

Life After Breaking Up:

Predicting Expectations about Post-Dissolution Relationships

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Abstract

Individuals ($N = 99$) in ongoing romantic relationships completed a questionnaire in which they first envisioned a hypothetical future in which their relationships had dissolved and then made a series of judgments concerning (a) how they would expect to feel toward their ex-partners in the aftermath of the break up and (b) how interested they expected to be in trying to re-establish a romantic relationship with these partners. The questionnaire also contained items assessing a range of personality and relationship variables as well as items that asked them to predict how the dissolution process would unfold should they and their current partners break up. Regression analyses revealed that trust predicted participants' expectations concerning their post-dissolution feelings for their partners whereas commitment and working models of self predicted participants' expectations concerning their willingness to reconcile with their former partners. In addition, controlling for the personality- and relationship-level predictors, participants' forecasts concerning the extent to which their post-dissolution adjustment would be painful and difficult predicted their expectations concerning their post-dissolution feelings for their former partners and participants' expectations about their own ability to prevent the relationship's demise predicted their expectations concerning their interest in reconciling with their exes.

Life After Breaking Up: Predicting Expectations About Post-Dissolution Relationships

Laypeople and relationship scholars alike often assume that contact between former dating partners ceases when their romantic relationship ends (Busboom, Collins, Givertz, & Levin, 2002). Yet, as several studies have convincingly demonstrated, the dissolution of a romantic partnership does not always spell the demise of the relationship between the former partners. After a break up or divorce, many individuals redefine their romantic relationships as friendships (e.g., Masheter, 1997; Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989; Schneider & Kenny, 2000); others maintain sexual contact with ex-partners despite the fact that their relationships as romantic partners have formally ended (e.g., Foley & Fraser, 1998); still others seek to re-establish or reinstate their romantic relationships (cf., Schneider & Kenny, 2000). In sum, even after a relationship is “over,” complete cessation of contact between and positive feelings toward ex-romantic partners may be far more rare than relationship theorists and researchers who study dissolution have acknowledged to date.

Importantly, relationship scholars’ growing recognition of the fact that the dissolution of a romantic partnership need not imply a complete end to contact and affection between partners has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in our knowledge concerning those factors that predispose some couples to desire continuing contact with and experience warm feelings toward each other whereas others do not. Beyond the results of studies suggesting that partners who were friends before they were romantic partners are more likely to remain friends after a break up (Metts et al., 1989) and that various characteristics of the dissolution process may predict whether former partners maintain friendly contact after a romance has ended (Busboom et al., 2003; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Metts et al., 1989), we know very little about the variables that influence people’s decisions as they contemplate whether and how to

relate to each other after a break up has occurred.

In our view, this gap in our understanding may in part be attributable to the fact that, thus far, the published literature on post-dissolution relationships consists almost entirely of studies in which investigators have recruited their respondents after their dating relationships have already dissolved. In several respects (one of which we will describe briefly below) research designs that involve post-dissolution recruitment of participants pose substantial challenges to those who wish, as we do here, to explore the underpinnings of individuals’ decisions regarding their relationships’ post-dissolution futures. We thus opted for a different approach in the present study: Rather than reporting on their past relationships with former romantic partners, participants were asked to envision a hypothetical future in which their current partners were their ex-partners. They were then asked to make predictions concerning the nature of their relationships with these partners in the aftermath of the break up. In short, we assessed people’s beliefs about the post-dissolution prospects of their relationships with their “exes” while their dating relationships with these partners were still intact.

As we indicated earlier, our decision to recruit participants prior to disengagement was motivated by an interest in examining the factors that predispose individuals to seek continued contact with former dating partners and/or which promote desires to reinstate the romantic relationship between exes. In particular, we were interested in moving backward along the causal pathway to explore variables that may influence people’s beliefs and feelings regarding their post-dissolution prospects, variables which might, by shaping their views concerning what the future may hold for their relationships if their relationships end, guide people’s decisions among alternative post-dissolution pathways. Knowledge concerning such variables might inform both research and theory (by broadening the range of variables examined as factors that influence the

post-dissolution course ex-partners' relationships take) and, perhaps, enable interventions aimed at minimizing the odds that couples experience added stress during and after dissolution as a consequence of experiencing significant discrepancies between their actual post-dissolution relations and what they expected their post-dissolution relations with each other to be like.

The present research was guided by the assumption that people's expectations about their post-dissolution outcomes are likely to figure prominently among the factors that influence individuals' post-dissolution decisions regarding the fates of their relationships. Expectations have been shown to direct attention, encoding, and the interpretation of information; influence memory, attribution, and counterfactual thought; guide decision-making and the allocation of effort to/persistence at tasks; and shape both affect and behavior (e.g., Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). They are both ubiquitous and influential, serving as "the mechanism through which past experiences and knowledge are used to predict the future" (Olson, et al., 1996, p. 211). In sum, expectations constitute an obvious point of departure for investigations aimed at understanding the process by which former partners negotiate the boundaries of their relationships—or whether they will have relationships—post-dissolution.

