

*Human Communication*. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.303 – 318.

**Social Exchange, Uncertainty, and Communication Content  
as Factors Impacting the Relational Outcomes of Betrayal**

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Abstract

The discovery of a betrayal sometimes spells the end of a relationship, yet other times relationships survive even egregious transgressions. This research draws upon social exchange theories, uncertainty reduction theory, and previous research on communication repair strategies to identify sets of variables that are likely central to predicting and understanding the relational outcomes of betrayal. Participants (N = 170) recalled, and reported on, a recent instance of betrayal. Post-betrayal relationship satisfaction, prior commitment, and post-betrayal uncertainty were all uniquely associated with relational continuance. Betrayal severity negatively impacted post-betrayal satisfaction. The findings were generally consistent with both social exchange and uncertainty reduction predictions.

Key Words: Betrayal, Social Exchange, Uncertainty

## Outcomes

Humans are social beings, and relationships with others are a primary source of pleasure, comfort, and satisfaction in people's lives. Relationships, however, also make people vulnerable to pain, stress, and emotional upheaval. People sometimes betray other's trust, and the betrayal by a relationally close other is experienced as an unwanted and unpleasant event. Such betrayals sometimes, but not always, lead to the demise of the relationship in which they occur.

It is not surprising that people sometimes cease to contact with those who have hurt and wronged them. It is natural to repel from pain. People, however, sometimes forgive others. Some people seem to get past some transgressions, and their relationships are salvaged and repaired. Other times, people remain in relationships despite both the hurt caused by a transgression and a lack of forgiveness. In such cases, other considerations may simply trump the transgression. An intriguing question therefore is just what determines the relational outcomes of a discovered betrayal. Is it possible to predict and explain when a discovered betrayal will cause relational demise and when it will not?

At least two theoretical approaches seem especially applicable to this problem: social exchange theories and uncertainty reduction theory. A betrayal surely counts as a cost in the economy of a relationship, and from a social exchange perspective, the relational impact of a betrayal is likely dependent on such factors as the severity of the betrayal, comparison level, availability of alternatives, prior satisfaction with the relationship, and the level of prior investment. Betrayals, too, are uncertainty-instilling events, and the literature on uncertainty reduction in relationships points to considerations such as pre- and post-betrayal uncertainty levels, similarity with partner, communication with partner, and network forces as important considerations. Finally, from a communication perspective, the betrayer may or may not actively seek forgiveness and relational repair. The existence and content of communication aimed at seeking reconciliation likely matters. The research reported here assesses the impact of these factors on the relational outcomes of betrayal.

### Literature Review, Theoretical Perspectives, and Research Predictions

Betrayal refers to an instance in which one person in a relationship is unfaithful to a relational expectation (Feldman, Cauffman, Jensen, & Arnett, 2000). Prominent examples of behaviors that usually count as betrayals include sexual and emotional infidelity, deception, and broken promises (cf. Jones & Burdette, 1994; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, and Kennedy, 1988).

Victims of betrayal experience an unpleasant emotional response (McCornack & Levine, 1990; Metts, 1994; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). However, whereas betrayals are always undesirable events, betrayals vary substantially in severity with some betrayals evaluated relatively more negatively than others. Generally, the greater the severity of the betrayal, the more intense and the more negative the emotional response to its discovery (McCornack & Levine, 1990).

The impact of a betrayal on the relationship is variable as well. Transgressions can lead to the near immediate termination of the relationship (e.g., "sudden death" terminations, Duck, 1994). Other times, betrayals cause more temporary damage, and the relationship stays intact gradually returning to its pre-betrayal trajectory. Finally, although presumably infrequent, some betrayals seem to make a relationship stronger (Jones & Burdette, 1994). Generally, the severity of the betrayal increases the likelihood of relational termination (McCornack & Levine, 1990; Jang, Smith, & Levine, 2002), but the relational outcomes of betrayal equation is considerably more

complex than a linear function of a single variable (Ferrara & Levine, 2009). In the next sections, theories that predict and explain this variability and complexity are considered.

#### A Social Exchange Perspective

Social Exchange theories all share the basic premise that people tend to initiate, develop, and maintain relationships that are profitable in that the rewards gained from the relationship outweigh the costs. That is, people in relationships have a metaphorical spreadsheet in which relational credits and debits are tabulated, and future profits are forecast. People are satisfied with their relationships when the rewards exceed the costs, and they continue in those relationships where investments lead to projected future profit.

