dates (M = 2.15).

Wave One

Participants

Participants for Wave One were 135 students enrolled in a communication course required for undergraduate communication majors at the University of Delaware. Of these students, 33% were male (N = 45) and 67% (N = 90) were female, ranging in age from 10 to 31 years (M = 20). All participants listed their sexual orientation as
This study was one of several opportunities offered to students as partial fulfillment of the research participation component required for the course; hence, students received class credit for their participation.

**Procedures**

Data were gathered in one experimental session. Participants were given a test booklet containing two surveys: one designed to assess participants' levels of cognitive complexity, and one designed to elicit messages to be used in Wave Two (see APPENDIX C for an example test booklet).

**Assessment of cognitive complexity.** Participants' levels of cognitive complexity were assessed utilizing a version of Crocken's (1965) Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ), in which an index of interpersonal cognitive complexity was obtained by coding participants' free-response descriptions of peers for the number of constructs they reflected. Although Crockett originally had participants write descriptions of eight peers for three minutes each, Burleson and Waltman (1988) note that substantial research has shown that reliable and valid estimates of cognitive complexity can be acquired by having subjects provide five-minute written descriptions of two well-known peers (one liked and one disliked). Participants were asked to make their descriptions as detailed as possible by including the person's personality characteristics, traits, habits, mannerisms, beliefs, etc.

Research utilizing the revised version of Crocken's RCQ has exhibited consistently high levels of intercoder reliability, test-retest reliability, and construct validity, as well as validity coefficients that are stronger than alternative cognitive
complexity measures (see reviews by Burleson, 1987; Burleson & Waltman, 1988; Burleson, Applegate, & Delia, 1991; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982; O'Keefe & Sypher, 1981; Sypher & Sypher, 1988). Furthermore, studies (e.g., Allen, Mabry, Banski, & Preiss, 1991; Burleson & Rowan, 1985; Burleson & Waltman, 1988; Burleson, Applegate, & Neuwirth, 1981) have established that RCQ assessments of cognitive complexity are not confounded by general intelligence, verbal intelligence, verbal fluency, writing skill, writing speed, or academic achievement. Likewise, though some scholars (e.g., Beatty & Payne, 1984) have expressed concern that loquacity (the tendency to be wordy) may confound RCQ assessments of cognitive complexity, research (e.g., Burleson et al., 1981; Burleson, Waltman, & Samter, 1987) has demonstrated that the relationship between independent measures of loquacity and RCQ complexity assessments is quite small.

**Elicitation of hurtful messages.** After completing a series of questions designed to assess demographic characteristics, participants were asked to imagine that they were involved in a romantic relationship that had been going on for a little over a year. Participants then read descriptions of the two scenarios developed from the pilot study (see APPENDIX D for descriptions). After reading the descriptions, they were instructed to try to place themselves in these situations; participants were asked to imagine that they were very hurt, angry, and frustrated and wanted their romantic partners to feel the same way. They were then asked to write what they would say to their partners to make them feel as hurt.
Although not germane to the research questions set forth in this thesis, an additional task was introduced within the two scenarios. After writing what they would say to make their romantic partner feel as hurt, angry, and frustrated as they were feeling, participants were asked to imagine that their partners did not seem to be very affected by what they said (i.e., their plans to hurt their relationship partners had failed). They were then instructed to write what else they could say to hurt their partners. This was only included for future investigations concerning plan failure and, therefore, will not be discussed in the analyses presented here.

Lastly, participants responded to eleven 7-point Likert-type response items (see APPENDIX C) designed to assess the realism and hurtfulness of the scenarios and the task used in this survey. Items assessing the realism of the scenarios consisted of questions such as, "How difficult was it to imagine yourself in the described scenario?" for which responses ranged from "not at all difficult" to "very difficult." Realism of the task (i.e., hurting one's relationship partner) was assessed by items such as "How likely would your goal be to hurt your romantic partner if you actually encountered this situation?" for which responses ranged from 'not very likely' to 'very likely.' Items assessing hurtfulness included questions like "How would you feel if you encountered this scenario?" for which responses ranged from "happy" to "very hurt" and "not at all hurt" to "very hurt."

In an effort to evaluate the reliability of the items measuring scenario realism, items were initially collapsed across conditions. A Cronbach's alpha of .75 was obtained for this measure, indicating that the items were reliable. A subsequent paired samples T-
test indicated that the Kiss Scenario was significantly less realistic than the Date Scenario ($t = 2.26, df = 133, p < .03$). While statistically significant, this finding is not very meaningful, however, in that a difference of only .30 between the mean realism scores for the Kiss Scenario ($M = 4.38$) the Date Scenario ($M = 4.68$) was found. In other words, although the Kiss Scenario may have been significantly less realistic than the Date Scenarios, both scenarios were rated as realistic.

Similarly, items measuring the hurtfulness of the scenarios were collapsed across conditions to assess reliability. A Cronbach's alpha of .76 was produced, indicating that these items were reliable. A paired samples T-test ($t = 7.18, df = 133, p < .000$) indicated that the Kiss Scenario ($M = 6.53$) was considered significantly more hurtful than the Date Scenario ($M = 5.90$). Again, however, the importance lay in the fact that both scenarios were rated as being hurtful.

Lastly, the task of hurting one's relationship partner in these scenarios was rated by subjects as being realistic. Items for this measure were initially collapsed across conditions to assess item reliability; with a Cronbach's alpha of .86, these items were reliable. In this case, a paired samples T-test ($t = 7.08, df = 133, p < .000$) indicated that in the Kiss Scenario ($M = 5.28$), participants would be significantly more likely to try to hurt their relationship partners than in the Date Scenario ($M = 4.36$). Again, however, the task of hurting one's relationship partner was assessed as being realistic for both scenarios.

**Structure of test booklets.** The test booklets were designed to control for two variables that could perhaps confound results. The first of these concerned the possibility
that filling out the RCQ before completing the rest of the measures could result in cognitive fatigue and, therefore, adversely influence the messages produced by participants. To account for this, half of the participants completed the RCQ after completing the other measures and half completed it before.

The second variable that might influence results concerned which scenario participants read first in the survey designed to elicit messages from them (see APPENDIX D for scenario descriptions). To account for this, half (51%) read and responded to the scenario in which their romantic partner cancels an important date first and then read and responded to the scenario in which their romantic partner kisses someone else second; the other half (49%) read and responded to the kiss scenario first and the date scenario second.

**Selection of Messages for Wave Two**

Based on scores generated by coding participants' RCQ responses, the messages produced by Wave One participants were organized into three mutually exclusive groups, from which messages for use in Wave Two were randomly selected: (1) messages from low complexity individuals, (2) messages from medium complexity individuals, and (3) messages from high complexity individuals. Descriptions of the coding, message grouping, and message selection procedures follow.

**RCQ coding procedures.** Participants' RCQ impressions were coded by the principal investigator in accordance with the coding manual outlined by Burleson and Waltman (1988). Training consisted of 10 hours of interaction between the principal investigator and an expert experienced in the coding of RCQ protocols, during which
they (a) coded 35 of the RCQs from Wave One, (b) discussed the reasons for coding the RCQs in this manner, and (c) established concrete examples for the rules outlined in the coding manual. An index of cognitive complexity was formed for each participant by summing the number of constructs in each impression. Coding reliability was assessed by having the principal investigator and the expert score approximately 20% ($N=20$) of the remaining protocols; 85% exact agreement was achieved. Hence, the principal investigator coded the remaining RCQs ($N=80$) on his own. In cases where there was confusion over how to code a response ($N=3$), the expert was consulted, and the dilemma was resolved through discussion.

**Message grouping procedures.** The frequency distribution of the RCQ scores for the entire sample indicated that the scores ranged from a low of 3 to a high of 68 ($M=20$). In an effort to preserve the integrity of both low complexity and high complexity messages, RCQ scores falling within one positive or negative standard deviation of the mean (SD = 9.6) were categorized as medium complexity ($N=101; M=18$); scores falling more than one negative standard deviation from the mean were categorized as low complexity ($N=16; M=8$) and scores falling more than one positive standard deviation from the mean were classified as high complexity ($N=18; M=38$).

**Message selection procedures.** In an effort to test multiple instantiations of the research questions (in Wave Two), it was determined that four sets of Wave One messages — each set containing one message from each of the three cognitive complexity groups (low, medium, and high) — should be selected for both scenarios used in the survey. In other words, for the situation in which the person's romantic partner was
caught kissing someone else, four sets of messages were selected; each of these sets had a different message from the low complexity group, a different message from the medium complexity group, and a different message from the high complexity group. Likewise, for the situation in which the person's romantic partner cancels a special date, four sets of messages were selected, each set with different low, medium, and high complexity group messages. In all, eight different sets of low, medium, and high messages were selected from the sample of messages generated in Wave One.

Messages for the eight sets were randomly selected using a counting technique. For each of the two scenarios, the total number of surveys within each of the complexity groups (low, medium, and high) was divided by four (i.e., the number of message sets needed), resulting in some number $n$; the message from every $n^{th}$ survey was then extracted for use in Wave Two. For instance, the total number of surveys in the low complexity group was 16. Therefore, every fourth survey was selected and the messages produced in response to the situation in which their romantic partner kisses someone else was extracted for use in Wave Two. This process was then executed for the medium and high complexity groups. Once completed, these surveys were returned to their respective groups, the surveys within those groups were shuffled, and the entire process was repeated to gather messages for the canceled date scenario.

The final sets were created by shuffling messages within each complexity level and then grouping them according to the order produced by the shuffling. In other words, for the kiss situation, the four selected low complexity messages were shuffled, the four medium complexity messages were shuffled, and the four high complexity messages
were shuffled. The first messages in each of the resulting stacks became a final message set, the second messages in each of the stacks became another set, and so on. This process was then repeated for the canceled date scenario. The eight resulting message sets were then evaluated by the participants in Wave Two (see APPENDIX E for the message sets).

Wave Two

Participants

Participants for Wave Two were 204 students enrolled in 12 sections of a communication course for undergraduate business students at the University of Delaware. Of these students, 50% were male and 50% were female, ranging in age from 17 to 26 years ($M = 20$). All participants except one reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual, and 53% indicated that they were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of data collection; the average length of relationship involvement was 22 months. Students received extra credit for their participation.

