Negotiating the Breakup of Romantic Relationships in an Era of New Media

by

Julia Wreford

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ABSTRACT

Negotiating the Breakup of Romantic Relationships in an Era of New Media

Julia Wreford
University of Guelph, 2016

Advisors:
Dr. Serge Desmarais and Dr. Arlene Young

Existing research indicates that the relationship between post-breakup contact and recovery is complicated, particularly when new media provide the avenue for such contact (Lukacs, 2012; Marshall, 2012). The primary objective of this dissertation was to gain a more meaningful understanding of the post-breakup relational landscape for young people, taking into account the intersection of new media and breakups. More specifically, the objectives were to investigate the impact that new media has had on perceived breakup norms, to assess whether or not young people act in a way that is consistent with such norms, and to establish whether, and under what conditions, post-breakup contact can be healthy. To meet these goals, the current investigation involved a qualitative survey for Study 1 (N= 97), and a set of interviews for Study 2 (N= 27), to explore the behaviours and perceived emerging norms of young people who are navigating post-breakup decisions. Questions in both studies were designed to learn more about post-breakup contact, with special attention paid to the impact new media have had on post-breakup contact.

Results of both Study 1 and Study 2 indicated that a number of new perceived norms have emerged for post-breakup contact as a result of the incorporation of new media into such norms. Results of Study 2 also indicated that while young people are aware that certain norms for post-breakup contact exist, they do not always act in a way that is congruent with their own personal normative beliefs. When there is incongruence, young people engage in motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) to explain their behaviour. Implications that take into account the weight of social norms, while remaining cognizant of young peoples’ post-breakup recovery, are discussed.
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Negotiating the Breakup of Romantic Relationships in an Era of New Media

Breaking up is hard to do, and dealing with the aftermath can be even harder. Young people are exposed to myriad messages about how to proceed after a breakup (Field, 2011; Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds & Delgado, 2010; Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008; Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). Beyond the advice that young people glean from their immediate social network, mass media provide countless messages about how to endure a breakup effectively. Suggestions about whether or not to “unfriend” or “unfollow” a previous romantic partner are often included in this advice, an indication of how pervasive social networking has become and its impact on romantic relationship breakups (Garimella, Weber & Cin, 2014; Gershon, 2010; LeFebvre, Blackburn & Brody, 2014). To this point, one study has found that, in the aftermath of a breakup, it is typical to lose 15-20 friends and followers on Twitter (Garimella et al., 2014). Thus, these post-breakup decisions appear to have significant relational implications, beyond the impact that these decisions have for the dyad.

In the aftermath of a breakup, there are a number of decisions to be made about post-breakup contact. Research has only recently recognized the impact that new media may have on these choices (Gershon, 2010). While there are numerous studies that examine how new media complicate certain aspects of relationships (e.g. Doornwaard, Moreno, van den Eijnden, Vanwesenbeeck, & Bogt, 2014; McAndrew & Shah, 2013; Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2014; Sprecher, 2011; Tokunaga, 2014), very few investigate the impact of new media on romantic breakups. In addition, researchers often assume that a breakup results in a termination of contact, or have not explored post-breakup contact as a potentially normative phenomenon (e.g., Battaglia, Richard, Datteri & Lord, 1998; Baxter, 1984; Duck, 1982). There is a limited relationship dissolution literature that offers some insight into the impact of post-breakup
contact, particularly when post-breakup contact was unavoidable (Foley & Fraser, 1998; Sprecher, Felmlee, Schmeckle & Shu, 2006; Weiss, 1975). Only recently have models taken into account the possibility of post-dissolution dyadic processes (see Battaglia et al., 1998; Rollie & Duck, 2006). Nonetheless, post-breakup contact is a minimally understood phenomenon, especially when it takes into account the more recent impact of new media.

Though the lack of understanding around breakup phenomena perseveres, the actual number of breakups encountered by young people is increasing. With the age of first marriage rising for adults, the opportunity for non-marital romantic involvements also increases (Parker, Wang & Brown, 2014). Similarly, the opportunity for romantic breakups increases. These romantic breakups are considered a critical social disruption, often regarded by young people as among the most distressing psychological events that one can endure (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley & Markman, 2011; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). According to Gilbert and Sifers (2011), the ending of a primary romantic relationship is one of the most common reasons for students to seek support from university counseling centers. Given that breakups are a normative event for emerging adults and often trigger profound distress, it is important to understand how to help young people navigate their consequences. Indeed, it is among the emerging adult demographic that social media is most pervasive.

The majority of research on breakups was conducted prior to the advent of new media. For instance, there is an extensive literature on post-breakup adjustment, dating back to Weiss’s early work on marital separation (1975). Models of dissolution have been proposed and since revised (Duck, 1982; Rollie & Duck, 2006). In more recent breakup script research (see Battaglia et al., 1998; Duck, 2006), there is acknowledgement that on-again/off-again relationships are
more likely than not. This suggests that researchers are slowly recognizing that post-breakup communication is a possibility. However, an issue with such breakup research, particularly that which was conducted before the new millennium, is that it does not take the influence of new media into account. That is, one might wonder how new media have changed the post-breakup relational landscape, including decisions around reconciliation. The impact of new media has been enormous, and breakup research has not been able to keep up with it.

Another reason for the void in our understanding of the way new media impacts breakup behaviour is the failure of conventional quantitative research to capture the context and idiosyncratic nature of these relational events (Gershon, 2008; 2010). By contrast, the current investigation adopted a “qualitative sensibility” to better understand the nature of these intersecting social and relational phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, an underlying premise of this research was that even an “ultimate” breakup is often not the end of communication between previous romantic partners. To that end, I used qualitative analyses to address the understudied intersection of new media, romantic breakups and post-breakup contact.

The overall purpose of this investigation was to gain a broader understanding of breakups in general, focusing specifically on a number of breakup-related phenomena. By extension, another goal of the study was to understand the factors considered when making post-breakup contact decisions, paying special attention to the impact of new media. Combing these two objectives, an additional intention of the study was to determine whether the same factors are considered for conventional post-breakup contact and for post-breakup contact mediated through new media. To provide some background for my program of studies, I will start by outlining what new media are, before discussing breakup-related experiences and outcomes, including post-breakup contact. With that framework established, I will outline the existing research that
examines the intersection of new media and breakups, with a specific focus on post-breakup contact. I will then turn to a brief exploration of social norms, before outlining the objectives of my program of research more comprehensively. Now, let us begin with defining new media.

**What are New Media?**

In the year 2000, text messaging experienced its first boom, with Americans sending an average of 35 text messages a month. Text messaging experienced an even bigger boom when, in 2007, the number of text messages sent each month in the U.S. surpassed the number of monthly phone calls made (Gayomali, 2012). Microsoft launched its first instant messaging application, MSN messenger, in 1999 (Microsoft News Centre, 1999). Though Facebook was launched in 2004, it became more popular in 2006 when anyone over the age of 13 with an email address could create a Facebook account (Zeevi, 2013). Underscoring the popularity of Facebook, a recent study found that young people have an average of 561 Facebook friends (Marshall, 2012). These three radical advancements (text messaging, instant messaging, and social networking) comprise some of the largest changes in technology-based social communication, and remarkably, they all gained substantial popularity in the 21st century.

The term “new media” is used in this investigation as a term for technologically-mediated communication media, and was selected for its “useful inclusiveness” (Lister, 2009). Other terms like “digital,” “electronic,” and “computer-mediated” all involve limitations that would not capture the variety of communication methods young people use in their breakup behaviour. Young people use a variety of communication technologies, including, but not limited to, social networking, text messaging, and instant messaging; “new media” is the term used that best captures these particular media. At times in this investigation, the term “social media” is used, which is reflective of the communicative nature of many of these evolving technologies. Social
media is actually a subset of new media, whereby an individual uses websites and applications to share content and network (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Now that I have outlined what new media comprises, I can speak to the impact of new media on breakup behaviour. Before doing so, though, let us first consider the current research that delves into the consequences of breakups.

**Breakups and their Aftermath**

A large body of research supports the notion that breakups are significant events in the lives of young people, catalyzing a number of associated emotional experiences. These emotions might include grief (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009; Boelen & van den Hout, 2010; Sbarra & Emery, 2005), anger (Collins & Gillath, 2012; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Sbarra & Emery, 2005), guilt (Davis et al., 2003), and, in some cases, a sense of resolution or relief (Davis et al., 2003; Sbarra & Emery, 2005). For many, the loss of a significant romantic relationship is associated with disruption of one’s identity (Weiss, 1975). These feelings are often intense, with post-breakup feelings among university students meeting high-severity criteria on post-traumatic stress scales (Chung et al., 2003). The emotional impact of breakups has been found to mimic bereavement or cardiac arrest, indicating the level of distress that a romantic breakup can involve (Field, 2011; Hebert & Popadiuk, 2008).

Commonly endorsed post-breakup experiences include dissatisfaction and distress. In one study of almost 1300 young adults, 43% of breakups resulted in an observed decline in life satisfaction and a parallel increase in distress (Rhoades et al., 2011). Research on the relationship factors that predict young people’s post-breakup experiences has yielded inconsistent findings. For example, several studies have found a connection between relationship satisfaction and reactions to breakups, but with mixed results (Bullock, Hackathorn, Clark & Mattingly 2011; Madey & Jilek, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2011). Madey and Jilek (2012) found that those who were
more satisfied in their romantic relationship experienced less relief, more depression, and more stress as a result of a breakup. Likewise, young adults who indicated that they were satisfied in their romantic relationship were less likely to start dating other people, but more likely to get back into their former relationship if given the opportunity. Recent research by Bullock and colleagues (2011) found similar results. Based on these findings together, one might conclude that experiencing greater relationship satisfaction results in increased post-breakup distress.

However, another study has suggested that relationship satisfaction can act as a buffer against experiencing profound distress following a breakup (Rhoades et al., 2011). The authors suggest that this finding may result from a connection between relationship quality and attitude, whereby individuals with a positive outlook would be more likely to experiencing satisfying romantic relationships, and these individuals would also have their positive outlook to buffer the psychological toll of the breakup. This finding suggests that the quality of the romantic relationship and the personality factors of the individuals within the dyad intersect to impact the type of post-breakup coping that takes place. It appears there are other intersections of inter-individual and intra-individual factors that predict post-breakup distress and recovery, including investment (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010), relationship-contingent self worth (Park, Sanchez & Brynildsen, 2011), initiator status (Hopper, 1993), and attachment (Madey & Jilek, 2012). I will explain each of these in turn.

Investment is defined as the resources that one attaches to a relationship (Tan, Agnew, VanderDrift & Harvey, 2014). As was the case for satisfaction, research suggests a connection between investment and post-breakup adjustment. Investment in one’s relationship is correlated with increased post-breakup grief (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010). As an extension, relationship-contingent self worth, or the extent to which one’s self-worth is dependent on being in a
particular relationship, is a factor strongly correlated with relationship investment (Park, Sanchez & Brynildsen, 2011). Relationship-contingent self worth, like investment, represents the intersection of personality and relational factors, and, again, is predictive of post-breakup distress (Park et al., 2011). As one invests more in a relationship, and the more one perceives his/her self-worth as reliant on the relationship, it becomes more likely that he/she will experience greater post-breakup distress, should the relationship dissolve.

Perhaps not surprisingly, initiator status (i.e., whether one broke up with his/her partner or one was broken up with) has been associated with post-breakup distress (Hopper, 1993). Several studies support the notion that the person to breakup with their partner experiences an expedited post-breakup recovery than the one who was broken up with (Barutçu Yıldırım, & Demir, 2015; Pettit & Bloom, 1984). Only a few studies (e.g., Hopper, 1993; Sbarra, 2006) did not identify an association between initiator status and recovery outcome. There is evidence that young people, even if they are not the initiator of the breakup, perceive themselves as having some control over the dissolution (Connolly & McIssac, 2009). In circumstances of uncertainty, such as being broken up with, it appears that it may be protective to assume one has more control over the situation than he/she does. The relationship between initiator status and post-breakup adjustment is one that requires further clarification, though this was not one of the factors of focus in the current investigation.

Allow me to now turn to two factors that were not investigated in this program of studies, specifically (1) attachment and (2) gender. Attachment is a factor associated with both post-breakup adjustment and post-breakup contact (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009; Davis et al., 2003; Dutton et al., 2006; Fagundes, 2012; Fox & Warber, 2014; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Madey & Jilek, 2012; Masheter, 1991; Moller Fouladi, McCarth & Hatch, 2003; Sbarra & Emery, 2005;
Weiss, 1975; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2012). To summarize the vast attachment and relationship dissolution literature, it appears that certain attachment styles differentially predict post-breakup coping and contact. For example, more securely attached individuals assign less blame to a previous romantic partner, and show greater readiness to start dating someone else following a breakup. By contrast, insecurely attached individuals show greater longing to rekindle the romantic relationship with their previous romantic partner (Madey & Jilek, 2012). Recently, there has been more inclusion of attachment style in research that examines relationship dissolution and new media. For example, Weisskirch and Delevi (2012) found that attachment anxiety predicted one’s willingness to use new media to terminate a relationship. While there is a push to include attachment as a factor in research examining breakups and new media, attachment style is a factor that lies beyond the scope of my studies. Therefore, it was not a variable that was considered in detail in this particular investigation.

There is also some evidence for gender differences in post-breakup adjustment. For example, men have been found to show less post-breakup coping than women (Helgeson, 1994). Conversely, another study showed that men and women experience similar levels of distress following a breakup (Sprecher, 1994), and yet another study showed that women experience greater distress than males (Field et al., 2010). These mixed findings suggest that other variables may play a role in the way in which gender and post-breakup distress relate to one another. Theories connecting gender and relationship dissolution posit that women might experience more post-breakup growth than men, given that relationships tend to be more fundamental to women’s identity (Duck & Wood, 2006, p.181; see Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). By contrast, men are more likely to experience unhappiness that is specific to the breakup, but are better equipped to compartmentalize such distress (Duck & Wood, 2006, p.182). Although gender is among the
variables often studied in connection with post-breakup coping, gender differences were not a primary focus of this investigation.

Researchers continue to investigate the various connections among post-breakup distress with gender, relational and intrapersonal factors. However, less is known about the relationship between post-breakup contact and post-breakup distress. Before outlining the research on post-breakup contact as it relates to coping and distress, let us first explore various types of post-breakup contact and a few of the many factors that predict continued contact.

**Conventional Post-Breakup Contact**

Post-breakup contact involves any communication between the two individuals engaged in a romantic relationship dissolution that takes place after the breakup event (Tan et al., 2014). For this investigation, the term “conventional contact” will be used to refer to communication that does not involve new media. Thus, conventional contact could include telephone calls, seeing each other in person, or in-person group interactions. Conventional post-breakup contact can include practical conversations related to “uncoupling,” (Foley & Fraser, 1998), unwanted pursuit behaviours (Dutton & Winstead, 2006), attempts to reconcile (Cupach, Spitzberg, Bolingbroke & Tellitocci, 2011) and meaningful post-breakup friendships (Bullock et al., 2011; Foley & Fraser, 1998; Tan et al., 2014), so long as new media is not involved. Essentially, conventional post-breakup contact is comprised of in-person and telephone (i.e., voice call) interactions taking place following a breakup. For the current investigation, I considered continued conventional contact as a broad domain, which includes post-breakup friendships. This is in contrast to other research that investigates specific forms within the domain of continued contact (e.g., “sex with an ex” as discussed in Foley & Fraser, 1998).
There is evidence suggesting that continued contact is a typical post-breakup behaviour among young people. In fact, post-breakup friendships are found to be quite likely. Estimates of prevalence of post-breakup friendships range, in large part depending on the level of closeness of interest to individual researchers. In one study of heterosexual university students, 37% of participants identified one of their three closest opposite sex friends as a former romantic partner (Wreford, 2012). In a longitudinal study of breakups from long distance relationships, 61% described themselves as being friends with their previous romantic partner (Wilmot, Carbaugh & Baxter, 1985). In another study of university students, almost 90% of participants indicated that they are friends with their most recent previous romantic partner (Bullock et al., 2011). Though the prevalence estimates range, these figures all support the notion that maintaining some degree of friendship with a previous romantic partner is quite likely.

Although post-breakup friendships are typical, very little is known about them. This is because the existing models of relationship dissolution have relied on the assumption that the termination of the romantic relationship represents finality within the relational process (Duck, 1982; Tan et al., 2014). Foley and Fraser (1998) also observed that language used around breakups tends to be very final, with terminology such as “ex-partner” being frequently used. Because terms like “ex-partner” have connotations of finality, the term “previous romantic partner” was used as often as possible in this investigation.

Despite the lack of research dedicated to post-breakup contact, a few factors have been delineated as predictive of post-breakup friendships. These include commitment, partner desirability, the quality of the breakup itself, and context sharing. Though time passed since the breakup is associated with diminished grief (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010), findings examining time passed since the breakup as a predictor of post-breakup relationship quality have been
inconclusive (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). Time passed since the breakup is one factor that requires further study to establish its relationship with post-breakup contact.

Commitment has been established as a mediating variable in some studies. For example, Tan and colleagues (2014) have found that, while romantic satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investment predict post-breakup contact, these relationships are all mediated by commitment. In other words, people who are more satisfied and invested, and who experience lower quality of alternatives, experience greater commitment, and in turn, greater post-breakup relational closeness. Though the investment model of relationships (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998) holds the tenant that commitment predicts relationship persistence, it is likely that relationship commitment also predicts post-breakup closeness. Relationship commitment refers to the subjective experience of dependence on a relationship, so it makes sense that this is a factor that would predict increased post-breakup closeness.

A related construct to relational commitment is “friendship valuing” (VanderDrift, Wilson & Agnew, 2013). Friendship valuing, or investing in the relationship as both a friendship and a romantic relationship, is associated with positive relational outcomes and actually buffers against relationship dissolution. In addition, friendship valuing and commitment have been established as significantly associated with one another (VanderDrift et al., 2013). We know from previous research that having a friendship prior to a romantic relationship makes it more likely that previous romantic partners will remain friends after their breakup (Metts, Cupach & Bejlovec, 1989; Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Research also suggests that when friends enter into a romantic relationship, they experience greater relational stability and commitment, and perceive a post-breakup friendship as a reasonable trajectory (Baxter, 1984; Metts et al., 1989). Overall,
these findings infer that friendship valuing and commitment are connected with one another, and both are associated with a greater likelihood of friendship post-breakup.

Research also suggests that partner desirability is a factor predictive of post-breakup friendships (Banks, Altendorf, Greene & Cody, 1987). Likewise, researchers have found that using neglect and avoidance as breakup strategies are negatively associated with post-breakup closeness (Banks et al., 1987; Busboom, Collins, Givertz & Levin, 2002). Extending these predictive factors, Banks and colleagues suggested partner desirability and breakup quality as interconnected, whereby the “disengager” (or the person who pursues the breakup) will use less hurtful strategies to breakup when they perceive their partner as more desirable. Partner desirability and the breakup quality are independently predictive of staying friends after the breakup (Banks et al., 1987; Busboom et al., 2002). These complex relationships suggest that both partner desirability and breakup quality are associated with post-breakup closeness, and yet the nuances of these relationships are yet to be understood completely.

Within a romantic relationship, it is not uncommon for partners to share friends, work and/or educational environments (Slotter, Gardner & Finkel, 2010). Such “context sharing” is associated with post-breakup closeness, whereby previous romantic partners cite reasons of shared work environments or social circles for the maintenance of their relationship following the romantic dissolution (Foley & Fraser, 1998; Sprecher et al., 2006). Moreover, if one’s social network is supportive of the post-breakup friendship, the relationship is much more likely to continue following the breakup (Busboom et al., 2002; Sprecher et al., 2006). In addition, Foley and Fraser (1998) found that most social networks are, in fact, supportive of a continued post-breakup relationship. Couples often share workplaces, educational environments and friends, and
this type of context sharing predicts post-breakup closeness, particularly if the contexts support the continued relationship.

Research on post-breakup friendships has demonstrated that these relationships are qualitatively different from other friendships (Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Post-breakup friendships are described less positively, and the desire for romantic involvement is seen as a significant cost, as compared to other friendships (Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Foley and Fraser (1998) purported that such relationships are maintained because they are unavoidable (i.e., because of unavoidable shared contexts), or because one or both partners does not want to end the romantic aspects of the relationship (see Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Particularly in the latter case, such friendships with previous romantic partners are unbalanced in terms of costs and benefits (Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Post-breakup friendships are experienced differently than other types of friendships, likely in part because they are valued differently than other friendships.

Though it was not a factor explored in the current investigation, allow me to take a moment to present some literature on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and its impact on post-breakup contact. Evidence indicates that violent romantic relationships continue to involve IPV following the actual breakup event (Katz & Rich, 2015). In Katz and Rich’s study (2015), college women who experienced IPV within the romantic relationship were more often the target of threats and intimidation, rather than surveillance, following the breakup with the violent partner. However, other research has established a connection between IPV and post-breakup surveillance; over half of women with a domestic violence order have experienced stalking at some point during their romantic relationship, and just under half have been the target of stalking following the dissolution of the romantic relationship (Logan, Shannon & Cole, 2007). It is
unclear whether or not a breakup constitutes a “risk factor” for increased intimate partner violence (see Katz & Rich, 2015), however Brownridge (2006) has posited that the likelihood of post-breakup IPV depends on several contextual factors, including the circumstances of the breakup (e.g., seeing other people is associated with increased post-breakup IPV), intrapersonal circumstances (e.g. male partner alcohol and drug abuse is associated with increased post-breakup IPV) and, of course, the circumstances of the relationship (e.g., frequency and severity of IPV during the romantic relationship). There is sufficient evidence establishing that IPV during a romantic relationship is associated with IPV following a breakup. However, in this investigation, intimate partner violence was not a specific factor explored in the context of post-breakup contact.

