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A NON-MARITAL, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION STUDY

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

A Non-Marital, Romantic Relationship Dissolution Study

The present study examines three non-marital, romantic relationship dissolution types: (1) normal dyadic dissolution, (2) fatal attraction dissolution, and (3) social allergen dissolution among a sample of 321 emerging adults, who are between ages eighteen and twenty-nine. Results of an online survey revealed that normal dyadic dissolution occurred in 62%, social allergen dissolution occurred in 27%, and fatal attraction dissolution occurred in 11% of the participants' relational demises. Results also revealed that there is a surprising amount of overlap between the three dissolution types, and that age is not specifically correlated with a particular dissolution type. However, there are two predictors of dissolution type within an emerging adult population: perceived family support and whether or not the couple cohabitate.

KEYWORDS AND PHRASES: Emerging Adulthood, Dissolution, Normal Dyadic Dissolution, Fatal Attraction Dissolution, and Social Allergen Dissolution

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THESIS

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The Graduate School
University of Kentucky

2010

A NON-MARITAL, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION STUDY

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the
College of Agriculture
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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and
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Lexington, Kentucky

2010

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Rome was not built in day; likewise, a thesis work is a minimum of two years in the making. Completing the following thesis required perseverance, countless hours of prep-work and editing, and an undeserving amount of patience from my Thesis Chairs, Dr. Ronald Werner-Wilson and Dr. Jason Hans. Though the progression was slow, neither one gave up on me or my work. I appreciate you both, and am grateful for the time and energy you have given. Next, I wish to thank Dr. Gary Hansen, who was also apart of my Thesis Committee; your flexibility and understanding allowed for me to finish this thesis strong and in good conscience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Researching romantic relationships is important because of the influence intimacy with another can have on a participant. Understanding romantic relationships includes research associated with adolescent relationships, mate selection, and divorce. Understanding the end of romantic relationships is important because of the influence severing intimacy with another can have on a participant. “Ending of close relationships can be one of life’s most difficult events” (Priest, Burnett, Thompson, Vogel, & Schvanevedlt, 2009, p. 48); this is probably why studying the causes and attributions of such events is so intriguing.

Generally, a person is satisfied with the relationship to the extent that perceived rewards from the relationship are high, perceived costs to being in the relationship are low, and the relationship is seen as meeting an internalized standard of what a good relationship should be” (Rusbult, 1983 as cited by Kurdek, 1994, p. 924).

The standard of “good” may be reevaluated, however, if the costs increase or the rewards decrease. At times this reevaluation process may contribute to the ending of a relationship.

Social exchange theory explains relationships in a similar manner, assuming that “relationships tend to form and endure so long as exchanges are sufficiently rewarding to all participants” (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005, p. 42). Presumably, in light of social exchange theory, if two individuals desire to be in a romantic relationship with one another, then observation of attempts to balance positive exchanges should be noted between the partners.

The present study will be centered on nonmarital, romantic relationship dissolution from a population that is referred to as “emerging adults,” who are between the ages of eighteen and twenty nine. This age group is of particular interest because the formation and severance of emerging adult, romantic relationships are directly related to identity solidification, maturation, and future goal obtainment. Understanding how an emerging adult justified terminating a romantic relationship or handled a romantic relationship termination initiated by a partner could provide information about said emerging adults overall development.

To gain a better understanding of nonmarital, romantic relationship dissolutions that occur within the emerging adult population the present study will investigate characteristics surrounding three different classifications of romantic relationship dissolution: (a) *normal dyadic dissolution*, (b) *fatal attraction*, and (c) *social allergies*. Originally, the present study was going to examine breakups in general. However, upon conducting the literature review, it became evident that the act of terminating a romantic relationship could be tied to very specific reasons, three reasons in particular. However, no one study had included three dissolution types to be compared and contrasted with one another. In order to encapsulate all known termination options, the present study will attempt to incorporate the three dissolution types.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Emerging Adulthood

Researcher Jeffery J. Arnett (2000) took a particular interest in a “quiet revolution” taking place concerning persons between the ages of 18 and 29. In his studies of the existing life cycle stage framework, Arnett became increasingly concerned with the limitations in place for persons transitioning from adolescence into young adulthood. There seemed to be a growing divide between these two developmental stages, and he did not agree with conceptualizations of this age group associated with either (a) extending the ages one spends in adolescence or (b) delaying the age one enters adulthood.

Pre-existing Framework

Although the first life stages were pioneered by Freud, Erik Erickson developed the most widely accepted framework of life stages (Craig & Dunn, 2007). Because of Erickson’s work, the common person could tell you the human life has neonatal beginnings and progresses forward to birth then infancy onto childhood then adolescence which then jumps to young adulthood, peaks in middle adulthood, and then declines into older adulthood (Craig & Dunn). The focus of the present paper concerns the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Adolescence is characterized by characteristics and qualities that identify their *growing*, yet still limited autonomy and maturity. They are in their “second decade” of life (between ages 12 and 18), and usually attending a required educational facility (such as a middle or high school). Physically, mentally and emotionally, adolescents are rapidly maturing into their adult-like features, but are still subject to their child-like demeanor in that they are very egocentric in thought and action (Craig & Dunn, 2007). Their developing adult-like bodies produce both a sense of self-assuredness (as they feel invulnerable to harm and are much more capable of performing “skilled” fine and gross motor movements) and self-consciousness (as they tend to compare their growth and composition to that of peers, both ahead and behind them).

In contrast to adolescents, young adults are characterized by certain characteristics and qualities that identify their established maturity and typically solidified autonomy, especially in regards to life positions such as careers, relationships,

and fundamental beliefs. Essentially, the search for self has reached a point of substance, and there is a definable settlement into committed, longer-term roles. This can be exemplified by use of defining statements about one's self that are highly specific, for example: I am a plumber (occupation), a mother (family role), and a Mormon (religious affiliation). (Valde, 1996).

One can infer that there is a significant decrease in the disjointed logic, ongoing identity revision, and egocentrism of adolescents in young adulthood. Those characteristics are replaced by a significant increase in rational thinking that is highly aware of personal consequence, a stable sense of self, and altruism (Arnett, 2000). The majority of young adults have obtained complete, or at least satisfactory, economic autonomy; are legal participants in society; are beginning or have family formations; take full responsibility for their actions; and are capable of making their own decisions. Age of onset of this life phase is considered to range from as young as 18 to as old as 40 (Craig & Dunn, 2007). Traditional markers such as marriage, parenthood, and even high school graduation have differentiated participants as entering into young adulthood for decades now, reinforcing the age of onset.

Historically those stark differences were not the quandary they are now because the categorization and sub-categorization of the life stages that are standard in present human science fields were virtually non-existent. Only two options were available, either one was an adult or was not an adult; that was the extent of the grouping. Once born, children were cared for until able bodied. "Chronological age was less important than physical strength, size, and maturity" (Mintz, 2007, p. 294).

But, as is abundantly clear, the "were or were not" grouping has thus developed much further a shining of the metaphorical spotlight directly on the aforementioned discrepancies between adolescence and young adulthood. Society has tried to compensate for the ever-widening gap between the characteristics of adolescence and those of young adulthood without changing the existing structural framework for life stages. It has both extended adolescence, believing to last until closer to age 20, and delayed young adulthood, presumably until age 21, in order to accommodate the cultural change in transition to adulthood.

