

## The Dissolution of Romantic Relationships: Factors Involved in Relationship Stability and Emotional Distress

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This investigation was designed to examine factors involved in the stability of premarital romantic relationships and the extent of emotional distress experienced following their dissolution. During the fall of 1985, a large sample of individuals involved in ongoing dating relationships completed an extensive questionnaire survey. The survey assessed 10 factors: satisfaction with the current partner, closeness of the relationship, duration of the relationship, sexual nature of the relationship, the quality of the best actual and imagined alternative dating partner(s), the ease with which a suitable alternative partner could be found, exclusivity of the relationship, self-monitoring propensity, and orientation to sexual relations. Approximately 3 months later, all individuals were recontacted to determine whether they were still dating the same partner and if not, how much emotional distress they experienced following relationship dissolution. Analyses revealed that at a univariate level, all 10 factors successfully forecasted relationship stability. Three of the 10 factors—closeness, duration, and ease of finding an alternative partner—reliably and independently predicted the intensity and duration of emotional distress. Specifically, individuals who were close to their former partner, who had dated the former partner for a long time, and who believed they could not easily acquire a desirable alternative tended to experience more pronounced distress following dissolution. These results are discussed in terms of the investment model and recent theorizing on emotion in relationships.

Few experiences in life are capable of producing more emotional distress, anguish, and suffering than is the dissolution of an important relationship. Indeed, the loss of a significant partner can be one of the most, if not the most, distressing and traumatic experiences that life has to offer (Bowlby, 1980; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Given the important role that relationship dissolution plays in the lives of most individuals, surprisingly little research has examined relationship dissolution and in particular the factors that precipitate it (Berscheid, 1985; Huston & Levinger, 1978; Moles & Levinger, 1976; Norton & Glick, 1976).

Past studies typically have focused on the dissolution of marital relationships (see Newcomb & Bentler, 1981, for a review). Relatively few have examined the breakdown of premarital ones. Research on premarital relationships, most of which has

been cross-sectional in design, has examined trajectories of disengagement (e.g., Baxter, 1984), stages of dissolution (e.g., Lee, 1984), and the impact of rewards, costs, investments, and alternative partners on commitment in dating relationships (e.g., Rusbult, 1980). Much of this research, however, is based on retrospective accounts of the events that preceded relationship termination. Because such accounts are susceptible to distortions in the interpretation of and memory for past events (cf. Duck, 1981), the results of cross-sectional research must be interpreted with caution.

Longitudinal research circumvents many of these problems. Unfortunately, only a few longitudinal studies have examined the factors that forecast the demise of premarital relationships. Burgess and Wallin (1953), in an extensive study of premarital courtships, identified five factors associated with relationship dissolution: slight attachment to the partner, prolonged separation from the partner, parental opposition to the relationship, cultural differences between the partners, and personality difficulties. Hill, Rubin, & Peplau (1976) found that premarital relationships characterized by little intimacy, unequal involvement, and large discrepancies in partners' age, educational aspirations, intelligence, and physical attractiveness were particularly vulnerable to dissolution. And Rusbult (1983) has demonstrated that relationships characterized by increases over time in rewards, satisfaction, investment size, and commitment and by decreases in quality of alternatives are less susceptible to dissolution.

Moreover, few if any longitudinal studies have examined the factors that forecast the extent of emotional distress that individuals experience when a relationship ends. Despite this paucity of research, several investigators adopting different theoret-

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ical orientations have hypothesized that certain factors internal to a relationship, certain factors external to a relationship, and certain individual difference factors ought to predict relationship stability and emotional distress.

### Factors Internal to a Relationship

On the basis of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), Levinger (1965, 1976, 1979) has suggested that attraction to (i.e., satisfaction with) a relationship might be one determinant of relationship stability. The attractiveness of a relationship is determined by the comparison level, a standard that individuals use to evaluate the rewards and costs of a relationship in terms of what they believe they deserve. Relationships that provide many rewards and few costs produce outcomes above the comparison level and therefore ought to be satisfying and attractive. As a result, individuals who are satisfied with their current relationship should be more likely to remain in it over time.

Such individuals also might experience strong emotional distress following dissolution (Parkes, 1972; Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Weiss, 1975). Given their rewarding nature, satisfying relationships may produce emotional ties between partners. Thus, relationships characterized by high satisfaction may be more vulnerable to emotional distress after a breakup.

Furthermore, the extent to which one is close to (i.e., interdependent on) the current partner should influence relationship stability (Berscheid, 1983, 1986; Kelley et al., 1983). According to Kelley et al. (1983), close relationships are those in which partners have frequent and strong impact on one another in diverse kinds of activities across time. Because close relationships are likely to be ones in which individuals are highly invested, they ought to be less vulnerable to dissolution over time.

However, they should be more vulnerable to severe emotional distress after dissolution (Berscheid, 1983, 1986; Bowlby, 1979, 1980; Spitz & Wolfe, 1946; Weiss, 1975). Individuals in close relationships are likely to develop routine patterns of interaction and to share important plans and goals with their partners. When a close relationship ends, many of these interaction patterns, plans, and goals no longer can be fulfilled. Berscheid (1983) has argued that the interruption of ongoing activities and plans represents a sufficient and possibly necessary condition for the experience of strong emotion. Accordingly, the dissolution of close relationships should produce particularly intense emotional distress.

Relationship duration also ought to prognosticate relationship stability (Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Davis, 1973). Relationships that have endured over time have survived the formative and often unstable stages of relationship development. Long-term relationships, therefore, should be less vulnerable to dissolution.