Although we have some knowledge of the factors that predict post-breakup conventional contact, the existing literature on this topic is relatively sparse. At the same time, we have some research suggesting that post-breakup relationships are qualitatively different from other types of friendships. Given that these differences exist, it is important to consider whether the same predictors of post-breakup contact (i.e., commitment, partner desirability, breakup quality and context-sharing) apply when new media is the platform for post-breakup communication. The current investigation extended previous research to consider of the impact of new media on post-breakup contact. Let us turn to some of the existing research examining post-breakup contact through new media platforms.

**Post-Breakup Contact and New Media**

Like conventional post-breakup contact, new media post-breakup contact involves any communication taking place after the breakup. However, in contrast to conventional post-breakup contact, new media post-breakup contact takes place exclusively using the previously
defined new media (e.g., text messaging, instant messaging, and social networking). New media post-breakup contact involves a spectrum of communication quality, ranging from merely having a previous romantic partner as a friend or follower, to engaging in frequent and intense communication with previous romantic partners using new media. New media inserts its presence into almost all aspects of the modern romantic relationship experience, including dating, relationship enhancement (Blais, Craig, Pepler & Connolly, 2008), breakups (Gershon, 2010), and post-breakup contact (Tsai, Shen & Chiang, 2015). When young people consider the ways that new media have impacted breakups, they often indicate that new media are used as a means to terminate a relationship (Gershon, 2008; 2010; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2012). However, using new media as a means to end a relationship is only one way that new media have changed the relationship landscape, especially for young people.

In some ways, the limited findings related to post break-up contact in the context of new media mirror those findings from research examining conventional post-breakup contact. For example, a study investigating dyads’ Twitter posts pre- and post-breakup found that pre-breakup commitment was predictive of post-breakup closeness (Garimella et al., 2014). These findings are consistent with Tan and colleagues’ findings, where Twitter use was not taken into account (2014). However, because there is such a void in the research on new media post-breakup contact, it is hard to know whether such contact is also predicted by the quality of the breakup, mutual contexts, or the other factors typically predictive of post-breakup conventional contact.

It is true that research has determined that some motives pertain either exclusively to, or at least more often to, new media post-breakup contact than to conventional post-breakup contact. One of these factors is previous partner monitoring, which in a new media context is
sometimes referred to as interpersonal electronic surveillance (or more colloquially referred to as “creeping”; Lee & O’Sullivan, 2014; Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015; Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2014). This monitoring phenomenon was initially only studied among current romantic partners, but has since been extended to previous romantic partners (e.g., Darvell, Walsh & White, 2011; Lee & O’Sullivan, 2014; Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015). There has been some evidence in the early current partner monitoring literature suggesting that monitoring might actually increase following a breakup. For example, diminished trust is predictive of increased monitoring behaviour (Darvell et al., 2011; Muise et al., 2014), and given that trust wanes and relationship uncertainty increases during the breakup process (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985; Tong, 2013), it is likely that partner monitoring may increase when relationships end. Because an increasing number of studies are endeavoring to understand previous partner monitoring as a distinct phenomenon from current partner monitoring, we do not have to rely on this speculation alone. For example, research has lent support to the notion that young people engage in partner monitoring to reduce their uncertainty regarding their previous romantic partner’s activities and relationship status, and that the initiator of the breakup is less likely to engage in monitoring than the individual who was broken up with (Tong, 2013). Other studies have conclusively demonstrated that monitoring of a previous romantic partner through new media can obstruct the adjustment process following a romantic breakup (Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015; Marshall, 2012). Marshall’s finding was particularly robust, given that previous romantic partner monitoring through Facebook was prohibitive of post-breakup growth and adjustment over and above offline contact (2012). Taken together, researchers have found that previous partner monitoring through Facebook is associated with greater distress, increased negative feelings, and
increased longing for the previous romantic partner (Lukacs, 2012; Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015; Marshall, 2012).

Monitoring is one means among many others that young people use to stay connected with previous romantic partners. In fact, over 87% of young people continue contact with or monitoring their previous romantic partner through a combination of online and offline means (Lee & O’Sullivan, 2014). Previous partner monitoring represents one of many emerging norms related to the proliferation of new media (Gershon, 2010; Gournelos & Gunkel, 2012). The proliferation of new media has been immeasurably impactful on a range of social norms. Before studying such impact of new media on norms, let us first consider norms from a wider perspective. In doing so, we will reflect on what norms are and how norms are established.

**Norms: What Are They and Where do They Come From?**

Norms describe overall behavioural regularities within a group. They may categorize a group, and furthermore, serve as phenomena to be explained (Henderson, 2012). Norms are often described as “rules,” particularly when discussing norms that govern the social world (Bicchieri, 2006, p.2). For example, gift-giving behaviours represent a type of social norm (Henderson, 2012). Bicchieri (2006) described an important issue with our definition and understanding of norms. For some norms, norm-inconsistent behaviour is just as common as norm-consistent behaviour. For instance, there is significant variance among adherence to norms around alcohol consumption, particularly in different social contexts. The explanation responding to this issue involves the recognition that norms are both created and maintained by those that follow them. This is a “constructivist” definition of norms, whereby a norm can only exist if a sufficient number of people believe that it exits, and behavioural expectations are in line with such a belief (p.2). This understanding of norms was the one adopted in this investigation.
Once a norm is socially constructed, it plays a crucial role in activating a script. Scripts involve the schemata that are connected within a sequence, and schemata describe cognitive structures involving stored knowledge about people, events and roles (Abelson, 1981; Bicchieri, 2006, p.93; see also Fiske & Taylor, 1991). There are a number of scripts that are said to govern common relationship behaviours. For example, researchers have examined scripts related to first dates (Allard, 2013; Serewicz & Gale, 2008), dating more generally (Rose & Frieze, 1993), sexual relationships (Simon & Gagnon, 1984), and finally, breakups (Battaglia et al., 1998; Koenig Kellas, Bean, Cunningham & Yun Cheng, 2008).

Several researchers have examined breakups as a scripted phenomenon. One study determined that a 16-step fundamental script underlies the process of a breakup, including elements such as “consider breakup”, “act distant”, “communicate feelings”, and “move on/recover” (Battaglia et al., 1998). Similarly, other research suggests that the entire experience can be reduced to a series of predictable moments or events, indicating that there are very limited pathways or trajectories involved in the breakup process (Koenig Kellas et al, 2008; Baxter, 1984). Though breakups are said to follow a script, Foley and Fraser (1998) suggested that post-breakup relationships are somewhat scriptless. Their interview study indicated that there are too few young people behaving in certain ways to outline a post-breakup relationship script (Bicchieri, 2006; Foley & Fraser, 1998). Though perhaps a sequence of typical behaviours (that is, a script) cannot be established, there is certainly support for the notion that new norms have emerged and are emerging for post-breakup relationships (Garimella, Weber & Cin, 2014; Gershon, 2010). Understanding the norms related to post-breakup contact, particularly when new media are involved, was the first of several aims of this investigation.
Aims of the Research Program

The primary purpose of the program of studies for this dissertation was to gain a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the post-breakup relational landscape for young people. As described earlier, the decisions facing young people after a breakup have shifted since the advent of new media. Breakups themselves have changed, and so have the quality of post-breakup relationships and the process of post-breakup recovery. This research used mixed methodology to gain a broader sense of these changes. Specifically, I used a qualitative survey in Study 1 and a set of interviews in Study 2 to meet the overall goal of gaining a meaningful understanding of the post-breakup relational landscape for young people. In order to gain such an understanding, this research explored perceived breakup norms. Norms have shifted as a result of new media; this research examined how new media have changed the way that people break up and how young people make post-breakup decisions, particularly around continuing contact with previous romantic partners. In addition, this investigation examined whether or not young people are inclined to follow the norms they recognize, and how they cope with any inconsistencies between such norms and their own behaviour, if such inconsistencies arise. Finally, this dissertation assessed whether or not young people perceive continuing contact after a breakup as part of their own recovery.

There are a number of ways in which this dissertation expands our existing knowledge. Indeed, there is a growing body of research that examines relationship dissolution, but there is significantly less research that examines post-breakup experiences. There is even less research that examines the post-breakup relationship landscape while taking the impact of new media into account. This program of studies was designed to help fill the apparent gap in the literature.
While it is true that the two studies of my research program overlap in various ways, they also addressed different pieces of the gaps in the literature. My first study addressed emerging norms, specifically focusing on the ways young people perceive new media as influencing the breakup process. As an extension, my second study examined whether young people follow these perceived norms, how they account for their behaviours, and whether and how post-breakup contact fits in the post-breakup recovery process. Let us now turn our attention to the aims of this, the first study in my research program.

**Study 1**

**Study 1: Aims**

The first study of this investigation comprised several goals and corresponding research questions. First, I was interested in understanding what young people perceive as typical, or normative, during the process of relationship dissolution and for post-breakup contact. The previous discussion of norms and breakup scripts underlines the evolving nature of post-breakup contact norms in particular. By adopting Bicchieri’s constructivist framework for norms (2006), I acknowledged that the young people I surveyed are the inventors and maintainers of the exact norms I would be assessing. As such, participants were asked for their own perceptions about the norms of breakup behaviour and post-breakup behaviour, including staying in touch, and staying connected through social media.

*RQ1: What do young people perceive as the norms associated with breaking up and post-breakup contact?*

A more specific aim was to understand the factors that are taken into account when making decisions about continued contact in the aftermath of a breakup. After a breakup, a significant decision that both parties must consider is whether or not to engage in continued
contact. We know from previous research that commitment (Tan et al., 2014; VanderDrift, Wilson & Agnew, 2013), partner desirability (Banks et al., 1987; Busboom et al., 2002), the quality of the breakup itself (Busboom et al., 2002), and context sharing (Foley & Fraser, 1998) influence post-breakup contact behaviour. In asking about the factors that young people consider when making post-breakup contact decisions, I anticipated replicating these factors and potentially extending the list of factors that young people consider.

RQ2: What factors are considered when determining whether or not to remain in continued contact with a previous romantic partner?

In addition, this research investigates the factors influencing both conventional contact and continued contact through new media. Previous research suggests that people have a tendency to compare new media to existing media (Bolter 1999; Gershon, 2010). New media is never evaluated in a vacuum but always compared to one’s experiences prior to the existence of such media. People are comparing and contrasting old and new media regularly and are often doing so within the limits of their own experiences.

This general tendency could be perceived as problematic for the current study because I am interested in the experiences of young people; this demographic, on average, has grown up immersed in new media. Hence, it is not possible to compare post-breakup experiences involving new media to post-breakup experiences that did not involve new media. These technologies have existed throughout the years in which my young participants have been involved in romantic relationships. Nonetheless, it is certainly possible that the young people sampled still have some notion of how new media influences their norms, behaviours and experiences. They may have some breakup experiences that were not directly impacted by new media, or some experiences in which conventional contact and new media contact were relatively distinct from one another. In
other words, young people may represent the perfect sample to include, because they are likely to have a variety of new media-mediated and conventional break-up experiences. As such, participants were asked questions that pertain to new media post-breakup contact specifically, and to conventional post-breakup contact specifically. Despite the common use of new media among my participants, I argue that it will still be possible to delineate some of the factors that exclusively predict either conventional or new media post-breakup contact. If young people are able to reflect on factors that influence new media post-breakup contact, these data would help to fill a significant void in the research literature. That is, we do not know if the factors that predict conventional post-breakup contact are the same as those that predict new media post-breakup contact. My third research question was designed to examine whether this is the case.

*RQ3: Are the factors that influence conventional post-breakup contact the same as, or different from, the factors that influence new media post-breakup contact?*

Though it is true that young people may not be able to compare their relationship experiences to a time prior to new media, which, of course, was an empirical question at this point, I was still interested in finding out whether participants could consider the implications of new media for breakups. In asking my participants about their perceptions of the impact of new media, I was curious to find out how, or even if, young people perceived an impact of new media on breakup and post-breakup norms. This interest was the source of my final research question for Study 1:

*RQ4: Do young people believe that new media have had an impact on breakup and post-breakup norms? If so, what is the impact?*
Study 1: Method

Participants

In order to conduct Study 1 with undergraduate participants, institutional ethics approval was obtained. 132 undergraduate students (66 male, 66 female) participated in Study 1, which was described as a study of relationship experiences and the impact of technology. Three of these participants were excluded for not providing any responses to the survey questions. Twenty-four participants were removed from the main analysis because they reported that they have experienced no significant romantic breakups. A small minority of participants (N=9; 6.8% of the sample) identified their sexual orientation as bisexual, homosexual or other. Because there were too few participants in these specific categories to run meaningful analyses, these participants’ data were removed from the data set. Additionally, in reviewing the data in Study 1, a self-identifying lesbian implied that the “rules” for breakups differ greatly among the Q+ community from the “straight” community. Upon investigating this further, I learned that Kurdek (1994) found that content of arguments differs slightly among gay and lesbian couples compared with heterosexual couples. While there is yet to be substantive research conducted on LGBTQ+ breakups (see Lannutti & Cameron, 2002; Oswald & Clausell, 2006, p. 499), I did not want my data to be erroneously generalized to a more inclusive population if the sample does not reflect the different set of “rules” that potentially exist within the LGBTQ+ community. As such, data from non-heterosexual persons were removed from analysis. The limited nature of research on LGBTQ+ breakups is a complex issue that must be addressed. Please see a further discussion of this issue in Appendix A. The final analysis, therefore, was conducted with 97 participants (48 male, 49 female). The sample was recruited from the undergraduate psychology subject pool at the University of Guelph. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 26, with an average age of 19.91
years. The majority of total participants had experienced one breakup of a significant romantic relationship (51.5%) and 24.7% had experienced two romantic breakups. The remaining 23.8% of the sample had experienced more than two significant romantic breakups. No definition of “significant romantic relationship” was provided, so participants self-defined this term when completing the survey. The majority of participants identified as European/White (80.4%). The remainder of the sample was comprised of Asian Canadians or those of Asian/Pacific Island origin (7.2%), Latino-a/Hispanic (2.1%), Aboriginal/First Nations (2.1%), African and Black Canadians (1%), and people that identify as bi- or multi-racial (3.1%). With regard to relationship status, 43.3% of participants indicated that they were in a relationship and 55.7% identified as single. While 59.8% of participants indicated that they keep in contact with at least one previous romantic partner, 77.3% of participants indicated that they have at least one previous romantic partner as a Facebook friend.

**Materials and Procedure**

Participants completed all of the materials included in Study 1 online. Once participants signed up to complete the survey, they were given a link (hosted by surveymonkey.com) to complete the study materials. After indicating their informed consent (see Appendix B) by selecting a specific link, participants provided responses to demographic questions. Subsequently, participants responded to seven questions (4 open-ended questions; 3 close-ended questions) regarding their history and experience with relationships. These questions (see Appendix C) asked respondents to describe their experiences and expectations regarding their contact with previous romantic partners. The questions asked about reasons for contact in general and reasons for contact across new media (e.g., Facebook), as well as about participants’ breakup philosophy and their approach to the aftermath of a breakup. Examples of questions include
“What factors or circumstances influence your decision as to whether or not you remain in contact with previous romantic partners/exes?” and “People approach their relationships with previous romantic partners differently. Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers, etc.) with previous romantic partners/exes, or to end contact altogether?”

On average, participants took just under 15 minutes (14:55) to complete the entire survey. Participants wrote an average of 181.33 words in response to the entire survey, meaning that each question had a mean response length of 36.27 words. After completing the study, participants read a debriefing statement (Appendix D) and were granted course credit for their participation.

Analysis

The data from Study 1 were downloaded from the surveymonkey.com server. Since participants completed the study online and provided full written responses to the various questions in the survey, transcription was not a necessary step. Data were coded using
conventional content analysis\textsuperscript{1}, a process summarized by Elo and Kyngäs (2008) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005). To state it simply, conventional content analysis involves coding messages using a derived classification scheme, in hopes of making replicable, valid inferences from the data (Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002; Krippendorff, 2012). Conventional content analysis provides an initial understanding of a specific phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This particular type of qualitative analysis was appropriate for this investigation, because so little is known about the intersection of new media and breakups. Many researchers hold the notion that conventional content analysis is not a purely qualitative method, due to its concern with frequencies and statistical techniques (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, like all other forms of qualitative analysis, content analysis is concerned with organizing non-numerical data. In addition, like all other forms of qualitative analysis, phenomena described by respondents are interpreted in light of relevant theory and existing research (Krippendorff, 2012). While there are some quantitative features of conventional content analysis, this approach to data analysis is not a purely quantitative method. For the purposes of this investigation, conventional content analysis

\textsuperscript{1} Author Note. I recognize that conventional content analysis is considered a positivist approach, essentially meaning that a measurable reality exists, and that there is a “straightforward relationship between the world and our perception of it” (Braun & Clark, 2013, p. 29; see Guba, 2004). At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically to some, I conceptualize social norms from a constructionist stance, which suggests that the ways in which people know the world essentially produces reality (Braun & Clark, 2013, p.30). These two epistemological stances are often conceived as incompatible but I believe that they can be coexist. Allow me to explain the rationale by which I reconciled the apparent incongruity between these two perspectives. When measuring breakup behaviours and attitudes, I had to assume that participants were providing their notion of the truth. Further, I made the assumption that there was some knowable, measurable reality related to breakup attitudes and behaviours since they were reporting on their own experiences. Meanwhile, my perspective regarding social norms aligns with Bicchieri’s (2006), whereby young people are capable of constructing new norms, particularly in the context of new media. Though positivist and constructivist approaches are typically considered mutually exclusive, this investigation assumes that behaviours and beliefs are measurable, external phenomena, whereas social norms are constructed (indeed, often by those that follow them).
analysis was the most appropriate method for analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data collected, because the intent of this study was to classify responses into cohesive and reliable patterns.

Allow me to explain the steps of content analysis that I followed in this investigation. After data collection occurred, content analysis began with complete immersion with the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2012). This process involved reading and re-reading the data. Next, I began data reduction in order to create a manageable data set (Krippendorff, 2012), a step I completed for each response a participant provided. In this investigation, I employed interpretative content coding, meaning that computers were not used to create codes (see Weber, 1990). This interpretative content coding involved several iterations of coding and re-coding. I started with open coding, where I generated as many detailed codes as necessary. Subsequently, I grouped these codes into larger, higher-order codes (see Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). I repeated this grouping process to come up with a parsimonious, while representative, coding manual. The unit of analysis for content coding, in this case, involved either a word or small group of words that reflected a unique concept, emotion, cognition, experience, or behaviour. Ultimately, for each question, there were an average of 9 codes derived, with a range of 7 to 11 codes per question (see Figures 1 through 5 for specific codes). As in other content analyses, my results are connected to relevant theory and addressed in my discussion (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To ensure that factors identified in Study 1 were consistent across different raters, I conducted an analysis of inter-rater reliability. Data were split into codes and subsequently analyzed by two coders. Level of agreement between coders was assessed using Cohen’s Kappa (\(\kappa\)) (Cohen, 1960; Warrens, 2011). Though Landis and Koch (1977) indicate that the guidelines of what constitutes adequate Kappa values are arbitrary, theirs are among the most agreed upon
benchmarks for interpreting the magnitude of agreement. Any Kappa value between 0.61-0.80 is considered “substantial” while any κ value above 0.80 is considered “almost perfect” (see Stemler, 2001). All Kappa values for the 5 questions analyzed in Study 1 indicated an adequate level of agreement (Q1: .74; Q2: .71; Q4: .75; Q5: .83; Q7: .71).

Before turning to the next section, I would like to clarify for the readers an important characteristic of the frequencies provided in the results section below. These percentages may vary because different questions required simpler answers than others, resulting in fewer codable responses. For instance, the question “Why or why not would you choose to have previous romantic partner(s)/exes as Facebook friends?” yielded only 130 coded responses. By contrast, the question “Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers) with previous romantic partners/exes, or to end contact altogether?” yielded 244 responses. Therefore, the denominator for each of the response ratios ranged, at times significantly. To provide a better sense of the range of denominators, the number of responses to each question is provided. Now, let us turn to examining the results of Study 1.

**Study 1: Results**

**Gender-Based Findings**

 Though gender was not a variable of focus, I ran preliminary chi-square analyses to determine if there was a detectable difference in responses based on gender. The results of these analyses can be found in Table 1. One of the reasons that gender was not a variable of interest was a lack of power needed in order to run meaningful gender analyses (each of the chi-square analyses violates the requirement that all cells have a count of at least 5). However, in examining the results of the analyses, one can see that it is likely that gender differences among responses did not exist.
Main Findings

Of the seven questions included in the study, two questions did not provide information that contributed to the issues under examination (i.e., “Have you had the experience of an “on again/off again” relationship?” and “Do you think that having a romantic partner changes your relationship with previous romantic partners?”). Participants provided answers to these two questions that did not correspond to the four research questions of the study and did not inform the goals of the research. Hence, they are not considered further in this dissertation. The five remaining questions are described and analyzed below. In addition, pie charts reflecting the proportions of endorsement are provided in Figures 1 through 5.

