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Quantitative Sex Differences in Response to the Dissolution of a Romantic Relationship

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We gathered data that would allow us to examine evolutionarily informed predictions regarding emotional and physical responses to a breakup—a cluster of correlated responses we refer to as postrelationship grief (PRG). We tested predictions of the existing biological model of human mating and looked to replicate or expand on the extant literature by surveying 5,705 participants in 96 countries ($M_{\text{age}} \approx 27$ years). Seventy-five percent of respondents experienced a breakup and 75% of those individuals experienced multiple breakups. Most responses differed significantly by sex. Emotional response was more severe than physical, with women expressing higher levels than men in each instance. Distribution of responses was similar between sexes. Intensity of emotional response for both sexes was notable: median (and mean) response of nearly 7 (of 10). Component responses, both physical and emotional, again showed significant variation but similar distributions. Women initiated breakups more frequently. Rejected individuals experienced higher PRG levels than those initiating the breakup or breakups via mutual agreement; however, the PRG experience was still relatively severe for both parties. “Lack of communication,” was the most prevalent breakup cause. This initial investigation suggests that PRG requires continued study.

Keywords: relationship termination, sex differences, breakups, sexual strategies theory, postrelationship grief

Romantic relationships appear to be a universal human experience (Fisher, 1995; Jankowiak, 1995). Most individuals will enter and exit a series of romantic relationships throughout their lifetimes based on their varying needs for romance, physical and emotional support, and sexual exclusivity (Fisher, 2006a, 2006b; Jankowiak, 2008). For the majority of individuals, this process is cyclical; most relationships are not “for life”—individuals will experience

failed relationships before (possibly) forming a lifelong pair bond (Buss, 2003; Fisher, 2005). Extant research has shown that upward of 85% of individuals will experience at least one romantic relationship dissolution in their lifetime (Battaglia, et al., 1998; Morris & Reiber, 2011). The formation and maintenance of romantic relationships is well represented in evolutionary research. From Trivers’s (1972) parental investment model to Symons’s (1979) biological model of human mating, through Buss’s (2003) sexual strategies model of human sexual interactions, the proximate mechanisms and behaviors (e.g., physical attraction, mate guarding, sex) and ultimate causation (i.e., reproductive success) of human romantic attachments have been major topics of study for human behavioral ecologists and evolutionary psychologists. However, from an evolutionary perspective, the termination of romantic relationships is less well-studied.

Loss of a partner generally provokes concomitant emotional reactions. In *The Nature of Grief*, Archer (1999) explored grief induced by

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widowhood, arguing that such grief is a result of a “trade-off” between costs and benefits. Humans establish romantic bonds that have multiple advantages and great adaptive value but there is a cost—a series of emotions and behavioral responses—if a partner dies. Archer called this “the cost of commitment” (p. 62). Importantly, these responses are often magnified by concurrent (possibly preexisting) mental and physical traits of the individuals involved in the breakup (e.g., anxiety, addictions, depression; Barbara & Dion, 2000; Fisher, 2004; Mearns, 1991). Grief often leads to depression that is often accompanied by, and inextricable from, related states (e.g., sadness, demoralization, guilt, boredom) (Keller & Nesse, 2005). Nesse suggested that the failure of “major social enterprises” (e.g., romantic relationship, friendships, careers) often leads to grief and serious depression. Although the term *breakup* is a colloquialism, it will be used here as a way of differentiating relationships dissolved by the choice of one or more of the partners (the focus of this study) from those terminated by the death of a partner.

Breakups trigger an interrelated series of emotions and behaviors (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Barbara & Dion, 2000; Fisher, 2006a; Morris & Reiber, 2011). Boelen and Reijntjes (2009) found that those who had preexisting issues with depression and anxiety expressed stronger emotional problems following a breakup. A longitudinal study on forecasting error found that those who were more in love with their partners, who thought it was unlikely that they would soon enter a new relationship, and who did not initiate the breakup, made especially inaccurate predictions about their responses to the breakup (Eastwick et al., 2008). Fisher (2004) has argued that “We humans are soft-wired to suffer terribly when we are rejected by someone we adore” (p. 1). After studying individuals who had recently suffered a breakup, Fisher concluded that: (a) being rejected in love is among the most painful experiences a human being can endure; (b) deserted lovers often become obsessed with winning back their former mate; (c) separation anxiety is expected; and (d) “abandonment rage” is likely, particularly in men. We argue that, in many relationships, Archer’s “cost of commitment” must also be paid after a breakup, initiating a complex suite of emotional states (e.g.,

depression, sadness, anxiety, rage), physical responses (e.g., insomnia, eating disorders, panic attacks), and behaviors that we refer to as *postrelationship grief* (PRG; Morris & Reiber, 2011).