Data were gathered in one experimental session. Participants were given one of eight different test booklets (see APPENDIX F for example) containing two surveys: one designed to assess participants' evaluations of the effectiveness (i.e., hurtfulness) and sophistication of messages produced by individuals of different levels of cognitive complexity in Wave One (see APPENDIX E for the eight message sets), and one designed to assess participants' own levels of complexity (i.e., the RCQ). Although there
is some evidence that cognitive complexity levels of recipients may moderate their perceptions of various message types (see Bingham & Burleson, 1989; Burleson & Samter, 1985b; O'Keefe & Shepherd, 1989), the RCQ was only included for future investigations concerning the interaction between complexity and the evaluation of hurtful messages; hence, it will not be discussed in the analyses presented here.

Relatively equal numbers of participants completed each of the eight versions of the test booklet (i.e., one version had 24 respondents, two versions had 25 respondents, and the remaining five had 26 respondents.)

**Evaluation of messages.** After completing a series of questions designed to assess demographic characteristics, participants were instructed that they would be presented with three sets of messages (two messages in each complexity set, for a total of six messages) and asked to respond to a series of questions concerning each message. Informed that the messages were produced by real men and women who were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario in which they felt hurt by their relationship partners, participants were given the scenario as a reference tool and asked to read it carefully before proceeding with the rest of the survey. Because some of the messages in any given survey were produced by men and some by women, gender neutral names (e.g., Chris and Pat) were used in the scenario descriptions (see APPENDIX G for descriptions). Participants were informed that the gender of the relationship partners described in the scenario was not significant; rather, the nature of the messages produced by the partners was what was important. For clarity, participants were assured by the principal investigator, however, that in all cases the couple was heterosexual.
After familiarizing themselves with the scenario, participants read each of the six messages separately and responded to fourteen 7-point Likert-type response items after each. Of the fourteen items, eight were proposed to assess the effectiveness (i.e., hurtfulness) of the messages by asking questions such as "How hurtful is this message?" and "How effective do you think this message would be at hurting Pat?". Four of the items were designed to assess their sophistication with questions such as, "To what extent does this message encourage Pat to reflect on why his/her actions hurt Chris?" and "To what extent does this message encourage Pat to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?". The remaining two items were used to evaluate the realism of the messages by asking, "How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?" and "How realistic is this message?". After reading and responding to all six of the messages, participants were then asked to rank order the messages from most to least hurtful. Participants placed a one next to the message that was most hurtful, a two next to the message that was the next most hurtful, and a six next to the message that was least hurtful. These rankings, however, were not used in the subsequent analyses.

**Structure of test booklets.** The test booklets were designed to control for several variables that could possibly confound results. As was the case with the Wave One test booklets, it was thought that completing the RCQ before filling out the rest of the measures could result in cognitive fatigue and, therefore, adversely influence participants' message evaluations. To account for this, half (50%) of the participants...
The second variable that might influence results concerned the order in which participants read the messages (low complexity messages, medium complexity messages, and high complexity messages). To account for this, message order was randomized within each of the test booklets. In other words, for each of the eight booklets, there were six different versions, each with a different message order: (1) high—medium—low, (2) high—low—medium, (3) medium—high—low, (4) medium—low—high, (5) low—high—medium, and (6) low—medium—high.

Lastly, in an attempt to prevent a systematic answering effect, the 14 survey items were randomized for each of the levels of messages. In other words, the items that followed the low complexity messages were in one order, the items that followed the medium complexity messages were in another order, and the items following the high complexity messages were in yet another order.

Reliability of scales. In an effort to ascertain whether the eight effectiveness items were, indeed, part of the same scale, a principle components factor analysis was conducted. A unidimensional solution was observed; all eight items loaded on a single factor that accounted for 64.15% of the variance (Eigen value = 5.13). To test scale reliability, items were collapsed across conditions. A Cronbach's alpha of .92 was obtained for this measure, indicating that the items for the effectiveness scale were highly reliable. Likewise, a Cronbach's alpha of .75 was observed for the items of the realism scale, suggesting that it, too, was reliable. An initial reliability test of all four sophistication items, however, revealed that Cronbach’s alpha would be increased significantly (from $\alpha=.81$ to $\alpha=.90$) by the removal of the fourth sophistication item ("To
what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT's perspective in situation?). As such, a decision was made to use only three of the sophist in subsequent data analyses.
Chapter 3

RESULTS

Research Question One was initially assessed using an 8 x 6 x 2 x 3 mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA). The between groups factors were message set, message order, and gender, while the within-groups factor was message level. The dependent variable was the mean rated effectiveness of message level. Clearly, the hypothetical scenario to which participants responded could have influenced effectiveness ratings; however, this variable was not included in the initial analysis because it was embedded in the message set variable. Only those variables for which significant main effects were observed were included in subsequent statistical tests.

The ANOVA detected significant main effects for the factors of message set \( F(\text{df} = 7) = 10.50, p < .000, \eta^2 = .39 \) and message level \( F(\text{df} = 2) = 23.23, p < .000, \eta^2 = .17 \). Thus, the factors of message order and gender were removed, and a second 8 x 3 (message set x message level) ANOVA was computed. Once again, significant main effects for message set \( F(\text{df} = 7) = 14.07, p < .000, \eta^2 = .33 \) and message level \( F(\text{df} = 2) = 25.26, p < .000, \eta^2 = .11 \) were discovered. Moreover, there was a highly significant two-way interaction between message set and message level \( F(\text{df} = 14) = \)
16.42, p < .000, \( \eta^2 = .37 \). These findings suggested that the eight message sets differed from one another enough to influence ratings of effectiveness.

In an attempt to derive a way to deal with these data in a meaningful fashion, the mean effectiveness ratings for the messages in each of the eight sets were compared. From this analysis, two distinct patterns of consistent effectiveness ratings emerged (see Table 1). This suggested that separate statistical analyses of the patterns would be more interpretable than singular examination of all of the messages together. The results of these tests are outlined below.

Table 1: Patterns of Mean Effectiveness Ratings as a Function of Message Set

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Set</th>
<th>Complexity Level</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Pattern One</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss Set 2</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss Set 3</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Set 2</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Set 3</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern Two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss Set 4</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Set 1</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Set 4</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pattern One**

In the first pattern, high complexity messages were rated as the most effective (i.e., *hurtful*) and medium complexity messages were rated as the least effective, while low complexity messages fell in the middle. Of the four message sets that exhibited this pattern of mean effectiveness ratings, two were from Scenario One (the Kiss Scenario) and two were from Scenario Two (the Date Scenario)—specifically, sets two and three from both scenarios (see Appendix E for message sets). This allowed for comparison of effectiveness ratings between and within the two scenarios for this pattern. Hence, a 2 × 2 × 3 (scenario x message set x message level) *ANOVA* was computed. This time, the between groups factors were *scenario* and message set (i.e., whether set two or three within each scenario), while the within groups factor was message level. The dependent variable was again the mean rated effectiveness of message level.

The *ANOVA* produced significant main effects for the factors of scenario \(F(df = 1) = 11.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11\) and message level \(F(df = 2) = 70.64, p < .000, \eta^2 = .42\). Thus, the factor of message set was removed, and the analysis was repeated. Table 2 displays the means for this analysis. A significant main effect for scenario was detected \(F(df = 1) = 8.34, p < .005, \eta^2 = .08\]. Overall, messages elicited by the Kiss Scenario \((M = 4.82)\) were rated as more effective at hurting a romantic partner than messages elicited by the Date Scenario \((M = 4.34)\). A highly significant main effect for message level was also observed \(F(df = 2) = 73.23, p < .001, \eta^2 = .41\]. Across scenarios, the most to least effective messages were: high complexity messages \((M = \ldots\)
5.25), low complexity messages ($M = 4.88$), and medium complexity messages ($M = 3.6$).

A marginally significant interaction effect for scenario by message level was also observed [$F(df = 2) = 2.97, p < .053, \eta^2 = .03$]. As indicated in Table 2, both scenarios exhibited the same pattern of means as that noted above: high complexity messages were perceived as the most hurtful, low complexity messages were perceived as the second most hurtful, and medium complexity messages were rated the least hurtful. However, the mean effectiveness ratings for the messages in the Date Scenario were lower than those for the Kiss Scenario. Subsequent paired samples T-tests indicated that, across scenarios, messages within the low complexity, medium complexity, and high complexity conditions were all perceived as significantly different from one another (for low vs. medium complexity messages, $t = 8.47, df = 99, p < .000$; for medium vs. high complexity messages, $t = 11.13, df = 99, p < .000$; for low vs. high complexity messages, $t = 2.43, df = 99, p < .016$).

Table 2: Mean Hurtfulness Ratings as a Function of Cognitive Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity Level</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kiss (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5.19 (.183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>3.99 (.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>5.28 (.172)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 204.
Pattern Two

Of the three sets of messages comprising Pattern Two (see Table 1), one was from Scenario One (the Kiss Scenario) and two were from Scenario Two (the Date Scenario)—specifically, set four of the former and sets one and four of the latter. This did not allow for comparison of effectiveness ratings between and within the two scenarios for this pattern. Hence, a $3 \times 6 \times 2 \times 3$ (message set $\times$ message order $\times$ gender $\times$ message level) ANOVA was computed. The between groups factors were message set, message order, and gender, while the within-groups factor was message level. Again, the dependent variable was the mean rated effectiveness of message level.

The ANOVA produced significant main effects for the factors of message set [$F(df = 2) = 10.64$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .32$] and message level [$F(df = 2) = 28.98$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .39$]; no interaction effects were produced. Table 3 displays the means for this analysis. These results were reported for the reader's edification only; hence, subsequent analyses were not conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Two was also initially assessed using an 8 x 6 x 2 x 3 mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA). The between groups factors were message set, message order, and gender, while the within-groups factor was message level. The dependent variable was mean rated sophistication of message level. Once again, the hypothetical scenario to which participants responded could have influenced such ratings; however, this factor was not included in the initial analysis because it was embedded in the message set variable. As before, only those variables for which significant main effects were observed were included in subsequent statistical tests.

The only significant main effect detected by the ANOVA was for message level \[F(df = 2) = 36.55, p < .000, \eta^2 = .24\]. Thus, the factors of message order and gender were discarded. However, a highly significant interaction between message level and message set was observed \[F(df = 14) = 6.78, p < .000, \eta^2 = .29\]. Because this interaction explained a relatively large portion of variance in sophistication ratings (i.e., close to 30%), message set was included in a subsequent 8 x 3 (message set x message...
level) ANOVA.

