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Communication after a romantic breakup

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COMMUNICATION AFTER A ROMANTIC BREAKUP

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Introduction

If a romantic relationship leads to a breakup, those involved may experience internal emotional distress (Monroe, et al., 1999). In response to the internal emotional distress, it is likely that a person will find ways to cope in order to help with the emotional distress. Some examples of how a person may cope, include online surveillance (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015) and direct continued communication (Kellas, et al., 2008). A person's ability to cope with a breakup is likely to differ from person to person and can possibly impact a person's mental health (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004) as well as physical health (Kellas, et al., 2008).

Relational communication research has found that the more invested or committed a person is during the time of the relationship, the more difficult it is for them to cope with the breakup (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). Those who report being highly invested for the duration of the relationship are more likely to seek out continued communication with their ex-partner after relationship dissolution (Busboom et al., 2002; Tan et al., 2015). Higher commitment during the relationship also increases the likelihood that a person will attempt to keep tabs on their ex-partner through online surveillance (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). Unfortunately, maintaining contact with an ex-partner after the breakup often, in turn, impairs a person's ability to adjust to post-breakup changes. Thus, slowing down the recovery process which then prolongs the period of their distress (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015).

The first objective of this thesis is to further explicate how a person's investment during their relationship impacts their ability to cope after a breakup. A partial replication and extension of Fox and Tokunaga's (2015) research is undertaken. This thesis explores an individual's tendency to engage in communication relational maintenance behaviors (e.g., texting or calling an ex on a regular basis, visiting one another's home after the breakup, going places with an ex-

partner) once the relationship has been terminated, as a function of investment during the relationship, and psychological distress post breakup.

The second objective of this thesis is to examine how individuals' romantic beliefs may play a role in post breakup coping and communication behavior. Romantic beliefs are associated with how people perceive romantic relationships, revolving around the notion of the ideal relationship and destiny; people are either meant to be together or not, and what is meant to be, will be (Anderson, 2005). Romantic beliefs may impact post breakup coping, as an individual's feelings towards their partner and romance will likely determine how upset they will be if the relationship is terminated. For instance, the termination of a relationship involving an individual who holds a more *ideal* belief regarding romantic involvement (i.e., monogamy and reproduction) may not be as distressing as for someone who holds an *alternative* belief (i.e., casual relationships, friends with benefits, non-exclusive relationships) due to the fact that ideal romantic beliefs are seen as an unobtainable fantasy, while alternative romantic beliefs are viewed as more obtainable (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2018).

This thesis explores the different experiences that individuals have during the time of a romantic breakup by exploring the association between ideal romantic beliefs and post breakup distress, as well as ideal romantic beliefs and post breakup communication. To better understand these differences, I conduct a survey of a series of nonhierarchical multiple regression models. The next section reviews the literature in the following order: post breakup distress, coping, communication with a partner post breakup (both indirect and direct), investment and romantic beliefs.

Literature Review

Post Breakup Distress

If a romantic relationship comes to the stage of termination, a person is likely to experience an internal feeling of loss. The feeling of loss can come from the desire one has for a person, as well as a place or thing that was cherished in the past (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014). When a person has a desire for something that is no longer available to them, they may fall into the emotional state of yearning (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014) which can be detrimental to an individual's mental health (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004). The cognitions caused by this feeling of loss and state of yearning can cause emotional problems such as complicated grief and depression (Monroe, et al., 1999; O'Connor & Sussman, 2014). In some instances, individuals may be at risk for severe mental health risks, such as suicide (Fordwood, et al., 2007).

Another mental health issue that can be caused by a breakup is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common reaction to traumatic events where a person can recover in anywhere from a couple of months, to sometimes years. According to Langeslag & Sanchez (2018), PTSD becomes persistent when individuals process the trauma in a way that leads to a sense of threat in their current life. Once romantic partners make the decision to breakup, they are then left to reflect back on the trauma they felt when the relationship came to an end. When reflecting back on the breakup, a person may be left thinking less of themselves, as if they weren't good enough to be in the relationship. Another possible feeling could be that they now view the world as an unsafe place, where they are unable to let themselves feel vulnerable. These two feeling, caused by the reflection of the breakup, is what turns the experienced trauma into PTSD. Those who experience trauma are at risk for poor adjustment to their new current situation due to their inability to create distance from a painful experience (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018).

When thinking back on memories, it is important to recognize the differences that may occur when recalling both positive and negative memories. Previous research shows that when a person has more positive memories, they are likely to experience high levels of breakup distress but are not likely to show depressive symptoms (Palacio-Gonzales, et al., 2017). When a person has frequent positive memories, they are likely to express breakup distress symptoms such as loneliness, disbelief over the breakup, and feelings of emptiness (Palacio-Gonzalez, et al., 2017). In addition to breakup distress symptoms, those who have a higher frequency of negative memories about the relationship also have higher depressive symptoms (Palacio-Gonzalez, et al., 2017).