From an exchange perspective, a betrayal is clearly a cost, and the more severe the betrayal, the bigger the liability. Not only do betrayals result in direct emotional costs, but they also erode trust and make the betrayed wary of future transgressions (McCornack & Levine, 1990). Thus, betrayals should result in an immediate reduction of relational satisfaction and potentially impact relationship stability by reducing projected future outcomes. Several theoretically specified mitigating factors, however, are relevant.

The more profitable and satisfying a relationship prior to a betrayal, the more likely the relationship will be to survive a transgression. Continuance in a relationship is usually not a function of a single event, but instead a function of the current running total and projected future balance of rewards and costs. Relationships may survive the incursion of a substantial debit if the other rewards and costs in the equation are such that profitability is maintained and projected to continue. Consistent with this, Ferrara and Levine (2009) found that relational satisfaction was a strong predictor of relational stability following a betrayal.

According to Kelley and Thibaut (1978), the effects of relational profit on satisfaction are further dependent on a person's comparison level (CL). CL is a standard, expectation, and a point of reference that people use to assess what level of profit is acceptable. Satisfaction results in relationships when the rewards-to-costs assessment exceeds the CL.

Kelley and Thibaut (1978) propose that stability in relationship is impacted by the availability of alternatives (CL<sub>alt</sub>). Not only are profits assessed in relation to the CL, but they are also compared to the profit projected from potential alternatives. If termination is perceived as a less profitable option, people are willing to continue an unsatisfying relationship.

Finally, prior investment must be considered. Not only are current and future outcomes important, but so too are prior investments (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). People who have invested heavily in a relationship should be less likely to terminate a relationship as a consequence of a betrayal, thereby forfeiting their investment. Consistent with this, research finds that those who have invested more in a relationship are more likely to forgive (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002) and that victims with high levels of relational commitment tend to accommodate rather than retaliate (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991).

These considerations stemming from social exchange theory allow the deduction of four hypotheses detailing the impact of betrayal on relationship stability.

H1: Betrayal severity is inversely associated with post-betrayal satisfaction (H1a) and stability (H1b).

H2: Pre-betrayal satisfaction is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

H3: Alternatives (CL<sub>alt</sub>) are inversely associated with post-betrayal stability.

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H4: The magnitude of pre-betrayal investment is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

## Uncertainty

The application of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) provides a different analysis of the impact of betrayal on relationships. At the core of URT is the premise that people seek to reduce uncertainty to better predict and explain the events that affect them. Applied to relationships, URT guided research finds that levels of uncertainty are substantially and inversely related to relationship stability (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Parks & Adelman, 1983).

An uncovered act of betrayal is an uncertainty inducing event (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Betrayals, by definition, involve a salient violation of expectations (Feldman et al., 2000). Betrayals, too, may lead the victim to question if other transgressions might have transpired (McCornack & Levine, 1990). They may wonder how well they really know the transgressor, if they should stay in the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). In short, the future of the relationship comes into question. Further, the greater the severity or magnitude of the transgression, the greater the uncertainty generated.

Increases in uncertainty in relationships are associated with decreases in relational stability (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Parks & Adelman, 1983). Because betrayals instill uncertainty, if the uncertainty is not reduced, the probability of relationship continuance is diminished. Because more severe betrayal results in increased uncertainty, betrayal severity should be inversely associated with post-betrayal satisfaction and stability. Thus, hypothesis one above can be derived from both social exchange theory and URT. However, URT leads to a different collection of mitigating conditions and it relies on a different logic.

From an uncertainty perspective, the prospects of a relationship surviving a betrayal depend on pre-betrayal levels of uncertainty, the amount of uncertainty generated by the betrayal, the ability of victim to reduce uncertainty post-betrayal, and ultimately the post-betrayal level of uncertainty. Knobloch and Solomon (2003) found, for example, that uncertainty increasing events often lead the victim to engage in active information-gathering (e.g., open, direct, and explicit communication about the event). In the forgiveness literature, uncertainty reduction is considered necessary for forgiveness (Gordon & Baucom, 1998, 2003).