Evolutionary approaches to romantic and sexual relationships in humans are well represented in the psychological and biocultural literature. Drawing from the parental fitness model of Trivers (1972), Symons (1979) proposed a model of human pair bonds based on gamete size and mobility, in which women are predicted to invest more physical and emotional resources in a romantic relationship than men, due to the requisite evolved biological costs of a possible pregnancy. Men, if they choose, can exit a mating encounter with no risk of additional biological cost. The relatively low cost to men leads to predictions of higher male promiscuity (Symons, 1979). This is the “investment model” of human pair bonding. Buss (2003) extended this line of reasoning to include the “men compete/women chose” model of pair bonding. This model proposed that men must acquire and situate their resources in such a way that they can win intrasexual competitions and secure mating partners who are carefully evaluating men based on their resource acquisition, display, and deployment (Buss, 2003). Additionally, Clutton-Brock and Vincent (1991) demonstrated the sex that has a faster potential reproductive rate (in this case, men) will face higher intrasexual competition for mates while the sex with a slower reproductive rate (women) will be more selective when choosing potential mates.

In short, (a) men must compete among themselves for mate access to a higher degree than women and are more prone to want multiple mates (Schmitt, Shackelford, & Buss, 2001); and (b) women, in general, are expected to be more selective in choosing a mate, particularly when employing a long-term mating strategy because they are likely to need various forms of assistance (e.g., time, energy, resources) to reproduce successfully (Buss & Shackelford, 2008). However, conflicting predictions concerning males’ responses to breakups can be derived from these premises. If males are selected to be highly competitive and promiscuous, the termination of a relationship should not be particularly traumatic to males, because they will quickly move to another female. However,

if females are particularly choosy concerning partners, the termination of a relationship should be highly traumatic for males, because they may expect to have a difficult time accruing a new mate. In addition, it is likely that those employing a short-term mating strategy (both women and men) may experience breakups differently than those employing a long-term strategy. However, we know of no current metric that allows for inclusion of this variable, because it has been argued that individuals are likely not consciously aware of the particular mating “strategy” they are employing at any given time (Buss, 2003).

Breakups happen to the majority of individuals at some point in their life, usually more than once, and have the potential to be one of the most traumatic experiences individuals may ever face in their lives (Chung et al., 2003; Fisher, 2004). As part of sexual strategies theory, Buss enumerated the causes for failure of romantic relationships for ancestral humans. These include: partner imposing unacceptable costs, lost resource availability due to illness or injury, infertility, infidelity, lost mating opportunities, compelling mating alternatives becoming available, inadequate care for children, psychological abuse, physical abuse, and death of a partner (Buss, 2003; Schmitt & Shackelford, 2003). More recently, Wade (2012) demonstrated that *sexual conflict*—which may include, but is not limited to infidelity (e.g., unmet sexual expectations, insufficient communication regarding sexual behaviors)—is a cause for relationship dissolution; in this particular instance, it the man who is more likely to initiate the breakup with the woman. In a pilot study of 1,735 university students, Morris and Reiber (2011) found that for individuals who had experienced a breakup: the termination of a romantic relationship elicited dramatic physical and emotional responses in over 95% of respondents and both men and women experienced PRG with virtually identical frequency and intensity, but expressed PRG very differently.

One study that explored the cause of and responses to breakups using an explicit evolutionary model found that women had more negative feelings following a breakup than men (Perilloux & Buss, 2008). This finding contrasted with previous studies that suggested it is men who experience breakups with stronger negative emotions than women (Choo et al.,

1996; Sprecher, 1994; Sprecher et al., 1998). Perilloux and Buss (2008) also found that women tend to report more personal growth after breakup, which mirrors the findings of other research (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003; Mearns, 1991; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). A major finding of Perilloux and Buss was that those who initiated the breakup had significantly different emotional responses than those who were rejected.

In contrast to most previous work in this area, which been based on small college samples, the current study undertook to investigate breakups in a large-scale population-based sample including variables related to more representative ranges of cultural, temporal, and sexual ecologies. We set out to investigate whether results from earlier work would be replicated in a large sample and whether existing and expanded predictions about breakup response are supported. We predicted that men and women would vary in their expression of PRG behavior, but that the intensity of the experience would be more similar than we would expect by using the men compete/women chose model. We predicted that the party who was rejected in the relationship would suffer higher overall PRG but we also predicted that, in most instances, both parties would suffer relatively high PRG levels. We sought to explore the causes of relationship dissolution and to evaluate whether the predicted evolutionary causes (e.g., male infidelity, infertility) would be represented in a large, cross-cultural population. Lastly, we sought to explore the intensity and expression of PRG in a large population to evaluate whether the experiences reported by this population would differ from or replicate prior findings (Perilloux & Buss, 2008; Morris & Reiber, 2011).

Method

Two studies were conducted online between June 2012 and March 2013. The invitations and survey questions were only offered in English. A secure link led to the survey instructions. Participants were told this was an academic survey about past romantic relationship experiences, that responses were confidential, and that they: were not obligated to answer all questions, could quit the survey at any time, and could take as much time as needed (although each survey was designed to be completed in approximately

15 min). Respondents could not access either survey until agreeing to participate in the study, and were given contact information for the principal investigator if they had questions or concerns related to the study. No tangible material or monetary compensation was offered to participants. This method of acquiring an informed consent follows the recommendations of the Board of Scientific Affairs' Advisory Group on the Conduct of Research on the Internet (Kraut et al., 2004). The surveys were hosted by Qualtrics, which has SAS 70 Certification and meets the privacy standards of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Qualtrics provides a filter option that permits only one survey submission from any individual IP address to prevent "ballot stuffing." This filter option was in effect for both surveys (i.e., no individual could take both surveys from the same IP address). All responses were labeled with random 15-digit alphanumeric codes, and no other identifying information was associated with any responses. No names or email addresses were collected during recruitment or data analyses. These studies were approved by Binghamton University's Human Subjects Research Review Committee, and all research was performed by certified investigators who conformed to the guidelines for the ethical treatment of human subjects.

