An Ex of a Friend is My Friend?: An Exploration of the Effects of Pre-Marital Romantic Relationship Termination on Social Networks

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of the termination of pre-marital relationships within college social networks. Fifteen undergraduates were asked questions pertaining to how the break-up of two friends affected them, as well as their social networks. Key aspects of the post-break-up experience include: the current relationship between the participant and the ex-partners, the relationship between the ex-partners when they were together, the reason for the break-up, the description of the social network, the current relationship between the ex-partners, and how the break-up story was told by each ex-partner. The results illustrate that the dissolution of pre-marital relationships within the college environment has significant consequences for the members of the ex-partners’ social networks.
Literature Review

“Can we still be friends?” This seems to be one of the most common ways many break-ups end. Whether the disengager means it or not, this question is not as simple as one might think. While it could possibly be the ideal situation, everyone knows that this is not always the case. However, Busboom, Collins, Givertz, and Levin’s (2002) study revealed that post-dating friendships are common among young adults. Significant research corresponds to this as Kaplan and Keys (1997) reported that 14% of males and 13% of females revealed that their closest current friendship was with an ex-romantic partner. Sheehan and Dillman (1998) discovered in their study that about 50% of respondents reported being friends with their ex-romantic partner. Some went as far as to describe the relationship as close friends, even best friends. Wilmot, Carbaugh, and Baxter (1985) found that 61% of former romantic partners were friends.

But, while there is a lot of previous literature on how ex-partners react to their break-up, there is limited research on how the break-up affects their social networks. As Loving (2006) explains, “One source of information about romantic relationships that has received little, albeit increasing attention is the perceptions held by a couple’s social network members. Family and friends play important roles in individuals’ lives and act as information sources” (p.349). He explains that social networks serve as “sounding boards” (p. 350), allowing each partner to learn more about his/her partner and partner’s behavior, which can influence the couples’ perceptions of each other and perception of the relationship. Therefore, given how much influence social networks have on their friends’ relationships, and how little research there is on the subject, the goal of my study was to discover how social networks were affected when two members of the network dated and subsequently broke up.
Before researching how social networks react to their friends’ break-ups, it was important to first consider how ex-partners react to their own break-up, and what type of post-dissolutional relationships they create. Foley and Fraser (1998) explain that post-dating relationships are “relatively script-less” (p. 215). However, as will be explained, a post-dissolutional relationship is dependent upon disengagement strategies and structural factors, post break-up emotions, and characteristics of the relationship prior to decline.

Duck’s Stage Model

In studying post-dissolutional relationships, it is important to first be familiar with and understand Duck’s (1982) stage model, in which he explains that there are certain phases of relational dissolution that all relationships tend to go through. This model organizes patterns which are present during relational deterioration into four major phases: the intrapsychic phase, the dyadic phase, the social phase, and the grave-dressing phase. The first phase, the intrapsychic phase, is a very internal and reflective phase, in which one, or both, partners think about the state of the relationship. This usually occurs when one partner starts to become dissatisfied or unhappy and identifies what the reason is for the discontent. For example, an individual may begin to feel neglected by his/her partner who puts more effort into his/her friendships than into the romantic relationship. Furthermore, brooding (dwelling), tends to be associated with this stage. The nature of the brooding typically differs between genders, as females tend to focus on the decline in communication, while males tend to focus on the decline of shared activities (sex being included). Also, males tend to view problems in the relationship as unrelated issues and unconnected to the self and self-image. In contrast, females tend to perceive trouble in the relationship as well as self and self-image issues as interrelated. Because a lot of rumination occurs in the intrapsychic phase, individuals within this phase tend to
withdraw socially, making it more difficult for them to get an outside perspective about the conflict. By the end of this phase, the individual usually comes to a decision about the future of the relationship.

In the second phase, the dyadic phase, the individual confronts his/her partner in order to address the problems he/she has been thinking about. The other partner, who may be taken aback, has two ways to react: he or she can refuse to discuss the problems or actively confront the issues. In general, men view the discussion of relationship issues as uncomfortable and problematic and would rather try to minimize problems than talk about them. In contrast, women are more likely than men to want to solve relational problems through conversation. They tend to view attempts at avoiding discussion of relationship issues as problematic. If the second partner chooses the path of active confrontation, then the two partners subsequently offer explanations and interpretations for the problems in their relationship. At this point, it is up to the couple to make a decision about the future of their relationship together. If they decide to end their relationship, then the third phase of Duck’s model begins.

In the social phase, the newly ex-romantic partners must make public the fact that they are no longer a couple. By sharing their decision with their social networks, the couple has finalized the break-up; it is official. The way the ex-partners relay this news to their friends and family is extremely important because sometimes when social networks are intertwined, members feel they are forced to choose between sides. Duck and Wood (2006) recommend that individuals use the social support process. During this process, the former romantic partners seek advice from close friends and family on how to present the break-up to the rest of their social network if they want to make sure that network will stay intact. Rubin (1985) discovered that women were more likely than men to use the social support process and count on their
friends and family for advice. While it is more common for partners to break the news to their social networks individually, there are some cases in which partners present their break-up to the public collaboratively, illustrating mutual responsibility and shared regret (Rollie & Duck, 2006).

The fourth and final phase of Duck’s stage model is the grave-dressing phase. During this process, the ex-romantic partners make sense of the termination, mourn the relationship, and adopt an account of what happened to mark the relationship’s beginning and end, like a gravestone. These stories tend to comprise of the high points, low points, and turning points of the relationship and the individuals tend to memorize this for a way to offer consistency that others can accept. According to Duck and Wood (2006), the key reason individuals rely on the grave-dressing phase is to “dress” things up to portray themselves as relationally responsible people so they can be considered attractive potential romantic partners to others. Spitzberg and Cupach (1998) explain that this phase helps the ex-romantic partners accept the relationship as dead and buried, so they can move on to future romantic relationships or to a single life.

