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Stephanie Villella

*Concordia College, Moorhead, [savillel@cord.edu](mailto:savillel@cord.edu)*

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***Broken Up but Not Broken: Satisfaction, Adjustment, and Communication in Post-Dissolutional Relationships***

***Stephanie Villella***

*Undergraduate Student*

*savillel@cord.edu*

*Communication Studies and Theatre Art Department*

*Concordia College*

*Moorhead, MN*

**ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this study was to examine adjustment, satisfaction, and the frequency of communication that occurs between ex-partners in post-dissolutional relationships. Participants (N = 239) were surveyed on their levels of satisfaction, adjustment to the break-up and communication with their most recent ex-romantic partner as a means to explore the process of redefining romantic relationships into platonic friendships. Results demonstrated that who initiated the break-up influenced levels of satisfaction and adjustment. Adjustment and frequency of communication were affected by whether ex-partners had moved on to a new romantic relationship. Differences were also observed between how males and females adjusted to break-ups. Though not predicted, additional results also showed that whether ex-partners remained friends with one another had an impact on post-dissolutional satisfaction and the frequency of communication.*

While interpersonal research focusing on relationships has historically focused on the variety of stages that occur during a romantic relationship, more recent research has started to address the events that follow the end of a romantic relationship. More specifically, research on dissolved relationships has centered attention on the phases that follow relationship dissolution, which often result in redefining romantic relationships into platonic friendships.

Much of the research that focuses on post-dissolutional stages sees relationship dissolution as a sometimes predictable cycle (Battaglia, Richard, Datteri, & Lord, 1998). Much like prior research has identified schemas for first dates, similar patterns have been observed in post-dissolutional relationships. Baxter (1984) identified seven specific stages that occur in the process of relational dissolution (the onset of problems, decision to end the relationship, initiation of dissolution by one partner, reaction from the other partner, partner agreement on dissolution, and more repair attempts or final dissolution of the relationship.) However, rather than claiming post-dissolutional relationships follow a consistent script, Baxter's study determined that there are differences in the disengagement process from situation to situation. The most common pattern occurring after a break-up has been found to be a relational decline, though there are several different trajectory types each relationship may follow (Kellas, Bean,

Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008). Battaglia et al. (1998) found that relationship dissolution begins with one partner losing interest, followed by a discussion of the dissatisfaction in the relationship. Usually, before the actual breaking up process begins, the partners begin to detach themselves emotionally to improve their adjustment abilities in the future, before finally resulting in the termination of the romantic relationship. Though this process may not always follow the same steps, this gradual detachment is noticed frequently in the average script for relationship termination (Battaglia et al., 1998).

The concept of waning interest and detachment that typically occurs before relationship termination is quite common. However, this detachment can display itself in a variety of forms with varying characteristics. Felmlee (2001) explored an idea similar to Battaglia's, which is that relationships go through stages of disenchantment. This disenchantment occurs when the infatuation that partners may have previously experienced with a certain personality trait of their significant other lessens or when the partners become less satisfied with the specific trait. This de-infatuation causes discontentment in the relationship. After the disenchantment process occurs, the partners often begin to evaluate one another negatively, which can affect the relationship that results after the romantic connection has been terminated (Felmlee, 2001). VanderDrift, Agnew, and Wilson (2009) also explored this process, finding that, in addition to the de-infatuation identified by Felmlee, the level of commitment in a relationship affects the leave behaviors. This led to identification of a stage in between experiencing low commitment and termination of the relationship, which VanderDrift et al. (2009) labeled consideration of dissolution. Once this stage occurs, whether as a result of low commitment or dissatisfaction with certain partner traits, the process of relationship termination usually follows shortly after (Felmlee, 2001; VanderDrift et al., 2009).

Since several studies have determined processes and cycles by which romantic relationships dissolve without addressing the stages and cycles that occur in the redefinition process, it is important to address this issue. It has been stated that relationship dissolution does not follow a defined script in which the stages are the same for each person. Foley and Fraser (1998) made this evident in a study discussing relationship dissolution as a process of redefining the romantic relationship, rather than simply complete termination of all relational ties. Foley and Fraser found that, similar to previous research, those who had more emotional involvement before the dissolution were more likely to redefine their relationship as a friendship. They also identified that this transition from romantic territory to the "just friends" category is often uncomfortable due to the lack of a schematic script that can be used for these situations (Foley & Fraser, 1998).

As with Foley and Fraser's (1998) research predicting the factors that would help to ease the transition into friendship territory, other studies have explored the probability of continuing relational ties after romantic dissolution using the framework of the social exchange theory. Social exchange theory was derived from the idea that, in relationships, people seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Felmlee, Sprecher, and Bassin (1990) used this framework to determine factors that may contribute to the pace at which a relationship would dissolve. The

factors they found included an evaluation of the potential for alternative partners, the frequency of contact, and the length of the relationship, among others. Social exchange theory helped to predict the probability of whether a relationship was likely to result in disengagement (Felmlee et al., 1990).