Approximately 295,000 individuals were invited and 5,705 participated, a response rate of 1.8%. Study B invitations were sent to different individuals than Study A, but an attempt was made to keep the approximate proportions of invitations comparable (i.e., total numbers of Facebook invitations, academic listervs, and on-line forums were comparable). The total number of invitees (about 295,000) reflects only recorded contacts—the true reach of the survey is unknowable (e.g., a department chair may have taken the survey, distributed it to her department, distributed it university-wide, or all/some/none of these actions).

Survey contacts were invited to participate in a brief survey on romantic relationships. No mention of breakups, divorce, or relationship termination was made in the invitation. Participants provided demographic information and responses to questions about romantic relationship history and, if applicable, breakups (e.g., Have you experienced a breakup? How severe was the breakup for you emotionally? Who do

you feel initiated the breakup? What sort of physical responses did you experience as a result of the breakup?). If respondents had experienced multiple breakups, they were asked to identify and confine responses to one breakup of their choosing (e.g., the most recent, the one that affected them most). Respondents were asked to report a self-assessment of their mate value—using whatever criteria they felt was applicable—and to rate their emotional response and physical response to their selected breakup on a scale from 0 (*none*) to 10 (*unbearable*). Participants were also asked to identify the components of their emotional and physical responses; they were provided a list of common responses that was generated from earlier pilot research, and were asked to endorse as many as applied to them. For analysis purposes, total response was calculated by summing (emotional response + physical response) to reflect how severe a breakup experience was, overall, on a scale from 1–20. In direct tests of a priori predictions, we used a two-tailed alpha level of .05 and calculated Cohen's *d* as a measure of effect size.

The two surveys (A and B) differed in two major ways. First, due to the high level of "other" responses to multiple choice questions (e.g., breakup cause) in Survey A, Survey B was modified to include a text box allowing participants to specify or elaborate on what they meant by "other." Because the analysis of these textual responses is beyond the scope of this article, quantitative data from the two studies were combined when possible for the analyses shown here. In addition, initial analysis demonstrated that depression was often accompanied by sadness, yet sadness itself was so frequently mentioned in the optional commentaries in Survey A that it was added as an additional category of emotional response in Survey B.

Table 1
Demographic Information for Participants Who Experienced a Breakup

Demographic variables	Men	Women
<i>N</i>	1,490	2,834
Age, years	26.8 (4.66)	26.46 (4.07)
Income, U.S.\$	26,714 (2.96)	22,589 (2.51)
Self-reported mate value ^a	7.64 (2.01)	7.88 (1.93)

Note. Values are *N* or *M* (*SD*).

^a Scale range: 1–10.

Table 2
Distribution of Male and Female Self-Reported Sexual Orientation

	Exclusively heterosexual	Mostly heterosexual	Bisexual	Mostly homosexual	Exclusively homosexual	Asexual ^a	Other
Men	72%	11%	5%	2%	7%	1%	2%
Women	61%	21%	8%	2%	3%	3%	2%

^a From the Asexual Visibility and Education Network: "Asexuals may regard other people as aesthetically attractive without feeling sexual attraction to them. Some asexual people also experience the desire of being romantically attracted to other people without it being sexual" (Asexual Visibility and Education Network, n.d.).

Results

Of the approximately 295,000 invited individuals, 5,705 participated. These individuals represented 96 countries and all 20 of the of the U.S. Census Bureau occupation types. Only 38% of respondents were undergraduate or graduate students. The five countries with the most respondents were the United States (63%), India (7%), Canada (5%), and the United Kingdom and Germany (3% each); the remaining 91 countries represented only 19% of respondents. Demographic information on survey participants can be seen in Table 1. Both samples included individuals from all sexual orientations self-selected from the following choices: exclusively heterosexual, mostly heterosexual, bisexual, mostly homosexual, exclusively homosexual, asexual, and other. The proportion of self-selected sexual orientation of respondents can be seen in Table 2. The PRG experiences of this substantial population are the topic of a forthcoming publication.