Coping

When a person experiences a distressing event, the way they react to that event has been labeled as coping (Mearns, 1991). A person's ability to cope with stress can have an impact on their health and well-being (Lightsey, 1996). Romantic breakups can impact people differently, causing extreme pain and sadness to some (Grello, et al., 2006), or be seen as a learning experience which causes strength and growth in others (Tuval-Mashiach, et al., 2014). The way a person regulates their emotions in regard to the impact of the breakup partially explains how a person copes with the breakup. When a person suppresses negative moods, post-breakup growth is highly unlikely (Norona, et al., 2018). In contrast, cognitive appraisal, which refers to the process in which potentially stressful events are evaluated for meaning and significance to individual well-being (Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018), can be more insightful as it assists in regulating negative moods and allows room for a person to learn and grow from the breakup (Norona, et al., 2018).

According to Langeslag and Sanchez (2018), decisions to suppress emotions or gain insight from the breakup can be determined by primary and secondary appraisals of the situation. Secondary appraisal of an assessment reflects on the options for coping that a person has while primary appraisal is what is at stake in a situation, which requires coping. Previous studies have found that the strategies a person uses to cope determines their reactions to distressing events. For example, when a person uses problem-solving strategies, that individual experiences more positive emotional outcomes. On the other hand, if a person tends to distance themselves from the problem, they are more likely to experience a more negative coping outcome (Billings & Moos, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Holahan & Moos, 1987). According to Rotter's (1982) model for behavior potential: Primary appraisal parallels represent value, while secondary appraisals represent expectancy (Folkman, et al., 1986).

Once a person has come to terms with the breakup, they will lean to one side or the other in coping with it, either deciding to suppress their emotions or taking part in cognitive appraisal, by allowing themselves to gain an understanding on the situation and the meaning of the relationship, as well as the breakup (Norona, et al., 2018; Langeslag & Sanchez, 2018). In a study which focuses on interpersonal emotion regulation (IER), Williams and colleagues (2018) found that when a person has emotional goals (i.e., to gain understanding about a breakup) they are motivated to use social behaviors for coping.

Communication with an ex-partner post breakup

Social behaviors require interaction to occur between at least two people (Gunaydin, et al., 2014). Considering a person is likely to have some type of emotional goal after their romantic relationship has come to an end with their ex-partner, it is possible that there will be some type of communication after the breakup occurs (Williams, et al., 2018). The

communication may range anywhere from frequently visiting an ex-partner's social media sites (a more indirect form of communication) (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015), to sending texts or planning a lunch date with an ex-partner (a more direct form of communication) (Kellas, et al., 2008).

Online Surveillance

Social media is a mainstream form of communication. This form of communication allows people to interact with others, both near and far (Trottier, 2012). Previous research has found that social media makes it much more difficult for partners to completely cut their ex out of their life because it makes a person's life much more accessible to others due to the photos, videos, etc. that people are now putting out on the web (Trottier, 2012). Social networking sites were created for people to share content and network with others. However, research suggests that more and more people are using social networking sites as a way to engage in the surveillance of others (Tokunaga, 2011). Interpersonal electronic surveillance is characterized as a strategy where one uses technology to gain awareness of another person's behaviors, whether it be online or offline. A person may use interpersonal electronic surveillance to gain awareness of behaviors from a number of people including friends, romantic partners, coworkers, or family members. There is typically a goal in mind when choosing to take part in surveillance on a specific person (Tokunaga, 2011). Many romantic partners take part in surveillance of their partner due to jealousy, which can have a negative impact on their mental health and the relationship overall (Marshall, 2012; Frampton & Fox, 2018).

The reasons why romantic partners use surveillance with their partners during the relationship may also continue after the termination of the relationship. According to previous research, one-half to two thirds of people have used Facebook to get into contact with their ex-partner and over half admit to looking through their ex-partner's photos to find pictures of their

ex-partner with a new romantic partner (Marshall, 2012). If a person continues to view their ex-partner's social media accounts, it is found to be positively correlated with an increase in distress and may disrupt emotional recovery during the stage of the breakup (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015; Marshall, 2012). If a person views their ex-partners social media page after the breakup, they are more likely to experience negative feelings, sexual desire and longing for their ex-partner in turn experiencing low levels of personal growth (Marshall, 2012).

Direct Communication

Considering previous research has found there to be a positive correlation between social media surveillance and post breakup distress, it is beneficial to explore the role that more direct means of communication play in post breakup distress. Once a romantic relationship has come to an end, it is possible that individuals may be in direct contact with their ex-partner such as phone calls and text messages or meeting out for lunch to catch up.

Although it sounds ideal to have a clean break with an ex-partner, it's true that rarely anyone ever gets to experience that (Kellas et al., 2008). During the time of a romantic relationship, partners tend to blend certain parts of their lives (Kellas, et al., 2008) causing an adjustment to be made once the relationship has come to an end. Due to this blend of assets, ex-partners may hope to remain friends, requiring both partners to figure out how they will share and/or divide the custody of things like property or children, or even communicate with one another at the workplace, school, or within their social network due to mutual members within their networks (Kellas, et al., 2008; Dailey, 2020). Ex-partners may also take part in continued communication with each other to "dress the grave" (Kellas, et al., 2008). This term refers to ex-partners continued communication in order to create a relational story to tell those outside of the partnership, including friends and family. This story is typically created so that others can gain

an understanding on why the breakup occurred and where each person now stands individually (Rollie & Duck, 2006).