**Disengagement Strategies and Structural Factors**

Metts, Cupach, and Bejlovec (1989) were the first to publish significant findings on the redefinition of romantic relationships at a time when little was known about post-dissolutional relationships. They found that certain communicative and disengagement strategies determined whether ex-partners redefined the relationship as a friendship, or terminated the relationship altogether. Through their research, they discovered that a partner’s use of positive disengagement strategies during the break-up, for example, “Told my partner that I didn’t regret the time we had spent together in the relationship” (p. 266) and “Tried to prevent us leaving on a sour note” (p. 266), was positively related to the redefinition of the relationship and being current
friends. Meanwhile, the disengager’s use of manipulative strategies, for example, “Became unpleasant in the hopes that my partner would make the first move” (p. 266) and “Tried to make my partner look selfish in refusing to disengage” (p. 266), was negatively related to the redefinition of the relationship and being friends. Furthermore, according to Metts, Cupach, and Bejlovec (1989), the use of withdrawal strategies like ”Kept our conversation brief whenever we talked (p. 266)” and “Disclosed little about my personal activities and interests whenever we talked” (p.266) were negatively related to the redefinition of the relationship as a friendship. These findings are consistent with Banks, Altendorf, Greene, and Cody’s (1987) study which discovered that 17% of the reasons for staying friends for participants were due to certain disengagement strategies utilized. For example, this study found that when the disengagers used de-escalation (a strategy which asks for less commitment but hints at future contact), the more ex-romantic partners tended to become friends. In contrast, when disengagers used justification (a strategy in which the rejecter states the reasons for ending the relationship), the less likely it was that ex-romantic partners became friends. Baxter’s (1985;1987) research suggests that a salient predictor of friendship is whether the disengager uses direct strategies or indirect strategies during the break-up. If the disengager uses direct strategies, (such as, “I feel it would be best to end our relationship”), then the ex-romantic partners had a close relationship and wished to maintain future contact. However, if the disengager uses indirect strategies such as avoidance, there is a less likely chance the ex-romantic partners will remain friends (Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989). In addition, Cody (1982) found that disengagers who used the strategies of justification, de-escalation, and positive tone had been in more intimate relationships than those initiators who used other strategies. In contrast, as Bachman and Guerrero (2006) suggest, when disengagers use strategies with more hurtful communication
during the break-up and the ex-partner perceives that to be intentional, the quality of the ex-partners’ redefined relationship is negatively associated with satisfaction and commitment. They call this “perceived intentionality” (p. 947) and it describes the partner’s perception of the disengager’s intent. It is strongly related to the couple’s post-dissolutional relationship and the face needs of the ex-partners.

Baxter (1987) found a strong connection between disengagement strategies and face needs, and how this affected the post-dissolutional relationship. His three strategy categories include Relationship Talk, Distance Cueing, and Cost Escalation. Relationship Talk signifies respect for the other party by confronting the issue, yet is difficult for the disengager. In Distance Cueing, the disengager uses less effort and shows less respect for his/her partner by preserving his/her own negative face (autonomy needs) and threatening his/her partner’s positive face (belonging needs) by avoiding a personal interaction. Cost Escalation greatly damages the positive face of the other person, as that partner is manipulated into initiating the breaking-up his or herself. Baxter’s data revealed that Distance Cueing and Cost Escalation strategies, which damaged the partner’s faced needs, were negatively associated with the redefinition of the relationship as a friendship. In contrast, the disengagement strategy of Relationship Talk, which respects the other partner’s face value, is associated with positive tones and is connected positively to the redefinition of the relationship (Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989).

Banks, Altendorf, Greene, and Cody (1987) discovered that the disengager’s social network greatly influences the disengagement strategies he or she will use because if many friends are shared, disengagers tend to be more aware of their partner’s, and their own, face needs and costs that could be experienced. Disengagers who reported sharing a social network with their partner were more likely to use the strategies of positive tone, de-escalation, and
justification, which imply concern for the other partner’s feelings (Vangelisti, 2006). This coincides with previous research which suggests that structural variables (external variables), such as a couple’s social network, may, in fact, have the most influential impact on the ex-partner’s post-dissolutional relationship. In Lannutti and Cameron’s study, one of the key positive predictors of interpersonal contact (among heterosexual couples) post-break up was the extent to which the ex-partners shared what Lannutti and Cameron called a “chosen family” (p. 161) or social network. Furthermore, the degree of the interpersonal contact was based on the standards the ex-partners’ social networks maintained about break-ups. Lannutti and Cameron concluded that more extensive norms were related to less interpersonal contact (Lannutti & Cameron, 2002). In addition, Busboom, Collins, Givertz, and Levin (2002) found that certain barriers, specifically, lack of support from friends and family in the post-dissolutional relationship, tend to be negatively associated with friendship quality. Parks and Adelman (1983) discovered that approval of a person’s romantic partner within his/her network was positively associated with remaining friends after the break-up rather than disengagement.

Apart from external variables, Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, and Cheng (2008) discovered that there are certain turning points within the relationship between the two individuals which predict the nature of the post-dissolutional relationship. Awkward or uncomfortable interactions, arguments, unrequited advances by their ex-partner, jealousy-provoked interactions, harassment, ex-partners’ new romantic relationships, and disappointment in the ex-partner were all turning points that characterized a negative redefinition of the relationship. In contrast, cathartic or reflective talks, becoming friends, social support, and forgiveness were turning points that characterized a positive redefinition of the relationship. However, some ex-partners were not ready to redefine their relationship as being no longer romantic. Turning points that
characterized this holding on category include sexual encounters, romantic reconciliations, lasting feelings, and unrequited advances by ex-partners. In some post-dissolutional relationships, partners feel the need to let go of the once romantic relationship. Turning points that characterize this tendency are waning feelings, realizing it is over, and subsequent break-ups. When ex-romantic partners realize the best relationship they can have with their ex-partner is separation, it is described as moving on. Turning points that characterize this type of relationship include moving away, a new romantic relationship, and being happy for their ex-partner in his or her new relationship. In contrast, everyday talk, efforts to initiate contact, and circumstantial meetings are turning points used in maintaining contact with the ex-partner. Some described returning items and moving out of a shared apartment as turning points that characterize no longer being a couple and other participants characterized the break-up itself as a turning point. Also in Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, and Cheng’s (2008) sample, 5% of participants reported ending the post-dissolutional relationship altogether with no future contact, and only 3 of the 174 participants got back together with their former romantic partners.