Just as the social exchange theory can aid in determining the likelihood of relational dissolution, it can be extended to relationship definitions beyond the break-up. In Busboom, Collins, Givertz, and Levin's (2002) study, the social exchange framework was used to predict the likelihood of the romantic relationship being redefined to a platonic friendship. The study found that resources, which are seen as benefits, and barriers, seen as costs, affected relational satisfaction and the extent to which the dissolved relationship would be redefined. Busboom et al. (2002) found that a higher frequency of and more satisfaction with resources received from the partner would increase the chances that a friendship would result after the romantic relationship had been terminated.

Schneider and Kenny (2000) also used the idea of comparing costs and benefits to weigh potential satisfaction by examining the differences in relationships between cross-sex friends who had once been romantically involved and cross-sex friends who had no history of romantic involvement. In addition to costs and benefits, the rules of friendship, romantic desires, and friendship quality were also measured. The results showed that more positive reactions and more benefits were reported in friends who had never experienced romantic involvement, while more negative responses and more costs were reported among ex partners (Schneider & Kenny, 2000). By analyzing the costs and benefits through a social exchange perspective, it was possible to predict specific characteristics of ex-partners after their relationships had dissolved. In this study, the key characteristics that became the focus of attention were satisfaction, adjustment, and frequency of communication. To further analyze these categories, the current study concentrated on the effects of sex, initiation of the break-up, and current relationship status on these three areas.

### **Post-Dissolution Relational Satisfaction**

Given that frequency and quality of benefits received in relationships are determining factors for whether ex-partners are likely to stay friends after romantic dissolution, it is necessary to examine satisfaction in post-dissolutional relationships and the factors that influence it. In a 2002 study, Lannutti and Cameron researched factors contributing to satisfaction in post-break-up relationships, arguing that satisfaction is essential to study in terminated relationships since dissatisfaction is usually a major cause of dissolution. For their study, they defined satisfaction as "the degree to which the ex partners feel positively about the post-dissolutional relationship" (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002, 156). They found that satisfaction was ultimately affected by the length of the romantic relationship before it ended, the extent to which partners hoped to renew their relationship, the amount of time since the break-up, and the amount of liking the exes had for one another (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). The finding that partners who hoped to renew the

romantic relationship were less satisfied with their friendship led to the proposed hypothesis of the current study. By inferring that people who are currently involved in (new) romantic relationships will have less hope to renew the romantic relationship with their ex, the current study predicts that this factor would influence satisfaction:

**Hypothesis 1: Those who are currently involved in a romantic relationship will be more satisfied with the quality of the platonic friendship with their ex-romantic partner than those who are not in a romantic relationship.**

Levels of satisfaction with a relationship depend on multiple factors. By knowing the factors that influence satisfaction, it becomes easier to predict how relational satisfaction will change when significant changes occur in a relationship. LeBel and Campbell's (2009) study related satisfaction to the amount of spontaneous feelings experienced by ex-partners about their past relationship. People who reported more positive feelings about the past relationship were perceived to be more satisfied in their current relationship. It was also predicted and revealed that these people would have a greater chance at maintaining a successful friendship with their exes (LeBel & Campbell, 2009).

Part of this satisfaction is determined by the level of agreement ex-partners have about their relationship. In Sprecher, Schmeekle, and Felmlee's (2006) study, it was predicted that partners who were not equally emotionally involved would experience less satisfaction in comparison to relationships where both partners reported equal emotional involvement. The study received support for their prediction, finding that unequal emotional involvement was also related to negative emotions and lower levels of satisfaction in the relationship after the dissolution. Additionally, people who reflected back on their relationships and viewed themselves as being more emotionally involved than their partners experienced less satisfaction and higher levels of distress after the relationship had ended (Sprecher et al., 2006). Since romantic relationships are generally terminated by those who feel less emotionally involved in their relationships (Sprecher et al., 2006) and since those who feel more emotionally involved have generally been found to be less satisfied, a hypothesis was formed for the current study based on this knowledge:

**Hypothesis 2: Non-initiators of break-ups will be less satisfied with the current relationship with their ex-romantic partner than initiators of break-ups.**

In addition to relationship agreement leading to higher satisfaction, Baxter and Pittman (2001) found that couple satisfaction was also associated with ex-partners' agreement of turning points recognized in their relationship. If both partners reminisced about the same aspects of their relationship and held the same attitudes about these recalled events or stages, they were found to be more satisfied with their relationship overall. However, if one partner reflected more positively on the relationship than another partner, there would not be the same balance of

feelings about the relationship, resulting in less overall satisfaction in the friendship that resulted after the romantic disengagement (Baxter & Pittman, 2001).

