

Abstract

Most romantic relationships end, and communication between former partners varies tremendously. Whereas some former partners maintain contact, others cease contact. Research on post-relationship communication is sparse. To address the lacuna, the this two-wave longitudinal study aims to 1) better understand individuals' decisions, behaviors, and narrative sense-making regarding post-relationship contact, including through digital media, 2) illuminate the temporal aspects of how individuals experience and understand post-breakup contact with their most recent ex-romantic partners, and 3) bring to light the moral reasoning and values individuals use to evaluate communication between former romantic partners. Preliminary results from the first wave surveys show variations in communication narratives and ideals.

Introduction

- The limited number of studies on post-relationship communication primarily focus on marital dissolutions.
- Studies on post-premarital dissolution communication have been mainly predictive (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002; Tan et al., 2015), and, recently, descriptive (Koenig Kellas, 2011).
- Scott Stanley, PhD, has speculated that social media has made possible "the soft breakup" (Huston, 2014).
- This study attends to the lacuna of research on post-breakup communication that attends to individual's appraisals, ideals/moral psychology, changes over time, and the role of digital media.

Methods

Sample

Participants (N = 27) are young adults, 19-23 years old, who have been in a romantic relationship. Participants were solicited through social media advertisements and were compensated with a \$20 gift card.

Procedures

Through Qualtrics, participants submitted narratives in response to 3 questions: 1) "Please describe in detail what communication there has been, if any, between you and your most recent ex-romantic partner since it ended. Include in your account how you have communicated (e.g. in-person, digital media, etc.)." 2) "What are the reasons for this particular communication situation?" 3) "Describe your ideals for communication after a romantic relationship has ended, and explain whether the experience you describe above reflects those ideals." Afterwards, participants filled out a demographics questionnaire.

Results

Table 1: Communication Narratives

Click blue link to see tables

Communication Narrative	# of Participants	Excerpt
Engaged in any Form of Digital Conversation	27/27	"There has been communication between my ex-partner since our relationship ended in the summer (July) of 2018. All of the communication has mostly been digital whether through text messages, Instagram DMs, or Snapchat messages." (Julia)
Engaged in In-Person Interaction	20/27	"Later, right before I left, I asked if he'd want to go on a walk with me. We spent about an hour and a half together talking about school, me, our relationship, his new girlfriend and Covid." (Neena)
Currently: Maintain Digital Ties with Former Partner	15/27	"Now, we don't text at all and our online communication is just watching each other's Instagram stories and liking their posts." (Zach)
Currently: Not on Speaking Terms	12/27	"I still follow him on Instagram but not the other way around. Ultimately, I am left to believe he hates me although in reality I have no idea how he really feels or thinks as I have been completely shut out." (Maya)

Results (Continued)

- Preliminary results show variations in communication ideals and degrees to which they were achieved ([Table 2](#))

Conclusion

- Analysis is currently underway.
- All of the participants have digital ties and access to their former partner, but they vary in the ways they engage and make sense of these ties.
- Results show how social media affords individuals particular behaviors and opportunities to sustain and cut off relationships.
- The line between being on speaking-terms and not on speaking-terms is ambiguous.
- Communication narratives are marked by ambivalence.
- 5 to 6 months after participating in the first part of the study, each participant will be contacted with a request to extend their narrative.

References

1. Lannutti, P. J., & Cameron, K. A. (2002). Beyond the Breakup: Heterosexual and Homosexual Post-Dissolutional Relationships. *Communication Quarterly*, 50(2), 153-170.
2. Koenig Kellas, J., & Sato, S. (2011). "The worst part is, we don't even talk anymore." The importance of post-dissolutional communication in break up stories." In K. M. Galvin, & P. J. Cooper (Eds.) *Making connections: Readings in relational communication*, 5th ed. (pp. 297-309). Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

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