This analysis yielded a significant main effect for message level \[ F(df = 2) = 33.40, p < .000, \eta^2 = .15 \], as well as a significant interaction effect for message set by message level \[ F(df = 14) = 7.80, p < .000, \eta^2 = .22 \]. As was the case for effectiveness, mean sophistication ratings for the messages in each of the eight sets were compared. From this analysis, two distinct patterns of consistent effectiveness ratings emerged (see Table 4). This suggested that separate statistical analyses of the patterns would be more interpretable than a single examination of all of the messages together. The results of these tests are delineated below.

| Table 4: Patterns of Mean Sophistication Ratings as a Function of Message Set |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | Complexity Level |                  |
| Message Set      | Low              | Medium           | High             |
| Pattern One      |                  |                  |                  |
| Kiss Set 2       | 4.79             | 4.87             | 5.64             |
| Kiss Set 4       | 3.98             | 4.28             | 5.22             |
| Date Set 1       | 3.15             | 4.96             | 5.88             |
| Date Set 4       | 4.62             | 4.52             | 5.86             |
| Pattern Two      |                  |                  |                  |
| Kiss Set 3       | 3.88             | 5.43             | 5.12             |
| Date Set 2       | 3.72             | 6.02             | 5.07             |
| Date Set 3       | 5.28             | 5.41             | 4.19             |
**Pattern One**

In the first pattern, high complexity messages were rated as the most sophisticated and low complexity messages were rated as the least effective, while medium complexity messages fell in the middle. Of the four message sets that exhibited this pattern of mean sophistication ratings, two were from the Kiss Scenario and two were from the Date Scenario—specifically, sets two and four from the Kiss Scenario and sets one and four from the Date Scenario (see Appendix E for message sets). This allowed for comparison of effectiveness ratings between and within the two scenarios of this pattern. Hence, a 2 x 2 x 3 (scenario x message set x message level) ANOVA was conducted in which the between groups factors were scenario and message set (i.e., set two or four in the Kiss Scenario; set one or four in the Date Scenario), and the dependent variable was the mean rated sophistication of message level.

The only significant main effect observed was for message level \[F(df = 2) = 33.76, p < .000, \eta^2 = .26\]. As the means in Table 5 indicate, across scenarios, the most to least sophisticated messages were: high complexity messages (M = 5.32), medium complexity messages (M = 5.07), and low complexity messages (M = 4.28). In other words, high complexity messages were perceived as the most sophisticated, medium complexity messages were perceived as the second most sophisticated, and low complexity messages were rated the least sophisticated. The ANOVA also produced a significant two-way interaction between scenario and message level \[F(df = 2) = 3.57, p < .03, \eta^2 = .04\] and a significant three-way interaction among scenario, message set, and
message level \[ F(df = 2) = 5.13, p < .007, \eta^2 = .05 \]. However, because (a) no main effects were observed for either scenario or message set and (b) the interactions collectively accounted for less than nine percent of the variance in sophistication ratings, they were not explored further. Subsequent paired samples T-tests involving the message levels indicated that across scenarios, messages within the low, medium, and high complexity conditions were all rated as significantly different from one another (for low vs. high complexity messages, \( t = 2.97, df = 101, p < .004 \); for medium vs. high complexity messages, \( t = 5.42, df = 101, p < .000 \); for low vs. high complexity messages, \( t = 7.20, df = 101, p < .000 \)).

Table 5: Mean Sophistication Ratings as a Function of Cognitive Complexity Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity Level</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kiss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( N = 204 \).

**Pattern Two**

Of the three sets of messages comprising Pattern Two (see Table 4), one was from Scenario One (the **Kiss** Scenario) and two were from Scenario Two (the **Date** Scenario)—specifically, set three of the former and sets two and three of the latter. This did not allow
for comparison of effectiveness ratings between and within the two scenarios for this pattern. Hence, a $3 \times 6 \times 2 \times 3$ (message set $\times$ message order $\times$ gender $\times$ message level) \textbf{ANOVA} was computed. The between groups factors were message set, message order, and gender, while the within-groups factor was message level. Again, the dependent variable was the mean rated effectiveness of message level.

The \textbf{ANOVA} produced only a significant main effect for the factor of message level $[F(\text{df} = 2) = 18.51, p < .000, \eta^2 = .31]$; no interaction effects were produced. Specifically, medium complexity messages were rated as most sophisticated, low complexity messages were rated as least sophisticated, while high complexity messages fell in the middle. Table 6 displays the means for this analysis. These results were also reported for the reader's edification only; hence, subsequent analyses were not conducted

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Mean Sophistication Ratings for Pattern I Main Effects}
\begin{tabular}{lll}
\hline
Variable       & Mean & Std. Dev. \\
\hline
Message Level  &      &            \\
Low            & 4.31 & .18        \\
Medium         & 5.66 & .14        \\
High           & 4.88 & .17        \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

Constructivist research has accrued considerable evidence indicating that, compared to persons exhibiting lower levels of cognitive complexity, high complexity individuals "read" social situations and people more deeply and make more accurate conclusions concerning others' intentions and affective states. In turn, this enhanced retrieval and cognitive handling of social information enables complex individuals to generate messages that are tailored to the unique characteristics of the communicative situation and interactant. Because they are so interactant- and situation-specific, these "sophisticated" message strategies tend to be judged by naive actors as more functionally effective in a variety of contexts than less adapted messages that stress role expectations and culturally shared definitions of the situation.

Unfortunately, our understanding of such individual differences in message production is severely limited because they have been examined solely within pro-social communicative domains (e.g., emotional support). The purpose of the current study was to extend Constructivist research concerning communication skill to include "darker" relational contexts typically not addressed in interpersonal communication literature.

More specifically, the project was designed to explore the possibility that in emotionally
painful situations, cognitively complex individuals produce messages that are perceived as more sophisticated and, therefore, more effective at hurting relationship partners than messages generated by individuals with lower levels of complexity. Descriptions of this study's major findings, implications, and limitations appear below, as do several directions for future research.

Research Findings

In an effort to explore the "dark side" of cognitive complexity, two research questions were addressed in the current project. The first inquired whether individuals exhibiting high levels of cognitive complexity produce messages that are perceived as more effective than those generated by less complex individuals, in situations where the goal is to hurt a romantic partner. The second question queried whether these messages are more "sophisticated" than those produced by less complex persons. Analysis of the interpretable data (through a variety of statistical procedures detailed in Chapter Three), tentatively suggests that the answer to both questions is in the affirmative: For the most part, messages produced by high complexity individuals were judged as being more effective (i.e., hurtful) and more sophisticated than those produced by less complex persons. It is important to qualify these results, however, before drawing conclusions about the relationship between cognitive complexity and the production of hurtful messages: The discussion presented here is based on the analysis of only the first patterns of means outlined in Chapter Three.
**Hurtful Messages**

Given the basic tenets of Constructivist theory, results involving the hurtfulness of messages were not surprising. In general, messages that were generated by individuals exhibiting high levels of cognitive complexity were evaluated as more hurtful than those produced by less complex persons. Put another way, when compared to noncomplex individuals, complex people generated messages that were perceived as meaner, nastier, more upsetting, and more damaging to one's self-image. Interestingly, though, the relationship between cognitive complexity and message hurtfulness was not linear. Although messages from high complexity individuals were seen as the most hurtful, the least hurtful messages were those from individuals with medium levels of complexity, rather than from persons exhibiting low levels. This suggests that, in the current sample at least, individuals with low levels of complexity produced messages that were more effective at causing pain than those produced by persons with medium complexity levels.

Also interesting was the interaction between message level and scenario. In both hypothetical situations, the most to least hurtful messages were high complexity messages, low complexity messages, and medium complexity messages. However, the messages produced in response to the scenario in which one's relationship partner kisses someone else were evaluated as significantly more hurtful than those produced in response to the scenario in which one's relationship partner cancels an important date. One possible explanation for this effect is that kissing someone else may be appraised as a more serious relational transgression than breaking a date; hence, reactions to the
former may have been more severe than reactions to the latter. Indeed, as was noted in Chapter Two, Wave One participants (a) assessed the Kiss Scenario as being significantly more hurtful than the Date Scenario and (b) indicated that they would be significantly more likely to try to hurt their relationship partners in the Kiss Scenario than in the Date Scenario.

In general, appraisal theories (see Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Scherer, 1984) argue that emotions occur as a consequence of an individual's evaluation of an event. In order to experience an emotion (including hurt, anger, and frustration), an individual must first perceive a stimulus event and then assess the impact of that event on his/her well-being. Although various theories conceptualize these assessments differently, most distinguish between at least two types of appraisals: (1) primary appraisals in which one evaluates the personal relevancy of the stimulus event and (2) secondary appraisals in which one evaluates his/her ability to cope with the event and/or its consequences. Primary appraisals consist of assessments of (a) goal relevance (the extent to which a stimulus event impacts personal goals), (b) goal congruence (the extent to which a stimulus event facilitates or frustrates the actualization of personally relevant goals), and (c) ego involvement (the aspects of identity that are entangled in the stimulus event). Secondary appraisals include evaluations of (a) accountability (who/what should receive credit/blame for the stimulus event), (b) coping potential (the ability to manage emergent feelings and consequences), and (c) future expectancy (the likelihood that the same stimulus event will occur again).
As Lazarus (1991) notes, all negative emotions share a common primary appraisal pattern. Specifically, negative emotions emanate from appraisals that the stimulus event is goal relevant, but goal incongruent. In other words, such events are evaluated as thwarting the achievement of some personally relevant goal. In the case of the scenarios used in this study, the goal was to maintain the romantic relationship. Previous to imagining themselves in the scenarios, participants were told that, although they had experienced some minor problems typical of all relationships, they wanted their relationship to continue. Clearly, the stimulus event in each case (i.e., kissing someone else and breaking a date) was incongruent with the goal of maintaining the relationship.

