

Hurt feelings in couple relationships: Exploring the role of attachment and perceptions of personal injury

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Abstract

This research program focused on perceptions of the appraisals and emotions involved in hurtful events in couple relationships. Study 1 tested the broad proposition that hurt feelings are elicited by relational transgressions that generally imply relational devaluation and that evoke a sense of personal injury by threatening positive mental models of self and/or others. Participants ($N = 224$) provided retrospective accounts of an experience of being hurt by a romantic partner. These accounts, together with expert judges' ratings, showed that most hurtful events involved relational transgressions that signal both relational devaluation and threat to positive mental models; however, relational devaluation was relatively unimportant in explaining the hurt associated with partners' distrust. A sense of injury emerged as the dominant theme in open-ended accounts of emotional reactions; however, other negative emotions also featured and were related to the type of event reported. The emotion terms generated in Study 1 were used as stimuli in a word-sorting task (Study 2). This study confirmed that many of the terms were perceived specifically as injury related, and shed further light on the link between appraisals and emotions. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Couple relationships cannot be fully understood without considering the role of emotion. According to Bowlby (1979), people experience their most intense emotions in the course of developing, maintaining, and terminating their close relationships. Further, the emotions experienced by each individual are usually expressed to the partner (even if such expression is unintended) and may be either intensified or weakened by subsequent interaction (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). The importance of understanding these emotional processes is highlighted by the finding that escalation of negative emotion predicts relationship distress (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997).

Although "hurt" is a well-known term that is regarded as a good example of

emotion, and as highly negative in tone (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987), surprisingly little attention has been paid to the elicitors and outcomes of "hurt feelings." Researchers generally agree that hurt is inherently relational in nature, with appraisals of others' behavior being central to hurt feelings (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Vangelisti & Young, 2000). This point of consensus fits with appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Smith, 2001), which argue that emotions result from individuals' evaluations (appraisals) of events or situations. However, researchers have offered somewhat differing assessments of the causal and emotional features of hurtful events.

This paper describes two studies examining people's perceptions of the cognitive appraisals and emotions involved in hurtful events in couple relationships. Examining such perceptions is an important endeavor,

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given their role in driving judgments and memories of hurtful events. The aim of the studies was two-fold. The first aim was to test the proposition (based on previous research and on attachment principles) that hurt is elicited by relational transgressions that generally imply low relational evaluation, and that evoke a sense of injury by threatening positive mental models. Given the complex nature of psychological hurt and the range of eliciting events, the second aim was to explore links between types of hurt-eliciting events and associated emotional responses.

The emotional experience of hurt feelings

As already noted, the term "hurt" is generally regarded as a good example of emotion. However, the nature of the emotional experience of hurt feelings remains controversial. According to one position, psychological hurt can be subsumed under the basic emotion "sadness." For example, in Shaver et al.'s (1987) prototype study of the hierarchical organization of emotion concepts, cluster analysis placed "hurt" in a subcluster of sadness terms (e.g., "agony," "anguish") reflecting the specific theme of suffering. Other researchers regard hurt as an emotion blend. For instance, Vangelisti (2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2000) has defined hurt as a combination of sadness and fear: sadness at a felt loss, and fear of being vulnerable to harm. (Note that this view has no explicit role for anger.) Finally, other researchers have proposed that hurt may be a unique emotion in its own right (although often accompanied by other negative emotions). Leary and Springer (2001) present preliminary support for this position. Specifically, in their retrospective and laboratory studies, comprehensive measures of negative emotions did not account for all of the reliable variance in hurt feelings, suggesting that hurt feelings are not simply reducible to other emotions.

Studies conducted to date raise further questions about the nature of hurt feelings. As Leary and Springer (2001) noted, if hurt is a relatively distinct emotion, we need to understand why hurt feelings are often accompanied by other negative emotions.

These researchers suggested two possible explanations: First, negative emotions tend to be interrelated because they share a common core of undifferentiated negative affect; second, the situations that induce hurt feelings usually trigger other emotions as well. Although both factors probably apply, the second is most relevant here because it has important implications for understanding the links between the appraisals and emotions involved in hurt feelings. For instance, Leary and Springer suggest that hurtful events involving relationship loss are likely to elicit sadness, those involving appraisals of unjustified attack are likely to elicit anger, and those threatening a sense of security are likely to elicit anxiety. Moreover, Fitness' (2001) work has linked betrayals of trust (including sexual infidelity) to feelings of anger and hate. However, there is a need for further studies to clarify the appraisals and emotions involved in different hurtful events.

Types of hurtful events

As these propositions about appraisals and emotions highlight, hurt feelings can be elicited by many different events. Vangelisti (2001) noted mixed findings regarding the relational effects of hurtful events and proposed that the picture may be complicated by such factors as whether the hurtful act is appraised as well intentioned or not. The relevance of distinguishing between different types of events is highlighted by Leary et al.'s (1998) retrospective study, in which victims' accounts of hurtful events could be grouped into six categories: active disassociation (explicit rejection, abandonment, or ostracism); passive disassociation (implicit rejection, such as being ignored); criticism; betrayal; teasing; and feeling unappreciated, used, or taken for granted. These categories differed in levels of hurt and in appraisals of rejection: On both these indexes, for example, criticism was seen as less serious than acts of disassociation and betrayal.

More recently, Feeney (2004) offered a critique of this typology and adapted it for romantic relationships. She found support for five types of hurtful events: active

disassociation (denying or retracting feelings of love and commitment), passive disassociation (ignoring or excluding partner from plans and activities), criticism, sexual infidelity, and deception (lying; breaking promises and confidences). Again, these categories differed in important ways. For example, passive disassociation was appraised as less intentionally hurtful than most other events, but nevertheless had severe long-term effects on victims' self-confidence. In short, it seems that different hurtful events may be linked with different patterns of appraisal and emotion.

The defining features of hurtful events

As noted earlier, researchers have provided somewhat differing assessments of the defining features of hurtful events. Leary (2001) has argued that the defining feature is perceived relational devaluation; that is, the target's perception that the offender regards the relationship as less valuable, important, or close than the target would like. Vangelisti (2001) offers a rather different emphasis, proposing that the defining feature of hurt feelings is relational transgression, with targets perceiving themselves as victimized and vulnerable. Both perspectives are relevant to an understanding of psychological hurt, and their varying emphases are not necessarily inconsistent. That is, most relational transgressions may be seen as implying that the offender devalues the relationship, and conversely, conveying to one's partner that their relational value is low would appear to violate the usual "rules" or norms of intimate relationships. Hence, it is possible that most hurtful events involve both relational devaluation and an element of transgression.