Many scholars find continued communication to make the process of a breakup easier, as it allows both partners to gain a sense of their individual self, separating one another from the partnership by using clear communication (Kellas & Manusov, 2003). By opening up room for communication between both partners, it allows everyone involved the ability to make sense of the relationships decline. Communication after the breakup gives both partners the opportunity to not only reflect back on the different stages of the relationship, but to also see where the other person stands after the relationship has come to an end (Kellas & Manusov, 2003). Having that access allows each person to assign characters, roles, and plots to the possibly confusing and traumatic events associated with the relationship and breakup. This creation of a narrative is a sense-making process that leads to a sense of satisfaction and alterations to self and other (Kellas & Manusov, 2003). Of course, direct communication with an ex-partner also entails risks, as it opens up the ability for a person to be rejected, placing them in a vulnerable situation (Sommer & Bernieri, 2015).

On-off relationships are also a possible outcome that transpires due to continued communication after a breakup. Some partners choose to discuss what went wrong, and then realize it can be changed if they got back together. While on the other hand, some partners just get back together, simply out of habit, which tends to eventually result in another breakup (Dailey, et al., 2013).

In sum, after a breakup, one's ex-partner is both a reminder of loss (i.e., representing the terminated relationship) but also a source by which the individual may engage in ongoing meaning-making – about the self, the relationship that was shared, the reasons for its dissolution,

and the possibilities for reconciliation or separate growth (Tokunaga, 2011). Continued direct or indirect communication with an ex-partner may therefore play an important role in post-breakup coping. This may include using surveillance on social media to keep up to date with an ex-partner behind closed doors (Tokunaga, 2011) or relational maintenance behaviors such as calling or texting an ex-partner (Kellas, et al., 2008). To best understand a person's coping, it is also beneficial to consider the components of the relationship when it was intact. Specifically, the investment an individual had in the relationship.

Investment

Investment refers to the size and importance of the resources a person attaches to the romantic relationship and the possible decline or loss in value, if the relationship were to be terminated (Becker, 1960; Rubin & Brockner, 1975; Staw, 1976; Teger, 1980; Tropper, 1972; Rusbult, et al., 1998). Personal resources invested may include emotions, time, and money (Kleinert, at al., 2020).

Investment is strongly predictive of relational parties' commitment (Sprecher, 1988). Specifically, when partners have invested heavily in their relationship, they form a strong intention to stay together and see themselves as being connected (i.e., developing a sense of "we-ness"; Rusbult, et al., 1998). Those who are highly invested also adopt an orientation that reflects taking into account how things will affect the relationship long-term (Rusbult, et al., 2011). According the Rusbult and colleagues (2011), a person's level of commitment directly influences everyday behavior in relationships and that mediates investments on behavior. Those who are highly committed are inclined to promote relationship persistence and do the things that are best for the relationship, no matter what the risk (Rusbult, et al., 2011).

A person's level of investment can also be a predictor of a relationship's success. It is completely normal for partners in a romantic relationship to experience disagreements, as well as times of dissatisfaction (Cramer, 2003). However, how both partners react to these instances can be crucial to the relationship. When a partner invests a lot into the relationship, they are more likely to create fairly constructive responses when they become dissatisfied in order to talk through the issue and find a resolution. These reactions include things such as discussing problems, compromising, adopting an active problem-solving orientation, or simply waiting patiently for conditions to improve (Rusbult, et al., 2011). If someone reports as not investing much into the relationship, they are more likely to take part in relatively destructive behaviors when experiencing dissatisfaction in their relationship. These behaviors could include ignoring the partner, quietly allowing the relationship to decay, or even ending the relationship (Rusbult, et al., 2011). According to Hadden and colleagues (2019), when a relationship begins to regress from a more serious relationship to a less serious relationship, levels of satisfaction and investment begin to decrease. This research suggests that in addition to predicting breakup, the investment model also predicts the development of relationships and whether or not they have the potential to develop successfully (Hadden, et al., 2019).

If the relationship does come to the point of termination, a person's levels of investment can carry on into their response to the breakup. When it comes to post breakup coping and communication, previous research has found that when a person is highly invested during the time of their relationship, they are more likely to surveille their ex-partner's social media account after the relationship has been terminated. By contrast, if they don't feel an attachment to their ex-partner, they are less likely to be interested in keeping up with their ex-partner's life (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015).

Investment may also influence one's attempts to continue direct communication with an ex-partner. Previous findings in relation to investment and post breakup coping/communication suggest that those who are heavily invested in their relationship, are likely to try and maintain a relationship with their former partner (Tan, et al., 2015). Additional studies have also found that those who received more resources, whether it be material or emotional, from their ex-partner have been shown to strive towards continuing a positive friendship, rather than completely removing their ex-partner from their life (Busboom et al., 2002).