However, participants may have evaluated the Kiss Scenario as engendering more ego involvement than the Date Scenario. As Metts (1994) notes, "Violations that are 'public' or known to members of the social network are usually considered more severe than those that involve only the couple," because they challenge the "face" of the relational partners. Indeed, Goffman (1959) might argue that the properties of the "backstage" have been brought into public view. In the Kiss Scenario, the relational transgression (i.e., kissing someone else) was discovered at a party and could be observed by other persons. Although the relational transgression in the Date Scenario (i.e., breaking an important date) was discovered in a public setting, it did not involve a behavior that could be readily observed by others. Hence, participants may have perceived the Kiss Scenario as more face threatening than the Date Scenario. In turn,
their responses to the Kiss Scenario may have been more hurtful.

In addition, the two scenarios may have elicited appraisals, as well. In both cases, accountability for transgressor. Likewise, the stimulus events were and having been discussed and resolved—so the likely appraised as being rather high. However, may have been perceived as less than that for the public, face-threatening nature. If the consequence appraised as more damaging and less changeable, been more severe (i.e., hurtful) precisely because irreparable. In other words, messages elicited by hurtful because the consequences of the stimulus

It is important to note, however, that the message level does not detract from the finding that produce more hurtful messages than less complex. shows support for the idea that complex persons situations and individuals. If some situations are then the messages produced in response to those precisely because they are tailored to the character interactants. The truly significant finding is that:
individuals exhibiting high levels of cognitive complexity were judged as being more hurtful than those produced by less complex individuals. In fact, message level alone accounted for 41% of the variance in hurtfulness ratings.

**Sophisticated Messages**

As was previously noted (see Chapter One), message sophistication is conceptualized in a very particular way by Constructivist scholars. Specifically, *person-centered* messages are "more responsive to the aims and utterances of an interactional partner, are tailored to the characteristics of the partner and situation, attend to the identity-relevant features of communicative contexts, and ... encourage reflection about persons and social situations" (Burleson & Denton, in press, p. 22). Such messages are considered more sophisticated than position-centered messages that "simply [index] the preexistent, culturally shared understandings appropriate for specific role relationships" (Burleson, 1987, p. 312). Analysis of these concepts (see Chapter One), however, indicates an inherent "positivity" to person-centeredness and message sophistication that precludes their use in the current study of hurtful messages. Nevertheless, it was thought that at least some of the features of person-centered messages might appear in hurtful strategies produced by cognitively complex persons.

And, indeed, this was the case. Messages generated by individuals with high levels of cognitive complexity were judged as more elaborate than those produced by less complex persons in that they (a) encouraged the transgressor to reflect on why his/her actions (as described in the scenario) were hurtful, (b) encouraged the transgressor to try
to see things from the wronged individual's perspective, and (c) encouraged the transgressor to think about how his/her actions might affect the relationship. In short, cognitively complex individuals generated more sophisticated messages. Unlike judgments of hurtfulness, though, the relationship between cognitive complexity and message sophistication was linear. In other words, messages from high complexity individuals were judged as being the most sophisticated, while the least sophisticated messages were from individuals with low levels of complexity.

Interestingly, though, scenario did not seem to play nearly as important a role in judgments of sophistication as it did in judgments of effectiveness. The reason for this is unclear. However, one possibility is that whereas the hurtful qualities of messages might vary as a function of the intensity of emotion aroused by the scenario used to elicit them (see the argument concerning Appraisal Theories earlier in this chapter), sophistication—at least as it was conceptualized in this study—may remain stable across situations because it is a feature of more general message production. In other words, elements of sophistication (e.g., elaboration of feelings, perspectives, consequences, etc.) are most likely present in any message produced by complex individuals—regardless of the situation that elicited that message. However, if sophisticated strategies are, in fact, more tailored and adapted to the situation that evoked them, then messages generated in response to more hurtful situations should be more damaging than those produced in response to relatively less hurtful situations.
Theoretical and Pragmatic Implications

Clearly, the findings presented here provide some evidence that in situations where the communicative objective is to hurt one's romantic partner, cognitively complex individuals generate messages that are evaluated by naïve actors as being more hurtful and more sophisticated than those generated by relatively less complex persons. These results have several implications for theory development within Constructivism, as well as for fine-tuning our understanding of the association between therapeutic interventions and relationship satisfaction.

Although Constructivist scholars have successfully established a relationship between cognitive complexity and communication skill, they have limited their analysis of this relationship to contexts in which the communicative objective is pro-social in nature (e.g., comforting). Thus, communication skill appears to be necessarily reflected in the pursuit of pro-social, relationship-enhancing goals. While the results of the current study do not directly challenge the legitimacy of past Constructivist research, they do suggest that treatments of cognitive complexity—and what it enables individuals to do—need to be expanded. Certainly, cognitive complexity does provide one with the ability to adapt messages to the relevant features of specific persons and communicative situations in order to actualize positive, pro-social communicative objectives. However, findings from the present study suggest that advanced social cognitive skill (as indexed by cognitive complexity) also enables one to achieve objectives that are negative and
anti-social, such as emotionally hurting one's romantic partner. Clearly, as Burleson and Denton (1997) note, one can "skillfully and effectively seek to injure" (p. 4).

The association between cognitive complexity and communication skill as it relates to more negative interactions suggests an interesting avenue for Constructivist research. For instance, cognitively complex individuals may be more effective than relatively less complex persons at rejecting others. Likewise, given the ability to cognitively manipulate social information, complex persons may be better equipped to deceive others or induce guilt in a loved one. Moreover, attempts at verbal sexual coercion might be more successful when generated by cognitively complex individuals than by persons exhibiting less complexity. Clearly, these questions merit attention by scholars.

On a related note, studies need to begin examining the specific features that make messages produced by complex people more hurtful than those produced by relatively noncomplex individuals. Items composing the measure of sophistication used in the current study suggest that one set of features might be organized around the concept of adaptation. Results showed that messages rated as the most hurtful were also seen as more effective at getting the transgressor to reflect on the situation in terms of the victim's feelings and perspective, as well as in terms of the damaging consequences for the relationship. Adapting to the unique characteristics of situations and people may be important components of hurtful messages, but they are certainly not the only characteristics of these messages. By exploring hurtful messages in more depth, the
features that make messages produced by high complexity people more hurtful than those generated by less complex persons can be isolated, and a coding scheme reminiscent of those for other communicative contexts can be developed.

Moreover, as was previously noted (see Chapter Two), there is some evidence that cognitive complexity levels of recipients may moderate their perceptions of various message types. For instance, in their study of comforting messages, Burleson and Samter (1985b) had participants evaluate various messages exhibiting three different levels of person-centeredness: high, medium, and low. As hypothesized, individuals with more developed systems of interpersonal constructs evaluated highly person-centered messages more positively and less person-centered messages more negatively than those with undeveloped systems. Likewise, Sarnter, Burleson, and Basden-Murphy (1989) discovered that cognitive complexity levels of perceivers interacted with the person-centered quality of a source's comforting message to influence the impression formed of the message source. In other words, high-complexity receivers developed differentiated impressions of the message source after reading highly person-centered messages, while the impressions of low-complexity perceivers did not vary as a function of message characteristics. These and other findings (see Bingham & Burleson, 1989; O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1989) suggest that cognitively complex perceivers are more sensitive to the person-centered qualities of some message types than are relatively noncomplex individuals.
If, as the interpretable results of this study suggest, particular features of person-centeredness are present in hurtful messages, cognitively complex individuals might be more sensitive to them and, in turn, perceive these messages as being more hurtful than would noncomplex persons. Thus, future research concerning hurtful interactions should examine the relationship between complexity levels of message targets and their ratings of messages produced in those situations. Indeed, the current study included Crockett’s (1965) Role Category Questionnaire to allow for this in subsequent analyses of hurtful messages.

Finally, it is important to note that the message elicitation task employed in the current study specified the communicative objective of hurting one's romantic partner. When given such a goal, complex individuals generated messages that were perceived as more injurious than those produced by less complex persons. However, these findings do not address the issue of whether or not complex persons spontaneously orient toward such negative communicative objectives. An important question for future research is the extent to which individuals' definitions of hurtful situations—and the goals they choose to pursue—vary according to levels of cognitive complexity.

On a more pragmatic level, the results of the current study suggest that therapeutic interventions aimed at increasing relationship satisfaction might benefit from re-evaluation of traditional skill-deficit approaches. As was noted earlier (see Chapter One), a popular assumption among therapists is that the reason for the scarcity of positive outcomes in distressed relationships is a lack of communication skills on the part of
relationship partners. As a result, therapy usually involves the teaching of "proper" communication skills. However, the results presented here illustrate that the production of hurtful messages can be achieved more or less skillfully. Clearly, research is needed to determine if relationship dissatisfaction is actually the result of an ill-motivated use of communication skill. If this is the case, therapists might consider shifting the focus of their interventions from teaching communication skills to helping relationship partners recognize when their communicative objectives are relationally damaging. In doing so, partners may be able to negotiate a more positive, relationship-enhancing objective for potentially damaging communicative situations.

Limitations

While the findings presented here suggest some interesting and significant theoretical and practical implications, it is important to note several limitations of this study. To an extensive degree, these limitations qualify the conclusions drawn throughout this chapter.

Methods

As is the case with a lot of research in the field of interpersonal communication, participants for this study were college students. Thus, the current findings can only be generalized to a very select portion of the larger population — specifically, heterosexual, European-American men and women who are between the ages of 19 and 30. It therefore remains unclear if the relationship between cognitive complexity and the production of
hurtful messages holds for other samples of the population (e.g., the elderly). Moreover, as is the case with all self-report data, one must proceed with caution when drawing conclusions about the phenomenon being studied. Clearly, as research concerning the "dark side" of cognitive complexity expands, so too will the need to study more diverse samples of people using other methods of inquiry.

**Data Analysis**

Most importantly, the findings discussed here are limited in their validity because they are based on the statistical analysis of only a portion of the available messages. As was noted in the previous chapter, initial tests indicated that the eight message sets differed from one another enough to influence ratings of hurtfulness and sophistication. Thus, each of the sets was analyzed separately, and those message sets which exhibited similar patterns of ratings were employed to explore the proposed research questions. In all, two patterns of ratings emerged, but the analysis of only one of the patterns was interpretable and, thus, discussed in this forum. While this does not entirely discredit the findings presented here, it does suggest that there is more than meets the proverbial eye when it comes to the production of hurtful messages by people differing in levels of cognitive complexity.