As with Baxter and Pittman's (2001) research involving turning points as a predictor of relational satisfaction, other studies have determined specific trajectory patterns that result in higher or lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Johnson et al. (2004) examined turning points in both friendships and dissolved romantic relationships to determine how the turning points affected friendship quality. While inspecting their results, they observed gender differences and noted that females reported more turning points dealing with conflict in their friendships than males did, which may have implications for satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2004). A different study conducted by Fitzpatrick and Sollie (1999) discovered a significant dissimilarity between males and females in terms of satisfaction. The study found that, in comparison to males, females were more committed to their relationships and thus more invested in them than men. The idea that females are more invested in relationships implies that they would be more likely to have stronger negative feelings after the relationship has dissolved (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). This reasoning, as well as the findings of Johnson et al. (2004) contributed to the third hypothesis in the current study:

**Hypothesis 3: Females will be less satisfied with the current relationship with their ex-romantic partner than males.**

In Johnson et al.'s (2004) study, attention was paid to the trajectory types and patterns of deteriorated relationships. Results showed that most ex-partners reported having a linear relational pattern, though some were marked by a downward turn followed by recovery, which led to higher levels of closeness and satisfaction in the relationship (Johnson et al., 2004). Similarly, Kellas et al. (2008) found that people who experienced an upward progression after their relationships had dissolved were more satisfied with the quality of their post-dissolutional relationships than those who reported any other type of trajectory pattern, such as a linear or declining pattern. The type of trajectory pattern that was experienced in the post-dissolutional relationships was also seen to be a predictor of how well both parties would adjust to the romantic dissolution.

### **Post-Dissolution Adjustment**

Adjustment is an important aspect to consider when studying platonic friendships that develop after relationship termination as it is interrelated with satisfaction and may determine the quality of friendship that develops. It is also an integral step in redefining post-dissolutional relationships. Being that break-ups are considered negative events, most people need to proceed through levels of coping after their romantic relationships dissolve. McCarthy, Lambert, and Brack (1997) set out to determine whether coping resources would determine reactions to break-ups. They found that where more coping resources were used, there were greater levels of

positive affect, and where fewer coping resources were used, there were greater levels of negative affect. The study also determined that “combative coping strategies” such as self-disclosure and social support often helped to lessen negative feelings pertaining to break-ups, aiding in adjustment (McCarthy et al., 1997, 60).

Since coping is such a significant part of the relationship redefinition process, several other studies have examined the factors contributing to or hindering this emotional recovery in post-break-up relationships. In one study, Sbarra (2006) predicted that people who initiated break-ups would recover more easily over time. The study found that, while attachment, love for one’s ex, and anger about the break-up were predictors of less adjustment, who initiated relationship termination was not a significant influence over the extent of recovery. However, because it is predicted that initiators of break-ups are likely to be less attached, they would be likely to have an easier time adjusting to the disengagement, so the current researchers set out to re-examine Sbarra’s finding.

**Hypothesis 4: Non-initiators of break-ups will be less adjusted to the break-up than those who initiated the relationship termination.**

When analyzing adjustment, just as with satisfaction, it is important to recognize the key factors that contribute to adjustment after significant changes are made in a relationship. In addition, it is equally essential to recognize those factors that stand in the way of adjustment to these changes. A study conducted by Busboom et al. (2002) found that several barriers can stand in the way of forming post-dissolution friendships. Some of these barriers included a lack of support from family or friends, involvement in a new relationship, and the amount of conflict that was experienced in the romantic relationship (Busboom et al., 2002). Sbarra and Emery (2005) discovered similar findings by having study participants record a diary of emotions when indicated by a beeper during a 28 day period. They found that the most negative emotions occurred immediately after participants’ break-ups and that those who continued to be in contact with their ex-partners did not stop loving them or overcoming sadness as quickly as those who had no contact with their ex-partners (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). The results of these two studies (Busboom et al., 2002; Sbarra & Emery, 2005), were combined to draw further inferences. Since involvement in a new relationship is a barrier that stands in the way of forming post-dissolutional friendships, and having no friendship or contact with an ex-partner results in easier adjustment, the previous research was combined to predict the following in the current study:

**Hypothesis 5: Those who are currently involved in a romantic relationship will be more adjusted to the break-up than those who are not currently involved in a romantic relationship.**

A study by Choo, Levine, and Hatfield (1996) determined that gender is an additional factor that can significantly influence adjustment. The study found that men and women utilized

different coping strategies when attempting to recover from a break-up. Women more frequently blamed their ex-partners as a coping strategy, while men were more likely to keep their minds occupied with other activities (Choo et al., 1996). In keeping with research on gender and adjustment, Davis, Shaver, and Vernon (2003) found that women were usually more emotionally involved in their romantic relationships prior to dissolution than men. Keeping in mind that those who viewed themselves as being more emotionally involved during the romantic relationship often had a more difficult time adjusting, another hypothesis was formed for the current study:

**Hypothesis 6: Females will be less adjusted to break-ups than males.**

The factors that influence post-dissolutional adjustment are necessary to identify since relationships often change dramatically after romantic dissolution. By viewing adjustment as a cycle, similar to that of the actual relationship development process, it becomes evident that relationship adjustment is a series of phases as opposed to one concrete event. For this reason, it is important to observe the impact of the emotional disruption experienced in the post-dissolutional stages of a relationship on the frequency of communication between ex-partners.

