

The moderating role of emotional skills between jealousy and mate retention tactics

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to investigate the moderating role of emotional skills – emotion regulation, emotion understanding and emotional intelligence – between jealousy in a close relationship and employing mate retention tactics.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The study involved a group of 196 Polish nationals (111 women and 85 men) aged between 19 and 62, who were involved in romantic relationships of the following types: dating relationship, cohabitating, engaged or married. The following research tools were used: the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), the Emotion Understanding Test, INTE questionnaire, the Mate Retention Inventory – Short Form (MRI-SF) and the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale.

RESULTS

Emotion suppression was identified as a modifier between jealousy and the use of acts linked to the direct guarding

tactic, and between jealousy and acts associated with the public signals of possession tactic. The ability to suppress emotion contributes to an increased readiness to employ direct guarding at the time of a high jealousy level.

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that the moderators of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics were emotional suppression and emotion understanding. Emotional functioning is important for the well-being of relationships, especially for dealing with jealousy.

KEY WORDS

jealousy; mate retention tactics; emotional skills; emotion regulation

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS – A: Study design · B: Data collection · C: Statistical analysis · D: Data interpretation · E: Manuscript preparation · F: Literature search · G: Funds collection

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Mandal, E., & Latusek, A. (2024). The moderating role of emotional skills between jealousy and mate retention tactics. *Health Psychology Report*. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr/185886>

RECEIVED 07.12.2023 · REVIEWED 16.02.2024 · ACCEPTED 09.03.2024 · ONLINE PUBLICATION 10.06.2024



BACKGROUND

Emotion regulation refers to the processes that influence the manner in which individuals experience and express emotions (Gross, 1998). It encompasses changes within the emotion dynamics, delay of emotional response, the timeline of an emotional episode and its intensity as well as duration and the switch of onset of behavioral or physiological reactions. While emotion regulation is often understood as control of negative emotions, it can – in fact – concern positive emotions as well (Parrott, 1993). Emotion regulation may occur consciously (e.g., when changing the subject in an awkward conversation or frowning with dissatisfaction); it may, however, be unconscious when, for instance, we laugh when a person is trying to jokingly flirt with our partner (Cole, 1986).

One of the main purposes of emotion regulation is the modification of emotional reactions. It seems to be a valid question, whether reappraisal of an event or phenomenon and emotion suppression differ in terms of their affective consequences. The ability to regulate emotions facilitates taking actions that change the probability of being in a context conducive to specific emotions (Schetsche et al., 2023). Research shows that emotional skills are extremely important in close relationships (Mandal, 2008).

Based on the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 2002), efforts to inhibit emotion regulation by reappraising one's emotions should alter the trajectory of the entire emotional reaction, by leading to a weaker expressive, behavioral and physiological reaction. Suppression, on the other hand, should reduce the expressive behavior but should not inhibit the emotional response; on the contrary, it may possibly heighten the physiological reaction due to the underlying effort to suppress the ongoing expressive behavior.

Emotions arise when something of significant importance is happening to an individual. Often, the goals that drive our emotions are transient (Clore, 1994), as, for instance, in the case of waiting for the results of an important exam or when cheering for our favorite sports team to win. Other times, those goals may be linked to some great, long-lasting values that have to do with our health, close relations and long-term projects in our career development. It often happens that many of those emotion-inducing events require a high level of cognitive skills (Richards & Gross, 2000). Under such circumstances, emotions are likely to require regulation – suppression – or should be reevaluated – subject to cognitive reframing. Emotional suppression is a form of regulation that requires a high level of self-control during an emotional episode. This type of monitoring of one's emotions entails a constant expenditure of cognitive resources which, in turn, may deplete resources that are available for individuals to process the experienc-

es that they go through. In contrast, since cognitive reappraisal occurs at an early stage of the emotion generation process, the strategy does not seem to require a continuous self-regulation effort.

Theoreticians, starting with Charles Darwin (1871), have claimed that emotional behaviors play an important part in facilitating social interactions. This notion was confirmed in research by Campos et al. (1994) which included functional emotion analyses. Cognitive reframing and emotion suppression may lead to a number of social consequences. Suppression decreases both negative and positive emotional behaviors, thus concealing the signals linked to experiencing a particular emotion that would not have gone unnoticed otherwise. This may potentially have negative consequences and affect the quality of social interactions, as the necessity to control one's own facial expressions and voice cues associated with certain emotions may compromise the ability to properly interpret the emotional signals given by interlocutors. Cognitive reframing decreases the negative experience and the expression of emotions and does not seem to be as emotionally exhausting as emotion suppression.