For the first question, participants were asked to give reasons why they would, or would not, keep previous romantic partners as Facebook friends. There were 130 responses provided to this question. A minority of participants (N= 29; 22.3%) made reference to the importance of cutting ties with previous romantic partners, and gave specific reasons for this. For example, a 25-year-old male wrote, “I would not because they are not friends, they are exes.” Many participants alluded to the notion of a clean break, such as a 19-year-old female who indicated, “I have no interest in keeping in contact with them.” A 19-year-old female simply wrote “too much drama.” These types of responses alluded to the significance of cutting ties with the previous romantic partner, whereby Facebook represents yet another means to maintain an unwanted connection to one’s previous romantic partner. As well, a small minority of respondents (N= 4, 3.1% of responses) mentioned the potential impact that being friends on Facebook with previous romantic partners might have on new relationships. One participant wrote “made current girlfriend uncomfortable” (22-year-old male).
Overall, participants were more likely to give passive or active reasons for staying in contact with their previous romantic partners than they were to report rationales for a “clean break.” Eighteen participants (13.8% of responses) gave passive reasons for maintaining Facebook contact with their previous romantic partners. For instance, a 19-year-old male wrote: “it does not bother me it was a long time ago”. Others simply noted that they did not go to the trouble of deleting their previous romantic partner(s). Meanwhile, others held more “active” explanations for their maintained Facebook relationship. Seventeen participants (13.1% of responses) described that, in their view, why and how a romantic relationship ended has significant implications for whether or not a Facebook friendship is maintained. For instance, a 20-year-old male explained that the sense of finality has some clear consequences. He noted: “as long as it didn’t end absolutely TERRIBLY they are still added on Facebook.” A number of participants included that cheating would most likely result in deleting the previous romantic partner on Facebook, such as an 18-year-old male who wrote “why would I want to stay in contact with someone who cheated on me and started dating another person over me?”

In contrast to these types of responses, 21 participants (16.2% of responses) wrote about their desire to either stay close or maintain a friendship with their previous romantic partner after the romantic relationship ended. Two participants simply wrote, “We are still friends.” A number of participants explained that they were friends before they started dating and would prefer to continue the relationship by returning to this previous relational status. Being friends outside of Facebook was several participants’ rationale for remaining friends through Facebook.

Other reasons participants suggested for staying friends through Facebook following a breakup were to remain civil or simply to maintain ongoing contact with their previous romantic partner(s) (N= 22; 16.9% of responses). Several wrote about mutual friends or contexts (N= 4;
3.1% of responses). Some participants indicated that they stay Facebook friends with previous romantic partners because of some specific feature of new media, such as the capacity to engage in previous partner monitoring (N= 10, 7.7% of responses). For example, a 23-year-old male wrote: “see what they are doing in their lives. Who else they are dating.” By contrast, others rejected this type of monitoring, like a 20-year-old female who wrote, “I don’t want to see their new girlfriends.”

Another rationalization specific to new media friendships was concern about the possible “awkwardness” associated with the deletion of a previous romantic partner (N= 5; 3.8% of responses). Responses of this type typically did not elaborate beyond this sort of statement: “it would be awkward if I deleted him on Facebook” (19-year-old female).

In sum, when participants were asked about the reasons they would or would not keep previous partners as Facebook friends, some rationales were specific to new media (such as previous partner monitoring). Other reasons, such as having mutual friends or wanting to cut ties, seemed to apply to contact more generally. These responses provided some insights into the perceived impact of social media, such as Facebook, on continued contact with previous partners. As an extension, my second question asked about more conventional contact with previous romantic partners.

In this question, participants were asked about the factors or circumstances that influence their decision to stay in contact with their previous romantic partners. In total, participants provided 158 responses to this question. The majority of the sample (N= 61; 38.6% of responses) indicated that the way the relationship ended would be a factor when considering whether or not to stay in contact with a previous romantic partner. For example, an 18-year-old female participant wrote, “If the breakup was a bad one I probably wouldn't stay in contact.”
The second-most-frequently endorsed factor was based on the quality of friendship (\(N=26\); 16.5\% of responses). This referred to friendship either before the romantic relationship began (e.g., “how close we were as friends before dating”; 24-year-old male), throughout the romantic relationship (e.g., “whether we developed a friendship throughout the relationship as opposed to just a romantic attraction”; 20-year-old female) or the desire or possibility to have their previous partner as a friend in the future (e.g., “if we both agree to remain friends”; 26-year-old female). Though contact between the previous romantic partners was sometimes desired, at other times it was reported to be the result of shared contexts. Almost 9\% (\(N=14\)) of responses included some reference to sharing mutual friends or environments, as was the case for this 19-year-old female, “The possibility of seeing him again, since we work together.” A 23-year-old male wrote that he and his previous partner are “involved in the same social circle. Easier to be friends than to avoid each other when we hung out in a group of friends.”

By contrast, some participants (\(N=9\), 5.7\% of responses) alluded to the cutting of ties completely. For instance, a 21-year-old female reported, “I’ve gotten over him. No contact is necessary.” A number of participants (\(N=16\), 10.1\% of responses) referred to the passage of time and diminishing of feelings as a consideration. A 20-year-old female wrote, “It brings up some hurtful memories” and a 21-year-old male wrote, “If I still have feelings for them.” Thirteen participants (8.2\% of responses) suggested that the personality or character of their previous romantic partner would be an important consideration (e.g., “I don’t have contact with her because she was clingy and unstable”; 19-year-old male). Still other participants left the decision to remain in contact or not to their previous romantic partner (e.g., “usually their decision. I try to keep in contact as long as I don’t see them as ‘crazy’ in my eyes”; 20-year-old male).
Participants sometimes wrote about the quality and length of the romantic relationship as being factors they might consider. Ten participants made reference to this, reporting “the length of the relationship” (19-year-old female) or “seriousness of the relationship” (19-year-old male) as a factor. Very few participants (N = 6, 3.8% of responses) indicated that being in a new relationship would be a factor they would consider when thinking about whether to remain in contact with a previous romantic partner. Even fewer participants (N = 4; 2.5% of responses) made reference to the possibility of future sexual encounters as a factor to consider in the decision to stay in contact with previous romantic partners.

To summarize, most participants made reference to the quality of the relationship and/or the quality of the breakup as major factors they consider in deciding whether or not to stay in contact with previous romantic partners. Other considerations, such as the time since the breakup or having a new romantic partner, were written about much less frequently. Let us now turn towards reported beliefs about the value of staying in contact following a breakup.

Specifically, the question I asked participants was “Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers) with previous romantic partners/exes, or to end contact altogether?” For this question, 244 responses were provided. Thirty-six participants were very explicit about ending contact altogether, whereas more participants (N = 45) described staying in contact as the best alternative. Some responses were not as explicitly indicative of contact preferences (for example, several participants mentioned that contact would “depend”). Responses sometimes included a description of the factors that would be considered rather than a decision one way or another. Altogether, participants alluded to seven major factor “themes” that they might consider when determining whether to stay in contact with previous romantic partners.
Thirty-six participants (14.8% of responses) indicated that residual or complicated feelings would be an important factor to consider when deciding to stay in contact or not. For example, a 23-year-old male wrote, “It all depends. If it makes you happy to stay in contact with them, then there is nothing wrong with that. However, if it makes you upset or is hard to cope with, then it's important to do what is best for you.” A 22-year-old male was more explicit about terminating contact in his response: “(End contact because) it will help you to get over them completely.” Related to residual feelings, 10 participants (7.0% of responses) indicated that time and space would provide some perspective. A 21-year-old male wrote “maybe not staying in contact for the first little bit is good to help get over each other and then after when you are back to [being] independent again then I feel it safe to get back in contact and remain friends.” Each of these responses is connected by the underlying factor of residual feelings.

Similarly, a number of participants suggested that this decision was dependent on the relationship (N= 28; 11.5% of responses), the breakup (N= 26; 10.7% of responses) or the person (N= 11; 4.5% of responses). A 19-year-old male indicated that these relational factors would be important to consider: “All depends on the past relationship with the person, the seriousness of the relationship and how the relationship went.” A 20-year-old female wrote that the relationship termination would be a determining factor: “It depends on the terms you have ended on.” Finally, some participants recognized that the other person would have some choice or impact on the decision to remain in contact, like this 18-year-old male who simply wrote, “It depends on the other person.”

About 7% of responses (N= 17) referred to a deep commitment or connection as a factor to consider, like this one: “everyone in your life has made an impact on you somehow and there’s no point in shutting a major person in your life out” (19-year-old female). In contrast,
several participants (N= 10; 4.1% of responses) suggested that they wanted to avoid drama, like a 20-year-old male, who wrote “staying in contact causes drama between not only you and your exes, but between your friends, their friends, and everyone close to you.” This response also touched on the impact of being in a current relationship, when he added, “staying in contact causes drama between (…) you and new girlfriends.” Like this one, a number of participants (N= 11; 4.5% of responses) indicated that one’s current relationship status would have some bearing on where or not one would remain in contact with previous romantic partners.

Although this particular question asked about contact more generally, 14 participants (5.7% of responses) indicated that contact through technology is more appropriate than “hanging out” with a previous romantic partner. For example, a 22-year-old male wrote “I would say that it’s better to stay in contact but only to the extent of Facebook friends. This way I can still be somewhat updated on the other person's life without having to actually interacting face-to-face.” Similarly, a 19-year-old female suggested that there were distinct differences in the appropriateness of different means of contact: “Being friends on Facebook, [keeping] cell phone numbers, and seeing each other occasionally with a group of friends is what I would consider to be appropriate contact, however hanging out alone is not the sort of contact I think should happen after a break up.”

Though the majority of participants indicated that their preference was to stay in contact, it appeared that a number of factors play into the decision of whether to remain in contact with a previous partner. To summarize, these factor themes were relationship quality, characteristics of the other person and the break-up itself, residual feelings, commitment, time passed, current relationship status, avoidance of drama, and mode of communication (Facebook being more acceptable than in-person contact).
Participants were then asked about their “breakup philosophy,” or how it was that they approached the aftermath of a breakup. In response to this, 159 comments were provided. The largest number of participants ($N=44$; 27.7% of responses) endorsed that moving on is important to them after a breakup. An 18-year-old male wrote “Breakups happen, it’s not the end of the world. Move on if it doesn't work. No use crying over spilt milk.” Another participant wrote “move on, move up, its gunna be ok” (22-year-old male). Some participants ($N=21$; 13.2% of responses) added that distraction, or relying on friends and family for support, can be helpful after a breakup (e.g., “keep reasonably distracted at first until you begin to feel more stable”; 20-year-old female; “lean on family and friends”; 19-year-old female).

Some participants ($N=18$; 11.3% of responses) alluded to self-pity in their written response, like this one from a 20-year-old female: “You can moan about a breakup for half the amount of time you dated. If you dated for a year, you can be upset and complain for 6 months. Then move on.” This participant also referenced taking time to move on, as did 26 other participants (15.3% of responses). For example, a 19-year-old female suggested “don’t talk for a couple weeks and see if that’s what you really want.”

A total of 20 participants (12.6% of responses) indicated that a breakup could be a learning experience and a chance to better oneself. Participants writing about this factor would have responses like this one: “I approach it as you learn from every relationship, and grow as a person. As you learn you can use that and apply it to future relationships, and hopefully make them better than the last” (18-year-old male). In contrast, about 6% of responses ($N=10$) suggested that a breakup provides an opportunity to meet other people. A 22-year-old male wrote, “Move on to the next one and don’t get so hung up on the one you just left.”
Some participants (N= 15; 9.4% of responses) suggested seeking friendship with their previous romantic partner after the breakup (e.g., “I try and keep in touch and maybe become friends”; 20-year-old male) while fewer (N= 6; 3.8% of responses) proposed repairing the relationship (“I tend to try and fix things between us”; 18-year-old male).

While participants suggested that moving on is an important focus following a breakup, other respondents wrote about different means of doing so. Some participants wrote about distraction, relying on family and friends, taking some time, and/or engaging in self-pity. Others mentioned learning something and bettering themselves. On the other hand, some participants described seeking friendships with or trying to fix the relationship with the previous romantic partner. Although the vast majority sought to “move on,” there were several different suggestions provided about how one might do this.

As the last question of this study, participants were asked for their opinion on whether technology and social media have changed the way that people breakup. For this question, 213 responses were provided. Almost all participants responded in the affirmative, indicating their unanimous agreement that technology and social media have altered the way that people breakup. One 18-year-old male participant started his response in the negative, and then through his explanation, showed agreement that technology and social media have changed how people breakup: “Not really, I feel like if you're close enough to someone, and mature enough that you would still break up in person. However depending on how serious a relationship is it may be easier to just phone or text the person.”

In terms of the way technology has impacted breakups, 53 participants (24.9% of responses), like the one above, indicated that technology is used as a medium for breaking up (e.g., “I think that cell phones and social media give people a way to breakup with each other”);
19-year-old female). Oftentimes, this explanation of the impact of technology was combined with a judgment about such breakups, like this one:

“Yes, I think technology that allows people to breakup over phone, text, or messages is bad. I think breaking up this way doesn't give most relationships and people the respect they deserve, makes it harder to be empathetic, and makes misinterpretations more likely” (19-year-old male).

At the same time, participants (N= 23; 10.8% of responses) often described breakups as being “easier” to do using technology. A 20-year-old female wrote, “Yes, it's easier to hide behind things now. You don't have to go face to face and so it can be easier for the person who is initiating the break up.” Many participants described breaking up through technology as easier and yet simultaneously judged it to be indecent, as was the case for this 21-year-old male: “Makes it easier to breakup with someone since you do not have to see them in person, essentially a cowardly way out.” Thirty-five participants (16.4% of responses) included some indication that using technology to break up with someone is impersonal or cowardly.

Though many participants commented on the way technology and social media have impacted breakups, a number of participants (N= 16; 7.5% of responses) wrote more about how these media have influenced the aftermath of a breakup. For example, some participants alluded to previous romantic partner monitoring through Facebook (“I think so, people can use it more of a spy tool to try and find out more information in a more sneaky way”; 22-year-old male; “You don't have to talk to the person but you can still ‘creep’ their Facebook profile to see what they are up to”; 19 year old female). Others wrote about additional ways that technology has impacted the breakup aftermath (e.g., “people now have to ponder when to change the status, and then deal with everyone commenting on it that they may not have even wanted to comment on”; 20-year-old male).
Almost all participants agreed that technology and social media have an impact on breakups, and most expressed an opinion about this impact. A number of participants recognized that these media have an impact on the aftermath of a breakup as well. Taken together, these responses alluded to the concepts of access and convenience. That is, technology has afforded young people a sense of access to one another that might not have existed in the past, which ultimately impacts post-breakup contact.

**Study 1: Summary**

Returning to the research questions, the data from Study 1 can be interpreted in response to each of the queries of the investigation.

*RQ1: What do young people perceive as the norms associated with breaking up and post-breakup contact?*

Overall, the results of Study 1 suggest that young people perceive evolving norms, which are shifting in part because these norms take new media into account. Though perhaps not enough to devise breakup and post-breakup scripts (e.g., Foley & Fraser, 1998), these data indicate that perceived breakup and post-breakup norms are certainly present and evolving. The first of these perceived norms involves the finding that slight majority of participants prefer to remain in contact with previous romantic partners. Related to this preference, one principal trend was identified: there seemed to be differential acceptance of post-breakup contact through conventional methods compared to new media post-breakup contact. Specifically, participants alluded to more acceptance of continued post-breakup contact through new media than through conventional means. These findings suggest that post-breakup contact, when occurring through new media channels, is somehow categorically and qualitatively different from conventional
post-breakup contact. Young people perceive new media post-breakup contact differently than conventional post-breakup contact, and accept the former more than the latter.

In fact, some participants suggested that continued contact is a component of their breakup philosophy. That is, unlike normative assumptions that emerged before the advent of new media, these participants perceived post-breakup contact as an element of “moving on”. This suggests that, not only do young people contemplate continuing their redefined relationship with a previous romantic partner, but that some actually prefer to do so. Unfortunately, no previous research addresses post-breakup contact preferences. There is no accurate basis of comparison for this finding, however a speculative assessment related to factors that may contribute to this finding can be offered. It is likely that these attitudes have shifted over time as new media became a gradually more habitual feature of young people’s social life. And with young people growing increasingly comfortable with remaining in contact with all current and past friends and acquaintances, a similar pattern may have emerged with previous romantic partners. Since the findings of this study denote a greater acceptance of new media post-breakup contact than through other means, one can hypothesize that evolving technologies have played a substantial role in shifting attitudes. This is one potential way in which new media are altering the post-breakup relational landscape for young people.

As noted in the introduction to Study 1, I had also wondered what considerations are involved when young people contemplate continuing such post-breakup relationships. This led to an exploration of the factors that might determine whether or not one continues their relationship with a previous romantic partner following their breakup.

**RQ2: What factors are considered when determining whether or not to remain in continued contact with a previous romantic partner?**
It was apparent from Study 1 that young people made post-breakup contact decisions based on a number of considerations. These included personal (e.g., clean break), interpersonal (e.g., termination quality, friends/closeness) and contextual (e.g., mutual contexts) factors. The young people surveyed addressed circumstances in which continued contact with previous romantic partners was unavoidable, such as having to attend the same school or working with a previous romantic partner. This was not surprising considering that many of the young people surveyed (approximately 38% of respondents) were in their first year of university, and likely referencing relationships and breakups that took place in high school. However, participants also wrote about circumstances in which such contact is actively sought out. In these cases, participants wrote about their underlying attachment or friendship with their previous romantic partner.

In Study 1, I found support for some of the same factors that were addressed in the literature, namely friendship valuing and commitment, the quality of the breakup itself, and context sharing. Participants did not explicitly discuss partner desirability as one of the factors they considered in determining whether or not to remain in contact with a previous partner. Nonetheless, these findings provide a foundation for learning more about the factors that influence post-breakup contact decisions, specifically those that are exclusive to the context of new media.

*RQ3: Are the factors that influence conventional post-breakup contact the same as, or different from, the factors that influence new media post-breakup contact?*

Again, participants provided answers that involved personal (e.g., monitoring, relationship status/cut ties), interpersonal (e.g., termination quality, maintaining civility) and contextual (e.g., passive, mutual friends) factors. Many of the factors that were said to influence
conventional post-breakup contact were similarly brought up in the context of new media, such as termination quality, friendship/closeness, mutual contexts, cutting ties, and current relationship implications. Nevertheless, some novel factors that distinctly influence new media post-breakup contact were mentioned. These factors that influence new media post-breakup contact, but not conventional contact, include maintaining civility, passivity, implications of deleting the previous romantic partner, and relationship status/monitoring factors. In contrast to these factors, those that were identified by participants as being distinctly linked to conventional contact included the quality and length of the relationship, and time passing and residual feelings. These factors, said to influence conventional post-breakup contact, seem more relational in nature. In contrast, with the exception of maintaining civility, the factors that exclusively influence new media post-breakup contact do not have this same relational focus. Keeping this trend in mind, further distinction could be made between the factors that may exclusively predict post-breakup conventional contact from those that exclusively predict post-breakup new media contact. However, returning to the research question, it appears that the factors that influence conventional post-breakup contact are not always the same as those that influence new media post-breakup contact.

RQ4: Do young people believe that new media have had an impact on breakup and post-breakup norms? If so, what is the impact?

There was consensus that new media have had a tremendous impact on breakups, particularly in the ways in which young people go about breaking up with their partner. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that when young people are asked about the intersection of new media and breakups, they often consider the use of new media as a means to terminate a relationship (Gershon, 2008; 2010; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2012). Despite
experiencing their romantic relationships while immersed in the impact of new media, the young people sampled were able to consider and reflect on the ways such media have altered the relational landscape. Specifically, their responses often alluded to increased access and convenience afforded by technology. At the same time, however, most of the information participants provided referred to the use of new media as a means to breakup, rather than its impact on the aftermath of the breakup. In fact, only 16 participants wrote about the impact of new media on the events following the breakup. Though young people are able to reflect on the impact of new media on breakups, their frame of reference may be limited to the way in which the breakup itself is impacted, rather than the events and their experiences following the breakup. For them, post-breakup experiences cannot be considered independently of new media since their personal experience always included this technology.

**Further Considerations and their Connection to Study 2**

Study 1 offered informative answers to the research questions that formed the basis of the study. However, the study also revealed important questions that remained unanswered and helped frame the second study of this dissertation. For example, the data from Study 1 did not clarify whether participants’ responses were informed by their own experience or by their perception of what can be considered “normative” post-breakup contact. Participants were not explicit about whether their responses reflected their own experiences or their understanding of breakups more broadly. By conducting a follow-up investigation, I had the opportunity to be more intentional in delineating actual behaviour from one’s perception of social norms.