**Frequency of Communication**

Much research conducted on post-dissolutional relationships has evaluated the romantic relationship as a process ending in relationship termination, implying that once a romantic relationship dissolves, no relationship remains. However, as the current study emphasizes, more recent research on the subject has recognized relationship disengagement as a process of redefining a relationship. Communication does not always stop once romantic ties have been severed.

Lannutti and Cameron (2002) found several factors that influence the amount of communication in post-dissolutional relationships. They determined that the amount of time that elapses after the break-up significantly predicts the amount of contact between ex-partners (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002).

With this finding, the researchers discovered that, as time passes, ex-partners contact one another less. However, they recognized that factors such as a person's social network, previously held beliefs about break-ups or relational norms, hope for a renewal of the romantic relationship, and the level of liking for the ex-partner all influenced the frequency of communication. Focusing on Lannutti and Cameron's (2002) finding that ex-partners who hope to renew the romantic relationship would attempt to communicate with their exes more frequently, two other variables were taken into consideration for the current study. Based on previous research, the current study predicted that those who were involved in a new romantic relationship and those who initiated their break-up would be less likely to hope for romantic renewal of their relationship than those who were not in a new relationship or did not initiate their break-up. These inferences led to two of the current study's hypotheses:



**Hypothesis 7: Those who are currently involved in a romantic relationship will attempt to communicate with their ex-partners less frequently than those who are not currently involved in a romantic relationship.**

**Hypothesis 8: Non-initiators of the relationship termination will attempt to communicate with break-up initiators more than initiators will attempt to communicate with non-initiators.**

Those who have moved on to a new partner, as well as those who initiate a break-up are likely to be people that consider themselves less attached in the relationship. So, when one person feels significantly less attached than the other, it is likely that the less attached partner will communicate less frequently. Previously mentioned research conducted by Davis et al. (2003) discussed attachment styles and reactions to relationship dissolution when theorizing about adjustment. A major coping strategy discovered was avoidance, which could be seen as preventing communication or decreasing the initiation of communication. Results showed that those who were more emotionally involved or attached in their relationship were less likely to avoid their ex-partners. However, since the study also found that women were likely to be more emotionally involved in their relationships, a hypothesis was proposed in the current study stating what this may mean in terms of differences in avoiding or initiating communication between males and females:

**Hypothesis 9: Females will attempt to communicate with their ex-romantic partner more often than males.**

## Method

### Participants

A total of 239 undergraduate students, 84 males and 155 females, from a small Midwestern private college participated in this study. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 29 years with a mean age of 20.3 years. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were notified before completion of the survey that there was potential for emotional discomfort. Surveys were distributed in classes from the departments of Communication (68.2%), Chemistry (18.0%), Business (7.5%) and Spanish (5.4%). In addition, 2 students (.8%) were given surveys in the library. In two of the Communication classes, participants were compensated with a small amount of extra credit offered by their professors. No additional compensation was provided.

## Procedure

Participants completed a multi-page self-administered survey questionnaire. On the first page of the survey, participants were asked to report demographic information, including whether they had ever experienced a romantic break-up. Of the 239 participants, 32 (13.4%) of the participants responded that they had never experienced a break-up. The participants that had never experienced a break-up were given instructions to turn in their survey at that time.

Of the remaining 207 participants that reported that they had experienced a break-up, 194 (93.7%) people responded that their most recent break-up had occurred at least a month earlier and 12 (5.8%) responded that their most recent relationship ended less than one month ago.

The 194 participants were instructed to continue the survey while the 12 were instructed not to continue. However, 6 of the 12 continued the survey despite these instructions creating a sample of 200 participants who completed the entire survey. The data from the 6 participants was kept in the study because it was determined that whether the break-up occurred more than one month ago did not significantly impact the responses. The reason the instructions originally advised participants to turn in their survey if their break-up had occurred less than one month ago was solely to decrease the possibility of emotional discomfort and sensitivity.

## Measures

In addition to the demographic questions, the survey included two previously established measures to assess satisfaction and adjustment. Satisfaction was measured using five of the six items in the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) created by Robert Norton (1983). Because the items in Norton's QMI discussed satisfaction in a marital relationship, these items were adapted by the current study to pertain to nonmarital relationships ("*We have a good relationship,*" "*My relationship with my ex partner is very stable,*" "*Our relationship is strong,*" "*My relationship with my ex partner makes me happy,*" and "*Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship?*"). The one item that was not used ("*I really feel like part of a team with my partner*") was omitted as it did not directly relate to dissolved relationships. The measure used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*strongly agree,*") except for the final item, which ranged from 1 ("*very unhappy*") to 7 ("*very happy.*") Reliability for this measure of satisfaction was high ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

Adjustment was measured with a scale developed by Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, and Cheng (2008). The measure used a 7-point Likert-type scale with six items measuring two separate categories. Three of the items measured emotional disruption due to the break-up. The other three items measured current adjustment to the relationship dissolution. Reliability of the two components of adjustment was determined using the Cronbach's alpha reliability test (emotional disruption,  $\alpha = .75$  and current adjustment,  $\alpha = .78$ ).