In an attempt to explore why some message sets functioned so differently from others, strategies from each version of the questionnaires employed in Wave II were examined. It was hoped that similarities and differences not addressed by the instrument used in the current study could be isolated, and possibly explain more of the variance in
ratings of hurtfulness and sophistication. However, the results of this cursory analysis were inconclusive.

Given the nature of the scenarios used in this study (i.e., hurtful relational transgressions) and the sample population (i.e., college students), intuition might lead one to conjecture that the differences among the message sets were due to something as simple as the use of swear words (e.g., fuck). A superficial content analysis, however, indicated that although swear words were used in some messages (and not used in others), they appeared randomly throughout the sample of messages. In other words, swear words were found in some of the messages sets used in the statistical analyses, as well as some of those that were not. Hence, another alternative, suggested by Vangelisti’s (1994) work, was considered.

In 1994, Vangelisti reported a category scheme for the types of speech acts that characterize hurtful messages. This scheme consists of ten categories. When an individual uses an accusation, he/she charges someone with a fault of offense. For instance, this person might say something like, "You are such a liar." Similarly, when an evaluation is used, there is a description of value, worth, or quality, as in the statement, "Going out with you was the biggest mistake of my life." When a person gives an order, set of directions, or a command (e.g., "Just leave me alone!"), he/she is using what is called a directive, whereas when there is a suggestion for a course of action (e.g., "I think we should see other people."), the person is using an advise technique. Express desire is a statement of preference, as in the message, "I don't ever want to see you again," while
threat is an expression of intention to inflict some sort of punishment under certain conditions (e.g., "If you ever do this again, we're through!") When a person makes a disclosure of information (e.g., "Well, I've been seeing someone else.") they are using an inform approach, while an inquiry or interrogation (e.g., "Do you have some mental deficiency?") is categorized as a question. A joke is a witticism or prank that a person deems hurtful (e.g., ethnic jokes), while a lie is an untrue, deceptive statement or question that is known to be a lie.

Initial analysis of the current data using this scheme indicated no patterns for speech acts between or within message sets. As was the case with swear words, categories of speech acts in hurtful messages were random both across and within the eight questionnaire versions. In other words, accusation, threat, inform, evaluation, advise, directive, express desire, lying, and question acts appeared randomly throughout each of the message sets. (The only act that did not appear was joking.) Hence, the differences among the messages in the various sets could not be accounted for by this category scheme. The question of why certain message sets functioned similarly and others did not remains unanswered. Any effort to continue this line of research must begin by accounting for the differences among message sets and explaining how and why such differences influence ratings of hurtfulness and sophistication.
Conclusion

Results of this study tentatively demonstrate that cognitively complex individuals produce more hurtful and sophisticated messages than less complex persons. Such findings suggest that scholars, researchers, and therapists alike might benefit from an expansion of what it means to be a "skilled" communicator. What is also clear, however, is that the relationship between complexity and the production of hurtful messages is not as straightforward as application of the basic tenets of Constructivist theory might suggest. Evidently, more exploration is needed to flesh out this relationship.
REFERENCES


Miller, R. S. (1997). We always hurt the ones we love: Aversive interactions in close relationships. In R. M. Kowalski (Ed.), *Aversive interpersonal behaviors* (pp. 11-29). New York: Plenum Press.


Appendix A

PILOT STUDY ONE SURVEY
Sex: Male  Female  (circle one)
Age: _____

**Sexual Orientation:** Homosexual  Heterosexual  Bisexual

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?  Yes  No

How long have you been involved in this relationship?  ____________

Have you ever been involved in a long-term (over 6 months) relationship?  Yes  No

How long did your relationship(s) last?  —  ____________

*Please think about your current or past long-term relationship(~)when responding to the following questions:*

Within every relationship, there are ups and downs. For the most part, we enjoy spending time with our partners and feel good about the relationship and that person. Sometimes, however, we come across "issues" or "problems" that anger or hurt us. While there are some major conflicts and tensions that would end virtually any relationship (e.g., infidelity), there are also hurtful situations that crop up from time to time but do not end things. Often, these are situations where we feel unappreciated or disrespected by our partners (especially when it concerns recurring behavior) and our emotions are running high. These situations make us extremely angry or upset, and sometimes we want to make our partners feel the same way.

Have you ever had this type of experience?  Yes  No  (circle one)

If yes, what was the state of the relationship before the hurtful event?
What specifically happened that hurt or angered you?


Why did this hurt or anger you?


How did you respond to this situation? What did you say to your partner?


What impact did this situation have on your relationship?


Lastly, was there ever a time in your current or past long-term relationship(s) that you wanted to purposely hurt your romantic partner? Please describe the situation that led you to feel this way and what you actually did in this situation.
Appendix B

PILOT STUDY TWO SURVEY
DIRECTIONS: You and your romantic partner have been involved for a little over a year. Although you have some minor problems that are typical of all couples, things are pretty good between you. With this in mind, please read ALL of the following scenarios. When you are finished, please read through them again and rank them from most hurtful to least hurtful. In other words, if you encountered these situations in your romantic relationship, which would be the most hurtful? Place a 1 on the line next to that scenario. Which would be the next most hurtful? Place a 2 on the line next to that scenario, and so on. You will put a 5 next to the situation that you would find least hurtful.

---

You and your romantic partner are at a basketball game with a group of your friends. On your way back from the bathroom, you see your partner talking with their ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend. They seem to be having quite a good time given that they're laughing a lot, and they keep touching each other lightly on the arm and shoulder. They were involved for several years and had a great relationship—they only broke up because of distance. Now, they're both going to school here and seem a little too close for comfort. You've told your romantic partner that this bothers you, and they promised to stop hanging out with him/her. But there they are all chummy again!

---

You and your romantic partner are having dinner with a group of your friends. You are having a good time except for the fact that your partner keeps telling embarrassing stories about you. This wouldn't normally bother you except that they do this quite often, and every time you try to change the subject or tell them to stop, they just make sarcastic comments and keep telling even more stories. You've told your partner how this makes you feel, but it just doesn't seem to matter--the jokes keep coming!
It is a Saturday night, and you and your romantic partner have agreed to meet at a party one of your friends is throwing. When you get to the party, there are a lot of people there, and at first you don’t see your partner anywhere. After wandering around the party for some time, you spot them out of the corner of your eye sitting on the arm of a chair across the room talking to some madwoman you’ve never seen before. As you make your way through the crowd toward them, you see your romantic partner lean down and kiss the madwoman. This has happened a few times in the past. In fact, you just had a discussion about it last weekend, and your girlfriend/boyfriend promised it would never happen again. Now here you are again--your romantic partner of over a year is kissing another person!

It's movie night at your place. You, your romantic partner, and some of your friends have rented some videos, ordered a pizza, and settled down to watch some movies and maybe play some cards later. Throughout the evening, you notice that your partner is flirting with one of the men/women that came with your best friend. Now, a little flirting isn't a problem—we all do it to a certain degree. But your partner is just being way too flirty with this person! This seems to be a regular event for them, given that you've seen this happen before. In fact, you had a discussion about it not too long ago, and they said they’d try to be more careful. But here you are, watching them obviously flirting with this madwoman!
You and your romantic partner have plans to go out for a special date. Four hours before you are supposed to go out, they phone you and cancel with the excuse that they aren't feeling well. You are sympathetic, of course, and ask if there is anything they need and if they'd like you to come over and keep them company. Your partner tells you it isn't necessary--they're just going to go to sleep, anyway--and they'll phone you tomorrow.

Since you aren't going out with your partner that night, you decide you might as well go out with your friends. While you're out, though, you see your romantic partner with a group of their friends. Interesting place for them to be when they're sick! They have done this in the past—canceled dates for one reason or another and then gone out with friends—and you've told them that you don't like it. The problem isn't that your partner wants to go out with their friends instead of you (everyone needs time with their own friends)--the problem is that they feel the need to lie about it. So there is your romantic partner who is supposed to be sick (again!) at home, unable to go out for a romantic dinner with you, partying with their friends!
Instructions: We are interested in learning how people describe others whom they know. Our concern here is with the habits and mannerisms—in general, with the personal characteristics rather than the physical traits—which characterize a number of different people.

In order to make sure you are describing real people, we have set down a list of two different categories of people. In the blank beside each category below, please write the initials for a person you know who fits into that category (i.e., you can’t think of the same person for both categories).

1. A person your own age whom you like. 
2. A person your own age whom you dislike.

Spend a few minutes mentally comparing and contrasting the people you have in mind for each category. Think of their habits, their beliefs, their mannerisms, their relations to others, any characteristics they may have which you might use to describe them to other people.

Do NOT turn the page until you have really thought about these two people for a few minutes.
Please place the initials you have used to designate the person in category 1 here: ______

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her. Pay particular attention to his/her habits, beliefs, ways of treating others, mannerisms, and similar attributes. Remember, describe him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the land of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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Please place the initials for the person in category 2 here:  

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her. Pay particular attention to his/her habits, beliefs, ways of beating others, mannerisms, and similar attributes. Remember, describe him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the kind of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only about five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:

________________________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________________________

93
Please provide the following information before completing the rest of this survey.

Sex:  Male  Female  (circle one)

Age:  ______

Sexual Orientation:  Homosexual  Heterosexual  Bisexual

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?  Yes  No
If yes, how long have you been involved?  ________________

INSTRUCTIONS:  On the following pages, you will be asked to write messages in response to two relationship situations.  IMAGINE that you have been involved in a romantic relationship for a little over a year.  Although you have some minor problems in this relationship that are typical of all couples, things are pretty good between you—you want the relationship to continue.  Please read each of the scenarios on the following pages and try to place yourself in those situations.  The situations depict distressing events that sometimes occur in romantic relationships.  While you may be tempted to say that you would break up with your romantic partner if these situations ever occurred, we ask that you not write that in response to the scenarios.  Instead, we ask that you write what you would SAY to achieve the goal indicated at the end of the situation description.  With this in mind, please read the following scenarios and respond to ALL of the questions that accompany them.  Please read the questions CAREFULLY.
**SITUATION 1**

Imagine it is a Saturday night, and you and your romantic partner have agreed to meet at a party one of your friends is throwing. When you get to the party, there are a lot of people there, and at first you don't see your partner anywhere. After wandering around the party for some time, you spot them out of the corner of your eye sitting on the arm of a chair across the room talking to some madwoman you've never seen before. As you make your way through the crowd toward them, you see your romantic partner lean down and kiss the madwoman. This has happened a few times in the past. In fact, you just had a discussion about it last weekend, and your girlfriend/boyfriend promised it would never happen again. Now here you are again—your romantic partner of over a year is kissing another person!