Taken together, previous research suggests that investment is determined by the amount of assets a person connects to the relationship, which could potentially lose value or be lost if the relationship were to be terminated (Becker, 1960; Rubin & Brockner, 1975; Staw, 1976; Teger, 1980; Tropper, 1972; Rusbult, et al., 1998). When partners find themselves blending the assets in their lives, such as property or mutual friends, they must keep in contact in order to make any adjustments they feel necessary once the two partners become separated (Kellas, et al., 2008). In addition to the external adjustments being made, internal feelings of loss are likely to arise if or when a romantic relationship comes to the stage of termination (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014). Experiencing a feeling of loss can cause one to go into an emotional state of yearning as they continue to desire something that is no longer available to them (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014) which can negatively impact an individual's mental health (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004). Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

H1: The greater investment a person reports in their romantic relationship, the greater their distress after relational termination.

H2: The greater investment a person reports in their romantic relationship, the more they engage in online surveillance of their ex-partner after the relational termination.

H3: The greater investment a person reports in their romantic relationship, the more they engage in direct communication with their ex-partner after relational termination.

Romantic Beliefs

As posed in the above hypotheses, there is believed to be a relationship between a person's investment during the time of the relationship, and their post-breakup experience. However, certain factors could potentially complicate this relationship. One of them being romantic beliefs.

Before a person enters into a romantic relationship, they have preconceptions of what relationships should be like and what characteristics about others they regard as satisfying. These beliefs are referred to as *romantic beliefs* (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Beliefs associated with the so-called *romantic ideal* include the idea that love is a basis for marriage, that love at first sight is possible, that there can only be one true love, that true love lasts forever, and that love can overcome all obstacles (Hatfield & Sprecher,1986; Knox & Sporakowski, 1968; Heiss, 1991; Sprecher & Metts, 1989).

Although scholars agree that romantic beliefs are associated with the romantic ideal, many continue to disagree on how an individual's romantic beliefs are formed. Some scholars have argued that the experience of romantic love is universal, while other scholars have found these ideals to be heavily influenced by one's culture (Anderson, 2005). Anderson (2005) states that "in Western culture, ideals of romanticism tend to characterize our intimate relationships.", however, scholars like Sprecher and Metts (1989) find romanticism to be a "relatively coherent individual orientation toward love."

Whether or not a person's romantic beliefs are formed by the individual or their culture, scholars have come to the agreement that many people's beliefs do not fall perfectly into the

romantic ideal. Instead, there are many modifications that can be made when it comes to how a person believes a relationship should be as well as the benefits a person feels should come from a romantic relationship (Fletcher & Fitness, 1996). When going into a relationship, it is possible that one may hold the expectations of the romantic ideal. However, it is also possible that romantic beliefs are subject to modification and adaptation in response to experiences within a particular relationship which is then considered to be an *alternative belief* (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

In a study done by Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017), the different expectations an individual may have of their romantic relationship were explored. In their study, they found four expectations that vary in importance to individuals which include connection (i.e., intense feelings of affinity, communion, and understanding), destiny (i.e., perceiving a relationship as predestined and able to withstand all obstacles), passion (i.e., overwhelming attraction, arousal, and desire to be in close physical proximity), and immediacy (i.e., romantic feelings emerging quickly and suddenly; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017).

The different expectations a person has while in a relationship, is a reflection of their overall beliefs on romance. Previous research has found two beliefs on romance to be key in the outcome of a relationship, which include destiny and growth. Destiny beliefs are similar to fixed mind-sets, as they revolve around the binary conceptualization that relationships are either going to work or not (Knee, 1998). In addition, those with strong destiny beliefs are likely to believe that those within a relationship are either meant to be or they are not. Also, that individuals have soulmates (Freedman, et al., 2019). Growth beliefs are tied more to growth mind-sets, and the idea that relationships grow over time (Knee, 1998). Those individuals with strong growth

beliefs see relationships as being malleable and able to improve over time through communication and overcoming hurdles in the relationship (Freedman, et al., 2019).

If both romantic partners believe in romantic destiny, they are likely to be satisfied from the very beginning, which then leads to relationship longevity (Knee, 1998). When both partners also hold the belief in growth independently, relationships tend to be more successful and associated with long-term approaches to dating and relationship maintaining coping strategies (Knee, 1998). By contrast, when two partners don't necessarily hold the same beliefs, it can difficult the relationship and even cause it to come to an end (Vannier, et al., 2018). Furthermore, individuals' unmet romantic expectations for ideal and alternative relationships challenge their ability to feel satisfied, invested, and committed to a relationship (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2018).

According to a study conducted by Brown (2004), those who reported as being more romantic and falling in line with the romantic ideal also reported as having more positive experiences in their relationship including high levels of commitment. Existing research has also found that individuals with romantic ideal beliefs, such as marriage and family, are positively correlated with high levels of investment. However, if both partners are found to have misaligning beliefs, those relationships are associated with lower relationship satisfaction, commitment, and investment (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2018).