In addition, the results of Study 1 did not allow me to gain a sense of when and how post-breakup contact could be healthy. Previous research examining post-breakup contact and post-breakup adjustment has yielded mixed findings (e.g., Marshall, 2012; Masheter, 1997; Tan et al.,
2014; Tsai et al., 2015), and the present study did not add to our understanding of the complex relationship between post-breakup contact and recovery. As I noted when describing the responses to RQ1, it seemed as if the majority of young people sampled held reasonably positive attitudes towards maintaining contact with a previous partner or, at least, they did so in the context of new media post-breakup contact. But looking beyond these positive attitudes, it appeared that many young people in my sample actually stay in touch with their previous romantic partners, with no apparent consideration of whether doing so is adaptive. I wondered what circumstances are required for continued contact to be recognized as healthful and adaptive for the people involved. When so many young people are looking to maintain a connection of some kind with their previous romantic partner, I wanted to know if and how this relational maintenance could be healthy or adaptive. In my second study, I explored this issue more explicitly.

Though considerable information was gained through the online survey methodology of Study 1, I wanted to confirm the findings from Study 1 in a more comprehensive way. Specifically, I wanted to add some context and nuance to the general patterns of results that emerged. For Study 2, I sought to replicate and extend the responses to the research questions from my previous study, using a different methodology (i.e., an interview rather than an online survey). Furthermore, I posed additional research questions that could help capture young people’s perceived distinctions between normative expectations and actual behaviour. Finally, this second study allowed me to examine factors that contribute to the healthfulness (self-defined by participants) of post-breakup contact.
Study 2

Study 2: Aims

In addition to the general goal of querying how new media have changed breakups and their aftermath, each of the research questions from Study 1 was posed in order to gain a better sense of what “norms,” if any, exist around these experiences. However, Study 2 was devised, in part, to determine whether or not the norms that participants perceive and describe are actually consistent with their own experiences and actions.

As indicated by Bicchieri (2006), it seems that when it comes to relationship norms, the exceptions are almost as common as the rules. However, when norms have been socially constructed into existence, they can be identified and described (Hertzog & Rowley, 2014), and individuals can identify norm violations (Bicchieri, 2006; Gershon, 2008; 2010; Gournelos & Gunkel, 2014). When an individual violates a norm, there are differing levels of acceptance of such norm violations (Felmlee, Sweet & Sinclair, 2012). For instance, women tend to be more critical of violations of friendship norms (Felmlee et al., 2012). Norms are established and identifiable and their violations are similarly identifiable. Such violations are socially accepted, though to varying degrees.

When discussing norms and violation, Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance becomes critical. Dissonance theory posits that inconsistencies between norms and actions are often uncomfortable, and that experiencing discomfort will often motivate a person to reduce the inconsistency (1957). Attitude changes are thought to be one way of responding to such dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Kunda, 1999). Given that behaviour is often more difficult to change than one’s attitude, Festinger argued that people are motivated to adopt an attitude that is consistent with their behaviour (Festinger, 1957; Kunda, 1999). This impetus to adopt a new
attitude is described by Kunda (1990) as “motivated reasoning.” Motivated reasoning is defined as the process of explaining such inconsistency between norms and actions (Kunda, 1990; 1999). One way of engaging in motivated reasoning is through the development of if-then statements (Edwards, 1995). An “if-then” statement with regards to post-breakup relationship behaviour could be “if my ex was unfaithful, then I would delete them from Facebook.” This kind of if-then statement would represent motivated reasoning for an individual who believes that it is the norm to remain in new media post-breakup contact with previous romantic partners. When a person engages in motivated reasoning to resolve dissonance, he or she will list the reasons why his or her circumstances required behaviour that violated existing norms.

Motivated reasoning, at least as a means to understanding post-breakup behaviour, is not necessarily a novel idea. While sometimes considered under a frame of narrative formation (e.g., Koenig Kellas & Manusov, 2003; Weiss, 1975) or account-making (Harvey & Fine, 2006, p.189), the concept of telling oneself a story about relational events is an important one. For example, Koenig Kellas and Manusov found that narrative completeness is associated with greater post-breakup adjustment, particularly if the narrative is coherent and the story makes sense (2003). What these findings suggest is that the congruence and sequence of the story one tells oneself about relationship dissolution has implications for the way in which that person recovers. In addition, Harvey and Fine (2006, p. 196) suggest that narrative formation, or account-making, serves a number of functions; these include providing catharsis, establishing blame or exoneration, clarifying one’s thinking, and providing information and lessons for future behaviour. Relatedly, motivated reasoning may serve similar functions, though its primary purpose is to resolve dissonance. Although narrative completeness or account-making represent one way I could have looked at the ways in which young people resolve dissonance, the
theoretical basis and nature of the second study were better suited to the concept of motivated reasoning.

Returning to the current study, the inclusion of motivated reasoning extended beyond the notion of constructed norms. First, it was critical to determine if young people’s actions are consistent with perceived post-breakup norms. Subsequently, an intention of this second study was to explore how young people deal with such inconsistency, if it is experienced. The existing research on post-breakup contact has not taken potential dissonance into account, and therefore, has not examined attempts to reduce dissonance. Thus, for this investigation, this issue was a subject of focus.

*RQ1: Do young people act in a way that is consistent with their perception of post-breakup communication norms? If not, how do they resolve such discrepancies?*

While it is certainly important to gain a sense of young people’s perception of social norms and their violations, it is arguably more critical to examine how breakup norms promote or hinder post-breakup recovery. There have been a few factors that have been delineated as predictive of post-breakup recovery, including having social support, higher likelihood of finding a new partner, and elapsed time since the breakup (Moller et al., 2003; Simpson, 1987). However, there is less evidence showing whether or not post-breakup contact is predictive of post-breakup adjustment.

Previous research indicates that continuing contact results in delayed psychological adjustment following a breakup. This finding holds particularly true when an individual was not responsible for terminating the relationship (Fagundes, 2012). Other research has established that staying in contact with a previous romantic partner predicts greater sadness, particularly during such contact (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Among divorced couples, however, this was not found to
be the case (Masheter, 1991; Mason, Sbarra, Bryan & Lee, 2012). Contact with a previous partner was found to be differentially correlated with adjustment, whereby contact fostered adjustment in those who have accepted their separation, but prevented adjustment when such acceptance has not occurred (Mason et al., 2012).

Research on the impact of new media post-breakup contact on recovery has, similarly, yielded mixed findings. Some research suggests that post-breakup monitoring over Facebook obstructs the recovery process (Lukacs, 2012; Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015; Marshall, 2012). Likewise, ruminating while on Facebook is associated with decreased post-breakup adjustment (Tran & Joormann, 2015). By contrast, remaining friends with a previous romantic partner predicts some outcomes suggestive of adjustment, such as less negative feelings towards the previous romantic partner (Marshall, 2012). Participants in one study indicated that monitoring a previous partner does not impact their current relationship, adding that it can be pleasing to learn that previous partners are doing well (Mod, 2010). This finding was supported by later research, which suggested that developing a meaningful new relationship renders feelings towards a previous partner irrelevant (Imhoff & Banse, 2011). Complicating these relationships, a recent finding showed that intra-individual factors, such as trait anxiety and depressive symptoms, are higher in those who accept friend requests from previous romantic partners (Tsai et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the research on post-breakup contact through new media is limited. Further, the limited findings are mixed, particularly when taking into consideration factors such as new relationship involvement.

Though findings concerning the relationship between post-breakup contact and adjustment are not cohesive, research strongly suggests that remaining in contact with previous partners, particularly through new media, represents the norm (Bullock et al., 2011; Mason et al.,
2012; Wilmot et al., 1985; Wreford, 2012). As such, it was important to understand whether continued contact can promote recovery, and under what circumstances it might. An additional aim of the current investigation was to get a sense of whether and where post-breakup contact fits into the recovery process.

\textit{RQ2: Under what conditions do young people perceive post-breakup contact to be healthy?}

\textbf{Study 2: Method}

\textbf{Participants}

Once again, institutional ethics approval was obtained in order to conduct Study 2 with undergraduate participants. Twenty-seven undergraduate students (6 male, 21 female) were recruited from the University of Guelph psychology participant pool. Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 28, with an average age of 19 years. Twenty-five participants identified as European/White, one as Black and one as bi/multi-racial. With regard to relationship status, 12 participants indicated that they were in a relationship (44%) and 15 identified as single (56%). The large majority of participants (85%) identified that they had two previous romantic partners from relationships that they would consider serious. Two participants identified having three previous romantic partners, one participant identified having four, and one participant identified having five previous romantic partners.

\textbf{Materials and Procedure}

Participants signed up to complete the study through the university undergraduate participant pool website. Once they had selected a timeslot, participants were directed to an on-campus location where interviews could be conducted in privacy. After introductions with the interviewer and providing written informed consent (see Appendix E) participants completed a
demographic form. Subsequently, participants were reminded that the interview would be audio recorded, as outlined in the informed consent letter. The interview included the questions outlined in Appendix F. The first part of the interview included questions related to participants’ views of breakups and post-breakup contact in general. The second part of the interview included questions related to participants’ actual breakup experiences. In responding to the second set of questions in the interview, participants were asked to speak of two former romantic partners from relationships which they self-identified as “significant.” When a participant identified that they had experienced more than two breakups of this kind, he/she was asked to speak about the two that were most significant for him/her. Questions for Study 2 were developed based on a review of the existing literature (e.g., Battaglia et al., 1998, Braun & Clarke, 2013; Dailey et al., 2009, Koenig Kellas et al., 2008), discussions with the advisory committee and on the findings of Study 1. Interviews ranged in length from 23 to 63 minutes, with an average interview length of 36 minutes. After completing the interview, participants were debriefed (see Appendix G) and thanked for their time. As part of debriefing, the interviewer reminded participants that the sensitive nature of the interview could lead to distressing feelings, and referrals were available if needed. Most participants indicated that they felt generally “better” after the interview, which is in line with other findings that suggest participation in breakup studies promotes psychological recovery (Larson & Sbarra, 2015). After completing the interview, participants received course credit for their involvement in the study.

Analysis

I transcribed the data from Study 2 using the program Express Scribe. The transcription process was naturalized, whereby the features of written language were privileged over the features of oral language. That is, nonstandard English was translated, and commas and full-
stops (periods) were included (Bucholtz, 2000; Davidson, 2009). Filler words such as “like,” “umm,” and “uhh,” were not noted. A general, naturalized written representation was sufficient for the transcription of this data.

The analytical approach in Study 2 parallels the content analytic strategy used in Study 1 (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). That is, I followed the steps of content analysis involving transcription, familiarization, data immersion, and coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hseih & Shannon, 2005). I used the same iterative coding process as in Study 1. That is, codes were derived to reduce and analyze the data. As in Study 1, the unit of analysis included either a word or group of words that reflected a unique concept, emotion, cognition, experience, or behavior, and did not involve features of speech. This time, for each question, there were an average of 4.82 codes derived, with a range of 2 to 10 codes per question (see Figures 6 through 20 for specific codes). Besides the number of codes derived, the content analytic strategy for Study 2 was exactly the same as for Study 1, aside from one other key difference; in Study 2, a second coder was not used. This is because, methodologically, the interviews themselves created significantly more data than the survey format. It was beyond the scope of the current investigation to assess the reliability with a second coder for Study 2.

Here again, it is important to remind readers about the characteristics of the frequencies provided in the results section. Recall that the percentages of responses may vary, because different questions required either a yes/no answer, or a number of possible codable responses. For example, the question “Do you think that some methods of breaking up are more appropriate than others?” yielded 27 responses, while the question, “What sorts of things influence whether two people stay in touch after a breakup?” yielded 57 responses. As such, each of the response
ratios ranged, at times significantly. To provide a better sense of the range of denominators, the number of responses to each question is provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Study 2: Results

Gender-Based Findings

As in Study 1, I conducted chi-square analyses to determine if there was a measurable difference in responding based on gender. The findings from these analyses can be found in Table 2. Once again, there was not enough power in order to make any meaningful conclusions from the chi-square analyses (again, each of the chi-squares violates the requirement that all cells have a count of at least 5), however, the analyses provide some general information about patterns of result that may, or may not, have been influenced by participants’ gender. These analyses suggest that gender differences most likely did not affect the results. Indeed, based on the interviews themselves, I did not encounter any indicators of specific gender patterns in responding. In fact, in transcribing and analyzing the interview data, I would have to cross-reference participant IDs with their demographic data to determine gender, since there were no patterns or indicators of any participant’s gender. Between the results of the chi-square analyses and my own impressions and interpretations as the interviewer, one can be reasonably certain that gender differences in responding did not exist.

Main Findings

Though a large number of questions were asked of participants, just less than half of the questions asked yielded responses relevant to the research questions. This is because the interview questions were not perfectly aligned with the final research questions. Therefore, the responses to several questions were irrelevant to the scope of the current study. For example, a number of the questions that were not analyzed asked about timelines, such as questions like “In
the days immediately after a breakup, what usually happens?” and “Tell me the timeline of the series of events that might have followed that breakup.” Because none of my research questions asked about specific timelines, these responses were not analyzed. Other questions asked about participant’s meaning-making, such as “Do you have any regrets related to the breakup” and “Have you learned anything from this particular breakup experience?” Such questions were, once again, not aligned perfectly with any one specific research question. In other words, in an effort to restrict the scope of the investigation, and to more specifically align participant responses to the research questions, a portion of interview was not analyzed. Consequently, participant’s responses to 24 out of the total 50 interview questions (9 from Part I, 14 from Parts II and IIB, and 1 from Part IIC) are discussed in detail. A summary of some of the findings is presented in Table 5.

As a continuation of the question from Study 1 asking about technology and breakups, I asked participants if they believed that some methods of breaking up were more appropriate than others. The large majority of participants (N= 22; 81.5% of responses) indicated adherence to a very specific hierarchy of appropriateness for different methods of breaking up. First, face-to-face breakups were considered most appropriate, followed by an approximation of a face-to-face breakup (e.g., video call), followed by a phone call. The “worst” way to breakup with someone, according to these participants, was text messaging or instant messaging. An example of the way participants would respond to the question of a hierarchy is highlighted:

“I think it would probably be face-to-face communication, then maybe video-chatting or something (…) like Skype. And then maybe a phone call. Maybe then would be a text message or maybe like a Facebook message - they’re kind of on the same level, I think” (17-year-old female).

Despite the preference for in-person breakups, 12 participants have experienced a breakup over phone, text message, Facebook message or video call. Of these 12 participants,
eight were the one who broke up with their partner. This indicates that 30% of participants have used an alternative method of breaking up with their partner than doing so in-person, violating their own described hierarchy of appropriateness with regard to ways of breaking up. When this was the case, participants often provided their rationale for using an alternative method (e.g., “Over the phone, because she lived kind of far away”; 18-year-old male; “(I did it over the phone) because I was scared of his reaction in person. I didn’t want to- I’m not a very comforting person”; 19-year-old female). A conversation with an 18-year-old female demonstrated her difficulty with the decision to end her relationship through text message:

“Researcher: OK. So when I asked you questions in the beginning of the interview, they were obviously more broad, more about your general ideas and beliefs around breakups. Then I asked you questions about your specific experience, and I noticed that there were a couple of things that I wanted to just get some more clarification on. Did you notice that there were some things that didn't totally add up?
Participant: Yeah.
R: What sort of things did you notice?
P: Like when I said breakups should be in person.
R: Yeah, but you've had this experience of two pretty significant breakups over text, so tell me about that.
P: That's what I regret about the first one, that it was over text. The second one, I got broken up with, so I can't really control that.”

The large majority of participants indicated that a hierarchy of appropriate break up strategies exists, whereby some methods of breaking up are considered more correct than others. Despite this belief, some participants did not act consistently with the hierarchy they described when they were the initiator of the breakup.

Post-Breakup Conventional Contact

The next series of questions were related to conventional contact with previous romantic partners. First, participants were asked whether they believed exes typically stay in touch. Twelve participants (44.4%) said that exes do not typically stay in touch, while only three
participants (11.1%) said that they do. The remaining 12 participants did not have a specific opinion on the matter. A 22-year-old male described it this way:

“I can't answer that. Highly dependent. I guess again, depending on how they handle situations, I guess that strings back from their upbringing but I know some people who do stay in touch and are good friends now and I know some people that absolutely do not talk to or about their exes.”

Many participants provided various caveats or responded that post-breakup contact is dependent on too many factors to name.

An additional question queried whether previous romantic partners, if they were to stay in touch, did so right after a breakup or took some time until they talked to each other again. The majority of participants agreed that most people take time to reconnect (N= 20; 66.7% of responses). For example, a 22-year-old male explained, “I would say- well, I'd say, later on it's easier. You know, they say time heals all.” An 18-year-old female participant voiced her opinion in response to this question: “I think to get over someone you need to spend time apart. If you just stay right together, even right- become friends right afterwards, it doesn't work at all. If it's right after, it's forced.” Only 3 participants (10% of responses) believed that previous romantic partners attempt reconnection immediately. A 20-year-old female participant suggested that this decision depended on the length of the relationship, “I'd say for long term relationships, they do try and stay in contact right after.” Other participants (N= 7; 23.3% of responses) gave answers that were too complex to code dichotomously, or brought up factors that would complicate the issue. For example, a 19-year-old female participant said, “I think maybe a little bit at first and then I think it takes time and if they are going to talk to each other again it will take some time before they start talking together- to each other if they talk at all.” Overall, despite some responses to the contrary, the majority of participants suggested that it does take time before previous romantic partners can and/or should initiate contact with one another.
Participants were asked to explain some of the factors that would influence whether two people would stay in touch after a breakup. Many of these factors were in line with what was found from Study 1. For example, 17 of the 27 participants indicated that the way the relationship ended would have a significant impact on their desire to keep in touch. For example, a 20-year-old female responded:

“I think also it depends on what the reasons of breaking up were. So if it was a mutual decisions and both parties are just not feeling comfortable or happy anymore but they feel as though they could still be friends (...) that may influence their decision to stay in contact. And the opposite- if it was a very messy breakup, they may not want to have any contact with each other. So that may influence it as well.”

It was apparent in many participants’ responses that the nature or context of the breakup itself is an important consideration in terms of post-breakup contact.

As was the case in Study 1, participants recognized that sharing mutual contexts and friends would be an important consideration in the decision to remain in touch with an ex. This time, about one-quarter of responses made reference to this factor. A 17-year-old male described it this way:

“I'd say how much they need to see each other everyday, so if they go to school with each other and stuff, they have to see each other so they're- for a while they'll probably hate each other but they'll become more civil in the end. That's probably legitimately the biggest one because after a relationship or what my friends have done, if it's a girl from another school or a girl random that they don't know, they just won't see them ever again so there's no reason to get back in touch, so much.”

This participant stated that, just as sharing contexts would be a factor in continued contact, not having certain shared environments, friendships and connections would be a factor in terminating contact.

Another commonly endorsed factor was the respondents’ perspectives on the influence of the partners’ compatibility as friends during their relationship, or whether the previous romantic partners were friends prior to the beginning of their relationship. Twelve participants (22% of
responses), made reference to a “compatibility as friends” factor. An 18-year-old female put it this way: “I think it depends on whether they're friends or not before. I think if they were, then that might be something that's important to them is to stay friends but typically I haven't really seen too many exes that have remained good friends after.” As was the case in Study 1, these participants discussed being friends before the romantic relationship and/or during the romantic relationship. Only one participant spoke of the need for that friendship after the romantic relationship:

“I think another one would be the amount of support each other has in their life existing already. If you already have a ton of- maybe guys, male figures in your life- or for a guy, female figures in your life, you might not need that ex to be one of those figures, especially if there was heartbreak or hurt feelings.”

This participant was the only one who brought up a need one might have for support following the breakup as a factor to consider. Though only one perspective, this comment suggests that it is not just the friendship one has with a previous romantic partner but the quantity and quality of the entire social network that may influence one’s desire to stay in touch with their previous romantic partner.

Whereas friendship before, during and/or after the romantic relationship was recognized as an important factor, seven participants identified relational investment as another important consideration. The investment factor reflects the responses of two groups of participants: those who identified the length of the relationship as an important factor that reflected relational investment (i.e., more time invested equaling greater investment; $N = 3$), and those who considered commitment to be predictive of post-breakup closeness ($N = 4$). The following illustration, from a 19-year-old male, captures the meaning of commitment for him, or for those who identified this factor:
“(When) there was a really strong connection, I feel like it's really hard to just go back to being friends (...) There's a reason that people are attracted to each other, I suppose… So if someone really is head over heels for the other person, I suppose, and then, I don't know, it really hurts to lose that person I suppose.”

Five participants (8.9% of responses) suggested that particular characteristics of the people involved are an important influencing factor for post-breakup contact. For example, an 18-year-old female reported that the “maturity of both people” would be an influencing factor. Similarly, a 19-year-old female stated, “I think (...) just the characters of the two people.” Only one participant (an 18-year-old female) brought up the consideration of having a new partner involved.