An advantage of approaching participants in ongoing (as opposed to already terminated) dating relationships, then, was that it enabled us to explore the nature of people's expectations concerning the post-dissolution outcomes for their relationship at a point in time prior to dissolution—indeed, at a point in time when, based on our data, most participants anticipated that their relationships were rather unlikely to break up at all. Admittedly, researchers could test hypotheses concerning predictors of individuals' expectations about the post-dissolution futures of their relationships using retrospective reports of their expectations and their post-dissolution memories of how they felt about themselves and their relationships prior to the break up.

Nevertheless, we think there is considerable value in testing such hypotheses at a point in time when people's *actual dissolution experiences* cannot have contaminated their responses to the key measures and before the influence of the hindsight bias (Fischhoff & Beyth, 1975) becomes an issue. It seems reasonable to believe, for example, that discrepancies between what partners *expect* to happen to their relationships with their partners in the aftermath of a break up and what *actually* happens when they break up may be quite common. Accordingly, our decision to approach participants while their relationships were intact enabled us to sidestep important problems associated with the propensity for people's actual experiences to color their recollections of their expectations about what they would experience.

Predicting Expectations About Post-Dissolution Relationships

The data we discuss in this paper are from a study that examined the nature of individuals' expectations concerning how the dissolution process might unfold in their ongoing romantic relationships. Here we present the results of regression analyses that examined predictors of individual's forecasts about two important post-dissolution outcomes: (a) how they expect to feel toward their former partners in the aftermath of a break up and (b) how interested they expect to be in trying to re-establish a romantic relationship with these partners. In our view, these two outcomes reflect the concerns most central to former partners' decisions regarding the nature of post-dissolution relationship they would like to have—or whether they would like to maintain any kind of relationship at all after their romance has ended.

The larger data set from which the present data are drawn includes participants' responses on a number of personality and relationship measures. Our choice of predictor variables for inclusion in the analyses reported here was guided by the results of a review of the premarital stability literature conducted by Cate, Levin and Richmond (2002).

Personality-level Predictors

Examined together, *self- and other-models* capture the core dimensions underlying the only two personality variables to have been investigated in two or more longitudinal studies since 1990: self-esteem and attachment style (Cate et al., 2002). Working models can be viewed as fundamental relational schemas that index individuals' enduring concerns with their own self-worth (model of self) and experiences of vulnerability relating closely to others (model of other). Individuals with negative models of self exhibit anxiety in interpersonal contexts because they doubt that others could truly care for them; individuals with negative models of other tend to avoid close relationships because they fear that others may not be trustworthy (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a).

Research has documented important links between working models of attachment and people's reactions to and efforts to cope with stressful life events like the dissolution of a dating relationship (e.g., Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997; Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Vanni, & Fehr, 1998). For example, Sprecher et al. found that models of self predicted distress both initially upon break up and at the time of the study: The greater participants' anxiety (i.e., the more negative their models of self), the more distress they reported. Based on these findings, we predicted that, the more negative participants' self-models (i.e., the more attachment-related anxiety they reported), the less they would expect to feel continuing affection for/desire continuing contact with their ex-partners and the less they would expect to be interested in restoring the relationship with their ex. This hypothesis is predicated on the assumption that, among individuals who harbor doubts about their own self-worth, post-dissolution distress is to an important extent the result of the negative implications that breaking up has for the individual's self-evaluations. If this thinking is correct, then the more individuals perceive the

end of their relationships as an indication of their partners' rejection, the less they should expect to want to restore or maintain that bond—whether by remaining friends with the ex-partners or by seeking to re-establish romances with their partners—and the less they should expect to experience feelings of warmth and goodwill toward their partners after the break up.

Sprecher et al.'s results suggest that models of other may be less strongly related to people's actual dissolution experiences than are models of self. Their data do not speak, however, to the issue of interest in this paper, namely, whether avoidance might relate to people's forecasts concerning the kinds of relations they will want to have with their current partners should their relationships end. In the absence of data concerning the connection between these variables, we opted to include both anxiety and avoidance as predictors in the analyses presented here. We speculated that, the more negative participants' other-models (i.e., the more attachment-related avoidance they reported), the less they would expect to feel continuing affection for/desire continuing contact with their ex-partners and the less they would expect to be interested in restoring the relationship with their ex. To the extent that avoidance captures tendencies to be distrustful of others and to desire distance in close relationships, it seemed reasonable to predict that increasing avoidance would be associated with expectations that connoted lesser desire to reconcile with and to maintain contact with the partner.

Relationship-level Predictors

According to Cate et al., *commitment* is among the most commonly examined variables in longitudinal research on premarital stability. Research has documented consistent relations between commitment and the stability of dating relationships and the intensity of emotional distress experienced in the aftermath of a break up (e.g., Attridge, Berscheid & Simpson, 1995; Fine & Sacher, 1997; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler., 1988; Hill et al., 1976; Rusbult, 1983). It

therefore seemed important to examine commitment as a predictor in this study, as well.

Based on the presumption that a dating partner becomes an increasingly important part of an individual's life the more committed the relationship, we hypothesized that increasing commitment would be associated with expectations that envision a future of continuing contact with and affection for the former partner—that is, with *increasingly positive* expectations about the nature of their post-dissolution relationships with their former partners. Generally speaking, with increasing relationship commitment, individuals' perceptions concerning how much they stand to lose if their current relationships end ought to increase. To the extent that this is true, individuals may be inclined to expect that they will remain friends with their partners (indeed, they may even feel it necessary to remain friends with their partners) even after the romantic relationship has been officially terminated. In contrast, the less committed their relationships, the more individuals may expect to move on to "greener pastures" should their relationships end.