As Vannier and O'Sullivan (2018) have stated in previous work, it is possible that individuals are able to recognize to some extent, that holding expectations based on the romantic ideal, can be seen as unobtainable much like a fantasy. By contrast, if a person holds some alternative belief outside of what is seen as ideal, they may be more likely to feel the expectations they have of their partner and their relationship are more obtainable. Therefore, as

Vannier and O'Sullivan (2018) explain, it may be likely that those that hold a more ideal romantic belief are less likely to be as hard on themselves if their expectations are not met in the relationship as they are understood as fantasy. Thus, it is possible that individuals endorsing the romantic ideal are subject to less distress if the relationship ultimately fails.

On the other hand, those who are more romantic in general about relationships, love more in their relationships and report being more satisfied and committed compared with those who are less romantic (Sprecher and Metts, 1999). Therefore, the endorsement of romantic beliefs is likely to have a positive association with post breakup distress and the desire for continued communication, post breakup.

Furthermore, certain romantic beliefs *in particular* are expected to predict post-breakup distress and continued communication. Sprecher and Metts' (1999) and Vannier and Sullivan's (2018) approach to romantic beliefs both include a dimension of destiny as well as robustness to external challenges. This thesis takes the similarity in literature and focuses on two dimensions of romantic beliefs -- *love finds a way* and *one and only. Love finds a way* is the romantic belief that no matter what happens in the relationship, both partners will work through all obstacles in order to make the relationship work. *One and only* includes is the romantic belief that there is only one person out there for everyone. Both of these sub-dimensions align with the emphasis that Vannier and O'sullivan (2017) put on 'destiny' and the expectations that a person may have for their relationship to withstand all obstacles, as they perceive their relationship to be predestined.

Beliefs in the existence of a predestined partner and the ability of romantic love to endure against all odds is likely to predict post break-up experiences for the following reason. First,

those who believe there is only one person out there for them are likely to experience distress if their relationship with their 'one true person' comes to an end, as they feel there is no one else for them. In addition, if a person believes there is only one person out there for them and that their love can overcome anything, it's likely they will continue to fight to be with that person by keeping in contact with them in order to mend the relationship.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H4: Endorsement of the *love finds a way* and *one and only* romantic beliefs positively associates with post breakup distress.

H5: Endorsement of the *love finds a way* and *one and only* romantic beliefs positively associates with continued communication with an ex-partner once the relationship has been terminated.

Methods

Participants

Following institutional review board (IRB) approval, 83 individuals voluntarily completed a web-based survey. The participants included students in Communication and Computing classes at a large, private Catholic university in the Midwestern United States. The students from this university who participated were recruited through a participant pool and received course credit for their participation. In addition, participants also included individuals from social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Inclusion criteria stipulated that individuals had experienced a nonmarital romantic breakup at some point in the preceding 12 months and that participants were at least 18 years of age. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 49 years (M= 28.98, SD= 7.32). The majority of participants identified as white (57.7%), with

smaller percentages identifying as Asian (15.5%), Hispanic (11.3%), African American (4.2%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.4%). More than half (59.7%) of participants identified as female, 37.5% identified as male, and 1.4% identified as transgender. The majority of participants identified as straight/heterosexual (76.4%), with smaller percentages identifying as bisexual (9.7%), gay (4.2%), lesbian (4.2%), queer (1.4%), and questioning (1.4%). The average length of lapsed time since the termination of relationship (in months) was ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 3.64$). The average length of time (in months) that participants were in their relationship was ($M = 16$, $SD = 27.71$).

Procedures

This study focuses on experiences that the participants had both during and after their romantic relationship. Participants were first asked to recall their level of investment during the time of their romantic relationship. Participants were then asked questions about their experience once the relationship had been terminated regarding their mental health and how it may have been affected by the breakup. Participants then answered questions about the communication that took place between them and their ex-partner after the breakup. Finally, participants responded to questions about their own personal beliefs on romance and dating and also provided demographic information.

Instrumentation

Investment

Investment was measured using an adapted version of the global items in the Investment Model used by Rusbult, et al., (1998). Using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*), participants indicated the level of investment they felt they had during the duration of their relationship with their ex-partner. The adapted version of the global items in the Investment

Model includes nine items (e.g., "I put a great deal into our relationship that I could have lost," "Many aspects of my life became linked to my partner," "I put things into our relationship that were lost because our relationship ended;" ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.15$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$)). Scale items are included as Appendix A.

Post Breakup Distress

Distress was measured using the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) (Field, et al., 2010), which was adapted from the Inventory of Compliance Grief (ICG) (Prigerson, et al., 1995), referring to the former relational partner rather than a deceased person. The Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) includes sixteen items (e.g., "I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do things I normally do," "Memories of the person upset me," "I go out of my way to avoid reminders of the person;" ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.33$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$)). Each question was accompanied by a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Scale items are included as Appendix B.

Online Surveillance

Online surveillance of an ex-partner was measure using the Post-breakup Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance Scale (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). The scale consists of seven items and was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (e.g., "I often spent time looking through my ex-partner's Facebook pictures;" ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.63$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$)). Scale items are included as Appendix C.