As a further exploration of the factors that participants consider important in their post-breakup contact decisions, I asked participants, “Is it healthy to stay in touch with previous romantic partners?” Responses were divided. Eighteen participants were decisive in their response, with 10 participants responding “no” and eight participants responding “yes.” The other nine participants had no specific opinion on the matter, or provided caveats or rationales after suggesting that post-breakup contact “depends.” Of the 10 participants who suggested that staying in contact is unhealthy, eight noted that they were still in touch with at least one of the two previous romantic partners that they identified. This may be another instance of discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, it is worth noting that 21 of 27 participants in this study (77.8% of participants) are still in touch with at least one ex-partner from their two most significant relationships. This finding suggests that staying in touch with previous romantic partners, at least among individuals in this age group, is more the norm than the exception.

A number of participants elaborated on the conditions in which conventional post-breakup contact could be healthy. Of the eight participants who said that it could potentially be healthy to keep in touch after a breakup, three indicated that being in post-breakup contact could
represent maturity and personal growth. For example, an 18-year-old male replied “it shows a level of maturity that you guys can settle your differences and get along, at least in a limited capacity.” Two participants suggested that post-breakup contact could be healthy if the relationship was based on friendship (e.g., “I think if you have, it can be healthy especially if you were friends before that- like before the relationship.” 18-year-old female). Finally, four participants focused on the need for boundaries or limitations in order to ensure that conventional post-breakup contact is healthy. As an illustration, an 18-year-old female described it this way: “It's good to have somewhat of a relationship with them afterwards (…) Like not alone, but with mutual friends and stuff like that.”

In sum, participants noted that three factors most likely impact decisions regarding post-breakup contact: (1) how the relationship ended, (2) sharing particular contexts, such as school, work or friends, and (3) if the individuals were friends before, during or after the breakup. In contrast, factors such as one’s investment with the previous romantic partner and the length of the relationship were less frequently endorsed. Though most participants that offered an opinion on whether previous romantic partners stay in touch suggested it was unlikely, the majority (77.8%) of the sample has been in post-breakup contact with at least one of their previous romantic partners. Participants were divided in their belief about whether such contact was healthy and under what conditions it can be healthy.

**New Media Post-Breakup Contact**

By way of contrast, participants were asked the same questions about new media contact specifically. For example, participants were asked whether they believed previous romantic partners would stay in touch over social media. Seventeen participants, or slightly more than 60% of respondents, indicated that previous romantic partners would typically stay in new media
contact, while only two participants indicated that social media contact would not be maintained. The other eight respondents did not provide clear or unambiguous responses to the question. The majority of these eight responses involved double-barreled answers (i.e., yes and no; “It depends on if they’re trying to avoid communication or not,” 22-year-old male) and some expanded on some contextual factors, such as the difficulty of the breakup (“I guess- I don't know actually. I think if at first- if it was a bad breakup- they probably would block each other and try to remove them from their lives entirely. But if they ended up going back to being friends or something or even mutual acquaintances they might add each other,” 17-year-old female).

Previously, I had asked about the factors that would typically influence whether or not previous romantic partners would stay in contact using conventional methods, such as meeting up in person. Later in the interview, I asked about the factors that would usually influence whether or not previous romantic partners would stay in contact over social media. Three factors were identified consistently across both answers: (1) the nature of the breakup and of the relationship ($N=12; 20.6\%$ of responses), (2) mutual contexts ($N=4; 6.9\%$ of responses), and (3) having a new partner ($N=4; 6.9\%$ of responses). These were the only factors that were consistent across both conventional and new media contexts. Of the factors specific to new media continued contact, the most commonly endorsed element was the extent of social media presence of the previous romantic partner ($N=15, 25.9\%$ of responses). For instance, an 18-year-old female respondent said, “if someone's been constantly doing statuses talking about what happened and what not, again they would probably not want to read that.” Likewise, another 18-year-old female participant observed, “I'd say if someone posts a lot. If they post a bunch of pictures or statuses, then that person might want to delete them or not follow them.” It appears
that the level and type of social media presence of the previous romantic partner is indeed a factor that influences whether new media contact continues after a breakup.

Ten participants (17.2% of responses) included a reference to monitoring their previous romantic partner’s activities. A 19-year-old female noted, “Actually there's also the other side where you actually might want to see what's going on in their life just for the curiosity. Are they having fun? Do they look like they're having fun? Have they found someone new, things like that.” Related to the concept of monitoring, a number of participants brought up feelings of jealousy. For instance, another 19-year-old female stated:

“Jealousy is a big one. If you're seeing- yeah, social media is bad with this- you want to delete the person, you want to delete them from your life but you can't because you'll find yourself just going on their profile without noticing or following their tweets or looking through their pictures on Facebook just to see what they've been up to”

Another factor that was brought up specifically with regard to new media contact was the degree of control or flexibility one can exercise over the relationship. A 24-year-old female said “(it’s) somewhere where they're not really talking to them that much,” suggesting that the contact can have a more distant quality. In contrast, a 19-year-old male described social media contact as being “a little less… vulnerable, I suppose.” Seven participants (12.1% of responses) made reference to this control or “distance” factor.

Though it was minimally endorsed (N= 3; 5.2% of responses), a unique factor was concern around what others might think. A 22-year-old male put it this way: “You could be judged by your peers on why like ‘why are you still talking to him or her, they did this’ or ‘You know, so-and-so is a good person, you should keep talking to them.’ So I guess a lot of- the social aspect.” Another minimally endorsed category (N= 3; 5.2% of responses) was passiveness or apathy about whether past romantic partners remained in contact through new media (e.g., “I
know that the people who keep their exes on Facebook, they don't think it's a big deal”; 19-year-old female).

Finally, participants were asked, “Is it healthy to stay in social media contact after a breakup?” This time, 23 participants, or slightly over 85% of the respondents, were decisive in their response, with 17 participants saying “yes.” The remaining four participants did not provide a clear answer to this question. Six participants said “no.” Despite categorically stating that staying in contact through social media is unhealthy, all six respondents endorsing this perspective maintained new media contact with at least one of their previous romantic partners.

Participants often elaborated on the factors that made new media post-breakup contact healthy or unhealthy. Some of the factors that were considered for conventional post-breakup contact were likewise considered for new media post-breakup contact. For example, two participants indicated that post-breakup new media contact could reflect maturity and personal growth (e.g., “I feel like it can be. It can give you a reminder of why you're no longer with them (…). You can feel happy for them. It kind of- it can be healthy if you make it that way” (20-year-old female). Eleven participants talked about healthy new media contact requiring boundaries or “distance.” For instance, one participant explained, “Yeah, I think so. As long as it's not that you're stalking their Facebook every day and seeing who they are with, like psycho ex-girlfriend ways” (18-year-old female). Another participant indicated that the medium has built-in boundaries: “I think so, just because I think of that indirect contact. It's not as real” (18-year-old female). Only one participant mentioned that the decision to remain in touch through social media may connect to the importance of being friends outside of the virtual worlds, saying,

“no- I don't really think that if you're not friends- if you're not friends anymore- if you're really just splitting and there's no connection anymore then no. You don't need to see what's going on, it's not really going to help you. You don't need to look at their tweets,
you don't need to know who they're out with or what they're doing. But if you're remaining friends, then yeah, totally.” (17-year-old female).

This participant’s response suggests that if you are not friends outside of the virtual world, there is no need to remain as new media friends. Although only one perspective, this quotation reflects a finding that new media friendships and friendships that exist outside of new media are perceived as different from one another.

Next, participants were asked if they thought that social media played a role in either of their breakups or the aftermath. For the first previous romantic partner, 11 participants said “no” (31.4% of responses) and for the second previous romantic partner, only five participants said “no” (13.2% of responses). A number of participants discussed how social media have made it harder to get over their previous romantic partner (first previous romantic partner: \( N=5 \), 14.3% of responses; second previous romantic partner: \( N=2 \), 5.3% of responses). An 18-year old female explained how social media made recovering from the breakup with her first previous romantic partner more difficult: “It just- it made it take longer for me to move on from it just because I was constantly seeing things I didn't- that would bring up old feelings.” Other participants spoke about how social media have led to increased monitoring and jealousy, particularly when speaking of their most recent romantic partner (first previous romantic partner: \( N=5 \); 14.3% of responses; second previous romantic partner: \( N=8 \); 21.1% of responses). A 24-year-old female explained how social media use has resulted in trust issues both in the past, and now:

“So definitely our breakup was- at the time I didn't actually know that he was really messaging people like this until I found out through other friends, I guess. But yeah, it's just made it now that I don't really trust my current boyfriend to have a Facebook account and for a while, I even thought about deleting mine with him but then one day, my phone broke and I went on Facebook to- like I reactivated my Facebook account and I went on to tell somebody that I couldn't get a hold of that my phone broke and that I'm going to have to message them through Facebook. And then I had seen that my current boyfriend had a Facebook account again- so there's really that issue of trust with Facebook.”
This participant spoke not only of the issue of trust that social media have perpetuated in the past, but the reasons why she has not been able to separate herself from the medium in her current relationship.

A number of participants mentioned that their breakup was started through social media (first previous romantic partner: \(N=3\); 8.6% of responses; second previous romantic partner: \(N=4\); 10.5% of responses) while others spoke of how social media fed into their breakup’s aftermath (first previous romantic partner: \(N=5\); 14.3% of responses; second previous romantic partner: \(N=2\); 5.3% of responses). A 19-year-old male participant said, “Maybe not the actual breakup, but the aftermath, I don't know, it was- I don't know there was still something that kind of tied us together.” Sometimes the social media aftermath was more tumultuous, like it was for this 18-year-old female: “Because he'd always tweet things about it because he thought that I cheated on him but I didn't. So that caused us to fight a lot.”

Moving On

The subsequent set of questions related to the concept of “moving on,” a concept which participants were asked to define. In asking what it means to move on from a breakup, participants’ responses were coded into three major categories. First, the overwhelming majority spoke about the end of the cognitive and/or behavioural preoccupation that one has with their previous romantic partner (\(N=25\); 52.1% of responses). Responses related to this theme would sound like this one: “I think when- when you- you've stopped thinking about the situation so much and over thinking it and over thinking what happened with the person and I think you just kind of realize that- oh, it's been a few days and I haven't thought about that person- that's interesting, that's new, right?” (19-year-old female). An 18-year-old male participant put it slightly differently, “I guess sort of when you get to the point where it doesn't dominate your
thoughts that often, so usually after you think about it a lot. You are moving on when it becomes just as significant as any other moment in your life.”

In response to the questions about moving on, other participants focused on the concepts of acceptance, resilience, and the ability to “let go” of the relationship and breakup (N = 14; 29.2% of responses). For example, an 18-year-old female said, “When you can just accept that they're happy and move on with that, and you're happy without each other.” Last, a number of participants suggested that moving on means that you have room in your life for a new relationship (N = 9; 18.8% of responses; e.g., “Honestly, most people I know, moving on just means finding someone else,” 17-year-old female).

Participants were asked if they had moved on from their own breakups. The large majority had moved on from their first previous romantic partner (N = 25; 92.6%) while fewer had moved on from their second previous romantic partner (N = 18; 66.7%). This is likely because participants typically spoke about their most recent breakup second, and were therefore less likely to have moved on.

Dissonance and Resolution

There were a few instances in which I could directly compare participant perceptions of the norm to his/her own lived experience. For example, I had an understanding of the factors participants perceived as predictive of keeping previous romantic partners as friends on new media (i.e., normative factors), and I wanted to determine whether those same factors applied in their own lives. Specifically, participants were asked about what factors influenced their decision to have or not have their previous romantic partner as a friend on a social networking site. A few unique trends emerged. First, participants were less likely to discuss monitoring or “creeping” when discussing earlier previous romantic partners (N = 3; 7.1% of responses), than they were to
describe monitoring of their more recent previous romantic partner (N = 10; 21.7% of responses). Participants were also more likely to describe their friendship outside of technology as a reason for remaining friends through social media than they were to mention friendship as a normative consideration (first previous romantic partner: N = 10; 23.8% of responses; second previous romantic partner: N = 7; 15.2% of responses). An 18-year-old female explained it this way: “Well he was always there for me and he's a very good friend to me and he always listens.” Finally, a few participants indicated that they do not share aligning social media accounts with their previous romantic partner, so they cannot continue as friends or followers (first previous romantic partner: N = 4; 9.5% of responses; second previous romantic partner: N = 4; 8.7% of responses). No participant had previously mentioned aligning social media accounts as a normative consideration.

While there were a few unique factors that participants spoke about in relationship to their own lived breakup experiences, participants generally spoke about the same factors as they believed were “typically considered” with regard to keeping previous romantic partners as friends and followers. There were two instances in which participants endorsed certain factors less when speaking about their own experience as compared to what is typical: (1) participants spoke less about the relationship and breakup as being a factor in their own experience (from 22.4% of responses: 2.4% and 6.5%, for each previous romantic partner, respectively) and (2) participants spoke less about the social media presence of the previous romantic partner when they spoke about their own experiences (from 25.9% of responses: 11.9% and 10.9%). It can be concluded that, while there was generally factor agreement between “typical” factors and the factors participants considered in personal experience, these were endorsed to differing degrees depending on the reference point.
Given that I had established a sense of each participant’s discrepancies/consistencies between their perceived norms and their lived experiences, I was prepared to ask about the experience of dissonance and how it was dealt with. After being asked the two sets of interview questions, participants were asked a final question. For this, participants were read the following script, tailored to their specific responses:

When I asked you questions in the beginning of this interview, the questions were more broad and about your general ideas about breakups. Then, I asked you questions about your specific experience of breakups. I noticed that there was/was not a lot of similarity between the responses that you gave. Did you notice that there was a mismatch between your general ideas about breakups and this specific breakup experience? How do you explain this mismatch? (Potential prompt: what was it about this breakup experience that might have led you to act differently than what you see as more typical?) How is it that you have been able to act in a way that matches with your general ideas about breakups? Participants provided a broad range of explanations and responses, making it challenging to codify their explanations in a systematic way. One complicating factor was that participants often acted both consistently and inconsistently with the perceived norms that they spoke about in Part I. That is, I often found myself saying to participants, “I noticed that there were some similarities and some dissimilarities between the responses you gave.” This complicated coding because participants experienced consistency between their perceived norms and behaviours in some domains, and inconsistency in others. Relatedly, participants often acted consistently with their perception of the norms in one of their significant romantic relationships, and inconsistently in the other relationship that they described. For example, an 18-year-old female described the difference between her relationships this way:

“OK. With X1, I just think it was- there was a lot of fighting in the end, and we probably both hurt each other in certain ways. Also the things with X1's family, there was that disconnect at a point and they were always very involved if we had any sort of minor conflict whereas X2 it was just- there was never any fighting or anything. We got along great. His family was awesome- he actually lived down my street, so he was right there and I was always in his house with his family and so they really accepted me. So I guess the positive way that X2 and I ended off is- it makes more sense for us to stay
in contact than the negative feelings, bad memories with X1 and that whole thing.”

Here, the participant lists a number of personal and contextual factors that influenced her choice to stay connected with X2, but not with X1. This is one of eight examples whereby participants described reasons for their acting inconsistently with their perceived norms in one case, but not in another.

Another complicating factor was that the young people I sampled were not always aware that any inconsistency between norm and behaviour existed, and had trouble reflecting on it when it was brought to their attention. For one, a 24-year-old female participant was surprised by the discrepancy between perceived norms and personal decisions: “I think it's just how I picture other people's relationships going, and then I never even realized with my relationships that they went a different way. Like saying that you should breakup with people in person and yet I did it both times over the phone- I had no idea.” Though only one perspective, this suggests that young people are not always aware when their behaviour does not align with what they perceive to be typical.

Despite these complicating factors, there were a number of responses that could be coded straightforwardly. For example, three participants had virtually perfect alignment between their responses in Part A (perception of social norms) and Part B (their own experiences). Their responses reflect on the consistency: “I guess just- you have your own beliefs or ideals- or even expectations of what a relationship should be- whether that be how we were raised, what we saw with our parents, what we experience from our friends or from movies or something along those lines” (22-year-old male). A 19-year-old male explained it slightly differently, saying, “I try to do what I believe, I suppose. I don't know.” A 17-year-old male participant specifically mentioned the pull of social norms:
“With breakups- if you do some stuff the wrong way, you're considered a huge bad person to put it nicely. It's just the social norms- you gotta follow them and just respect the person. I think the reason that the social norms are so set because it's very disrespectful to go against them- text them that it's over or whatever.”

Finally, there were a large number of participants (24) who did not experience such perfect consistency, and each of these participants provided explanations for the discrepancy that could be further coded in a systematic way. These rationalizations were determined to fall into two categories; either (1) contextual or (2) personal. However, some explanations touched upon both contextual and personal factors.

Let us begin with a few examples of contextual rationalizations. First, a participant explained that the differential circumstances of her romantic relationships have led her to act differently from what she perceives to be the norm:

“Everyone in my life hasn't and usually criticizes me for doing so and say that it's not good and all that stuff. So I'm used to being surrounded by people who would not stay friends with exes. I have friends who will date people that don't go to their school or that they never have to see again whereas those two relationships were both with people who went to my high school and that I was friends with- I had been friends with X for almost four years before we started dating and with X2 for a couple of years as well before we started dating so it was easy for us to go back to being friends.” (18-year-old female).

Despite criticism from her friends, the romantic relationships themselves have motivated this young woman to remain in contact with her previous romantic partners. She also alluded to shared contexts as being a rationalization for her to remain in contact with previous romantic partners, a behaviour that she perceived to be in contrast to broader social norms.

As a second example, when asked about her decision to breakup with someone through text message (a decision which was in direct conflict with the hierarchy norm she had previously presented), a 20-year-old female provided this explanation: “And in the instance of me breaking up with X, I had just seen him and everything was fine and then he freaked on me through text messages and I guess I just got to a point where I couldn't deal with it.” In this specific case, her
previous romantic partner’s behaviour provided the context for this participant to act differently than the norm. Similarly, when asked about why he chose to breakup with a partner on the phone rather than in person, a 19-year-old participant said, “It's because she said she didn't want to- she didn't want me to breakup with her in person. Or she didn't want to be in person because she didn't want me to breakup with her. So I just called her.” This participant explained that it was the previous romantic partner, or more broadly, the context, that led him to terminate the relationship with his partner in a way that conflicted with the norm.

Moving to an example of a personal rationalization, a 19-year-old female explained that she is different from others in relationships, and therefore, has acted differently:

“(…) thinking about my friends and what they've done and I know with them- they're much more jealous people I guess where if they saw a picture or if they you know, got a text from their ex, they would blow up about it. Whereas, I'm more calm about that kind of stuff I think. Yeah, I don't really like confrontation too much so- I mean with- because my other friends, not a lot of them had very serious relationships (…) So I think that me talking to my exes- I know that it's not- like I'm not going to get upset to their face about it. If anything I would just keep it to myself so it would really affect them too much. So I think that's the difference is that I just handle it differently.”

This is an example of a personal rationalization, because this young woman compared herself to her friends. She indicated that she is unique from the friends who make up her perception of social norms. An additional example of a personal rationalization came from an 18-year-old participant. She explained that her current boyfriend is upset with her decision to stay in contact with one of her previous romantic partners. She stated “I just tell [my boyfriend] ‘If I didn't want to be with you, then I wouldn't’.” Though she has acted inconsistently with what she had previously described as typical post-breakup behaviour (that is, to not stay in post-breakup contact), she maintained that her personal feelings do not get in the way of her continued relationship with the previous romantic partner.
Finally, a 17-year-old female explained that she has acted either to help others or to learn from her actions:

“I would just say that I don't always make the right choices in my life. Sometimes I do things to help other people and not necessarily focus on myself. So, you know, staying in touch with X- I have no idea what to make of the situation right now. I don't know if it's a good thing that I'm staying in touch with him. And I guess the only way to know is to go through it and then learn from whatever happens.”

This quote provides an example of a case in which the participant rationalized her inconsistency based on contextual factors; she felt as though she needed to act differently than the norm because she was focused on her previous romantic partner. She then went on to incorporate a personal rationalization, suggesting that she must experience the outcome of her decisions for herself, rather than behaving in line with a broader social norm. This participant provided an example of a combined contextual and personal rationalization for norm-inconsistent behaviour.

Each of the quotes represents the range of explanations that participants gave for this particular decisions or circumstances around post-breakup contact. What was clear from the explanations is that when participants’ actions did not align with their perceptions of the norms, they provided some sort of explanation for the discrepancy. Though these explanations varied in their details, each participant provided some narrative of their reasoning, explaining why his/her actions differed from his/her perception of broader social norms. When participants provided such explanations for the discrepancy, the explanation involved something that was different about themselves or the circumstances of the relationship that led them to act incongruously from the norm.

**Study 2: Summary and Further Considerations**

To summarize the findings of Study 2 and some general implications, allow me to review the pattern of responses to the two research questions posed in this study.
RQ1: Do the factors that young people cite as important in making post-breakup contact decisions actually apply to their personal breakup experiences?