However, both these perspectives raise important questions about the factors that elicit hurt feelings. First, consider the position that hurt feelings stem from the target's perception that the offender values the relationship less highly than the target would like (Leary, 2001; Leary et al., 1998). This perspective fits with many reports of hurtful acts, including those in which the offender disassociates from the target, either actively (e.g., by explicit abandonment) or passively

(e.g., by excluding the target from activities). However, individuals also report being hurt by partners' jealous and distrusting behavior and by acts of concealment that were motivated by the offenders' desire to protect the partners' feelings or to maintain the relationship. Such instances of hurt involve offenders who seem to value the relationship highly and may in fact be extremely invested in it. Hence, they do not fit readily with the theme of relational devaluation, unless this term is defined very broadly to include low evaluation of the partner's ability to be loyal and accepting and to cope with negative disclosures.

Turning to the second perspective (Vangelisti, 2001), it is important to consider the concept of relational transgression. According to dictionary definitions and social psychological usage (e.g., Jones, Moore, Schratter, & Negel, 2001), transgressions involve the infringement or violation of norms and rules. Although it is probably true that hurtful acts always involve the violation of a relationship rule, and the sense that one has been harmed or victimized, not all relational transgressions may cause targets to feel hurt. For example, consider an individual who is very enmeshed in a relationship and pursues connection at the expense of autonomy. This behavior violates a key rule of romantic relationships. In fact, in Baxter's (1986) study of romantic relationships, the partner's reluctance to grant sufficient autonomy (e.g., resenting time spent apart) emerged as the single most important rule violation. Similarly, respecting the other's privacy emerged as important in Argyle's studies of the rules of marriage (e.g., Argyle & Henderson, 1985). However, pursuing connection at the expense of autonomy is unlikely to be seen as hurtful (except for extreme cases of relational obsession), as there is no element of personal injury to the target. This type of example suggests that hurt feelings may stem from relational transgressions that involve such a sense of injury.

The relevance of attachment theory

A sense of personal injury is proposed here as a distinctive and key feature of hurt

feelings. A number of researchers (e.g., Folkes, 1982; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998) have discussed, in general terms, links between hurt feelings and a sense of harm, vulnerability, or wounding. However, the present research integrates and extends previous work by proposing that hurt is an emotion elicited specifically by relational transgressions that evoke a sense of personal injury and that generally (but not invariably) imply low relational evaluation. In this context, "personal injury" is defined as damage to the victim's view of the self as worthy of love and/or to core beliefs about the availability and trustworthiness of others.

This conceptualization is based on attachment principles. According to attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1979), humans possess an innate attachment behavioral system, which has evolved through a process of natural selection and which motivates them to form and maintain intimate relationships. The attachment system is a safety-regulating system that maintains a balance between exploratory behavior and attachment (proximity-seeking) behavior; attachment behavior is most likely to be activated in situations involving threat, stress, or challenge. Although attachment needs are universal, attachment behavior shows clear individual differences that have been explained in terms of working models of attachment. That is, based on their particular history of attachment-related experiences, individuals develop working models that embody their perceptions and expectations regarding two broad, interrelated issues: whether they themselves are worthy of love (mental model of self) and whether attachment figures are available, responsive, and trustworthy (mental model of others). Working models influence reactions to relational events, giving rise to "systematic patterns of expectations, needs, emotions, emotion-regulation strategies and social behavior" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002, p. 134).

Although the notion of attachment as a safety-regulating system was based primarily on studies of infant-caregiver bonds, a large body of theory and research supports the applicability of attachment principles to adults' romantic relationships. In particular,

there is evidence that romantic relationships fulfill needs for comfort and a sense of security, and that positive models of self and others promote relational stability and psychological well-being (Feeney, 1999; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). Further, mental models of attachment carry vital information about rejection and exclusion and as noted above, play an active role in guiding responses to relational events (Collins & Read, 1994; Downey & Feldman, 1996). Hence, relational events that compromise positive views of self or others are likely to be seen as signaling a threat to safety and may be experienced as a kind of injury, similar in many respects to physical injury. The link between relational threat and physical injury is also supported by recent neuroimaging data (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003), showing that the neural correlates of social pain (operationalized as exclusion from a social activity) are very similar to those found in studies of physical pain. These researchers noted that because mammalian social bonds have strong adaptive value, the attachment system may have "piggybacked onto the physical pain system to promote survival" (Eisenberger et al., 2003, p. 291).

The current perspective builds on previous work on hurt that has stressed the role of relational transgression (Vangelisti, 2001) and the evolutionary significance of monitoring one's relational standing (Leary, 2001). In studying couple relationships, however, the attachment approach has several strengths. First, because attachment theory highlights the importance of felt security and its basis in interactions with attachment figures, it helps explain the intensity of emotion that can result from acts that threaten models of self and others. Hence, this approach fits with studies documenting the deep, visceral impact of acts such as sexual infidelity (Fitness, 2001) and showing that a sense of pain and injury can remain, long after the relationship with the offender has ended (Kowalski, 2001). Second, this approach may explain why only some relational transgressions are hurtful and why acts of distrust and concealment may be hurtful without necessarily signaling that the victim's relational value is

low: Mental models are threatened by acts that “devalue” either actor or partner (or, by extension, generalized “others”) as attachment figures. Third, attachment theory generates testable predictions about individual differences in responses to hurtful events. For example, avoidant adults may report relatively little distress in response to such events, having learned to focus their attention away from thoughts that activate attachment-related concerns (Fraley & Shaver, 1997). In contrast, those who are high in relationship anxiety may report considerable distress (including hurt), reflecting hyperactivation of the attachment system (Kobak & Sceery, 1988); given their tendency to fear rejection and to expect the worst of partners, they may be particularly prone to experience fear.

The present research

The present studies investigated reports of the appraisals and emotions involved in hurtful events in couple relationships. In Study 1, participants provided retrospective accounts of an experience of being hurt by a romantic partner, including open-ended reports of perceived violation of relationship rules and open-ended and structured reports of emotional reactions. The emotion terms generated in this study were then used as stimuli in a word-sorting task in Study 2, which was designed to investigate whether lay people would recognize terms such as “hurt,” “let down,” and “betrayed” as injury related; that is, as distinguishable from emotions such as anger and sadness.

Together, the studies tested five broad hypotheses. With regard to Study 1, four hypotheses were derived. First, participants were expected to report hurtful events as involving rule violations (transgressions) that threaten models of self or others, and that generally imply relational devaluation (Hypothesis 1). Second, a theme of pain and injury was expected to be dominant in open-ended accounts of hurtful events (Hypothesis 2). Third, it was hypothesized that most respondents would also report other negative emotions, depending on the appraisals inherent in the type of event (Hypothesis 3). Specifically,

sexual infidelity and other acts of deception were expected to elicit anger (as well as hurt) because they involve betrayals of trust and appraisals that the offender promoted his or her own interests over those of the victim (Fitness, 2001). Passive disassociation was expected to elicit sadness (as well as hurt) because it signals the offender’s disinterest and disengagement; active disassociation was expected to elicit anxiety (as well as hurt) because it involves explicit threat to the relationship and hence to felt security. Fourth, it was hypothesized that attachment dimensions would be linked to reported emotional reactions; specifically, that highly avoidant individuals would report lower levels of hurt and distress, and highly anxious individuals would report higher levels of hurt, distress, and fear (Hypothesis 4).