The ability to understand emotions is the ability to successfully identify and name one's own emotions (Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002). Emotion understanding, above all, serves as an effective means to form cause-effect relationships (event-emotion). Individuals with a high-level skill in understanding emotions are able to categorize their emotions properly and link certain emotions and situations together. The behavioral consequences of a poor understanding of emotion render this skill particularly adaptive (Saarni, 1999). In problematic situations, superior emotion comprehension may produce more effective solutions. In addition, individuals with a better understanding of emotion and a greater ability to empathize with other people or relate to certain situations tend to be less prone to act poorly when provoked.

Emotional intelligence relates to individuals' capacity to identify their emotion and be able to recognize other people's emotions and modify them to suit particular circumstances or situations (Mayer et al., 2004). It is expected that such an ability should correlate with superior social and romantic relationships. In this regard, it has been observed that a higher level of emotional intelligence is associated with better relations within partnerships, a decreased level of aggression and an overall greater life satisfaction (Smith et al., 2008). Individuals higher in emotional intelligence engage in more prosocial behaviors (Frederickson et al., 2012). The role that emotional intelligence plays in romantic relationships has not gone unnoticed – greater emotional intelligence is positively correlated with the ability to foster new relationships and to engage in flirting; therefore, it

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is suspected that emotional intelligence is of key importance in terms of the effectiveness of securing romantic partners and retaining them.

Research by Apostolou et al. (2019) demonstrated that emotional intelligence, the dark triad and jealousy are significant predictors of mating performance. Specifically, higher emotional intelligence and narcissism were associated with higher scores in terms of securing a partner. Emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of both a romantic relationship and the ability to retain a mate. The obtained effect values indicated that emotional intelligence affected mate retention to a greater extent than it did in the case of relationship initiation.

Jealousy in a close relationship is defined as a combination of thoughts, feelings and actions that are likely to cause an individual to feel threatened when their self-value is concerned. They may compromise a romantic relationship's sense of stability and impair its quality. Jealousy may be triggered by signs of a partner's engagement in another romantic relationship with another person (Sheets et al., 1997). These signs may be of realistic or imagined nature. Jealousy in a close relationship tends to have a derogatory connotation, as it is associated with a range of destructive incidents and behaviors (Aronson & Pines, 1980; Barnett et al., 1995). At the same time, it may serve as an adaptation that allows the relationship to persist (Buss, 2000). Evolutionary psychologists formulated a hypothesis that jealousy is an emotional functional adaptation whose purpose is to resolve recurring reproductive problems (Buss, 2013). It has been argued that jealousy may alarm an individual about a possible threat to a romantic relationship. It is likely to occur in the presence of people who seem potentially dangerous to the relationship. Jealousy drives behaviors whose purpose is to prevent a partner's infidelity. It is, therefore, an evolutionarily developed adaptation that protects the relationship from disintegrating.

Being involved in a close relationship provides both women and men with a sense of security and stability. It is beneficial for both genders, and the inability to forge a close relationship can cause people to suffer social and emotional consequences. The dissolution of a romantic relationship ranks among the most difficult experiences in a person's life (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). It seems that, for this reason, people seem to be prompted to employ strategies aimed at keeping their partners involved in the relationship. According to the concept of mate retention tactics formulated by Buss (1988), these strategies vary from *vigilance to violence* and are classified as follows: direct guarding (vigilance, concealment of mate, monopolization of mate's time); intersexual negative inducements (infidelity threat, punishment of mate's threat to infidelity, emotional manipulation, commitment manipulation, and derogation of competi-

tors); positive inducements (resource display, sexual inducements, enhancement of physical appearance, love and caring, submission and debasement); public signals of possession (verbal signals of possession, physical signals of possession, possessive ornamentation); intrasexual negative inducements (derogation of mate to competitors, intrasexual threats, violence).