Imagine yourself in this situation. You are VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated, and you want to make your partner feel the same way. When you are alone with them, what would you say to make them feel as hurt as you feel? Please be specific and describe what you would SAY to hurt them.

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Now imagine that your romantic partner didn't seem to be very affected by what you said. In other words, your partner didn't seem to be hurt by your message. What else could you say to them? Remember, you are VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated and you want them to feel the same way. What else could you say to hurt your partner?

1. How difficult was it to imagine yourself in the described scenario?

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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all difficult</td>
<td>Very difficult</td>
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</table>

2. How would you feel if you found yourself in the scenario described above?

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<th>4</th>
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<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Very Hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

3. How would you feel if this situation actually occurred?

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all angry</td>
<td>Very angry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How likely would your goal be to hurt your romantic partner if you actually encountered this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all likely  Very likely

5. How realistic is the scenario described above?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very realistic  Not at all realistic

6. How frustrated would you feel if you encountered this scenario?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all frustrated  Very frustrated

7. How much would you want to hurt your partner in return if you found yourself in this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very much  Not at all

8. How hurt would you feel in the situation described above?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very hurt  Not at all hurt

9. How humiliated would this situation make you feel?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all humiliated  Very humiliated

10. How insulted would you feel if this situation actually occurred?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all insulted  Very insulted

11. How degraded would you feel in this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all degraded  Very degraded
SITUATION 2

Imagine that you and your romantic partner have plans to go out for a special date. Four hours before you are supposed to go out, they phone you and cancel with the excuse that they aren't feeling well. You are sympathetic, of course, and ask if there is anything they need and if they'd like you to come over to keep them company. Your partner tells you it isn't necessary—they're just going to go to sleep anyway—and they'll phone you tomorrow.

Since you aren't going out with your partner that night, you decide you might as well go out with your friends. While you're out, though, you see your romantic partner with a group of their friends. Interesting place for them to be when they're sick! They have done this in the past—canceled dates for one reason or another and then gone out with friends—and you've told them that you don't like it. The problem isn't that your partner wants to go out with their friends instead of you (everyone needs time with their own friends)—the problem is that they feel the need to lie about it. So there is your romantic partner who is supposed to be sick (again!) at home, unable to go out for a romantic dinner with you, partying with their friends!

Imagine yourself in this situation. You are VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated, and you want to make your partner feel the same way. When you are alone with them, what would you say to make them feel as hurt as you feel? Please be specific and describe what you would SAY to hurt them.
Now imagine that your romantic *partner* didn't seem to be very affected by what you said. In other words, your *partner* didn't seem to be hurt by your message. What else could you SAY to them? Remember, you are VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated and you want them to feel the same way. What else could you SAY to hurt your *partner*?

---

1. How difficult was it to imagine yourself in the described scenario?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all difficult

Very difficult

2. How would you feel if you found yourself in the scenario described above?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Happy

Very Hurt

3. How would you feel if this situation actually occurred?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all angry

Very angry

99
4. How likely would your goal be to hurt your romantic partner if you actually encountered this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all likely Very likely

5. How realistic is the scenario described above?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very realistic Not at all realistic

6. How frustrated would you feel if you encountered this scenario?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all frustrated Very frustrated

7. How much would you want to hurt your partner in return if you found yourself in this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very much Not at all

8. How hurt would you feel in the situation described above?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very hurt Not at all hurt

9. How humiliated would this situation make you feel?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all humiliated Very humiliated

10. How insulted would you feel if this situation actually occurred?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all insulted Very insulted

11. How degraded would you feel in this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all degraded Very degraded
Appendix D

WAVE ONE SCENARIO DESCRIPTIONS
SCENARIO I: Partner Kisses Someone Else

Imagine it is a Saturday night, and you and your romantic partner have agreed to meet at a party one of your friends is throwing. When you get to the party, there are a lot of people there, and at first you don't see your partner anywhere. After wandering around the party for some time, you spot them out of the corner of your eye sitting on the arm of a chair across the room talking to some man/woman you've never seen before. As you make your way through the crowd toward them, you see your romantic partner lean down and kiss the madwoman. This has happened a few times in the past. In fact, you just had a discussion about it last weekend, and your girlfriend/boyfriend promised it would never happen again. Now here you are again—your romantic partner of over a year is kissing another person!

SCENARIO II: Partner Breaks an Important Date

Imagine that you and your romantic partner have plans to go out for a special date. Four hours before you are supposed to go out, they phone you and cancel with the excuse that they aren't feeling well. You are sympathetic, of course, and ask if there is anything they need and if they'd like you to come over to keep them company. Your partner tells you it isn't necessary—they're just going to go to sleep anyway—and they'll phone you tomorrow.

Since you aren't going out with your partner that night, you decide you might as well go out with your friends. While you're out, though, you see your romantic partner with a group of their friends. Interesting place for them to be when they're sick! They
have done this in the past—canceled dates for one reason or another and then gone out with friends—and you've told them that you don't like it. The problem isn't that your partner wants to go out with their friends instead of you (everyone needs time with their own friends)—the problem is that they feel the need to lie about it. So there is your romantic partner who is supposed to be sick (again!) at home, unable to go out for a romantic dinner with you, partying with their friends!
Appendix E

WAVE TWO MESSAGE SETS
SCENARIO I: MESSAGE SET I

High Complexity Messages

What were you doing kissing that girl? I thought we spoke about this last week. Don't you realize that we're in an exclusive relationship and you're basically cheating on me when you do that? How would you like it if I kissed another guy? It would hurt so badly. I feel like I'm not as important to you as you are to me. If you only wanted to be with me, then I don't think you'd be kissing other random girls. You've really hurt me and I only wish you knew how it felt.

Maybe we need a break. Maybe I should start dating that guy that I used to talk to, and you can get all this crap out of your system. Maybe it'll be better that way. You can hook up with all your hoochies and maybe I'll find someone who really appreciates me that I like better.

Medium Complexity Messages

What the hell is the matter with you? Do you have a hearing problem or are you just that stupid? Did we or did we not just discuss this last weekend? You have a serious problem, besides the fact that you are a complete bastard, and honestly, I don't think you are worth my time.

Fine, don't care, because I sure as hell don't. You've thrown this relationship away, so when you finally realize that, DO NOT come crawling back. And you better hope you don't get past the kissing phase with any other girl, because after that, they'll know just how pathetic you really are. Oh, and by the way, I fucked your best friend last month!

Low Complexity Messages

What the hell were you thinking? Did you think I wouldn't find out? I was going to the same party, we have the same friends. Are you so pathetic that you couldn't control yourself at a party I was at? Do you know what people say about you? What I have to hear and put up with? How would you like it if I started making out with some random girl? Well it hurts dammit!

Look at you—you don't even care that you hurt me. You're so cold and heartless. I don't know how I ever loved you. I just give and give, and all you do is use me. People always called you a slut. They said, "Chris, you deserve better." But I defended you. Well now I believe you are a slut.
SCENARIO I: MESSAGE SET II

**High Complexity Messages**

Do you really understand how I am feeling when I look across the room and I see you—the guy that I am totally in love with and want to be with forever—kissing someone else? I don't understand why you would do that! Remember Brian, my ex boyfriend? Well he was there at the party. I was so mad at you that we got together and ended up kissing. I just wanted to get that out before you heard it from someone else. (Then I'd let him respond and think for a while.) Well, I'm actually lying to you about Brian, but all that you just felt, I was feeling it 10 times harder because it was real and actually happening in front of my face.

I just don't understand what is going on that you weren't hurt by that. If you saw me kissing another guy—you wouldn't be mad? So, I am understanding that I can go right now and get together with the next person that walks through the door? Is that correct to assume? I think that you are just saying that, but you'd be REAL hurt if I actually did it. I think we should try it then.

**Medium Complexity Messages**

I can't believe that you would sit here and kiss this other girl in a room where our friends are knowing I was going to show up. I told you that if you ever did this to me again, I would be forced to look at our relationship in a different way. I can't believe you do not respect me enough to tell me if you don't want to be with me.

I love you, but I can't do this anymore. If you want to be with other girls, break up with me. I want someone that only wants me. I know I deserve that. If you don't think I do, maybe I made a mistake in choosing you. I hope you know how bad you hurt me.

**Low Complexity Messages**

What the hell are you doing? We just talked about this the other day? I can't even trust you! You know how much I care for you, and you treat me like shit! Why would you do this? Do you want to just throw away this past year? I don't understand you.

This is one of the worst feelings of my life. Can you please tell me why you did this? Please tell me. Are you not happy with our relationship? Do you really like this guy? Did I do something wrong? I don't think I did, but if I did, please tell me. I wish you could feel my pain.
SCENARIO I: MESSAGE SET III

**High Complexity Messages**

You are a total bastard with no regard for my feelings. You've disrespected me and yourself time and time again, and you're making yourself look like a complete asshole. Everybody saw what you did... you think they don't know? Then you're stupid. This isn't how you're supposed to act in life you idiot, and if you keep on doing stupid shit like this, you're gonna get fucked in the end. Oh you'd like that, huh? Well you are a whore, you're dirty, sick, and diseased—don't even try to excuse this one. There is no excuse. You aren't worth it. I can't believe it took me this long to figure out. You're acting like you don't even want to be with me. So instead of screwing around, why don't you let me know, right now—you tell me what you want.

Well fuck you then. We're over. I carried your sorry ass for a year. I'd like to see you find something other than a dirty bitch for a one night stand in your lifetime, you dickhead. I can bet it won't happen either, because the whole world's gonna find out about this one, you jackass. See ya.

**Medium Complexity Messages**

Whatever bitch—if you think you can keep doing this, you're wrong. Why are you kissing them? You really are hurting me—and did you think I wouldn't find out? Jesus—I was going to the same party as you. I don't know if I can forget about this one.

All right, fuck you. Go ahead and try to do better than me. Nobody's gonna put up with your shit like I did.

**Low Complexity Messages**

What the fuck?! Why do you do this shit? Did your parents not give you enough attention or are you an all out slut?