As recently as 1970, the typical 21-year-old was married or about to be married, caring for a newborn child or expecting one soon, done with education or about to be done, and settled into a long-term job or the role of a full-time mother. Young people of that time grew up quickly and made serious enduring choices about their lives at a relatively early age. Today, the life of a typical 21-year-old could hardly be more different. For today's young people, the road to adulthood is a long one... they explore the possibilities available to them in love and work, and move gradually toward making enduring choices (Arnett, 2004, p. 328).

Emerging Adulthood Modification

Arnett argued that, instead of being either prematurely grouped into the young adulthood stage or held back by adolescence, this is a unique life stage. He coined the term “emerging adult” to represent the new life cycle stage he believed should be permanently installed into the existing framework (Arnett, 1998). Others have also purposed terms to describe this new stage such as: twixters, thresholders, younger adults, and in-betweens (Kimmel, 2008).

Persons considered to be emerging adults are, in fact, adults of the youngest kind. Just as an employee in training for his new position is considered to be an employee that is fully part of the company and paid for his time, an emerging adult is fully considered to be an adult. One chief purpose of the stage of emerging adulthood is to allow the emerging adult the transition time necessary for getting acquainted with new adult features and responsibilities while relieving pressure to fulfill those roles all at once (Arnett, 1998, 2000, & 2004) .

In between the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of [young] adulthood lie the explorations and instability of emerging adulthood. . . . Emerging adulthood is an opportunity to transform [participant young people] so that they are not merely made in their parents' images but have made independent decisions about what kind of person they wish to be and how they wish to live (Arnett, 2004, pp. 337-339).

Emerging adults either instinctively understand or have been aptly informed that they need to form a strategy to move through their transitional years in order reach the optimal potential they possess. However, since instability and self-focus are actually encouraged (as they are a result of expanded exploration, handling the in-between feelings, and the realization of possibilities), life plan strategies are sometimes subject multiple revisions before a stable, yet still short-term, pathway is formed (Whiting, 1998). Life plan strategies meld a myriad of different life challenges (e.g. should I apply

to graduate school or seek a full time job after graduation?) and experiences (e.g. my parents are no longer providing my income due my poor grades, what do I do?) so that the arenas of an emerging adulthood must coordinate can be managed more efficiently. One such arena of an emerging adult's life that is often reworked is that of romantic relationships.

In the present study there is a concern for the distinct characteristics and patterns which may be present in emerging adults' approaches to revising their romantic relationships. Arnett (2004) suggested that "explorations in love in emerging adulthood tend to involve a deeper level of intimacy, and the implicit question is more identity-focused: 'What kind of person am I, and what kind of person would suit me best as a partner through life?'" (p. 333). Because of these explorations, there is a stretch of trial and error that goes on in most emerging adults' love lives.

Through this process of being romantically involved with other people, an emerging adult can better identify those qualities that are either attractive or unattractive (Arnett, 2004). If an emerging adult is in a relationship where the unattractive qualities outweigh the attractive qualities, it is likely that the relationship will be terminated. In view of the fact that "relationships can be training grounds for participant attitudes, interactions and skills that may help relationships with future partners" (Priest *et al.*, 2009, p. 48), it is a goal of the researcher to learn from the breakup experiences of participants who are in the emerging adulthood stage of life.

Non-marital, Romantic Relationship Breakup Classifications

The cliché about the lives we lead being akin to a performance on stage started because of Shakespeare, but it was made into a research rich field of human science by Dr. Erving Goffman. Goffman (1959) in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* presented a view of how people live by describing everyday life as a performance, complete with both a front and a backstage. The front stage presented by the actor is what is seen by all. The backstage, however, is where the actor conceals performance secrets, and a metamorphic curtain separates the two.

There is an unwritten expectation that if one enters into a romantic relationship with another, then the backstage of one's life will be slowly revealed. Progression from only showing one's frontstage self to allowing one's partner to peer behind the curtain to

one's backstage indicates a sense of wanting to get to know one another. However, "the process of going backstage and learning everything there is to know about the other person's private self can also lead to some undesirable surprises" (Cunningham, Shamblen, Barbee, & Ault, 2005, p. 273). Undesirable surprises can, in turn, result in the decision by either the participant or the partner, or even a mutual decision by both members, to terminate the relationship.

The decision to terminate a relationship can arise from an array of reasons and be attributed to multiple discrepancies. However, in the present study, there is a focus on only three explanations for the end of a romantic relationship (a) normal dyadic dissolution, (b) fatal attraction dissolution, or (c) social allergen dissolution. Prior research by Felmlee, Sprecher, and Bassin (1990) led to the discovery of the first breakup classification which concerns the researcher: normal dyadic dissolution. Their research indicated that it was, in fact, a combination of participant, dyadic, and social/environmental influences that contributed to the termination of romantic relationships.

Felmlee (2001), after further research, introduced a new possibility that was referred to as fatal attraction dissolution. This explanation suggested that a revelation occurs and certain aspects of one's partner are revealed that cause a decline in attraction. The stunning quality of this breakup experience is this: the aspects of the partner that were, in the end, least attractive to the participant are either extremely similar to or the exact aspects which the participant first found appealing.

A final explanation for relationship dissolution was elucidated by Cunningham *et al.* (2005), and identified as a participant's "allergic reactions" to particularly annoying or grating behavior performed by one's partner. They termed this phenomenon of breakups social allergens, and it is the last classification of breakups that will be focused on in this study.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory will serve as a theoretical lens for understanding the breakup classifications, as it is often used to explain or predict behavior associated with romantic relationships issues, including relationship dissolution. One of the primary assumptions of social exchange theory is that people are stimulated by what is best for

self. This is evident by the basic desire to gain a profit, even in our romantic relationships. People constantly seek to maximize their rewards, while minimizing their costs (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). As can be noted in the following, in depth summarizations of the three breakup classifications, more often than not romantic relationship termination is initiated by the partner who perceived the cost-benefit exchange to be woefully out of balance, in which the scale was tipped more heavily in costs.

Normal Dyadic Dissolution

According to Felmlee *et al.* (1990) three major components affected relationship stability which might lead to a normal dyadic dissolution: (1) the participant, (2) the dyad, and (3) the social/environmental context of the relationship. Discrepancy between the participant's ideal and the participant's reality in any one of the above components could lead to a re-evaluation of the relationship, and possible termination as a result of normal dyadic dissolution. In the present study, the information collected about the participant revolved around the participant's self-esteem which was dependent on a partner's opinions and the ability to be one's self while with a partner. A participant's dependency on a partner or the relationship greatly influences the desire to leave or remain in the relationship (Drigotas, & Rusbult, 1992). Felmlee *et al.* (1990) hypothesized that

People who feel that their self-esteem depends on the relationship probably need the relationship and hence would be less likely to break up. People who perceive that it is easy to be themselves with their partner also probably would want to remain in the relationship (p. 16).

As it pertains to the dyad, Felmlee *et al.* (1990) found that perceived levels of love, commitment, and "give" and "take" were major components that affected relationship satisfaction. Discrepancies in any of the above could lead to relationship re-evaluation, and possible termination. The success or failure of each area, for example love, can be influenced by either the participant or the partner- both members of the dyad have an effect.