Finally, to determine frequency of communication, participants were asked two separate questions about their level of contact with their ex-partner. The first of these questions asked

“How frequently do you communicate with your ex?” (“Every day,” “2-7 times per week,” “Every other week,” “Once a month,” “Less than once a month,” and “I do not communicate with my ex.”) Participants were also asked to report “When you communicate with your ex, who initiates conversation more frequently?” (“Me,” “My ex,” “We both initiate conversation equally,” or “I do not communicate with my ex.”)

## Results

### Satisfaction

To analyze post-dissolution satisfaction, a 2 (sex) x 2 (new romantic partner) x 2 (initiator of break-up) x 2 (current friendship with ex) ANOVA was performed. Whether the ex-partners were still friends was added as an additional factor because we realized it could possibly influence satisfaction in the relationship. Current friendship with an ex was the only factor that was found to be significant in this ANOVA. Results showed that current friendship with the ex did influence satisfaction,  $F(1, 182) = 96.10, p < .001$ . As one might expect, people who remained friends with their exes reported higher satisfaction with their current relationship ( $m = 4.32$ ) than those who did not remain friends with their exes ( $m = 2.37$ ).

In this ANOVA, two factors were found to have no real significance in predicting satisfaction: Sex was found to be a non-significant factor in determining satisfaction, providing no support for Hypothesis 3,  $F(1, 182) = .00, p > .05$ . In addition, whether an ex-partner was involved in a new romantic relationship was also a non-significant factor in determining satisfaction, providing no support for Hypothesis 1,  $F(1, 182) = .17, p > .05$ .

Since some of the factors seemed to cloud the results, a reduced model was created by dropping the factors which resulted in  $F$ -values below 1.00 (Buller, Burgoon, White, & Ebesu, 1994), resulting in a 2 (initiator of break-up) x 2 (current friendship with ex) ANOVA. In this ANOVA, whether a person had initiated the break-up was a significant factor related to satisfaction, which supported Hypothesis 2,  $F(1, 190) = 5.14, p < .03$  (one-tailed hypothesis). Those who had initiated the break-up were found to be more satisfied with their post-dissolutional relationship ( $m = 3.70$ ) than those who did not initiate the break-up ( $m = 3.46$ ).

### Adjustment

Adjustment was broken up into two components, adapted from Kellas et al. (2008), which included emotional disruption and current adjustment. These two components were found to have a Pearson correlation of  $.47, p < .001$ , meaning that the more emotionally disrupted by the break-up a participant was, the less well adjusted he/she currently felt (high scores on the current adjustment scale indicated a *lack of* current adjustment) To analyze overall post-dissolution adjustment, a MANOVA was conducted with the dependent variables current adjustment and emotional disruption and the independent variables of sex, involvement in a new

romantic relationship, who initiated the break-up, and whether the ex-partners were still friends. While there were no hypotheses concerning current friendship with an ex, this variable was included to see if it would have an effect on adjustment.

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were created to determine which factors would contribute to adjustment capabilities in post-dissolutional relationships. To identify levels of emotional disruption and current adjustment, a 2 (sex) x 2 (new romantic partner) x 2 (initiator of break-up) x 2 (current friendship with ex) MANOVA was performed. Since current friendship was found to be a non-significant factor affecting adjustment, multivariate  $F(2, 183) = .43, p > .05$ , this variable was taken out of the data and a new 2 (sex) x 2 (new romantic partner) x 2 (initiator of break-up) MANOVA was performed. In this new reduced-model MANOVA, some support was found for each of the remaining hypotheses.

The prediction in Hypothesis 4 that people who did not initiate relationship dissolution would experience less adjustment to the break-up than those who initiated relationship termination was supported, multivariate  $F(2, 189) = 8.15, p < .001$ , with a significant univariate effect on emotional disruption,  $F(1, 190) = 13.50, p < .001$ . Participants who did not initiate the break-up were found to be more emotionally disrupted ( $m = 3.96$ ) by the dissolution than those who initiated the break-up ( $m = 3.17$ ). While the initiator aspect did influence emotional disruption, it did not result in a significant univariate effect for current adjustment,  $F(1, 190) = .096, p > .05$ .

Hypothesis 5, which stated that those currently involved in a romantic relationship would be more adjusted to the break-up than those not currently involved in a romantic relationship, also received support, multivariate  $F(2, 189) = 14.80, p < .001$ . Results showed no significant univariate effect for emotional disruption,  $F(1, 190) = 2.20, p > .05$ . However, existence of a new romantic relationship revealed a significant univariate effect on current adjustment,  $F(1, 190) = 28.15, p < .001$ . Those who were not currently in a relationship were less adjusted ( $m = 2.39$ ) than those who were in a current relationship ( $m = 1.51$ ). (Lower scores represent higher levels of adjustment.)