Continued Communication

Direct communication with an ex-partner was measured using an adapted version of the *routine contact and activity items* from the Relational Maintenance Behaviors scale (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005). The scale consists of four items and was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (e.g., "After the breakup, I would text or call my ex-partner on a regular basis;" Cronbach's α = .87). Scale items are included as Appendix D.

Romantic Beliefs

Romantic beliefs were measured using the four-factor structure of the romantic belief scale (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The scale includes a total of fifteen items, which are split up into four different dimensions: *love finds a way* (Cronbach's α = .83)*, one and only* (Cronbach's α = .74)*, love at first sight* (Cronbach's α = -.10)*, and idealization* (Cronbach's α = .69)*. For the purpose of this study, *love finds a way* and *one and only* were the dimensions of focus and were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. *Love finds a way* (e.g., "If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles," "I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; it won't fade with time" [$M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.15$]). *One and only* (e.g., "I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever," "One I experience 'true love,' I could never experience it again, to the same degree with another person" [$M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.47$]). Scale items are included as Appendix E.

Results

A correlation was conducted to partially replicate Fox and Tokunaga's (2015) study which explores the relationship between investment and online surveillance. Table 1 displays the correlation between variables, showing no correlation between investment and online surveillance ($r = .44$, $p = -.02$). Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

A pair of nonhierarchical multiple regression models were conducted to evaluate the remaining hypotheses. In these separate models, post breakup distress (Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 4) and continued communication (Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 5) were regressed on levels of investment and romantic beliefs. Predictor variables were mean centered prior to analysis. Table 2 displays the standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for each model.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) and Hypothesis 4 (H4). H1 predicted that investment would positively associate with post breakup distress, while H4 predicted that endorsement in the ideal romantic beliefs of *love finds a way* and *one and only* would positively associate with post breakup distress. The overall model was significant $R^2 = .30$, adjusted $R^2 = .26$, $F(3,68) = 9.50$, $p < .001$. Investment and the *love finds a way* romantic belief, - but not the *one and only* romantic belief - emerged as significant predictors of post breakup distress. H1 was supported and H4 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) and Hypothesis 5 (H5). H2 predicted that investment would positively associate with continuous communication with an ex-partner post breakup. H5 predicted that endorsement in the ideal romantic beliefs of *love finds a way* and *one and only* would positively associate with continued communication with an ex-partner post breakup. The overall model was not statistically significant, $R^2 = .06$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$, $F(3,68) = 1.40$, $p = .25$. H2 and H5 were not supported.

Discussion

This study examines how an individual's level of investment during their romantic relationship, as well as their romantic beliefs of *love finds a way* and *one and only*, contribute to both their distress and continued communication with their ex-partner, post breakup. The

findings move scholars toward a better understanding of the role of investment and romantic beliefs as well as a person's experience once the relationship has been terminated.

Investment and Post Breakup Experiences

Consistent with predictions and previous research (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014; Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004), investment positively associated with post breakup distress. Investing in a relationship entails blending assets such as property or mutual friends (Kellas, et al., 2018). Once those assets become separated again due to the termination of the relationship, they are likely to lose value (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014). From this loss in value, internal feelings of loss are likely to arise which can then negatively impact a person's mental health (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004). Results from this study support the idea that those who reported as having high levels of investment during the time of their relationship, experienced higher levels of distress.

Contrary to predictions, investment did not positively associate with direct communication with, or indirect surveillance of, an ex-partner after a breakup. This study was rooted from a partial replication of previous research done by Fox and Tokunaga (2015), which examines investment in romantic relationships and its association with online surveillance with an ex-partner. The predictions for this study were based on the Fox and Tokunaga's (2015) work which found that when a person is highly invested during the time of the relationship, they are more likely to surveille their ex-partner's social media account after the relationship has been terminated (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015).

In the present study, there was no statistically significant correlation found between investment and online surveillance. The difference in findings could be due to the fact that these two studies were done six years apart from one another, which could be problematic when

comparing the use of technology. As time goes on, the use of social networking sites continues to increase, and also be used for many different things (Bardus, et al., 2020). Relational ex-partners use of social media in 2021 may differ from those in 2015 in that security and the ability to select who you share things with is more accessible now. There are options to share what you post with only the people you select, and you can also choose to block or mute those you don't wish to share content with back and forth. From this newer capability, people can be more conscious of what they should or shouldn't be viewing, as well as what they are even capable of viewing.

The predictions regarding investment and continued communication post-breakup were also not borne out here. Considering the predictions were not proven and were not in line with the findings from Fox and Tokunaga (2015), it is beneficial to recognize the differences between online surveillance and direct communication in order to better understand the difference in these findings. Taking part in direct communication is much riskier than surveilling social media, as the ex-partner is aware that the other person wishes to keep in contact. This places the person who chooses to initiate the communicate in a vulnerable situation, as there is a possibility for rejection (Sommer & Bernieri, 2015; Kellas, et al., 2008). This increase in risk and vulnerability could potentially be the reason why the findings for this study differ from previous research as people may be cautious of possible rejection when directly communicating with their ex-partner, and instead, would rather take part in online surveillance.