Along with elements internal to the relationship, there are external factors to which both the participant and the partner expose the relationship. "Relationships do not

exist in a social vacuum, but are affected by networks of family and friends” (Felmlee *et al.*, 1990, p. 15). Therefore, social and participant issues can have constraining effects on a relationship.

Each participant in a relationship brings to it a personal social network, meaning that there are two social networks for a couple to manage from the beginning. Simultaneously, the couple could be forming a new social network together, making friends that only know them as a dyad. The result is numerous potential social/environmental influences, with some influences having more power than others.

For example, if a participant’s immediate family disapproves of a partner, the relationship will probably undergo scrutiny by the participant. The participant will make assessments of the relationship and will either defend against or begin to agree with family about his/her partner.

Social networks can have a powerful influence on relationship outcomes. Examples of social networks could include family, close friendships, roommates, co-workers, or teammates. In summary, the present study will be examining aspects of the three major components in a relationship (e.g. the participant, the dyad, and its surrounding social networks) that have influence on whether or not a relationship’s termination can be labeled a normal dyadic dissolution. Refer to Figure 2.1 for further illustration of the predictors present in a relationship that are expected to be associated with a normal dyadic dissolution.

Fatal Attraction Dissolution

Fatal attraction is a popular term used to describe the dilemma of finding those characteristics initially viewed as attractive at the outset of the relationship to be taxing or bothersome as passion wanes. As Felmlee (2001) described the situation, “[it] begins with attraction to a partner quality and ends in disillusionment with that quality” (2001, p. 263). The most obvious impact that this has on a couple’s relationship is disenchantment. The participants have an epiphany, a revelation of sorts, that their partners are very different from whom they thought them to be, and those “differences are often cited as a reason for the demise of a relationship” (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976 as cited in Felmlee, 2001, p. 266). The participant begins to have second thoughts about the relationship because the partner is seen in a different light. Negative,

unbearable qualities are discovered in the partner and the participant is forced to end the relationship.

Felmlee (2001) presented three possible explanations for the presence of fatally attractive relationships: (1) opposing forces, (2) idealization, and (3) corresponding weaknesses. *Opposing forces* relates to the desire a participant has for contradictory characteristics to be present in one partner. Participants also can desire that the trait a partner expresses is either similar or complimentary to their own dominant traits.

For example, a participant may want his/her partner to be both reliable and unpredictable. However, perhaps the participant is more reliable than unpredictable. In which case, the participant may desire a partner to be more similar, expressing more reliability than unpredictability, or more complimentary, expressing more unpredictability than reliability (Dijkstra, & Kruisstraat, 2008). The fatal attraction occurs when a participant is drawn to a quality, whether similar or complimentary, a partner openly presents, for instance being reliable. However, as the relationship progresses, the participant discovers that same partner is sorely lacking in the contradictory quality, unpredictability.

The explanation of *idealization* posits that it is within every participant to believe that the present relationship is the right relationship, and the participant is happy about it. Because of this desire, participants tend to explain away a partner's faults and mask true feelings about grating or unattractive traits or subsequent behaviors. A fatal attraction occurs, however, when the participant no longer has the energy to rationalize a partner's traits, and the partner's faults are laid bare. It is as if the participant has had their "rose-colored glasses" knocked off, and the reality of a partner is seen untainted (Kammrath, Ames, & Scholer, 2007).

The third and final explanation is that fatal attraction occurs due to *corresponding weaknesses*. The reasoning for the explanation is actually supported by a popular teaching- that a person's greatest strength doubles as their greatest weakness. As it relates to fatal attraction, a participant is drawn to virtue or strength they admire in a partner. However, as the two grow more intimate, the admirable strength turns to an unappealing vice in the participant's eyes. For instance, in a fatal attraction scenario, if one is attracted to the quality adventurous at the beginning of the relationship, then most likely it will be

found that the negative of that same quality, unstableness, is the most distasteful about a partner in the end.

Out of the three explanations, *corresponding weaknesses* is tested in this study as the reason why most fatal attraction dissolutions occur. While it is expected that the three breakup classifications would share similar properties, it is believed that a distinct dissolution will be determined for each participant's breakup. With this in mind, the corresponding weaknesses theory presents an explanation for fatal attraction dissolution that shares the least amount of overlap with either normal dyadic or social allergen dissolution. The opposing forces theory focuses on dyad interactions, which is similar to normal dyadic dissolution. Idealization theory has a slight focus on re-exposure to traits and trait-driven behaviors, similar to social allergen dissolution. However, the corresponding weaknesses explanation focuses only on the trait aspect of the fatal attraction (e.g. personality qualities, physical qualities, and common interest qualities), providing the least amount of classification overlap.

In summary, the present study will be examining aspects of the three major components of attraction to one's ex-partner (e.g. the personality, the physical, and any common interests) that have influence on whether or not a relationship's termination can be labeled a fatal attraction dissolution. Refer to Figure 2.2 for further illustration of the process present in a relationship that is expected to be associated with fatal attraction dissolution.

Social Allergen Dissolution

The process of a participant developing a social allergy to a partner is referred to as *repetition-sensitization*, and it is not unlike the development of a physical allergic reaction (Cunningham, *et al.*, 2005). The concept of repetition-sensitization simply assumes that repeat exposure to a particular behavior, or set of behaviors, creates a heightened sensitivity to, not only the behaviors, but one's partner as well. In the process of a physical allergy development, one's first exposure to the source will most likely only produce a small, uncomfortable reaction. However, "with repeat contact, sensitivity tends to increase, and the negative response is stronger" (Cunningham, *et al.*, p. 274).

Based on this analogy, Cunningham *et al.* (2005) similarly described a social allergen as "an emotion-arousing behavior or situation created by another person that is

seen as unpleasant, but not unbearably aversive” (p. 274). However, “a reaction of hypersensitive annoyance or disgust to a social allergen” due to repeat or prolonged exposure may result in a social allergy to said person (Cunningham, *et al.*, p. 274). The researchers broke social allergens down into two dimensions: personalism and intentionality. The levels and frequency of these two dimensions were used to measure (1) the intensity of the allergy and (2) if an allergy a participant developed was only to a few behaviors committed by a partner or the partner as whole.

The measures produced four categories of allergen behaviors: (1) *Uncouth habits*, (2) *Inconsiderate acts*, (3) *Intrusive behaviors*, and (4) *Norm violations*. Uncouth habits which are considered to be neither personal nor intentional. Examples of such an allergen would be: picking one’s nose in public or belching at the dinner table. Inconsiderate acts are personally imposing, but unintentional. These behaviors are those that would be considered rude or thoughtless by the participant, for example forgetting an anniversary or making plans without prior consultation. Intrusive behaviors are both personal and intentional. Sarcastic teasing or disheartening comments are such behaviors. Norm violations are intentional performed behaviors that are not personal, the most common of which is cheating on one’s significant other.

Level of irritation experienced by the participant was multiplied by the perceived frequency of the action committed by the partner to determine the ranking of the four categories from most bearable to most aversive. Allergens perceived to be committed intentionally were most likely to be correlated with relationship termination (Theiss & Solomon, 2006; Cunningham *et al.*, 2005).

Because it is in our nature to be desirable, allergies may not develop quickly in a relationship between two romantically involved participants. Impression management, or the tendency for partners in a relationship to put on their best faces when with their significant other, keeps those allergen behaviors well covered for some time until disenchantment begins. Once the passion between the couple plateaus, the desire to always present one’s best starts to wither, which in turn weakens the buffer between a partner’s annoying, disgusting behaviors and an participant’s attention to those behaviors (Cunningham *et al.*, 2005).