Hypothesis 6, which stated that females would be less adjusted to the break-up than males, was partially supported. Taken as a whole, sex was seen to be a significant factor in determining adjustment, multivariate  $F(2, 189) = 4.49, p = .012$ . Even though sex did not have a significant univariate effect on emotional disruption,  $F(1, 190) = 2.52, p > .05$ , or a significant univariate effect on current adjustment,  $F(1, 190) = 2.11, p > .05$ , the multivariate effect showed a significant difference between the adjustment of males and females. Females were found to be more disrupted at the time of the break-up ( $m = 3.64$ ) than males ( $m = 3.25$ ). However, females also showed more current adjustment ( $m = 1.84$ ) than males ( $m = 2.13$ ). (Lower scores represent higher levels of adjustment.)

## Frequency of Communication

To determine the overall frequency of communication between exes, a chi-square test was conducted to see if there were significant differences in the frequency of communication between those who were currently involved in a romantic relationship ( $n = 102, 51.0\%$ ) and those who were not ( $n = 98, 49.0\%$ ). The chi-square method was used due to its effectiveness in comparing unequal categorical groups, such as those involved with the variable of current relationship involvement. In this test, a significant effect was revealed, supporting Hypothesis 7,  $\chi^2(5, N = 200) = 18.76, p < .002$ .

The results of this chi-square analysis demonstrated a pattern, which reflected that those who were not currently in a romantic relationship were more likely to communicate with their exes at least once a month, while those who were in a current romantic relationship were more likely to communicate with their ex-partners less than once a month or not at all. Table 1 shows the specific patterns in communication frequencies between those who were involved in a romantic relationship and those who were not involved in a romantic relationship.

**Table 1**

### *Involvement in Current Romantic Relationship and Frequency of Communication*

<i>Frequency of Communication</i>	<i>Involved in a current romantic relationship</i>	<i>Not involved in a current romantic relationship</i>
Every day	4 (3.9%)	5 (5.1%)
2-7 times per week	8 (7.8%)	9 (9.2%)
Every other week	6 (5.9%)	19 (19.4%)
Once a month	11 (10.8%)	22 (22.4%)
Less than once a month	29 (28.4%)	20 (20.4%)
Never	44 (43.1%)	23 (23.5%)
<i>Total</i>	102 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)

Post hoc chi-square analysis also revealed significant differences in the frequency of communication between those who remained friends with their exes and those who did not,  $\chi^2(5, N = 198) = 108.21, p < .001$ . The pattern discovered in these results demonstrated that those who remained friends with their exes were significantly more likely to communicate with their ex-partners at least once a month. None of the respondents who reported that they were no longer

friends with their exes communicated with their ex-partners more frequently than once a month. In fact, a large portion of those that did not remain friends with their ex-partners reported having no communication with their exes at all. More specific results are given in Table 2, which details the comparisons of the frequency of communication between those that did not remain friends with their exes and those that did.

**Table 2*****Current Friendship and Frequency of Communication***

<i>Frequency of Communication</i>	<i>Still friends with ex</i>	<i>Not still friends with ex</i>
Every day	9 (7.3%)	0 (0%)
2-7 times per week	17 (13.7%)	0 (0%)
Every other week	25 (20.2%)	0 (0%)
Once a month	28 (22.6%)	5 (6.8%)
Less than once a month	36 (29.0%)	12 (16.2%)
Never	9 (7.3%)	57 (77.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>124 (100.0%)</b>	<b>74 (100.0%)</b>

Hypothesis 8, which predicted that non-initiators would attempt to communicate with their exes more frequently than those who initiated the break-up, was not supported,  $\chi^2(10, N = 200) = 11.52, p > .05$ . There was also no support found for Hypothesis 9, which predicted that females would try to communicate with their ex-romantic partner more often than males,  $\chi^2(5, N = 200) = 6.37, p > .05$ .

**Post Hoc Analyses of Communication Initiation**

In addition to analyzing the frequency of communication among ex-partners, chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences in who initiated communication after the relationship was terminated. Similar to the results found with frequency of communication, significant effects were discovered amongst those who were currently in a romantic relationship and those who were not,  $\chi^2(3, N = 200) = 13.22, p < .004$ . For those currently involved in a romantic relationship, communication was initiated less by both parties and more participants responded that they did not communicate with their ex-partners at all. Conversely, for those who

reported not being involved in a new romantic relationship, more communication was initiated by both parties and fewer respondents reported that they did not communicate with their exes. Table 3 shows more in-depth results of these patterns.

**Table 3**

*Involvement in Current Romantic Relationship and Initiation of Communication*

<i>Who Initiates Communication</i>	<i>Involved in a current romantic relationship</i>	<i>Not involved in a current romantic relationship</i>
Me	5 (4.9%)	14 (14.3%)
My ex	19 (18.6%)	21 (21.4%)
Both initiate conversation equally	38 (37.3%)	45 (45.9%)
I do not communicate with my ex	40 (39.2%)	18 (18.4%)
<i>Total</i>	102 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)

A significant effect was also found between whether ex-partners remained friends and who initiated post-break-up communication,  $\chi^2(3, N = 198) = 90.01, p < .001$ . As would be expected, those who reported that they remained friends with their exes after the relationship had dissolved also reported that communication was initiated by them or their partners more frequently than with those who did not stay friends with their exes. Not surprisingly, a significant portion of those that remained friends with their ex-partners reported that communication was initiated equally by both members of the dissolved romantic relationship. Those who reported that they had not remained friends with their ex reported much more frequently that there was no communication between them and their ex-partners. However, not all of the participants who responded that they had not remained friends with their exes reported that they did not initiate communication. A more in-depth analysis of these results is depicted in Table 4.