With regard to Study 2, it was expected that lay people would recognize terms such as “hurt,” “let down,” and “betrayed” as injury related; that is, as distinguishable from emotions such as anger and sadness (Hypothesis 5). In addition, this study further assessed the link between appraisals and emotions (cf. Hypothesis 3) by exploring the themes common to terms seen as tapping particular combinations of emotions (e.g., hurt and anger; hurt and sadness).

Study 1

Study 1 focused on victims’ retrospective accounts of hurtful events. The aim was to examine the relational transgressions that underpin hurtful events, together with the variety of emotions reported and their links with type of event.

Method

Participants

The sample ($N = 224$) consisted of 181 first-year psychology students who participated for partial course credit and 43 students in a third-year course in social psychology who volunteered to complete the materials. There were 167 women and 55 men (2 participants did not specify their sex). Ages ranged from

17 to 54 years, with a mean of 20.9 years and a median of 18 years. All participants were required to have been married or to have had a dating relationship of at least three-month duration. Most of the respondents (88%) were full-time students, with the remainder spread across the occupational categories of sales, clerical, and professional.

Measures and procedure

As part of a larger study (Feeney, 2004), respondents completed a questionnaire package assessing background variables (gender, age, and occupation), attachment security, and perceptions of an event in which a romantic partner had hurt their feelings. Respondents were asked to think of instances in which a partner said or did something that hurt their feelings and to choose a specific instance that they could recall clearly. To assist this process, they were asked to write the initials of the partner and to indicate the partner's age, gender, and relationship to them (dating partner, live-in partner, or spouse) when the event occurred, and the length of time since the event. Perceptions of the hurtful event were obtained using both open-ended and structured questions. The open-ended questions were presented first to avoid contamination by the structured ratings. Although the open-ended responses are hence given primary emphasis in this paper, the structured ratings are also important because they provide a way of quantifying reports of the specific emotions experienced.

Open-ended questions. As in Leary et al.'s (1998) study, participants were asked to write a brief account of the hurtful event. To elicit as much detail as possible, the questionnaire provided labeled sections for participants to describe (a) what led up to the situation, (b) exactly what the partner said and/or did that was hurtful, (c) how they (the victim) felt at the time, and (d) what happened afterward.

An additional question was included to tap respondents' perceptions of rule violation. This question was worded so as to introduce the notion of relationship rules and transgressions, while at the same time minimizing

experimenter demand. The question read "People generally have a shared understanding of the 'rules' of romantic relationships. In other words, they have a set of expectations about the behaviors that partners *should*, and *should not*, engage in. For example, people generally agree that relationship partners should be faithful to each other and should not make unjust accusations. Note that these are simply examples; there are many other 'rules' about how partners should behave. In the event you have just described, what rule or expectation, if any, did your partner's behavior violate?"

Structured measures of emotional reactions. Two structured measures assessed immediate emotional reactions to the event. First, a simple, global measure assessed the degree of hurt experienced, from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*. Second, respondents completed the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This instrument contains 10 adjectives assessing positive affect (e.g., excited, proud) and 10 adjectives assessing negative affect (e.g., hostile, afraid), rated from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. Principal components analysis of responses to the PANAS yielded five factors that explained 57.7% of the variance. Factor 1, labeled *positive affect*, was defined by nine items: active, determined, attentive, alert, strong, inspired, proud, enthusiastic, and excited. Factor 2, labeled *fear*, was defined by four items: afraid, scared, nervous, and jittery. Factor 3 was defined by "upset" and "distressed," and was labeled *general distress*. Factor 4, *shame*, was defined by "ashamed" and "guilty." The final factor, *anger*, was defined by "hostile" and "irritable." Scales formed by summing responses to each group of items showed adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .73 to .82).

Attachment security. The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) consists of two 18-item scales assessing the major dimensions of adult attachment: avoidance and anxiety. The avoidance scale contains such items as "I try to

avoid getting too close to my partner,” and “I am nervous when partners get too close to me.” Sample items from the anxiety scale include “I worry about being abandoned,” and “I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.” The measure uses a seven-point response scale, from 1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *agree strongly*. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were .94 (avoidance) and .88 (anxiety).

Results and Discussion

Hurtful events: descriptive data

Most of the events that participants reported ($n = 200$; 89%) took place in the context of dating relationships, with the remainder occurring in cohabiting and marital relationships. Time elapsed since the event ranged from less than 1 to 96 months ($M = 13.20$ months). As noted earlier, one of the aims of the larger study (Feeney, 2004) was to adapt Leary et al.’s (1998) typology of hurtful events, specifically for romantic relationships. Coding of respondents’ accounts supported the relevance of the five proposed categories, all of which occurred with substantial frequency: active disassociation ($n = 46$), passive disassociation ($n = 47$), criticism ($n = 41$), infidelity ($n = 51$), and deception ($n = 35$). Interrater reliability (assessed using Cohen’s kappa) was .84. Only four reports could not be coded into these categories; these reports involved hurt that stemmed from simple misunderstandings between partners.

Violation of relationship rules

Responses to the question about possible violation of relationship rules were first coded for whether rule violation was reported or not. Only 13 of the 224 respondents reported no rule violation, and these included the 4 participants who reported on simple misunderstandings.

The 211 accounts of rule violation were then coded for (a) the rule that was violated and (b) particular emphasis on the role of rule violation. Coding of rules was based on Baxter’s (1986) scheme, which deals specifically with the rules of opposite-sex romantic relationships.

These rules are autonomy (partners should acknowledge one another’s individual identities and lives beyond the relationship); similarity display (partners should express similar beliefs, values, and interests); supportiveness (partners should enhance one another’s self-worth and self-esteem); openness (partners should be open, genuine, and authentic with one another); loyalty/fidelity (partners should be loyal and faithful to one another); shared time (partners should have substantial shared time together); equity (partners should reap rewards commensurate with their investment, relative to the other); and romance (partners should experience a mysterious “magic” in one another’s presence).

Inspection of participants’ responses revealed only one theme that was not included in Baxter’s scheme; namely, that partners should trust in (i.e., have a confident expectation of) each other’s good intentions and behavior. This rule was labeled “trust.” Note that violations of this rule refer to the partner’s failure to trust the participant, rather than the reverse (issues regarding the partner’s trustworthiness are implicit in Baxter’s rules of openness and loyalty). Finally, participants were coded as emphasizing the role of rule violation if they explicitly noted the importance of partners adhering to relationship rules and the severe effects of rule violation, or if they cited two or more rule violations as applying to the reported event.

Two graduate students in psychology coded the accounts. Of the 226 reports of rule violation (including multiples), only 9 could not be coded into the nine rules. (These included very general comments, such as “You name it, and it was a problem.”) Initial analyses supported the reliability of coding, with 179 of the 226 rules (79.20%; Cohen’s $\kappa = .76$) coded into the same category by each coder. Disagreements were resolved by the coders working together to achieve consensus. Before considering the specific rules cited, it is important to note that 45 participants (20% of the sample) particularly emphasized the role of rule violation (interrater reliability was high, with Cohen’s kappa of .87). For example, one respondent wrote

He violated the rule of being open and communicating with me. If he had communicated to me his feelings about what was happening, I would have known and understood. The most important thing is that we had actually discussed this rule—we had made known to each other that we should communicate everything.

