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Reactions to Hurtful Messages: A Quantitative Analysis

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REACTIONS TO HURTFUL MESSAGES

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Abstract

This thesis involved the study of hurtful messages and individuals' reactions to them. A literature review provides extensive review of the variables that may contribute to an individual's response to a hurtful message: relationship type (romantic relationships and friendships), sex of the individual, and attachment type (secure and insecure). Reactions to these messages were grouped in three categories: emotional, communicative, and physical.

Results offered statistical support for differences in several areas of this research. First, emotional and communicative responses were significantly different in the two relationship types. Second, men and women were found to differ in emotional and physical responses. Last, emotional responses were significantly different in securely -- and insecurely -- attached individuals.
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Chapter One: Literature Review

“I never even loved you.”

Messages this simple can have a profound effect; a powerful message of hurt can be conveyed just a few seconds. Hurtful messages may be brief, but the pain they cause can last a lifetime.

Hurtful messages involve any communication that evokes emotional and/or psychological suffering from another. These messages can come from a variety of sources with a variety of results. They often occur in the context of a close relationship: either a romantic relationship or a friendship (Vangelisti, 1994). Because close relationships are fundamental parts of people’s lives, it is important for individuals to understand the power and influence of negative messages in those relationships.

It seems natural for people to expect others to respond to hurtful messages as they do themselves, but this is not necessarily the case. Each individual is unique, which means that each person reacts to messages differently. Thus, the question of how this is displayed important. While extremely complex, several possible avenues for answering this question will be explored. In this research, connections between hurtful messages, relationship type, sex, and attachment are investigated.

Research has found important differences in quality between romantic partners and friends (Davis & Todd, 1982). Obviously, the type of relationship is different, but the level of connection is stronger in romantic relationships than in friendships. Thus, it is reasonable to explore potential differences in reactions to hurtful messages in each type of relationship.

Differences between men and women have also been explored in the context of hurtful messages. Scholars tend to disagree about whether or not these messages are experienced differently by men and women. While some disparities have been found (e.g., Young & Bippus,
2001), most research suggests that sex has little or no impact on the experience of hurtful messages. Several meta-analyses have reported small sex differences in behaviors (e.g., Canary & Hause, 1993; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991). This research seeks to determine whether or not men and women react differently to hurtful messages.

By looking at an individual’s attachment style, another method of understanding reactions can be explored. Many studies have focused on Attachment Theory, established mainly by John Bowlby (1969). This theory says that, depending on how he or she was raised, a person may have predisposed tendencies for relating to relational partners. The theory has been used in a variety of ways; for example, Attachment Theory has been studied in relation to romantic relationships (Simpson, 1990), commitment (Tran & Simpson, 2009), and anxiety (Hill, 2009). This paper will focus specifically on how attachment theory may be contributing to how a person reacts to a hurtful message.

Hurtful messages have been studied in depth (e.g., McLaren & Solomon, 2008; Vangelisti, 1994; Young, Kubicka, Tucker, Chávez-Appel, and Rex, 2005). Findings suggest that these messages occur frequently in relationships. While some behavioral reactions have been studied (e.g., Leary & Springer, 2001), there is a need for more analysis on a variety of reactions. For example, Leary and Springer (2001) describe the rationale for studying physical reactions in future research, as they were not explored in their study. This research will investigate three types of responses to hurtful messages: emotional (what the receiver feels), communicative (what the receiver says), and physical (what the receiver does).

Research in the field of communication has been thorough in defining most independent avenues of this topic in relation to hurtful messages: relationship type, sex, and attachment type. Hurtful messages have been studied extensively, but (as stated above) there is very little on
people's specific reactions to those messages. Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) studied the influence of relational contexts on reactions to hurtful messages, which is the foundation of this research. Young et al. (2005) analyzed communicative responses to hurtful messages in families. In her suggestions for future research, she presents the idea that recipients of hurtful communication may be stunned into a skills deficit that limits their response options. If this is the case, it would be worth the study of whether other response options (including physical or emotional responses) are being utilized. Lastly, Leary and Springer (2001) describe four behavioral reactions to hurtful messages: crying, aggressing, derogating, and seeking other relationships. Again, this paper will attempt to look deeper into what causes those reactions, and search for other possible reactions.

While most topics (hurtful messages, relationship type, sex, attachment type, and reactions to hurtful messages) have been studied extensively, there have not been many attempts at exploring the connections between these variables. Dailey and LePoire (2003) made the closest attempt at integrating these fields of study; the authors explored the relationship between hurtful messages and partner attachment. This groundbreaking study establishes the need for future research in this area, which this study will attempt.

This paper will examine the relationship between people's relationship type (romantic relationships and friendships), sex, and attachment style and their reaction to hurtful messages. The researcher will study the correlation between these variables and people's reactions to hurtful messages.

The findings of this study will be important to interpersonal communication scholars, specifically those who are interested in hurtful messages. While there has been much research on both attachment theory and hurtful messages, there has been little that links the two in relation
to a reaction to a hurtful message. This study will be particularly new in the sense that it is specifically analyzing that reaction.

In addition to the obvious benefits in the specific area of communication, this research will benefit other areas as well. First, psychologists and psychiatrists (especially those specializing in marriage) may benefit in understanding why clients react to their partners in a certain way after hearing a hurtful message. Second, some clients may feel that they are pushing their partners away, without understanding why; with a therapist’s help, the client and therapist could explore how attachment styles (or other areas of difference) of both partners might be affecting perception of messages.

To step away from the academic and therapeutic realms, individuals themselves might benefit from the findings of this study. People who are involved in a romantic relationship or friendship might find this study of use. Individuals may understand that there are reactions to hurtful messages, but may not be able to explain why they react (or their partner reacts) in a certain way. By exploring the idea, people may begin to realize that this reaction is not simply a “heat of the moment” decision or a random decision; rather, there are other factors that come into play.

**Literature Review**

An extensive examination of the literature is important to provide a foundation for why these topics must be studied. This review will focus first on the feeling of hurt, then move to a discussion of hurtful messages. Second, responses to hurtful messages will be explored. Next, a review of relational types and hurtful messages will be presented. Following that exploration, the researcher investigates the relationship between sex and the experience of hurtful messages. Finally, the research will explore attachment in regards to hurtful messages.
The feeling of hurt. A review of hurtful messages must first begin with the study of the underlying emotion of hurt. Hurt has been defined as a feeling that occurs as a result of an individual being emotionally injured or wounded by another (Folkes, 1982; L’Abate, 1977; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998; Young & Bippus, 2001). This can be interpreted in various ways by individuals. Hurt can be experienced for several reasons. Sometimes hurt occurs because an individual feels personally rejected (Fitness, 2001). Other times people feel hurt because they believe some sort of transgression has been committed against them (Vangelisti & Young, 2000). When given a choice, hurt is one of the most avoided emotions (L’Abate, 1997) for understandable reasons.

It is important to note that hurt is a feeling that is experienced in different ways. Studies that have been done on the social elicitation of emotions tend to fall on a continuum between “self” and “other” oriented feelings (Vangelisti, 1994). Vangelisti (1994) suggests that hurt falls under neither category; it is not fully directed at others, but it is not fully directed at the self. Also, the experience may differ simply because of individual difference; it is necessary to note that some people tend to feel hurt more than others, simply due to a variation in personality such as having a stronger negative affect than other people (Leary & Springer, 2001).

Hurt feelings are common occurrences. In a study by Leary and Springer (2001), 60% of university students reported feeling hurt more often than once a month, and 20% of students said they felt hurt at least once a week. It is evident that most college students experience hurt often, and can be inferred that this may be true of the general population. Because of the prevalence of the emotion, it is important to study people’s reactions to this sensation.

Because hurt is experienced in different ways, it can be difficult to quantify. Leary and Springer (2001) note that it can be difficult to measure hurt feelings because there are no close
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synonyms to the emotion of "hurt feelings." Research about emotions often uses close synonyms to verify that the correct feeling is being analyzed; for example, in a study of sadness, terms such as feeling "down" or "depressed" can be used interchangeably. One effective way to ensure participants' reports about feeling hurt is to use a self-identified hurtful message as the stimulus. This method is effective because it encourages participants to choose something that would be hurtful to that individual, regardless of if it would hurt another person's feelings. Rather than use a hypothetical situation that may be hurtful to one person (but not another), using a self-identified hurtful message places individuals at an equal starting place.

Hurt feelings generally occur for one of two reasons. Kelley (1983) found that emotion is generally elicited through outcome-based events or through interpersonal tendencies with relational partners. In other words, feelings typically arise due to situations an individual is in with other people, rather than through a situation that occurs on an individual level. Several other theorists have acknowledged that social interaction is key to the study of emotions (e.g., Averill, 1980; de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986; Lazarus, Kanner, & Folkman, 1980; Metts & Bowers, 1994; Weiner, 1986). While understanding the feeling from a social and an individual perspective is important, this study attempts to identify aspects relational differences in the experience of hurt.