Sprecher and Metts (1999) discovered that after a break-up, the overall romanticism score of a couple significantly decreases, and as Knee (1998) points out, romantic beliefs tend to serve as a screening device, so when those lessen, even very idealist persons abandon the idea of trying to save that relationship. Furthermore, Busboom, Collins, Givertz, and Levin (2002) found, in accordance with the social exchange framework, that the more resources (such as love, status, services, information, goods, and money) a person receives from his/her ex-romantic partner, the greater the chance of becoming high quality friends.

The use of metaphors can also help to describe turning points in post-dissolutional relationships, as Owen (1993) explains. In the “Partner is Up/Down” (p. 268) metaphor
category, participants depicted their ex-partners as once good and now evil. For example, a woman who first described her partner as someone she could look up to, soon described him as a “snake in the grass” (p. 268). Also, metaphors such as a “pig rooting around in the mud” (p. 268) fall under this category as well as metaphors like “lower than a snake’s belly” (p. 268), which illustrate how the individual is in a higher position than his/her ex. In the “Relationship is Up/Down” (p. 269) category, many of the participants described how their post-dissolutional relationships could be bumpy and had many high points and low points. For example, “when we rode the roller-coaster to the bottom, I knew we would soon make up and head back to greater heights” (p. 270) and “we were a boat in a storm, rocking up and down and back and forth at the mercy of the storm—we just had to ride it out” (270).

**Post Break-Up Emotions**

While disengagement strategies and structural factors are great predictors for the type and quality of any post-dissolutional relationship, so too are the emotions and costs experienced after a break-up. Perilloux and Buss (2008) studied the differences between men and women and rejecters (those who initiate the break-up) and rejectees (those who are rejected) in reaction to the termination of romantic relationships. They found these differences to be noteworthy as, after the break-up, rejectees reported feeling significantly more sad, jealous, confused, shocked, and angry than the rejecters. There were many gender differences as female rejectees reported feeling more scared, confused, and sad than male rejectees. In contrast to rejectees, rejecters experienced more happiness and guilt, and more male rejecters than female rejecters reported they felt happy and indifferent. There were also differences in the costs experienced, depending on the gender and role of the individual in the break-up. Costs experienced by rejectees included perceived less desirability, loss of ex-partner’s resources or skills, loss of concentration, and
inability to acquire a replacement mate. Higher costliness for women was related to a loss of protection. For the rejecters, men and women both reported the loss of sexual access, the loss of shared friends, and the loss of ex-partner’s resources. However, women rejecters reported higher costliness associated with stalking and loss of protection.

Simpson (1987) found three predictors that indicated the intensity and length of the emotional distress after a break-up. The first predictor was how close the partners reported being during their romantic relationship, the second was the length of the relationship, and the third was the effort the participants perceived it would take in finding a new romantic partner. Simpson concluded that the closer the partners were during the relationship, the longer the length of that relationship, and the more perceived difficulty of finding a new partner, all increased the suffering and grief experienced after a break-up (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998). Choo, Levine, and Hatfield (1996) also conducted a study to determine how the termination of romantic relationships affected men and women differently emotionally. They discovered that in comparison to men, secure women were more likely to feel a sense of relief after the break-up. In contrast, secure men were especially likely to bury themselves in work and sports after the break-up. Furthermore, clingy men were more likely to feel guilty after the break-up, and men considered to be fickle were more likely than women to feel better after the relationship ended.

As Owen (1993) explains, metaphors can also help characterize people’s post-break-up emotions. In the “Self is Up/Down” (p. 268) metaphor category, 13% of the participants described how they felt in relation to their ex-romantic partner after the break-up. It became clear in this study that males were more likely than females to switch from “down” to “up” feelings about themselves after a break-up. This is illustrated in metaphors such as, it felt as if “a heavy burden had been lifted from my back, like a pack horse unloaded” (p. 269) or “It was like
a heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders” (p. 269). Some participants, mostly females, used metaphors describing the self as “down” after the break-up. One female used metaphors such as “I felt like dirt” (p. 269) and “As a rocky mountain slide, I felt lower than a well-digger’s ass” (p. 269). The “Self is Injured” (p. 270) metaphor category also describes how injured individuals felt after the relationship termination. Women used metaphors such as “He bored a hole in my heart” (p. 270) and “It was like a knife stabbed into my heart” (p. 270). Men were more likely to use metaphors that were not as intimate and not related to heart injuries. Men participants were reported using metaphors like “I was torn to shreds” (p. 271), and described the relationship as being like a headache or painful wisdom tooth, but nothing that indicated mortal wounding like the females (Owen, 1993).

One way in which men and women deal with their emotions after a break-up is to employ coping strategies. Many of these strategies allow the newly single individual to come to terms with his or her feelings and work towards redefining their once romantic relationship. As Harvey and Fine (2006) explain about the account-making theory, “account-making plays a major positive role in dealing with life’s major stresses” (p. 189). Creating stories of how their relationship deteriorated and consequently ended, helps individuals understand their losses and they can move on to redefine their relationship. Furthermore, there is evidence that confiding in others improves psychological and physical health.

Perilloux and Buss (2008) discovered that male and female rejectees seemed to utilize coping strategies similarly, as both genders used crying and pleading with the ex-partner, avoiding the ex-partner, discussing the break-up, and threatening the ex-partner. The only coping strategy women used that men did not was shopping more frequently. Among the rejecters, gender also played a very small role as men and women both reported using strategies
such as boost ex-partner’s self-esteem, remain friends with ex-partner, show affection to someone else in public, use drugs, drink heavily, and spend money to attract a new partner. The only difference between men and women was that women rejecters reported discussing the break-up with family and friends, rumination, shopping after the break-up, and crying and pleading with the ex-partner more than male rejecters.