To summarize, the present study will be examining the exposure that one has to the four different allergen causing behaviors that one's ex-partner can exhibit (e.g. uncouth, invasive, intrusive, and norm violating) the effect on whether or not a relationship's termination can be labeled a social allergen dissolution. Refer to Figure 2.3 for further illustration of the effect that lengthy and frequent exposure to an allergen causing behavior is expected to in a relationship labeled social allergen dissolution.

Figure 2.1

Normal Dyadic Dissolution

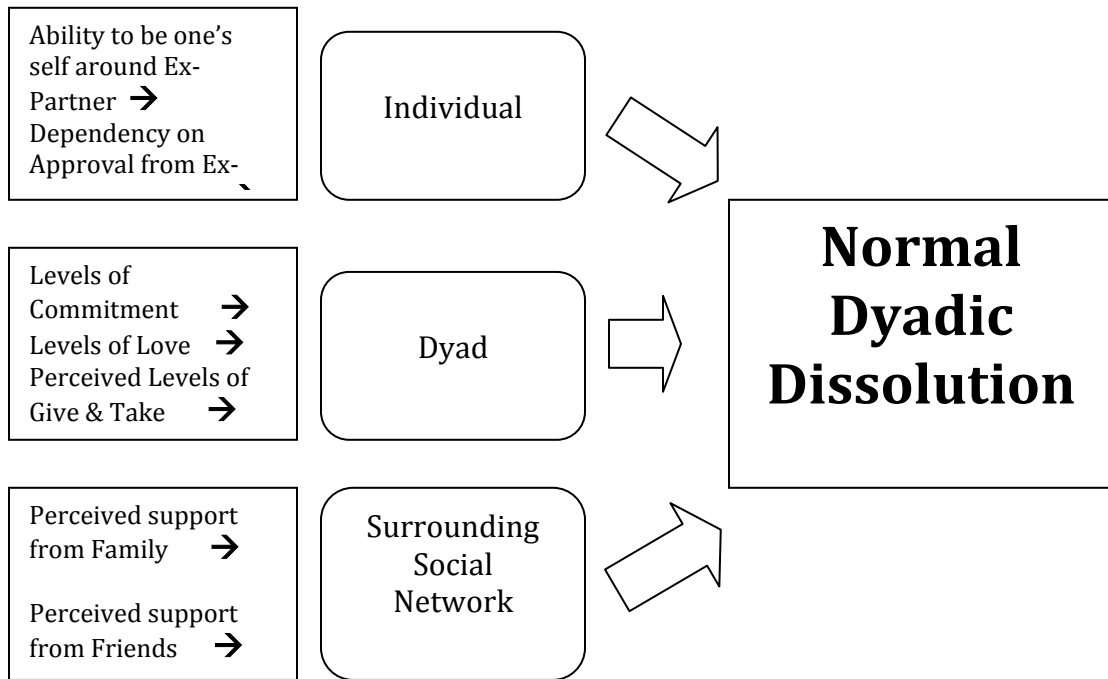


Figure 2.2

Fatal Attraction Dissolution

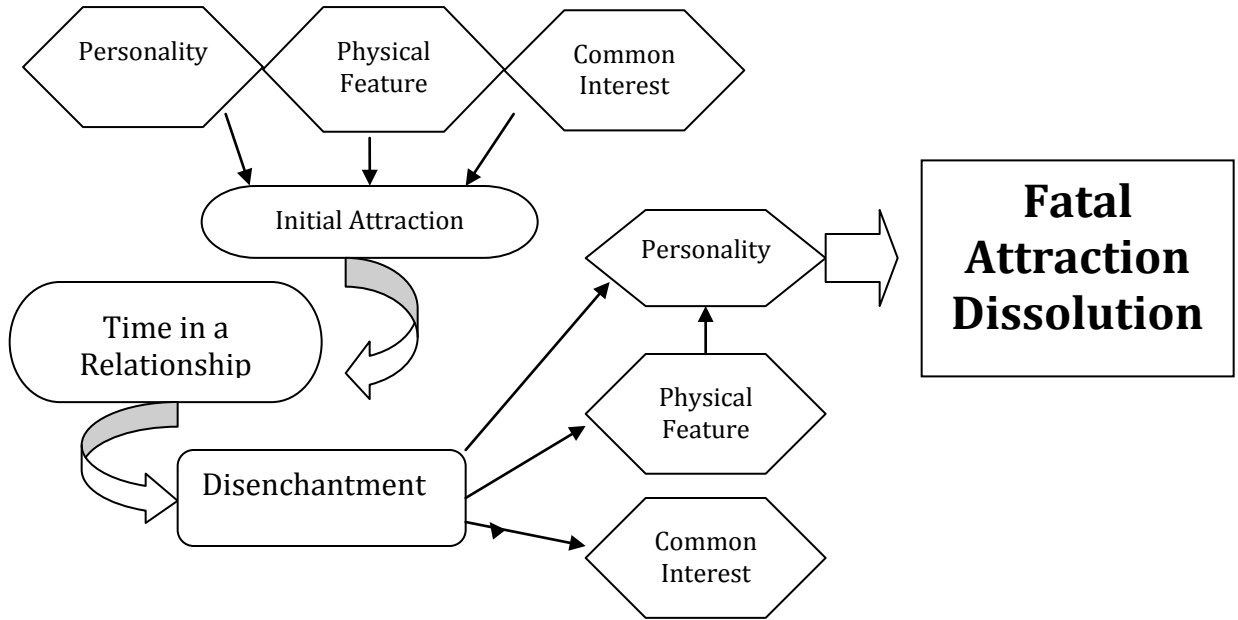
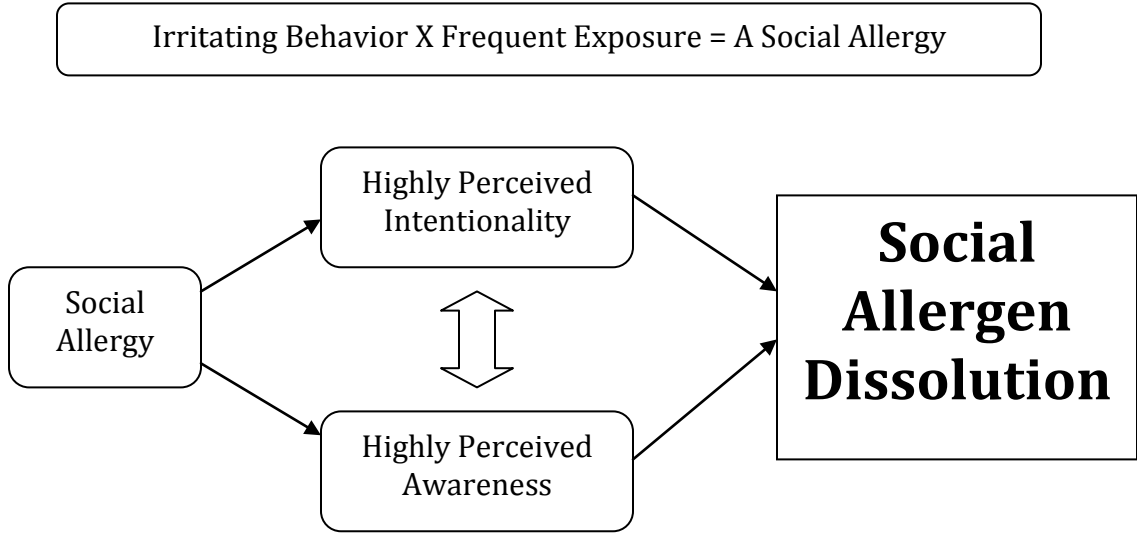


Figure 2.3

Social Allergen Dissolution



Chapter 3: The Present Study

Correlation with Age

The first goal of the researcher is to determine what correlations age has with the three different breakup classifications. Because this study is focusing on nonmarital, romantic relationship dissolution in the emerging adulthood life cycle stage, it is a given that there is curiosity surrounding how age relates to the three particular breakup styles. However, quite a bit is known about these three breakup styles as they relate to age. Most of the above breakup information already discussed was collected from three distinct studies corresponding with the three different breakup classifications.