Another participant stated that her partner had broken the rule of being faithful, and that “in breaking this rule, he also violated all of my feelings for him and for the relationship.” Similarly, another noted that his partner had broken “the rule of trusting in me; partners have to obey this rule, because it’s the only way any relationship can survive.” Of the 45 participants coded as strongly endorsing the role of rule violation, 22 cited two or three rules that had been violated; for example, one woman noted, “he not only failed to be faithful; he then added insult to injury by not being open and honest about the situation.”

The numbers of respondents citing each rule appear in Table 1 (first column). As the entries indicate, participants generally cited only a subset of Baxter’s rules (supportiveness, loyalty, and openness), together with the additional rule regarding trust. This result

is unlikely to be an artifact of the sample studied, given that Baxter’s (1986) rules were also derived from the accounts of a relatively young, student sample. A possible explanation of these results is that, in line with Hypothesis 1, respondents cited only those rules that involve core expectations of self and others as embodied in working models of attachment. In contrast, violation of the remaining rules may raise doubts about the viability of the relationship (e.g., the partner may be “too different,” or “too clingy”) but do little to imply an unlovable self or untrustworthy partner. However, differences in the extent to which different rule violations signal relational devaluation may also be important.

To address these issues, 15 researchers and graduate students in psychology who were not otherwise involved in the research were asked to read the definitions of the nine rules and to rate the likely impact of rule violation. They made four ratings (randomly ordered) for each violation, indicating how likely targets were to (a) feel hurt, (b) think that the offender regarded the relationship as less valuable, close, or important than they would like (relational devaluation), (c) question their own love worthiness (model of self), and (d) question the availability and

Table 1. Numbers of respondents citing each rule, and experts’ ratings of hurt, relational devaluation, and threat to models of self and others

Rule	Frequency of mention (<i>N</i> = 224)	Experts' mean ratings (<i>N</i> = 15)			
		Hurt	Relational devaluation	Threat to model of self	Threat to model of other
Rules frequently cited					
Supportiveness	94	4.93 (1.03)	5.00 (0.93)	5.20 (0.77)	4.53 (0.74)
Loyalty/fidelity	52	5.73 (0.80)	5.93 (1.03)	4.67 (0.49)	5.73 (0.70)
Openness	41	4.60 (0.51)	5.00 (0.76)	4.13 (0.83)	4.67 (0.82)
Trust	29	4.80 (0.86)	2.27 (0.70)	3.90 (0.74)	3.27 (0.70)
Rules infrequently cited					
Similarity display	4	1.53 (0.52)	1.53 (0.64)	2.07 (0.59)	2.07 (0.80)
Romance	3	2.33 (0.49)	2.40 (0.51)	2.47 (0.74)	1.80 (0.68)
Equity	2	2.60 (0.63)	3.00 (0.93)	2.60 (1.12)	3.47 (0.92)
Shared time	1	3.07 (0.59)	3.23 (0.46)	2.93 (0.70)	3.40 (0.74)
Autonomy	0	1.67 (0.49)	1.27 (0.46)	1.27 (0.46)	1.73 (0.59)

trustworthiness of others (model of other). Response format was from 1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*.

Mean ratings of these four variables are shown in Table 1. Violations of the rules that were frequently cited (supportiveness, loyalty, openness, trust) were seen as likely to elicit hurt (mean scores were well above the midpoint of the scale), whereas other rule violations were not. Repeated measures analyses of variance on each set of four ratings also showed that for most rule violations, ratings of hurt, relational devaluation, and threats to models of self and others were of similar magnitude. That is, rule violations that were rated as hurtful were generally seen as threatening mental models and as devaluing the relationship. This was not the case for the "trust" rule, however, $F(3, 12) = 30.76$, $p < .001$, violation of which was seen as entailing a moderate degree of threat to model of self, but little sense of relational devaluation. Ratings also differed for the "loyalty" rule, $F(3, 12) = 14.66$, $p < .001$, which was seen as less relevant to model of self than to relational devaluation and model of other. Together, the findings suggest that most hurtful events in couple relationships involve both threat to positive mental models and perceived relational devaluation; however, relational devaluation seems relatively unimportant in explaining the hurt that is associated with being mistrusted.

Open-ended reports of emotions experienced

All the emotion terms appearing in participants' responses to the question "How did you feel at the time?" were first listed. They were then placed into one of six major categories (detailed below): surprise, anger, sadness, fear/anxiety, shame/inadequacy, and hurt/injury. These categories were designed to provide an extensive classification of negative emotions, based on methods as diverse as studies of facial expression (e.g., Ekman, 1999), prototype studies of emotion (e.g., Shaver et al., 1987), and studies of emotions reported in the counseling context (e.g., Cormier & Cormier, 1985).

The first category was surprise. Many theorists (e.g., Roseman, 2001) view surprise as an orienting response, rather than an emotion (a position supported by the fact that surprise applies to both positive and negative events). Although this category was therefore excluded from the later word-sorting task, it is relevant to the analysis of open-ended accounts because it sheds light on the unexpected (rule-violating) nature of hurtful events; in fact, surprise is defined by appraisals of unexpectedness (Roseman). Studies of the counseling process also support the distinction between surprise (bewilderment, confusion) and emotions such as fear (Cormier & Cormier, 1985).

The next three categories were anger, sadness, and fear. Despite controversies concerning the number and nature of discrete emotions (Ortony & Turner, 1990), research supports the inclusion of these three among the basic negative emotions (Ellsworth, 1991). It is worth noting that while anger, sadness, and fear are all negative in hedonic tone, these emotions differ in crucial ways (Izard, 1991; Wallbott & Scherer, 1988). The experience of anger is associated with tension, impulsiveness, and a tendency for active and destructive behavior. In contrast, the experience of sadness (which is linked to perceptions of deprivation) involves less tension than most negative emotions and is generally regarded as more tolerable. Finally, the experience of fear (related to insecurity and lack of control) involves high tension but low impulsiveness.

The fifth category, shame/inadequacy, is supported by studies of emotions in the counseling context (Cormier & Cormier, 1985) and by research into the relational nature of the self-conscious emotions (Fischer & Tangney, 1995). In the present study, this category was broadly defined to include emotion-laden self-perceptions (e.g., blameworthy, worthless), which respondents clearly regarded as "feelings."

The final category, injury, consisted of terms focusing directly on pain and injury (e.g., "hurt," "torn apart," "in pain") and terms implying that damage was inflicted on the victim by the offender. Some of the latter

terms (e.g., “rejected”) have been reported by Shaver et al. (1987) as a subclass of sadness. However, the widespread use of these and similar terms (e.g., “betrayed,” “used”) in accounts of hurtful events, together with their inherent focus on relational issues, suggests the importance of considering these terms as specifically injury related.