Masuda (2006) conducted a study on terminated romantic relationships in which she discovered ways in which individuals use justification of their post-dissolutional relationships as coping strategies. Masuda came up with five major categories of justification strategies. The majority of the participants fell into the first category, “Irreplaceability of the PDR (premarital post-dissolutional relationship): ‘He Is a Part of My Life’” (p.121), in which the individual described that over the course of the romantic relationship, his/her partner came to mean so much that they share a special bond and he/she wanted to at least have some type of relationship with the ex-romantic partner. In the second category, “Detachment of the Past: ‘We’re Different Now’” (p. 123), individuals reported that they became friends with their ex-partner because they became more mature and could put their romantic relationship in the past. As one ex-couple reported, friends treat each other differently than romantic partners do. For example, the ex-girlfriend stated, “I don’t think he tries-or wants me to feel important-like he does for the girlfriend. You know, for the girlfriend he’s willing to do anything to make her feel special, feel love, to make sure she feels happy, to make sure she feels comfortable” (p.123). As the ex-boyfriend explained, “I think friends, uh, don’t need, uh, the best treatment in the world, like…you know, you don’t take your friends to go out to dinner” (p.123). In the third category, “Denial of Traumatic Dissolution: ‘It Was a Clean Break-Up’” (p. 124), participants described that it was easy to transition from a romantic relationship to a friendship. They described the
break-up as being clean and mutual and based on external factors which led to the dissolution. As one male interviewee described regarding the transition, “It was easy just because we had such a good relationship, (we broke up) only because it was apart by our distance… but I think…it was very easy, just like, becoming best friends again” (pg. 124). The fourth category, “Nullification of Questions About the PDR: ‘I Have a Lot of Girl Friends’” (p. 125), included participants who felt that being friends with an ex-romantic partner and having a lot of cross-sex friends was natural. One male reportedly explained to his social network, “I’ve dated her already, and now it’s just a friendship, that’s what we’re doing” (p. 126). In the fifth and final category Masuda discovered, “Inaccessibility of the Partner: ‘I Want Him to Find a Girlfriend’” (p. 126), participants believed that if their ex-romantic partner became involved in a new romantic relationship, it would have a positive influence on their PDR, and establish the fact that the ex-couple was now just friends. One male explained about his ex-girlfriend, “She described me as her ex-boyfriend…She made it very clear. And she let everyone know that I was involved with someone else” (p. 127).

In Choo, Levine, and Hatfield’s (1996) study on reactions to break-ups, they discovered that as coping strategies, the majority (56%) of the individuals reported engaging in distractions, 47% of the participants blamed their ex-romantic partners, 41% blamed themselves for the break-up, and 9% reported physiological dampening such as increased drinking or drug use after the break-up. The researchers also concluded that while men and women were equally as likely to blame themselves for the break-up, men were less likely to blame their ex-partners than women were and were more likely to engage in distraction techniques following the break-up (such as burying themselves in work or sports). Furthermore, clingy people tended to blame themselves more for the break-up, and people considered to be skittish were also less likely to
blame their partners for the termination. Associated with the physiological dampening category, secure people were less likely to become involved with drugs and alcohol, while people who were fickle and skittish tended to score much higher on this scale. Interestingly, Hill et al. (1976) found that men were much less likely to continue a friendship with a former romantic partner if the woman was the one who initiated the break-up. In comparison, when the break-up was considered mutual, 71% of couples remained friends, and if the man was the initiator of the break-up, 70% of couples remained friends.

In cases where couples did remain friends after the break-up, Schneider and Kenny (2000) conducted a study in which they researched the rules of these friendships between ex-romantic partners. They discovered that rules associated with intimacy, emotional support, trust, confidence, and disclosing personal problems and feelings were used more in reference to platonic relationships than former romantic relationships. In contrast, jealousy, nagging, and being critical of the friend’s other relationships were associated more frequently when the friend was an ex-romantic partner. Evidence was also found which suggests that feelings such as boredom and irritation were more likely to be present when ex-romantic partners were with each other rather than with a platonic friend. Argyle and Henderson (1984) distinguished six rules of friendship which determine the quality of relationships. These rules include: stand up for the other in his/her absence, share news of success, show emotional support, trust and confide in each other, volunteer help in time of need, and strive to make each other happy. Schneider and Kenny (2000) applied these rules in their study and found that all six of them were applied less frequently in ex-romantic partner friendships than in platonic friendships. Therefore, the results of this study show that for both males and females, relationships are of higher quality if they are
cross-sex friendships between platonic friends than if they are cross-sex friendships between former romantic partners.

In addition, romantic desires were also present between former romantic partners who considered themselves friends. While females showed more longing for romantic involvement with their ex-romantic partner than with their platonic friend, males showed the same desire for romantic involvement with both their ex-romantic partner and their platonic friend. Furthermore, the results of this study supported the hypothesis that, in general, individuals believe that their ex-romantic partners would prefer more romantic involvement with them than with a platonic friend (Schneider & Kenny, 2000).

**Relationship Prior to Decline**

Metts, Cupach, and Bejlovec (1989) found evidence that even if ex-romantic partners feel their redefined friendship is different from strictly platonic friendships, participants who reported being friends prior to the romantic relationship were much more likely to maintain a friendship after the break-up. As Foley and Fraser (1998) found, respondents who were originally friends with their ex-romantic partner did not want to give up the friendship they once had simply because their romantic relationship ended. In Schneider and Kenny’s study (2000), of the 182 participants who reported being friends with their ex-romantic partner, 76% said they were friends with their partner before the romantic relationship. Schneider and Kenny explain that the reason being friends prior to a romantic relationship is so positively associated with remaining friends after the relationship is due to the fact that the former romantic partners already know what it is like to be friends with their ex platonically. This makes the transition to friendship much easier because partners know they are capable of maintaining a friendship. Furthermore,
Metts, Cupach, and Bejlovec (1989) suggest that relationships which have high levels of emotional and psychological involvement before their decline are more likely to be redefined as friendships than relationships with low levels of emotional and psychological involvement.