In contrast to commitment, Cate et al. identified *trust* as a variable largely absent in the premarital stability literature but deserving of greater research attention. Trust entails confidence that the partner will take the individual's best interests into account when deciding how to act, even in the presence of incentives that would otherwise encourage acting in ways that serve self-interested motives (Holmes, 1991). As the process of terminating a dating relationship seems likely to raise the specter of a partner's untrustworthiness, we expected that individuals' level of trust in their partners would be implicated in their expectations concerning how they will relate to these partners after the relationship has been officially dissolved. More specifically, we predicted that the more individuals trust their partners, the more they would expect to feel continuing affection for the partner and the more interested they would expect to be in trying to reconcile with their partner should the relationship end. In short, we are arguing here that, as

individuals' level of trust in their partners increases, the dissolution of the relationship is less apt to call into question their convictions regarding the benevolence of their partner's motives and thus less likely to diminish their interest in either maintaining contact and friendly relations with their former partners or in seeking reconciliation or renewed romance.

Expectations-based Predictors

As we indicated earlier, prior research (e.g., Busboom et al., 2003; Hill, et al., 1976; Metts et al., 1989) highlights the possibility that features of the dissolution process, itself, may influence individuals' feelings for their ex- partners and the nature of the contact they maintain with these partners in the wake of a break up. By extension, we contend that individuals' *expectations* about what breaking up with their current partners might be like may predict their expectations concerning how they will feel toward their partners post-dissolution and how motivated they will be to re-establish a romance with their partners. Because expectations about the dissolution process may themselves be influenced by the personality and relationship variables under investigation in much the same way that we predict expectations about their post-dissolution futures with their partners may be, we examined whether the expectation-based predictors accounted for incremental variance in individuals' expectations about their post-dissolution relationships above and beyond the variance predicted by the personality and relationship variables. In other words, the hypotheses advanced below all presume that expectations-based predictors will be significant controlling for the effects of the personality- and relationship-level predictors.

Expectations concerning which partner would initiate the break up. Research by Akert (as cited in Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Fehr, 2004) suggests that individuals' responses to the demise of their romantic relationships are influenced to an important degree by their role in the

decision to bring the relationship to an end. In particular, individuals who reported being “dumped” by their partners also reported experiencing more distress in the aftermath of the break up than either individuals who reported that the break up was mutual or that they were responsible for the decision to break up. In line with these findings, we predicted that the more participants expected that they, rather than their partners, would be responsible for making the overtures required to terminate the relationship, the less they would anticipate maintaining warm feelings toward/desiring continuing contact with their former partners and the less they would expect to be motivated to re-establish a romance with these partners.

Expected preventability of the break up. We also predicted that participants’ expectations concerning their post-dissolution relationships with their former partners might depend on the nature of their expectations concerning whether they or their partners might have been able to do something to prevent the break up. We predicted that the more participants expected that they, themselves, might have been able to circumvent the break up, the more they would expect to be interested in reconciling with the partner and the more they would expect to want continuing contact with/to experience continuing affection for the partner. Because expectations that the self could have averted the break up implicate the self rather than the partner as the party responsible for the break up, they leave room for the participant to view a post-dissolution relationship with their former partner in positive and desirable terms (e.g., “it’s not his fault I took him for granted and caused our relationship to break up”). For expectations concerning the partner’s likely ability to prevent the break up we predicted the reverse: that participants would expect to experience less affection for/less desire for continuing contact with the ex-partner and less interest in restoring the romantic aspect of the relationship to the extent that the partner was expected to have been capable of acting in ways that might have forestalled the break up.

Anticipated difficulty of adjustment. Finally, we assumed that expectations of a difficult recovery reflect emotional attachment to and dependence on the partner. Accordingly, we predicted that the more emotionally painful and difficult participants anticipated their adjustment to the break up would be, the more acutely they would expect to feel the loss of the partner (i.e., they would expect to feel continuing attachment to and dependence on the partner) and thus the more they would expect to feel continuing affection for/desire continuing contact with the partner and the more they would expect to be motivated to re-establish a romantic relationship with the ex.

In sum, we tested a variety of hypotheses concerning the ability of several personality, relationship, and expectations-based variables to predict variance in two criterion variables assessing participants’ forecasts about the nature of their post-dissolution relationships with their partners. These hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

H1: Models of self and other, commitment, and trust will predict unique variance in participants’ forecasts of (a) the likelihood that they will experience continuing affection for/desire continuing contact with their ex partners and (b) their interest in rekindling the romance with these partners.

H2: Controlling for the personality- and relationship-based predictors, each of the expectations-based predictors will predict unique variance in the two post-dissolution relationship criterion variables.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate psychology students ($N = 107$) involved in ongoing heterosexual relationships of six months or more duration completed a questionnaire in which they made a

number of predictions concerning the dissolution process and how it might unfold in their own current relationships if they and their partners were to break up. Complete data were available for 99 participants (66 women, 32 men, and one participant who did not indicate his/her gender). Participants in the final sample ranged in age from 17 to 53 ($M = 22.69$ years, $SD = 5.93$). The mean length of their relationships was 26.02 months ($SD = 17.59$, range 6 to 84 months).