Respondents reported self-assessments of mate value on a scale from 1–10, with 10 being highest. Men ($N = 1,092$) reported a mean mate value of 7.54 ($SD = 1.95$, $Mdn = 8$); women ($N = 1,756$) reported a mean mate value of 7.84 ($SD = 1.81$, $Mdn = 8$). In this sample, over 90% of individuals rated themselves as 7+ on a 10-point Mate Value Scale, which rendered that metric unusable in our analyses. Across both surveys, 2,834 women (84%) and 1,490 men (79%) reported experiencing a breakup. Of these, 2,318 women (82%) and 1,159 men (78%) experienced multiple breakups. Of those who had experienced multiple breakups, women experienced an average of 4.10 ($SD = 2.58$) and men, 3.86 ($SD = 2.22$). These respondents were asked to address one breakup of their choosing for the remainder of the survey queries. The length of these selected relationships averaged 2.9 years ($SD = 2.68$) for women ($N = 2,813$) and 2.51 years ($SD = 2.47$) for men ($N =$

1,482), $t = 4.576$ (4,158), $p < .001$. Responses addressing relationship length were not submitted by .07% of women and .05% of men. For women ($N = 2,695$), the mean level of emotional response was 6.84 ($SD = 2.52$) and for men ($N = 1,409$), 6.58 ($SD = 2.58$), $t(4102) = 3.115$, $p = .002$, $d = .102$. This difference was statistically significant, but with a very small effect size. Physical response levels were lower overall; the mean PR for women ($N = 2,682$) was 4.21 ($SD = 2.94$) and for men ($N = 1,398$), 3.75 ($SD = 2.93$), $t(4078) = 4.677$, $p < .001$, $d = .157$. Again, the sex difference was statistically significant, but with a small effect size. The distribution of physical and emotional response levels by all respondents of each sex can be seen in Figure 1. The basic components of emotional and physical responses identified by all male and female respondents are shown in Figure 2. The initiator of the breakup, as reported by all respondents of each sex, is shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 shows emotional, physical, and total response levels.

Respondents to Survey A were asked what caused their breakup.¹ Response options were not mutually exclusive. The results for women ($N = 1,966$) and men ($N = 1,125$) are shown in Figure 5. The emotional, physical, and total response based on the cause of breakup is shown by sex in Figure 6.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine evolutionarily informed predictions regarding emotional and physical responses to a breakup—a cluster of correlated responses that we refer to as PRG. We sought to test multiple

¹ Respondents to Survey B were asked to "describe what caused your breakup" in text form only. This resulted in 1,123 responses, totaling 40,752 words. These results require qualitative analyses that are beyond the scope of this initial inquiry.