In addition, URT axioms specify that amount of communication with partner and similarity with partner facilitate uncertainty reduction. Research on uncertainty and relationship stability adds communication with partner's network and support from partner's network as variables that impact uncertainty and relationship stability (Parks & Adelman, 1983). Thus, consideration of an uncertainty perspective on betrayal outcomes leads to the derivation of an additional five hypotheses.

H5: Pre- (H5a) and post-betrayal (H5b) uncertainty are inversely associated with post-betrayal stability.

H6: Amount of communication with partner is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

H7. Partner similarity is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

H8. Communication with partner network is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

H9: Support from partner network is positively associated with post-betrayal stability.

### Communicative Repair

Whereas URT offers the plausible hypothesis that communication is likely to play an important role in the relational consequences of betrayal, the theory offers little guidance on what types of communication strategies would be conducive to mending post-betrayal relationships. Prior betrayal research has found that the likelihood of relationship survival after transgressions depends on the betrayer's conflict management style (e.g., Shi, 2003). Similarly, Aune, Metts, and Hubbard (1989) report deceivers who make use of active remedial approaches (e.g., direct discussion, apology, relational work, or soothing) are more likely to regain trust and affection from the victim compared to those who try to make excuses, justify, avoid, or deny the offense. Ferrera and Levine (2009) suggest that common options available to betrayers seeking forgiveness include apologies, justification, promises to change, statements of relational value, and taking responsibility. Consideration of strategies such as these is essential because betrayal perpetrators may actively seek the forgiveness from their victims, and those doing so have a number of communication strategies available. The net effectiveness of these strategies, however, especially when considering the structural and cognitive considerations raised by social exchange theory and URT, is unclear (Ferrera & Levine, 2009). Therefore, the impact of these options is addressed in the following research question.

RQ1: Is the reported use of apologies, justification, promises to change, statements of relational value, taking responsibility, dismissal, and blaming the victim associated with relationship stability?

The impact of the social exchange, uncertainty, and communication strategies variables are not mutually exclusive, and each perspective likely adds to the understanding of relational betrayal outcomes. Each perspective, however, may not be equally strong in explanatory or predictive utility. Therefore, a final research is offered.

RQ2: What is the relative predictive impact of social exchange, URT, and communication repair strategies on relationship stability?

### Method

#### Participants

The participants were 170 students enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at a large midwestern university who could recall a recent betrayal by a romantic partner. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years ( $M = 19.03$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) and 51.5% were female. All received research or extra credit in exchange for their participation. The data collection, measures, and procedures were IRB approved.

The reported betrayals occurred in exclusive dating relationships (48.2%), casual dating relationships (28.0%), other (22.6%), or engaged (1.2%) relationships. Few (5.9%) were cohabitating at the time of the betrayal, but many of the relationships in which the betrayals occurred had been in existence for a substantial time prior to the betrayal ( $M = 40.57$  months,  $SD = 42.89$ ). Most (89.2%) of the relationships involved an opposite-sex partner. On average, the

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participants reported that the betrayal occurred about a month prior to completing the current survey ( $Mdn = 20$  days, 83% 30 days or less).

## Procedures

Participants were asked to recall a recent situation in which a relational partner had betrayed them. Prior to questionnaire completion, participants were provided with four criteria specifying the type of betrayal that they were to recall. The relationship must have been a romantic relationship (vs. friendship, professional, or family relationship), the betrayal need to fit within the definition specified (i.e., the romantic partner was disloyal to them or violated their trust), the betrayal must involve with an incident in which they were the victim, and the incident must have occurred recently, preferably within the last month. Participants able to recall an instance meeting these criteria then completed an extensive questionnaire. Participants not recalling a betrayal episode meeting the above criteria were offered an alternate research task for equal credit and effort.

## Measures

Each participant received a questionnaire containing scales assessing exchange, uncertainty, and communication variables. Exchange variables included scales measuring satisfaction, commitment, investment, CL, and CLalt. Uncertainty-related scales include the amount of communication with, and support from, partner's social network, the amount of communication with partner, interpersonal similarity and uncertainty with partner. Communication strategies items include apology, responsibility acceptance, justification, promise change, emphasizing relationship importance, dismissing, and blaming the victim. Participants completed exchange and uncertainty measures about the relationship prior to the betrayal, and then completed the communication strategies, perceived severity of betrayal, post betrayal satisfaction and uncertainty, and stability measures evaluating their relationship after the betrayal.