Experiencing emotion may be – depending on the context – beneficial or detrimental. Emotions prove helpful in terms of management of sensory acquisition (Susskind et al., 2008), facilitate decision making, aid in choosing the best course of action (Schwarz & Clore, 1983), provide information about other people's behavioral intentions and drive socially desirable behaviors that alter the situation that triggered the occurrence of emotions (Averill, 1980). Some classic examples of adaptive emotions are episodes of fear that help people avoid certain dangers or episodes of anger that propel people into action to fight for a cause that they care about.

Emotions become detrimental when their intensity, duration or frequency are inappropriate (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). Unfortunately, there exists a wide range of harmful emotions, including anger, that may lead to hurting oneself or a loved one, such as laughter that can render a person deeply offended or cases of anxiety that will nag a person relentlessly at work or at home. These useless emotions become the stimulation to concentrate on the workings of emotion regulation. Typically, people report on their attempts to curb negative emotions with particular attention to the behavioral aspects of anger, sadness or fear (Gross et al., 2006). Individuals tend to point to trying to manage positive emotions as well – particularly love. These reports are consistent with the traditional hedonic descriptions of emotion regulation according to which people are motivated to decrease the negative states and enhance the positive ones (Larsen, 2000).

The current study verified whether jealousy toward a partner in a close relationship can be controlled through the moderating role of emotional skills: emotion regulation, emotion understanding and emotional intelligence.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

PARTICIPANTS

The study involved 196 individuals (111 women and 85 men) who were at the time of the study in close relationships. The mean age of participants was $M = 29.62$ years (min = 19, max = 62). Among the respondents 61 (31.1%) participants were married, 108 (55.1%) participants were involved in a "dating" type of relationship, 18 participants (9.2%) were cohabi-

tating with their partner, 7 participants (3.6%) were engaged, and 2 participants did not provide information on the status of the relationship they were in. The average duration of the relationship was $M = 8.5$ years (min = 6 months, max = 41 years). In the study 59.2% of participants had secondary education, 32.1% of participants had higher education, and 7.7% of participants had vocational education.

MEASURES

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003; Polish adaptation: Kobylińska, 2015). The ERQ is a 10-item measure composed of 2 subscales: expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. Participants respond to each item using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Some of the scale's example statements are: "I keep my emotions to myself"; "When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them". The reliability of the questionnaire is $\alpha = .72$ for expressive suppression and $\alpha = .82$ for cognitive reappraisal.

Emotion Understanding Test (Polish acronym TRE; Matczak & Piekarska, 2011). The questionnaire contains 30 tasks grouped into 5 parts, each consisting of 6 closed tasks. The results are the achieved total scores based on correctly completed tasks. The test measures the ability to understand emotions and its reliability is $\alpha = .66$.

INTE (Schutte et al., 1998; Polish adaptation: Ciechanowicz et al., 2000). The questionnaire measures emotional intelligence understood as the ability to identify, understand and control one's own and other people's emotion as well as the ability to effectively use emotions to manage our own and other people's actions. The tool consists of 33 items. Each of the statements is rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The questionnaire's sample statements are: "I know when I can tell others about my personal problems"; "Feelings are the most important thing in the world". The questionnaire's reliability is $\alpha = .88$.

The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (Elphinston et al., 2011; Polish adaptation: Mandal et al., 2015). The questionnaire measures the level of romantic jealousy and the three dimensions of experiencing jealousy in a close relationship: behavioral, emotional and cognitive (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). The questionnaire has a 7-point response format. The cognitive and behavioral subscales range from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*all the time*), while the emotional subscale ranges from 1 (*very pleased*) to 7 (*very upset*). The reliability of the scale is $\alpha = .86$.

Mate Retention Inventory – Short Form (MRI-SF; Buss et al., 2008; author's translation). The inventory is a tool that examines the strategies used by individuals in a close relationship aimed at retaining their

partners. The short form contains 38 questions pertaining to 19 mate retention tactics. The answers provided by participants range from 0 (*never performed this act*) to 3 (*often performed this act*). Sample items are: "Called to make sure my partner was where she said she would be"; "Insisted that my partner spend all her free time with me". The scale's reliability is $\alpha = .91$. The reliability of the groups of mate retention tactics is as follows: direct guarding $\alpha = .73$, intersexual negative inducements $\alpha = .72$, positive inducements $\alpha = .80$, public signals of possession $\alpha = .80$, intrasexual negative inducements $\alpha = .61$.