Distribution of Response Levels to a Breakup

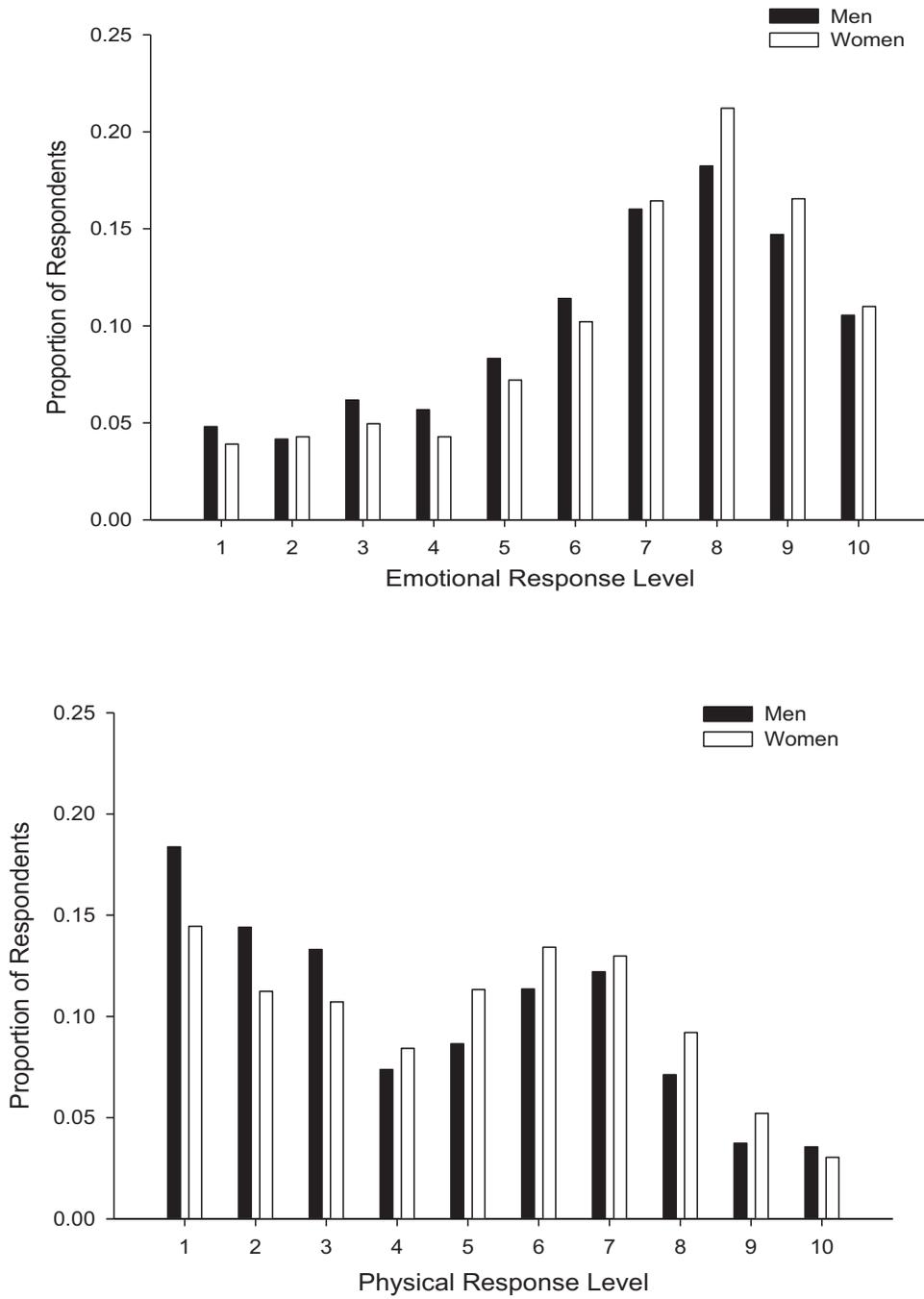


Figure 1. Distribution of emotional (A) and physical (B) response levels to a breakup, by sex.

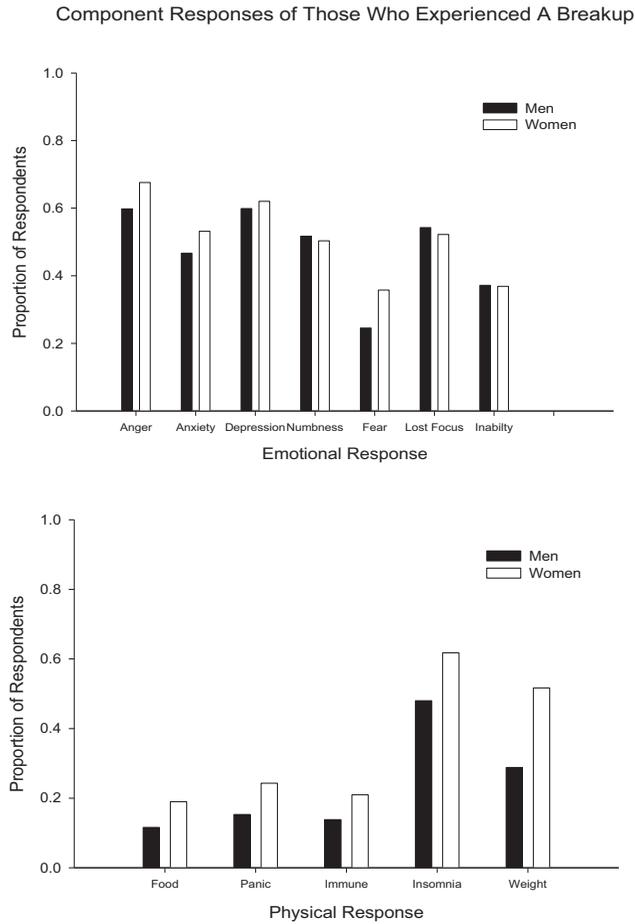


Figure 2. Components of emotional (A) and physical responses (B) to a breakup, by sex. The *x* axis legend in panel A is Anger; Anxiety; Depression; Emotional numbness; Fear; General loss of focus; and Inability to function at school or work. The *x* axis legend in panel B is Nausea and/or inability to eat; Panic attacks; Reduced immune system function; Insomnia; and Unwanted weight loss/gain.

predictions of the biological model stemming from the work of Trivers (1972), Symons (1979), and Buss (2003), and looked to replicate or expand on the extant findings.

Nearly three quarters of respondents had experienced a breakup. Of these respondents, an additional three quarters had experienced multiple breakups—roughly four each for both sexes. Because the mean age of respondents of both sexes was approximately 27 years, we conclude that having multiple breakups, relatively early in life, is the norm rather than the exception. This suggests that just as mate attraction, mate guarding, and mate retention tactics are

products of evolution, so too must be PRG itself, as well as a means of mitigating the PRG experience and “moving on.” As Fisher (2004) asked: “Why did our ancestors evolve brain links to cause us to hate the one we love? Perhaps because it enabled jilted lovers to extricate themselves and start again” (p. 43).

In most instances, the mean responses to a breakup differed significantly by sex, however, virtually all effect sizes (using Cohen’s *d*) were negligible to small. Emotional response to a breakup was substantially more severe than physical response for both sexes, with women expressing significantly higher levels than men in each

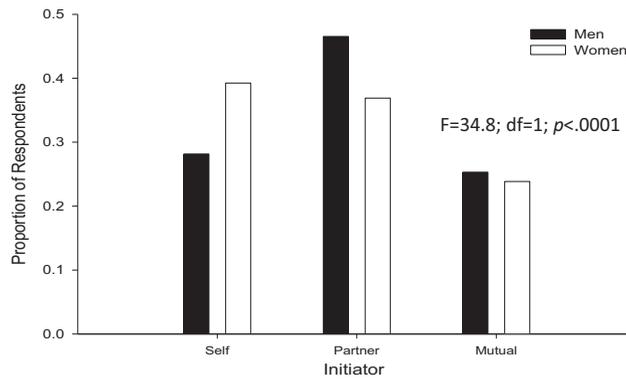


Figure 3. Initiator of breakup by sex. $F(1) = 34.8, p < .001$.