Relationship stability was measured with a dichotomous item asking "Are you still romantically involved with this person?" Just over one-third (34.7%) of the participants answered "yes." Participants were also asked if the current post-betrayal relationship is better (15.7%) or worse (53.0%) than, or about the same as (31.3%), the relationship prior to the betrayal.

Perceived severity of betrayal was measured using four-item, 7-point semantic differential scale. Each of the four items was anchored by "significant-insignificant," "important-unimportant," "major-minor," and "relevant-irrelevant." Obtained internal consistency reliability was  $\alpha = .86$ .

Satisfaction with the relationship was measured with five items created by Ohira (2001) and three items addressing global satisfaction with the relationship used in previous exchange research (e.g., Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, 1980). All items used 7-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). The same items were used to assess pre- and post-betrayal satisfaction, with the exception that pre-betrayal items were worded in past tense and post-betrayal items used present tense. Sample items included, "I was happy with the state of our relationship," "Our relationship is fulfilling," and "I feel content in the relationship." These items proved nicely reliable ( $\alpha = .95$  for both before and after the betrayal).

Commitment items reflected the recalled intention to remain in the relationship before the betrayal incident. A 5-item, 7- point Likert scale (1= Strongly Agree, 7= Strongly Disagree)

was used, which was modified from Parks and Floyd (1996). Items included "I was very committed to maintaining the relationship." Acceptable scale reliability was observed ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Investment items were adopted from previous research (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Truman-Schram et al., 2000). Eight items using 7-point Likert scales (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree) were used in this study, but 5 items were removed for a failure to contribute to scale reliability. The remaining 3 items were "I invested a lot of time into the relationship," "We did several activities that were unique to the relationship," and "I invested a lot of emotion in the relationship." These three items were reliable ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

The quality of relationship alternatives scale was developed for the present investigation and was comprised of 5 Likert items, using a 7-point response format (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Three items were excluded for a negative impact on scale reliability. The remaining two items were "I had realistic options in addition to this relationship," and "I did have good alternatives to this relationship." The reliability of the remaining items was minimally acceptable ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

The measure of comparison level was also developed for the current investigation. Five general questions assessed comparison level on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). A sample item was, "Generally, this relationship exceeded my standards for a romantic relationship." The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = .82$ .

The amount of contact with partner's social network was measured using 5, 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Sample items were "I met most of my partner's close friends," "I met most of my partner's immediate family members." Acceptable reliability was obtained ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

A 6-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) was used to assess the level of support from partner's social network. Items include, for example, "My partner's family included me in their activities," and "My partner's friends expressed their support of our relationship." Reliability was  $\alpha = .89$ .

A 3-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = Almost no time, 7 = Every moment possible) was developed to measure the amount of communication with partner. One item, however, was removed to increase internal consistency reliability. Remaining two items were "We talked face-to-face \_\_\_\_\_," and "We communicated by email, phone, letters, etc." A minimally acceptable reliability was obtained for this measure ( $\alpha = .68$ ).

Similarity with partner was assessed with 5-items using 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). One item was excluded for lowering the reliability. Among the remaining four items included "We share a lot of the same attitudes," and "The two of us are very similar." Standardized alpha was .88.

A 5-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) was used to measure the level of uncertainty with partner. As with the measure of satisfaction, the same items were worded in either past or present tense for pre- and post-betrayal uncertainty. For the measure of uncertainty before the betrayal, removing one item enhanced the internal consistency to  $\alpha = .93$ . Two items were removed from the measure of uncertainty after the betrayal, which resulted in  $\alpha = .93$ . "I can accurately predict how my partner will respond in most situations," and "I can usually tell what this person is feeling inside" were among the retained items.