Interestingly enough, the mean ages for these three prior works of research were: 19.96 years old in the normal dyadic dissolution study performed by Felmlee *et al.* (1990); 19.4 years old in the fatal attraction dissolution study performed by Felmlee (2001); and 20.84 years old in the social allergen dissolution study performed by Cunningham *et al.* (2005). The other supporting sources in the present review reported close to the same mean ages for their participants as well, but none of the above studies tied their results to particular ages or particular age groups, such as emerging adults.

Therefore, in order to “know to what we know” about emerging adults and their tendencies towards the three distinct breakup classifications, the following question is asked:

RQ₁: Is age correlated with the three breakup classifications?

Patterns within the Three Dissolution Types

Also in the current investigation the researcher will be seeking evidence of predictor variables within the three different breakup classifications, as well as comparing and contrasting their various overlaps and differences. Because “relationships are complex, probably it is not surprising that their demise is influenced by several factors” (Felmlee, *et al.*, 1990, p.28). This leads to the first research question of this study:

RQ₂: What predictors, if any, can be detected among the responses that fall within each of the breakup classifications?

As related to *social exchange theory*, a common characteristic of all three dissolution types is that the scales of reward and cost are tipped in such a way that the

partner primarily responsible for the breakup no longer believed the relationship to be profitable. In keeping with the metaphor, the weight added to the cost plate could vary depending on dissolution type leading to the researcher to assume that certain predictor variables are more likely than others within the different breakup classifications. Based on the literature already presented, the following hypotheses have been formed.

H1: Normal dyadic dissolution is more common than social allergen or fatal attraction among participants who report:

- A) non-dependence between themselves and their ex-partners,
- B) the inability to be themselves when they were with their ex-partners,
- C) discordant levels of love and commitment between themselves their ex-partners,
- D) a perceived imbalance of “give” and “take,” or
- E) little to no support from family or friends or from their ex-partners’ family or friends.

H2: Fatal attraction dissolution is more common than social allergen or normal dyadic dissolution among participants who report:

- A) initial attraction to the strength and disenchantment with the weakness of a personality characteristic, or
- B) being primarily or solely responsible for their breakups.

H3: Fatal attraction is less common than social allergen and normal dyadic dissolution in serious, monogamous, moderately to highly committed relationships.

H4: Social allergen dissolution is more common than fatal attraction and normal dyadic dissolution among participants who report exposure to crude, rude, invasive, or norm violating behaviors.

H5: Duration of relationships preceding fatal attraction dissolution is shorter than duration of relationships preceding social allergen or normal dyadic dissolution, but the duration of social allergen and normal dyadic dissolution relationships does not vary.

Response Related to Responsibility

Tashiro and Frazier (2003) found in their study that the attributions participants ascribed to the cause of their breakups were the most influential sources of associated emotions that participants felt about their breakups. Likewise, Rempel and Burris (2005) stated that an appraisal process occurs within the participant of the emotion-arousing event. This appraisal process allows the participant to rationalize and decide how they feel about the circumstance experienced, like a relationship's breakup. And Sbarra & Emery (2005) noted that "for those who are left without warning, a breakup can be devastating. For the leavers, in contrast, ending a relationship can be positive" (p. 213).

In this study, participants were asked to indicate which emotions were best associated with how they felt just after their breakup and which emotions were best associated with how they felt currently about their breakup. Participants were also asked to indicate how responsible they were for initiating their relationship's termination. Is it possible that participants who, after the emotional appraisal process, attribute themselves as the source of the breakup associate more positive feelings with the breakup? In keeping with the above information, the final hypothesis was formed:

H6: Positive feelings about a breakup are positively associated with taking primary or sole responsible for the breakup.

Chapter 4: Methods

Participants

There were 321 participants, 25% male and 77% female. The mean average age of the participants was 23.7 years old. Ninety percent of the sample reported their racial/ethnic group to be White/ Caucasian; 3.9% self-reported as being Black/ African American; and 5.7% self-reported being another racial group. Fifty-four percent of participants reported their highest level of education as having completed some college, but have not yet obtained a Bachelor's degree; 20% reported completing their Bachelor's degree; and 26% reported their highest level of education completed as something other than completing some college or receiving a Bachelor's degree.

Inclusion criteria were that participants had to be between 18 and 29 years of age and experienced non-marital, romantic relationship dissolution at least once prior to the present study. All participants self-selected to complete the questionnaire, which was distributed through campus email, classroom promotion, and word of mouth. No informed consent signature was obtained, and no compensation for participation was awarded.

Measures

A 78 item questionnaire was created to determine a) the type of romantic relationship dissolution experienced by the participant, b) what relationship characteristics, if any, were distinguished as being linked to a particular type of dissolution, and c) how much responsibility the participant assumed for the dissolution and what effect that had on feelings experienced coinciding with the dissolution.

Prior to the present study, a pilot study was administered. That questionnaire had 53, mostly open-ended items, which were modeled after the research and results of Felmlee, *et al.* (1990), Felmlee (2001), and Cunningham, *et al.* (2005); and it was designed to measure the frequency of normal dyadic dissolution, fatal attraction dissolution, and social allergen dissolution in participants. While the above researchers used pre-existing measures, the decision to create an original questionnaire was made with the intent of achieving maximum face validity. No single questionnaire had compared the three dissolution categories prior to the pilot.

The 78 item, mostly close-ended questionnaire was developed inductively, with the use of the pilot questionnaire as a primary source. The open-ended style of the pilot questionnaire proved to be exhausting and frustrating to code due to an overwhelming rate of non-descriptive responses. Close-ended questions were then developed, and the choices following those questions were created from the answers that participants gave in response to the pilot questionnaire.

Demographic Measures. Twenty items were constructed to obtain demographic information about the participant and about the participant's most recent ex-partner. Participants were asked to indicate their sex, age, ethnicity/race, highest level of education completed, religion, and religiosity at the time of their most recent breakup. Participants were then asked to indicate the same information only about their most recent ex-partner. Obtaining these facts provided not only information about the participating sample, but informed the researcher of any basic difference between the participant and ex-partner that might have been a catalyst to the dissolution.

Six items were constructed to obtain information about the former relationship between participant and ex-partner. These questions were created to gauge the participant's perceived intent for relationship (e.g. *Which of the following best describes your initial intent for the relationship?*), length of the relationship, and seriousness of the relationship. Also, two items were used to measure how frequently the participant saw the ex-partner both during the relationship and currently.