instance. However, the distribution of responses is remarkably similar across the sexes—an occurrence not predicted by a coarse interpretation of the biological model. Equally striking is the intensity of the emotional response for both sexes. Considering that a response level of 0 indicated “no effect” while 10 indicated “unbearable,” the median (and mean) response of nearly 7 for both men and women is notable. As with intensity of response, the component responses, both physical and emotional, showed statistically significant variation in most instances, but similar distributions by sex. Important, perhaps predictably, is the higher rate of a “fear” response in women as well as the extremely high rate of insomnia for both men and women. Unwanted weight loss or gain was also far more common in women than men, but if the qualitative analyses mirror our pilot study (Morris & Reiber, 2011), this response will, contrary to the stereotype, involve substantial unwanted weight loss.

Women initiated breakups more often than men. Women reported initiating the breakup 39% of the time versus men at 37%, with a mutual decision at 24%. Men reported initiating the breakup 28% of time versus women at 47%, with a mutual decision at 25%. These findings mirror the trend, but to a lesser degree than those found in a 100-year survey of U.S. divorce rates by Brinig and Allen (2000), who found that women initiated the divorce in almost 70% of legal cases. Those who were rejected also suffered significantly higher levels of overall PRG than those who initiated the breakup or in instances where the relationship was dissolved by mutual agreement. However,

it should be noted that, regardless of the initiator, the PRG experience was still relatively severe for both parties.

The biological model suggests that infidelity, primarily male, is by far the most common cause of breakups (Symons, 1979; Einon, 1994; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Drigotas & Barta, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2001). The data from this larger population does not support that argument. “Lack of communication” was selected nearly twice as often as infidelity, by roughly half of men and women as the number one reason for the breakup. However, these causal options were *not* mutually exclusive and, furthermore, the high rate of “other” as a breakup cause clearly demonstrates that the complexity of this phenomenon requires additional study.

This initial investigation into PRG suggests that the topic is one that avails itself to continued study. Although the survey response rates were low (approximately 2%), the sample size is quite large. Also, the attentiveness with which participants engaged the surveys (approximately 87% of participants completed the full survey) and the surfeit of qualitative data gathered from the optional additional comments (over 400,000 words of text) suggest that continued investigation along these lines will provide meaningful information on relationship termination.

Limitations and Future Directions

Any Internet-based survey presents its own set of limitations. The reach of the surveys is unknowable, and therefore a true response rate is incalculable. However, valuable data *are* at-