They also should be a source of more intense distress following dissolution (Bowlby, 1979; Weiss, 1975). The extent to which an individual is emotionally invested in a relationship is likely to depend on how long the relationship has existed (cf. Kelley et al., 1983). If this is so, the dissolution of long-term relationships ought to generate particularly strong emotional distress.

Moreover, the sexual nature of a relationship might affect re-

lationship stability (Burgess & Wallin, 1953). The occurrence of sex is likely to intensify partners' obligation and commitment to the relationship. Accordingly, relationships that are sexual in nature should be less susceptible to dissolution.

Such relationships also might be characterized by strong emotional distress following dissolution (D'Augelli & D'Augelli, 1979). Oftentimes, sex is an expression of and a means of building strong emotional intimacy in a relationship (see D'Augelli & D'Augelli, 1979; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). Individuals who have engaged in sex with their partners are likely to be highly emotionally invested in their relationships. Therefore, the dissolution of sexual relationships may generate intense emotional distress.

In sum, relationships characterized by high satisfaction, pronounced closeness, long duration, and the occurrence of sex are hypothesized to be less susceptible to dissolution and more vulnerable to emotional distress.

### Factors External to a Relationship

On the basis of interdependence theory, Levinger (1965, 1976, 1979) has suggested that the quality of an individual's best alternative dating partner might be another determinant of relationship stability. The standard that individuals use to decide whether to remain in a relationship is the comparison level for alternatives, the lowest level of outcomes an individual will accept in an existing relationship in light of available opportunities. Because individuals are most likely to leave a relationship when its outcomes fall below the comparison level for alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and because individuals who possess an attractive alternative are likely to have relatively high standards for this level, the relationships of individuals who possess desirable alternatives should be particularly vulnerable to dissolution.

Such individuals also may experience less distress following dissolution (Berscheid, 1986). Individuals who possess highly desirable alternative partners are likely to have alternatives who are more capable of facilitating interrupted routines and plans. If this is so, they ought to experience less pronounced emotional distress following a breakup.

Past approaches to alternative relationships (e.g., interdependence theory) have focused mainly on alternative partners who are currently available to an individual (see Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). By and large, they have not focused on imagined alternatives, prospective partners who are not yet known but who might be acquired in the future. Because many individuals may not always think about, be aware of, or know of specific persons who could serve as alternative partners (cf. Levinger, 1979), the quality of an individual's best imagined alternative partner might serve as a better predictor of relationship stability and emotional distress than the quality of their best currently available one.

Past approaches also have not fully considered the ease with which individuals are able to find suitable alternative partners. The quality of an individual's best current or imagined alternative should have an impact on relationship stability and emotional distress only if such partners can be easily acquired. Thus, the best predictor of relationship stability and distress might simply be the ease with which individuals believe they

can or could find a satisfactory replacement for the current partner.

In addition, relationship exclusivity might forecast relationship stability. Individuals who are dating the current partner exclusively are likely to have fewer alternative partners. The absence of alternatives may be an indication of and may actually promote commitment to the current relationship (cf. Levinger, 1979). Consequently, the relationships of individuals who are dating the current partner exclusively should be less vulnerable to dissolution over time.

Relationship exclusivity also might affect emotional distress. Alternative partners often may be capable of facilitating interrupted plans, goals, and behavioral routines. Because of their greater accessibility to alternatives, individuals who are dating both the current partner and others may experience less interruption (and therefore less emotional distress) following relationship termination.

In sum, it is hypothesized that individuals who possess poor actual and imagined alternatives, who believe they cannot find a suitable alternative easily, and who are dating the current partner exclusively should be involved in relationships less susceptible to dissolution and more vulnerable to emotional distress.

### Individual Difference Factors

Individuals high and low in self-monitoring are known to adopt different orientations toward romantic relationships (see Snyder & Simpson, 1987). Those high in self-monitoring (who are responsive to social and interpersonal cues of situational appropriateness) tend to adopt an uncommitted orientation to dating relationships, whereas those low in self-monitoring (whose actions typically reflect their own attitudes and dispositions) tend to adopt a committed one (Snyder & Simpson, 1984). Moreover, individuals low in self-monitoring tend to possess a restricted orientation to engaging in casual sexual relations, whereas individuals high in self-monitoring tend to possess an unrestricted one (Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986).

Given their committed and restricted orientations to romantic involvements, individuals low in self-monitoring should be involved in relationships that are less susceptible to dissolution. Furthermore, they may be more likely to develop strong and lasting emotional ties to their partners. Accordingly, such individuals may be more likely to experience strong emotional distress following dissolution.

Even though self-monitoring propensity might predict relationship dissolution and distress, it probably is not the strongest and most direct predictor of these phenomena. Recently, Snyder et al. (1986) have identified six behavioral and attitudinal indexes that, taken together, more directly tap propensity to adopt a restricted as opposed to an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations. Perhaps individual differences in orientation to sexual relations might predict dissolution and emotional distress more strongly than self-monitoring propensity does.

In sum, individuals who are low in self-monitoring and who adopt a restricted orientation to sexual relations are hypothesized to be involved in relationships less susceptible to dissolution and more vulnerable to emotional distress.

Which of these 10 factors predict the stability of romantic relationships? And which ones predict the intensity and dura-

tion of emotional distress that follows dissolution? To answer these questions, a longitudinal investigation was conducted. During the fall of 1985, a large sample of individuals involved in ongoing heterosexual dating relationships completed an extensive questionnaire survey. The survey assessed each of the 10 factors just discussed. Approximately 3 months later, these individuals participated in a follow-up telephone survey, the purpose of which was twofold: (a) to determine whether participants were still dating the same partner and (b) if they were not, to assess the intensity and duration of emotional distress that followed relationship termination.