This question was more complex to answer than initially thought. Some participants experienced relative consistency between what they perceive to be the accepted social norms of appropriate post-breakup behaviour and their personal actions in their own relationships following a breakup. That is, a few participants acted consistently with perceived social norms. However, the majority of participants have not experienced such consistency. An example of inconsistency between beliefs and actions manifested in breakup method, whereby participants broke up with their partners in ways that were incompatible with their established hierarchy of appropriateness. Another example of inconsistency manifested when participants discussed post-breakup contact as unhealthy, but these participants often were, in fact, in touch with their previous romantic partner(s). When there was such discrepancy, the young people sampled often provided an explanation of why their personal experiences made it difficult or impossible to abide by what they perceived the norms to be. This is in line with social theories around dissonance, whereby people are inclined to engage in motivated reasoning to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Kunda, 1990). Though they may not have explicitly made if-then statements (see Edwards, 1995), participants provided some sort of explanation when the discrepancy between their perception of the norms and their own behaviour was made clear to them. Participants provided answers that suggested their circumstances, either personal or contextual, were such that they were required to violate perceived social norms. This use of personal or contextual rationales is entirely consistent with the theoretical concept of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). In sum, there were a number of instances of inconsistency between the norms participants described and their own behaviours; when the inconsistencies were brought to
participants’ attention, participants provided contextual and/or personal explanations for their norm-inconsistent behaviour.

**RQ2: Under what conditions do young people perceive post-breakup contact to be healthy?**

It is important to recognize that young people were not given a definition of “healthy,” so when they were responding to this particular question, they were using their own definition of what constitutes healthy post-breakup contact. In lieu of a provided definition, the answer to this question can be interpreted with participants’ definition of “moving on,” in mind, given that participants had provided their personal definitions earlier in the interview. Over half of the sample suggested that moving on involves an end to preoccupation with the previous partner. This interpretation is in line with previous research, which suggests that intrusive thoughts about the previous partner hinder post-breakup adjustment (Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds & Delgado, 2013).

If one were to make the assumption that young people are aware of and act consistently with what is healthful for them, then it appears that new media post-breakup contact is healthier than conventional post-breakup contact. The slight majority of participants believe that conventional post-breakup contact is unhealthy. In contrast, the large majority of participants believe that new media post-breakup contact is healthy. This is yet another instance in which the conventional and new media post-breakup landscapes are different, wherein new media post-breakup contact is perceived to be “healthier” than conventional post-breakup contact.

Though not explicitly asked in the interview, the majority of participants discussed certain conditions under which different types of post-breakup contact are healthy. Presumably, if these conditions are not met, participants then see it as less healthful to maintain post-breakup
contact. These conditions include the passage of time, such that an interval needs to elapse before contact can be healthy, and that one has “moved on.” To remind readers, participants often described moving on as the end of one’s cognitive and behavioural preoccupation with their former romantic partner. Taken together, participants perceived the passage of time as one of the few means to end their preoccupation with a former romantic partner.

Moreover, a number of participants indicated that some sort of friendship, either prior to or during the relationship, is essential for post-breakup contact to be healthy. This is consistent with previous research related to friendship valuing and the likelihood of post-breakup relational maintenance (VanderDrift et al., 2013). In addition, some participants recognized that boundaries are necessary for post-breakup contact to be considered healthy. Though this “boundaries” component was not among the factors identified in the post-breakup communication literature, it is one that makes intuitive sense. Learning to establish boundaries in relationships is a critical part of healthy development for young people (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). It makes sense that in order for a previous romantic relationship to be redefined as a healthy and new form of relationship, reasonable boundaries must be involved. Though this matter was an infrequently endorsed theme, it is nevertheless an important one given that key role of boundaries in the developmental stage of my participants (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). In summary, and to respond to the question to the initial question, it appears that the passing of time, the valuing of friendship and the exercising of boundaries are seen as necessary conditions for post-breakup contact to be considered healthy.

**Discussion**

There were several goals of this research: to explore the impact that new media has had on perceived breakup norms, to determine whether or not young people acted consistently with
such norms, and to establish whether, and under what conditions, post-breakup contact can be healthy. Overall, the two studies that I conducted suggest that, indeed, new media have had a profound impact on perceived breakup norms. For example, new media have impacted the factors that one considers in choosing whether or not to remain in contact with his/her previous romantic partner(s). Despite the identification of new emergent norms, young people do not always act consistently with the norms that they construct. When such inconsistency occurs, young people typically construct an explanation about why their circumstances required norm-inconsistent behaviour. Further, these individuals tend to believe that continued contact after a breakup can be healthy, and my sample suggested a number of conditions under which it is the case.

This program of research adds to the literature in a number of ways; for one, by replicating and extending the list of considerations that young people contemplate in determining whether or not to stay in contact with a previous romantic partner. Moreover, this investigation draws parallels and distinguishes among the factors that predict conventional post-breakup contact and those that predict new media post-breakup contact. Similarly, this research contributes to the literature by examining perceived norms and norm-incongruent behaviour as they apply to relationship behaviours. Last, this program of research provides some insight into the conditions under which continued contact after a breakup can be healthy, and this has significant implications for anyone close to or working with young people who have experienced or are experiencing breakups. While the two studies of my research program addressed slightly different goals, there was clear overlap in their findings. Here are some of the common conclusions that can be derived from my results.
Emergent Norms

One of the most robust conclusions of my research program is that previous romantic partners are much more likely to stay in touch through social media than to remain in conventional, often face-to-face, contact. A few findings in my studies support this notion. First, in Study 1, participants alluded to more factors that would encourage them to maintain contact through new media than they did when they were speaking about conventional contact. That is, participants wrote about 7 factors of new media that would most likely foster continued contact (i.e., friendship, maintain civility, passivity, monitoring, implications of deleting and mutual friends). By contrast, participants wrote about only 2 factors that would most likely encourage continued conventional contact (i.e., friendship and mutual contexts). Furthermore, when asked about their perception of whether it is better to stay in contact with previous romantic partners, some participants suggested that it is best to stay in contact only when it is mediated through new media. Also, recall that 59.8% of participants indicated that they stay in touch with at least one of their previous romantic partners, while 77.3% of participants indicated that they have at least one previous romantic partner as a Facebook friend. These findings from Study 1 suggested that young people are more likely to stay in touch through new media than through other means. Supporting these initial findings, the majority of participants from Study 2 suggested that previous romantic partners would stay in contact through social media, but not through conventional means. In terms of their actual behaviour, participants were in conventional contact with just over half of previous romantic partners, while participants were friends and/or followers to two-thirds of previous romantic partners.

Putting this into the context of existing literature, it seems that young people are very inclined to remain friends on social media with previous romantic partners (Lee & O’Sullivan,
In Study 1, 77.3% of participants indicated that they have at least one previous romantic partner as a friend on Facebook. This parallels Muise and colleagues’ findings; they found that 74.6% of undergraduate participants reported that their partner has added previous romantic partners as friends on Facebook (2009). In comparing these figures to those from before the advent of new media (e.g., before 2001), there are some differences, though it is difficult to compare frequencies due to operational differences in definitions of friendships. For example, in Kaplan and Keys’ (1997) study, only about 14% reported that their closest current friendship was with a previous romantic partner. When using less conservative parameters for friendship, Schneider and Kenny (2000) found that approximately 67% of undergraduates indicate being friends with one of their previous romantic partners. Despite these differences in operational definitions, it seems as though a trend is emerging whereby young people are more frequently “friends” through new media than they are “friends” through conventional means. In line with this, when I assessed participants’ actual behaviours, participants were much more likely to remain in contact with their previous romantic partners using new media than to remain in conventional contact. This is one instance when participants’ behaviours were consistent with what they believed to be the case more generally.

The next general finding does not relate to post-breakup contact per se, but does speak to the intersection of new media and breakups. In Study 1, when I asked participants about the way in which new media have changed breakups, almost 25% of responses alluded to the use of technology to breakup with their partner. This trend (i.e., using new media to breakup with a partner) has been associated with profoundly negative social attitudes in other studies (Gershon, 2010; Sprecher, Zimmerman & Abrahams, 2010; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2012). Many participants in Study 1 expressed similarly negative attitudes. Accordingly, I wanted to gauge the attitudes
about using new media to breakup among my second sample. Not surprisingly, Study 2 participants were very clear about the hierarchy of appropriateness of ways to breakup with partners: the data indicate that in-person breakups were considered more appropriate than video calling or Skype, which were both more appropriate than a phone call, which were all more appropriate than using some sort of instant messaging (e.g., “texting” or Facebook chat). This hierarchy is consistent with research by Gershon (2008; 2010) and suggests that the perceived appropriateness of the different means of breaking up has not changed significantly in the past five years or so. My findings are consistent with previous research, collectively suggesting that using new media to breakup with a partner is socially unacceptable.

In both studies, participants provided their perspectives about what it means to move on from a breakup. According to participants in my two samples, the concept of moving on involves a combination of constructs: acceptance, letting go of the relationship, and ending the preoccupation one has with the previous romantic partner. This pattern is consistent with research suggesting that a failure to accept the breakup is associated with prolonged post-breakup distress (Field et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2012; Sbarra, 2006). As an extension, the passing of time was recognized as a critical factor for one to “move on” from a breakup. This is consistent with literature suggesting that time is an important component of moving on (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010). In both studies of the current investigation, participants alluded to the old adage that “time heals all wounds.” The recognition of time as healing is important, particularly when we consider the way in which new media impact post-breakup recovery. The fact that young people require time in order to make a healthier post-breakup recovery has implications for how accessible a previous romantic partner should be, including through new media. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that previous partner monitoring impedes the
The recovery process following a breakup (Lyndon Bonds-Raacke & Cratty, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Tong et al., 2013). Combining these empirical findings, we are in better position to speculate on how best to amplify and expedite a young person’s post-breakup recovery process. The implications of these findings are discussed in greater detail in the clinical considerations section.

Three common emergent norms were underscored in this research program: (1) young people are more likely to stay in touch through new media than through conventional means, (2) young people perceive the use of new media to breakup as the least socially acceptable breakup approach, and (3) many young people recognize that the passage of time as a critical component in moving on. In general, this investigation helps clarify our understanding of the way in which new media have impacted young people’s perceptions of social norms. To further this understanding, allow me to turn to other common findings of my program of study, specifically around the influencing factors for post-breakup contact.

**Factors Predicting Post-Breakup Contact**

In past research, friendship valuing, the quality of the breakup, and commitment were all found to be predictive of post-breakup contact (Banks et al., 1987; Baxter, 1984; Busboom et al., 2002; Collins & Gillath, 2012; Foley & Fraser, 1998; Metts et al., 1989; Tan et al., 2014; VanderDrift et al., 2013). In this investigation, each of these factors was also identified as an important determinant of whether or not to remain in contact with a previous romantic partner. Consistent with Foley and Fraser (1998), sharing mutual contexts was an identified factor considered in making post-breakup contact decisions. In addition, previous partner monitoring was an established factor in the literature and within this investigation (Darvell et al., 2011; Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Muise et al., 2014; Rempel et al., 1985; Tong, 2013). Other factors identified in this study included convenience, having a new partner, the
characteristics of the people involved, the need to move on, concern around how terminating contact is perceived, and the social media presence of the previous romantic partner. In terms of frequency, overall friendship quality, mutual contexts, the breakup itself, and commitment were the most common factors cited. These factors, coincidentally, are the same factors that have been most established in the literature (Banks et al., 1987; Baxter, 1984; Busboom et al., 2002; Collins & Gillath, 2012; Foley & Fraser, 1998; Metts et al., 1989; Tan et al., 2014; VanderDrift et al., 2013). Generally, this investigation is consistent with previous research in terms of the factors young people consider when determining whether or not to remain in contact with a previous romantic partner.

Some of the same factors that were found to influence conventional post-breakup contact were also found to influence new media post-breakup contact. These include the quality of the relationship and the breakup, sharing contexts, and the introduction of a new partner. Of these factors, only the quality of the relationship and break-up and shared contexts were established in the literature as predictive of post-breakup contact (Foley & Fraser, 1998; Metts et al., 1989; Tan et al., 2014; VanderDrift et al., 2013). The introduction of a new partner as an influencing factor for post-breakup contact is intuitive, but it is not one that has been explored in the previous breakup literature in any depth. This finding offers an opportunity for future research to explore the impact of having a new partner on previous romantic relationships, and conversely, the impact of maintaining post-breakup contact on one’s current romantic relationship.

Returning to the comparison among predictive factors of post-breakup contact, there were a number of factors that participants cited as being important considerations for conventional post-breakup contact that were not mentioned in the context of new media contact. This list includes investment, friendships before and after, and the personality characteristics of the
partners involved. Likewise, some factors were cited as important in considering new media post-breakup contact but not conventional post-breakup contact. This list includes the social media “presence” of the previous romantic partner, monitoring, the ability to exercise boundaries, concern about what others might think, and finally, passiveness/apathy. In the context of these findings, I would like to remind readers of a pattern I identified while reflecting on the factors that were uniquely cited as important in considering conventional post-breakup contact. That is, the factors predicting conventional post-breakup contact (e.g., investment, friendships before and after, and personality factors) are all relevant to the relationship itself and to the people involved in the relationship. By way of contrast, the factors that were uniquely cited for post-breakup contact through new media (e.g., monitoring, perceptions of deleting previous romantic partners) all seem to share a common pattern in that they pertain to the medium itself. The “social media presence” of the previous romantic partner, monitoring, ability to exercise boundaries, concern about what others might think, and passiveness to delete/unfriend each result from characteristics of the medium, and not necessarily from characteristics of the relationship. Hence, in summary, the studies in this investigation suggest an important distinction between factors predictive of conventional post-breakup contact compared to factors predictive of new media post-breakup contact.

Now that I have outlined the outcomes and associated contributions of this research program to our existing knowledge, let us consider the application of this research. Allow me to first turn to clinical applications, and then consider the limitations of the investigation and future directions for such research.
Clinical Considerations

As mentioned, the breakup of a romantic relationship is among the most common reasons for young people to seek therapeutic support (Gilbert & Sifers, 2011). Existing evidence supports the notion that therapies which target post-breakup negative cognitions can be an effective clinical strategy in treating breakup distress (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009). Likewise, expressive writing has been thought to habituate the writer to stressful stimuli, making it a form of exposure therapy that has been established as somewhat helpful for young peoples’ post-breakup recovery (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). Although research has provided some indication of what can be helpful for young people in the midst of a breakup, it would be ideal to equip clinicians and those working with young people with more adaptive strategies and advice for promoting post-breakup recovery, particularly in this era of new media.

The results of this investigation point to a critical clinical consideration: the significance of acknowledging the emotional importance of new media contact with a previous romantic partner. A clinician or counselor might recommend that a client who is complaining that he/she is engaging in monitoring their previous romantic partner simply delete, un-friend and un-follow the previous romantic partner. This advice would be consistent with the findings of that suggest that new media monitoring is inhibitive of post-breakup recovery (Tran & Joormann, 2015). This recommendation could be likened to what psychoanalyst Denise Cullington called “refusing to mind,” which involves active forgetting “in order to short-circuit emotional pain” (2008, p. 87). However, research suggests that the experience of completely “unfriending” is, in fact, associated with increased post-breakup distress (Lukacs, 2012; Marshall, 2012). Moreover, taking into account the pull of perceived social norms, young people may have a great deal of difficulty taking the steps to completely delete, unfriend and unfollow a previous romantic
partner. As this study indicated, there are a number of reasons why a person would want to remain a friend and follower of their previous romantic partner. Complicating matters, romantic partners are connected to a broader network of personal friends who also use social media to interact. Hence, while the concept of “deleting” and “unfriending” are perhaps good ideas in theory, expanding social media connections do not permit such a simple approach. As discovered by Garimella and colleagues (2014), one can anticipate losing an average of 20 Twitter followers after a breakup. Highly intertwined social connections, particularly through new media, make it complicated for young people to simply “delete,” “unfriend” and “unfollow.”

Evidently, “unfriending” comes at a cost, and a clinician who recommends the removal of a former romantic partner from social media could actually be inadvertently complicating their client’s recovery. A generation of clinicians that is less familiar with new media might see continued contact through new media as a nuisance, rather than acknowledging how significant and difficult decisions around post-breakup contact are. Psychotherapist Linda Cundy articulated the generational chasm caused by new media: “All but the youngest of parents have offspring who are radically different from themselves” because of the differential impact of technology (2015, p. 25). This quotation acknowledges a generational gap that must be bridged for clinical work with young people experiencing a relationship breakup.

Clinicians working with young people should strive to maintain some familiarity with novel communication media. For example, Facebook has recently established new relationship status tools that will allow its clients to limit what you see of your past romantic partner and what he/she sees of yours (Winters, 2015). It is important for clinicians working with young people to acknowledge developments like these in new media. This investigation contextualizes such developments by shedding insight on what levels and type of communication young people
perceive as adaptive following a breakup. Reflecting on my finding that post-breakup contact is healthier after some time passed since the breakup, clinicians can encourage their clients to use the aforementioned social media tools to *temporarily* enforce limits and boundaries on the extent of exposure and contact to previous romantic partners. Young clients may be more receptive to a message that is not definitive, and these tools allow time to pass for clients to process their breakup-related feelings.

Further and specific recommendations for clinicians and professionals working with young people experiencing breakups can be found in Lukacs (2012). These recommendations are aligned with some of the recommendations that can be extrapolated from the findings of the current investigation. Some suggestions include advising young adult clients to change their passwords, removing information from one’s wall or feed (including relationships statuses and photos), unsubscribing from certain news updates, and finally, directing these clients to reflect on how they may interact differently with new media in the context of future relationships. The clinical suggestion from Lukacs (2012) that is particularly reinforced by this investigation is the recommendation to “listen carefully to the person’s concerns and avoid oversimplifying their situation” (p.89). Adopting a curious stance, rather than making assumptions, can help young adult clients access and accept their emotional reactions following a breakup (Harris, 2009). Fostering acceptance is thought to be particularly helpful for healthy emotional recovery from a number of stressful situations (Harris, 2009) and has been specifically connected to post-breakup recovery (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002). Taken together, one can draw from Lukacs’s suggestions (2012), as well as acceptance-based clinical strategies, to more adequately support the recovery of a young person experiencing a breakup.
Limitations

There were a number of limitations that may have had some impact on the results and applications of this investigation. These limitations include question variations from Study 1 to Study 2, participants’ apparent difficulty delineating their own experience from broader norms, considerations regarding the trustworthiness of the analysis, and variations in participants’ breakup experience. Allow me to explore each of these limitations in more detail.

The first limitation has to do with some question inconsistency between Study 1 and Study 2. Had the questions been crafted more congruently, it may have been easier to draw parallels between the larger questionnaire data of Study 1 and the comprehensive interview of Study 2. Instead, the questions from Study 1 were used to inform Study 2, and even the slightest wording difference could have potentially produced a different proportion of results (Schwarz, 1999). For example, in Study 1 I asked, “Why or why not would you choose to have previous romantic partner(s)/exes as Facebook friends?” In Study 2 I asked, “What sorts of things influence whether exes remain as friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter?” These slight differences may represent a limitation, and yet, there was not a lot of variability in the responses reported for these two inquiries. The responses from Study 1 map almost perfectly with the responses from Study 2 for each of the questions, with a few exceptions. In the example I provided previously, all of the response themes mapped well from Study 1 and Study 2, with the exception of the friends/closeness theme discussed by participants in Study 1. Each of the questions for Study 1 that used similar (but not the same) wording in Study 2 yielded almost identical results. This is a limitation in so far as I cannot estimate the impact of such slight wording differences. However, the fact that both questions produced similar results is indicative that I am tapping the same underlying constructs.
Another limitation was discovered, particularly in Study 2, when participants had difficulty separating their own experience from what they believed to be typical, or average. At times, participants asked for clarification about whom it was that they were answering in reference to. I would answer similarly each time, saying something along the lines of “friends, media… what you think would be typically true.” But it was apparent that participants still grappled with this, as evidenced by this statement provided in Part 1 of the Study 2 interview: “for me, let's say my ex was posting a bunch of pictures with her hanging out with dudes, all the time, I'm not going to follow you on Instagram because I don't want to see crap like that” (18-year-old male). Though this participant was explaining a normative phenomenon, he had trouble doing so without self-referencing. Similarly, a 19-year-old male had trouble with articulating his response without self-referencing, “I'm really just talking about what I've seen with friends, I don't know, me, what works for me and them, or what I think works for them.” One participant explained the difficulty he was having in response to the final question: “I think- I think it's because my answers are based on my experience in life, so in a way, I'm giving you my outlook on life. I find it hard to generalize for other people because I know that everybody sees the world differently and they have their own views and expectations so there's no real set answer for anything” (28-year-old male).

I would argue that this limitation does not represent cognitive misunderstanding of the questions (Schwarz, 1999). Instead, I think that asking participants about their perception of norms, without a specific reference point, requires a level of abstract thinking that can be difficult for many people (see Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, Goldstein & Griskevicius, 2008). This is likely particularly true for the young adult population I sampled, given that, even after late adolescence, the brain structures required for complex abstract thinking are not fully developed
(van den Bos, de Rooij, Sumter & Westernberg, 2016). For anyone, but especially young people, it can be hard to separate one’s own experiences from their perception of the norms. Though one could determine if the order of questioning would make a difference in this regard (i.e., counterbalancing by asking about personal experience first, and then norms), it is likely that the difficulty of answering the questions in the abstract, without self-referencing, would remain an issue. Future research involving self-reported perceptions of social norms should take participant’s apparent need for a reference point into consideration, and consider counterbalancing to determine if this is still problematic for participants.