Regardless of the causes of hurt feelings, the experience of this emotion is important to understand. Psychological hurt can be as acute and aversive as the physical pain of bodily injury, and sometimes lasts far longer (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). Doctors and researchers often study physical ailments to determine the cause of pain; findings by Leary et al. (1998) assert that emotional injuries are of equal importance to research. Similar to physical ailments, hurt feelings can have powerful effects, sometimes causing feelings of pain
and distress. Whether the hurt results from a big or small event, it can have both short -- and long -- term relational consequences and negative repercussions on self-esteem (Feeney, 2004; Leary & Springer, 2001; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005). Again, similar to a study on the physical body, this research is necessary because of potential consequences hurt feelings may create. This research offers additional information about the emotional, communicative, and physical reactions invoked by hurt. The next section explores research about hurtful messages.

**Hurtful messages.** Hurt feelings arise when friends and loved ones use insensitive language or behavior. These hurtful messages occur frequently (Leary & Springer, 2001) and can have consequences for relationships (Vangelisti, 1994). Thus, an examination of hurtful messages is warranted.

Hurtful messages come in a variety of forms. In a groundbreaking study, Vangelisti (1994) established ten types of hurtful messages: accusations, evaluations, directives, advice, expressing desire of preference, informative, questioning, threats, jokes, and lies. Vangelisti found that informative statements were seen as the most hurtful messages because there are few arguments an individual can present to counteract the message received. By contrast, accusations were seen as the least hurtful, because the receiver is often able to overtly or covertly “defend” themselves against hurt.

While Vangelisti (1994) clarified that messages can hurt, hurt feelings can also be formed through hurtful experiences. Leary and Springer (2001) established six types of hurtful experiences: active disassociation (in which the receiver is explicitly rejected, abandoned, or ostracized), passive disassociation (involving ignoring, shunning, or uninclusive behavior), criticism, teasing, betrayal, and feeling unappreciated. Dailey and LePoire (2003) add omission
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of behavior (e.g., forgetting a birthday) to this list, while Feeney (2004) adds two other experiences: sexual infidelity and deception. It seems evident that hurtful messages and hurtful experiences both evoke a feeling of hurt by the receiver of the message or behavior. Since communication is the foundation of both, this research will focus upon messages as the stimulus for hurt feelings.

Regardless of the way in which a message is delivered, its fundamental importance lies in how it makes the receiver feel. That feeling will provoke some sort of reaction from the victim. Because hurt can occur from nearly any type of message, it is best to define hurtful messages in terms of the result rather than the content of the message. The most important consideration is that an individual does feel hurt from a message. In this research, a hurtful message is conceptualized as any communication evoking emotional and/or psychological suffering (regardless of amount of hurt experienced), resulting from perceived injury or wounding by another. This research does not focus on intent because the receiver is of primary interest; a response may or may not differ based on the intent of the message sender. The next section will examine research on individuals’ reactions to hurtful messages.

Reactions to hurtful messages. Once a hurtful message is received, a recipient will have some sort of reaction to that message. Appraisal theories suggest that emotions occur as a result of an individual’s appraisal of an event or situation (Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Parkinson, 1997; Scherer, 1984; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). Thus, that appraisal will result in a response to the event or situation. If the appraisal is favorably correlated with goals, then positive emotions typically arise. If the appraisal is incongruent with conditions and what an individual wishes for, negative emotions arise (Oatley, 1992).
Giving support to this argument, Burgoon (1993) argues that negative expectancy violations (e.g., a person communicating in an unexpected manner) extract increased levels of arousal, which is associated with aversive emotional reactions such as hurt and anger. When experiencing heightened arousal and hurt, it is likely difficult for a person to communicate in a composed and productive manner. These feelings cause an individual to react in a way they find appropriate to the situation. Burgoon (1993) found that a person will often react with reciprocation or retaliation. Thus, the pattern often follows as such:

Hurtful message → appraisal → emotion → reaction

An individual's response indicates many things about that person. Vangelisti and Young (2000) show that responses to hurt feelings demonstrate the way responders construe their role within the larger social framework. In other words, how an individual reacts to a message is affected by the individual's past, present, and future associations with the sender. Thus, the relationship that a person has with the sender of a hurtful message will affect the way in which the receiver responds.

Responses to hurtful messages have been categorized in various ways. Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) categorized reactions in three primary ways: active verbal (e.g., attacking back or defending), acquiescent (i.e., crying or apologizing), and invulnerable responses (e.g., silence or ignoring). Using a different method, Feeney (2004) classified responses to hurtful messages in two categories: constructive (e.g., disclosing hurt feelings, asking for explanation) and destructive (e.g., expressing anger, crying alone).

While these studies are appropriate and have merit, they leave out several aspects of reactions to hurtful messages. Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) did not include emotional feelings and physical responses of the receiver. These reactions are important to consider in that
Communicative reactions are not the only choice of a receiver. Feeney (2004) simply categorizes responses as “good” or “bad,” without distinguishing the method individuals used to convey their response. Understanding the response methodology is important for analyzing how the receiver communicated his/her feelings. A thorough exploration of reactions to hurtful messages needs two dimensions: valence of the response and method of delivery. The current research will attempt to integrate these ideas to identify and explore three types of reactions: emotional, communicative, and physical. Each type of response carries a certain message about how the recipient of the message evaluated the remark and how he or she feels about the relationship.

*Emotional responses.* Emotional responses are classified as the feeling an individual has in response to the receiving of a hurtful message. Some recipients of hurtful messages may not display any outward sign of a reaction, and some may have a strong internal reaction but mild outward reaction; thus, it seems likely that the relationship between the sender and receiver will have some relationship to the level of emotional response.

Emotional responses can be categorized in several ways. In a 2005 study, Feeney asked participants to answer the question, “How did you feel at the time?” Based on several methods, the researcher developed six major categories of emotional response: surprise, anger, sadness, fear/anxiety, shame/inadequacy, and hurt/injury. Some words (e.g., upset, devastated, terrible, awful, bad) were not able to be classified in one of the categories, so a seventh category was created, called diffuse negative. Feeney’s study demonstrates that although there are a multitude of feelings a person can experience in response to a message, those responses tend to cluster into a few discrete categories. This study will explore those feelings and determine how common they are.
Communicative responses. Communicative responses, like emotional responses, can be displayed in several ways. In a study by Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) participants were found to communicatively display several responses to messages including defending, crying, laughing, silence, verbally attacking, sarcasm, apologizing, asking for an explanation, and ignoring. While the researchers classified these behaviors in a different manner, this research defines these as communicative responses because they provide immediate feedback to the sender of the message. Other communicative responses have been found in research, including verbal attacking (Leary & Springer, 2001), telling the sender that the message hurt their feelings (Leary et al., 1998), and arguing (Leary et al., 1998). This research explores how prevalent communicative responses are in relation to the other types.

Physical responses. While emotional and communicative reactions are studied extensively in communication research, physical reactions are less prevalent because they are often seen as an uncommunicative act. Several researchers acknowledge that while some forms of aggression (usually verbal) are studied, physical aggression is usually forgotten. For example, Leary and Springer (2001) acknowledge that while they did study verbal aggression because of its prevalence in an initial study, they lacked the foresight to ask whether participants displayed physical aggression when they were hurt.

Physical responses of participants are examined in other areas of emotion research. Guerrero, Andersen, Jorgensen, Spitzberg, and Eloy (1995) studied reactions to jealousy. Several physical behaviors were categorized, including physically pulling away or physically harming the other. Jealousy and hurt are related emotions because they are most often experienced as negative or unpleasant feelings (Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Therefore, if
physical reactions occur in response to jealousy, they are likely to occur in response to hurt, as well.

Responses to hurtful messages are important to study in and of themselves, but the relationship between the sender and receiver may impact the way a recipient of a hurtful message responds to that message. If it is the case, as Burgoon (1993) states, that reactions are processed using a combination of appraisals and emotions, the type of relationship in which the message occurs could temper that process. The following section will explore relationship type in regards to hurtful messages.

**Relationship type and hurtful messages.** Research has shown that relational context is one of the most important elements for determining meaning in a communicative situation. Bowlby (1979) asserted that people experience their most intense emotions in the context of their close relationships, which includes familial relationships, romantic relationships, and friendships. This research will exclude familial relationships from its study because those relationships are involuntary; individuals do not have a choice of their familial relations. On the other hand, individuals can choose those contacts with whom they maintain friendships and relationships with.