## Method

### *Initial Data Collection: Participants and Requirements of Participation*

Two hundred thirty-four University of Minnesota undergraduates (126 women and 108 men) completed an extensive questionnaire survey for introductory psychology course credit. To participate in the project, participants had to meet three requirements. First, they had to be dating someone at the time of initial data collection; second, they could not be engaged; and third, they could not be married.

### *Measures (Predictor Variables)*

*Satisfaction index.* Participant's satisfaction with their current (or "most steady") dating partner was assessed by an index consisting of 11 items. For each of 11 attributes, participants indicated (on 7-point scales, where 1 = *very unsatisfactory*, 7 = *very satisfactory*) the extent to which they were satisfied with their current dating partner. The 11 attributes included financial resources, physical attractiveness, ability to provide emotional support, reliability/trustworthiness, similarity of attitudes and values, ability to be kind and understanding, similarity of activity interests, stability and pleasantness of personality, social status, ability to be close and intimate, and sexual attractiveness. These 11 items were aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach alpha = .85). Scores could range from 11 to 77. Higher scores indicated greater satisfaction.

*Closeness Inventory.* The closeness of each participant's current dating relationship was assessed by the Closeness Inventory (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1987), which measures the frequency, diversity, and strength of impact that exists between partners in a relationship. It has three components. The first, frequency of impact, assesses the amount of time each participant typically spends alone with his or her dating partner each day. Participants indicated the total number of minutes typically spent alone with the partner each day. They were then assigned a frequency-of-impact scale score that ranged from 1 to 10 (see Berscheid et al., 1987). Higher scores indicated a greater amount of time.

The second component, diversity of impact, assesses the number of different activities each participant had engaged in alone with the dating partner during the preceding week. Participants indicated which of 38 activities they had engaged in. These activities were added to form an index of the total number of activities. Participants were then assigned a diversity-of-impact scale score that ranged from 1 to 10 (see Berscheid et al., 1987). Higher scores indicated a greater number of different activities.

The third component, strength of impact, assesses the extent to which each participant is influenced or affected by his or her dating partner. Participants first responded to 27 items that assessed the amount of influence the dating partner has on various aspects of their lives. These 27 items were rated on 7-point scales where 1 = *I strongly disagree (that my partner influences me)* and 7 = *I strongly agree (that my partner*

*influences me*). They then answered 7 items that assessed the extent to which the dating partner affects their future plans and goals. These 7 items were rated on 7-point scales, where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *a great extent*. All 34 items were then aggregated to form a single index (Cronbach alpha = .88). Scores could range from 34 to 238. Participants were then assigned a strength-of-impact scale score that ranged from 1 to 10 (see Berscheid et al., 1987). Higher scores indicated greater influence.

Once participants had been assigned 1-to-10 scale scores on each of the three components, their scores were aggregated to form a single Closeness Inventory score. Scores could range from 3 to 30. Higher scores indicated a greater degree of closeness (i.e., greater frequency, diversity, and strength of impact).

*Length of relationship.* The length of participants' current dating relationship was assessed by the item "How many months have you dated (your current partner)?"

*Sexual nature of relationship.* The sexual nature of participants' current dating relationship was assessed by an item inquiring about whether they had engaged in sexual intercourse with their current partner (coded 1 if yes, 0 if no).

*Best alternative partner index.* The quality of each participant's best alternative dating partner was assessed on an index composed of 11 items. Participants first identified one person whom they knew who was the best realistic alternative to their current partner. For each of the 11 attributes described previously, participants then indicated (on 7-point scales, where 1 = *much less*, 7 = *much greater*) the extent to which the benefits associated with dating the best alternative would be greater or less than those associated with dating the current partner. These 11 items were then aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach alpha = .84). Scores could range from 11 to 77. Higher scores indicated that the benefits associated with dating the best alternative were greater than those associated with dating the current partner.

*Best imagined alternative partner index.* The quality of each participant's best imagined alternative dating partner was measured by an index composed of 11 items. Participants first were asked to imagine the *best possible* alternative dating partner they could realistically acquire. For each of the 11 attributes described previously, participants then indicated (on 7-point scales, where 1 = *much less*, 7 = *much greater*) the degree to which the benefits associated with dating the best imagined alternative would be greater or less than those associated with dating the current partner. These 11 items were then aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach alpha = .86). Scores could range from 11 to 77. Higher scores indicated that the benefits associated with dating the best imagined alternative were greater than those associated with dating the current partner.

*Ease of finding an alternative partner index.* The ease with which participants believed they could find a suitable substitute for their current partner was assessed by an index composed of six items (e.g., "I would have little trouble finding someone who could serve as an adequate replacement for my current dating partner"; reverse keying). Participants responded to the six items on 7-point scales where 1 = *I strongly agree* and 7 = *I strongly disagree*. These items were then aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach alpha = .90). Scores could range from 6 to 42. Higher scores indicated a suitable alternative could be found more easily.

*Exclusivity of relationship.* The exclusivity of participants' current dating relationship (i.e., whether they were dating one or more than one partner) was assessed by the item "What is your current dating status: dating one person (my current partner)/dating more than one person (my current partner and others)?" Participants who were dating only the current partner were coded 0, and those who were dating the current partner and others were coded 1.