The analytic method chosen, conventional content analysis, brings with it a number of considerations. The massive amount of data that required reduction results in an inevitable loss of richness and variability of responses (Weber, 1990). The reduction process within coding involves a great deal of decision-making by the researcher, with only minimal means to determine if the decisions made are credible, transferable and dependable (Guba, 1981; Krippendorff, 2012; Shenton, 2004; Weber, 1990). Though attempts were made to reduce the impact of the issues with coding, all investigations employing qualitative analytic methods are vulnerable to similar complications (e.g., concerns around credibility, transferability and dependability). It is impossible to know for certain, in this and other studies, the impact of data reduction. However, steps were taken to satisfy the various criteria for rigorous qualitative research, and I will discuss each in turn.

Credibility refers to the congruence between what one sought to measure and what one actually measured (i.e., the qualitative equivalent to internal validity; see Shenton, 2004). There are a number of ways for a researcher to conduct credible research. In this investigation specifically, I used a well-established qualitative strategy (i.e., conventional content analysis)
and developed the investigation with scrutiny at each stage (particularly at the proposal stage). I also followed informed consent procedures, and examined my findings in light of previous research, comparing and contrasting each current finding to previous literature. Each of these processes lends support to the notion that I measured what I sought out to. That is, these processes provide creditability to the findings of this investigation (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Krippendorff (2012) noted that if categories are extracted from the data, there is no way, necessarily, to determine if the categories transfer beyond the sample from which the data were taken. A common question of qualitative research is whether findings can be extended to broader populations (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This is consistent with concerns proposed by Guba (1981), related to the transferability of the research at hand (see Shenton, 2004). The data from this investigation were intended to identify general trends and patterns to further delineate in future research. While it is impossible to say for certain whether the data from this research would transfer to broader populations, the data provide a snapshot of the trends and patterns among a certain demographic, which can either be supported or refuted by future qualitative and quantitative investigations. It is important to recognize that this is only one snapshot, and that, like in all research, replication among other groups is the best way to determine the transferability of a particular program of studies (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

Replication is related to the construct of dependability. Dependability refers to the likelihood that if the same study were repeated, with the same participants and the same contexts, similar results would be obtained (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Having a second coder in Study 1 was one way in which this investigation sought to satisfy dependability criteria. Qualitative researchers suggest that the primary way in which one can satisfy the criteria of dependability is
to be explicit about the details of the research method and analytic strategy (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). By providing particulars about the steps I took in the analysis, as well as Figures 1-20, I have worked towards satisfying dependability criteria. Taken together, in these ways, I have made an effort to satisfy three of Guba’s (1981) standards for trustworthy qualitative research: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, and (3) dependability.

An additional concern involves the varying legitimacy of participants to respond to questions about breakups, based on their varying breakup experience. For example, participants in Study 1 experienced an average of 1.85 breakups. To gain more meaningful information about personal experiences, Study 2 participants were required to have experienced 2 significant romantic breakups. For Study 2, 23 participants experienced two breakups, 2 participants experienced three breakups, and 2 participants experienced more than three breakups. As such, participants in Study 2 experienced an average of 2.15 breakups. Given the range of breakup experiences, one might say that those experiencing more than a single or a couple of breakups have better informed answers to each of the questions.

A question underlies this issue: how can I know which breakup experience(s) each participant is drawing from? That is, when a participant describes his/her broader breakup perceptions, he/she could be considering any number of things: a most recent breakup, a most psychologically salient breakup, or a combination of experiences. This is a consideration for Study 1 and for Part I of Study 2, where participants were not asked questions about a specific breakup experience(s).

Unfortunately, I cannot know which breakup experience(s) each participant is drawing from. Existing research suggests that breakup experiences can be vastly different from one another (Baxter, 1984) and that some breakup experiences are on-again/off-again (Dailey,
Rosetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009). Therefore, asking participants to discretely quantify their breakup experiences may be artificial to begin with. In addition, there is substantial evidence indicating that representations of emotional events vary significantly in their encoding and retrieval (Canli, Zhao, Brewer, Gabrieli & Cahill, 2000; Kensinger, 2004). Within the scope of this study, it was impossible to know exactly which representation of a breakup experience(s) a participant was drawing on in order to provide a response. A participant with multiple breakup experiences may have relied on just a single breakup experience, while a participant with a few breakup experiences may have relied on all of their representations in responding. Though I could not identify the comparability of each participant’s breakup experience(s) in this investigation, future research could focus on this, perhaps by investigating how responses differ when participants have varying quantities and qualities of breakups.

**Future Directions**

In addition to addressing the limitations listed above, future research could explore a number of diverse avenues. Some of the avenues for future research include previous partner monitoring, breakup norms within LGBTQ+ populations and applying this methodology as a cross-sectional study.

One such consideration, one that was identified relatively infrequently but remains quite significant in terms of its potential consequences, is the concept of previous partner monitoring. Though it was one of many considerations acknowledged in this study, we know from previous research that new media provides unprecedented access to previous partner monitoring and that it occurs with intensity and frequency (Lyndon et al., 2011; Marshall, 2012). Previous research has found that 88% of young people “creep” their previous romantic partner if they remain friends on Facebook (Lukacs, 2012). One possible explanation for the limited identification of
partner monitoring in my studies is that it has become a taken-for-granted phenomenon that young people no longer recognize as worth mentioning. Another explanation for its limited discussion is that young people might be embarrassed by the degree to which they use new media for previous partner monitoring. The medium itself provides both access and anonymity for previous partner monitoring, so it is possible that participants do not feel comfortable bringing their previous partner monitoring habits to the attention of others. Though previous partner monitoring was mentioned only occasionally in my studies, it is nonetheless an important consideration for young people’s habits with new media. Specifically, it will be critical for future studies to delineate “creeping” from more traditional forms of previous partner monitoring. We have very clear guidelines about what constitutes traditional “stalking” in Canada, yet cyberstalking is less clearly defined (Department of Justice, 2012). This lack of definition is particularly concerning because more benign forms of previous partner monitoring are associated with more serious stalking behaviours (Lee & O’Sullivan, 2014; Lyndon et al., 2011). Twenty percent of university students are targeted by some form of post-breakup intrusive contact (e.g., repeatedly phoning and hanging up, following, watching residence; Haugaard & Seri, 2003). This pattern is especially concerning because young people tend to engage in even more disinhibited behaviour in their online environments than their offline ones (Suler, 2004). Yet, in my investigation and in others (e.g., Fox & Warber, 2014; Muise et al., 2014), young people talk about “creeping” as a relatively nonthreatening behaviour, while simultaneously engaging in this behaviour with intensity and frequency. Grasping a more comprehensive understanding of monitoring behaviours, especially in terms of social and legal appropriateness, will be an important objective for future research.
Let us now turn to avenues for future research related to the transferability (or generalizability) of the current investigation. In Study 1, data from participants who identified as non-heterosexual were excluded from analysis. In Study 2, participation was restricted to only heterosexual participants. These decisions were made for a number of reasons, though it is with regret that sexual minority participants were excluded from this program of studies. It will be important for future research to compare the breakup experiences of LGBTQ+ couples, delineating the similarities and differences, which was unfortunately not possible in the current program of research. That being said, for a brief review of the literature on sexual minority breakups, and an overview of my related findings, see Appendix A.

Finally, running similar studies to this one, but with an older demographic, could yield some interesting comparison data. As indicated, the young people sampled in these studies have only experienced breakups within a context of new media. By contrast, a study focusing on generation X (referring to those born between the early 1960s to early 1980s) would suggest the changes in post-breakup contact over time, some of which are a result of the impact of new media. While maturity and relational experience in such a study would be confounding factors, the information gleaned would be valuable and could reflect, to some extent, the impact of technology. Participants from generation X were not included in this study, though evidence suggests that these middle-aged adults are quickly adopting technology, becoming more like young adults in their use of new media (Van Volkom, Stapley & Amaturo, 2014). A generational shift like this one would make it increasingly difficult to make cross-cohort comparisons. Nonetheless, the generation X demographic would likely have a better sense of the way in which technology has changed the post-breakup script, because they have lived experience of these changes.
These are some of the many avenues to which this research could be extended. Importantly, new measures are being created and validated to measure post-breakup experiences (see Brenner & Vogel, 2015 and Lukacs & Quaan-Haase, 2015). Through the aforementioned areas of future research, these measures, combined with qualitative strategies, will provide an integrative understanding of breakup and post-breakup norms and experiences.

Conclusions: Negotiation of a New Script for New Media

Taken together, the results of the current investigation support the notion that the post-breakup relational landscape is, in fact, changing. New norms are being established and these norms are evolving. Those within the age demographic I sampled are the creators of these new standards and customs. When their behaviours do not align with such norms, and such a discrepancy is made explicit, it is likely that young people experience some dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In these instances, young people usually engage in motivated reasoning to explain why their circumstances demanded that they diverge from the norm (Kunda, 1999). We know that the psychological pull of perceived social norms is intensely felt (Abelson, 1981; Nolan et al., 2008). Taking these complex factors into consideration, those working and interacting with young people should strive towards balancing such social norms with what is most healthful and adaptive for emerging adults navigating a complex post-breakup landscape.
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### Tables and Figures

*Gender Comparisons (Chi-square Analysis) for Study 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why/why not PRP as FB friends?</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.51</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors influencing PBU contact decisions</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.94</td>
<td>.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better or worst to stay in contact?</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breakup philosophy</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.96</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology impact</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.84</td>
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*Note.* All chi-square tests conducted have some cells with expected counts less than 5.
Table 2

*Gender Comparisons (Chi-square Analysis) for Study 2*

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<td>Appropriateness hierarchy of breakup methods</td>
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<td>Breakup method used X1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
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<td>Breakup method used X2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do exes stay in touch?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors associated with CC</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.84</td>
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<td>In CC with X1?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In CC with X2?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.84</td>
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<td>Would exes take time?</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Do exes stay in touch over SM?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>Factors influencing SM PBU contact</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>In NMC with X1?</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>In NMC with X2?</td>
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<td>Factors influencing contact decisions with X1</td>
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<td>Factors influencing contact decisions with X2</td>
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<td>.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does moving on mean?</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<td>Have you moved on from X1?</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>.62</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you moved on from X2?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to be in touch?</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to be in touch over NM?</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did SM play a role with X1 breakup?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did SM play a role with X2 breakup?</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.80</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All chi-square tests conducted have some cells with expected counts less than 5.
Table 3

*Number of Responses to Each Question in Study 2, Part I*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that some methods of breaking up are more appropriate than others?</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do exes typically stay in touch?</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do exes stay in touch right after a breakup or does it take some time until they talk to each other again?</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sorts of things influence whether two people stay in touch after a breakup?</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sorts of things influence whether exes remain as friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would exes stay in touch over social media? For example, would they remain friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter after a breakup?</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does it mean to move on from a breakup?</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to stay in contact with previous romantic partners?</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to stay in contact with previous romantic partners over social media?</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Number of Responses to Each Question in Study 2, Part II*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of Responses for Ex 1</th>
<th>Number of Responses for Ex 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have X as a “friend” on a social networking site?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you stay in contact with X?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When X broke up with Y, how did they do it?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you “moved on?”</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You said that you have/have not chosen to be friends with X on a social networking site. What do you think influences that decision for you?</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think social media played a role in the way the breakup (and its aftermath) happened</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Summary of Participant Responses to Select Questions in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of participants responding in the affirmative</th>
<th>Number of participants responding in the negative</th>
<th>Number of participants whose responses could not be coded dichotomously</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy of appropriateness for breakups: face-to-face, video call, phone call, instant messaging</td>
<td>22 (8⁹)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do exes stay in touch?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to stay in touch?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10 (8⁹)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you stay in contact with your previous romantic partner?</td>
<td>13 (Ex 1)</td>
<td>14 (Ex 1)</td>
<td>12 (Ex 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (Ex 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do exes stay in touch over social media?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it healthy to stay in touch over social media?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6 (6⁹)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have your previous romantic partner as a “friend” on a social networking site?</td>
<td>18 (Ex 1)</td>
<td>9 (Ex 1)</td>
<td>9 (Ex 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (Ex 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you moved on?</td>
<td>25 (Ex 1)</td>
<td>2 (Ex 1; 2⁹)</td>
<td>1 (Ex 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (Ex 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 (Ex 2; 7⁹)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N= 27

⁹ Participants who suggested that in-person breakups were preferred, but had broken up with their partner using technology or social media

⁹ Participants who are still in contact with their previous romantic partner who also suggested that post-breakup contact is unhealthy

⁹ Participants who have not moved on and are still in contact with their partner
Figure 1. Percentage of responses for Study 1: “Why or why not would you choose to have previous romantic partner(s)/exes as Facebook friends?”
Figure 2. Percentage of responses for Study 1: “What factors or circumstances influence your decision as to whether or not you remain in contact with previous romantic partners/exes?”

Figure 3. Percentage of responses for Study 1: “Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers, etc.) with previous partners/exes, or to end contact altogether? I would like to know what factors account for your decision.”

Figure 4. Percentage of responses for Study 1: “What is your breakup philosophy? That is, how do you approach the aftermath of a breakup?”
Figure 5. Percentage of responses for Study 1: “Do you think that technology (e.g., cell phones) and social media (e.g., Facebook) have changed the way that people breakup?” Note that the segments in this figure do not add to 100%. This is because the chart only reflects responses that included elaborations on the ways in which technology and social media have changed the way that people breakup.
Figure 6. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “How is a breakup communicated?”

Figure 7. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “Do you think that some methods of breaking up are more appropriate than others? Explain the hierarchy of appropriateness.”
Figure 8. An aggregate of percentage of the responses to “When X broke up with Y, how did they do it?”

Figure 9. Percentage of participants for Study 2: “Do exes typically stay in touch?”

Figure 10. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “Do exes- if they are to stay in touch- would it be right after a breakup or does it usually take some time until they talk to each other again?”
Figure 11. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “What sorts of things influence where two people stay in touch after a breakup?”

Figure 12. Percentage of participants for Study 2: “Is it healthy to stay in touch after a breakup?”
Figure 13. An aggregate of the responses to “Do you stay in contact with X?”

Figure 14. Percentage of participants for Study 2: “Would exes stay in touch over social media?”
Figure 15. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “What sort of things would influence whether or not someone stays in touch over Facebook, or other social media?”

Figure 16. Percentage of participants for Study 2: “Is it healthy to stay in in social media contact after a breakup?”
Figure 17. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “Do you have X as a “friend” on a social networking site?”
Figure 18. Percentage of responses for Study 2, Ex 1: “You said that you have/have not chosen to be friends with X on a social networking site. What do you think influences that decision for you?”
Figure 19. Percentage of responses for Study 2, Ex 2: “You said that you have/have not chosen to be friends with X on a social networking site. What do you think influences that decision for you?”

- The nature of the relationship and its breakup: 21.70%
- External pressure: 19.60%
- Monitoring/jealousy: 15.20%
- SM presence of the ex: 10.90%
- Passive: 8.70%
- Shared contexts: 8.70%
- Friends in "real life": 6.50%
- No control over this: 5.00%

Figure 20. Percentage of responses for Study 2: “What does it mean to move on from a breakup?”

- End of preoccupation: 52.10%
- Acceptance/resilience: 29.20%
- Room in life for someone else: 18.80%
Appendix A

Breakups Among LGBTQ+ Couples: A Review and Overview Analysis

Though I identified very little literature investigating breakups among sexual minority romantic couples, this area is an important one for several reasons. For one, with the legalization of marriage comes the inevitable possibility of divorce, bringing with it implications for custody (see Kinsey, 2009; Oswald & Clausell, 2006; Underwood, 2002). In addition, we know from previous research that the experience of a breakup is among the most common reasons for young people to come to therapy (Gilbert & Sifers, 2011). Given that any person, regardless of sexual orientation, is more likely to require support in the aftermath of a breakup, we require more research investigating the breakup experience of LGBTQ+ individuals to better meet the post-breakup mental health needs of this specific population. Finally, and most importantly, it is best practice for research to be inclusive, recognizing the similarities and differences among the experiences of all people (Gottman et al., 2003; Math & Seshadri, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

This review found that breakups for LGBTQ+ individuals represent a similar but distinct phenomenon from breakups among heterosexual individuals. This brief review will first explain two key similarities: (1) homosexual couples experience similar stressors and break up for the same reasons that heterosexual couples do (Kurdek, 1997; Underwood, 2002) and (2) sexual minority individuals experience similar levels of breakup distress as heterosexual individuals (Kurdek, 1997). In contrast, some distinctions will be made between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual breakups in two domains: (1) homosexual relationships develop in different social contexts than heterosexual relationships and (2) the relationship that sexual minority individuals hold with their family of origin differs from that of heterosexual individuals.
Starting with similarities, research suggests that homosexual individuals break up with their partners for the same reasons as heterosexual individuals (Kurdek, 1997). Using Cupach and Metts’ (1986) typology of reasons for separation (e.g., relationship roles, third-party involvement), Kurdek did not identify statistically significant differences in reasons for breaking up when comparing sexual minority couples to heterosexual couples (1997). Indeed, Gottman and colleagues identified the same connection between heart rate and relationship termination between both heterosexual couples and homosexual couples. That is, for both heterosexual and non-heterosexual couples, higher heart rates are associated with greater likelihood of breaking up. Gottman and colleagues explained this physiological phenomenon as “chronic reactivity” (2003).

In the same article that identified that heterosexual and homosexual couples break up for the same reasons, Kurdek (1997) also examined post-breakup distress levels. Both homosexual couples and heterosexual couples were found to experience similar levels of distress following a breakup. This is just one finding, so replication is required to determine whether it is indeed the case that homosexual and heterosexual couples experience comparable post-breakup distress levels.

Turning now to the differences between homosexual and heterosexual breakups, it is important to reflect on the context in which relationships develop. That is, sexual minority relationships develop in social contexts that diverge from the context for heterosexual couples (Oswald & Clausell, 2006). Specifically, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that homosexual couples meet in different ways than heterosexual couples, and maintain slightly different dynamics in some respects (Bauermeister et al., 2010; Kurdek, 1994; Kurdek, 2003; Oswald & Clausell, 2006). After explaining that gay men, in particular, experience more variety of types of
romantic relationships (e.g., “flings” and “open relationships”) family therapist Michael Shernoff wrote, “Gay men, reflecting the larger culture's biases and prejudice, don't acknowledge break-ups apart from traditional-looking committed relationships” (1997, p.10). He reflected that many gay clients present as highly troubled following an unconventional breakup, but have difficulty acknowledging that the breakup is the source of their distress. A significant difference for the breakups of sexual minority couples compared with heterosexual clients is the dissimilarity in social context in which these relationships develop.

What is more, we know that sexual minority individuals relate differently to their family of origin than do heterosexual individuals. In contrast to heterosexual individuals, for example, homosexual individuals tend to seek friendships to complete their social network, rather than relying on kin to do so (Julien, Chartrand & Begin, 1999). Further, these friendships are a greater source of social support than kin is (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993). Both findings are interpreted as the result of rejection from kin family members (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Julien, Chartrand & Begin, 1999). We could extend these findings to a breakup context, whereby homosexual individuals might be less likely to rely on their family for support than would heterosexual individuals. Further, breakups may represent a more critical social disruption for a homosexual couple, if the social network is shared between the dyad.

Lawrence Kurdek does most of the research that we have investigating and contrasting LGBTQ+ breakups and heterosexual breakups (Oswald & Clausell, 2006). Kurdek wrote, “I have found in other domains of relationship functioning- relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, relationship conflict resolution styles and areas of relationship conflict- that gay and lesbian partners in cohabitating relationships are more similar to than different from married heterosexual partners. With the current set of findings, I add the domain of separation adjustment
to this list” (1997, p.157). However, Oswald and Clausell suggest that Kurdek’s research is based on very small samples, which overlap from study to study. They add that Kurdek employs measures that have previously only been normed with heterosexual couples (2006), which has implications for the type of conclusions one can make based on this body of literature. In contrast to the comparison literature, Lannutti and Cameron (2009) used a large, well-balanced sample of heterosexual and homosexual participants in a study of post-dissolutional relationships, but did not compare various types of relationships. Instead, their intention was to add to the diversity of the relationship research. While inclusivity like this is certainly warranted, we also really require replication of the comparison literature, to ensure that the similarities and differences addressed this review are, in fact, valid.

Essentially, we have extremely limited literature on breakups for LGBTQ+ couples, and what we have, like all research, is imperfect. Further research is certainly necessary, to provide a better sense of the similarities and differences in the breakup experiences of various types of couples. Research should extend beyond the implications of divorce among same-sex couples. Additionally, we need applied research focusing on how to best meet the clinical needs of sexual minority individuals who require mental health care following a breakup, since we know this is a time any person, regardless of sexual orientation, is most likely to require such support.

