



Breaking Hearts: The Two Sides of Unrequited Love (Emotions and Social Behavior)

By Roy F. Baumeister, Sara R. Wotman



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Throughout history, unrequited love has inspired ballads, arias, poetry, drama, and literature. Almost always, however, the tale of the "star-crossed lovers" has been told from the point of view of the heartbroken pursuer. This illuminating new work explores unrequited love from both sides--that of the aspiring and eventually brokenhearted lover, and more unusually, that of the beloved, unwilling rejector. Based on systematically collected first-person accounts, BREAKING HEARTS shows how radically different and often contradictory the two experiences actually are.

Blending scientific research with vivid narrative, the book utilizes current psychological theories about relationships, interdependence, attachment, and communication to provide careful analysis of the sometimes amusing and often heartrending stories people tell about their love lives. The central focus is the subjective experience: What it feels like to love someone who does not love you in return, and what is it like to be pursued by someone whose attentions you wish to discourage. Demolishing pat theories about human fulfillment coming from loving or being loved, this valuable counterweight to traditional studies explores the other, darker side of love to show that it is the mutuality of affection that is crucial to happiness.

A particularly valuable feature of BREAKING HEARTS is its unprecedented treatment of the rejector's experience. Known only from the unreliable perspective of the would-be lover, the elusive "heartbreaker" has remained an enigma. Here, perhaps for the first time, rejectors tell what it is like to be loved in vain. They describe their inner turmoil, pervasive uncertainty about how to act, and distressed reluctance to inflict harm. They grapple with the paradox of believing themselves to be morally innocent yet feeling profoundly guilty, and describe powerful feelings of exasperation and helplessness when the admirer refuses to take no for an answer. Contrary to stereotypes, the rejectors describe their experiences more negatively than the heartbroken lovers. For the would-be lover, the encounter was a high-stakes gamble, with possible outcomes ranging from tortured pain and humiliation to ecstatic bliss and fulfillment. To the rejector, it was a no-win proposition that offered only vexation and trouble.

Throughout, chapters deal with the separate roller-coaster ordeals of two people--the ups and downs of self-esteem, struggles over guilt and justification, and the systematically discrepant versions of what actually occurred. Lessons people learn from being either willing or unwilling participants in unrequited love are discussed, as are the ways in which they change following such episodes.

BREAKING HEARTS presents careful research in an engaging style that will be accessible to all. Social scientists interested in marriage, family issues, emotion, self esteem, guilt, and human coping will find the book illuminating. It will obviously be of interest to anyone who has experienced unrequited love, and is fascinating reading for those seeking new insights into the tragicomic mystery of romance.

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- Sales Rank: #1403718 in Books
- Brand: Brand: The Guilford Press
- Published on: 1994-08-05
- Released on: 1994-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .58" w x 6.00" l, .79 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 241 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Engagingly written, BREAKING HEARTS offers an insightful and broad-ranging theoretical analysis and a careful empirical documentation of the heart breakers and the heart broken....It captures the drama of breaking hearts without sacrificing the rigor of the scientific enterprise."

--Bella DePaulo, Ph.D., University of Virginia

"This book is a rich and enlightening account of the experience of unrequited love, and should be of interest not only to scientists who study close relationships, but also to the general public." --Caryl E. Rusbult, Ph.D., University of North Carolina

"The topic of unrequited love is an intriguing one that has caused much interest lately since the film, *Fatal Attraction*, and the several cases of stalking that have received public attention. This book offers the first systematic attempt to uncover the patterns of unrequited love and it is a good example of what a psychological analysis of important social issues can contribute to their solution." --Steve Duck, Ph.D., University of Iowa

"Often I found myself swept along by the charming, fluid style in which the book is written....In short, the authors are highly successful in creating a book that will appeal to a wide audience....This book makes a significant contribution to the literature."--Contemporary Psychology
(*Contemporary Psychology* 1994-08-07)

"For all who've ever loved and lost, and for all therapists who've worked with lovesick clients (or their fantasy objects)."--Behavioral Science Book Service
(*Behavioral Science Book Service* 1994-08-07)

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Baumeister received his PhD in experimental social psychology from Princeton University in 1978. Since then, his research career has taken him to the University of California at Berkeley, to the University of Texas at Austin, to the Max-Planck-Institute in Munich, Germany, and to Case Western Reserve University, where in 1992 he was awarded the Elsie B. Smith Professorship in Liberal Arts. The recipient of an American Psychological Association award for his first book, he has authored over 100 publications and numerous articles in professional journals and scholarly volumes.

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Michelle Carlson:

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