*Self-Monitoring Scale.* Participants' self-monitoring propensity was assessed by the 18-item version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangstad, 1986).

*Orientation to sexual relations index.* Participants' orientation to sexual relations was assessed by six indexes designed to tap aspects of their past sexual behavior, their anticipated (future) sexual behavior, and their attitudes toward engaging in casual, uncommitted sexual relations (see Snyder et al., 1986).

Four of the indexes consisted of single behavioral items: (a) number of partners in the past year: "With how many different partners have you had sex within the past year?"; (b) number of partners foreseen: "How many different partners do you foresee yourself having sex with during the next five years?"; (c) number of one-night stands: "With how many different partners have you had sex on one and only one occasion?" (coded 1 if one or more partners, 0 otherwise); and (d) frequency of sexual fantasy with other partners: "How often do you fantasize about having sex with someone other than your most steady dating partner?" (responded to on an 8-point scale, where 1 = *never* and 8 = *at least once a day*). The two remaining indexes consisted of aggregated attitudinal items: (e) attitudes toward sex without commitment index, with two aggregated items (e.g., "For me, having sex with someone does not necessarily imply that I am committed to that individual"; higher scores indicated greater willingness to engage in sex without commitment); and (f) attitudes toward casual sex index, with six aggregated items (e.g., "I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying casual sex with different partners"; higher scores indicated greater anticipated comfort with, enjoyment of, and willingness to engage in casual sex). Participants responded to all attitude items on 9-point scales, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 9 = *strongly agree*. The full possible range of the index of attitudes toward sex without commitment and the index of attitudes toward casual sex was 2 to 18 and 6 to 54, respectively. Each index was internally consistent (Cronbach alphas = .76 and .92, respectively).

Each of the six indexes was standardized (through *Z*-score transformation) and then aggregated to form a single, composite index of participants' orientation to sexual relations. As anticipated, principal-components factor analyses conducted separately on male and female participants revealed that all six indexes loaded highly on the first unrotated factor. High scores indicated the adoption of an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations, and low scores indicated the adoption of a restricted one.

## Procedure

Participants reported to a large room in groups of 25 to 75. Once everyone arrived, the investigator described the questions on the survey, restated the requirements of participation, emphasized the importance of honest responding, and guaranteed anonymity. At the conclusion of the session, participants were informed that in approximately 3 months everyone would be recontacted and asked to respond to a brief telephone survey.

## Follow-Up Data Collection: Participants and Procedure

Approximately 3 months (93 to 100 days) after the questionnaire survey was administered, an attempt was made to recontact all 234 participants by telephone. Two hundred twenty-two participants (94.87%) were successfully reached.

## Measures (Criterion Variables)

The follow-up survey assessed two criterion variables: relationship stability and intensity and duration of emotional distress.

*Relationship stability.* The stability of participants' dating relationship was assessed by the following item: "When you completed the questionnaire last quarter, we asked you to give us the initials of the person you were dating at the time. You indicated that you were dating a person

with the initials [dating partner's initials]. Are you still dating this person?" Participants could respond either yes or no. All 222 individuals answered this question.

*Intensity and duration of emotional distress index.* Participants who no longer were dating the partner ( $N = 94$ ) then responded to three items: "Immediately after the breakup, how difficult was it for you to make an emotional adjustment?" "Immediately after the breakup occurred, to what extent did it disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine?" and "How upset were you immediately after the breakup?" Participants responded to these three items on 7-point scales where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *a great deal/extremely*. They then responded to three more items: "How long did it take you to make an emotional adjustment after the breakup?" "How long were you upset after the breakup?" and "How long did the breakup disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine?" Participants responded to these three items on 8-point scales where 1 = *no time at all* and 8 = *more than 2 months*. All six items were then aggregated to form a single, more reliable index (Cronbach alpha = .87). Scores could range from 6 to 45. Higher scores indicated more intense and prolonged distress.

*Additional items.* Participants also responded to three additional items: "When (during the 3-month period) did you stop dating this person?" "Who initiated the breakup: you, both you and your partner (mutually), or your partner?" and "Are you dating anyone at the present time?"

## Results

### *Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample*

One hundred twenty-eight individuals were still dating the same partner at 3-month followup. The mean age of these participants was 19.81 years. Descriptive statistics on the 10 predictor variables, presented separately for these men and women, are displayed in Table 1.

Men and women reliably differed on only 1 of the 10 predictor variables. Men, relative to women, tended to adopt a rather unrestricted orientation to sexual relations,  $t(126) = 5.62, p < .001$ .

Ninety-four individuals were no longer dating the same partner at 3-month followup. The mean age of these participants was 19.36 years. Descriptive statistics on the 10 predictor variables, presented separately for these men and women, also are displayed in Table 1. Once again, men and women differed reliably on only 1 of the 10 variables. Men, relative to women, tended to adopt an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations,  $t(92) = 3.67, p < .001$ .

### *Relationship Stability*

Which of the 10 factors, if any, are associated with the stability of romantic relationships? To answer this question, a 2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (dating status: still dating vs. no longer dating) multivariate analysis of variance involving all 10 factors was conducted. A highly significant overall effect for relationship stability emerged,  $F(10, 209) = 14.04, p < .0001$ .