Predictor Variables

Working models of attachment. Respondents rated each of the four attachment prototypes from Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire to indicate how closely each description reflected their typical style of relating to others (endpoints labeled 1 "not at all like me" and 7 "very much like me"). Following the procedure advocated by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994a, 1994b), we combined the individual ratings to create dimensions representing participants' scores in terms of working models of self and other. Specifically, we computed scores for the model of self by adding participants' ratings for the two attachment prototypes reflecting positive self-models (secure and dismissing) and then subtracting from this sum the sum of the ratings for the two attachment prototypes reflecting negative self-models (fearful and preoccupied). We also computed scores for the model of other by adding participants' ratings for the two prototypes reflecting positive other-models (secure and preoccupied) and then subtracting from this sum the sum of their ratings for the two prototypes reflecting negative other-models (fearful and dismissing). Sprecher et al. (1998) label these dimensions "anxiety" and "avoidance," respectively. Higher numbers reflect more positive working models, that is, lower anxiety and avoidance.

Trust. The 34-item Relationship Trust Scale (Holmes & Boon, 1994) assesses an individual's current level of confidence in the benevolence of his or her romantic partner's

motives within the relationship (e.g., "it is sometimes difficult for me to be absolutely certain that my partner will always care for me. Too many things can change in our relationship as time goes on"). Participants rated each item on a 7-point scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree." The composite index created by averaging across the 34 items demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). Higher scores reflect greater trust in the partner.

Commitment. Participants used a 7-point response scale (endpoints 1 "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree") to indicate their own and their partners' commitment to their current relationships ("I am/I believe my partner is committed to making this a long term relationship"). They also completed two parallel five-item scales (endpoints 1 "none at all" and 7 "a tremendous amount") gauging their perceptions of how much they had invested in and benefited from these relationships in terms of time, emotional commitment, material goods, physical closeness, and overall effort. The composite index created by combining scores on the investment and benefit scales with ratings of own and partner commitment was reliable ($\alpha = .73$). Higher numbers indicate greater commitment.

Anticipated likelihood that the participant would initiate the break up. Two items tapped participants' expectations concerning whether they or their partner would be most likely to initiate steps to terminate the relationship in the event that it were to break up ("I/my partner would probably be the one to end it"). Participants indicated their responses to each item on a scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree." As self and partner ratings were substantially correlated ($r = -.63$), we reverse-scored the partner item and created a single initiation index by averaging across the two items ($\alpha = .77$). Higher numbers reflect predictions that the participant—not the partner—would initiate the move to end the relationship.

Anticipated difficulty of adjustment. Three items assessed participants' expectations

concerning how much difficulty they would experience adjusting to the loss of their relationships in the wake of a break up with their current partners. On a scale from 1 “not at all” to 7 “extremely,” participants indicated the extent to which (a) their immediate emotional adjustment would be difficult and (b) the break up would disrupt their typical everyday functioning. They also rated their agreement with the item “things would be back to ‘normal’ in my life almost immediately” using a response scale with endpoints 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” We reverse-coded responses to the latter item and then computed a composite recovery index by averaging across the three items ($\alpha = .74$).

Participants also responded to the question “if my relationship ended I would feel...” by indicating on a 7-point scale (1 “not at all” and 7 “extremely”) the extent to which they expected to experience each of 23 different emotions (e.g., angry, relieved, distraught) in the event their relationships with their partners broke up. We reverse-coded responses to the positive emotion items and dropped the item “indifferent” prior to computing a composite emotional pain index by averaging across the remaining 22 items ($\alpha = .86$).

As the anticipated recovery and emotional pain indexes were substantially correlated ($r = .68$), we averaged scores on each to create a single index that reflected participants’ expectations concerning how painful and difficult their adjustment to the break up would be ($\alpha = .78$). Higher scores on this index represent expectations of greater difficulty in adjustment.

Expected preventability of the break up. Participants responded to two parallel items intended to assess their expectations concerning whether they or their partners would be likely to have been able to do something to prevent the break up in the event their relationships dissolved (“My partner could probably have prevented the break-up if he/she had given more to the relationship” and “I could probably have prevented the break-up if I had given more to the

relationship”). Participants rated their response to each item on a response scale from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” Higher numbers thus indicate greater assignment of blame to partner or self, as appropriate. As responses to the two blame items were statistically independent, $r(99) = .08, ns$, we included them both as predictors in the analyses reported here.

Criterion Variables

Predicting continuing affection toward the partner post-dissolution. Five items examined participants’ expectations concerning how they would feel about their partners in the aftermath of a break up (e.g., “I would not remain friends with my present partner,” “I would remain close to my present partner,” “we would still spend time together,” “I would have strong feelings of dislike toward my partner,” and “I would still have strong positive feelings towards my partner.”). Participants indicated their response to each item using a 7-point scale with endpoints 1 “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree.” We reverse-coded responses to the two negatively-phrased items prior to creating an overall feelings index by averaging ratings across the individual items ($\alpha = .85$). Higher numbers indicate increasing expectations of experiencing continued affection for/desiring continuing contact with the partner.