There are important differences between romantic partners and friends (Davis & Todd, 1982). Obviously, the type of relationship is different, but the level of connection could be stronger in either type of relationship based on variables such as shared history or emotional connection. This research will attempt to discover whether or not hurtful messages are experienced differently in two types of close relationships: romantic relationships and friendships.
Differences in reactions to hurtful messages received from different relational partners may actually result from differences in relational intensity. Prior research suggests that relational contexts provide conditions for interpreting and reacting to communication (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The type of relationship the individual is in -- based around associations such as closeness, satisfaction, and history -- affects the way in which partners perceive and respond to social interaction (Duck & Pond, 1989). Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that partners may feel more hurt in one type of relationship than in the other. In fact, Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) show hurtful messages from romantic partners to be more hurtful than those received from friends. In particular, individuals who received hurtful messages from relational partners had a tendency to display acquiescent responses (yielding in some way to the partner) more often than those who were hurt by a friend. On the other hand, it is reasonable to expect that individuals will react to different relational partners depending upon the level of connection they have with their partners. For example, a lie told by a friend may be more hurtful than a lie from a lover if the levels of satisfaction or closeness in the romantic relationship have been low or if the history between the friends has always been strong and satisfying. Perceptions about relational intensity are unique to each relationship; therefore, predicting how much hurt an individual will experience by determining whether the hurtful message is presented in a romantic relationship or friendship is extremely difficult.

Another factor impacting perceptions of hurtful messages in romantic relationships versus friendships is the amount of “effort” individuals apply to make sense of hurtful messages (Vangelisti, 1994). This can also vary depending on the relationship type being studied. For example, if a person’s feelings are hurt by a gas-station attendant -- someone with whom the individual has no level of connection with -- the person is less likely to spend time analyzing the
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person's aim than if the same message was received from a close relational partner or friend. Vangelisti (1994) notes that this may be true because, in part, people expect to be treated by intimate relational partners in fairly positive ways. When a trusted partner or friend infringes on that expectation, extensive effort may be necessary to process the violation.

Hurtful messages can have a serious impact on the connection of individuals, regardless of whether it is a romantic relationship or friendship. Leary et al. (1998) discovered that 67% of victims of hurtful messages indicated a weakened relationship with the perpetrator for a while afterward, while 42% indicated that the relationship was permanently altered. In less than 5% of cases, the victim said the relationship was unaffected. Clearly, this issue is worth study.

Relational context may have some sort of impact upon individuals' responses to hurtful messages. However, elements of connection, satisfaction, intensity, and effort (among others) present in relational contexts can complicate the issue so a simple hypothesis cannot be made. Additional variables are necessary to attempt to clarify to connection between relationship type and reactions to hurtful messages. Two likely variables contributing are sex and attachment, which will be reviewed in the next sections.

**Sex differences and hurtful messages.** In analyzing hurtful messages, there has been more research on relational differences than on sex differences. However, some evidence can be found in relation to differences between men and women.

Specific reactions to hurtful messages differ between men and women. Some research has been performed to determine what men and women do that angers and upsets one another (Buss, 1989), but not in regards to reactions to those feelings. In other research, reactions to hurtful messages are sometimes found to differ based on specific responses. For example, it has been found that women cry in equal measures in response to a hurtful message received from a
man or woman. Men are just as likely as women to cry in front of women who hurt them, but are less likely to cry in front of other men (Leary et al., 1998). In other words, women seem to not vary in their reactions based on the sex of the perpetrators. However, the relationship between the women and their perpetrators was not identified. Miller and Roloff (2005) found that in hypothetical situations of experiencing hurtful messages, more men than women said they would not confront their romantic partners' attacks. In this case, the lack of response is clearly a response in itself.

Further findings have indicated that women tend to be more nonverbally expressive than men during disagreements (Newton & Burgoon, 1990), while men tend to be more verbally aggressive than women in disagreements (Kinney, Smith, & Donzella, 2001; Shuntich & Shapiro, 1991). In addition, men are more likely to react with violence than women (Young et al., 2005).

Scholars disagree about whether or not hurtful messages are experienced differently by men and women. According to Dailey and Le Poire (2003), in the U.S. culture, females experience hurtful messages more often than men. The researchers hypothesize that this may be true because they are more aware of relational maintenance than men, thus they may be more aware of messages that are potentially hurtful. An alternative explanation is that women may be more likely to interpret a message as hurtful, whereas men would see the same message as not hurtful.

In contrast, most research has found that sex has little or no impact on the experience of hurtful messages. For example, Young and Bippus (2001) conducted research to determine whether or not message interpretation had any difference based on the amount of humor. The researchers found no overall effect for sex on the dependent variables. Several meta-analyses
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have also reported small sex differences in behaviors (i.e. Canary & Hause, 1993; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991). Because of the discrepancies in this and prior research, the issue is worth study. Whether sex differences are present with regard to the type of response preferred is the focus of this research.

Hurtful messages have been found to impact a variety of relationships. Because relational context is so important in the study of hurt, it is useful to understand individuals’ attachment to the parties involved in the sending and receiving of a hurtful message. One way to frame this connection is through the lens of Attachment Theory, which has been linked to romantic relationships, sex, love, friendships, and emotional functioning (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Attachment Theory has been widely used to study individuals’ relationships and involvement with others. Thus, it is reasonable to study hurtful messages and individuals’ attachment to relational figures.

Attachment theory. Attachment Theory was developed by the British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1969, 1973) to explain the universal human need to form close relational bonds. While once controversial (e.g., Fonagy, 1999), this theory is now widely accepted by developmental, neurological, and clinical psychologists (Schore, 1994). Bowlby (1988) defines attachments as close, intensely emotional relationships between infants and one or two close, caretaking individuals. These experiences in early relationships are thought to have extensive emotional consequences and effects on individuals the lifespan (Daniel, 2009).

Attachment is a process that begins in infancy. Attachment theorists posit that children are born with inherent behaviors that function to create close relationships with supportive others to protect against threats -- physical and psychological -- in times of distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Bowlby (1973) suggests that individual differences in attachment type occur.
through environmental differences in children’s upbringing; caregivers respond differently in terms of availability and responsiveness. These differences create attachment models that vary from individual to individual.

Attachment, while begun in infancy, evolves throughout childhood. Early-year interactions with caregivers assist children in forming internal working models of themselves and of others (Sroufe, 1988). These models are then carried with the children as they develop (Benoit & Parker, 1994), and serve as a foundation for the expectations and beliefs that individuals hold in their close relationships in adulthood (Peluso, Peluso, Buckner, Kern, & Curlette, 2009).

Bowlby’s (1969, 1973, 1980) theory maintains that these models shape an individual’s personality and interpersonal styles in predictable ways. Thus, an attachment style for an individual is thought to remain steady throughout a lifespan.

Attachment styles are thought to remain consistent from childhood to adulthood (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Grossman, Grossman, & Waters, 2005; Richards & Schat, 2010). In addition, attachment relationships continue to be important throughout an individual’s life (Ainsworth, 1982, 1989; Bowlby, 1980). Recent longitudinal studies suggest that attachment exerts a moderate degree of influence upon an adult’s state of mind (Fraley, 2002); discontinuity, or “change” between attachment types in later years is often found to be related to life events such as death of a parent, divorce, or other major life change (Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000).

Evidently, there is no steadfast rule that an individual’s attachment style will remain consistent throughout life; new relationship experience can shift the developmental attachment course. Regardless, early relational experiences do seem to have an impact on adult relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Daniel, 2009). Specifically, it is highly likely that parents, peers, siblings, and sexual partners may all play the role of an attachment figure over a person’s
lifespan (Ainsworth 1982, 1989; Ammaniti, Van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli, 2000). In fact, Feeney & Noller's (1990) study found significant results to support the use of Attachment Theory as a predictor for adult romantic relationships. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that there is potential for Attachment Theory to be utilized as a predictor for other relationships, as well.

**Two-dimensional typology.** The concept of attachment as steadily evolved over a period of several decades, with an abundance of information and research to support the reliability of the theory. Past research has utilized both three -- and four -- dimensional typology. More recently, researchers have moved towards a two-dimensional typology: secure attachment versus insecure attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Research has suggested that this typology provides a more accurate configuration of attachment (Fraley & Waller, 1998). An individual displaying any insecure patterns of attachment (avoidant, anxious, or preoccupied) varies considerably from a securely-attached individual; thus, it is reasonable to classify individuals in one of the two categories.

**Secure attachment.** The first (and most common) style of attachment is secure attachment. A child with this type of attachment has developed a healthy relationship with caretakers. These children have received adequate or sufficient care from their guardian(s) (Hill, 2009). They also perceive and experience this attachment figure(s) as being available, consistent, responsive, and sensitive (Hill, 2009). A securely attached child understands that a caregiver is a source of shelter and protection, comfort, and love.

Securely attached children have several common characteristics. First, these children present the "expected response" of protest upon separation and joy upon reunion with their caregivers (Daniel, 2009). While it may be assumed that this is a natural response, children without this type of attachment do not react in this manner. Raised in a secure relationship, children are also more likely to feel comfortable in their investigation of the world, and in their
ability to handle life's experiences (Hill, 2009). Thus, securely attached children become at ease with a sense of individuality and separation of self from their attachment figure.

As securely attached children grow into adults, behaviors maintain consistency with regards to connections with others. Naturally, a child who views attachment figures as available will most likely transform into an adult with the same attitude. Securely attached adults expect others to be emotionally available, responsive, and to interact in positive ways (Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993) just as they expected of their childhood attachment figures.

As adults, these individuals are more confident in themselves. Securely attached adults are more likely to view themselves as worthy of attention and affection (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Generally, these individuals have the ability to draw on internal resources during good times and bad; they feel confident in their ability to handle what life hands them (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Thus, they have the ability to adapt to different situations.