Given this effect, a series of 2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (dating status: still dating vs. no longer dating) univariate analyses of variance was then performed on each of the factors. These analyses revealed reliable effects in the predicted direction for all 10 variables. In particular, individuals who were still dating the same partner at 3-month followup, relative to those who were not, were more satisfied with their relationship,  $F(1, 218) = 18.77, p < .001$ ;

were closer to the partner,  $F(1, 218) = 27.70, p < .001$ ; had dated the partner for a longer period of time,  $F(1, 218) = 32.53, p < .001$ ; were more likely to have engaged in sex with the partner,  $F(1, 218) = 23.48, p < .001$ ; possessed less desirable best actual,  $F(1, 218) = 18.77, p < .001$ , and imagined,  $F(1, 218) = 22.82, p < .001$ , alternative partners; thought they could find a suitable alternative partner less easily,  $F(1, 218) = 65.90, p < .001$ ; were more likely to be dating the partner exclusively,  $F(1, 218) = 34.69, p < .001$ ; tended to be low in self-monitoring,  $F(1, 218) = 3.60, p < .06$ ; and tended to adopt a restricted orientation to sexual relations,  $F(1, 218) = 12.91, p < .001$ .<sup>1</sup> A significant effect for sex also emerged,  $F(10, 209) = 5.63, p < .001$ . This effect was mainly attributable to the tendency of men to adopt an unrestricted, and women a restricted, orientation to sexual relations. There were no Sex  $\times$  Dating Status interactions (all  $F$ s  $< 1.51, ns$ ).

As might be expected, the factors forecasting relationship stability were moderately correlated. To control for the covariation that exists between them, a forward multiple regression analysis was performed. Relationship stability served as the criterion variable, and all 10 factors served as predictors. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

Five of the 10 predictor variables continued to be associated with relationship stability at significant or marginally significant levels when the effects of the remaining nine variables were statistically controlled for (i.e., partialled out). Specifically, the satisfaction index ( $t = 1.88, p < .07$ ), the length of the relationship ( $t = 2.47, p < .02$ ), the sexual nature of the relationship ( $t = 3.60, p < .001$ ), the exclusivity of the relationship ( $t = -3.53, p < .001$ ), and the index of orientation to sexual relations ( $t = -2.40, p < .02$ ) all continued to predict stability.<sup>2</sup> The remaining five predictors no longer predicted stability once

<sup>1</sup> To determine whether any of the three components of the Closeness Inventory differed in their ability to predict relationship stability, the full inventory and all three components were correlated with the relationship stability measure. The following correlations emerged: full Closeness Inventory ( $r = .35$ ), strength component ( $r = .34$ ), diversity component ( $r = .27$ ), frequency component ( $r = .18$ ). Pair-wise analyses performed on these dependent component correlations (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) revealed that the strength component accounted for significantly more variance on the relationship stability measure than did the frequency component,  $t(220) = 2.12, p < .05$ . All other pair-wise analyses proved to be nonsignificant (all  $t$ s  $< 1.20$ ).

To determine whether any of the three factors believed to underlie the Self-Monitoring Scale (see Briggs, Check, & Buss, 1980) differed in their ability to predict relationship stability, the full scale and all three factors were correlated with the relationship stability measure. Pair-wise analyses performed on these dependent correlations indicated that no single factor (e.g., sociability) accounted for significantly more variance on this measure than did any other factor (e.g., acting, other-directedness), all  $t$ s  $< 1.00, ns$ .

<sup>2</sup> Unlike zero-order correlations, the statistical significance of partial correlations can be strongly affected by the number and nature of the predictors included in or excluded from a regression equation (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Because of this, partial correlations must be interpreted with caution, particularly when predictors show multicollinearity or the effects of zero-order and partial correlations diverge. Although multicollinearity does not appear to be a problem in this study, the significance of zero-order and partial correlations do differ on some of the factors in the relationship stability analysis. Therefore less emphasis is

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages for the 10 Predictor Variables

Predictor variable	Still dating				No longer dating			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Satisfaction index <sup>a</sup>	66.28	6.79	64.60	7.74	60.12	9.30	58.10	7.27
Closeness Inventory <sup>b</sup>	15.71	3.57	15.66	3.78	13.17	3.65	12.87	3.41
Length of relationship (months)	16.75	14.80	16.30	12.51	7.33	8.75	6.94	9.82
Best alternative partner index <sup>c</sup>	40.22	9.86	40.47	8.55	47.31	10.21	47.36	10.12
Best imagined alternative partner index <sup>d</sup>	51.16	7.22	50.51	6.08	55.62	8.19	55.81	8.36
Ease of finding an alternative partner index <sup>e</sup>	15.12	7.45	14.98	6.59	21.98	8.21	24.35	7.66
Self-Monitoring Scale	9.85	3.62	10.15	3.59	10.45	3.43	11.21	3.17
Orientation to sexual relations index <sup>f</sup>	-2.31	2.81	1.28	4.39	-.76	4.06	2.86	5.07
% dating only current partner	89.19		92.45		56.10		57.69	
% who have had sex with current partner	77.33		86.79		51.22		51.92	

Note. For those still dating, women ( $N = 75$ ), men ( $N = 53$ ); for those no longer dating, women ( $N = 42$ ), men ( $N = 52$ ).

<sup>a</sup> Possible range = 11 to 77. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. <sup>b</sup> Possible range = 3 to 30. Higher scores indicate greater closeness. <sup>c</sup> Possible range = 11 to 77. Higher scores indicate the quality of the best alternative is relatively greater. <sup>d</sup> Possible range = 11 to 77. Higher scores indicate the quality of the best imagined alternative is relatively greater. <sup>e</sup> Possible range = 6 to 42. Higher scores indicate that an alternative could be found with greater ease. <sup>f</sup> Higher (positive) scores indicate the adoption of an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations, and lower (negative) scores the adoption of a restricted one.

the effects of the other predictors were removed (all  $t$ s < 1.40,  $ns$ ). With all 10 predictors in the regression equation, 40% of the variance in relationship stability was accounted for ( $R = .64$ ,  $R^2 = .40$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .37$ ).

### Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress

Which of the 10 factors, if any, predict the intensity and duration of emotional distress? To address this question, a multiple regression analysis was first conducted with scores on the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress serving as the criterion variable and all 10 factors serving as predictors. When all 10 factors were entered into the regression equation, a highly significant overall effect for regression emerged,  $F(10, 79) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .003$ .

Given this effect, a series of 10 multiple regression analyses was performed, one for each predictor variable. For each analysis, the predictor variable, sex, and the Predictor Variable  $\times$  Sex interaction term were hierarchically regressed on the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress. These analyses revealed significant effects in the expected direction for 3 of the 10 predictors.

Specifically, individuals who experienced more intense and prolonged distress, relative to those who experienced less distress, tended to have been closer to the former partner,  $F(1, 90) = 10.04$ ,  $p < .003$ ; to have dated the former partner for a longer period of time,  $F(1, 90) = 13.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and to believe they could not find a suitable alternative easily,  $F(1, 90) = 8.19$ ,  $p < .006$ .<sup>3</sup> Men and women did not differ in level of reported emotional distress,  $F(1, 90) = .19$ ,  $ns$ . Both sexes re-

ported experiencing moderate levels of distress ( $M$ s = 23.69 and 24.36, respectively).

There was, however, a single, unanticipated Orientation to Sexual Relations  $\times$  Sex interaction. Women who possessed an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations and men who possessed a restricted one tended to experience more emotional distress than did men who possessed an unrestricted orientation and women who possessed a restricted one,  $F(1, 87) = 5.37$ ,  $p < .03$ . A closer examination of this interaction revealed that this effect was attributable to the pronounced distress experienced by women who adopted an unrestricted orientation to sexual relations. Indeed, a weighted contrast (Hays, 1981) re-

<sup>3</sup> To determine whether any of the three components of the Closeness Inventory differed in their ability to forecast the intensity and duration of emotional distress, the full inventory and all three components were correlated with the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress. The following correlations emerged: full Closeness Inventory ( $r = .33$ ), strength component ( $r = .43$ ), diversity component ( $r = .13$ ), frequency component ( $r = .16$ ). Pair-wise analyses performed on these dependent component correlations (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) revealed that the strength component accounted for significantly more variance on the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress than did the diversity component,  $t(92) = 2.36$ ,  $p < .02$ , and the frequency component,  $t(92) = 2.61$ ,  $p < .02$ . The other pair-wise analysis (between the diversity component and the frequency component) was nonsignificant,  $t(92) < 1.00$ .

To determine whether any of the three factors believed to underlie the Self-Monitoring Scale (see Briggs, Cheek, & Buss, 1980) differed in their ability to predict the intensity and duration of emotional distress, the full scale and all three factors were correlated with the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress. Pair-wise analyses performed on these dependent correlations revealed that no single factor accounted for significantly more variance on this measure than did any other factor (all  $t$ s < 1.55,  $ns$ ).

placed on the partialled effects with respect to the relationship stability findings.

vealed that unrestricted women experienced more intense and prolonged emotional distress following dissolution than did the other three groups (unrestricted men, restricted women, and restricted men) considered together,  $F(1, 87) = 6.69, p < .01$ .<sup>4</sup>

To determine whether these three predictors continue to forecast emotional distress when the other predictors are controlled for, a forward multiple regression analysis was conducted. Scores on the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress were treated as the criterion variable, and all 10 factors served as predictors. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

The three predictor variables continued to reliably predict the intensity and duration of emotional distress at significant levels when the effects of all other predictors were partialled out. Specifically, the Closeness Inventory ( $t = 2.40, p < .02$ ), the length of the relationship ( $t = 3.12, p < .003$ ), and the index of ease of finding an alternative partner ( $t = -2.14, p < .04$ ) all continued to forecast the intensity and duration of distress. With all 10 predictors in the equation, 28% of the variance in the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress was accounted for ( $R = .53, R^2 = .28, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .19$ ).<sup>5</sup>

Scores on the index of intensity and duration of emotional distress were not reliably associated with when during the 3-month period participants stopped dating the partner,  $t(92) < 1, ns$ ; who initiated the breakup,  $F(1, 90) < 2.25, ns$ ; and whether participants were dating someone else at followup,  $t(92) < 1, ns$ .