Normal Dyadic Dissolution Measures. Fourteen items were constructed to measure whether or not former couple experienced gradual separation from one another due to barriers created by the individual, dyad, or surrounding social/environmental influences (i.e. social networks). Items measured how dependent the participant was on the ex-partner (e.g. *How important was [My_ExName]'s approval (of decisions, behaviors, etc.) to you during the relationship?*), the perceived levels of commitment (e.g. *At the point when you were most committed to the relationship with [My_ExName], how committed were you?*), and love expressed, perceived balance of give-and-take from the ex-partner relationship, and the perceived social support close family members and friends exerted over the former relationship (e.g. *How supportive of the relationship was your best friend/ mother/ father?*).

Those participants who reported lower dependence levels, lower levels of perceived commitment and love, perceived an imbalanced give-to-take ratio, and perceived lower levels of social support from either family members or friends were labeled as having experienced a barrier that could contribute to a normal dyadic dissolution.

Fatal Attraction Dissolution Measure. Seven items were constructed to determine whether or not a participant had experienced one or more fatal attractions during the former with relationship with the ex-partner. Participants were then asked what about the ex-partner was first attractive: personality, physical features, or common interests. Participants were then presented with 48 personality qualities that have positive connotations, for example: adventurous, affectionate, and/or ambitious. Participants were asked, *Which of the following personality traits initially attracted you to [My_ExName]?* and were able to choose up to 10 qualities that initially attracted them to their ex-partners. The qualities were listed in alphabetical order to avoid ordering effects or the impression that some qualities were more desirable than others.

Later on, participants were presented with 56 synonyms of the original 48 personality qualities that have negative connotations. For example, instead of adventurous the participants were presented the quality unreliable; in place of affectionate participants could choose smothering; and selfish was the alternate option for ambitious. Participants were then asked, *Which of the following personality traits were the least attractive about [My_ExName] when the relationship ended,* and were able to choose up to 10 qualities that were least attractive to them about their ex-partners at the end of their relationships. Once again the negative synonyms of the qualities were listed in alphabetical order to avoid ordering effects or the impression that some qualities were least desirable than others.

Participants who chose both the positive (i.e. adventurous) and the negative (i.e. unreliable) synonym were considered to have found the same quality both initially attractive and conclusively least attractive. These participants were labeled as having experienced a fatal attraction during their former relationship.

Social Allergen Dissolution Measures. Thirteen items were constructed to measure whether or not the participant experienced one or more social allergies during

the former relationship with the ex-partner. Participants were asked to indicate how often on a scale from 0 to 5, on which 0 = Never and 5 = Almost Always, they had been exposed to uncouth, intrusive, invasive, and normal violating behaviors.

Participants were also asked to indicate how aware they perceived their ex-partners to be of their committal of said behaviors (e.g. *Do you think that [My_ExName] knew those invasive or malicious behaviors were invasive or malicious?*), and the level of annoyance said behaviors aroused (e.g. *How often do you believe those invasive or malicious behaviors were done intentionally to annoy you?*). Participants who indicated higher levels of exposure to a said behavior, high perceived awareness by their ex-partners, and high levels of annoyance due to exposure of said behavior were labeled as having experience a social allergy.

Breakup Category Assignment Measures. One item was created to determine which dissolution type each participant experienced. Participants were asked to respond to the open-ended question, *If you were only allowed to attribute one reason to the break up of this relationship, what would it be?*” Each participant’s response was then coded as a 0, 1, 2, or 3, with 0 = Unusable Response, 1 = Fatal Attraction Dissolution, 2= Social Allergen Dissolution, and 3 = Normal Dyadic Dissolution.

The codes were determined through inter-rater reliability. The primary investigator and a colleague, a fellow graduate student, were the two coders. Each were instructed on how to code each response (0, 1, 2, or 3), and then were emailed the following criteria developed by the primary investigator by which to evaluate each participant’s open response:

Fatal Attraction Dissolution Codes. Open ended response indicated a trait as the primary reason for the relationship’s demise. Examples include personality traits (dull, abrasive, egotistic, etc...), physical traits (weight or hair color), and common interests (religious differences, schedule conflict).

Social Allergen Dissolution Codes. Opened ended response indicated a behavior as the primary reason for the relationship’s demise. Examples include: crude/uncouth behaviors (bodily functions), rude/inconsiderate behaviors (forgetting anniversaries, making plans without consulting significant other), invasive/intrusive behaviors (mean or sarcastic comments, a constant tearing

down, and invasive questioning) and/or norm violating behaviors (cheating on significant other, ignoring significant other, and avoiding significant other) *Norma Dyadic Dissolution Codes*. Opened ended response indicated an interaction between the dyad members or social networks as the primary reason for the relationship's demise. Examples include: distance between couples (physical or emotional), disapproval from social network members, incompatibilities (didn't talk much, more like friends than in a relationship), and desire to date others.

The coders received the evaluation criteria and an excel sheet with all participant responses through an email from a third party source, another investigator of the present study. The coders completed their coding individual, having no contact during the coding process. The completed codes of the responses were emailed back to the third party source for analysis, which revealed the inter-rater reliability to be established as $\kappa = 0.83$. The responses with the codes were then reconfigured into a new excel sheet. All responses that were not in agreement were highlighted on said sheet and sent to the primary researcher for an executive decision on the appropriate code.

Response Correlated with Responsibility Measures. Three items were created to measure the level of responsibility the participants assumed for their breakups as well as their emotional responses associated with their breakups (both at the time of dissolution and at present). An example of these questions was, *who wanted the breakup*, were 1 = Only [My_ExName] and 5 = Only Me.

Procedures

In an effort to obtain the maximum amount of participants, the questionnaire was made accessible through the internet. Participants were able to self-administer the questionnaire at their own leisure in the environment of their choice.

Chapter 5: Results

Normal dyadic dissolution occurred in 62%, social allergen dissolution occurred in 27%, and fatal attraction dissolution occurred in 11% of the participants' (N= 321) relational demises. (More descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 5:1) RQ_1 , which asked *is age correlated with the three breakup classifications*, and RQ_2 , which asked *what predictors, if any, can be detected among the responses that fall within each of the breakup classifications*, were assessed using a multinomial regression analysis. The multinomial regression analysis revealed two predictor variables, as shown in Table 5:2; however, age was not significantly correlated with any of the breakup categories. First, an emerging adult is one third as likely to experience fatal attraction dissolution ($p = .04$) as compared to normal dyadic dissolution if they have not cohabited with their significant other. Second, an emerging adult was more likely to have perceived family support to have been higher in both fatal attraction ($p = .03$) and social allergen dissolutions ($p < .01$) when compared with those experienced normal dyadic dissolution.

Normal Dyadic Dissolution. A series of Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to analyze the data to reach conclusions about the following hypotheses made about predictor variables for normal dyadic dissolution:

H1: Normal dyadic dissolution is more common than social allergen or fatal

attraction among participants who report:

- A) feeling independent from their ex-partners,
- B) the inability to be themselves when they were with their ex-partners,
- C) discordant levels of love and commitment between themselves their ex-partners,
- D) a perceived imbalance of “give” and “take,” or
- E) little to no support from family or friends or from their ex-partners’ family or friends.