Though current involvement in a romantic relationship and current level of friendship with an ex both impacted patterns of who initiated communication, sex and who initiated the break-up were factors that did not significantly influence initiation of communication. No significant difference was demonstrated between communication initiation for males and females,  $\chi^2(3, N = 200) = 3.57, p > .05$ . Who initiated the break-up was also found to be a non-significant factor pertaining to initiation of communication,  $\chi^2(6, N = 200) = 8.48, p > .05$ .

**Table 4*****Current Friendship and Initiation of Communication***

<i>Who Initiates Communication</i>	<i>Still friends with ex</i>	<i>Not still friends with ex</i>
Me	13 (10.5%)	5 (6.8%)
My ex	30 (24.2%)	10 (13.5%)
Both initiate conversation equally	74 (59.7%)	9 (12.2%)
I do not communicate with my ex	7 (5.6%)	50 (67.6%)
<i>Total</i>	124 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)

**Discussion**

Only recently has research on post-dissolutional relationships started to focus on the process of redefining romantic relationships into friendships as opposed to a complete termination of the relationship. Since many break-ups do not result in completely severed relational ties, this study recognizes the relationships that form after a romantic relationship has dissolved. Since romantic and platonic relationships both frame themselves in the social exchange theory, satisfaction plays an integral role in determining the success of redefined relationships. Those who consider their relationship to be highly rewarding and not very costly are likely to be more satisfied with their relationship, which increases the quality and probability of success for their post-dissolutional relationship (Busboom et al., 2002).

In this study, four separate variables, including participant sex, who initiated the break-up, involvement in a current relationship, and current friendship level, were tested to see which would have an impact on satisfaction within post-break-up relationships. A post-hoc result showed that those who were still friends with their exes experienced more satisfaction than those who were not still friends with their exes. Surprisingly, our first and third hypotheses, which dealt with involvement in a new romantic relationship and sex, were not found to impact levels of satisfaction. However, support was revealed for Hypothesis 2, which predicted that break-up initiators would experience greater levels of satisfaction than non-initiators.

Despite the lack of significant results for sex and current involvement in a relationship in the current study, previous research has discovered that several factors contribute to the redefinition of a romantic relationship into a friendship as opposed to complete termination. Metts, Cupach, and Bejlovec (1989) found that being friends before becoming romantically involved was a significant factor that predicted that a friendship may result after romantic relationship dissolution. Which strategies were used in the actual break-up process, such as



withdrawal or positive tone techniques, were also determined to affect the extent of friendship that would exist after the break-up (Metts et al., 1989). If the actual break-up affects the extent and quality of the friendship that occurs after the relationship has ended, it is not surprising that our first hypothesis was supported. Results of the current study showed that those who initiated the break-up reported more satisfaction in their post-dissolutional relationship than those who did not initiate the break-up.

In keeping with the theory that many romantic relationships are simply redefined into friendships after romantic dissolution occurs, the current study observed levels of adjustment to relationship disengagement. We found support for all of our hypotheses for adjustment. Hypothesis 4, which predicted that non-initiators of the break-up would be less adjusted than those who initiated the break-up, was partially supported. We found that those who were on the receiving end of the disengagement were more emotionally disrupted at the time of the break-up than those who initiated termination. Surprisingly, who initiated the break-up was not found to influence levels of current adjustment, suggesting that, after time has passed, non-initiators and initiators of dissolution have the same level of difficulty adjusting. This is consistent with Sbarra's (2006) finding that who initiates relationship termination does not affect the extent of the recovery, however it is still important to recognize that this variable did influence emotional disruption at the time of the break-up.

Hypothesis 5, which predicted that current involvement in a romantic relationship would result in more adjustment, was also supported. While involvement in a romantic relationship did not affect emotional disruption, simply because emotional disruption was the measure of adjustment immediately after the break-up occurred, we did find that those who had moved on to be in a new romantic relationship were more well-adjusted than those who were still single. This result was consistent with studies showing that involvement in a new relationship acts as a barrier toward redefining romantic relationships into platonic friendships (Busboom et al., 2002). Thus, if individuals enter into new relationships after the dissolution occurs, the existence of a new romantic partner might serve as a barrier to the friendship because the ex-partners may have lost investment in their old relationship and begun to focus on their new partner or relationship.