The Current Study

Given what was found in this review of the literature, and based on a few responses of LGBTQ+ participants in my study, there was sufficient evidence to analyze the data from non-heterosexual individuals separately. That is, data provided by non-heterosexual individuals were not included in the main analysis. Instead, allow me to provide a brief summary of the responses from the 9 individuals who did not identify as heterosexual.
Method

Participants

Though nine individuals in the overall Study 1 sample indicated that they identified as homosexual, bisexual or “other,” one of these participants was excluded from this analysis because they had no prior breakup experience. Thus, participants included eight individuals (4 male, 4 female). Five participants identified as bisexual, two participants identified as “other,” and one participant identified as homosexual. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 22, with a mean age of 19.63. Three participants identified as being European/White, three participants identified as being Asian Canadians or of Asian/Pacific Island origin, one participant identified as Latino-a/Hispanic, and the remaining participant identified as “Other.” Half of the sexual minority participants indicated that they are in a relationship, with the average relationship being 6 months in length. Participants had experienced an average of 2.5 previous romantic relationships. On average, participants were still in contact with 1.75 previous romantic partners, although they had an average of 2.38 previous romantic partners as friends on Facebook.

Materials, Procedure and Analysis

For this subset of analyses, the materials, procedure and analytic method are identical to those described in the Study 1 Materials and Procedures section and the Study 1 Analysis section (see pages 26 and 27). However, it should be noted that these eight participants took, on average, just over 11 minutes (11:08) to complete the entire survey. Participants wrote an average of 201.38 words in response to the entire survey, meaning that each question had a mean response length of 28.77 words. In addition, all Kappa values for the questions analyzed indicated an adequate level of agreement (Q1: .72; Q2: .76; Q4: .71; Q5: .78; Q7: .85).
Results

The first question of this study asked, “Why or why not would you choose to have previous romantic partner(s)/exes as Facebook friends?” This question yielded 10 responses. Six participants referenced the friends/closeness theme, whereby they indicated their desire to stay connected and close with their previous romantic partner. A 19-year-old female put it this way: “I try to stay friends with my ex's. If I decide to date someone they mean a lot to me and always will regardless if our romance works out or not.” However, three participants wrote that the quality of the termination was a factor in determining whether or not to stay Facebook friends with previous romantic partners. For example, a 19-year-old female wrote, “I think there's nothing wrong with staying friends with someone I dated, unless the break up was bad.” Finally, one participant wrote about how their current relationship status would be a factor in deciding whether or not to remain Facebook friends with previous romantic partners. Based on their responses to this question, it appears that the majority of participants see friendship and closeness as being the reason to maintain a Facebook friendship, while several others see the breakup itself as having implications for maintaining social media contact.

Next, participants were asked about what factors or circumstances influence their decision to remain in contact with previous romantic partners or to not. This question yielded 11 responses from the eight participants. Once again, several participant’s responses (N=4) related to the friends/closeness theme, like this 18-year-old male’s response: “since we were great friends and that's why we started dating.” A few participants (N=3) alluded to the quality of the breakup as having significant implications for staying connected. A 19-year-old female wrote, “As long as it ended without viciousness I try and stay in contact.” One participant seemed to see some potential for a future relationship, writing, “good relationship, could re-work” (21-year-old
male). Another participant wrote about the personality characteristics of the previous romantic partner as a factor. One participant wrote about the quality and length of the relationship. Finally, one participant alluded to mutual contexts as being a factor in deciding whether or not to remain in contact with previous romantic partners.

The next question asked, “Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers) with previous romantic partners/exes, or to end contact altogether? I would like to know what factors account for your decision.” This question yielded 24 responses. Six participants indicated decisively that it is better to stay in contact, and only 1 decisively said that it is not. One participant wrote that it depends on the way that the relationship ended, referring to her own breakup as an example: “I feel like it is better (…) even though in my case, we ended badly” (22-year-old female). Four participants wrote about the attachment they have with the partner as playing into their response, as was the case for this 21-year-old male: “for support in times of trouble.” Two participants suggested that it depends on the previous romantic partner, while three participants alluded to the importance of time passing in order to be in contact. Finally, two participants suggested that the answer to this question would depend on whether or not residual feelings existed for the previous romantic partner.

Subsequently, I asked participants about their breakup philosophy, or how they “approach” the aftermath of a breakup. There were 12 responses to this question. Several responses involved suggestions around how to move on, like this 18-year-old male’s response: “Overall, just consider their feelings and yours and try to make the best of the situation.” Two responses suggested to take some time and space in order to get over the relationship. In fact, a 19-year-old female participant suggested “Take a bit of space, maybe 1 week per month we dated, and then try and be friends.” Yet another participant wrote, “keep yourself occupied” (19-
year-old female). One participant wrote about making the breakup a learning experience, and yet another wrote about trying to get back together. Finally, two participants wrote about ultimately becoming friends (e.g., “When I get the apology I accept and form a friendship again,” 19-year-old female).

As a final question, participants were asked, “Do you think that technology (e.g., cell phones) and social media (e.g., Facebook) have changed the way that people breakup?” There were 16 responses to this question. Six participants wrote “yes.” However, a 19-year-old male wrote, “Not really but sometimes. Personally I hate when people need to publicize their breakup or fight on Facebook, and it’s happened to me and its a complete turn off and I get really angry (…) Otherwise, I think technology doesn’t affect breakups much at all.” An 18-year-old male had similar ideas,

“I personally don’t think so just because it is very frowned upon if somebody breaks up with the other person through anyway but talking to them directly. There has to be that sincerity when the breakup is happening to let the other person know that you really do care about them and that it didn’t work about because of so and so. Being there physically really brings out the personal side whereas if you go through any kind of media, the emotions just isn't there.”

This comment was one of four that also addressed the fact that some people use technology to breakup with their partners. Three participants suggested that this is rude, or an “easy way out” (22-year-old female). Similarly, a 19-year-old female described using technology to breakup as “cowardly.” Overall, most participants agreed that technology has had an impact on breakups, and similarly agreed that this impact has not been a positive one.
Discussion

It was one of the Study 1 participants who cued me to recognize that sexual minority breakup experiences might be different from those of my heterosexual participants. Specifically, this participant wrote about her desire to be friends with her previous romantic partner, and added “but the lesbian community doesn't give you much room on this topic” (19-year-old female). This participant’s response implies that there are differences between the sexual minority community and heterosexual culture with regard to perceived breakup norms. It would be fascinating to explore such differences, but unfortunately, there were too few sexual minority participants to draw comparisons to the overall sample in my study. However, from this small subset of data, we see suggestions of some of the same trends across samples. For example, both samples wrote about friendship/closeness and termination quality as factors in determining whether or not to remain in contact (through both conventional and new media means). Further research can clarify whether or not the norms around breakups and post-breakup contact are the same for LGBTQ+ young people as they are for heterosexual young people. Future research should follow the example of researchers like Kurdek (1994; 1997; 2003), to make comparisons across groups (i.e., heterosexual and sexual minority groups). However, Lannutti and Cameron (2009) have also set an example by using a well-balanced sample in terms of sexual orientation. If future researchers were to follow these two methodological examples, the breakup literature would benefit tremendously in being more representative of all young people, regardless of sexual orientation.
References


Appendix B

Study 1: Informed Consent

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Psychology

Julia Wreford, M.A. voice: (519) 824-4120 ex
Department of 52361 email:
Psychology University of jwreford@uoguelph.ca
Guelph, Ontario

Information and Consent Form: Relationships Experiences and the Impact of Technology

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to examine romantic relationships, and specifically the dissolution of relationships (breakups) and to understand the impact of social communication technology (e.g., Facebook, texting) on these phenomena.

Procedures: The study will be completed in one online session lasting 15-25 minutes. Participants will complete a questionnaire asking for demographic information, a questionnaire about their relationship experiences in general, and finally, a questionnaire gauging technology use. Any identifying information provided in the context of these questionnaires, particularly in open-ended questions, will be modified or eliminated.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There is a possibility of experiencing some discomfort with some of the measures because they ask about information regarding relationships (i.e., the extent of communication with previous romantic partners). Participants may feel discomfort in providing information that they consider private.

Your agreement to participate in this study will make an important contribution to our understanding of that which we know very little, that is, how social communication media are being used to facilitate certain personal relationships and impact the aftermath of a breakup.

Confidentiality and Consent: All identifying information provided by participants in this study is strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Identifying information will be stored in a separate file to that of the actual questionnaire information. The questionnaire data itself will only use a randomly generated ID number, and will not contain any identifying information. Note that in providing text responses, your response may be included in write-ups (e.g. journal manuscripts), though any potentially identifying information will be excluded.

Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, even after you have begun the questionnaire. You are free to decline answering any questions you wish not to answer. Withdrawal from the study will not exclude you from receiving course credit.

Compensation: As per the SONA participant pool allowance, you will receive .5 credit for participating in this research. Should you choose not to participate for research credit, you may complete an alternative assignment as outlined in your PSYC 1000 course instruction.

Rights of Research Participants: You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics
clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:
Research Ethics Coordinator Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606 University of Guelph E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca 437 University Centre Fax: (519) 821-5236 Guelph, ON N1G 2W1
I have read the information provided for the study “Relationship Experiences & The Impact of Technology” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I can print off a copy of this form if I wish.
I consent to participate in the above study entitled the “Relationship Experiences & The Impact of Technology”.
Yes, I agree to participate (Continue to Survey)
No, I would not like to participate (Exit)
Appendix C

Questions in Study 1

Relationship History Questions

Reflecting back, how long ago (in months) was your most recent breakup?
How many previous romantic partners/exes have you had from relationships that you consider “serious”?
How many of these previous romantic partners/exes do you stay in contact with?
How many of those previous romantic partners do you have as Facebook friends?

Relationship Experience Questions

Why or why not would you choose to have previous romantic partner(s)/exes as Facebook friends?
What factors or circumstances influence your decision as to whether or not you remain in contact with previous romantic partners/exes?
Have you had the experience of an “on again/ off again” relationship? If so, please explain what that was like.
People approach their relationships with previous romantic partners differently. Do you think it is better to stay in contact (e.g., remain Facebook friends, keep cell phone numbers, etc.) with previous romantic partners/exes, or to end contact altogether? I would like to know what factors account for your decision.
What is your breakup philosophy? That is, how do you approach the aftermath of a breakup?
Do you think that having a romantic partner changes your relationship with previous romantic partners? That is, does being with a partner in the present moment impact your relationship with any exes?
Do you think that technology (e.g., cell phones) and social media (e.g., Facebook, etc.) have changed the way that people breakup?
Appendix D

Study 1: Debriefing

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Psychology

Relations and the Impact of Technology
Julia Wreford
Department of Psychology University of Guelph, Ontario
Contact: (519) 824-4120 ex. 52361
jwreford@uoguelph.ca

Dr. Serge Desmarais
Provost and VP Academic University of Guelph, Ontario
Contact: (519) 824-4120 ex. 53880
s.desmarais@exec.uoguelph.ca

As indicated on the Consent Form, the purpose of this study is to examine romantic relationships, with a special focus on breakups, and to understand the impact of recent technologies on relational events. More specifically, I am interested in how technology (particularly social media) may impact how individuals negotiate the termination of romantic relationships.

We realize that after participating in this study, some participants may have questions or concerns. Feel free to contact Dr. Serge Desmarais, or myself, using the information provided above. I have asked you to provide some personal information, and considering these things can bring about feelings of distress. As such, I have provided the name and contact information for personal support resources that I encourage you to contact, should this be the case for you.

Once again, your name has not been collected for the purpose of this study, and all data provided will not be associated with any identifying information when the data is made public (e.g., through publication or dissertation document).

Thank you very much for your time and responses.

Sincerely,
Julia Wreford

Available Services:
Counselling Services: 519-824-4120 x53244
Individual counseling for University of Guelph students. Open 8:15 am to 4:15pm

Guelph Wellington Dufferin Distress Line: 519-821-3760
A 24-hour line to call for people who are in distress and need someone to talk to.
Appendix E

Study 2: Informed Consent

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES: Department of Psychology

Julia Wreford, M.A., Student
Department of Psychology
University of Guelph, Ontario
voice: (519) 824-4120 ex 52361
e-mail: jwreford@uoguelph.ca

Serge Desmarais, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Psychology
University of Guelph, Ontario

Letter of Information and Consent Form: An Exploration of Breakups in the Context of New Media

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to examine romantic relationships, and specifically the dissolution of relationships (breakups) and to understand the impact of social communication technology (e.g., Facebook, texting) on these phenomena.

Procedures: The study will be completed in one semistructured interview lasting less than 90 minutes. As a participant, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking for demographic information and for information about your social media use. Any identifying information provided in the context of these questionnaires, particularly in open-ended questions, will be modified or eliminated. This is to ensure that the data you provide will be difficult or impossible to link back to you directly. That is, if you provide information that could clearly be connected back to you, the researcher will modify it so that it does not reveal your identity. Next, you will be asked a number of open-ended questions by the primary investigator. Just like in the questionnaires, any identifying information you provide in your responses will either be modified or eliminated. Again, this is to ensure that the data you provide will be difficult or impossible to link back to you. It is possible that direct quotes will be used in documents containing the results of this study. Any identifying information within quotes will be modified or eliminated in such documents.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There is a possibility of experiencing some discomfort with some of the questions asked because they ask about information regarding relationships (i.e., the extent of communication with previous romantic partners). Participants may feel discomfort in providing information that they consider private. If you feel discomfort at any time, please make the primary investigator aware. In addition, we provide you with the contact information of available services should you experience discomfort or distress through responding to these questions:

Available Services:
Counselling Services: 519-824-4120 x53244
Individual counseling for University of Guelph students. Open 8:15 am to 4:15pm
Guelph Wellington Dufferin Distress Line: 519-821-3760
A 24-hour line to call for people who are in distress and need someone to talk to.
The information you provide for this study will make an important contribution to our understanding of that which we know very little, that is, how social communication media are being used to facilitate certain personal relationships and impact the aftermath of a breakup. The data you provide will likely be used in the student investigator’s dissertation, and may be included in a manuscript that would be submitted for publication. Once again, you are reminded that identifying information, that would connect that data you provide back to you, would be modified and/or eliminated in the dissertation/manuscript.

Confidentiality and Consent: All identifying information provided by participants in this study is strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Identifying information will be stored in a separate file to that of the actual questionnaire information. The questionnaire data itself will only use a randomly generated ID number, and will not contain any identifying information. Note that in providing open-ended responses, your response may be included in write-ups (e.g. journal manuscripts), though any potentially identifying information will be excluded. Further questions related to this can be directed to the student investigator (Julia Wreford; jjwreford@uoguelph.ca)

Audio Recording: Any interviews conducted will be recorded using an audio recording device. Audio recordings are kept until transcription of the interview has taken place. Audio recordings allow for a more accurate representation of the data you provide. Audio recording is necessary for the interview to be conducted. If you are uncomfortable being audio recorded, you have the right to refuse participation without penalty.

Data Storage: Data is stored on the primary investigator’s computer and is encrypted using TruCrpt s software and password protected. Any time data is viewed or put on a storage device (e.g. USB or external hard drive) it too will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within the secured lab. Moreover, data will only be accessed on private computers. Audio recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed once the data are transcribed.

Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, even after you have begun answering the questions. You are free to decline answering any questions you wish not to answer. Withdrawal from the study will not exclude you from receiving course credit. Individuals who do not agree to participate will not be granted compensation.

Compensation: As per the SONA participant pool allowance, you will receive 1.5 credits for participating in this research. Should you choose not to participate in this or any other research project for credit, you may complete an alternative assignment as outlined in your PSYC 1000 course instruction.

Rights of Research Participants: You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator  Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
University of Guelph  E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
437 University Centre  Fax: (519) 821-5236
Guelph, ON  N1G 2W1

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I have read the information provided for the study “An Exploration of Breakups in the Context of New Media” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided with a copy of this letter of information/consent form.

I consent to participate in the above study entitled the “An Exploration of Breakups in the Context of New Media”

__________________________________________
Signature and Date

__________________________________________
Witness Signature and Date

AUDIO RECORDING

I consent to be audio recorded for the above study entitled “An Exploration of Breakups in the Context of New Media”

__________________________________________
Signature and Date

__________________________________________
Witness Signature and Date
Appendix F

Questions in Study 2

Part I

1. How do breakups typically happen? How is a breakup communicated? (Potential prompt: For example, do breakups usually happen in person, over the phone, through Facebook, text message…)
2. Do you think some methods of breaking up are more appropriate than others? (Potential prompt: By appropriate, I mean accepted or sanctioned ways of breaking up)
3. How does a person start a breakup? (Potential prompt: what I mean is, how would a person initiate a breakup moment?)
4. Typically, what would the conversation look like? What are the types of things that would be communicated?
5. In the days immediately after a breakup, what usually happens?
6. In the weeks and months after a breakup, what typically happens?
7. Do exes typically stay in touch?
8. Do exes stay in touch right after a breakup or does it take some time until they talk to each other again?
9. What sorts of things influence whether two people stay in touch after a breakup? (Probe direction if necessary)
10. What sorts of things influence whether exes remain as friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter?
11. Would exes stay in touch over social media? For example, would they remain friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter after a breakup?
12. Do exes keep each other’s telephone numbers, typically?
13. On average, do exes text each other?
14. Are there other ways that exes stay in touch with each other? (If so, what sorts of things decide whether to stay in touch in these ways?)
15. What does it mean to move on from a breakup? How long does it take to move on from a breakup?
16. How long does it usually take until an ex might start to “see someone new?” How would the ex-partner react?
17. Do exes typically meet up after a breakup? Do exes typically “hook up” after a breakup? What circumstances might lead exes to hook up? (If there is inconsistency in the answer, query it)
18. What are some things that people might do after a breakup?
19. Is it healthy to stay in contact with previous romantic partners? What about over social media?

Part II

1. How long was the relationship?
2. How long ago did the relationship end?
3. Why is it that you consider this past relationship significant?
4. Do you have X as a “friend” on a social networking site?
5. Do you stay in contact with X?
6. Who broke up with whom? (Potential prompt: if the participant says it was mutual, ask questions like “did someone start the conversation that led to the breakup?” or “Did either of you seem to want or need to breakup more than the other?”)
7. Tell me about the breakup event and the events that followed.
8. For example, when X broke up with Y, how did they do it? (Potential prompt: What I mean here is did they do so in person, over the phone, or maybe through Facebook or text message?)
9. Tell me the timeline of the series of events that might have followed that breakup. For example, when did you start dating someone new, if you did? When did X start dating someone new, if they did? How long was it before you “hooked up” with someone, if you have? Earlier, we talked about moving on. When did you “move on”, if you have? How long after you broke up did you see X again, if you have?
10. Did you find the way that you dealt with that breakup, either in the event or afterwards, was expected? Did anything surprise you?
11. What factors helped you decide to stay in contact/ not stay in contact with X?
12. You said that you have/have not chosen to be friends with X on a social networking site. What do you think influences that decision for you?
13. Do you have any regrets related to the breakup of the relationship? Any regrets related to the aftermath?
14. Have you learned anything from this particular breakup experience? If so, what?
15. Do you think social media played a role in the way the breakup (and its aftermath) happened? (Potential prompt: for example, did Facebook play a role in the breakup and the events that followed?)

Part IIB: Repeat Part II for Ex #2

Part IIC:

When I asked you questions in the beginning of this interview, the questions were more broad and about your general ideas about breakups. Then, I asked you questions about your specific experience of breakups. I noticed that there was*/was not** a lot of similarity between the responses that you gave. Did you notice that there was a mismatch between your general ideas about breakups and this specific breakup experience? How do you explain this mismatch? (Potential prompt: what was it about this breakup experience that might have led you to act differently than what you see as more typical?) How is it that you have been able to act in a way that matches with your general ideas about breakups?
Appendix G

Study 2: Debriefing

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Psychology

An Exploration of Breakups in the Context of New Media

Julia Wreford, M.A.
Student
Department of Psychology
University of Guelph, Ontario

Dr. Serge Desmarais
Professor, Department of Psychology
University of Guelph, Ontario

Contact :
(519) 824-4120 ex. 52361
jwreford@uoguelph.ca

Contact :
(519) 824-4120 ex. 53880
s.desmarais@exec.uoguelph.ca

As indicated on the Consent Form, the purpose of this study is to examine romantic relationships, with a special focus on breakups, and to understand the impact of recent technologies on relational events. More specifically, I am interested in how technology (particularly social media) may impact how individuals negotiate the termination of romantic relationships.

We realize that after participating in this study, some participants may have questions or concerns. Feel free to contact Dr. Serge Desmarais, or myself, using the information provided above.

Additionally, I have asked you to provide some personal information, and considering these things can bring about feelings of distress. As such, I have provided the name and contact information for personal support resources that I encourage you to contact, should this be the case for you. Please inform me if you are experiencing feelings of distress and we may address them.

Once again, your name has not been collected for the purpose of this study, and all data provided will not be associated with any identifying information when the data is made public (e.g., through publication or the dissertation document).

If you would like to see a copy of the results, please let me know by emailing jwreford@uoguelph.ca

Thank you very much for your time and responses.
Sincerely,
Julia Wreford

Available Services:
Counselling Services: 519-824-4120 x53244
Individual counseling for University of Guelph students. Open 8:15 am to 4:15 pm
Guelph Wellington Dufferin Distress Line: 519-821-3760
A 24-hour line to call for people who are in distress and need someone to talk to.