Predicting motivation to restore the relationship post-dissolution. Three items assessed participants’ expectations concerning how much they would be motivated to restore the relationship with their partners should their relationships break up (“I would do everything possible to get my partner back,” “I would fall in love again someday,” and “I would never find another partner as good as my present partner”). Our decision to treat the latter two items as indicators of participants’ anticipated desire to reconcile with their partners is predicated on the assumption that responses to both of these items serve as indirect markers of an individual’s sense of attachment to the partner (i.e., the more confidently an individual expects to fall in love

again some day, the less likely he or she is to feel compelled to make efforts to reconcile with the current partner in the event of a break up; conversely, the more an individual expects to experience difficulty finding an equally-good “substitute” for the present partner, the more likely he or she is to feel compelled to make such efforts) and hence his or her felt need to restore the relationship with that partner. Participants indicated their response to each item using a 7-point scale with endpoints 1 “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree.” We reverse-coded responses to the item about falling in love and then constructed a composite motivation index ($\alpha = .66$). Higher numbers thus reflect expectations of stronger motivation to reconcile with the partner.

Control Variable

Estimated likelihood of dissolution. Participants’ expectations about the post-dissolution courses of their current relationships might vary in a systematic and predictable fashion with their perceptions of the odds that their relationships are, in fact, at risk of termination. To allow us to control for variance in such perceptions (where necessary), we asked participants to estimate the likelihood that their current relationship would break up. Endpoints for the 7-point response scale for this single-item measure were 1 “not at all likely” and 7 “extremely likely.”

Results

Prior to conducting the main regression analyses, we conducted a series of t-tests to determine whether there were sex differences in participants’ responses to the various measures. Men scored significantly higher than women on the anxiety dimension of attachment, $t(96) = 2.38, p < .02$, and the item assessing the tendency to expect that they, themselves, would have been able to prevent the break up, $t(96) = 1.98, p = .05$. Although both sexes fall on the positive side of the scale, on average, men reported more positive (less anxious) models of self ($M = 3.72, SD = 3.48$) than women ($M = 1.55, SD = 4.57$). Men also expected that they would be more

likely to have been able to prevent the dissolution of their current relationships ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.85$) than did women ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.84$). Apart from the differences on these two measures, however, men’s and women’s responses were substantially similar. Most important, men and women did not differ in their expectations concerning their post-dissolution relationships. Accordingly, given that men’s and women’s responses on the various measures were more similar than different, and in consideration of the ratio of predictors to cases, we opted not to include sex as an additional predictor in the analyses reported here.

We tested our hypotheses concerning which of the various predictor variables account for significant variability in participants’ expectations concerning (a) the nature of their affectional ties to their former partners in the wake of a break up and (b) their anticipated motivation to restore the relationship with their former partners via regression. For each criterion variable, we entered the predictors hierarchically, reflecting our assumption that the personality- and relationship-level predictors might influence participants’ responses to the expectation-level predictors—an assumption that gains some support from the observed correlations between the two types of predictors (see Table 1).

Examination of the correlations between the criterion variables and participants’ estimates of the likelihood that their relationships would break up also indicated that it was appropriate to include the anticipated likelihood measure as a control variable in analysis of anticipated motivation to restore the relationship as it was substantially and significantly correlated with the motivation index (Pedhazur, 1997). Accordingly, the analysis of the motive index included an additional block that the analysis of the feelings index did not. In any case, in each analysis we entered scores on the two attachment dimensions (i.e., avoidance and anxiety), trust, and commitment prior to entering anticipated difficulty of adjustment, anticipated

likelihood that the participant (and not the partner) would initiate the break up, and expectations that the partner and the self could have prevented the break up in the last block (as scores on commitment, trust and the anticipated adjustment index were substantially skewed, we submitted them to a logarithmic transformation prior to conducting the regression analyses). This order of entry allowed us to examine the unique contribution of the expectation-level predictors while controlling for their shared variance with the personality- and relationship-level predictors. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Predicting expectations of continuing affection between former partners. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the personality- and relationship-level predictors would account for unique variance in participants' predictions concerning their post-dissolution feelings for their exes. Consistent with this hypothesis, the more participants reported trusting their current partners, the more they expected to experience continuing affection for and desire continuing contact with their ex-partners should their relationships break up. Obtained t 's for commitment and the two attachment dimensions, however, were small and far from significant. Accordingly, H1 received partial support at best.

Hypothesis 2 tested the possibility that the expectation-based predictors might predict incremental variance in participants' scores on the feelings index, controlling for the effects of the personality- and relationship-level predictors. As expected, anticipated difficulty of adjustment accounted for unique variance in participants' responses on the feelings index, controlling for the effects of the predictor variables entered in block 1. However, the direction of prediction was counter to our hypothesis: The more difficult and painful participants believed adjusting to the dissolution of their current relationships would likely be, the less—not more—participants expected to remain emotionally close to and to maintain contact with their ex-

partners after the break up took place. Controlling for the other variables in the model the obtained t 's for the remaining expectations-based predictors failed to achieve significance.

