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Hatred

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Synonyms

[Dislike](#); [Hate](#); [Hostility](#)

Definition

Hatred is a secondary, extreme, and continuous emotion which is directed at a particular object or group and fundamentally and all-inclusively denounces that object or group (Halperin 2008).

Introduction

Emotions play an important role in our lives, as they are central to all meaningful human interactions, including professional, formal, personal, and intimate relationships. Hatred is one of the most important emotions in close relationships and is also one of the major sources of destructive motivations, violent actions, and harmful crimes against individuals and groups. Although many people would mention hatred as one of the first

emotional words when asked to provide a list of emotions and although there is wide consensus about the impact of hatred on our personal and social lives, defining hatred and understanding its nature and characteristics still pose a great challenge for scholars and lay people alike.

The aim of this entry is to create a clearer picture and provide a deeper understanding to this somewhat intuitive and ambiguous term which is well recognized when felt, but not necessarily easy to define. In an attempt to differentiate hatred from other negative emotions and identify its uniquely destructive features, the entry will review the nature of hatred (its characteristics, core appraisals, and behavioral intentions) and distinguish it from other related emotions. Finally, potential explanations for individual differences in hatred will be addressed, and scholar's attempts to reduce hatred and its negative consequences will be presented.

The Nature of Hatred (Characteristics, Cognitive Appraisals, and Behavioral Intentions)

Many definitions of hatred emphasize its persistent nature. Gordon Allport, one of the most important scholars to deal with this phenomenon in recent times, suggested that hatred is an “enduring organization of aggressive impulses toward a person or a class of persons” (Allport 1954, p. 363). This approach challenges the perception

of hatred as simply an emotion, provoked by a specific event, and instead suggests that it is a persistent, long-term emotional phenomenon. This dispute regarding the momentary versus the chronic nature of hatred was resolved by the suggestion that hatred can occur in both an immediate form and a chronic one.

According to Halperin et al. (2012), the first type of hatred, referred to as chronic/mild hatred, is a stable emotional sentiment. It involves a restricted amount of negative feelings, a stable cognitive perception that the offenses caused by the hated are severe, unjust, and intentional, and leads to disengagement and a desire for separation. The second type, referred to as immediate/strong hatred, is a powerful “burning” hatred that occurs in response to significant events and may generate a willingness to humiliate and destroy the subject of hatred. While both types derive from the same cognitive appraisals and invoke the same basic emotional goals, their duration, intensity, and immediate implications are different (Halperin et al. 2012). They are interconnected in the sense that the more frequently incidents of immediate hatred occur, the more probable it is that chronic hatred will develop, and chronic hatred serves as fertile ground for the occurrence of immediate hatred. This dual nature of hatred sheds light on the way hatred forms and can also explain the difficulties and challenges of trying to deal with this destructive phenomenon.

Another interesting characteristic of hatred is that it is susceptible to becoming an intergroup emotion as it does not require personal interaction or acquaintance between the hater and the hated group. According to Jasini and Fischer (2015), the absence of interactions with the targets of one’s hatred may further increase one’s hatred, because it diminishes chances of perspective taking by the victim. Another way Jasini and Fischer’s (2015) work demonstrates how hatred is especially suited to an intergroup context is that their research shows hatred also increases when there are opportunities to share the emotion with other ingroup members.

Hatred’s uniqueness goes beyond its characteristic into its core appraisal themes. The unique aspect of hatred’s appraisals is the perception

that the hated’s negative or harmful behavior stems from negative characteristics that are inherent to the subject of hatred (rather than related to the context or specific events) and cannot be changed. Halperin (2008) claimed that hatred is caused by the judgment that the target of hatred is evil by nature and further emphasized that the evil nature and malicious intentions are perceived as stable and fixed. This unique component of hatred, the perceived fixed negative nature of the hated, is of great importance as it generates specific and more aggressive behavioral intentions and differentiates hatred from other emotions as will be elaborated further.

The behavioral intentions associated with hatred seem to be a direct result of its core appraisals that imply a total lack of belief in the possibility of positive change among the hated. According to White (1996), hatred reflects the desire to harm, humiliate, or even kill its object – not always instrumentally, but rather to cause harm as a vengeful objective in itself. It could be argued that when people say they hate someone, they usually mean they wish to hurt or harm him, and sometimes even eliminate him. Royzman et al. (2005) stated that “. . .hate entails an intense desire for the annihilation of its object”, and that it “. . .seems also consistent with a wish that the hated person experience sufferings whose nature and magnitude are roughly proportionate to one’s own” (Royzman et al. 2005, p. 13). The key appraisals of attributing evilness to the subject of hatred and viewing this subject’s character as unchangeable make it easier to understand how such extreme destructive intentions are formulated: if the object of hatred is so harmful and there is no possibility of change, the thought of eliminating him or at least harming him seems to be the last resort.