RESULTS

Analyses were conducted into moderation of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics. The moderators were emotional skills: emotion regulation, emotional intelligence and emotion understanding. The analyses were carried out using PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2022). The discussed models are those for which emotional skills were moderating variables.

SUPPRESSION AS A MODERATOR OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEALOUSY AND DIRECT GUARDING AS A MATE RETENTION TACTIC

The first analyzed model included the moderating role of suppression as a moderator of the relationship between jealousy and direct guarding. The conducted analysis showed that the model accounts for slightly over 30% ($R^2 = .31$) of the variation of the dependent variable and fitted the data well $F(3, 192) = 28.26$, $p < .001$. The inclusion of the interaction increased the variance significantly by 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02$), $F(1, 192) = 6.61$, $p = .011$. The coefficients of the conducted regression analysis with the included interaction are shown in Table 1.

The conducted analysis showed that jealousy positively affected the level of direct guarding – as the level of jealousy increased by one unit, the level of direct guarding as a mate retention tactic increased by 0.12 units. Suppression as a mate retention tactic was not identified as a significant predictor of direct guarding. Table 2 contains detailed results of the effects of moderation at individual levels of the moderator.

The analysis demonstrated that at every moderation level there was a significant correlation between the level of jealousy and direct guarding. For each level an increase of direct guarding can be observed, parallel with an increase of jealousy. The strongest effect was identified for the lower level of emotion suppression.

Table 1*Coefficients of multiple linear regression with interaction variable for prediction of direct guarding*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Intercept	2.77	0.18	15.74	< .001	2.43	3.12
Jealousy	0.12	0.01	8.74	< .001	0.09	0.15
Suppression	0.06	0.04	1.55	.123	-0.02	0.13
Interaction	-0.01	< 0.01	-2.57	.011	-0.01	< -0.01

*Emotional skills, jealousy and mate retention tactics***Table 2***Effects of the moderating role of suppression in the relationship between jealousy and direct guarding*

Suppression	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)	0.16	0.02	8.30	< .001	0.12	0.19
Mean level	0.12	0.01	8.74	< .001	0.09	0.15
Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	0.09	0.02	4.66	< .001	0.05	0.13

SUPPRESSION AS A MODERATOR IN THE CORRELATION BETWEEN JEALOUSY AND PUBLIC SIGNALS OF POSSESSION AS A MATE RETENTION TACTIC

The subsequent analysis included the moderating role of suppression in the relationship between jealousy and public signals of possession. The conducted analysis revealed that the model accounted for slightly over 5% ($R^2 = .06$) of the dependent variable and fitted the data well $F(3, 192) = 3.72, p = .012$. The inclusion of the interaction increased the variance significantly by 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02$), $F(1, 192) = 4.02, p = .047$. Table 3 contains regression coefficients including the interaction.

The conducted analysis revealed that jealousy positively affected public signals of affection – as the jealousy level increased by one unit, the level of the mate retention tactic rose by 0.06 units. Suppression as an emotional skill did not prove to be a significant predictor of public signals of possession. The interaction of both predictors was found to be significant. Table 4 includes detailed results of the moderation effects at different moderator levels.

The analysis showed that there was a significant correlation between jealousy for lower ($t = 3.28, p = .001$) and mean ($t = 2.53, p = .012$) suppression levels. In individuals characterized by a high level of suppression, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables did not prove significant. In participants with lower and mean suppression levels, as the level of jealousy increased, so did the level of public signals of possession.

EMOTION UNDERSTANDING – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEALOUSY AND INTERSEXUAL NEGATIVE INDUCEMENTS AS A MATE RETENTION TACTIC

The next model included the moderating role of emotion understanding in the relationship between jealousy and intersexual negative inducements. The conducted analysis demonstrated that the model accounted for approximately 25% ($R^2 = .25$) of the variance of the response variable and fitted well to the data $F(3, 192) = 21.01, p < .001$. The inclusion of the interaction significantly increased the variance by 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02$), $F(1, 192) = 4.99, p = .026$. Table 5 presents the moderation analysis coefficients.

As shown in Table 5, jealousy proved a significant predictor of intersexual negative inducements ($B = 0.21, t = 7.78, p < .001$). As the level of jealousy increased by one unit, the level of this mate retention tactic increased by 0.21 units. While emotion understanding was not identified as a significant predictor of the mate retention tactic, the interaction of both predictors was identified as significant ($t = 2.25, p = .026$). Table 6 illustrates the values of the moderating effects.