In sum, the range of variables that predicted participants' expectations concerning how they would feel toward their former partners was much narrower than we had anticipated, providing only partial support for our hypotheses. Nevertheless, the overall model accounted for a respectable 25% of the variance in scores on the feelings index, $F(8, 90) = 3.78, p = .001$.

Predicting expectations concerning motivation to restore the relationship. Analysis of the motives index again provided partial support for H1. Controlling for variation in anticipated likelihood of breaking up, only commitment accounted for significant variance in participants' expectations concerning how interested they would be in rekindling the flames of romance with their exes. As hypothesized, the greater participants' commitment to their partners at the time of the study, the more they expected that they would desire to reconcile with their partners if their relationships were to break up. The b -weight for anxiety was also marginally significant. However, contrary to our hypothesis concerning the direction of prediction for this variable, the more positive participants' working models of self (recall that higher anxiety scores reflect more positive models of self), the less—not more—they expected to feel motivated to restore the romantic aspect of their relationships with their former partners. Obtained t 's for the remaining personality- and relationship-level predictors were all small and non-significant.

Hypothesis 2 received mixed support, as well, in analysis of the motives index. Consistent with H2, expectations concerning self-blame accounted for unique variance in participants' responses on the motivation index controlling for the contributions of the other variables in the model. As anticipated, the more participants expected that they, themselves, might have been able to prevent the break up, the more they expected that they would be

interested in restoring their relationships with their partners in the aftermath of a break up. The b-weight for anticipated difficulty of adjustment also attained marginal significance. As hypothesized, the more participants expected their adjustment to the break up to be painful and difficult, the more they tended to expect to be motivated to rekindle a romance with their partners. Once we controlled for the other variables in the model, however, none of the remaining expectations-based predictors accounted for significant variance in motivation scores.

In sum, similar to the results for the feelings index, fewer of the predictors accounted for unique variance in scores on the motives index than we had anticipated. Once again, however, R^2 for the full model (in this case including 9 predictors) was highly significant, $R^2 = .43$, $F(9, 89) = 7.30$, $p < .001$. Thus, the model as a whole accounted for substantial variance in participants' expectations concerning the extent to which they were likely to desire reuniting romantically with their former partners, even though our specific predictions met with partial support.

Discussion

Our interest in identifying predictors of individuals' forecasts concerning the post-dissolution pathways their relationships with their partners might take was predicated on the assumption that expectations about the dissolution process—in particular, expectations concerning how they will feel toward their partner in the wake of termination and whether they will be motivated to try to rekindle the flames of romance if they and their partner break up—are important influences in the processes by which partners negotiate the parameters of their post-dissolution relations with each other. The data we present here reveal that there is meaningful variation in people's expectations about the form their post-dissolution relationships will take and that this variation is predictable on the basis of knowledge of people's personalities, relationships, and their expectations about how the dissolution process may unfold in their

relationships should these relationships end. The results of the present analyses thus set the stage for future research aimed more directly at determining the extent to which people's expectations explain their choices among alternative post-dissolution courses of action related to their feelings for and interactions with former romantic partners.

Predicting Expectations about Post-Dissolution Outcomes

We hypothesized that the more positive their models of self and other—the lower their scores on the anxiety and avoidance dimensions—the more participants would expect to feel continuing affection for/desire continuing contact with their ex-partners and the more they would expect to be interested in restoring the relationship with their ex. Instead, we found that avoidance predicted neither criterion variable and that the results for anxiety were weak and inconsistent. Specifically, anxiety scores failed to predict significant variability in expectations concerning feelings toward the partner and were only marginally significant in the regression predicting motivation. Moreover, the b-weight in the latter analysis was negative, contradicting our hypotheses concerning the direction of prediction. Whereas we predicted that more positive models of self would predict increasing confidence in participants' expectations that they would seek to rekindle the flames of romance with their ex-partners, in actuality the less they doubted their self-worth the less—not more—participants were inclined to expect that they would seek to re-establish a romance with their exes.

Given that the attachment dimensions were entered in the model in the same block as trust and commitment, it might seem tempting to attribute the spotty performance of the attachment dimensions to correlations with the relationship-level predictors (r s of .28 and .35 for avoidance with commitment and anxiety with trust, respectively). As the correlations in Table 1 indicate, however, this explanation cannot account for the results for avoidance, as avoidance

was uncorrelated with scores on either the feelings or the motivation index. In addition, although the correlation between anxiety and trust may explain why anxiety was significantly correlated with scores on the feelings index but not significant as a predictor in the regression, it cannot explain why anxiety emerged as a marginally significant predictor in the analysis of the motives index in the absence of a significant zero-order correlation with motives (this latter finding suggests, if anything, that the inclusion of trust in the regression equation might actually have *increased* anxiety's capacity to predict variance in motivation).

At present, our best explanation for the poor prediction afforded by the attachment dimensions hinges on the argument that models of self and other are likely to be considerably more distal influences on people's expectations concerning the post-dissolution pathways their relationships may take than either trust and commitment or their expectations about how the dissolution process is likely to unfold in their relationships. Holmes (1991), for example, has argued that attachment experiences are formative in the development of trust in a partner, thus suggesting that working models of self influence trust rather than the other way around. Moreover, not only do models of self and other differ from the other predictors in terms of their likely causal distance from the criterion variables, but there was a disparity in specificity of measurement, as well, in that avoidance and anxiety were measured in relation to participants' enduring tendencies to experience vulnerability and to question their self-worth in romantic relationships, generally, whereas the remaining predictors targeted participants' perceptions of and forecasts concerning their current relationships in particular. In combination, these differences may account in large part for the pattern of results obtained here.