Differentiation Between Hatred and Other Emotions

Hatred is many times perceived as an extreme version of dislike, or a phenomenon that consists of few other emotions, mostly anger and fear. Recent work by Van Bavel et al. (2016), studying

the differentiation between hatred and dislike, suggest that it is not just a matter of negative intensity that differentiates them but rather a matter of moral content, as hatred was found more associated with morality than dislike. The perception of hatred as consisting of anger and fear have been challenged by empirical findings in the realm of intergroup emotions, suggesting hatred's cognitive appraisals, emotional goals, and response tendencies differ from these of both anger and fear (Halperin 2008). In terms of cognitive appraisals, each of these emotions has its own distinct appraisals, generating different emotional goals and behavioral tendencies.

According to Halperin (2008), anger results from the perception that the actions of the other are not fair or just, while the individual perceives himself as relatively strong and possessing high coping potential. For this reason, the behavioral tendencies often derived from anger are to confront or attack the anger-inducing target. Fear is usually evoked by perceived threat, accompanied with appraisals of low strength or control over the situation, resulting in a tendency to avoid and a desire to create a safe environment. Hatred, in most cases, involves appraisal of the behavior of an out-group as stemming from a deep-rooted, permanent evil character. As a result, hatred is associated with very low expectations for positive change and with high levels of despair. If one is convinced of the destructive intentions of the out-group and feels total despair regarding the likelihood of the out-group changing its ways, the violent alternative may seem as the only reasonable one.

Individual Differences in Experiencing Hatred

There is little in current literature that addresses individual differences in the propensity to experience hatred; however, several lines of work are suggestive of relevant variables that would be associated with such a tendency, or with social phenomenon related and based on hatred such as xenophobia, prejudice, and racism. First, on the interpersonal level, since a key appraisal of hatred

is the perceived fixed nature of the hated, it is only logical to conclude that people who are less prone to believe in the possibility of change will be more likely to hate.

According to a long line of work on implicit theories, people differ in the way they perceive the nature of personal attributes. Some people tend to believe that personal attributes are fixed and nonmalleable (this is referred to as holding an entity theory), while others tend to believe that these attributes are indeed malleable and can even be developed and changed (this is referred to as holding an incremental theory) (Dweck et al. 1995). Since this inclination serves as a predisposition to human interactions, it could very well explain differences between individuals. Those who hold an entity, rather than incremental theory, will be more prone to develop hatred as it will be more difficult for them to see a chance for future positive change. This logic is also what inspired a line of research on psychological interventions to reduce hatred (see below).

Second, on the intergroup level, right wing authoritarianism (RWA) can be considered as a variable that can explain individual differences in hatred, especially in the social realm. Altemeyer refers to RWA as "...the covariation of three attitudinal clusters in a person" (Altemeyer 1996, p. 6), which are authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. The most relevant to our matter is authoritarian aggression, which Altemeyer describes as "a general aggressiveness, directed against various persons, that is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities" (Altemeyer 1996, p. 6). This aggression is an intentional causing of harm, whether physical, psychological, financial, or in any other form. Many researchers have shown that compared to others, individuals high in authoritarianism tend to be the most ethnically and racially prejudiced (Altemeyer 1996). In addition to prejudice, researchers have used authoritarianism to explain a number of social phenomena related to hatred such as stereotyping, discrimination, symbolic racism, ethnocentrism, and aversive racism.

How to Cope with Hatred?

As demonstrated above, an intrinsic part of hatred is its destructive behavioral intentions, derived from its cognitive appraisals. Although the will to harm, hurt, and even annihilate is not always carried out, it is clear that hatred carries severe implications. Many horrific violent crimes against individuals and groups stem from hatred, and thus it is necessary and even crucial for both scholars and practitioners to address how to reduce or downregulate hatred. In the recent years, a few attempts have been made by researchers to design and construct psychological interventions aimed at tackling hatred's negative implications. Interventions targeting the perceived inability of the hated to change have been successful in the realm of intergroup conflicts. These interventions showed that teaching people that groups have a malleable nature led them to express less hatred-related appraisals toward their respective out-group, compared to those who learned that groups have fixed nature, and in turn led them to be more willing to make concessions with the out-group (Halperin et al. 2011).

Conclusion

Hatred is a strong, negative emotion that is very present in our lives and has negative, sometimes destructive, consequences. Despite its prevalence and its negative effects, and despite much effort by scholars, researchers, and philosophers, our understanding of hatred is not yet complete. In recent years, a few attempts to reduce hatred have been made, and they serve as a good example as to why a better understanding of hatred and further investigation of its nature are crucial as they can

assist future attempts to reduce hatred, or at least its harmful implications.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Appraisal Theory of Emotion](#)
- ▶ [Emotion Regulation](#)
- ▶ [Hostility](#)
- ▶ [Implicit Theories of Intelligence](#)

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