These adults are also likely to be comfortable with the world around them. Generally, they will view others as trustworthy (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005), rather than having a negative view of others' intentions. Also, they typically understand their social world to be supportive (Bachman & Bippus, 2005), rather than an accessory or an afterthought. It is typical for a securely attached individual to feel comfortable leaning on supportive others during times of difficulty (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005).

Relationships in adulthood are affected by an individual’s model of attachment. Securely attached adults are likely to develop mutual and reciprocal relationships (Hill, 2009), in which they are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bartholomew &
REACTIONS TO HURTFUL MESSAGES

Horowitz, 1991). These individuals are most likely to develop a healthy relational style with any type of partner.

In contrast to a secure type of attachment, some individuals display insecure behavior.

_Insecure attachment._ Insecure attachment is a broad term that encompasses anxious and avoidant types of attachment behavior. These two types will be described to provide a basis for defining insecure attachment.

Anxious attachment. A child with anxious attachment has conflicting views of themselves and of others, due to inconsistent support from caregivers. Support figures have occasionally been present during times of distress, but other times have ignored the child or been unavailable (Tran & Simpson, 2009). During a period of separation with a caregiver, this child will demonstrate a different reaction than a securely attached child. Typically, the child will display ambivalence upon separation and an inability to be comforted upon reunion (Bartholomew, 1990). Years of not knowing how attachment figures will respond in times of distress causes children to develop into adults who are unsure of themselves and others.

Unlike securely attached adults, anxiously attached adults are unconfident. This feeling is most likely caused by the inconsistent experiences they have had with significant others (Baldwin et al., 1993). They have a negative view of themselves, never feeling as though they are worthy or able (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). However, they have a different view of others.

Anxiously attached adults have a varying relationship with attachment figures. They are often overly dependent on their partner to provide care, attention, and love (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). This characteristic exemplifies one major difference between anxiously attached and securely attached adults; in contrast, securely attached adults
feel confident in their ability to care for themselves, yet have a healthy appreciation for the help others can provide.

Besides being overly dependent, the anxiously attached adult is hyperaware of others. This person is extremely attentive of social and emotional cues from others (Fraley, Niedenthal, Marks, Brumbaugh, & Bicary, 2006). Most often, this hyper vigilance leads to further variation in feelings towards their partner. To overcome emotional barriers that the anxiously attached person often feels, they will generally seek intimacy with a partner. However, the individual will often feel unsure about their partner’s willingness to be close (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Baldwin et al., 1993). The individual constantly feels as though they would like to be closer to their attachment figure.

These conflicting feelings about attachment figures lead anxiously attached individuals to have a fearful preoccupation with abandonment by their partners (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). While securely attached individuals demonstrate an ability to be independent, anxiously attached individuals dread it. This fear of abandonment leads to a display of more stress, hostility, and anxiety while interacting with their partner (Simpson et al., 1996). Thus, relationships can become strained due to the behaviors of the anxiously attached individual.

Avoidant attachment. Another type of insecure attachment is classified as avoidant (sometimes called dismissive) attachment. Unlike securely or anxiously attached children, these individuals have generally been ignored by their caregiver(s).

Avoidant children display behaviors unlike securely or anxiously attached children. Rather than displaying emotion when distanced from an attachment figure, these children do not exhibit protestation during separation and do not show joy or happiness upon reunion with caregivers (Daniel, 2009). Attachment figures typically stress emotional independence of these
children, and reject pleas for comfort or consolidation (Daniel, 2009), leading children to understand that they must perform as their own caregiver during times of distress.

Because of the way in which these children are raised, they may grow into adults who do not rely on others. In fact, they generally view others as unavailable or unresponsive (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Sometimes, outsiders are even categorized as cold, rejecting, or manipulative (Baldwin et al., 1993). These children have grown up with the belief that their calls for help or comfort are ignored. Because of this, they may grow into adults who almost expect to be rebuffed by others (Hill, 2009). Thus, these individuals often learn early to be independent, and actually feel a strong need for it. In adult years, this continues; they tend to have difficulty relying on anyone but themselves (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). Because they may have been ignored as children, avoidant adults have often learned to care and rely only on themselves.

Avoidant adults display several distinct behaviors in regards to relations with others. First, it is typically hard for these individuals to trust others (Ainsworth et al., 1978), which leads to a tendency to deny the importance of relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). It is hard for these individuals to have “normal” relationships with others, especially romantic partners. Avoidant adults tend to shun or completely dismiss of emotional intimacy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005) because of how they were treated as children. Rather than become close with another, it is easier and simpler to maintain a distance to avoid pain. Maintaining an emotional distance is presumably done for defensive reasons (Baldwin et al., 1993), to prevent what happened with early-year attachment figures from happening again.
Besides emotional distance from others, avoidant adults also maintain a physical distance. These adults typically live alone and detached from others (Hill, 2009). Because of their strong need for independence, this does not seem abnormal or difficult. These individuals have become completely self-reliant (Hill, 2009). These individuals learned from early on that they must care for themselves; depending on others has proven to be unhelpful.

Attachment theory helps explain why some individuals have a secure attachment to relational partners and why others experience an insecure attachment. It is important to consider these differences in relation to how hurtful messages are experienced.

**Hurtful messages and Attachment Theory.** Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of experienced security and its basis in interactions with attachment figures. It also helps to explain the power of emotion that can result from acts that threaten an individual’s model of themselves and of others.

Research has shown that attachment type does impact how a recipient handles a hurtful message. Young (2004) found that close and relationally satisfied partners are better able to deal with hurtful messages than emotionally distant partners. Thus, this researcher will attempt to explore potential differences in securely -- and insecurely -- attached individuals.

Interestingly, attachment may also impact how often individuals feel hurt in a relationship. Dailey and Le Poire (2003) found that individuals with preoccupations (which in the current research would be classified as insecure attachment) experience more hurtful messages in relationships. Securely-attached individuals experienced less hurtful messages, but experienced greater hurt from the conflict episode. Again, this is relevant to this research in that the researcher can hypothesize that securely-attached individuals may feel more hurt from a message, and may also have a different response than insecurely-attached individuals.
In this research, quantitative data were collected to examine whether any relationship exists between the major independent variables (relationship type, sex, and attachment type) and hurtful messages. Data was collected to determine the type(s) of participants’ reactions to hurtful messages. The three primary types of responses (emotional, communicative, and physical) will be compared to address the first research question.

RQ1: Of the three possible reactions (emotional, communicative, and physical), which response is experienced most intensely in friendships and relationships?

Since people react differently to messages received from different partners, it is important to consider the type of relationship and its influence upon respondents’ reactions to hurtful messages. This idea leads to the second research question.

RQ2: Do reactions to hurtful messages vary between people who receive hurtful messages from a close friend and those who receive the messages from a relational partner?

Some research suggests that men and women respond differently to hurtful messages, which becomes the basis for the third and fourth research questions.

RQ3: Do men and women react differently to hurtful messages?

To determine whether the interaction between sex and relationship type actually explained any differences, a fourth research question was posed.

RQ4: Is there a relationship between sex, relationship type, and reactions to hurtful messages?

The review of literature suggests a possible connection between adult attachment type and reactions to hurtful messages. The fifth question addresses this body of research in an attempt to see whether a connection exists in this sample of participants.
RQ5: Is attachment type (secure vs. insecure) related to an individual's reaction to a hurtful message?

Finally, it is important to see whether any interaction effects between the independent variables helped explain different reactions, leading to the final research question.

RQ6: Is there a relationship between reactions to hurtful messages, relationship type, sex, and attachment type?
Chapter Two: Method

Data Collection

Upon obtaining IRB approval, the researcher recruited participants through several methods. The researcher attempted to gather more than 200 participants (as seen in Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Waite & Roloff, 2003; Young, et al., 2005). Adult individuals who had recently experienced a hurtful message from a romantic partner or from a friend and were willing to discuss that experience were encouraged to access a web link to a survey.

Respondents of adult age were chosen as they have more “life experience” than younger participants might; relationships are different in young adults and in adults. Using older participants helped to increase the possibility that the hurtful messages they experience had deeply affected them in some way. Both sexes were studied because one part of this study sought to determine whether responses were different between men and women. Finally, participants were recruited from the Midwest because the researcher was interested in obtaining results from a specific geographical location, and her research was based in that area. Two methods were used to recruit participants.

First, the researcher sent an e-mail to family and friends asking for assistance. In that e-mail, the researcher also asked that the survey be passed along to other family and friends (thus, utilizing the “snowball” technique). Second, the researcher (who is an instructor at a college in a medium-sized Midwestern town) asked her colleagues for assistance in recruiting their students and students’ parents for participation. Pursuing participants through various methods encouraged participants of varying demographics (race, education level, socioeconomic status,
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eqtc.) to contribute to the study. This is important because it increased the odds for finding applicability to varying populations.

