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Edited by Anita L. Vangelisti
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FEELING HURT IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Feeling Hurt in Close Relationships presents a synthesis of cutting-edge research and theory on hurt feelings. People hurt each other even in the closest, most satisfying relationships. What varies from one relationship to another is not whether partners hurt each other but how their relationship is affected by hurtful events. Given the potential influence of hurt feelings on people's interpersonal relationships, it is not surprising that scholars have begun to study the antecedents, processes, and outcomes associated with hurt. This collection integrates the various issues addressed by researchers, theorists, and practitioners who study the causes of hurt feelings, the interpersonal events associated with hurt, and the ways people respond to hurting and being hurt by others. To capture the breadth and depth of the literature in this area, the work of scholars from a variety of disciplines – including social psychology, communication, sociology, and family studies – is highlighted.

Anita L. Vangelisti is the Jesse H. Jones Centennial Professor of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work focuses on the associations between communication and emotion in the context of close, personal relationships. She has published numerous articles and chapters and has edited or authored several books. Vangelisti has served on the editorial boards of more than a dozen scholarly journals. She has received recognition for her research from the National Communication Association, the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, and the International Association for Relationship Research.

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Advances in Personal Relationships

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Although scholars from a variety of disciplines have written and conversed about the importance of personal relationships for decades, the emergence of personal relationships as a field of study is relatively recent. *Advances in Personal Relationships* represents the culmination of years of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work on personal relationships. Sponsored by the International Association for Relationship Research, the series offers readers cutting-edge research and theory in the field. Contributing authors are internationally known scholars from a variety of disciplines, including social psychology, clinical psychology, communication, history, sociology, gerontology, and family studies. Volumes include integrative reviews, conceptual pieces, summaries of research programs, and major theoretical works. *Advances in Personal Relationships* presents first-rate scholarship that is both provocative and theoretically grounded. The theoretical and empirical work described by authors will stimulate readers and advance the field by offering new ideas and retooling old ones. The series will be of interest to upper division undergraduate students, graduate students, researchers, and practitioners.

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FOREWORD

DANIEL PERLMAN

Hurt feelings are at the bottom of our existence. If left covered, pushed down, and avoided they can produce dangerous personal and interpersonal outcomes. It is doubtful whether scholars and clinicians in psychology can continue to ignore these feelings.

L. L'Abate, this volume

Think about it: When was the last time you were hurt in a close relationship? Who was it who hurt you? What led up to it? How severe was the hurt you experienced? What interpretations and explanations did you have for what the other person did? How did you feel initially? What did you do? How did the other person respond? Did your feelings change? Was the incident resolved? Questions of this sort are what this book is all about: It examines the feelings of hurt that we experience in our relationships.

HURT: ITS NATURE AND PREVALENCE

Throughout the book, there are several definitions of hurt. A useful starting point for several contributors is editor Anita Vangelisti's statement that hurt is "a feeling that occurs as a result of a person being emotionally injured by another" (Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005, p. 446). Thus the hurt of concern in this volume is a reaction to the interaction between two people. The reaction is in the negative part of the emotional spectrum, with the outcomes often – but not necessarily – being negative.

There are multiple views of what constitutes the core of relational hurt. Vangelisti (2001) used the notion of relational transgression, a person's sense that their partner has violated relational norms or rules, victimized them in some way, or heightened their sense of vulnerability. Leary and Leder (this volume) contend that a central aspect of hurt is relationship devaluation, wanting a partner to value the relationships more than he or she does. Attachment theorists see hurt as stemming from the threats that interpersonal events pose for one's positive views of self (e.g., "I'm not worthy of love") and others

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(“My partner isn’t available,” “My partner isn’t trustworthy”) (Feeney, this volume). It is not too far of a stretch to imagine that these views may have complementary aspects (e.g., when relational transgressions occur, people feel their relationship is being devalued). Furthermore, at an underlying process level, all these authors share in common the assumption that the experience of hurt is filtered through people’s perceptions and appraisals rather than a direct response to the other person’s actions *per se*.

Reports of the frequency of hurt vary depending on the population, the definition of hurt used, the data collection method employed, and so on. At the higher end, Mills and Piotrowski (this volume) report that mothers interacting with preschool children experience an aversive event every few minutes, with major events occurring up to three times an hour. At the lower end, over the course of a 3-week diary study, Feeney (see Chapter 15) found that dating and married couples reported an average of about four hurtful events, with more of those events being reported from the victim’s than the perpetrator’s perspective. Whatever the exact count, hurt is common in close relationships.

THE PLACE OF HURT IN THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The study of hurt fits into the larger landscape of research on close relationships. With intellectual roots that can be traced back to antiquity and empirical roots dating back to the late 1800s, the area of personal relationships has flourished during the past 30 years. As in this volume, it is a multidisciplinary, multinational endeavor. Contributor Lu L’Abate published an early comment on the value of confronting hurt as a means of achieving intimacy (L’Abate, 1977). Vangelisti’s 1994 chapter “Messages that Hurt” was a seminal contribution that triggered contemporary interest in hurt within relationships. This was in Cupach and Spitzberg’s *The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication*, a volume that awakened concern with the aversive, negative aspect of relationships. Thus, the study of hurt is part of a more general thrust of recent scholarly work on the problematic aspects of relationships such as abuse, bereavement, betrayal, conflict, deception, divorce, infidelity, jealousy, loneliness, peer rejection, stalking, and unrequited love. As chapters in the current volume testify, there are links among these phenomena (DeWall, Baumeister, & Masicampo; Caughlin, Scott, & Miller; DePaulo, Morris, & Sternglanz; Allan & Harrison; Spitzberg; Card, Isaacs, & Hodges). For example, infidelity typically leads to hurt, whereas lies are often told to spare the feelings of others.

Despite the interwoven aspects of the dark side of relationships, hurt is important in its own right for at least three reasons: its functions, its role in relationships, and its implications for individuals. First, Vangelisti (this volume) argues that hurt functions as an indicator of the quality of a relationship, as a means of influencing others (cf. Metts, Braithwaite, & Fine, this volume), and paradoxically as a form of support. Second, hurt is important throughout the life cycle of relationships. In the early, less certain stage of initiating

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relationships, hurtful words and deeds are likely important in whether relationships evolve (Feeney, this volume). Dealing with hurt is important in maintaining relationships. Hurtful messages undermine relationship satisfaction (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998) and therefore are likely implicated in the dissolution of many relationships. Third, beyond their role in relationships, hurtful messages are also important for the individuals in those relationships. Loving, Le, and Crockett (this volume) indicate that being in what they presume are hurtful relations affects endocrine responses as well as immune system functioning. They conclude “it is clear that living with an emotionally abusive partner is a risk factor for long-term poor health.” Similarly, Braithwaite, Fincham, and Lambert (this volume) sum up by saying that “the hurt that can be experienced in marriage and other close relationships is significant and can exert significant influence on the mental health of those involved.”

A PREVIEW OF THE BOOK’S CONTENTS

This volume provides a synthesis of current research and theory on hurt feelings in relationships. Following the Introduction in Part I, the book includes four main parts: conceptualizing hurt, hurtful acts, relational contexts, and applied contexts. In conceptualizing hurt in Part II, Leary and Leder ask: Is hurt a blend of other emotions, part of a common core of negative affect that is shared by all negative emotions, or a distinct emotion in its own right? This question reverberates throughout the volume. Working within the social cognition tradition, Fitness and Warburton discuss appraisal processes: cognitive processes leading to the experience of hurt feelings. (In Part IV, Card, Isaacs, and Hodges work from a similar perspective.) Rooted in Goffman’s symbolic interaction, self-presentation position, Goldsmith and Donovan-Kicken link hurt to face threats. The final two chapters in this part stem from the personality tradition within psychology: Kang, Downey, Iida, and Rodriguez illuminate the role of rejection sensitivity (individual differences in the thoughts and feelings of individuals in the presence of cues of potential rejection) whereas Shaver, Mikulincer, Lavy, and Cassidy apply their influential attachment perspective. (In Part IV, Feeney also employs this perspective in discussing hurt in couple relationships.)

The third part of the volume identifies acts that often lead to hurt; the fourth part examines the special aspects of hurt in different types of relationships. These parts confirm that a range of antecedents lead to hurt and that hurt is a significant aspect of various types of relationships.