Romantic Beliefs and Post Breakup Experiences

This study further examined whether a person's endorsement of the romantic beliefs of *love finds a way* and *one and only* associated with post breakup distress. Findings suggest that the more a person endorsed the ideal romantic belief of *love finds a way* (i.e., a relationship can work despite any obstacles), the more distress they experience once the relationship has been

terminated. However, there was no association found between the endorsement of the ideal romantic belief of *one and only* (i.e., there can be only one true love), and post break-up distress.

Taken together, these results suggest that belief in the endurance of a romantic relationship, as represented in the *love finds a way* belief, is a better predictor of post-breakup distress than *one and only*. The *love finds a way* belief may lead to increased distress because if a person holds the belief that they can overcome any obstacle with their partner and then the relationship comes to an end because they have tried everything they possible could, the person is likely to not only experience a feeling of loss (Monroe, et al., 1999; O'Connor & Sussman, 2014), but they are also likely to feel as if they have failed. The feeling of being a failure is likely to cause distress (Mclean, et al., 2004), especially when being paired with the feeling of loss (Monroe, et al., 1999).

The lack of association between the romantic belief of *one and only* may be partially explained by previous research, which states that those who hold an ideal belief on romance experience lower levels of distress due to their understanding that their expectations on romance are unrealistic and unobtainable (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2018). It is possible that if a person believes that there is only one person out there for them and then the relationship becomes terminated, they may come to terms with how unrealistic that idea may be, considering the number of people in the world that could be potential partners for them.

This study failed to find an association between a person's romantic beliefs of *love finds a way* and *one and only* and direct communication with their ex-partner once the relationship has been terminated. This finding was surprising given that a key tenet of romanticism is willingness for an individual to fight for the person they love. For example, according to the Romantic Beliefs Scale, those who have adopted the ideal romantic belief of *love finds a way* score highly

on the item, 'I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise' (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). In fact, endorsement of romanticism and exposure to romantic idealization may even increase tolerance of intrusive relational pursuit or stalking (Dunlap, et al., 2014; Lippman, 2018).

The lack of findings may be due to unmeasured variables. For instance, the circumstance of the breakup may play a role in continued communication. For example, someone may hold ideal romantic beliefs, but if their partner cheats on them, they may be less likely to take part in continuous communication. Infidelity could potentially change a person's beliefs towards their partner because they can see that their partner doesn't hold the same values and beliefs as them. Additionally, it could make a person realize that the person they thought to be their soulmate is actually not the one for them. Something else that could have an impact on a person's communication with their ex-partner after the breakup is who made the decision to terminate the relationship. A breakup can happen and be caused by a number of different things, but there are situations (e.g., infidelity, lying, abuse) that could immediately change the way a person feels about the person they were romantic with, leading them to cut all ties.

Practical Implications

This thesis contributes to a better understanding of the impact a person's investment and romantic beliefs has on their experiences post breakup, specifically distress and continuous communication between ex-partners. The finding of this study can be relevant to anyone who has experienced a breakup, is thinking about terminating a romantic relationship, or is currently in a romantic relationship. Additionally, this study can be useful for those providing support to someone who is going through a breakup. By understanding the impact that a person's

investment has on their experience throughout the breakup and also how a person's romantic beliefs can potentially complicate these experiences, one may be able to better cope with the overall experience as they can get down to the root of why they are feeling the way that they are.

Limitations

As previously stated, these data were collected using an untested measure of Relational Maintenance Behaviors, as the routine and activity items created by Guerreo and Chavez (2005) were switched to past tense, causing participants to recall on the items. Although all participants experienced their breakup within the last 12 months, the fact that the entire study was all recall based could be problematic. It is possible that participants could have forgotten certain parts of the relationship, as well as the breakup. Also, participants could have reported incorrectly on themselves when it comes to their investment levels because it is from their own point of view. They also may want to make themselves seem more invested than they really were during the relationship. When it comes to the sample itself, majority of the participants reported as being White, which limits generalizability of participants' reported experiences (Henrich, et al., 2010). There were also only 83 participants that fully completed the survey, which is a fairly small sample size.

Future Research

In the future, other ways that people may be motivated to keep an ex-partner in their lives outside of surveillance and direct communication, could allow for a better understanding on the extent to which people desire to stay in touch with an ex-partner. For example, ex-partners who are embedded in social networks may maintain relationships via third parties (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Future research could also look into who initiated the breakup as that is likely to play a very large role in the way a person reports their experience coping with the breakup.

Finally, it could be beneficial in the future to include factors external to the relationship that necessitate interaction (e.g. ex-partners who are coworkers or co-parents).

Conclusion

As the adage says, relationships can both be the greatest joy we experience as well as the greatest loss we experience. Although not everyone adopts the ideal romantic belief, gaining an understanding on how romantic beliefs influence the loss many experience are important and useful in helping to move forward, both individually and romantically. This study demonstrates that investment and romantic beliefs impact a person's distress post breakup and underscores the role that online surveillance and direct communication with an ex-partner play in a person's post breakup experiences. Continued research in this area will help individuals to grasp a better understanding on their emotions and why they are feeling and acting in the way that they are, when experiencing relational termination as an all-but-inevitable fact of life.