Even though we predicted that the opposite would be true, we can understand the finding regarding the *b*-weight for anxiety if we assume that individuals with more positive models of

self—who are less anxious relating closely to others—feel sufficiently comfortable in themselves that they do not feel a particular need to restore failed relationships. In any case, it is worth noting that the strongest evidence that knowledge of their working models of attachment enhances prediction of participants' perceptions of their relationships' post-dissolution prospects was obtained for models of self, a finding congruent with the results of Sprecher et al. (1998) in their investigation of actual break ups.

The results for trust and commitment—the relationship-level predictors—were somewhat more consistent than for attachment (both predicted significant variance in the post-dissolution outcomes), but our hypotheses received mixed support here, as well. We hypothesized that, the more participants trusted their partners and experienced strong feelings of commitment to their relationships with these partners, the more they would expect to experience continuing feelings of affection for/desire continuing contact with these partners after a break up and the more they would expect to be motivated to re-establish a romantic relationship with these partners. Instead, increasing trust predicted more confident expectations of maintaining contact with and feeling warmly toward the partner but not expected motivation to restore the romance. Increasing commitment, on the other hand, predicted more confident expectations of feeling motivated to restore the romance but not expectations concerning maintaining contact with and warm feelings for the ex-partner.

The fact that trust failed to emerge as a significant predictor of anticipated motivation to reconcile seems more readily amenable to explanation than commitment's failure to predict scores on the feeling index. Although trust was modestly but significantly correlated with both criterion variables, it was also highly correlated with commitment, which, though uncorrelated with scores on the feelings index, was significantly related to anticipated motivation to reconcile.

Trust's failure to predict unique variance in scores on the motives index may then be attributable in large part to the fact that it shared substantial variance with commitment.

We are less certain why commitment failed to predict variance in scores on the feelings index. Redundancy cannot explain the obtained pattern of results because commitment was unrelated to participants' expectations concerning their post-dissolution feelings for their partners at the bivariate level, as well ($r = .14, ns$). Instead, our findings suggest that, in contrast to our measure of trust, our measure of commitment may have elicited a considerably narrower perspective on participants' relationships, a perspective focused on their hopes and fears concerning their relationships as *romances* distinct from friendships. Our findings further suggest that participants may have viewed maintaining a friendship with and warm feelings for a partner as quite different than seeking to restore the *romantic* aspects of the relationship, a possibility we will discuss in more depth below.

In addition to testing various personality and relationship variables as predictors, we also tested the possibility that people's expectations about how the dissolution process might unfold in their relationships would predict their expectations concerning the nature of their post-dissolution futures with their partners. Previous research has suggested that characteristics of the dissolution process influence individuals' feelings for their ex-partners and the nature of the contact they maintain with these partners in the wake of a break up. The present results extend such findings to an examination of people's *expectations* about the dissolution process and its outcomes, demonstrating that, at a point in time when most participants believed it quite unlikely their relationships would end, their beliefs about several key parameters of the dissolution process and how it would evolve in their relationships predicted their beliefs about the post-dissolution prospects for these relationships. More importantly, these expectations-based

predictors were significant, controlling for the variance they shared with the personality- and relationship-based predictors.

Of the four expectations-based predictors we examined, the results were most consistent for anticipated difficulty of adjustment. Participants' expectations concerning how painful and difficult their adjustment to the loss of their relationships would be predicted significant variance in scores on the feelings index and emerged as a marginally significant predictor in analysis of the motives index, as well. In fact, anticipated difficulty of adjustment was the single predictor to account for variance in both criterion variables, even though it was entered later in the analysis than the personality- and relationship-level predictors and was forced to compete for variance with the other expectations-based predictors, as well.

Nevertheless, the results for this variable were not entirely consistent with our expectations. In particular, the b-weight for the feelings index was opposite in direction to what we had predicted. Contrary to our hypotheses, the more difficult and painful participants expected their adjustment to the loss of their relationships to be, the less—not more—they expected to experience continuing feelings of affection for/desire continuing contact with their ex-partners, even though greater expectations that adjustment would be difficult predicted greater expected desire to restore the relationship. Although we are not entirely certain how to reconcile this conflicting pattern of results, it once again suggests considerable divergence between participants' views concerning the two post-dissolution outcomes we examined. The emerging picture is one in which (anticipated) decisions to seek a renewal of the romantic relationship, though weakly related to (anticipated) decisions to remain friends ($r = .25$), are largely predicted by different variables and, moreover, even when the same variable predicts expectations regarding both outcomes, the directions of prediction may conflict. In the case of

the present predictor, our best guess is that the results for the feelings index reflect anticipated anger and bitterness at the termination of the relationship which translate into reduced expectations that the participant will maintain affection for the partner and want to continue contact as friends. It is intriguing that such expectations do not appear to diminish participants' expectations that they would be motivated to re-establish a romantic relationship with their ex-partner. Future research might examine whether this pattern would replicate in a study of *actual* dissolution experiences. Is there a type of anger experience, for example, that disinclines former partners to want to remain friends but simultaneously motivates them to take actions to restore their relationships to their former romantic status?