Lannutti and Cameron (2002) performed a study to determine the factors that influence a post-dissolutional relationship between ex-romantic partners. They came up with four predictors which determine the degree of interpersonal contact in the post-dissolutional relationship between same-sex ex-partners. Three positive predictors emerged which included the extent of a shared social network as a structural predictor, and two personal predictors: the uniqueness of the relationship, and how much the former romantic partners liked each other. The single negative demographic predictor was how much time had passed since the break-up; the longer the time, the less interpersonal contact. Lannutti and Cameron discovered five predictors associated with the degree of emotional intimacy in the post-dissolutional relationships of same-sex ex-partners. The one negative demographic predictor of emotional intimacy was the length of the romantic relationship; the longer the relationship, the less emotional intimacy. The one positive structural predictor was the extent of the former romantic partners’ shared social network. The three personal positive predictors included the uniqueness of the relationship, how much the individual hoped for romantic renewal, and how much the individual liked his or her ex-partner. Three predictors of sexual intimacy in the post-dissolutional relationship emerged which included the negative demographic predictor of length of the romance and two personal positive predictors associated with the uniqueness of the relationship and how much the individual hoped for romantic renewal. Four predictors of satisfaction in the post-dissolutional relationship between same-sex ex-partners were identified. The one negative demographic predictor was the length of the romantic relationship; the longer the romance, the less satisfaction. The positive
demographic predictor of satisfaction was time since the break up. The personal negative predictor was the individual’s hope for romantic renewal and the personal positive predictor was how much the individual liked his or her former romantic partner.

When the study was conducted on opposite-sex ex-partners, four predictors of interpersonal contact in the post-dissolutional relationship also emerged. The three positive personal predictors were the degree to which the individual hoped for romantic renewal, how much he or she liked the ex-partner, and the extent of the individual’s norms about break-ups. The negative structural predictor was the extent of the norms the individual’s social network had about break-ups; the more extensive the norms, the less interpersonal contact. In addition, in researching the amount of emotional intimacy in the post-dissolutional relationships between opposite-sex ex-partners, Lannutti and Cameron discovered six significant predictors. The demographic negative predictor was the length of the romantic relationship, while the demographic positive predictor was the length of time since the break-up. The structural negative predictor was the extent of the norms the ex-partner’s social network had; the more extensive the norms, the less emotional intimacy. The three personal positive predictors included how much the individual hoped for romantic renewal, how much the individual liked his or her ex-partner, and the extent of the individual’s norms about break-ups. Two personal positive predictors emerged in regards to the sexual intimacy of the post-dissolutional relationship. These included how much the individual hoped for romantic renewal and the extent of the pre-romantic friendship. There was only one predictor associated with satisfaction in opposite-sex post-dissolutional relationships and that was the demographic negative predictor of time since the break-up.
Overall, across the samples of both same-sex and opposite-sex ex-partners, post-dissolutional relationships tended to contain relatively low amounts of sexual intimacy, high amounts of satisfaction, and moderate amounts of emotional intimacy (Lannutti & Cameron 2002).

The dissolution of a romantic relationship is always likely to cause a stir when the ex-partners break the news. The reason for this is because the ex-partners are not the only ones affected by the break-up, but their social networks are as well. Foley and Fraser (1998) suggest that ambiguity surrounding post-dissolutional relationships in social networks may be influenced by lack of scripts; the ex-partners do not know how to act among their friends, especially if they are friends in common. Their research implies that if the ex-couple’s social network wanted to stay together and remain unchanged, the ex-couple’s friends would be very supportive. However, the social networks that tended to disintegrate after a break-up were the ones who were unwilling to accept the changes that had occurred. Masuda (2006) suggests that because termination is a definitive change in the romantic relationship, the ex-couple’s “social network expects them to establish a peaceful relationship that is saliently different from their previous status” (p. 117)

This is why, as discussed earlier, Duck (1982) emphasizes the importance of the social phase in his stage model. He implies that in order to have a truly successful post-dissolutional relationship, the ex-romantic partners need to first inform their social network of their dissolution. Next, the ex-couple needs to redefine their relationship amidst their group as friends as no longer being a romantic one; this phase is known as the grave-dressing phase. This way, the ex-romantic couple can be viewed in a new light, as friends, and can continue to interact with their mutual friends within their social circle (Masuda, 2006). However, not all social networks
so easily accept this unconventional relationship redefinition. Foley and Fraser (1998) came up with the term the “audience challenge” (p. 212) to describe the problems ex-romantic partners have in presenting this change to their relevant audiences. Some ex-couples even described that it was difficult to try to convince their social networks that their newly defined friendship with their ex-romantic partner would not become romantic again (Masuda 2006). In addition, Harvey and Fine (2006) concluded that individuals develop account-making (story telling which explains and describes emotional events in our lives) to present a socially acceptable story of the termination to people in the individual’s social network.