The conducted analysis showed that the effect was significant for every level of moderating variable ($p < .001$). As the level of jealousy increased, the level of intersexual negative inducements also increased in participants characterized by lower (effect = 0.17), mean (effect = 0.21) and higher (effect = 0.25) levels of emotion understanding. The strongest effect was observed in participants high in emotion understanding.

Table 3*Multiple linear regression coefficients with interaction variable for prediction of public signals of possession*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Intercept	7.14	0.31	23.38	< .001	6.54	7.74
Jealousy	0.06	0.02	2.53	.012	0.01	0.11
Suppression	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	.895	-0.14	0.12
Interaction	-0.01	< 0.01	-2.00	.047	-0.02	< -0.01

Eugenia Mandal,
Anna Latusek**Table 4***Effects of the moderating role of suppression in the relationship between jealousy and public signals of possession*

Suppression	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)	0.11	0.03	3.28	.001	0.04	0.17
Mean level	0.06	0.02	2.53	.012	0.01	0.11
Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	0.02	0.03	0.48	.635	-0.05	0.08

Table 5*Multiple linear regression coefficients with interaction variable for prediction of intersexual negative inducements*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Intercept	7.99	0.30	26.22	< .001	7.39	8.59
Jealousy	0.21	0.03	7.78	< .001	0.16	0.26
Emotion understanding	0.02	0.08	0.23	.820	-0.14	0.18
Interaction	0.01	< 0.01	2.25	.026	< 0.01	0.02

Table 6*Effects of the moderating role of emotion understanding in the relationship between jealousy and intersexual negative inducements*

Emotion understanding	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)	0.17	0.03	6.74	< .001	0.12	0.22
Mean level	0.21	0.03	7.78	< .001	0.16	0.26
Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	0.25	0.04	6.44	< .001	0.18	0.33

EMOTION UNDERSTANDING AS A MODERATOR OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEALOUSY AND POSITIVE INDUCEMENTS AS A MATE RETENTION TACTIC

The last moderation analysis included emotion understanding as a moderator of the relationship be-

tween jealousy and positive inducements. The conducted analysis showed that the model accounted for approximately 9% ($R^2 = .09$) of the variance of the response variable and fitted well to the data $F(3,192) = 6.38, p = .001$. The inclusion of the interaction increased the variance significantly by 3.6% ($\Delta R^2 = .04$), $F(1, 192) = 7.50, p = .007$. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Effects of the moderating role of emotion understanding in the relationship between jealousy and positive inducements

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Intercept	15.79	0.40	39.35	< .001	15.00	16.59
Jealousy	0.15	0.04	4.14	< .001	0.08	0.22
Emotion understanding	0.21	0.11	2.01	.046	< 0.01	0.42
Interaction	0.02	0.01	2.74	.007	< 0.01	0.03

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Table 8

Effects of the moderating role of emotion understanding in the relationship between jealousy and positive inducements

Emotion understanding	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)	0.08	0.03	2.44	.016	0.02	0.15
Mean level	0.15	0.04	4.14	< .001	0.08	0.22
Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	0.21	0.05	4.16	< .001	0.11	0.32

The performed analysis demonstrated that jealousy positively affected positive inducements ($t = 4.14$, $p < .001$) – as the level of jealousy increased by one unit, the level of positive inducements rose by 0.15 units. In addition, emotion understanding was identified to be a significant predictor of the tactic as well ($t = 2.01$, $p = .046$) – as the level of emotion understanding increased by one unit, the level of positive inducements rose by 0.21 units. Interaction of both predictors proved significant ($t = 2.74$, $p = .007$) and its results are shown in Table 8.

The analysis showed that the effect of emotion understanding was significant at all moderation levels. As the level of jealousy rose, so did the level of positive inducements in participants with lower ($t = 2.44$, $p = .016$), mean ($t = 4.14$, $p < .001$) and high ($t = 4.16$, $p < .001$) levels of emotion understanding.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the moderating role of emotional skills between jealousy and mate retention tactics. Emotion suppression was identified as a moderator at low, mean and high levels between jealousy and the use of acts linked to the direct guarding tactic. Emotion suppression was also a moderator (at lower and mean levels) between jealousy and acts associated with the public signals of possession tactic.