The test results concluded that the relationships between feelings of independence and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 3.867, p = .145$), an individuals ability to be themselves and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 3.116, p = .211$), and love and commitment levels and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 2.612, p = .271$) were

not significant. These independent variables cannot be used as predictors of whether a relationship will end due to a normal dyadic dissolution.

The relationship between perceived levels of give-and-take and breakup classification was significant, $X^2(2, N = 321) = 14.460, p = .001$. Further testing using a Mann-Whitney U test revealed that those who experienced a normal dyadic dissolution ($n = 198$) were significantly more likely to perceived imbalanced levels of give-and-take than those who experienced a social allergen dissolution ($n = 87$), $Z = -3.738, p < .001, r = .22$.

The relationships between perceived support received from family and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 293) = 15.326, p < .001$) and perceived support received from friends and breakup classification ($2, N = 302 = 12,138, p = .002$) were significant. Further testing through a subsequent series of Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that those who experience a normal dyadic dissolution ($n = 180, 190$) were significantly more likely to perceive lower levels of support from family ($Z = -3.661, p < .001, r = .23$) and lower levels of support from friends ($Z = -3.420, p = .001, r = .21$) than were those who experienced a social allergen dissolution ($n = 78, 77$).

Fatal Attraction Dissolution. A series of 2×3 Chi-Square tests were used to analyze the data to reach conclusions about the following hypotheses made about predictor variables for fatal attraction dissolution:

H2: Fatal attraction dissolution is more common than social allergen or normal dyadic dissolution among participants who report:

- A) initial attraction to the strength and disenchantment with the weakness of a personality characteristic, or
- B) being primarily or solely responsible for their breakups.

H3: Fatal attraction is less common than social allergen and normal dyadic dissolution in serious, monogamous, moderately to highly committed relationships.

The relationship between the occurrence of a fatal attraction, or the initial attraction to the strength and disenchantment with the weakness of a personality characteristic, in an emerging adult, romantic relationship and breakup classification was not significant, $X^2(2, N = 321) = 2.807, p = .246, V = .094$, as shown in Table 5:3.

The relationship between how much responsibility a participant assumed for the relationship's dissolution and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 320) = 6.824, p = .033, V = .146$) was significant, as shown in Table 5:4. A subsequent series 2X2 chi-square tests for independence revealed that those who experienced fatal attraction dissolution were more likely to assumed primary or sole responsibility for the relationship's dissolution ($X^2(= N = 233, 1) 5.008, p = .025, V = -.147$) than were those who experienced normal dyadic dissolution. However, the relationship between the level of commitment and breakup classification was not significant, $X^2(2, N = 245) = .493, p = .781, V = .045$.

Social Allergen Dissolution. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to analyze the data to reach conclusions about the following hypothesis made about predictor variables for social allergen dissolution:

H4: Social allergen dissolution is more common than fatal attraction and normal dyadic dissolution among participants who report exposure to crude, rude, invasive, or norm violating behaviors.

Results revealed that the relationship between one's exposure to uncouth behaviors and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 8.490, p = .014$), intrusive behaviors and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 17.583, p < .001$), invasive behaviors and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 11.797, p = .003$), and norm violating behaviors and breakup classification ($X^2(2, N = 321) = 24.701, p < .001$) were significant.

A subsequent series of Mann-Whitney revealed that those who experienced a social allergen dissolution ($n = 87$) were significantly more like to have been exposed to uncouth behaviors ($Z = -2.629, p = .009, r = .16$) intrusive behaviors ($Z = -4.036, p < .001, r = .22$), invasive behaviors ($Z = -3.279, p = .001, r = .19$), and norm violating behaviors ($Z = -4.970, p < .001, r = .29$) than were those who experience a normal dyadic dissolution ($n = 199$).

Duration. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to analyze the data to reach conclusions about the following hypothesis made about the predictor variable of duration of relationship pertaining to the three breakup classifications:

H5: Duration of relationships preceding fatal attraction dissolution is shorter than duration of relationships preceding social allergen or normal dyadic

dissolution, but the duration of social allergen and normal dyadic dissolution relationships does not vary.

Results revealed that there were no differences in the duration of relationships preceding fatal attraction, social allergen, or normal dyadic dissolution, ($X^2(2, N = 299) = 1.404, p = .495$). This is, in part, constant with hypothesis 5, which predicted no difference between the durations of relationships preceding social allergen and normal dyadic dissolutions.

Response Correlated with Responsibility. An independent groups *t* test was used to analyze the data to reach conclusions about the following hypothesis:

H6: Positive feelings about a breakup are positively associated with taking primary or sole responsible for the breakup.

Results revealed that individuals who assumed more responsibility than they allotted their partner for their relationship's dissolution ($M = -3.9, SD = 3.7$) were less likely to experience negatively associated feelings towards their breakup than those who assumed equal or less responsibility for their relationship's dissolution than they allotted their partner ($M = -6.1, SD = 3.5$) $t(333) = -5.653, p < .001, r = .09$.

Tables

Table 5:1

Descriptive Statistics

	Fatal Attraction Dissolution, N = 35	Social Allergen Dissolution, N = 87	Normal Dyadic Dissolution, N = 199	Total N = 321
Sex				
Male	23%	20%	23%	25%
Female	77%	80%	77%	75%
Age				
Mean	22	21	21	N/A
Standard Deviation	3.1	2.5	2.6	
Highest Completed Level of Education				
High school diploma or less	6%	8%	10%	9%
Some college	8%	17%	12%	13%
Bachelor's	52%	56%	53%	54%
Master's	6%	2%	3%	2%
Other	28%	17%	22%	22%
Cohabited				
No	63%	76%	79%	77%
Yes	37%	24%	21%	23%
Talk Seriously About Marriage				
No	49%	43%	48%	46%
Yes, but never Engaged	40%	52%	48%	48%
Yes, and Engaged	11%	5%	4%	6%

Table 5:2*Multinomial Regression (Reference Category is Normal Dyadic Dissolution)*

Variable	Fatal Attraction Dissolution					Social Allergen Dissolution				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	95% <i>CI</i> [<i>LL, UL</i>]	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>	95% <i>CI</i> [<i>LL, UL</i>]	<i>p</i>
Respondent Sex ^(Female)	-0.49	.55	0.61	[0.21, 1.80]	.37	-0.52	.44	1.15	[0.25, 1.41]	.24
Respondent Age at Breakup	0.14	.13	1.15	[0.89, 1.48]	.29	-0.04	.11	0.96	[0.78, 1.18]	.68
Contact Frequency	-0.04	.11	0.97	[0.79, 1.19]	.73	0.09	.09	1.10	[0.92, 1.30]	.30
Marriage Considered ^(Yes)	0.80	.52	2.24	[0.81, 6.15]	.12	-0.18	.43	0.84	[0.36, 1.95]	.68
Ever Cohabited ^(Yes)	-1.16	.57	0.32	[0.10, 0.96]	.04	-0.20	.48	0.82	[0.32, 2.11]	.68
Education Discrepancy ^(Yes)	-0.55	.51	1.18	[0.27, 5.10]	.28	0.45	.40	1.57	[0.72, 3.42]	.26
Religious Discrepancy ^(Yes)	0.05	.48	1.05	[0.42, 2.68]	.91	0.37	.37	1.44	[0.69, 3.00]	.33
Relationship Duration	0.48	.57	1.61	[0.52, 4.95]	.41	0.13	.46	1.14	[0.47, 2.79]	.78
Ex-Partner Initiated Breakup ^(Respondent)	-5.31	4.93	0.01	[0.00, 77.94]	.28	-5.07	4.12	0.01	[0.00, 20.272]	.22
Mutually Initiated Breakup ^(Respondent)	0.95	2.92	2.60	[0.01, 796.03]	.74	-1.93	2.33	0.15	[0.00, 13.96]	.41
Fatal Attraction ^(Experienced)	0.17	.75	1.18	[0.27, 5.10]	.82	-0.31	.63	0.73	[0.21, 2.51]	.62
Social Allergen ^(Experienced)	-	.00	0.00	[0.00, 0.00]		0.25	.70	1.28	[0.32, 5.08]	.73
	20.0									
	0									