Discussion

The results of this investigation permit the following characterizations. Individuals who were still dating the same person at 3-month followup, relative to those who were not, tended to be more satisfied with the relationship, to be closer to the partner, to have dated the partner for a longer period of time, and to have engaged in sex with the partner (as assessed 3 months earlier). Moreover, they tended to possess a less desirable best actual or imagined alternative partner, tended to believe themselves less capable of easily finding a suitable alternative, and were in-

Table 2  
Regression Analysis: Relationship Stability

Predictor variable	Zero-order <i>r</i>	$\beta$
Ease of finding an alternative partner index	-.47	-.12
Exclusivity of relationship	-.40	-.21***
Sexual nature of relationship	.31	.23***
Orientation to sexual relations index	-.24	-.15**
Length of relationship	.36	.15**
Satisfaction index	.40	.14*
Best alternative partner index	-.35	-.10
Closeness Inventory	.35	.06
Best imagined alternative partner index	-.30	.06
Self-Monitoring Scale	-.14	-.02

Note.  $N = 222$ . Tolerance levels were set so that all 10 predictors entered the regression equation.  
\*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3  
Regression Analysis: Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index

Predictor variable	Zero-order <i>r</i>	$\beta$
Length of relationship	.36	.32**
Closeness Inventory	.34	.25*
Ease of finding an alternative partner index	-.30	-.33*
Best imagined alternative partner index	-.06	-.17
Self-Monitoring Scale	-.04	-.12
Orientation to sexual relations index	-.05	.10
Exclusivity of relationship	.00	.08
Satisfaction index	.14	.09
Sexual nature of relationship	-.02	-.07
Best alternative partner index	-.10	-.02

Note.  $N = 94$ . Tolerance levels were set so that all 10 predictors entered the regression equation.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

clined to have been dating the current partner exclusively. They also were inclined to be low in self-monitoring and to adopt a restricted orientation to sexual relations. Because the 10 predictor variables were moderately correlated, however, some of the predictive variance they shared with relationship stability was redundant. Thus, at a multivariate level, only 5 of the 10 predictors—satisfaction with the relationship, length of the relationship, sexual nature of the relationship, exclusivity of the relationship, and orientation to sexual relations—continued to predict relationship stability when all other predictors were controlled for.

Furthermore, individuals who experienced strong emotional

<sup>4</sup> One speculative explanation for this finding stems from the observation that sexual and emotional intimacy tend to be more closely associated with one another for women than for men (Ehrmann, 1959; Hinde, 1984; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). Women tend to view emotional intimacy as a necessary prerequisite to engaging in sex, whereas men are less inclined to hold such a view. Consequently, women who are most likely to engage in sex with their partners (unrestricted women) ought to be more emotionally invested in their relationships. Internal analyses did reveal that unrestricted women were significantly more likely to have engaged in sex with their partners than were restricted women. Perhaps the intense distress experienced by unrestricted women may be attributed at least in part to their tendency to become sexually involved with their partners.

<sup>5</sup> Self-monitoring did not forecast relationship stability when the effects of the other predictors were held constant. Furthermore, it did not predict emotional distress. Given the nature of the other nine predictors, however, this should come as no surprise. Unlike the other predictors, the Self-Monitoring Scale was not constructed to assess and predict aspects of interpersonal relationships. Naturally, any measure that is not designed for such predictive purposes cannot be expected to outperform those that are. Moreover, the effects that self-monitoring has on interpersonal relationships are likely to be mediated by the characteristics of the relationships that high and low self-monitors typically prefer or find themselves in (e.g., relationship duration, quality of alternatives, etc.). When the effects of these variables are partialled out, self-monitoring should not have strong effects on important aspects of interpersonal relationships.

distress following relationship dissolution, relative to those who experienced less distress, tended to be closer to their former partner, to have dated the former partner for a longer period of time, and to believe they could not easily acquire a satisfactory alternative. Although these three predictors were moderately correlated, a minimal amount of the predictive variance they shared with the emotional-distress index was redundant. Therefore, at a multivariate level, all three factors—closeness, duration, and ease of finding a suitable alternative—continued to independently predict emotional distress when all other predictors were held constant.

The hypotheses on which this research is based were derived from many different theoretical perspectives. Can these diverse hypotheses be integrated by a single, more general theory of interpersonal relations? Based on extensions of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), Rusbult (1980, 1983) has proposed an investment model that appears to provide considerable conceptual integration. According to this model commitment, which entails both the tendency to remain in and to feel psychologically attached to a relationship (cf. Rosenblatt, 1977), should be a function of three dimensions: level of satisfaction (i.e., the extent to which the relationship provides rewarding outcomes), quality of alternative partners (i.e., the extent to which alternatives can provide rewarding outcomes), and level of investment (i.e., the extent to which various resources have been put into the relationship). The model predicts that commitment should be greatest in relationships characterized by high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high levels of investment. Each of these dimensions is directly or indirectly represented by one or more of the 10 factors used in this investigation.

### *Relationship Stability*

One component of commitment is the tendency to remain in the same relationship over time (Kiesler, 1971; Rosenblatt, 1977). The relationship stability findings reported here support investment model predictions with respect to this behavioral component of commitment. Relationships characterized by high satisfaction (assessed by the satisfaction index), by poor alternatives (assessed by the alternative partner indexes), by high intrinsic investments (assessed by the closeness, duration, and sexual nature indexes), and by individual differences in the tendency to become highly invested (assessed by the orientation to sexual relations index) were indeed less susceptible to dissolution over time.

These results corroborate previous work on the investment model that has shown that decreases over time in satisfaction and investment and increases in quality of alternatives predict relationship dissolution (Rusbult, 1983). At the same time, this investigation builds on past research by revealing that systematic differences in the orientations that individuals adopt toward restricted versus unrestricted sexual relations also have strong effects on relationship stability. In fact, these individual differences appear to affect stability independently of level of satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and level of investment.

### *Emotional Distress*

A second component of commitment is the tendency to become psychologically and emotionally attached to a partner in

a relationship (Kelley, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1977). The extent of emotional attachment in a relationship is believed to be reflected in the degree of emotional distress experienced upon its dissolution (cf. Berscheid, 1986; Bowlby, 1979). The emotional distress findings reported here provide partial support for investment model predictions with respect to this affective component of commitment. Specifically, individuals involved in relationships characterized by high investments (those that were close and of long duration) and by poor, inaccessible alternatives (those in which suitable alternatives could not be found easily) experienced greater levels of distress following dissolution. Contrary to predictions, however, satisfaction did not predict emotional distress.