Upon accessing the website link provided in by the researcher, individuals were asked to complete a survey developed by the researcher by a predetermined date. They were also informed that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Upon acceptance of these terms, the website then directed participants to a series of forms, created by the researcher. The order of these forms was purposeful. Attachment was assessed after demographics, as it relates to individuals' personality. Likewise, the measure of reactions necessarily followed the description of a hurtful message.

Consent and demographic forms. The first form was a consent form (Appendix A) that participants electronically accepted (The survey read, “Your submission constitutes your consent to participate in this research.”) to indicate understanding of the terms of research. The second form was a form asking for a student’s name if extra credit was to be given (Appendix B). The form indicated that this name (if included) would be detached from all data. The third form was a demographic questionnaire created by the researcher (Appendix C), including information such as sex, age, ethnicity, and education level. Demographic information other than sex was collected for possible exploratory value, but was not used in the study.

Attachment measure. The third form was a measure of attachment type (Appendix D). Arguments about which type of instrument best measures attachment occur frequently. Recently, several attachment researchers (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley & Waller, 1998) have concurred that dimensional measures with several related items provide the best measurement for adult attachment (as opposed to interview-style measures like the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985)). These types of
instruments have a greater reliability, validity, and amount of precision (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley & Waller, 1998). While there are some published measures of adult attachment, none currently measure the specific traits with which this research is concerned. Thus, the researcher developed a new measure for this trait. The researcher strayed from the recommendation to create dimensional items in order to reduce the overall time a participant would need to spend on the survey.

Rather than a Likert-type measure, the researcher developed two paragraphs: one indicating a secure attachment style, the other indicating an insecure attachment style. Statements within each paragraph were developed based on previous research that indicates these are significant or common traits of people with each type of attachment (Bachman & Bippus, 2005; Hill, 2009; Tran & Simpson, 2009). For example, a statement indicating secure attachment read “In general, I prefer to interact with others.” A statement indicating insecure attachment read “In general, I am mostly self-reliant.”

**Hurtful message questionnaire.** The fourth form was a questionnaire (Appendix E) developed by the researcher to gather relevant information about the hurtful message and the experience the participant had. This form was an open-ended questionnaire into which the participants type answers. Respondents were asked to recall a recent event in which they received a hurtful message from a close friend or relational partner; answers from respondents indicating any other type of relationship were collected, but not included in the analysis. Respondents also indicated the average length (X years, X months) of the relationship between the respondent and the person who sent the hurtful message.

The respondent then described the situation and what led up to the hurtful statement. Subsequently, they reconstructed the conversation in script-like format, and described their
reaction to the message (as used in Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). They also responded to a
statement (on a 5-point Likert scale) regarding how hurtful the message was.

Reactions to hurtful messages questionnaire. Finally, a questionnaire was used to
measure reactions to hurtful messages (Appendix F). This index specifically addressed
respondents' reactions to messages discussed previously. Work by Vangelisti and Crumley
(1998) suggests that there are several different emotional or communicative responses to hurtful
messages, and propose that further research be conducted to also analyze physical reactions to
these messages. This study attempted to integrate three “types” of responses: emotional (e.g.,
laughing, crying, “bottling up feelings”), physical (e.g., aggressive movement, slapping, or
hitting partner), and communicative (e.g., asking for an explanation, apologizing, critical or nasty
response).

In this section, respondents were instructed to think back to the same hurtful message as
reported in the introductory questionnaire. Then, they responded to 18 “yes” or “no” statements
about the message (“yes” -- I did experience this reaction” or “no”-- I did not experience this
reaction). The subscales reflect the three types of reactions: emotional, physical, and
communicative. Each subscale has six related statements.

Emotional and communicative response statements on the questionnaire were based on
work by Vangelisti and Crumley (1998). An example of a statement reflecting an emotional
response is, “I bottled up my feelings.” An example of a statement indicating a communicative
response is, “I verbally defended myself.” Statements relating to physical reactions were
adapted from the Physical Abuse Scale (Earls, Brooks-Gunn, Raudenbush, & Sampson, 2002).
An example of a statement illustrating a physical response is, “I threw an object at the person.”
These previously established instruments were adapted by the researcher because they are both
sources of previously established valid measures. At completion of the study, the researcher tabulated subscale scores for each individual.

The next section will explore the findings from the research.
Chapter Three: Results

Upon examination of participant responses, several responses were excluded from the study. Five respondents were excluded because they could not recall an instance of hurt, two respondents were excluded because they were not 18 years of age, and ten respondents were excluded because they lived outside of the Midwest. In addition, 107 respondents were excluded because they did not complete the portions of the survey necessary for analysis, or they described a hurtful message from a family member or stranger. Thus, 355 of the 479 collected surveys were used for analysis.

Participants consisted of 149 men and 205 women (one respondent had no answer), ranging from ages 18 to 77 ($M = 22.16$, $SD = 9.38$). Respondents classified themselves as a variety of primary ethnicities, including Caucasian (91.5%), African American (1.1%), Hispanic (3.7%), Asian (1.1%) and other (2.3%). Education level of respondents ranged from some high school to post-doctoral work.

Within the survey, respondents were asked to describe a hurtful message received from a close friend ($N=166$) or relational partner ($N=189$). Participants were also instructed to recall a recent event; time passed since receiving the message ranged from 0 days to 28 years prior ($M = 334.65$ days, $SD = 842.26$ days). Respondents specified the length of time they had had a relationship with the other person at the time of the event; relationship length ranged from one month to 52 years ($M = 63.48$ months, $SD = 86.48$ months).

The following results display the findings of each of the six research questions.

**RQ1:** Of the three possible reactions (emotional, communicative, and physical), which response is experienced most intensely in friendships and relationships?
Table 1

*Responses to Hurtful Messages in Friendships and Relationships*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational partner</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational partner</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational partner</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highest possible score = 6

Descriptive statistics illustrate which of the three reactions were experienced most intensely. Across both types of relationships, communicative responses were the most common type of reaction ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.76$), followed by emotional responses ($M = 2.30, SD = 1.27$) and physical responses ($M = .34, SD = .72$).

A breakdown of each relationship type illustrates this same pattern of responses. In friendships, communicative responses were the most common in this sample ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.87$), followed by emotional responses ($M = 2.09, SD = 1.17$) and physical responses ($M = .36, SD = .84$). In relationships, the pattern is identical; communicative responses were the most common ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.61$), followed by emotional responses ($M = 2.47, SD = 1.33$) and physical responses ($M = .32, SD = .60$).

**RQ2:** Do reactions to hurtful messages vary between people who receive hurtful messages from a close friend and those who receive the message from a relational partner?
An independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to determine whether reactions to hurtful messages vary between people who received hurtful messages from each type of relational partner; means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1. Relational partners had significantly more emotional responses than did friends ($t(353) = -2.88, p = .004$). Relational partners also had significantly more communicative responses than did friends ($t(353) = -3.30, p = .004$). However, there were no significant differences between relationship type and physical responses ($t(294) = .49, p = .622$). This means that communicative and emotional reactions were significantly different in the two types of relationships.

**RQ3: Do men and women react differently to hurtful messages?**

An independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to determine whether men and women reacted differently to a hurtful message; means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2. In this sample, women were found to have significantly more emotional responses than men ($t(325) = -.04, p = .000$). Men were significantly more likely than women to have a stronger physical response to a hurtful message ($t(352) = -.04, p = .001$). However, there were no significant differences between men and women with regards to communicative responses ($t(317) = -.04, p = .969$) to hurtful messages.

**RQ4: Is there a relationship between sex, relationship type, and reactions to hurtful messages?**

While the analysis for RQ2 and RQ3 found significant differences for the bivariate relationship, a multivariate analysis of variance revealed that the interaction between sex and relationship did not produce significant differences between reaction types (communicative $F(1) = .30, p = .587$; emotional $F(1) = .65, p = .422$; physical $F(1) = 2.35, p = .126$).
Table 2

*Sex and Reactions to Hurtful Messages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highest possible score = 6*

RQ5: Is attachment type (secure vs. insecure) related to an individual’s reaction to a hurtful message?

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether an individual’s reaction type was related to their response to a hurtful message; the means and standard deviations can be found in Table 3. Insecurely attached individuals were significantly more likely than securely attached individuals to have an emotional response to a hurtful message \((t(190) = -2.67, p = .008)\). However, there were no significant relationships between attachment type and either communicative \((t(353) = -1.10, p = .272)\) or physical responses \((t(191) = -.26, p = .794)\). This means that an individual’s attachment type was significantly related only to their emotional response to a hurtful message in this sample.

RQ6: Is there a relationship between reactions to hurtful messages, relationship type, sex, and attachment type?
Table 3

*Attachment Type and Responses to Hurtful Messages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highest possible score = 6

This research question was tested using MANOVA. Results showed no significant interaction effects between sex, relationship, and attachment type to help explain values for the three reaction types (communicative $F(1) = 1.76, p = .185$; emotional $F(1) = .01, p = .934$; physical $F(1) = .70, p = .404$).