The author and a research assistant classified each emotion term, aided by listings of emotion words falling into the various categories (Cormier & Cormier, 1985; Hutchins & Cole, 1986; Roseman, 2001; Shaver et al., 1987). However, this task required that the six categories of interest be supplemented with an additional one: Many respondents used terms that were negative in tone but could not be readily categorized. For example, words such as “upset” and “awful” clearly reflect negative feelings but do not specify the dominant emotion (e.g., fear vs. sadness). These terms were placed into a category labeled “diffuse negative affect.” Again, initial analyses showed the coding to be reliable: 80.10% of terms were coded into the same category by each coder. Disagree-

ments were resolved by coders working together to achieve consensus.

Table 2 shows the classification and reported frequency of the emotion terms. The most common terms (reported by 10 or more participants) were hurt, angry, betrayed, upset, sad, confused, used, embarrassed, depressed, shocked, rejected, and pained. Note that 5 of these 12 terms were from the “injury” category, a result that provides some support for the dominant nature of the injury theme (Hypothesis 2). At the same time, the breadth of these common terms highlights the complexity of hurt feelings, with all seven categories of terms being represented. As suggested earlier, the relatively common reports of surprise fit with the rule-violating nature of hurtful events.

The remaining analyses of emotional responses focused on the five specific emotion categories: anger, sadness, fear, shame, and injury. In total, participants provided 502 responses that fell into these categories (including idiosyncratic terms; i.e., those reported by only one respondent). The distribution of responses across the categories was injury, 226

Table 2. *Classification and frequencies of emotion terms used by participants*

Emotion family	Frequencies of terms used by participants
Surprise	Confused (23), disbelieving (9), bewildered (7), unsure (3)
Anger	Angry (68), annoyed (9), frustrated (9), mad (4), hateful (4), furious (4), enraged (2), disgusted (2)
Sadness	Sad (24), depressed (13), alone (7), disappointed (5), lonely (3), lost (3), unwanted (3), deflated (3), pitying (2), empty (2)
Fear/anxiety	Shocked (11), fearful (2), scared (2), anxious (2), worried (2), afraid (2)
Shame/inadequacy	Embarrassed (13), blameworthy (8), helpless (6), stupid (6), worthless (5), unimportant (5), inadequate (3), unattractive (3), self-conscious (3), ugly (2), foolish (2), naive (2), incomplete (2)
Injury	Hurt (82), betrayed (40), used (13), rejected (10), pained/in pain (10), humiliated (9), deceived (6), cheated (6), damaged (5), mistrusted (4), heartbroken (4), shattered (3), numb (2), aching hearted (2), heavyhearted (2), depersonalized (2), let down (2), unsupported (2), misunderstood (2), torn apart (2)
Diffuse negative	Upset (37), devastated (6), terrible (5), awful (4), bad (3)

Note. For ease of presentation and for consistency with Study 2, only terms provided by more than one respondent are listed.

(45.02%); anger, 107 (21.31%); shame, 73 (14.54%); sadness, 72 (14.34%); and fear, 24 (4.78%). Again, these results support the dominant nature of the injury theme, although all emotion categories except "fear" were quite important. It could be argued that the apparent dominance of the injury theme is inflated by including the term "hurt," given that the study focused explicitly on hurt feelings. However, omitting this term from the analysis did not markedly affect the distribution of responses: injury, 34.13%; anger, 25.54%; shame, 17.42%; sadness, 17.18%, and fear, 5.73%. Further, a similar picture emerged from the numbers of respondents referring to each emotion category: injury, 141; sadness, 115; anger, 86; shame, 54; and fear, 14. A final source of evidence for the role of a sense of injury comes from the considerable number of idiosyncratic terms focusing on pain, damage, and incapacitation ($n = 18$). These terms included "cut to the quick," "pierced," "totally traumatized," "like I'd been stabbed," "like a needle in my heart," "like a nerve had been hit," "something in my heart popped," and "I felt this wrench."

As already noted, the complexity of hurt feelings is suggested by the wide variety of terms used by participants and by the relevance of the various emotion categories. To explore this issue further, the number of respondents whose emotion terms spanned different categories was calculated. (This analysis was again restricted to the five major categories of emotion.) Of the 224 respondents, 123 (54.91%) listed terms from more than one category. The numbers of respondents whose descriptions spanned multiple categories were: two categories (74), three categories (39), and four categories (10). The most common combinations were injury and sadness (38), injury and anger (28), injury and shame (25), and anger and sadness (23).

This complexity of emotional experience may reflect, in part, the diverse events that elicit hurt feelings: According to Hypothesis 3, the emotions experienced may depend on the type of event. This question was addressed using frequency comparisons, in which event type (using the five categories of the typology) was related to a dichotomous

measure of whether a given emotion was reported or not. Event type was unrelated to reports of injury and shame/inadequacy: A sense of injury was reported frequently for all five categories (ranging from 60.98% to 70.59%), and shame was reported by roughly 25% of respondents in each category. In contrast, event type was related to the likelihood of reporting anger, $\chi^2(4) = 11.31$, $p < .05$; fear, $\chi^2(4) = 12.04$, $p < .02$; and sadness, $\chi^2(4) = 9.68$, $p < .05$. Specifically, reports of anger were overrepresented in the categories of infidelity (49.02%) and deception (57.58%), and underrepresented in the categories of active (28.89%) and passive (27.66%) disassociation. Reports of sadness were overrepresented in the categories of active (64.44%) and passive (61.70%) disassociation, and underrepresented in the category of criticism (36.59%). Finally, fear was overrepresented in reports of active disassociation (15.56%) and not mentioned at all in regard to criticism or deception.

These results support Hypothesis 3 (although sadness was reported in the context of active, as well as passive, disassociation) and can be explained in terms of the appraisals that accompany different hurtful events. Acts involving infidelity and other forms of deception are seen as the "ultimate betrayal" and as signaling that the offender regards his or her own needs as more important than those of the partner or the relationship (Fitness, 2001). Hence, the link between these acts and feelings of anger is readily understood. In contrast, acts of disassociation involve the offender's distant behavior and apparent lack of interest in the target and may signal the weakening (or even potential loss) of the relationship. The fact that these acts elicit sadness is consistent with the more general link between sadness and perceptions of deprivation and hopelessness. Importantly, only active disassociation was related to reports of fear/anxiety. Again, this finding has theoretical meaning: Recent formulations of adult attachment theory emphasize that attachment security is threatened by conflict, but only when conflict is severe or focused on the nature of the relationship itself (Feeney, 1998; Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998). In

the case of active disassociation, offenders explicitly deny or retract feelings of love and commitment, and relationship breakdown becomes probable. Given evidence that relationship breakdown can erode attachment security (e.g., Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994), it is not surprising that active disassociation is particularly likely to elicit anxiety and challenge targets' "felt security."