In their study, Foley and Fraser (1998) explore the question of the dynamic between an ex-couple’s social network and their post-dissolutional relationship. They found that many participants’ reasons for having a post-dissolutional relationship was out of convenience or perceived necessity because of their shared social network and, therefore, frequent interactions. In their interviews, some participants claimed to have never lost contact with their ex-partner, while others said the transition to friendship was not easy. The participants who said redefining the relationship could be difficult explained that many times they reported feeling awkward or uncomfortable, or that sexual tension was still present. Foley and Fraser’s study also revealed that social networks could have positive and negative effects on the post-dissolutional relationship. Sometimes the ex-couple would become friends when they were influenced to do so by mutual friends. Other times, friends would convince the ex-partners to avoid each other for various reasons. Foley and Fraser discovered that 34% of the participants’ friends supported the post-dating relationship, 41% were neutral, 9% opposed the relationship, and 9% did not know about the post-dating relationship.
Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) illustrate that individuals who feel accepted by their partner’s social network and feel that their partner is accepted by their own social network perceive the relationship more positively. This alludes to the uncertainty reduction theory in that, if an individual feels their social network approves of his/her relationship, the individual will have less doubts and become more romantically involved. Parks and Adelman (1983) discovered that couples who broke up over a three month period had less social network support than couples who stayed together. Lehmiller and Agnew (2007) found that perceived relationship marginalization was negatively related to relationship commitment. This meant that when a couple felt their social network did not approve of the relationship, the relationship was more likely to be terminated. Consistent with their hypothesis, Lehmiller and Agnew discovered that perceived social network marginalization was a significant predictor of relationship termination.

Bryan, Fitzpatrick, Crawford, and Fischer (2002) explain that interference from social network members was associated with negative romantic outcomes. Johnson and Milardo (1984) discovered that couples who had the highest break-up rate over the course of one year, had the highest levels of interference from friends and family. In addition, parental disapproval of the relationship was inversely related to the development of romance within that relationship.

Parks, Stan, and Eggert (1983) discovered that romantic involvement was positively associated with perceived support from the participant’s own social network, perceived support from their partner’s social network, attraction to the partner’s social network, the number of people the participant met in his/her partner’s social network, and communication with his/her partner’s social network. Also, Agnew, Loving, and Drigotas (2001) conducted a study in which they found that social networks were good at predicting when their friends would break-up. This
ability is related to what is referred to as “couple disclosure” (p. 1046), and the more a couple discusses their relationship with their social network, the easier it is for the social network to predict the fate of that relationship. Another interesting find in this study was that couples whose social networks were composed of a high amount of joint friends were less likely to break up over the course of six months.

Moreover, a study by Sprecher, Felmlee, Schmeeckle, and Shu (2006) implies that compared to the dissolution of heterosexual relationships, the termination of same-sex relationships tends to affect social networks in a different way. They discovered that, on average, when a gay or lesbian relationship ends, whether the relationship was hidden or overt, social networks are impacted less by the dissolution (Peplau & Beals, 2004). Furthermore, while less support and sympathy tends to be offered from the network, former same-sex romantic partners are more likely to transition as part of that network as friends (Huston & Schwartz, 1995). In addition, Nardi (1999) found that in a study of 161 gay men, 19% of the participants reported that their best friend was an ex-lover.

Most people have, or will, experience a break-up during their lifetime. The reason the study of post-dissolutional relationships is so important is because when a relationship ends, individuals (whether it is the ex-partners or members of the social network) are looking for some sort of closure. As we have seen, one way to achieve such closure is through a redefinition of the romantic relationship. Therefore, break-ups alter the way ex-partners interact, but they also alter social network interactions. This is why the following study is so important: it addresses the way social networks are influenced by break-ups.
For four years, college becomes a students’ “home away from home.” This makes the students’ friends their “family away from home,” so their friends play a significant role in their lives. Clearly then, any type of alteration within a group of friends will most likely have some sort of effect on the students’ lives. The fact that there is limited literature on the effects of a break-up on a social network makes this study all the more valuable in gaining insight into how a pre-marital relationship termination, within a group of friends, will influence college students’ lives.

Method

Participant Recruitment

The sample consisted of fifteen undergraduate students of Boston College. Each participant received an email, which had been delivered to all Communication majors. The email sought participants who had two friends who dated each other and subsequently broke up within the participant’s college experience. Students who met this criterion emailed the researcher, who was responsible for conducting the interviews and executing the study. Once emailed, the researcher verified that the student fit the participation requirement, and set up a convenient time to conduct the interview. For taking part in the study, participants fulfilled a research participation credit for one of their required Communication classes.

Participants

The participants were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, the average age being 20.07 years old. Four (26.6%) of the participants were in their sophomore year of college, nine (60%) were in their junior year, and two (13.3%) were in their senior year of college. Ten (66.6%) of the participants were female, while five (33.3%) were male. Ten participants
(66.6%) described themselves as Caucasian, while three (20%) were Hispanic, and two (13.3%) were African American. Thirteen (86.6%) of the participants categorized themselves as straight, two (13.3%) as bi-sexual, and none of the participants described themselves as lesbian or gay.

**Interview Procedure**

Once participants had been selected for the study, each arranged a time to meet with the researcher to perform the interview. At the beginning of each interview, participants filled out a survey regarding background information and demographics. The participant read and signed a consent form, allowing their information and interview to be used for purposes of the study. Each confidential interview was taped with a recording device that the participant was aware of. Each interview was conducted in a quiet room and was one-on-one and face-to-face (conducted by the researcher), lasting approximately thirty minutes.

Each participant was asked a series of open-ended questions about how a break-up between two of their friends affected them and their social network. Because the interviews were conducted in a semi-standardized style, interview questions differed somewhat between participants. However, in each interview, eight questions were addressed:

1. What is your current relationship with each of the ex-partners now?
2. Can you describe the relationship the ex-partners had when they were together?
3. Can you describe the break-up?
4. Can you describe the social network you are all a part of?
5. Can you describe the current relationship between the ex-partners?
6. How was the break-up story told to you by each of the ex-partners?
7. How did the break-up affect you and your life?
8. How did the break up affect your social network?
Analysis

When all fifteen interviews had been concluded, the recordings were transcribed. The first step in analyzing the interviews was done through a process called “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, open coding is “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). By performing open coding on each of the participant’s interviews, key concepts related to each of the eight research questions were identified and put into broad categories. Then, using selective coding, “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143), these broad categories were each assigned to a theme, which would ultimately answer the questions which were proposed by the study. To ensure the validity of the study, a peer of the researcher reviewed the coding work. At random, this student examined four (26.6%) of the interviews to verify that both coding procedures classified the concepts, categories, and themes correctly.