The next section will explore the findings of these research questions.
Chapter Four: Discussion

In general, the findings of the current study support previous research in the field of hurtful messages with regard to relational, sex, and attachment differences in responses to hurtful messages. Some areas, like responses preferred by individuals, are inconsistent with prior research. The next section will examine the results of these variables in relation to the six research questions.

The first research question asked which type of response -- emotional, communicative, or physical -- was experienced most intensely by participants in each type of relationship (friendships and romantic relationships). Research suggests responses to messages are impacted by perceptions of the relationships within which the messages occur. In particular, responses to messages reflect the social roles individuals occupy within a larger social framework (Vangelisti & Young, 2000) and general associations with the sender (Duck & Pond, 1989). Given these findings, it seems logical to expect differences in responses to hurtful messages received from friends and those received from a relational partner. After all, there are important differences between the two types of relationships (Davis & Todd, 1982).

In this sample, the primary role assumed in each type of relationship was that of the "communicator." Communicative displays -- both verbal and nonverbal -- were experienced more frequently than emotional or physical responses in the sample. When the sample was split to examine the prevalence of each response type in the different relationship types, differences suggested by previous research were not found. Instead, the results followed the same pattern in each group as across the whole sample. Communicative responses, rather than emotional or physical responses, were preferred by those in either type of relationship.
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If responses to messages in general, and hurtful messages in specific, depend upon perceptions of social roles, these findings suggest individuals assume similar roles in friendships and romantic relationships. However, research by Goffman (1959) asserts that human interaction takes place on a social stage, with individuals choosing different roles to adopt within different relationships or situations. While the findings of the current study do not necessarily contradict Goffman's findings, questions are raised. Which role(s) are participants electing to play when receiving a hurtful message? Which appraisals lead them to conclude that a communicative response will be the most effective? Why do those appraisals appear so similar in friendships and romantic relationships?

The results of this research question contradict findings by Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) who found differences between relational and non-relational partners. However, the findings of those researchers were very specific in nature; they found that individuals in romantic relationships displayed more acquiescent responses (yielding in some way to the partner) than individuals in non-romantic relationships. In this study, acquiescent responses do not neatly fit into any of the response categories presented; they could fit in any of the three categories. Acquiescence could happen emotionally (e.g. through a lowering of self-esteem), communicatively (e.g. remaining silent), or physically (e.g. walking away from the partner). Given the more general nature of this study, differences between specific responses would not have been noted.

This suggestion – that communicative responses take more cognitive effort to produce – must be examined in conjunction with Vangelisti's (1994) findings about the relationship between cognitive effort used to produce a response to hurtful messages and relationship type. Vangelisti's (1994) study showed differences in cognitive effort reflected by reactions to hurtful
messages made in different relationships. She presents the notion that romantic relationships have a greater degree of closeness than friendships, because individuals in romantic relationships expanded more effort than those in friendships in response to hurtful messages. Thus, individuals who receive a hurtful message from a romantic partner should exert more cognitive effort than those who receive the same type of message from a friend. This suggests that participants who received a hurtful message from a relational partner should produce more communicative responses than those who received a hurtful message from a friend. This was the focus of the second research question.

The second research question focused on whether or not reactions to hurtful messages varied between those who received the messages from close friends and from relational partners. Appraisal theories suggest that emotions occur as a result of an individual’s appraisal of an event or situation (Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Parkinson, 1997; Scherer, 1984; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). That appraisal will then result in a response to the event or situation. These findings, in addition to Vangelisti’s (1994) work, suggest that individuals in romantic relationships may have a stronger communicative response to a hurtful message than individuals receiving the same message from a friend. The current study supported that suggestion, as communicative responses were significantly more likely to be utilized in response to a hurtful message from a relational partner than from a friend.

In this study, physical reactions showed no significant differences in either type of relationship. In general, physical responses are less prevalent in prior research than communicative responses, because they are often seen as an uncommunicative act. However, physical reactions have been studied in other areas of emotion research. For example, Guerrero et al., (1995) studied reactions to jealousy, which is a related emotion to hurt (Vangelisti &
Sprague, 1998). Guerrero et al. found that violent behavior was occasionally used as a response to jealousy, but mention that it is rarely successful. Because there is virtually no previous research on physical responses specific to hurtful messages, the current study had no basis of expectation for what results would show. This finding would benefit from additional research in the future.

Results related to emotional responses did seem consistent with existing research. Burgoon (1993) argues that negative expectancy violations (e.g. a person communicating in an unexpected manner) extract increased levels of arousal, which is associated with aversive emotional reactions such as hurt and anger. Vangelisti and Young (2000) show that responses to hurt feelings demonstrate the way responders construe their role within the larger social framework. In other words, an individual’s reaction to a hurtful message is affected by the individual’s past, present, and future associations with the sender. Thus, the closer an individual feels to the person sending the hurtful message, the stronger the appraisal (and resulting negative emotions and reactions) will be. Because hurtful messages from romantic partners have been found to be more hurtful than those received from a friend (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998), it is reasonable to assume that an individual’s aversive emotional reaction would be stronger in a romantic relationship than in a friendship. Thus, emotional responses would be more prevalent in romantic relationships than friendships; this finding was echoed in the current study.

Research question three attempted to determine whether differences exist in how men and women react to hurtful messages. Scholars disagree about whether or not hurtful messages are experienced differently by the two sexes. Most research has found that sex has little to no impact on the experience of hurtful messages (e.g. Canary & Hause, 1993; Wilkins & Anderson, 1991; Young & Bippus, 2001). However, it has been found that specific reactions can differ between
men and women. For example, Leary et al. (1998) found that women cry in equal measures in response to a hurtful message received from a man or woman. Men are just as likely as women to cry in front of women who hurt them, but less likely to cry in front of other men (Leary et al., 1998). Because the current study did not analyze specific reactions, but instead studied broad categories of responses, differences in specific reactions would not have been apparent. All three types of reactions -- emotional, communicative, and physical -- were studied in regards to possible differences between the sexes.

In the current study, women had significantly higher emotional responses than men in the sample. Previous research about how men and women experience emotional responses to hurtful messages is somewhat limited. Newton and Burgoon (1990) found that women tend to be more nonverbally expressive than men during disagreements. However, nonverbal expressiveness does not necessarily fall under the category of an emotional response in the current study. Some nonverbal acts, such as crying, were classified as communicative responses as they inform the other person of a feeling. In this study, emotional responses related towards inner feelings that were not expressed to the partner or friend. For example, participants indicated responses such as, “I bottled up my feelings,” or “got worked up and thought about the situation over and over.” Newton and Burgoon (1990) did not specify what nonverbally expressive behaviors were in their study, but some could potentially be categorized emotionally in this study. Reasoning logically, then, women would still be considered to have a stronger emotional reaction. This finding was supported by the current research, as stated previously; women had significantly more emotional responses than men in the sample.

The current study did not find any significant differences between men and women with regard to communicative responses to hurtful messages. Prior research has disagreed on whether
or not there are differences between the sexes in these types of responses to hurtful messages. As mentioned earlier, Newton and Burgoon (1990) found that women tend to be more nonverbally expressive than men during disagreements. Nonverbal expressions (e.g. crying, silence) were categorized as communicative acts in the current study. Women were also found to have higher communicative responses than men in a study by Miller and Roloff (2005); the researchers found that in hypothetical situations of experiencing hurtful messages, more men said they would not confront their partners' attacks than women. On the other hand, Kinney et al. (2001) and Shuntich and Shapiro (1991) found that men tend to be more verbally aggressive than women in disagreements. Essentially, because the acts listed above are all considered communicative by the current research, previous research has found that each sex is sometimes more likely to be more communicative. Thus, it seems likely that the findings of the current study would produce no significant differences between the sexes. The study did, in fact, find no significant differences between the sexes in communicative responses to hurtful messages.

Prior research, while limited, also supports the findings of sex differences in physical reactions to hurtful messages. Young et al. (2005) found that men are more likely than women to react with violence. The types of physical responses offered in the current study were mostly violent by nature; for example, statements were posed such as “threw an object at the person” or “slapped the person.” The current study showed that men were significantly more likely than women to have a physical response to hurtful messages, which supports Young’s (2005) findings.

Research question four attempted to determine whether there is a relationship between sex, relationship type, and reactions to hurtful messages. Previously, it has been indicated that there are significant differences between the sexes with regards to their reactions to hurtful
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messages. However, there were no significant findings to indicate that the different relationship types (relational partners and friends) elicited different reactions to hurtful messages.

Because results from the earlier tests showed significant differences between responses preferred by men versus women, but did not show differences between those in romantic relationships versus friendships, the interaction between the two variables did not seem likely to produce significant differences. An ANOVA run to test research question four verified this expectation. Individual differences for sex were reproduced, but differences dissolved when the sample was sub-divided according to relationship type.