Table 1 Correlation Matrix of Investment and Romantic Beliefs of *Love Finds A Way* and *One and Only* and Post Breakup Behaviors

	Investment	Distress	Surveillance	Direct Communication	RB-Love Finds	RB-One and Only
Investment		--	--	--	--	--
Distress	.47**		--	--	--	--
Surveillance.	-.02	.20*		--	--	--
Direct Communication	.10	.22*	.09		--	--
Love Finds A Way- RB	.12	.32**	.21*	.17		--
One and Only- RB	.11	.27*	.13	.22*	.55**	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

N = 72

Table 2 Summary of Regression Analyses for Investment and Romantic Beliefs of *Love Finds A Way* and *One and Only* predicting Post Breakup Distress and Continued Communication

Distress

Predictor	*B*	*t*	Zero-Order	Squared Part Correlation
Investment	.50**	4.19**	.47	.18
Romantic Beliefs-Love Finds A Way	.25*	1.76*	.32	.03
Romantic Beliefs-One and Only	.09	.80	.27	.01

$R^2 = .30$, adjusted $R^2 = .26$, $F(3,68) = 9.50$, $p < .001$

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$

Continued Communication

Predictor	*B*	*t*	Zero-Order	Squared Part Correlation
Investment	.10	.62	.10	.006
Romantic Beliefs-Love Finds A Way	.07	.39	.17	.002
Romantic Beliefs-One and Only	.19	1.31	.22	.02

$R^2 = .06$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$, $F(3,68) = 1.40$, $p = .25$

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$

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Appendix A

Investment Model Global Items (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998); Adapted

1. I put a great deal into our relationship that I could have lost

2. Compared to other people I know, I invested a great deal

3. I felt very involved in our relationship—like I had put a great deal into it

4. Many aspects of my life became linked to my partner

5. My relationships with friends and family members became complicated

6. I invested a great deal in our relationship that I lost

7. I put things into our relationship that were lost because our relationship ended

8. There were special activities that were associated with our relationship

9. There were things that became tied to our relationship that I have now lost

Appendix B

Breakup Distress Scale (BDS)—Adapted from the Inventory of Compliance Grief Scale (Field, et al., 2010)

1. I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do things I normally do

2. Memories of the person upset me

3. I feel I cannot accept the breakup I've experienced

4. I feel drawn to places and things associated with the person

5. I can't help feeling angry about the breakup

6. I feel distressed about what happened

7. I feel stunned or dazed over what happened

8. Ever since the breakup it is hard for me to trust people

9. Ever since the breakup I feel like I have lost the ability to care about other people or I feel distant from people I care about

10. I have been experiencing pain since the breakup

11. I go out of my way to avoid reminders of the person

12. I feel that life is empty without the person

13. I feel bitter over the breakup

14. I feel envious of others who have not experienced a breakup like this

15. I feel lonely a great deal of the time since the breakup

16. I feel like crying when I think about the person

Appendix C

Post-breakup Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance Scale (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015)

1. When visiting my ex-partner's Facebook page, I would read the new posts of his/her friends.

2. I often spent time looking through my ex-partner's Facebook pictures.

3. I paid particularly close attention to news feeds and posts that mentioned my ex-partner.

4. I noticed when my ex-partner updated his/her Facebook page.

5. If there were messaged on my ex-partner's wall or pictures I didn't understand, I tried to investigate them.

6. I was generally aware of my ex-partner's Facebook activities.

7. I would explore my ex-partner's Facebook page to see if there was anything new or exciting.

Appendix D

Relational Maintenance Behaviors- routine contact and activity items (Guerrero and Chavez, 2005); Adapted

1. After the breakup, I would text or call my ex-partner on a regular basis.

2. After the breakup, I would go places with my ex-partner on a regular basis.

3. After the breakup, my ex-partner and I would visit one another's homes or apartments on a regular basis.

4. After the breakup, I would initiate phone calls to my ex-partner.

Appendix E

Four-Factor Structure-- Romantic Beliefs Scale (Sprecher and Metts, 1989)

<u>Love finds a way</u>

1. If I were in love with someone, I would commit myself to him or her even if my parents and friends disapproved of the relationship.

2. If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles.

3. If I love someone, I will find a way for us to be together regardless of the opposition to the relationship, physical distance between us or any other barrier.

4. If a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (e.g. lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome.

5. I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; it won't fade with time.

6. I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise.

<u>One and only</u>

1. Once I experience 'true love,' I could never experience it again, to the same degree with another person.

2. I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever.

3. There will be only one real love for me.

Love at first sight

1. I need to know someone for a long period of time before I fall in love with him or her.

2. When I find my 'true love' I will probably know it soon after we meet.

3. I am likely to fall in love almost immediately if I meet the right person.

Idealization

1. I'm sure that every new thing I learn about the person I choose for a long-term commitment will please me.

2. The relationship I have with my 'true love' will be nearly perfect.

3. The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; for example, he/she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding.