

The Effects of Perspective on the Perceived Outcomes of Romantic Revenge: Comparing Affective and Empathic Forecasting

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Background

How we judge acts of revenge, whether looking at them from the outside or engaging in them ourselves, could be influenced by how we predict their consequences. Avengers and those observing revenge make predictions from different perspectives. Avengers make affective forecasts on how they will feel following revenge, while outside observers make empathic forecasts about how the avenger will feel in the future.

These different perspectives may result in avengers and observers taking different information into account when making emotional forecasts. The present study searched for differences between affective and empathic forecasters when predicting emotions following revenge.

Method

- 86 undergraduates (38 Male, 48 Female), randomly assigned to one of two forecasting conditions:
 - affective** (If *you* were the avenger, how would you feel now?)
 - empathic** (How would the avenger feel now?)
- Participants read a scenario of revenge between romantic partners:

Provocation (what the Avenger's partner did):

My girlfriend was cheating on me and once it was brought to my attention and I confronted her about it, she continued to say that she was not involved with someone else, that I was crazy for thinking it.

Response (how the Avenger got even):

Once I confronted her and she denied everything, she ended the relationship and I was devastated. Not only was it over, but I felt humiliated and very angry. I wanted her to feel the way I felt and so I came up with a way to do that. I hacked into her Facebook to figure out who the other guy was. I got his e-mail and sent him an email letting him know who I was and how my ex had been conning both of us at the same time. I sent proof of our relationship and let him know that I only wanted him to know the truth, so maybe it wouldn't be so surprising to him. I apologized if I hurt him, because I knew what it felt like and it ended there. A few days later I heard from a friend of my ex's that she had a very public breakup with a guy no one knew she was seeing. Apparently it was pretty bad and she was humiliated.

Measures

- 14 item index - The extent to which the avenger would feel:
 - Positive emotions (*proud, satisfied, fulfilled, content, rewarded, happy, justified*)
 - Negative emotions (*regretful, guilty, angry, frustrated, disturbed, shamed, distressed*)
- Predicted positive and negative outcomes from revenge:
 - Mean positive or negative severity of each outcome (1 = Not at all positive/negative, 5 = Extremely positive/negative)
 - Outcomes categorized by two independent raters (Cohen's Kappa = .96)

Results and Conclusions

Table 1

Correlations between outcome ratings and forecasted emotions for affective and empathic forecasters.

| | Affective | Positive Outcomes | Negative Outcomes |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Positive Emotions | | .726** | -.150 |
| Negative Emotions | | -.196 | .534** |
| | Empathic | | |
| Positive Emotions | | .294 | -.252 |
| Negative Emotions | | -.405* | .412* |

Note: * $p = .01$, ** $p = .001$

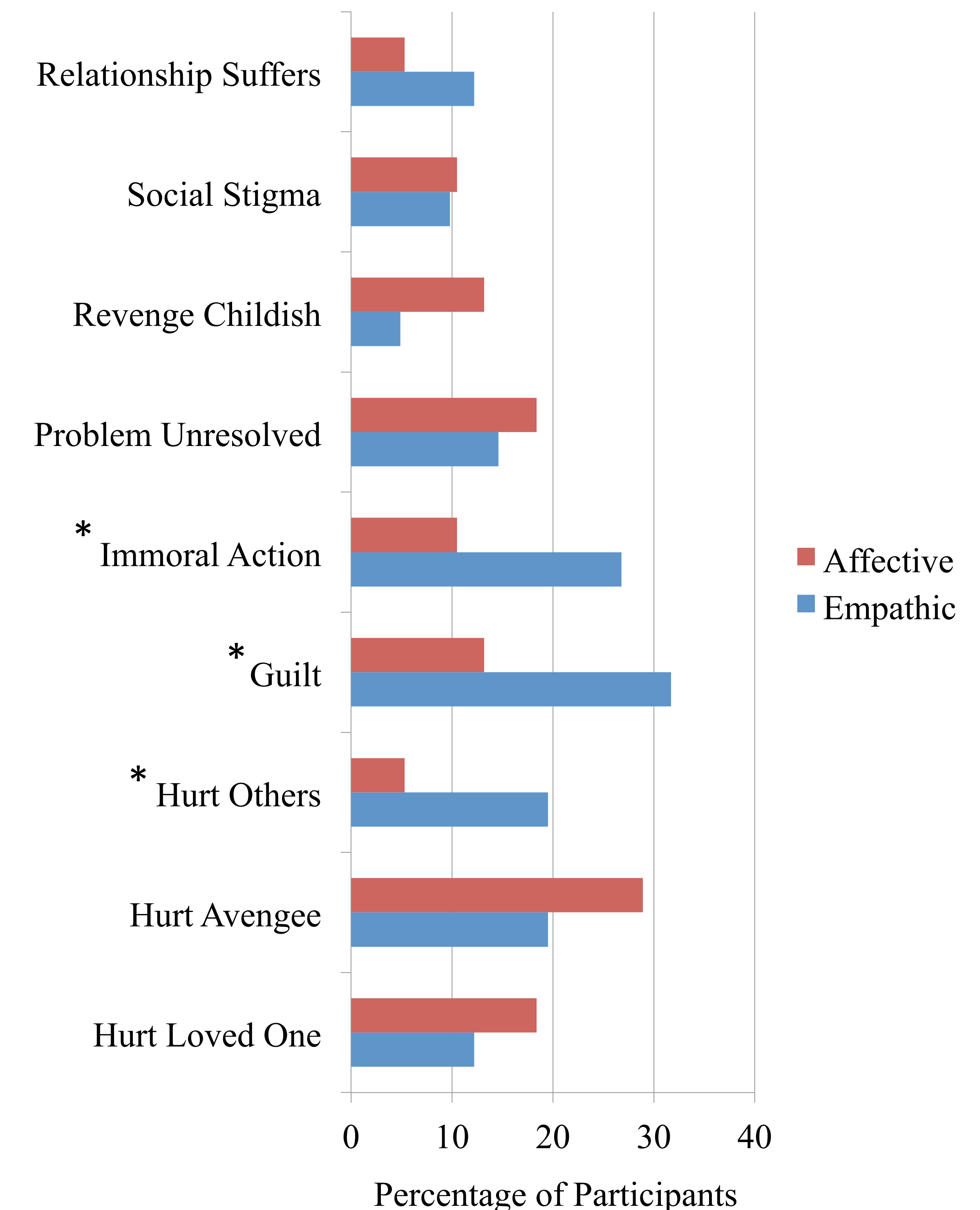


Figure 1. Proportion of affective and empathic forecasters listing negative outcome categories, frequency above 10% for either group. Asterisk denotes significance at .05.

- No substantive differences between groups for positive outcomes.
- Perspective matters, but the pattern of differences is complex.
- It may be more difficult for affective forecasters to associate themselves with guilt or wrongdoing.



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