As other studies (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999; Johnson et al., 2004) have made predictions on the effects of sex and post-dissolutional relationships, we thought it necessary to examine the differences between males and females in these redefined relationships. Previous research has determined that women are often more invested in and more committed to romantic relationships than men, thus it would be understandable for women to have a more difficult time adjusting to the dissolution of a relationship in which they have been more invested (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). Hypothesis 6, which predicted that females would be less adjusted to break-ups than males, was partially supported, most likely for this reason. Our results showed that women were more emotionally disrupted by the break-up, meaning they initially had a more difficult time adjusting. Since women are more often the more committed partners in their relationships (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999), it was not surprising to find that they experienced more immediate emotional disruption than men in the current study. Surprisingly though, our study also found

that female participants indicated higher levels of current adjustment to the break-up than male participants, meaning that although women experienced more emotional disruption at the time of the break-up, it was men who took longer to fully adjust to the relationship dissolution.

The final portion of our study investigated differences in the frequency of communication between male and female exes, initiators and non-initiators of relational dissolution, those involved and those not involved in a current romantic relationship, as well as those who remained friends with their exes and those who did not. Although Hypotheses 8 and 9, which dealt with who initiated the break-up and comparisons between men and women, were not supported, our results did indicate that there were two significant factors that affected frequency of communication.

In support of Hypothesis 7, we discovered that those who were not currently involved in a romantic relationship communicated with their ex-partners more frequently than those who were in a romantic relationship. Those who had moved into a new romantic relationship were more likely than those who had not become romantically involved to communicate with their exes infrequently, less than once a month, or to have cut off all communication entirely. Those not currently involved in a romantic relationship were also more likely to initiate conversation or have communication initiated by their exes than those involved in a romantic relationship. These ideas are supported by the social exchange framework because those who had moved into a current romantic relationship no longer needed the benefits provided by their ex-partners, since they were getting it from a new romantic relationship. It also brings forth the idea that people weigh the costs and benefits of their relationships while evaluating potential alternative partners who may provide more benefits or fewer costs (Felmlee et al., 1990). Once the ex-partners are seen as more costly than beneficial due to the existence of a new romantic partner, communication dissipates.

Though we did not propose any hypotheses about those who were currently friends with their exes, our results demonstrated that current level of friendship with an ex was a significant predictor of the frequency of communication. We found that, as may be expected, those who remained friends with their exes after the romantic relationship had ended were more likely to communicate with their exes than those who had not maintained friendship status with their ex-partners. Conversely, those who did not remain friends with their ex-partners were more likely to report no communication with their exes. Our results also showed that those who were still friends with their ex-partners were significantly more likely to have a friendship in which both parties initiated communication equally.

The study by LeBel and Campbell (2009) that discussed the role of implicit partner affect, or spontaneous feelings about a partner, supported this idea in its finding that the more a person experienced spontaneous feelings about their partner, or in the current study's case, an ex-partner, the more stable the relationship would be. Given that those not currently involved in a relationship and those who are still friends with their partners are more likely to experience implicit partner affect, the results that show more frequent communication and more initiation of communication from people who meet these criteria do not come as a surprise.

## **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the main limitations of the study was that it was obtained from a sample consisting solely of college students. While this is a necessary sample to study, given that many romantic relationships develop and dissolve in this environment, it may be beneficial for future researchers to expand by using a sample containing a variety of age groups. This would provide important insight into the differences between relationships at different ages. For instance, a relationship that exists and dissolves at the college level will likely be vastly different in comparison to a marriage that has dissolved.

The current study was also limited due to the fact that only one partner in the relationship was surveyed, eliminating the possibility of analyzing data from both initiators and non-initiators of the same relationship dissolution. It may benefit future research in the field of interpersonal relationships if both partners in the post-dissolutional relationships were interrogated and their results compared. This would provide interesting information about the specific differences between ex-partners, whether comparing who initiated the relationship, sex of respondents, or other variables. In addition, it may be beneficial in future research to specifically define friendship as a term for the participants. This may ensure that each respondent reflects on their relationship using consistent definitions of friendship.

A final limitation of the current study is the fact that differences in communication were determined by asking only two questions, which related to communication frequency and initiation of communication. While significant results were taken away from these two measurements, future research may draw out more results, or even more precise results, if the frequency of communication was measured using a scale with multiple items (much like the scales used in this study for satisfaction and adjustment).

## **Conclusion**

While relationship dissolution has been an increasing focus for interpersonal scholars, only recently has this concept been observed as a complex process involving a variety of characteristics. When romantic relationships dissolve, there are often significant changes in the interaction between ex-partners. This study aimed to identify the types of factors that determine the quality of friendship that will likely be produced after two romantic partners terminate their relationship. However, while romantic relationships often dissolve, it is important to recognize that the termination of romantic ties does not necessarily lead to a termination of the relationship as a whole. Just as romantic relationships often start off as friendships, it is possible for them to end this way too. Though the term break-up often implies that the relational ties are severed or broken, it is essential to remember that the process of dissolution is often nothing more than a course for redefining the relationship. The romance may be broken after the disengagement process, but that does not mean the friendship cannot be repaired.

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