Table 5:2 Continuation*Multinomial Regression (Reference Category is Normal Dyadic Dissolution)*

Give/Take Balance	-0.10	.14	0.90	[0.68, 1.19]	.46	-0.18	.11	0.83	[0.67, 1.03]	.10
Parental Support	0.78	.35	2.17	[1.09, 4.31]	.03	1.00	.29	2.71	[1.53, 4.78]	<.01
Friend Support	0.17	.31	1.18	[0.64, 2.19]	.59	0.44	.25	1.55	[0.96, 2.53]	.08
Participant Age at Breakup x Ex-Partner Initiated Breakup	0.20	.22	1.23	[0.80, 1.89]	.35	0.21	.19	1.23	[0.85, 1.79]	.28
Participant Age at Breakup x Mutually Initiated Breakup	-0.14	.13	0.87	[0.68, 1.12]	.29	0.05	.11	1.05	[0.85, 1.29]	.67

Table 5:3*Results for Hypothesis 2_a, Occurrence of Fatal Attraction in Relationship by Breakup Classification*

Fatal Attraction Occurred?	Yes	No	Total
Normal Dyadic Dissolution	86%	14%	100% (N = 199)
Fatal Attraction Dissolution	86%	14%	100% (N = 35)
Social Allergen Dissolution	93%	7%	100% (N = 87)

Table 5:4

Results for Hypothesis 2_b, Reported Primary or Sole Responsibility for the Relationship's Dissolution by Breakup Classification

Reported prime/sole Responsibility?	Yes	No	Total
Normal Dyadic Dissolution	42%	58%	100% (N = 198)
Fatal Attraction Dissolution	63%	37%	100% (N = 35)
Social Allergen Dissolution	54%	46%	100% (N = 87)

Chapter 6: Discussion

As seen in the present study, romantic relationship dissolution can be highly specific: life stage development, personalities, behaviors, emotions, and social surroundings all have a part in contributing relational demise. Furthermore, since there is also a surprising amount of overlap between the different classifications, one would need to be very deliberate, as well as careful, in assigning a relationship's dissolution to a breakup category.

Contrary to the thoughts of the researcher, no distinctions related to age could be found among normal dyadic, fatal attraction, or social allergen dissolutions. Gender, educational, racial, and religious differences also appear to be minimal when examined as predictors for a particular breakup classification, alluding to the idea that heartbreak does not discriminate by demographic. It would seem that, according to the results of this study, virtually any emerging adult is just as likely to experience one kind of breakup as another, with a few key exceptions like perceived family support and whether or not the couple had cohabitated.

Because few distinctions could be made and considerable overlap between the three breakup categories was prominent, a conclusion one could draw from the present study is that there are not three separate categories of breaking up. Perhaps an integrated model of relationship dissolution needs to be made. Each supposed category of dissolution had an emphasis; normal dyadic dissolution was strongly connected to social interaction within the couple and the social surroundings of the couple. Fatal attraction dissolution is primarily influenced by attraction and disenchantment of observable components of one's partner (e.g. physical features, personality traits, and participation in shared interests). Social allergen dissolution is affected by exposure to and frequency of habitual behaviors that are usually viewed, at minimum, as irritating.

A participant could be labeled as having experienced a fatal attraction even though the relationship conclusively ended due to normal dyadic dissolution. To rephrase, a participant experienced attraction/disenchantment issues involving a partner, but ultimately their relationship dissolved due to social factors. Attraction and social interactions were both *components* of single dissolution, not necessarily categories of dissolution.

Integration would require future research to look at the three relationship dissolutions *components*, instead of at three relationship dissolution categories. The concept would be that the social, attractive and behavioral aspects overlap within a single relationship, and can contribute as catalyst to either the relationship's demise or success.

Limitations and Suggestions

While the results of this research were illuminating, there is always limitation. The limitations identified in this study are those from which future research can benefit. One restricted arena was time; data was collected in a three week period about a single, past relationship. No opportunity to learn from changes that may have occurred over time was available. A future study might attempt to find individuals who are just starting relationships, follow them for perhaps six month to a year, and note changes that could be connected with dissolution.

A second limitation of the study was that our data was collected through self-reported measure, and by only one member of the former dyad. While "dissolution only requires that one partner become inclined to act," (VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009, p. 1222) future research could benefit from both partners' points of view on the dissolution. To have been in the position to interview both members of a known relationship after a termination had occurred may have shaped the results differently.

The study would have also benefited from a few more key questions concerning the participants, for example, questions probing the participants' personality dimensions, number of total breakups while in this life stage, and political stances. Considering that emerging adulthood is centered on exploration and identity solidification, future studies may also want to attempt to measure if a participant experienced any personal growth from the breakup.

A final limitation of this study was the unbalanced number of participants in each breakup classification. An improvement for this study would be to set a minimum goal number of participants for each breakup classification using analysis of power. Then recruit more individuals to participate until that minimum goal number of participants is reach.

Implications and Conclusions

Research on the details and intimacies of personal relationships has been the fuel to the fire that is human science. Parent/child relationships, sibling relationship, friendships, and of course, romantic relationships all have their fair share of publications. With regards to romantic relations, research has set out to discover what makes these relationships health, happy, and long-lasting. And, most often, what to do in relationships is learned from those relationships that did not succeed.

“Perhaps because of the host of negative consequences, [for example: depression, distraught emotions, loss of sense of self, and decreases in physical health] attention has focused on achieving a better understanding of what leads a couple to dissolution” (VanderDrift, *et al.* 2009, p. 1220). But as it pertains to this study, the reasons for examining romantic relational demises are not founded in the negative consequences, but the positive ones. While severing a connection with another is typically painful, personal growth can take place.

Because “breakups can shape attitudes and expectations toward intimate relationships,” the information gathered from this study can be used toward improving the decision-making skills of all emerging adults as related to romance (Priest, *et al.* 2009, p. 48). Looking through the lens of social exchange theory, being able to weigh both the rewards and costs of romantic relationship alternatives should positively enhance one’s chance of reaching a realistic relationship ideal resulting in a higher likelihood of profit (Ingoldsby *et al.*, 2004).

For example, if an emerging adult could be educated in such a way that he or she examined social interactions and surroundings, carefully evaluated reasons for attraction and possible disenchantment, and early observation of irritating behaviors perhaps then future heartbreak could be mineralized. This extends beyond the boundaries of dating and into engagement and marriage. Engagements break off and marriage end in divorce because of normal dyadic, fatal attraction, or social allergen dissolution... Advanced detection of mismatch in partner choice could reduce the cost of severing a relationship, and maximize the profit of discovering a good fit.

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