Fuck off.
SCENARIO I: MESSAGE SET IV

High Complexity Messages

You disgust me right now. You absolutely DISGUST me. You have a girlfriend who you love. Did that momentarily slip your mind? Maybe we should take a minute to briefly go over the rules of being in a relationship: You don't kiss other girls!! My God, I am humiliated right now—in the middle of a party for God's sake! My FRIEND'S party! I am so hurt. I am so disgusted. And I am so mad at myself for thinking you would change!! You're nothing but a piece of shit.

Think for a minute how you would feel if this happened to you. Go ahead. Picture it. Picture me KISSING another guy. Feel the pit in your stomach—that burning aching feeling. Feel your heart breaking, you bastard. But you'd NEVER have to worry about this because I have DECENCY. You have some serious, serious problems. You've got some growing up to do. I now officially give you permission to kiss whomever you want—because you're not kissing these lips anymore!

Medium Complexity Messages

I can't believe you did that. You are my girlfriend and have no right to kiss somebody else. You are a slut and can never be trusted.

You fucking slut. I came into a party and you're drunk and can't wait for me so you kiss somebody else. Why don't you go screw him and after that go screw yourself. You make me sick, go to hell!

Low Complexity Messages

What the fuck do you think you're doing? I thought we talked about this. You're a little slut. What the fuck's wrong with a handshake? Fuck you.

If you can't straighten your nympho attitude out, then we're through.
SCENARIO II: MESSAGE SET I

High Complexity Messages

Hi. (little sarcastic and disgusted laugh) I'm glad to see you're feeling better. I CANNOT believe you. If you canceled on me because you were sick, that would be one thing. If you told me you wanted to go out with your friends-THAT would be one thing. But you feel the need to LIE to me? And this isn't the first time this has happened? Something is truly wrong with YOU and with our RELATIONSHIP if you see no problem in you doing this. I really do not understand you sometimes. Do you have ANY IDEA how this makes me feel? About you? About the quality of our relationship? About your opinion of me?! If you feel that you don't see your friends enough, if you think I would be upset if you were to tell me that you wanted to go out with them-These are things I want to TALK ABOUT. But when you LIE to me—you're opening up a WHOLE NEW AREA. All that does is make ME hurt and unable to trust you.

Hello? Are you human? I mean, do you care AT ALL about how I feel? Or are you concerned only with yourself? My friends thought you were sick, they took me out, and YOU'RE HERE!! Do you know how HUMILIATED I FEEL?! HOW HURT I AM?! That you have to lie to me, sneak around behind my back?! You see, I had this misconception all along that you were SOMEWHAT mature, that you were truthful, and that you thought even just a little-about OTHERS and not only yourself. Unfortunately, these qualities are REQUIRED of a good relationship!! So, until you think you're capable of considering someone ELSE'S feelings . . . take care of YOURSELF.

Medium Complexity Messages

Why do you keep lying to me about this? If you want to go out with your friends, just tell me. We had plans, and you just blew me off again. And you lied. I'm probably going to go cry now, because I'm dating such an ass. I hope you have fun with your friends, bastard.

You don't care about this relationship, do you? You like knowing I'm pissed at you and feeling like you hat me or something, don't you? Because every time you do this, I feel like I'm not important enough to have my feelings considered. You don't care about me. You're more interested in your friends than me. I feel horrible, and it's all your fault.

Low Complexity Messages

You are a bad, bad person. I can't do this anymore. I'm sleeping with your best friend.

You're a lousy lay and your breath smells bad.
SCENARIO II: MESSAGE SET II

High Complexity Messages

If you can't have the fucking balls to admit you'd rather go out with your friends, you might as well just go fuck yourself. Why don't you just tell the fucking truth? What is your deal with the truth? What if every time I wanted to go out with my friends I lied and told you I was sick? How about from now on I just lie to you about everything, how does that sound? You are as weak as a snail, and you have no fucking backbone.

You think I really care about you? You're wrong. I think you are the most worthless piece of shit I have ever come across in my entire life. You're so low, such a piece of shit that I don't even know why I bother.

Medium Complexity Messages

Why do you need to lie to me? I have always told you the truth and I expect the same from you. You are ridiculous to think I wouldn't give you time with your friends. I need the same with my friends. Plans are just plans—I can always rearrange them. I can't believe you think I am that overbearing. How can I trust you? Trust is the basis of all relationships and you're fucking it up.

You have lost my trust. You have hurt me, and you have embarrassed me. For that, I will never forgive you.

Low Complexity Messages

Listen bitch if you're going to lie to me, then you can go fuck yourself.

You pathetic piece of shit. I put up with your horrible performance in bed for what? For your slut ass to come and lie to me.
SCENARIO II: MESSAGE SET III

**High Complexity Messages**

What is your problem, you're such a liar! I thought we'd been through this—You know I'd be a lot less angry if you'd just told me the truth you're not going to disappoint me, but you HAVE now. Do you have some sort of mental/emotional issue it's really pissing me off so either get over it or tell me what the hell is the matter!

You dumbass, are you listening to me? You must look pretty dumb to your friends by ditching me by lying—are you embarrassed by me? Because I'm really starting to be embarrassed by you. Would you like it if I lied to you? God you are a child, I'm not going to deal with this anymore so knock it off or fuck off—this issue should not be such a big deal. Just don't LIE! My God!

**Medium Complexity Messages**

I really don't understand why this keeps happening. Do you not enjoy going out to dinner with me? I know I don't like it when you cancel our dates to go out with your friends, but it makes me much more upset when you lie about it. How am I ever supposed to trust you when you frequently lie to me without a second thought? I understand your need to just hang out with friends sometimes—so do I—but if that's the case, JUST TELL ME THE TRUTH! You will see I will be much more sympathetic.

If that didn't get through to you, I really don't know what to say. You cannot be in a committed relationship and lie about what you're doing—it's not possible! Please realize that I won't be nearly as upset, regardless of what you tell me, if I know it's the truth.

**Low Complexity Messages**

First of all, how can you do this to me? You know we have been planning this special dinner for so long. I have worked so hard at my job to earn money so that I can take you to nice places, then you do this to me. I feel like I don't know you. We're supposed to be in a trusting relationship and you always lie to me. Why do you do this to me?

If you can't be sympathetic to the way I feel, I should not have sympathy towards you, but I guess I'm not as cold as you. Sometimes I just can't figure you out. You hurt me all the time. Why am I wasting my time with you?
SCENARIO II: MESSAGE SET IV

**High Complexity Messages**

I'm not mad that you felt like you wanted to hang out with your friends, I'm just mad that after all this time you can't be honest with me. I would be a little **hurt** if you didn't want to see me, but it doesn't compare to how angry I **am** that you lied to hick me. Relationships are about trust, and I don't like that I can't trust you to just be honest with me even if you think I'll get a little mad. How would you feel if I did this to you? And tonight was a special date, too, why couldn't you pull this **crap** on an ordinary day? Then I would be angry—but not AS disappointed.

If you cared about me the way I care about you, you would not have done this. I have to question how serious our relationship really is if you can see that I **am** this angry and hurt and you still have nothing to say about it. And if you apologize—I want you to mean it—which means really see what you did wrong and not do it again. I hate when we talk and just go in circles. Why are you so inconsiderate? You are such a jerk-do you really not have any feelings?

**Medium Complexity Messages**

Oh so you're sick, are you? I just want to know what doctor you go to? Because I want to also go to a doctor that prescribes that I should LIE and go out with my friends to get over my illness! You've done this before and I told you that you don't have to lie to me. If you don't want to be with me, you just have to tell me what you want to do instead. Could you be any more thick headed? I just can't figure out your idiotic reasoning.

What if I did the same thing to you? Well, we both know that I wouldn't, because I'm a decent person with reasonable thinking. I think that you're completely screwed up in the head, and you need some definite help.

**Low Complexity Messages**

Why the fuck do you cancel dinner plans and tell me that you're sick, then show up partying with your friends. If you didn't want to go out to **dinner**, you could have just told me! You don't have to lie and pretend that you're sick and have me **worry**. I can't believe that you did that.

Do you even give a shit that I'm pissed off right now. What the **fuck** is the matter with you? Go fuck yourself!
Appendix F

WAVE TWO TEST BOOKLET
Please provide the following information before completing the rest of this survey.

Sex:  Male  Female (circle one)

Age:  

Sexual Orientation:  Homosexual  Heterosexual  Bisexual

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?  Yes  No

If yes, how long have you been involved?  

INSTRUCTIONS: On the following pages, you will be presented with three sets of messages (two messages in each set) and asked to respond to a series of questions about each message. These messages were produced by real men and women who were asked to imagine themselves in a situation similar to the scenario described below. Please take a few minutes to read over the scenario twice before proceeding to the messages and questions on the following pages. Gender neutral names were used in the scenario because some of the messages that follow were produced by men and some were produced by women. The gender of the message recipient is unimportant; we simply want your reactions to the nature of the messages.

Chris and Pat have been involved in a heterosexual relationship for a little over a year. Although they have some minor problems in their relationship that are typical of all couples, things are pretty good between them. Last night, Chris and Pat agreed to meet at a party one of their friends was throwing. There were a lot of people at the party, and at first, Chris didn’t see Pat anywhere. After wandering around the party for some time, however, Chris spotted Pat sitting on the arm of a chair across the room, talking to someone Chris had never seen before. As Chris walked through the crowd toward them, Pat leaned down and kissed the person! This has happened a few times in the past. In fact, they just had a discussion about it last weekend, and Pat promised it would never happen again. Now there they were again—Pat was kissing another person!

Last night, Chris was VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated. Moreover, Chris wanted to make Pat feel the same way. On the following pages are various things Chris could have said to try to hurt Pat. Please read each message and then carefully respond to ALL of the questions that follow them. Remember, Chris was very hurt, angry, and frustrated and wanted to HURT Pat.
Suppose Chris said ... "You disgust me right now. You absolutely DISGUST me. You have a girlfriend who you love. Did that momentarily slip your mind? Maybe we should take a minute to briefly go over the rules of being in a relationship: You don't kiss other girls!! My God, I am humiliated right now—in the middle of a party for God's sake! My FRIEND'S party! I am so hurt. I am so disgusted. And I am so mad at myself for thinking you would change!! You're nothing but a piece of shit."

REMEMBER: In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.

1. How effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

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2. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to reflect on why his/her actions hurt CHRIS?