The fifth part of book starts with chapters on the physical and mental health correlates of hurt. In the second of these, Braithwaite, Fincham, and Lambert suggest that forgiveness can ameliorate the impact of hurt. The next three chapters in this part focus on hurt in a broader context. In her chapter on technology, Whitty examines hurt inflicted via the Internet. She considers views on whether the lack of social context cues available via the

Internet promulgate hurtful communication (e.g., flaming). She also discusses electronically enacted relationship behaviors that might cause hurt (e.g., lying, cyberstalking, monitoring someone’s behavior, revenge Web sites, infidelity). Cunningham, Barbee, and Mandal consider multiple aspects of hurt in the workplace (e.g., in job interviews, in exchange processes, in the process of unionization, as a result of leaders’ behaviors, incivility). A capstone of their chapter is an application of Cunningham and Barbee’s social allergy model, the idea that sensitivity to behaviors that are initially only minor irritants becomes stronger as repetitions of the behaviors increase. In the following chapter, Kowalski examines hurt in a cultural perspective. She especially draws on Mesquita’s (2003) theory of emotions that acknowledges the neurological and physiological aspects of emotions but believes that emotional experience and expression is heavily influenced by the sociocultural context. Thus factors such as the interdependent, collective vs. independent nature of a culture are seen as important in the antecedent events, appraisals, physiological changes, action tendencies, and emotional regulation surrounding hurt. This part concludes with a chapter in which a distinguished senior contributor, Lu L’Abate, provides a multilayered theoretical model of hurt rooted in clinical work and Tomkins’ (1962, 1963) notion that affect amplifies drives. L’Abate also makes suggestions for how practitioners can help people deal positively with their hurt feelings.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELATIONSHIP
RESEARCH SPONSORSHIP

The International Association for Relationship Research (IARR) is the leading professional organization concerned with the scientific study of personal relationships. This volume is sponsored by IARR and was developed under the oversight of IARR’s publication committee to meet the Association’s expectations for excellence and importance. It is an exemplary addition to their *Advances in Personal Relationship Series*. This volume admirably achieves the standards and orientation of the series in presenting:

first-rate scholarship that is both provocative and theoretically grounded. The theoretical and empirical work described by authors will stimulate readers and advance the field by offering up new ideas and retooling old ones. The series will be of interest to upper division undergraduate students, graduate students, researchers, and practitioners.

STRENGTHS OF THE VOLUME

As noted in IARR’s sponsorship statement, IARR volumes are characterized by presenting the best in current empirical work and theoretical thinking. An asset of the current volume is that it provides the broad picture of research

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on hurt, presented in a less technical way that will be easily accessible to a wide range of readers. In terms of theory, the book is rich in conceptual viewpoints (e.g., social cognitive, attachment, script, prototype, politeness, the social allergy model, L'Abate's multilayered amplification model). Collectively, these perspectives offer a fuller, more comprehensive view of hurt than any one theoretical perspective would by itself.

For me, other strengths of this volume include:

- It is the first book-length treatment of hurt. It is being published at a moment when work in this area has matured to where having a compendium is very timely both to synthesize the now substantial body of what is known and to serve as a foundation for the next generation of knowledge and practice.
- The set of contributors is outstanding in terms of the quantity and quality of the work they have been doing on hurt.
- The book is well edited in terms of both introductory and concluding pieces and of the parts fitting together. Contributors were aware of each others' writing so several core issues (e.g., is hurt a discrete emotion?) are addressed by multiple authors. Editor Vangelisti gave authors a set of useful guidelines to add consistency across chapters. Thus, the chapters regularly offer integrative reviews, comments on relevant approaches to studying hurt, identification of major conflicts in the literature, and directions for future research.

I have studied relationships throughout my professional career. Like many other people, I have perpetrated hurt and been its victim. *Feeling Hurt in Close Relationships* has given me a comprehensive tour of work on hurt that has taught me new information, expanded my thinking about this key phenomenon, and made me consider how to conduct my own relationships. Reading the manuscript stimulated my insights into researchable questions and practical implications for mental health professionals and our everyday lives. While reading, I was teaching a graduate course and immediately changed my syllabus to include a section on hurt. I wanted my students (and others) to have the experience of reading *Feeling Hurt in Close Relationships* to explore this phenomenon.

In sum, for me this is an excellent book on an important and relevant topic. I am grateful to the book's authors. I enthusiastically recommend their work to you. Read on – you will be glad you did!

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