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## You Hurt My Feelings

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## You Hurt My Feelings

### Abstract

This is a film review of *You Hurt My Feelings* (2023), directed by Nicole Holofcener.

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### Author Notes

Chris Deacy is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies and former Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. His PhD (University of Wales, 1999) was in the area of redemption and film, and Chris has published monographs which include *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred* (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film* (Routledge, 2012); and *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (University of Wales Press, 2001). Chris also writes regular film reviews, is writing a book about nostalgia and religion and has been hosting a podcast since 2018 called *Nostalgia Interviews with Chris Deacy* - <https://audioboom.com/channels/4956567>



**You Hurt My Feelings (2023), dir. Nicole Holofcener**

There is a TV sitcom (specifically *Seinfeld*) feel to this gently acerbic exposé of the ways in which family dynamics can often feed into and engender a creative impasse in our lives and the ways in which the perceptions others have of our work impact on our ability to be as honest and forthcoming as we might like. If, for example, we know that a book that a spouse or child is writing is not actually all that good, should we be brutally honest and tell them what we really think—especially as they are asking for our advice and counsel—or should we opt instead for diplomacy and just tell them what we think they want to hear?

There are plenty of neuroses here in a perfectly affluent, indeed privileged, white middle class family where the wife (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) is an author whose memoir has sold well but is struggling to find an agent who wants to publish her first work of fiction, and whose own creative writing students are indifferent to her outputs. The husband (Tobias Menzies) is a therapist who tends to offer little by way of input in his sessions, listening to the problems besetting his patients

but really letting them talk without much of a steer, to the point that a couple who have been coming to see him for years decide they want a full refund to the tune of over \$30,000 because they haven't overcome their antipathy towards one another. The worst thing that happens in this film is that Louis-Dreyfus overhears her husband tell her brother-in-law that her latest book is disappointing, and this in turn sets in motion all manner of feelings of betrayal and even gaslighting—especially when Menzies later tells her to her face that of course he likes her book. This is amiable enough as a movie: somewhat on the slight side, as we have characters who don't undergo any great tragedy, and there is no substantial character arc or trajectory because they are too well-anchored for this to happen.

There is some pleasure to be had from watching characters go through variations of emotions which are broadly located in the everyday. After all, maybe even the most well-adjusted and stable of relationships requires some element of dishonesty if it is going to weather every storm, as support for the other person trumps the kind of brutal honesty that there is more than enough of in the world outside. We also see characters going through a midlife crisis, with Menzies starting to mix up his patients, telling one young woman that the way her partner treats her is reminiscent of her own relationship with her father, which turns out to be a major faux pas for a professional therapist who needs his clients to know he is in touch with their stories and emotions. The film doesn't shift gear at any point, and while this makes *You Hurt My Feelings* somewhat thin and insubstantial as a motion picture, it is perfectly amiable in what it sets out to do.