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3. How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?

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4. How damaging do you think this message would be to PAT'S self-image?

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7. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to try to see things from CHRIS' perspective?

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8. How hurtful is this message?

1 Very hurtful  2  3  4  5  6  7 Not at all hurtful

9. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

1 Not at all angry  2  3  4  5  6  7 Very angry

10. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat's relationship?

1 Not at all damaging  2  3  4  5  6  7 Very damaging

11. How upsetting do you think this message is?

1 Very upsetting  2  3  4  5  6  7 Not at all upsetting

12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?

1 Not at all  2  3  4  5  6  7 Very much

13. How nasty is this message?

1 Not at all nasty  2  3  4  5  6  7 Very nasty

14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT'S perspective in this situation?

1 Not at all  2  3  4  5  6  7 Very much

Suppose Pat didn't seem very affected by the previous message, so Chris came back with ... "Think for a minute how you would feel if this happened to you. Go ahead. Picture it. Picture me KISSING another guy. Feel the pit in your stomach—that burning aching feeling. Feel your heart breaking, you bastard. But you'd NEVER have to worry about this because I have DECENCY. You have some serious, serious problems. You've got some growing up to do. I now officially give you permission to kiss whomever you want—because you're not kissing these lips anymore!"

REMEMBER: In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.
1. How effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

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9. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

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10. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat's relationship?

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11. How upsetting do you think this message is?

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12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?

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13. How nasty is this message?

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14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT'S perspective in this situation?

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Suppose Chris said... "I can't believe you did that. You are my girlfriend and have no right to kiss somebody else. You are a slut and can never be trusted."

REMEMBER: In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.

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2. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

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3. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat's relationship?

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5. **How** effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

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6. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to reflect on why **his/her** actions hurt **CHRIS**?

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7. How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?

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8. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to try to see things from **CHRIS' perspective**?

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9. How damaging do you think this message would be to PAT's self-image?

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10. How mean is this message?

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11. How realistic is this message?

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12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how **his/her** actions could affect the relationship?

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13. How nasty is this message?

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14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of **PAT’S perspective** in this situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all  Neutral Very much

*Suppose Pat didn’t seem very affected by the previous message, so Chris came back with ...
"You fucking slut. I came into a party and you're drunk and can't wait for me so you kiss somebody else. Why don't you go screw him and after that go screw yourself. You make me sick, go to hell!*"

**REMEMBER:** In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.

1. How hurtful is this message?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very hurtful  Neutral Not at all hurtful

2. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all angry  Neutral Very angry

3. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat’s relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all damaging  Neutral Very damaging

4. How upsetting do you think this message is?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Very upsetting  Neutral Not at all upsetting

5. How effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all effective  Neutral Very effective

6. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to reflect on why **his/her** actions hurt CHRIS?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all  Neutral Very much
7. How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?

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9. How damaging do you think this message would be to PAT'S self-image?

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12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?

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13. How nasty is this message?

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14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT'S perspective in this situation?

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Suppose Chris said ... "What the fuck do you think you're doing? I thought we talked about this. You're a little slut. What the fuck's wrong with a handshake? Fuck you."

REMEMBER: In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.
1. How realistic is this message?

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2. How effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

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<td>Very effective</td>
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3. How damaging do you think this message would be to PAT's self-image?

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4. How mean is this message?

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5. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?

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6. How hurtful is this message?

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<tr>
<td>Very hurtful</td>
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<td>Not at all hurtful</td>
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7. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

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<tr>
<td>Not at all angry</td>
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<td>Very angry</td>
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8. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat's relationship?

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<td>Very damaging</td>
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9. How upsetting do you think this message is?

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10. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to reflect on why his/her actions hurt CHRIS?

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11. How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?

Ver... 1 Very easy 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very difficult

12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to try to see things from CHRIS' perspective?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very much

13. How nasty is this message?

Not at all nasty 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very nasty

14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT'S perspective in this situation?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very much

Suppose Pat didn't seem very affected by the previous message, so Chris came back with...
... "If you can't straighten your nympho attitude out, then we're through."

REMEMBER. In the following questions, PAT is the person who kissed someone else and CHRIS is the person who produced this message.

1. How realistic is this message?

Not at all realistic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very realistic

2. How effective do you think this message would be at hurting PAT?

Not at all effective 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very effective

3. How damaging do you think this message would be to PAT'S self-image?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Very much

4. How mean is this message?

Very mean 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Neutral Not at all mean
5. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to think about how his/her actions could affect the relationship?

1 Not at all 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very much

6. How hurtful is this message?

1 Very hurtful 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Not at all hurtful

7. How angry do you think this message would make PAT?

1 Not at all angry 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very angry

8. How damaging do you think this message would be to Chris and Pat's relationship?

1 Not at all damaging 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very damaging

9. How upsetting do you think this message is?

1 Very upsetting 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Not at all upsetting

10. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to reflect on why his/her actions hurt CHRIS?

1 Not at all 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very much

11. How easy was it to imagine someone saying this message?

1 Very easy 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very difficult

12. To what extent does this message encourage PAT to try to see things from CHRIS' perspective?

1 Not at all 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very much

13. How nasty is this message?

1 Not at all nasty 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very nasty

14. To what extent does this message reflect an awareness of PAT's perspective in this situation?

1 Not at all 2 3 4 Neutral 5 6 7 Very much
INSTRUCTIONS: Below is a list of the messages you just read and about which you just answered several questions. Please read through the messages again and then rank order the messages from most to least hurtful. In other words, place a 1 on the line next to the message you think is the MOST hurtful, a 2 on the line next to the message that is a little less hurtful than that one, and so on. Finally, a 6 should be placed on the line next to the message you think is the LEAST hurtful.

____ You disgust me right now. You absolutely DISGUST me. You have a girlfriend who you love. Did that momentarily slip your mind? Maybe we should take a minute to briefly go over the rules of being in a relationship: You don't kiss other girls!! My god, I am humiliated right now—in the middle of a party for God's sake! My FRIEND'S party! I am so hurt. I am so disgusted. And I am so mad at myself for thinking you would change!! You're nothing but a piece of shit.

____ Think for a minute how you would feel if this happened to you. Go ahead. Picture it. Picture me KISSING another guy. Feel the pit in your stomach—that burning aching feeling. Feel your heart breaking, you bastard. But you'd NEVER have to worry about this because I have DECENCY. You have some serious, serious problems. You've got some growing up to do. I now officially give you permission to kiss whomever you want—because you're not kissing these lips anymore!

____ I can't believe you did that. You are my girlfriend and have no right to kiss somebody else. You are a slut and can never be trusted.

____ You fucking slut. I came into a party and you're drunk and can't wait for me so you kiss somebody else. Why don't you go screw him and after that go screw yourself. You make me sick, go to hell!

____ What the fuck do you think you're doing? I thought we talked about this. You're a little slut. What the fuck's wrong with a handshake? Fuck you.

If you can't straighten your nympho attitude out, then we're through
Instructions: We are interested in learning how people describe others whom they know. Our concern here is with the habits and mannerisms—in general, with the personal characteristics rather than the physical traits—which characterize a number of different people.

In order to make sure you are describing real people, we have set down a list of two different categories of people. In the blank beside each category below, please write the initials for a person you know who fits into that category (i.e., you can’t think of the same person for both categories).

1. A person your own age whom you like.        
2. A person your own age whom you dislike.      

Spend a few minutes mentally comparing and contrasting the people you have in mind for each category. Think of their habits, their beliefs, their mannerisms, their relations to others, any characteristics they may have which you might use to describe them to other people.

Do NOT turn the page until you have really thought about these two people for a few minutes.
Please place the initials you have used to designate the person in category 1 here: ________________

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her. Pay particular attention to his/her habits, beliefs, ways of treating others, mannerisms, and similar attributes. Remember, describe him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the kind of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:

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Please place the initials for the person in category 2 here: _______...

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her. Pay particular attention to his/her habits, beliefs, ways of treating others, mannerisms, and similar attributes. Remember, describe him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the kind of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only about five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:

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Appendix G

WAVE II SCENARIO DESCRIPTIONS
SCENARIO I: Partner Kisses Someone Else

Chris and Pat have been involved in a heterosexual relationship for a little over a year. Although they have some minor problems in their relationship that are typical of all couples, things are pretty good between them. Last night, Chris and Pat agreed to meet at a party one of their friends was throwing. There were a lot of people at the party, and at first, Chris didn’t see Pat anywhere. After wandering around the party for some time, however, Chris spotted Pat sitting on the arm of a chair across the room, talking to someone Chris had never seen before. As Chris walked through the crowd toward them, Pat leaned down and kissed the person! This has happened a few times in the past. In fact, they just had a discussion about it last weekend, and Pat promised it would never happen again. Now there they were again—Pat was kissing another person!

Last night, Chris was VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated. Moreover, Chris wanted to make Pat feel the same way. On the following pages are various things Chris could have said to try to hurt Pat. Please read each message and then carefully respond to ALL of the questions that follow them. Remember, Chris was very hurt, angry, and frustrated and wanted to HURT Pat.

SCENARIO II: Partner Breaks an Important Date

Chris and Pat have been involved in a heterosexual relationship for a little over a year. Although they have some minor problems in their relationship that are typical of all couples, things are pretty good between them. Last night, Chris and Pat had plans to go out for a special date, but four hours before they were supposed to go out, Pat phoned and canceled with the excuse of not feeling well and wanting to go to sleep. Sympathetic but
a bit disappointed, Chris decided to go out with friends instead of sitting home alone worrying about Pat.

While out at a bar with these friends, who does Chris run into? Pat! Interesting place for a person to be when they're sick! Pat has done this in the past—canceled dates for one reason or another and then gone out with friends—and has been told that Chris does not like it. The problem isn't that Pat wants to go out with friends instead of Chris—everyone needs time with their own friends—the problem is that Pat feels the need to lie about it. So there was Pat who was supposed to be sick (again!) at home, unable to go out for a romantic dinner with Chris, partying with friends!

Last night, Chris was VERY hurt, VERY angry, and VERY frustrated. Moreover, Chris wanted to make Pat feel the same way. On the following pages are various things Chris could have said to try to hurt Pat. Please read each message and then carefully respond to ALL of the questions that follow them. Remember, Chris was very hurt, angry, and frustrated and wanted to HURT Pat.