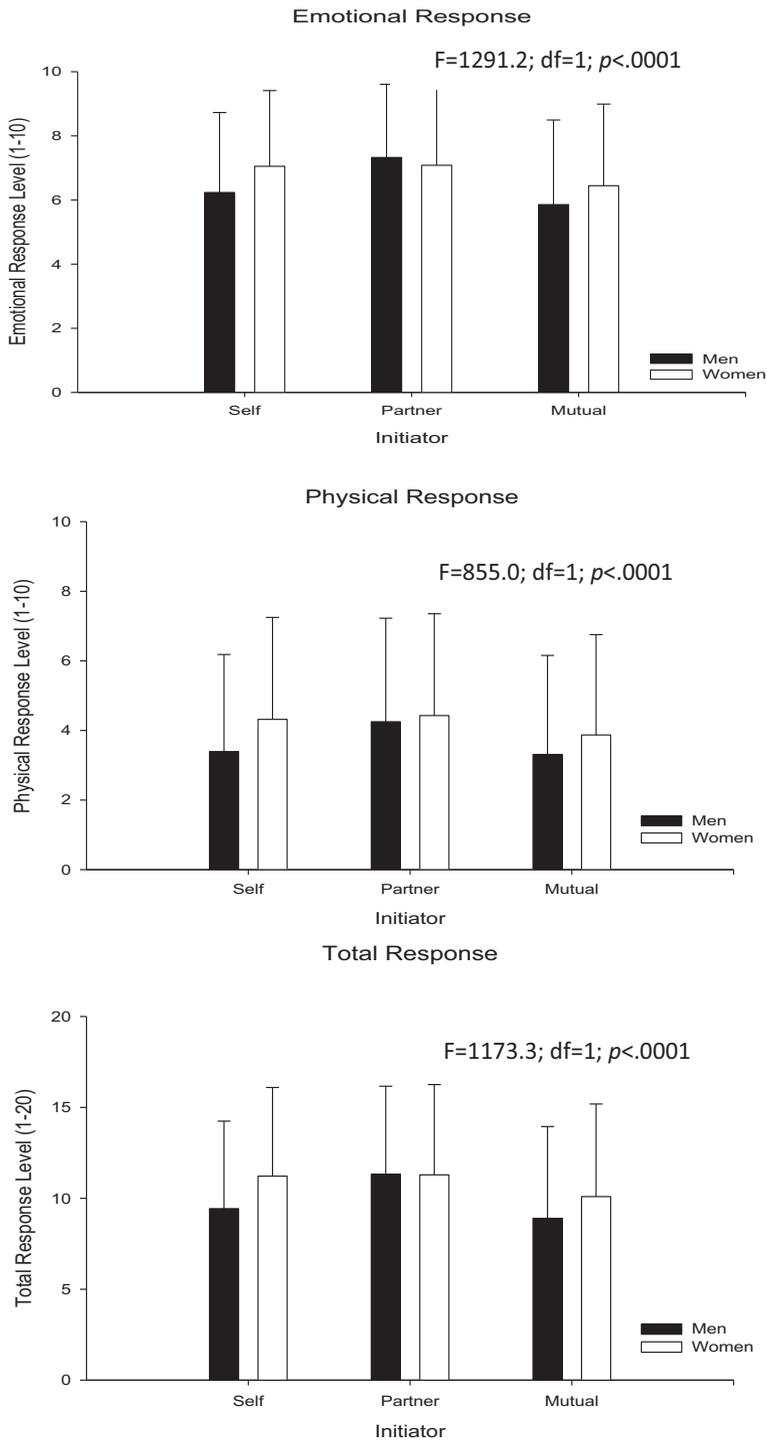


Figure 4. Mean (standard deviation) emotional (A), physical (B), and total (C) response levels by initiator of breakup and sex. Panel A: $F(1) = 1,291.2, p < .001$; panel B: $F(1) = 855.0, p < .001$; and panel C: $F(1) = 1,173.3, p < .001$.

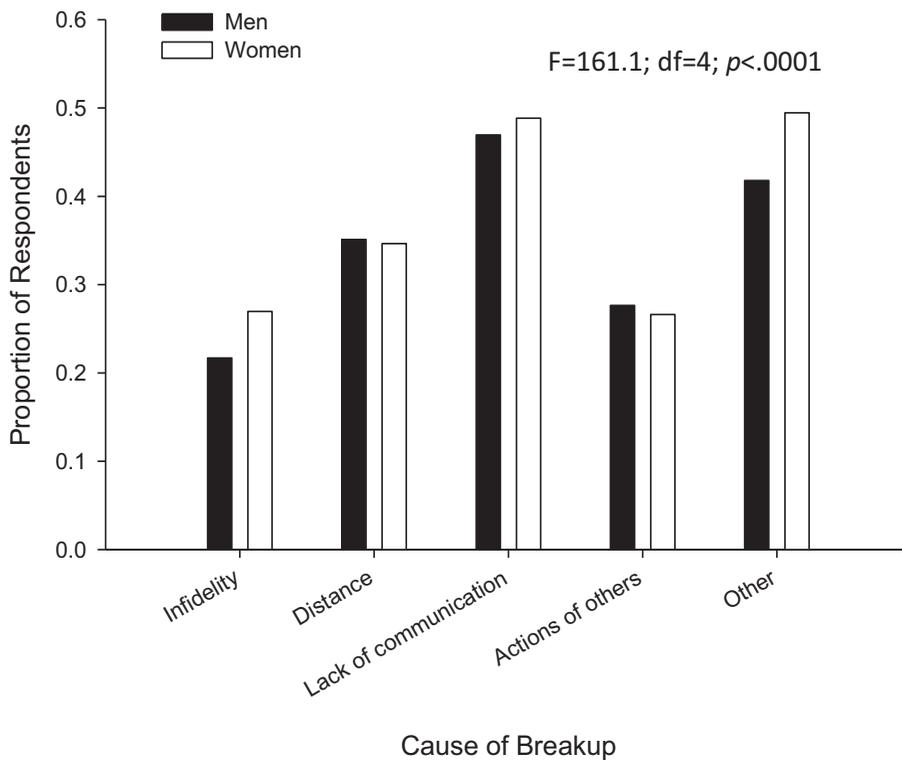


Figure 5. Distribution of cause of breakup as reported by sex. $F(4) = 161.1, p < .001$.

tainable using the Internet if the project is approached in a logical and diligent manner (e.g., be inclusive with the targeting of groups, striving for representative group samples). Moreover, anonymous and confidential Internet-based research is an ideal way to let subjects “speak with their own voice” on sensitive topics (e.g., sexual behavior, pornography use, sexually transmitted infections) without interviewer bias and other dilemmas associated with lab interviews.

In addition, the survey was offered only in English—a conscious choice. Although the survey host service offered thorough translation options, we felt the subject matter and question wording would, literally, get lost in translation. Hence, although 89 countries are represented, the participants were all English speakers. This may alter the true “cross-cultural” nature of the surveys.

As with any survey instrument, particularly one distributed internationally, survey design is fundamental. To ensure that our data captured the reality of participants, our method-

ology included a pilot survey, an initial survey, and a final survey that were refined at each step to address any issues that appeared. For example, participants spontaneously noted “sadness” so often in the “other” category of Survey A’s emotional responses (via optional comments) that we included it as a separate category in Survey B—one that was widely selected (83% of men and 82% of women selected this new category in Survey B). This is a key example of letting subjects speak for themselves.

Mate value clearly plays a major role in any study of this type (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). However, in this sample, over 90% of individuals rated themselves as 7+ on a 10-point Mate Value Scale with a median value of 8, which rendered that metric unusable in our analyses. A more sophisticated survey instrument would yield more accurate information that would be particularly valuable as related mate value differences in PRG response.