Measures of the various communication strategies were adopted from Ferrara and Levine (2009). All strategy items used 7-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly

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Agree). Apology was tested with two items (e.g., “My partner said he/she was sorry that the betrayal happened,”  $\alpha = .94$ ). Responsibility acceptance was also tested with two items ( $\alpha = .90$ ). A sample item read “My partner took the blame for the betrayal.” The justification strategy also involved two items ( $\alpha = .80$ ; e.g., “My partner offered excuses for why he/she betrayed me.”). Two items were used for promising change as well ( $\alpha = .91$ , e.g., “My partner promised that he/she would make changes in his/her behavior.”). Two items emphasizing relationship importance, e.g., “My partner told me how important the relationship was to him/her,” produced  $\alpha = .90$ . Finally, dismissing the betrayal and blaming the victim were assessed using one item each. Sample items included “My partner told me to get over it,” and “My partner tried to place the blame on me,” respectively. Descriptive statistics for the various scale totals are presented in Table 1 along with reliabilities and a full correlation matrix.

Table 1 *Descriptive and Correlation Matrix*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Relational stability				—									
2. Commitment	5.3	1.3	.8	.35*	—								
	9	4	5	*									
3. Investment	5.2	1.5	.9	.24*	.71*	—							
	8	9	0	*	*								
4. CL	4.5	1.4	.8	.30*	.56*	.53*	—						
	1	5	2	*	*	*							
5. CL <sub>alt</sub>	4.7	1.4	.7	.05	.03	.14	.03	—					
	9	0	0										
6. Satisfaction Before betrayal	5.4	1.3	.9	.26*	.63*	.40*	.47*	.17	—				
	1	5	5	*	*	*	*	*					
7. Satisfaction After betrayal	3.9	1.9	.9	.42*	.07	.02	.11	.10	.03	—			
	6	1	5	*									
8. Severity of betrayal	4.9	1.5	.8	-.19*	.12	.27*	.12	.05	.03	-	—		
	0	8	6			*					.26*		
											*		
9. Contact with partner's network	4.8	1.5	.8	.18*	.49*	.64*	.48*	.19	.33*	.12	.13	—	
	1	7	1		*	*	*	*	*				
10. Support from partner's network	4.8	1.6	.8	.25*	.50*	.70*	.63*	.12	.34*	.15	.20*	.77*	—
	5	3	9	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	
11. Communication with partner	5.3	1.3	.6	.06	.38*	.49*	.31*	.20	.29*	-.02	.33*	.39*	.38*
	3	1	8		*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
12. Similarity	5.0	1.3	.8	.27*	.62*	.53*	.46*	.07	.48*	.10	.05	.42*	.42*
	5	0	8	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*
13. Uncertainty Before betrayal	5.3	1.3	.9	.19*	.58*	.69*	.46*	.13	.40*	.09	.27*	.64*	.60*
	9	6	3		*	*	*		*		*	*	*
14. Uncertainty After betrayal	4.3	1.9	.9	.38*	.25*	.23*	.28*	.06	.09	.48*	-.04	.30*	.23*
	2	1	3	*	*	*	*			*		*	*
15. Apology	4.5	2.2	.9	.10	.17*	.23*	.18*	.04	.10	.21*	.25*	.21*	.33*
	5	8	4			*				*	*	*	*
16. Responsibility taking	4.3	2.2	.9	.21*	.16*	.19*	.20*	.06	.12	.25*	.10	.15	.27*
	7	0	0	*			*			*			*
17. Excuse	4.3	2.0	.8	.02	.07	.11	.03	.02	.04	.00	.16*	.07	.09



Outcomes

Table 1 Continued

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
11. Communication with partner	5.3 3	1.3 1	.6 8	—									
12. Similarity	5.0 5	1.3 0	.8 8	.42*	—								
13. Uncertainty Before betrayal	5.3 9	1.3 6	.9 3	.45*	.57*	—							
14. Uncertainty After betrayal	4.3 2	1.9 1	.9 3	.13	.25*	.40*	—						
15. Apology	4.5 5	2.2 8	.9 4	.22*	.17*	.21*	.15	—					
16. Responsibility taking	4.3 7	2.2 0	.9 0	.13	.16*	.14	.14	.81*	—				
17. Excuse	4.3 3	2.0 1	.8 0	.17*	.14	.11	.03	.28*	.21*	—			
18. Promise change	4.0 1	2.2 9	.9 1	.26*	.11	.25*	.24*	.66*	.63*	.24*	—		
19. Relationship valuing	4.4 7	2.1 6	.9 0	.31*	.22*	.35*	.33*	.56*	.54*	.28*	.68*		
20. Dismiss	3.1 4	2.1 2		.00	-.03	-.01	-.07	-.25*	-.24*	.17*	-.12	-.07	-.07
21. Blame the victim	2.7 3	2.0 7		-.07	.05	.06	-.02	-.23*	-.28*	.09	-.10	-.07	.51*