Results

The results present a view of college “break-up” effects on social network members and the network itself. They illustrate how social networks and network members react to break-ups. Furthermore, the results of this study provide insight into why certain social networks and network members are affected by a break-up, when others are not.

Participant’s Current Relationship with the Ex-Partners

Coding for the first research question, which regarded the participant’s current relationship with the ex-partners, created two major categories. In the first category, “Friendship Preservation,” participants described that they remained friends with both of the ex-partners even after the break-up occurred. Under the category of “Friendship Preservation,” two notable
themes were formed. Those participants who described that their current contact with both ex-partners fell under the theme of “Friends” used terms such as “really good friends,” “best friends,” and “very friendly” to describe their relationship with both-ex-partners. In this theme, participants stated that the break-up had either a neutral or a positive effect on their lives, and only one person noted the break-up had a negative effect on their life. The second theme, “Closer to One Ex-Partner,” describes participants who had a more intimate relationship with one of the ex-partners. “Post-Break-Up Friendship Loss” is the second major category pertaining to the first research question. This category also produced two themes. The first, “Less Contact with One Ex-Partner,” illustrates how some participants lessened their contact with one of the ex-partners following the break-up. The second theme, “Haven’t Spoken to One Ex-Partner Since the Break-Up,” describes participants who have lost contact altogether with one of the ex-partners.

Effect on Participant. In the “Friendship Preservation” category, in respect to how the participant was affected by the break-up, out of sixty-three mentions of current friendships with both ex-partners, across all fifteen interviews, forty-one (65.1%) of those responses indicated that the break-up had a neutral effect on the participants’ lives. Furthermore, 25.4% of those responses indicated the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives, while only 9.5% said the break-up had a negative effect on their lives.

From the information gathered, it is clear that it was easier for participants to maintain friendships with the ex-partners when the break-up had no effect on their life, or a positive effect on their life. Understandably, it was harder for the participants to continue their friendships with both ex-partners when the break-up had a negative effect on their lives.
One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained he had such strong friendships with both ex-partners that he could talk about the break up with each of them:

*Oh, I can bring it up, because when I say ‘best friends,’ there is nothing off-limits between the two of us.*

Another participant, who described the break-up has having a neutral effect on his life, explained that while he was still closer to his guy friend after the break-up, he and the ex-girlfriend were still on friendly terms:

*Rachel (ex-girlfriend), our relationship was good too, you know, she called me ‘brother.’*

Many of the participants, who described the break-up as having neutral effects on their lives, fell into the “Closer to One Ex-Partner” theme. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained he was friends with both ex-partners, but much closer with one:

*He is sort of an older brother to me, you know...he really knows who I am so I know him very well and I met his girlfriend through him... we have a friendly relationship.*

Another interesting find within this theme was that those participants, who met and became friends with one of the ex-partners through the other ex-partner, all said that the break-up had a neutral or positive effect on their life; none noted it had a negative effect on their life when the partners broke up.

In the “Post-Break-Up Friendship Loss” category, in respect to how the participants were affected by the break-up, 66.6% of all statements regarding only being friends with one ex-partner post-break-up, revealed that the break-up had a positive effect on their lives, while 33.3% showed the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives, and 0% revealed the break-up had a
negative effect on their lives. Results in the two themes that were produced by this category show that the reason the post-break-up friendship losses did not have a negative impact on the participants’ lives was because the participant was looking out for their closer friend. In the first theme, “Haven’t Spoken To One Ex-Partner Since the Break-Up,” one participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on his life, explained:

*Ben, like I said, is my best friend. Megan and I got along, but I haven’t spoken to her since they broke up.*

In a similar situation, an interviewee, who also said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained:

*I mean Greg is going to be one of my friends for life. I mean, I felt really bad for him about Chelsea, but I’m never going to see Chelsea again basically.*

Another participant who said the break-up had a positive effect on her life, said she was happy about the break-up because it was beneficial and healthy for her close friend, Elizabeth:

*Participant: And John (ex-boyfriend), I don’t talk to at all anymore, but we used to be friends.*
*Researcher: And have you remained in contact with both of them?*
*Participant: Only Elizabeth, I didn’t want to stay in contact with John.*
*Researcher: And how did you feel when they broke up?*
*Participant: I was sort of sad for my friend (Elizabeth), but at the same time I was relieved because this kid (John) wasn’t right.*

These interviews allude to the concept of loyalty; that friends may have more allegiance to the person that they are closer to. Therefore, a break-up or falling out will have less of a negative impact if one person is a less valuable friend.

One interviewee who was closer to his friend Matt (the ex-boyfriend), said he would never see Sue (the ex-girlfriend) again, and that he was relieved by the break-up:
If anything it (the break-up) had a positive effect on my life just knowing Matt was in a better position...because Sue was controlling.

The participant went on to explain:

I am in contact with Matt; he is still a good friend of mine. I have not spoken to Sue in about seven months.

Participants who were incorporated into this “Less Contact with One Ex-Partner” theme, expressed still being friends, or at least friendly with, one ex-partner, but the contact had greatly diminished since the break-up. Not surprisingly, many participants who were associated with this theme were also associated with the “Closer to One Ex-Partner” theme. The participants maintained their friendships with the friend they were closer to, and lessened contact with the friend they were not as close to. As one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained:

Participant: I’ve been friends with Alex for a really long time...and Lisa, we became friends after they started dating last year.
Researcher: So you are not as close with her?
Participant: Right not as close with her.
Researcher: And are you in current contact with both of them now?
Participant: Well, I haven’t talked to her in, like a week maybe. When I see her she says ‘hi’ and she tries to talk to me... but we don’t really contact each other.

