The Experience and Expression of Uncertainty in Close Relationships

Close relationships are an important and desired aspect of the human experience; but as individuals pursue intimacy and connection with others, they will encounter a variety of questions about the nature, status, and future of their relationships. Consequently, uncertainty is an inevitable element of close relationships. It can arise in response to a variety of relational circumstances and can shape the ways in which partners think, feel, and act toward one another.

This book summarizes the expansive body of theoretical and empirical research regarding the nature of uncertainty, the conditions that promote uncertainty about relational involvement, and the emotional, cognitive, and communicative outcomes of uncertainty for individuals and their relationships. Based on the robust accumulation of data about uncertainty in close relationships, the book also offers recommendations for coping with ambiguous relational circumstances and proposes new directions for conceptualizing and studying uncertainty in close relationships.

Jennifer A. Theiss [PhD, University of Wisconsin] is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Rutgers University. Her research has contributed to the development of relational turbulence theory, which focuses on conditions during transitions in close relationships that give rise to cognitive, emotional, and communicative turmoil. She is a Rutgers University Chancellor’s Scholar and her scholarship has received several awards, including the Early Career Award from the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National Communication Association, the Distinguished Article Award from the International Association for Relationship Research, and the John Garrison Award for Interpersonal Communication Research in Applied Contexts.
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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The Experience and Expression of Uncertainty in Close Relationships

JENNIFER A. THEISS

Rutgers University, New Jersey
For Kevin, without a doubt
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I want to start by thanking Chris Agnew for approaching me to write a book for the Advances in Personal Relationships book series, as well as the editorial board of the series for their enthusiastic response to my proposal. Without the friendly nudge I received from Chris to submit a proposal for a book on relational uncertainty, I probably would not have considered the possibility of a project like this. My plate was always full with new data sets, new graduate students, new conference deadlines, new manuscript submissions, new course preparation, and new service obligations. Taking the time to step back from this frenetic pace to contemplate the bigger picture seemed like a luxury I could not afford. Also, writing a book always looked like a daunting and often painful undertaking, which it most certainly was, but in hindsight I am glad to have taken on the challenge. The timing was right to take stock of the theoretical and empirical advances that had been made in the literature on relational uncertainty and to consider the future trajectory of theory and research on this fundamental aspect of close relationships. Furthermore, the timing was right for me to step off the academic hamster wheel to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a phenomenon that is so central to my own body of work. I am grateful to have had that opportunity. I am also grateful to the team at Cambridge University Press for publishing the book, especially Janka Romero, who had the good sense to occasionally check in on my progress and the courtesy to give me room to work at my own pace.
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