Structured reports of emotion

Global ratings of hurt ranged from 3 to 7 ($M = 5.86$). Mean scale scores on the PANAS (averaged over the number of items in the scale) were 4.30 (general distress), 3.12 (anger), 2.66 (fear), 2.20 (shame), and 1.97 (positive affect). These findings cannot be compared directly with those from the open-ended reports: The PANAS has no items that specifically assess sadness or hurt (injury), and this may inflate ratings of general distress. However, these scales are useful in providing a quantitative index of different emotions, and show that hurtful events were seen as eliciting very high levels of general distress, high levels of anger, and moderate levels of fear. Global ratings of hurt showed significant correlations with all four negative affect scales (but not with positive affect): $r = .69$ (general distress), $r = .33$ (anger), $r = .28$ (fear), and $r = .19$ (shame). Again, these results indicate that hurtful events can elicit a range of negative emotions.

As a check on the findings linking event type to open-ended reports of emotion, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to assess the effect of event type on the five PANAS scales. The multivariate effect of event type was highly significant, $F(20, 684) = 2.71$, $p < .001$. However, univariate tests showed that the effect was restricted to the scales assessing fear, $F(4, 210) = 4.85$, $p < .001$, and anger, $F(4, 210) = 2.59$, $p < .05$. Again, the pattern of findings was largely consistent with predictions. Reported levels of fear were higher for events involving active and passive disassociation ($M_s = 2.97$ and 2.80 , respectively) than for other events (M_s ranged from 2.07 to 2.44). Further, reported levels of anger were higher for events involving infidelity and deception

($M_s = 3.32$ and 3.30 , respectively) than for other events (M_s ranged from 2.74 to 2.99).

In terms of the attachment dimensions, respondents high in avoidance reported lower levels of hurt ($r = -.28$), as well as lower levels of general distress ($r = -.29$) and fear ($r = -.19$). In addition, those high in relationship anxiety reported higher levels of hurt ($r = .20$), as well as higher levels of fear ($r = .41$), general distress ($r = .28$), and shame ($r = .26$). These results support Hypothesis 4.

Study 2

In Study 1, almost all participants cited at least one relationship rule that the partner had violated, and one fifth of them clearly emphasized the role of rule violation. These results support the relevance of relational transgression to hurt feelings, although questioning participants about relationship rules may have created some experimenter demand. Experts' ratings of the impact of different transgressions suggest that threat to mental models is relevant to hurt feelings in couple relationships, and that relational devaluation is also a common element. Further, respondents' accounts of emotional reactions highlighted the link between hurt feelings and a sense of personal injury. To further clarify perceptions of hurt feelings, the emotion terms generated in Study 1 were used as stimuli in a word-sorting task in a second study. This study examined whether lay people recognize such terms as "hurt," "let down," and; "betrayed" as specifically injury related, that is, as distinguishable from emotions such as fear and anger. The study also further assessed the link between appraisals and emotions by exploring the themes common to terms seen as tapping particular combinations of emotions (e.g., hurt and anger).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 82 first-year psychology students (30 males and 52 females) who

participated for partial course credit. Most of the participants were single but 5 were in cohabiting relationships and 5 were married. Ages ranged from 17 to 43 years, with a mean of 22.11 years and a median of 18 years.

Materials and procedure

Stimuli for this study were the 57 emotion terms listed in Table 2 (excluding those in the "surprise" and "diffuse negative affect" categories). The word-sorting task was computerized, with the software being written specifically for this study by Information Technology staff within the School of Psychology. Participants accessed the materials on a Web site, using personal computers. They completed the task in small groups (with a maximum of 8 participants per session), and a research assistant was present at all times to answer any questions that arose.

The experiment was introduced with the following instructions: "People experience many emotions, including negative emotions, in the course of their close relationships. However, they sometimes find it difficult to describe these emotions in words. Some researchers have suggested that there are groups, or 'families', of emotion terms. We would like you to consider each of the following terms, as they apply to experiences in romantic relationships, and sort them into the following five families (or groups). Please note that each term is to be put into only one family. However, there is no need to make the families the same size, and you can move terms around from one group to another until you have completed the sorting task."

Respondents were presented with the list of 57 terms (in random order, generated separately for each participant) and the names of the five emotion groups: anger, fear/anxiety, sadness, shame/inadequacy, and hurt/injury. To move terms into or out of a particular family, respondents selected the word using the mouse or keyboard, and clicked the '+' or '-' button, respectively, corresponding to that family. When they had sorted all the words, they clicked the 'Finished' button. The data went directly to the server, where they were processed using the SPSS computing package.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows the 21 terms that were seen as injury related by at least 25% of respondents, together with any other emotion categories that met this level of endorsement. It is worth noting that the first 5 terms were placed in the injury category with very high consistency, and that the first 12 terms (down to "aching heart") were all endorsed by at least 50% of respondents. These findings support Hypothesis 5, which proposed that lay people would regard terms such as "hurt," "let down," and "betrayed" as specifically injury related. These findings also provide some support for the notion that hurt is a discrete

Table 3. *Terms seen as injury related by at least 25% of respondents, and additional emotion categories meeting this level of endorsement*

Term	Percentage of respondents choosing "hurt" category	Percentage of respondents choosing additional categories
Hurt	93.90	—
In pain	91.46	—
Damaged	90.24	—
Torn apart	76.83	—
Shattered	69.51	—
Betrayed	56.10	31.71 (anger)
Deceived	53.66	35.37 (anger)
Used	53.66	30.49 (anger)
Heartbroken	51.22	45.12 (sadness)
Rejected	51.22	25.61 (shame)
Cheated	51.22	39.02 (anger)
Aching heart	50.00	48.78 (sadness)
Let down	42.68	40.24 (sadness)
Depersonalized	34.15	29.27 (shame)
Mistrusted	30.49	26.83 (anger); 25.61 (shame)
Disappointed	28.05	63.41 (sadness)
Deflated	28.05	51.22 (sadness)
Misunderstood	28.05	30.49 (sadness)
Numb	25.61	56.10 (sadness)
Unsupported	25.61	34.15 (sadness)
Humiliated	25.61	58.54 (shame)

emotion; if this were not the case, injury-related words would be just as likely to be placed in such emotion categories as anger or fear. Further, “hurt/injury” was the modal response for each of the first 15 terms (down to “mistrusted”). In comparison, shame was the modal response for 14 terms; the most consistent markers were “inadequate” and “embarrassed.” Sadness was the modal response for 13 terms, with the most consistent markers being “sad” and “depressed.” Finally, anger (e.g., “angry,” “furious”) and fear (e.g., “afraid,” “anxious”) were each defined by 8 terms.

There was substantial agreement across the two studies with regard to the terms that the research team (Study 1) and students (Study 2) considered as injury related. Specifically, if “injury-related terms” are defined in Study 2 in terms of the modal response category, all 15 of these terms were also regarded as injury related in the coding scheme from Study 1. This finding lends further support to Hypothesis 5. However, five terms that were coded as injury related in Study 1 did not have injury as the modal response in Study 2: heavy-hearted, misunderstood, numb, unsupported, and humiliated. All of these terms except “hu-

miliated” tended to be placed in the sadness category in Study 2, but all except “heavy-hearted” were still seen as injury related by more than 25% of the sample. These results suggest that words such as “unsupported” and “misunderstood” are seen as including an element of hurt, and that the stronger element of sadness reflects the implicit theme of disconnection and invalidation.