Of the remaining expectations-based predictors, only participants' expectations concerning the extent to which they, themselves, might have been able to do something to prevent the break up accounted for significant variability in either of the criterion variables. Consistent with our hypotheses, the more strongly participants expected that they would have been able to avert the break up, the more strongly they expected to desire reconciliation with their partners should their relationships dissolve. This finding makes intuitive sense: To the extent that individuals' expectations that they might have been able to prevent the break up by putting more into the relationship reflect thinking which positions themselves as the partners likely to be *responsible for causing or contributing to* the break up, it seems logical that they would be motivated, after a break up, to "undo" the harm they had caused (the logic of this interpretation assumes that, by and large, participants did not expect to act in a deliberate fashion to intentionally end the relationship. We think this assumption is tenable, given the very high level of commitment our participants reported ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 0.69$) on a 7-point scale) and, overall, how unlikely they believed their relationships were to break up ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.44$,

again on a 7-point scale). It is interesting to note here, however, that expectations which positioned the self as *responsible for initiating the break up* were not predictive of either expected motivation to reconcile or expectations of continuing affection/desire for continuing contact with the ex, at least when controlling for the variance they shared with other predictors in the analysis. Such a pattern of results suggests that the distinction between causing the break up (or expecting to) and being the one to formally bring the relationship to an end (or expecting to be) is a nontrivial one.

At a bivariate level, expectations that the partner would have been able to take steps to avoid the break up were correlated with both post-dissolution outcome measures. However, when entered into the analysis with the other expectations-based predictors and after the personality- and relationship-level predictors, these expectations failed to predict significant variance in either criterion variable. We expect that the high correlation between trust and expectations concerning the partner's ability to prevent the break up ($r = -.60$) likely accounts in large measure for the former variable's failure to emerge as a significant predictor in the present analyses. To a considerable (and logical) extent, participants' trust in their partners seems to capture much of the variance in their beliefs concerning the probability that their partners might have been able to forestall the collapse of their relationships.

As a final observation worthy of mention, the present set of predictors was substantially more effective in predicting participants' expectations concerning their motivation to rekindle a romance with their partners in the wake of a break up than their expectations concerning the extent to which they would be likely to experience continuing feelings of affection for/desire continuing contact with these partners (43% of the variance for the motives index, 25% for the feelings index). Together with the quite modest correlation between the criterion variables and

the finding that the variables that predicted anticipated feelings toward the partner rarely overlapped with the variables that predicted anticipated motivation to reconcile (not to mention that the one variable that predicted both outcomes evidenced a negative b-weight for one outcome and a positive for the other), this evidence is consistent with the conclusion, discussed above, that people's expectations about these two post-dissolution outcomes reflect quite different concerns. Moreover, it would appear that future research has further to go in identifying predictors of people's pre-dissolution beliefs about whether they will experience continuing feelings of affection for/desire continuing contact with their exes than in identifying predictors of their expectations that they will want to re-establish a romantic relationship with their exes.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Two limitations of this research seem particularly deserving of discussion. First, we recognize that our decision to restrict participants to those whose current relationships were at least six months in duration or longer has important implications for our findings. In particular, it means that we have deliberately sampled from a population whose relationships have, in fact, survived the earliest phases of relationship development when the risks of dissolution are likely most severe. As a result, we cannot comment on the nature of people's expectations about breaking up as they exist during the very earliest phases of relationship development, when breaking up may be a central concern in most partners' minds.

At the same time, our decision to limit our sample to more established relationships has the noteworthy advantage of focusing our research on individuals who should have a reasonable sense—after six months or more together with their partners—of precisely what it is they will lose should their relationships end. Accordingly, whereas sampling persons from established relationships might preclude drawing conclusions about what people think about breaking up

when they are most focused on the possibility that their relationships might end, it enables us to comment on people's expectations at (or perhaps beyond) the point in time where their concern might shift from the possibility that their relationships might end to concern about what they may lose if they do. Whether the present findings would generalize to younger, less established relationships remains an empirical question to be addressed by future research.

Second, expectations involve two components: a predictive or anticipatory component and a prescriptive or normative component (e.g., Hackel & Ruble, 1992; see also Olson et al., 1996). The present study focused exclusively on the predictive component of participants' beliefs about the dissolution process. Future research should explore the prescriptive or normative component of such beliefs, as well. Such research would mesh nicely with efforts such as those of Battaglia et al. (1998), which have sought to map cultural scripts that describe the sequence of steps by which dissolution occurs.

Conclusion

To a considerable extent, previous research on post-dissolution relationships has been limited by a tendency for investigators to recruit participants after their relationships have already dissolved. The present study is novel in having examined these relationships from the perspective of individuals in ongoing relationships. It thus extends previous research by exploring people's thoughts and beliefs about their post-dissolution futures (in particular, by identifying variables that predict these thoughts and beliefs) at a time when most of them considered dissolution an unlikely eventuality in their relationships. Our results thus help to broaden the focus of research in this area, expanding its range to consider people's forecasts or predictions about what *will* happen to their relationships after the romance ends.

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