Research question five focused on whether attachment type (secure versus insecure) related to an individual’s reaction to a hurtful message. This study found that insecurely attached individuals had a significantly higher emotional response rate than securely attached individuals. As reviewed earlier, secure and insecure adults have different outlooks on social interaction and the world in general. Securely attached individuals have a healthy or “normal” connection with their relational partners. They expect others to be emotionally available, responsive, and to interact in positive ways (Baldwin et al., 1993). These adults generally view others as trustworthy (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005), rather than having a negative view of others’ intentions. In contrast, insecurely attached individuals are typically not confident in themselves and their surroundings. They have a negative view of themselves, never feeling as though they are worthy or able (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). They also have a varying relationship with their attachment figures, sometimes being overly dependent (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005) or hyperaware of others (Fraley et al., 2006), and sometimes choosing to ignore, reject, or manipulate others (Baldwin et al., 1993).
Attachment Theory focuses on an emotional investment with attachment (or relational) figures. Relationships are emotional in nature, and thus emotional responses vary based on an individual’s attachment type. For example, it is typical for a securely attached individual to feel comfortable leaning on supportive others during times of difficulty (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). On the other hand, insecurely attached individuals can either be overly dependent on attachment figures (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). It is reasonable to infer that difficult times would include times that hurtful messages are exchanged between individuals. Thus, securely attached individuals would be more likely than insecurely attached individuals to “lean” on their relational partners or friends in these times. This finding is evident in the current study, which showed that insecurely attached individuals had significantly more emotional responses than securely attached individuals. By definition in this study, emotional responses are not shown to the sender of the hurtful message. In this sample, insecurely attached individuals had stronger emotional responses, which means they had higher inner turmoil than securely attached individuals. This is consistent with prior research, and illustrates the complex inner workings of the different attachment types.

Prior research shows inconsistencies in how individuals with the different attachment types would react in a communicative or physical manner. For example, as mentioned earlier, Mikulincer and Florian (1998) found that individuals with secure attachment feel more comfortable leaning on others during difficult times. It is reasonable to infer that this could include asking for explanations or other types of communicative responses in a hurtful situation. Additionally, this could include not having a violent reaction to an attachment figure, as securely attached individuals typically have a healthy relationship with relational partners.
However, some types of insecurely attached individuals may also have communicative responses; for example, some individuals with insecure attachment are overly dependent on attachment figures (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). This could result in some sort of communicative act in a hurtful situation. A physical response could also indicate overdependence; if a person felt threatened, they may reach out to the individual. For example, a hurtful message could provoke an insecurely attached adult to reach out to their partner, or to physically stop the partner from leaving the room. Thus, research is inconclusive on which attachment type would be more likely to respond communicatively or physically to a hurtful message. The current research supports this finding, as neither securely attached individuals or insecurely attached individuals had significantly more communicative or physical responses than the other group.

The sixth research question focused on whether the interaction between all three independent variables had an impact upon the intensity of reported responses to hurtful messages. A MANOVA reproduced univariate differences found for sex and attachment, but no significant interaction effects. Independent variables distinguished between responses to hurtful messages individually, but none of those relationships depended upon the value of any other independent variable.

The absence of significant findings for this research question appeared to be a factor of the reduced sample size. When the filtered responses were entered back into analyses, results did show a significant interaction between sex and attachment for physical responses. Secure males had significantly more physical responses than secure females. Results for the smaller sample trended in the same direction, but were not significant.
While interaction effects between all independent variables were studied and did not produce significant results, there are several important findings in this study. First, it was found that communicative responses were significantly more likely to be utilized in response to a hurtful message from a relational partner than from a friend. Additionally, emotional responses to hurtful messages were significantly higher in romantic relationships than in friendships. These findings are supported by previous research, meaning this sample echoed established theories in the field of hurtful messages.

Scholars have previously disagreed whether differences exist in how men and women respond to hurtful messages. Some research supports the idea that specific behaviors will differ, but there is very little research to support an overall difference in the type of response preferred. However, this sample indicates that men and women do differ in their preferred response; in this study, men were significantly more likely to respond in a physical manner, and women were significantly more likely to respond emotionally. While there were no differences in communicative responses, the emotional and physical response rate suggest that differences in sex and reaction type are beneficial to take into consideration in the future.

Finally, this research supports the use of Attachment Theory in determining which type of response is preferred by individuals. Attachment Theory relies heavily on the study of emotions and the differences between securely – and insecurely – attached individuals. This sample showed that individuals with an insecure attachment were more likely than securely attached individuals to produce an emotional response. Thus, it may be important to utilize this theory in relation to the study of hurtful messages, and to other fields of communication.

Other research questions had no significant findings, but nonetheless warrant additional research to determine how these findings relate to prior research in the field. Based on prior
research, it seemed logical to expect differences in responses to hurtful messages in friendships and relationships. However, it was found that the same type of response (communicative) was preferred by individuals in each type of relationship. Additionally, physical responses were experienced to the same degree in either type of relationship. Because there is virtually no research on physical responses in relation to reactions to hurtful messages, this finding suggests that future research is necessary to determine if and how physical reactions are utilized as a response technique to these messages.

The next section will further explore the limitations of the current study, and provide avenues for future research based on the findings presented previously.
Chapter Five: Limitations and Future Research

The analysis of the results combined with the limitations lead to several possible directions for future research. This section will first discuss several limitations of the present research, followed by recommendations for additional future research.

Limitations

The first major limitation of the study involves the instruments used for the collection of data. All instruments were developed by the researcher without the use of pilot testing.

Researchers often struggle to agree on which type of instrument best measures attachment. Since 1985, one of the most commonly used measures of attachment is the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985); this instrument utilizes an interview style. More recently, several researchers in the field of attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley & Waller, 1998) have concurred that dimensional measures with several related items provide the best measurement for adult attachment. The researchers say that these types of instruments have a greater reliability, validity, and amount of precision (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley & Waller, 1998).

Straying from these recommendations, the researcher created a new attachment index (Appendix D) to measure secure versus insecure attachment. The index displayed two paragraphs (one describing each type of attachment), allowing the participant to choose which paragraph sounded "most" like him or her. The researcher chose to develop this measure to shorten the length of time required from the participant for the entire survey.

In hindsight, it may have been useful to use a dimensional measure or to utilize a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the created instrument. While the pattern of responses (greater percentage of securely attached individuals in a sample in comparison with insecurely
attached individuals) remained consistent with previous research of "normal" population samples (Feeney & Noller, 1990; McWilliams & Bailey, 2010), it is unclear how accurate the instrument was. However, the degrees of attachment are not necessarily relevant in this research, as the study sought to determine differences in only the two categories of attachment. Future research may consider whether a higher degree of secure or insecure attachment relates to the degree of response elicited.

A second instrumentation issue involved a specific question on the hurtful messages questionnaire (Appendix E). The researcher included a question asking participants to recall a recent event in which they were hurt. They were directed to record how recent the event was. Time passed since receiving the message ranged from 0 days to 28 years prior ($M=334.65$ days, $SD=842.26$ days). The researcher should have defined "recent" for participants; the description may have been too vague. One way to overcome this potential problem is employed by Young (2010); she asks participants to recall "the most recent time [someone] said something hurtful." While the researcher does not display data to indicate the average length of time passed since receiving the message, it could be beneficial to word the question in a more specific manner.

A third instrumentation concern involves the Reactions to Hurtful Messages questionnaire (Appendix F). Previous research categorized responses to hurtful messages in various ways, but none specific to what the current research was aiming to find. For example, Vangelisti and Crumley (1998) categorized reactions as active verbal (e.g., attacking back or defending), acquiescent (e.g., crying or apologizing), and invulnerable response (e.g., silence or ignoring). Using a different method, Feeney (2004) classified responses as constructive or destructive. While some of these reactions are of interest to the researcher, they did not distinguish between emotional, communicative, and physical responses. In addition, physical
responses to hurtful messages are often neglected in research; several researchers acknowledge that while some forms of aggression are studied (usually verbal), physical aggression is usually forgotten (as seen in Leary and Springer, 2001). In addition, classifications of behaviors in the current study contradict some others; for example, crying could be seen as a communicative response (as is in the current study), but could also be classified as a physical or emotional response. Future research may want to include behaviors that are exclusively one type of response.

The concern with the Reactions to Hurtful Messages questionnaire relates to its reliability and validity. While the results of the study indicate that the instrument most likely worked correctly, no pilot studies were conducted and the instrument had not been tested in prior research. In addition, the choices of physical responses were primarily “negative” behaviors. While the communicative responses did have “healthy” behaviors to choose from (e.g. “I asked for an explanation”) the physical scale involved mainly violence or negative physical aggression. However, participants might have used other physical behaviors, including Compensatory Regulatory Behaviors (as defined by Guerrero et al., 1995) which are characterized by their positive tone of improving the relationship or improving the self. Examples of these behaviors would be giving a partner a hug or going for a bicycle ride. The researcher did not include activities that happened later, but lacked the foresight to include repairing and/or caring behaviors. Future research could include this type of action.