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Results

H1 predicted that betrayal severity is inversely associated with post-betrayal satisfaction (H1a) and stability (H1b). The results were consistent with both parts of this hypothesis,  $r(162) = -.26, p = .001$  and  $r(160) = -.19, p = .01$ , respectively. These results indicate that as perceived severity of betrayal increases, post-betrayal satisfaction with the relationship decreases, and also it becomes less likely for the victim to stay in the relationship. H2 stated that pre-betrayal satisfaction is positively associated with post-betrayal stability. This prediction was also consistent with the results,  $r(164) = .26, p = .001$ . Greater satisfaction with pre-betrayal relationship reduces the likelihood of relationship termination. H3 predicted that CLalt is inversely associated with post-betrayal stability. Results were inconsistent with this prediction,  $r(164) = .05, p = .50$ . H4 stated that the magnitude of pre-betrayal investment is positively associated with post-betrayal stability. The results were consistent with this prediction,  $r(165) = .24, p = .002$ . As expected, greater relational investment led to an increase in the likelihood of maintaining the relationship post betrayal.

H5 predicted that pre- (H5a) and post-betrayal uncertainty (H5b) are inversely associated with post-betrayal stability. The data were consistent with these predictions. Both pre- and post-betrayal uncertainty were negatively correlated with post-betrayal stability,  $r(164) = -.19, p = .02$ , and  $r(165) = -.38, p < .001$ , respectively. H6 stated that amount of communication with partner is

positively associated with post-betrayal stability. Results were inconsistent with this prediction,  $r(164) = .06, p = .43$ . H7 proposed that similarity with partner is positively associated with post-betrayal stability. Results showed that, as predicted, as perceived similarity with partner increases, so does the likelihood of relationship maintenance post betrayal,  $r(165) = .27, p < .001$ . H8 predicted that communication with partner's network is positively associated with post-betrayal stability. Results were consistent with this hypothesis. Frequent interaction with partner's significant others (i.e., family and close friends) tended to raise the probability that the relationship survives the incident of betrayal,  $r(165) = .18, p = .02$ . Finally, H9 stated that support from partner's network is positively associated with post-betrayal stability. Consistent with this prediction, results indicated that the greater the support from partner's network, the more likely it is that the victim of betrayal stays in the relationship  $r(162) = .25, p = .001$ .

RQ1 asked if the reported use of apologies, justification, promises to change, statements of relational value, taking responsibility, dismissal, and blaming the victim associated with post-betrayal stability. Out of these 7 communication repair strategies, only responsibility acceptance and statements of relational value were significantly correlated with relational stability,  $r(165) = .21, p = .007$ , and  $r(165) = .24, p = .002$ , respectively.

RQ2 addressed the relative predictive impact of social exchange, URT, and communication repair strategies on relationship stability. To answer this research question, logistic regression analysis was run for the dichotomous continue-terminate outcome. A saturated model containing all the predictor variables included in the previous hypotheses and research questions resulted in a statistically significant omnibus model,  $\chi^2(20) = 64.01, p < .001$ , Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .34$ . Inclusion of the variable set led to a modest increase in correct classification from 66.0% to 77.1%. The independent variables that significantly and uniquely contributed to the model included prior commitment ( $b = .69, p = .04$ ), post-betrayal satisfaction ( $b = .41, p = .01$ ), post-betrayal uncertainty ( $b = -.37, p = .03$ ), and apologies ( $b = -.42, p = .05$ ).