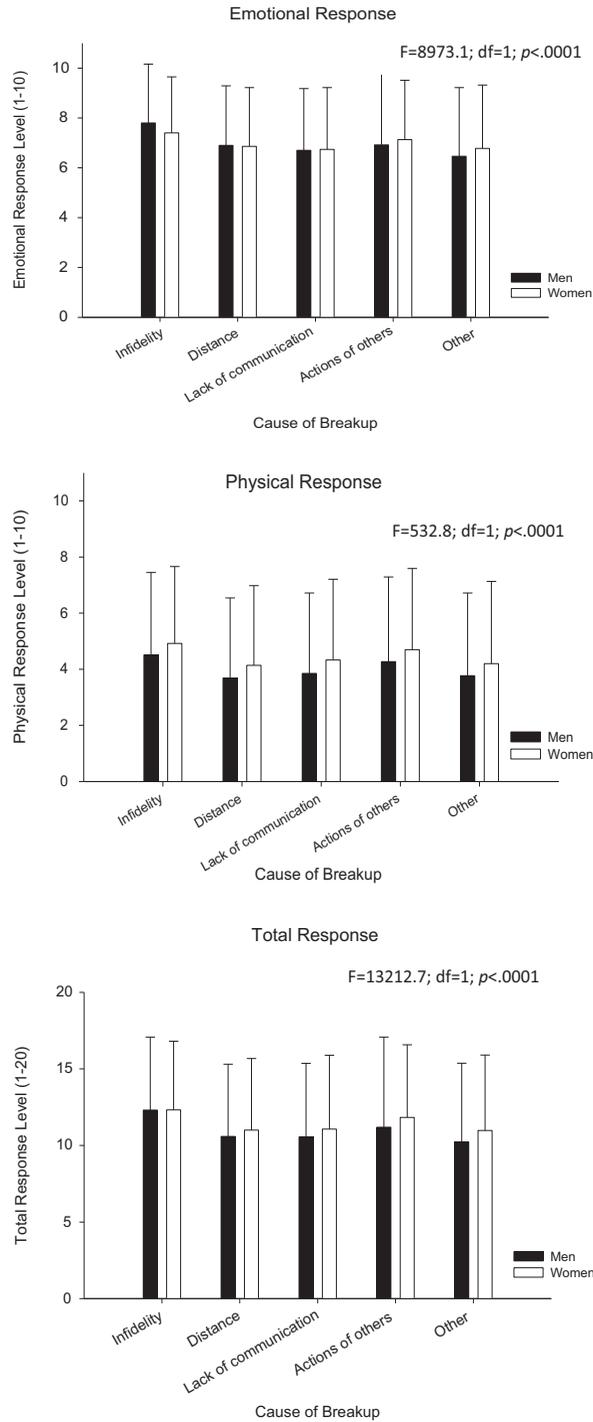


Figure 6. Mean (standard deviation) emotional (A), physical (B), and total (C) response levels by cause of breakup and sex. Panel A: $F(1) = 8,973.1, p < .001$; panel B: $F(1) = 532.8, p < .001$; and panel C: $F(1) = 1,3212.7, p < .001$.

Lastly, as with any study of this scope on a complex human behavior, more questions were raised than were answered. Other lines of inquiry are apparent and immediate:

1. Will the information gathered vary and/or be correlated with complex identities (e.g., relationship history, life history stage, sexual identity)?
2. Does the PRG experience vary cross-culturally and, if so, in what ways?
3. A pilot study (Morris & Reiber, 2011) demonstrated that men and women may “feel” a breakup in similar ways, but their postbreakup behavior varies dramatically. Will this finding be replicated in this wider sample?
4. What is causing the “second peak” in physical response levels? Is it individual-based (e.g., a result of attachment style, relationship history, age) or relationship-based (e.g., dependent on the cause of the breakup)?
5. Of particular importance as this project moves beyond simple sex differences is whether intrasexual variation in PRG response may be more significant than intersexual variation in both intensity and expression.
6. Lastly, in our pilot study and both iterations of the survey reported here, women consistently participated nearly three times as often as did men. How do we gather more information on the experiences of men, and what will we find? Are they the epitome of the “promiscuous male” who has so little investment in relationships that they have no response to a breakup and thus no reason to participate in such a study? Are they examples of the purported “loser male” who has limited access to a romantic partner?

We suggest that men who recover quickly from a breakup while experiencing low levels of PRG may be those who possess sufficient resources so that future mates will readily choose them. Males who have low resources and are unlikely to be selected by “choosy women” should experience severe and long-lasting PRG. However, by expressing a strong negative response to a breakup, a man may be signaling to rivals and potential future partners that he expects to have a difficult time

acquiring a new mate—a behavior that is, evolutionarily, harmful to reproductive success. Therefore, the most adaptive behavior for men who have experienced a recent breakup may be to behave as if the breakup has not affected them—men who are “winners” would not care about the breakup because they would have the ability to quickly move on to another relationship. Conversely, or perhaps for this very reason, is it possible that a portion of the male population suffers PRG so severely that they are unable even to consider participation in any such study that addresses a past romantic failure?

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