Another important limitation of the present study involves the demographic characteristics of the participants. First, the majority of respondents were Caucasian college students. Future research may benefit from recruiting a more culturally diverse sample. Second, the researcher entered the study with the intent to only utilize Midwestern participants to limit
REACTIONS TO HURTFUL MESSAGES

the scope of the research. However, different cultures (or culture subsets) may use different communicative techniques than others. Future research in the field could examine other areas of the United States (as well as other countries) to establish what role the culture is playing in individual’s reactions to these messages.

The last major limitation of the present research relates to the study of sex differences in reactions to hurtful messages. The current study treats sex as a fairly simple independent variable. However, since at least 1987, research has re-conceptualized gender as a complex social/communicative display (see West & Zimmerman, 1987). Most social science researchers now take this conceptualization of gender seriously; however, the current study does not acknowledge gender differences.

The researcher chose to focus on sex differences rather than gender differences for two reasons. First, there is very little research supporting the idea that men and women react differently to hurtful messages. The researcher was interested in first showing that there was a difference in the two sexes in this sample, in order to show that sex differences may be useful to study in future research. Second, while communication researchers in general may be using the model of gender rather than sex, there is no research specifically in the field of hurtful messages addressing gender. Once the conclusion that men and women are different is widely acknowledged in this subsection of communication study, future research should expand to take into account the complexity of gender differences.

With these limitations established, the next section will explore possible avenues for future research.

Future Research
The prior section established several limitations of the current research; these limitations introduce several ideas for future research. The next section will introduce more opportunities for exploring reactions to hurtful messages.

As mentioned in the limitation section, the attachment measure utilized in this research (Appendix D) may benefit from some modification. Further, the field could benefit from extensive research focusing only on these two areas. Attachment is often studied in relation to other areas of communication; for example, attachment has been analyzed as a predictor of anger/aggression (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011), to explain individual behavior in organizations (Richards & Schat, 2010), and as related to relationship quality (Saavedra, Chapman, & Rogge, 2010). Because it may be such a strong base for many aspects of personality, the field could benefit from exploring just how much of a role attachment plays in an individual’s reaction to a hurtful message.

In the review of literature, the researcher established that the current study did not seek to ascertain the intent of the message sender. However, future research may want to consider whether or not the intent of the message sender impacts an individual’s reaction to that message. A study of this nature may involve surveying/interviewing both parties involved in the hurtful message -- the sender and the receiver.

Last, reactions to hurtful messages need to be more widely studied. As established previously, there is very little encompassing research on responses to these messages. Often, research will study one “type” of reaction (e.g. emotional, as seen in Feeney, 2005). By combining several types of reactions in one study, the research can be more accurate. A qualitative study of the concepts presented in the current study would help to indicate which direction researchers could focus their study of these reactions.
Conclusion

The results from this study offer support for the study of reactions to hurtful messages. Significant differences were found in relation to relationship type, sex, and attachment type of individuals and their responses to hurtful messages. Specifically, romantic partners had significantly more emotional and physical responses than individuals experiencing hurt in a friendship. Men were significantly more likely than women to have a physical response to a message, while women had a higher rate of emotional response. Last, insecurely attached individuals had significantly higher emotional responses than securely attached individuals.

Overall, the findings of this study provide a basis for future research in the field of hurtful messages. Hurtful messages can have a profound effect; they may be conveyed in an instant, but the pain they cause can last a lifetime. While the messages themselves are often studied, the reactions individuals have to them are, perhaps, just as important.
Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subject Research

Lindsey Googins, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to understand hurtful messages. You are being asked to complete a web-based survey, which is estimated to take 15 minutes.

Participants will be granted access to final research (if desired) to increase their general knowledge of hurtful messages, and will be contributing to general knowledge in the field. Some participants may receive extra credit for their participation, or for recruiting others to take the survey (at the discretion of their instructor).

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that the researcher may gain valuable information about interpersonal communication when hurtful messages occur.

The researcher anticipates no risk to you as a result of your participation in this survey other than the inconvenience of the time to participate in the survey. You could, however, experience some discomfort if your recalling of a hurtful message is unsettling. If you feel the need to further discuss any issues that this survey has brought to your attention, crisis hotline numbers are provided below:

1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
Boys Town Suicide and Crisis Line: 1-800-448-3000

The information that you share will be recorded in anonymous form. At no point will you be asked to provide your name, unless you are completing the survey for extra credit. If so, your name will not be attached to any data; it will be used for extra credit purposes only. The survey instrument is set so that the IP address of your computer is not recorded. The researcher will not release any information that could identify you. All completed surveys and demographic information will be recorded electronically (on a password protected website and computer) and will not be available to anyone not directly involved with this study. Upon completion of the survey, all data will be destroyed.

If you want to withdraw from the study at any time you may do so without penalty. The information on you up to that point would be destroyed.

Once the study is completed, we would be glad to give you the results. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please ask the researcher or contact:

Lindsey Googins
Graduate Student/ Instructional Assistant
Communication Department
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715) 346-2060
lgoogins@uwsp.edu
If you have any complaints about your treatment as participant in this study, please call or write:

Dr. Jason R. Davis, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
School of Business and Economics
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4598

Although Dr. Davis will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Your completion and submission of the survey to the researchers represents your consent to serve as a subject in this research.

This research project has been approved by the UWSP Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.
Appendix B

Student Information

Are you participating in this research in order for you or a student to receive extra credit? If so, please leave your name (or student’s name), course number, and section number (e.g., Lindsey Googins, Comm 101, Section 1). If not, please leave this question blank. NOTE: This name will not be attached to any data.
Appendix C

Demographic Information

Your sex:

☐ Male
☐ Female

Your age: ______________

Primary ethnicity (please choose one):

☐ Caucasian
☐ African American
☐ Hispanic
☐ Asian
☐ Native American
☐ Other (please specify): ________________________________

Highest level of education completed:

☐ No high school
☐ Some high school
☐ High school or equivalent (G.E.D.)
☐ Some college
☐ Associates degree (2 year)
☐ Bachelor’s degree (4 year)
☐ Some education beyond four year degree
☐ Master’s degree
☐ Doctorate/Ph.D
☐ Post-Doctorate
☐ Other education (please specify): ________________________________

Current state of residence: __________________________________________
Appendix D

Which Sounds Most Like You?

Please read the following two passages carefully.

1. In general, I prefer to interact with others. I typically feel that my social world is supportive, and I am confident in the good intentions of others. I would describe my style of caring as reciprocal (I “get” and “give” equally). I am generally comfortable depending on others and with intimacy. I don’t often worry about someone getting too close to me. If given a choice, I would choose to live with roommates rather than alone.

2. In general, I am mostly self-reliant. I prefer to depend on myself rather than others, either because I get nervous when others get too close or I feel that others don’t want to get too close. I believe that I can handle most things on my own, because I have difficulty depending on others to make the decision that is best for me. While I sometimes wish for care, attention, and love, I have found that it is easiest to depend on myself to provide these things. If given a choice, I would choose to live alone rather than with roommates.

While it may not be a perfect fit, which paragraph BEST describes you?

☐ Paragraph 1 sounds MOST like me
☐ Paragraph 2 sounds MOST like me
Appendix E

Hurtful Message Questionnaire

********** Please be sure to read all instructions carefully. **********

Please recall a recent instance in which a close friend or relational partner said something to you that was extremely hurtful—something that made you feel very badly. This does not include hurtful actions; it must be a statement. Please answer the following questions about that situation:

Is this person a (choose one):

- [ ] Close friend
- [ ] Relational partner (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife, domestic partner, etc.)
- [ ] Other, please specify: ____________________________

About how long had you had a relationship with this person (at the time of the event)? Please state in years and months.

How long ago did this event take place? Please state in years and months.

What was the situation? What happened that led up to the hurtful statement?

In the space below, please write a brief “script” of the conversation as you remember it. For example, I said: _______ S/he said: _______

Please note who started the conversation, what you said, and what your partner said that was hurtful to you. **PUT A STAR NEXT TO THE STATEMENT OR QUESTION THAT WAS THE HURTFUL ONE.**
At the time, how hurtful was this statement to you?

[ ] Not at all hurtful  
[ ] A little hurtful  
[ ] Somewhat hurtful  
[ ] Pretty hurtful  
[ ] Extremely hurtful

Do you feel the message was intended to hurt you? Please briefly explain why or why not.
Reactions to Hurtful Messages

When people say things that hurt us, we usually have some type of reaction. Below are a number of ways that you might react when someone says something hurtful to you.

Thinking back to the conversation you just described, please indicate whether you had any of the following types of reactions to the message at the time:

(Participants will check “yes” or “no”)

1. Laughed
2. Asked for an explanation
3. Aggressively moved towards partner
4. Ignored the whole situation
5. Apologized
6. Said something critical or nasty
7. Took aggression out on an inanimate object (ex. slammed a door)
8. Got worked up and thought about the situation over and over
9. Slapped the person
10. Cried in front of the person
11. Cried later, when alone
12. Threw an object at the person
13. Argued with the other person
14. Verbally defended myself
15. Bottled up my feelings
16. Physically hit, kicked, or bit the person
17. Told the other person how I felt
18. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the person

Did you have any other type of reaction not listed above? If so, please state here:
References


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