Follow-up regression analyses investigated the factors leading to post-betrayal satisfaction, commitment, and uncertainty. Of the social exchange variables (i.e., commitment, CL, CLalt, investment, and betrayal severity),  $F(5, 154) = 3.37, p = .006, R^2 = .10$ , only betrayal severity uniquely impacted post-betrayal satisfaction,  $\beta = -.27, p = .001$ . Prior commitment was predicted,  $F(4, 160) = 79.96, p < .001, R^2 = .67$ , by investment,  $\beta = .51, p < .001$ , prior satisfaction,  $\beta = .39, p < .001$ , and CLalt,  $\beta = -.12, p = .01$ . For post-betrayal uncertainty, when all URT variables were entered,  $F(6, 151) = 5.20, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ , only pre-betrayal uncertainty was statistically significant,  $\beta = .39, p = .001$ . Pre-betrayal uncertainty,  $F(4, 159) = 48.72, p < .001, R^2 = .55$ , in turn, was predicted by contact with partner's network,  $\beta = -.32, p < .001$ , support from partner's network,  $\beta = -.18, p = .04$ , similarity,  $\beta = -.30, p < .001$ , and communication with partner,  $\beta = -.14, p = .03$ . The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 1.

## Discussion

Betrayals by a romantic partner can be psychologically devastating. Regardless of the ultimate consequences, it is experienced as an unpleasant experience. The focus of the current research, however, is on the relational outcomes of betrayal, and specifically on predicting and explaining when a betrayal will result in termination and when relationships are maintained in spite of the transgression.

Participants in the current research were asked to recall and report on a recent betrayal by a romantic partner. About two-thirds of relationships reported on had ended. Predictions

## Outcomes

generated from Social Exchange Theory and Uncertainty Reduction Theory were tested, and the data suggested that both approaches uniquely contributed to the explanation and prediction of relational outcomes.

The data were consistent with a hybrid social exchange perspective merging social interdependence and investment perspectives. Relational stability was a function of both commitment and post betrayal relationship satisfaction. Consistent with the investment model, commitment was, in turn, a function of prior satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. Consistent with the current arguments that betrayal is a cost in the relational spreadsheet, post-betrayal satisfaction was predominantly a function of betrayal severity. Thus, betrayals directly reduce relationship satisfaction, with more serious betrayals leading to greater reductions in satisfaction and consequently higher likelihoods of termination. This process, however, is tempered by commitment. The greater the prior commitment, the more likely the relationship will survive a transgression independent of current satisfaction levels and betrayal severity.

The results were also consistent with uncertainty predictions. Post-betrayal uncertainty was negatively and substantially associated with relational survival, and this remained the case when statistically controlling for exchange variables. Those who broke up reported higher levels of uncertainty than those who stayed together. One might expect the opposite. It is plausible that those who chose to end their relationship would be more certain that breaking up was the best course of action whereas those staying in their relationships might be more uncertain. This, however, was not the case.

Other findings, too, were URT consistent. Pre-betrayal uncertainty predicted post-betrayal uncertainty, and pre-betrayal uncertainty was predicted nicely by communication with partner, similarity, contact with partner's network, and support from partner's network. These latter findings are consistent with two URT axioms and replicate the findings of Parks and Adelman (1983).

The findings for the communication strategies were more meager. When controlling for exchange and uncertainty variables, only apologies had a statistically significant impact on stability. This result ( $b = -.42, p < .05$ ) is inconsistent with that suggested by a zero-order correlation analysis ( $r = .10, p > .05$ ). Apparently, the impact of apologies on relational stability was suppressed by unpredicted influence of some other variables in the model. At first glance, this result may seem counter-intuitive because it is more likely that apologies would facilitate forgiveness from the victim and, in turn, restore relational stability. However, more severe transgressions may produce more apologies. The victim of a consequential betrayal might decide to end the relationship no matter how hard the betrayer seeks forgiveness. The significant correlation between apologies and the severity of betrayal ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ) is consistent this interpretation.

Some zero-order associations, however, are suggestive. Taking responsibility and claiming to value the relationship were significantly and positively associated with stability, and apologies, taking responsibility, and valuing relationship were positively associated with post-betrayal satisfaction. Nevertheless, at least in recalled betrayals data, the severity of betrayal act trumped communicative attempts at post-betrayal repair. Ferrera and Levine (2009) report similar findings.

In conclusion, these data present a theoretically informed portrait of the relational outcomes of betrayal. Whether or not the recalled betrayals were relationally fatal came down to

the badness of the transgression, how well people thought they could understand and predict their partners, and how much the relationship had in the metaphorical bank. Big nasty betrayals were more likely to be fatal, but previously happy and committed relationships had higher survival rates, and did those in which the uncertainty levels were lower.

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