Similarly, a conceptual analysis of the terms placed in the various emotion categories sheds further light on the link between appraisals and emotions. To assist this analysis, Figure 1 shows the main terms defining the categories of hurt, anger, sadness, and shame, together with terms showing substantial overlap between hurt and each of the other three emotions. (The figure does not include the “fear” category, as no terms showed substantial overlap between fear and hurt.) “Pure” hurt terms (i.e., those in the center of the figure) are terms that were placed in this category by at least 50% of respondents and that had no clear secondary category. The terms in this set (e.g., “in pain,” “damaged,” “torn apart”) clearly reflect the theme of injury and incapacitation and can be regarded as representing the core

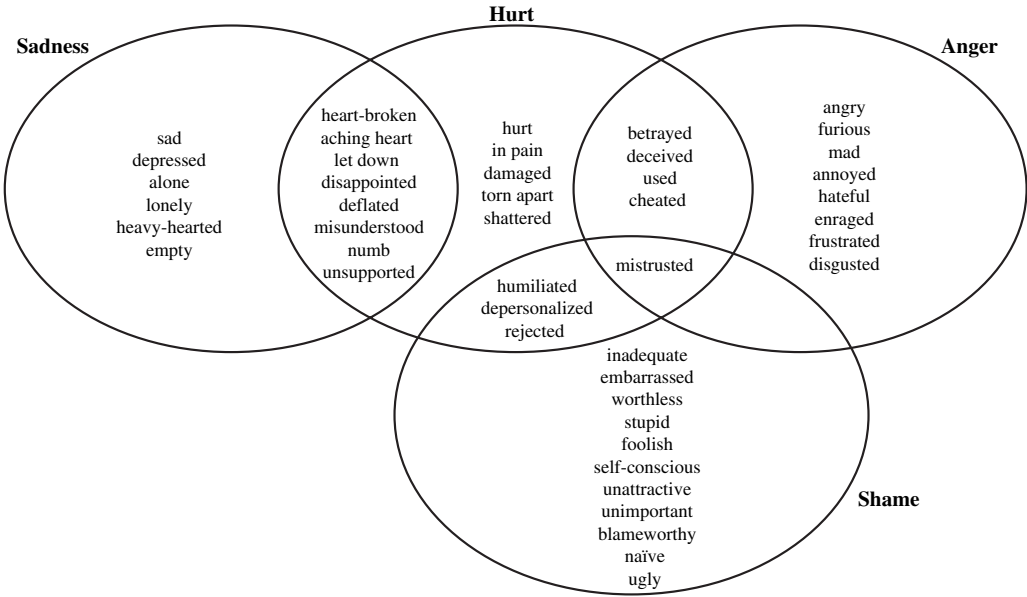


Figure 1. Main terms defining the categories of hurt, sadness, anger, and shame.

of hurt feelings. In addition, 16 terms (e.g., “let down,” “betrayed,” “rejected”) showed overlap between hurt and one or more of the other emotions. Given that participants were asked to consider terms in the context of romantic relationships, this finding provides indirect support for the notion that acts of betrayal and rejection may be experienced as a threat, analogous to physical injury.

Terms that were seen as tapping both hurt and anger (e.g., “betrayed,” “deceived,” “used”) imply dishonesty and exploitation. Given that these terms are commonly used in the context of infidelity and deception, these findings fit with the results of Study 1, in which these types of events were linked to victims’ reports of anger. It is worth noting that each of these five terms was placed in the “hurt/injury” group more often than the “anger” group. In other words, these terms were still seen as involving a clear element of injury. In contrast to the “pure” anger terms (see Figure 1), these five terms are distinguished by their interpersonal focus; people feel betrayed or deceived by something another individual has said or done (or not said or done).

Terms seen as tapping both hurt and sadness (e.g., “heartbroken,” “let down,” “deflated”) share the theme of lost hopes, illusions, and expectations. Insofar as acts of disassociation may be appraised as signaling potential relationship loss, these findings also fit with those of Study 1, in which active and passive disassociations were linked to victims’ reports of sadness. However, a sense of lost hopes and expectations can also result from the simple discovery that partners differ in attitudes, ideals, and goals. This may explain why sadness (rather than hurt) tended to be the modal response for these terms: Not all instances of relationship loss involve appraisals of partners’ wrongdoing.

Finally, three terms were seen as tapping both hurt and shame: depersonalized, humiliated, and rejected. In addition, “mistrusted” was placed relatively evenly across three families: hurt, anger, and shame. Collectively, these terms imply that the target feels unworthy, abased, or inferior, but it is not clear what specific relational acts elicit these

feelings. For example, Williams and Zadro (2001) described ostracism (a severe form of disassociation) as “social death” and as a metaphor for what life would be like without the target. Hence, ostracism is likely to evoke a strong sense of humiliation and depersonalization. However, deception and criticism can also be experienced as humiliating, especially if they occur in a public setting (Fitness, 2001). Similarly, in Study 1, shame was reported by roughly 25% of respondents, regardless of the type of hurtful event. Together, these findings suggest that hurtful acts that elicit a sense of shame or inadequacy cut across the categories in existing typologies (Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998). The common element in these acts may be their “face-threatening” nature, which tends to be exacerbated by public delivery (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

General Discussion

Before discussing the present findings in more detail, it is important to consider the strengths and limitations of the research. In terms of limitations, both studies used student samples, which were hence relatively restricted in terms of age and education. In addition, both studies focused on the appraisals and emotions associated with hurt in couple relationships, which may differ from those in other relationships. Study 1 relied primarily on retrospective accounts, which are subject to memory and reporting biases; further, asking about violation of relationship rules may create a degree of experimenter demand, hence exaggerating the role of this variable. Finally, it could be argued that the sorting task in Study 2 was somewhat contrived, and that requiring respondents to place each term into a single family may understate the extent of overlap between hurt and other emotions. However, all research methods in this area have limitations. The present studies used two very different methods to assess respondents’ understanding of hurt and other negative emotions. This combined approach offers important advantages: Weaknesses of one method can be offset by the other, and findings that are consistent across methods

are quite compelling (Ickes, 1994). Further, in Study 1, the addition of "outsider" data from expert judges provided some clarification of the roles of perceived relational devaluation and of threat to models of self and others.