Why might this be so? Moreover, why do closeness and duration, two factors that appear to reflect degree of investment, serve as independent predictors of distress? And why does only one measure of alternative quality—the ease with which individuals believe they can find a suitable alternative—forecast distress? Speculative answers to these questions can be found in recent theorizing on emotion in relationships. Berscheid (1983, 1986) has argued that the interruption of routine interaction patterns, plans, and goals brought about by relationship dissolution constitutes a sufficient and perhaps necessary condition for emotion. The extent of emotional distress is believed to be a function of both the number of interaction patterns, plans, and goals interrupted (which in turn should depend on the level of investment in the relationship) and the availability of alternative partners who can facilitate these interrupted events (which should depend on the quality of alternatives).

According to Berscheid's theory, the level of satisfaction should not necessarily forecast distress. Many rewarding outcomes that produce satisfaction with a given partner (e.g., his or her social status, physical attractiveness, etc.) can be readily provided by a variety of alternative partners, particularly by desirable ones. Unlike intrinsic investments, which often require considerable time to develop, tend to be bound to one specific person, and are irrevocably lost when a relationship ends, many rewarding outcomes typically require less time to develop, are not exclusively associated with one individual, and are not subject to substantial loss following a breakup. Clearly, it is considerably easier to secure a partner who can provide good, rewarding outcomes than it is to secure one with whom a close, long-term relationship can be developed. As a result, satisfaction should not be a strong predictor of distress.

The level of intrinsic investment, however, should forecast emotional distress. Indeed, relationship closeness and duration, two of the best indicators of intrinsic investment level (cf. Kelley et al., 1983), reliably and independently did so. In view of Berscheid's theory of emotion, this should come as no surprise. The number of behavioral routines, plans, and goals that partners share should be a result of both the frequency, strength, and diversity of daily impact that exists in a relationship (assessed by the Closeness Inventory) and the length of time over which such impact has occurred (indexed by the length of the relationship). Because the extent of emotional distress is thought to depend in part on the absolute number of events interrupted when a relationship ends, relationship duration and closeness should forecast distress independent of one another.

Similarly, the quality of alternative partners also should fore-



cast emotional distress. A measure of the ease with which individuals thought they could find a suitable alternative reliably and independently did so even though measures of individuals' best actual and imagined alternatives did not. These results are consistent with Berscheid's theory of emotion. To facilitate interrupted plans, goals, and behavioral routines, alternative partners must not only be capable of providing good, rewarding outcomes; they also must be accessible. If such partners are not readily available, they cannot facilitate interrupted events and therefore quell emotional distress following a breakup. Because the index of ease of finding an alternative partner takes into account both the quality and the perceived availability of alternatives, it should be a stronger predictor of distress.

It is difficult to know whether individuals who thought they could find suitable alternatives experienced less distress because they actually acquired such partners or because they simply thought they could do so. Internal analyses revealed that such individuals were more likely to be dating someone else at followup. However, dating status at followup was only weakly correlated with strength of emotional distress. It is, of course, possible for alternatives to facilitate interrupted events without actually becoming dating partners. Nevertheless, the mere belief that attractive alternatives can be found if wanted or needed appears to assume a central role in mitigating emotional distress. Perhaps the expectation that interrupted events can and eventually will be facilitated by someone in the near future is enough to minimize emotional reaction to dissolution.

This research, of course, possesses some limitations. First, it is based on self-report information. Even though many of the factors hypothesized to forecast relationship stability and emotional distress successfully did so, it is not possible to know whether and the extent to which what individuals say and believe about their relationships accurately reflects the objective conditions that exist within them. Second, this study is based on the responses of only one member of each dyad. However, the incidence of relationship stability and emotional distress is also likely to depend on how both members of a dyad perceive the factors relevant to their relationship. To gain greater insight into dissolution processes, future research must examine the perceptions of both partners. And third, despite the fact that many of the hypotheses on which this investigation is based were derived from the accounts of individuals recovering from divorce and despite the fact that over 90% of the individuals who participated in this research are likely to marry at some point in their lives (cf. Kelley et al., 1983), the findings of this investigation can be generalized only to individuals involved in premarital romantic relationships.

Nonetheless, this research makes several contributions to our knowledge and understanding of relationship dissolution processes. First, it identifies new, previously unexplored variables that have important effects on relationship stability. Second, it provides some of the first evidence on which factors promote emotional distress following a breakup. Third, it reveals that only a subset of the factors implicated in the breakdown of premarital relationships are also involved in producing emotional distress following dissolution. And fourth, it reveals that the three factors that do predict emotional distress—closeness, duration, and ease of finding an alternative—do so independent of one another.

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### Kintsch Appointed Editor of *Psychological Review*, 1989-1994

The Publications and Communications Board of the American Psychological Association announces the appointment of Walter Kintsch, University of Colorado, as editor of *Psychological Review* for a 6-year term beginning in 1989. As of January 1, 1988, manuscripts should be directed to

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Manuscript submission patterns for *Psychological Review* make the precise date of completion of the 1988 volume uncertain. The current editor, Martin Hoffman, will receive and consider manuscripts until December 31, 1987. Should the 1988 volume be completed before that date, manuscripts will be redirected to Kintsch for consideration in the 1989 volume.

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