The ability to suppress emotion contributes to an increased readiness to employ direct guarding at the

time of a high jealousy level. Direct guarding includes such acts as vigilance, concealment of mate and monopolization of time. The tactics associated with public signals of possession are: verbal and physical signals of possession and possessive ornamentation. They are constructive tactics that offer great potential in terms of retaining a partner in a close relation and the relationship's stability. Emotion suppression helps control the intensity of jealousy and take preventive and protective actions for the sake of the relationship. Suppression was not a predictor of direct guarding and public signals of possession. This result is in line with the expectations. Suppression itself does not influence the willingness to use mate retention tactics. Its role is to moderate the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics.

The second significant moderator of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics was identified to be emotion understanding. As the level of jealousy increased, so did the levels of intersexual negative inducements and positive inducements in individuals with lower, mean and higher levels of emotion understanding. Intersexual negative inducements are tactics that revolve around causing harm to potential competitors. The obtained results, although contrary to the common perception of how emotion understanding affects aggressive behaviors towards rivals (such as threats or violence), are consistent with the existing research on the correlation between emotion understanding and aggression. In fact, studies have shown that not only does emotion

understanding not decrease the readiness to deploy aggressive behaviors but – by causing individuals to feel less sorry – it increases the tendency to act aggressively. Intrasexual threats or violence against competitors are forms of overt aggression employed by aggressors who understand their emotions.

As an explanation of this phenomenon, researchers cite the notion of a skilled social manipulator (Sutton et al., 1999). It is based on the idea that certain emotional skills – emotion understanding, among others – help individuals achieve their personal goals, even if they can only be achieved through aggressive behaviors.

In line with that, similar correlations were identified between jealousy and the tactics linked to positive inducements. In jealous individuals, emotion understanding increases their readiness to display their resources, offer sexual inducements, enhance their appearance, engage in love and caring or resort to submission or debasement. As with suppression, understanding emotions was not a predictor of intersexual negative inducements. The mere understanding of emotions, however, did not reduce the willingness to use mate retention tactics among jealousy men and women; on the contrary. Understanding emotions turned out to be a moderator of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics.

Contrary to expectations, emotional intelligence was not identified as a moderator of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics. One possible reason was that the mere fact that individuals would be able to identify their emotions – for instance, jealousy – might prove insufficient when trying to modify their reaction to these emotions. Research has shown that emotional intelligence inhibits aggressive behaviors in interpersonal relations (Smith et al., 2008). Since using mate retention tactics may be a sign of aggression toward a partner or competitors, emotional intelligence was not identified as a moderator of the relationship between jealousy and the employed tactics. Both emotion suppression and emotion understanding increased the frequency of usage of mate retention tactics. Therefore, emotional skills are likely to affect the expression of relevant mate retention tactics. Emotional intelligence may be a key capacity that tends to enable flexible emotion regulation but is not an independent moderator (Double et al., 2022). Research also shows that emotional intelligence has a much greater impact on the process of mating than on ability to keep a partner (Apostolou et al., 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the present study was to determine the moderators of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics. It was found that: suppression was a moderator of the relationship between jealousy

and using direct protection, and understanding emotions was a moderator of the relationship between jealousy and mate retention tactics: intersexual negative motivation and positive motivation. Therefore it can be concluded that emotional skills such as suppressing emotions and understanding emotions are important in coping with jealousy and trying to keep a partner.

IMPLICATIONS

The primary area for application of the results obtained in this research is couples therapy. The results can also be used in psychoeducation and psychological counseling. It is important to show partners in close relationships the role of emotional functioning for the well-being of relationships, especially the importance of understanding emotions and the ability to suppress them. In many situations, this can have a positive impact on the quality of the relationship, including dealing with destructive jealousy.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study has several limitations. First, the study only includes a diverse sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population. Secondly, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and the Mate Retention Inventory were adapted to the Polish context, so the results should be interpreted with some caution. Future research should verify the results in a culture other than Poland. Third, due to the fact that understanding emotions and suppression turned out to be moderators of the relationship between jealousy and partner retention tactics, in future studies it will be worth considering analyzing their impact on the types of jealousy. Moreover, it was a self-report study, and due to possible systematic errors, an experimental form of research may be considered in the future.

DISCLOSURES

This research received no external funding. Institutional review board statement: Not applicable. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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