Findings from Study 1 suggest that relational transgression is a common theme underlying hurtful events in couple relationships: Almost all participants stated that the offender had violated at least one relationship rule, and several endorsed this notion in strong terms. (The relatively common use of "surprise" terms also supports the rule-violating nature of hurtful events.) However, as expected (Hypothesis 1), not all relationship rules were relevant to hurt feelings; rather, hurt was linked to violation of rules regarding supportiveness, fidelity, openness, and trust. Ratings by expert judges showed that perceived relational devaluation and threat to models of self or others apply to most of these violations, and that these variables generally go together. However, threat to mental models may explain more readily the hurt related to partners' distrust.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, a sense of injury emerged as the dominant theme in respondents' open-ended accounts of their emotional reactions to hurtful events. Several interrelated lines of evidence bear on this point: the high overall frequency of injury-related terms, the large number of respondents who included these terms in their accounts, and the variety of idiosyncratic terms that relied on the lexicon of physical pain and injury. Again, these findings support the notion that a sense of personal injury is one of the defining features of hurt feelings. Interestingly, in discussing the results of Eisenberger et al.'s (2003) brain imaging study, Panksepp (2003) argued that the use of physical pain words (e.g., "hurt feelings") in response to relationship loss is not purely metaphorical. Rather, this language pattern reflects the fact that common neural pathways are involved in the experience and regulation of both social attachment and the affective qualities of physical pain.

The third hypothesis also received considerable support. Other negative emotions (sadness, anger, shame, and fear) also featured in

the accounts of emotional reactions to hurtful events. Moreover, three of these emotions showed meaningful relations with type of event (active and passive disassociation, criticism, infidelity, and deception). All five events were linked to a sense of injury and to only moderate levels of shame. However, anger tended to be elicited by betrayals (infidelity and other acts of deception); sadness was elicited by acts of disassociation (active and passive); and fear, by active disassociation. As noted earlier, these findings can be explained in terms of the appraisals that accompany different types of acts. For example, acts of betrayal may be appraised as unjustified attacks (Leary & Springer, 2001) and as signs that the offender disregards the partner's needs and interests (Fitness, 2001). In contrast, active disassociation may be appraised as heralding imminent loss of the relationship.

As expected (Hypothesis 4), attachment dimensions were linked to reports of emotional reactions. Avoidant individuals reported lower levels of hurt, fear, and general distress. This finding is consistent with theory linking attachment styles to affect regulation. Specifically, avoidant attachment is thought to be associated with rules and strategies (learned through interactions with attachment figures) that restrict expression of distress and support seeking (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). More recently, studies by Fraley and Shaver (1997) suggest that avoidant adults experience relatively little distress in relation to attachment-related stressors because they have learned to focus their attention away from these events. Conversely, in Study 1, individuals high in relationship anxiety reported more negative affect (hurt, general distress, shame), and in particular, high levels of fear. Again, these results are consistent with theory linking relationship anxiety to rules and strategies that encourage heightened awareness and expression of distress, and to fears of loss and abandonment (Kobak & Sceery, 1988).

Results from the word-sorting task (Study 2) indicated that many of the emotion terms generated in Study 1 were perceived as injury related. In line with Hypothesis 5, these terms showed substantial agreement with those

coded as injury related in Study 1. Further, consistent categorization as injury related applied not only to terms that are used to describe physical pain (e.g., "hurt," "damaged") but also to terms with an interpersonal focus, such as "let down" and "betrayed." Again, however, this study supported the relevance of other negative emotions and their meaningful links with appraisals of events. For example, terms connoting exploitation ("deceived," "used") were seen as related to both injury (hurt) and anger; this result fits with the earlier finding that anger and hurt are jointly elicited by betrayals (Study 1). Similarly, terms connoting loss of hopes and ideals ("deflated," "disappointed") were seen as reflecting both injury and sadness, consistent with the earlier finding that sadness and hurt are jointly elicited by acts of disassociation.

Together, the present findings suggest that hurt is a unique emotion, elicited by relational transgressions that damage the victim's core beliefs about self or others, and that generally imply relational devaluation. The sense of personal injury that lies at the heart of hurt feelings is often accompanied by other negative emotions, which depend on the type of hurtful event. Hence, the view that hurt is a blend of sadness and fear (Vangelisti, 2001) is only partially supported; in many instances of hurt feelings, anger may be more salient than fear.

The present findings also suggest that attachment theory provides a useful framework for studying hurt feelings in couple relationships: Attachment principles underpinned the current conceptualization of personal injury, and generated viable predictions about individual differences in emotional reactions to romantic partners' hurtful behavior. It is worth noting that conceptualizing personal injury as damage to the victim's models of self and others does not imply that all threats to self-concept elicit hurt feelings. As Shaver, Collins, and Clark (1996) noted, mental models of attachment are explicitly relational; they involve images of the self and others in highly interdependent situations, rather than in isolation. Hence, damage to mental models involves threats specific to the *relational* worth of self or others. Simi-

larly, Bowlby emphasized the complementary nature of models of self and others, noting that a key feature of the working model of self is the individual's "notion of how acceptable or unacceptable he himself is in the eyes of his attachment figures" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 203).

Further, linking hurt feelings to events that compromise positive mental models does not mean that psychological hurt arises from purely intrapsychic threat or has no adaptive function. Like other conceptualizations of hurt, the current perspective focuses on the victim's appraisals (interpretations) of actual relational events; in this case, on appraisals of the lovability of the self and the availability and trustworthiness of others. A particular relational event is appraised through the lens of existing mental models but can also challenge or disconfirm these models. As noted earlier, mental models of attachment carry information about rejection and exclusion. Hence, they are important to the way we manage close relationships, being used to predict the behavior of others in response to the self, and to plan one's own behavior in relation to others (Collins & Read, 1994). This role in shaping behavior is vital to couple relationships. Couple bonds are the prime example of adult attachments (Weiss, 1991), and individuals do not risk becoming closely attached to a romantic partner unless they have strong reason to believe that their positive feelings for that partner are reciprocated (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). In short, mental models play a key role in monitoring and maintaining couple bonds; in turn, successful couple bonds promote survival, reproductive fitness, and psychological well-being (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999).

Summary and conclusions

The present findings suggest that hurt feelings in couple relationships are elicited by relational transgressions that threaten positive models of attachment and that may imply relational devaluation. Although the studies shed light on the emotions and appraisals elicited by different transgressions, it is worth noting that hurtful events can involve more

than one type of act. For example, infidelity may also involve deception and offenders' retraction of feelings of love (Feeney, 2004). Hence, victims may often report a complex set of cognitions and emotions. It is also worth noting that the exact nature of the link between appraisals and the experience of hurt feelings remains unclear. According to most formulations of appraisal theories, the evaluation of an event precedes the experience of the relevant emotion. However, as Planalp and Fitness (1999) cogently argued, humans may register betrayal affectively (i.e., feel hurt) before much conscious cognitive processing has occurred, although at some point, they usually seek to evaluate the causes and implications of the event. The difficulty in disentangling emotions and cognitions is highlighted by Jones et al. (2001), who view both hurt and rejection as "cognitive-affective" variables that may be linked in a circular fashion. Although understanding the chain of reactions to hurtful events is a major challenge, it has important implications. It seems that hurt feelings generally reflect a complex set of perceptions about the value of the self, the partner, and the relationship; hence, benefit may be derived from a range of interventions, including those that focus on working models of attachment. Unpacking the complex experience of "hurt feelings" is thus an important goal for researchers and clinicians.

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