Out of all the participants who said they lessened contact with one of the ex-partners, only one interviewee explained that she lessened contact with the one she was closer to (Steven) and became friendlier with his ex-girlfriend (Ashley):

Participant: Steven has a (new) girlfriend now and spends like all his time with her...he doesn’t hang out with us that much anymore.
Researcher: Are you in contact with both of them now?
Participant: Steven, not as much. If I see him I will say hi to him, but I don’t go out of my way to talk to him. I see Ashley all the time.
Researcher: And what type of effect did Ashley and Steven’s break-up have on your life?
Participant: In some ways it had a positive effect, because Ashley and I became closer just by talking about it.
**Effect on Social Network.** Coding for the first research question (the participant’s current relationship with the ex-partners), in regards to how the break-up affected the participant’s social network, revealed the same categories and themes, yet different experiences.

Overall, when the participant fell into the “Friendship Preservation” category and was friends with both ex-partners, 61.9% of the statements in respect to how the social network was affected revealed the break-up only had a neutral effect. It became apparent that many participants who said the break-up had a neutral effect on their social network were glad it did not alter any friendships:

Researcher: And what type of effect did the break-up have on your social network?
Participant: *I would say neutral because I think that it is good we have all been able to remain friends.*

Another participant who explained the break-up had a neutral effect on her life stated:

*As a whole I think it (the social network) didn’t really change the way anyone was friends with anyone else...because it was civil between them (the ex-partners), it remained civil between everyone else.*

It becomes clear here that a lot of social networks were able to remain friends with both ex-partners and not become affected by the break-up when the ex-partners were able to remain friends. This topic will be analyzed in further detail when the sixth research question, current contact between ex-partners, is addressed.

In addition, 28.6% of statements revealed that when the participant was friends with both ex-partners, the break-up had a negative effect on the social network. One participant, whose social network was her basketball team, explained,

*Lauren (the ex-girlfriend) will get upset when one of my teammates will talk to him (Lauren’s ex-boyfriend). I don’t tell her that I talk to him because I know that won’t make her happy, but he is still my friend, so I am still going to talk to him.*
This interview reveals how complicated the break-up made it for members of social networks to remain friends with both ex-partners, especially when they fell into the “Closer to One” theme, which this social network (being Lauren’s teammates) did. In another interview, one participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her social network, explained that it takes a toll on the social network when two friends are breaking up within it:

*When they broke up, maybe a negative effect (on the social network) because it was tense and everyone was a little worried, because like I said before, Mike gets a little agitated when he gets drunk, so everyone was worried he would have another outburst. And Caroline also gets upset pretty easily and she just wanted him (Mike) to be nice to her like he was to everyone else, and if he wasn’t she would cry or be upset, so it made everyone worry all the time.*

Furthermore, when the participant maintained friendships with both ex-partners, only 9.5% of statements illustrated the break-up had a positive effect on the social network. This exemplifies how hard it is for an individual and social network to cope with a break-up when the members are friends with both ex-partners. In one of the few cases a break-up had a positive effect on a social network which was friends with both ex-partners; the participant fell into the “Closer to One” theme, in which she explains:

*I think it (the break-up) indirectly had a positive effect because the group became a lot closer and we realized who we can count on and who our true friends are.*

Coding for the second category created by research question one, “Post-Break-Up Friendship Loss,” revealed that 66.6% of the statements participants produced showed that the break-up had a positive effect on the social network when the participant maintained friendship with only one ex-partner. One interview, which illustrates the “Haven’t Spoken to One Ex-Partner Since the Break-Up” theme, revealed:

Researcher: What kind of effect did this have on your social network?
Participant: *Positive…well there wasn’t much to deal with because Ben wasn’t depressed and we were all happy to see her go.*
The rest of the statements in the “Post-Break-Up Friendship Loss” category, (33.3%), illustrated that the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network when the participant maintained friendship with only one ex-partner. One participant explained that his close friend, Greg, had brought his ex-girlfriend, Chelsea, into the social network at first but that:

Participant: ...it just wouldn’t have happened that she would remain in our social network.
Researcher: So what effect did the break-up have on your social network?
Participant: I would say neutral. I think it is back to the way it was.

Another interviewee who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, fell into the “Less Contact with One Ex-Partner” category, as she described being in contact

More with Amy than Luke... it was a little bit awkward.

Interestingly, the participants produced no statements illustrating that when they were friends with only one ex-partner post-break-up, that the break-up had a negative effect on their social network. This could be due to the fact that they felt the friendship they were losing was invaluable, or as stated before, they were “happy to see her (or him) go.”

**Relationship Between Ex-Partners When They Were Together**

Coding for the second research question, ex-partners’ relationship while they were dating, created two major categories. The first category, “Positive Relational Quality,” refers to relationships that participants viewed as positive. This category is composed of two themes. The first, “Good Relationship,” is described by words such as “caring,” “respectful,” “very happy,” “really close,” “loving,” “healthy,” and “beautiful.” The second theme, “Serious Relationship,” is described by words such as “serious” and “exclusive.” The second major category produced is “Negative Relational Quality.” Three themes were created in this category.
The first theme, “Turbulent Relationship,” includes terms such as “argumentative,” “unhealthy,”
“controlling,” and “unequal.” The second theme, “Unfaithful Relationship,” deals with cheating
between both, or one, of the ex-partners. The third and final theme, “Not a Serious
Relationship,” deals with couples who were sometimes described by terms such as “off-and-on”
or “not exclusive.”

**Effect on Participant.** Overall, out of the twenty-one statements in reference to the ex-
partners’ past relationship, fourteen (66.6%) illustrated that the break-up had a neutral effect on
the participant when the former relationship fell into the “Positive Relational Quality” category.

Under “A Good Relationship” theme, a couple of the participants, who said the break-up
had a neutral effect on their lives, described the relationship as healthy:

Participant One: *It seemed very relaxed and sane and safe and calm.*
Participant Two: *He seemed very happy with her, she is a very nice girl from a good
family...I mean he really liked her and gave her a lot of respect and treated her really
well.*

In these interviews, it became apparent that the good relationships were very equal and
both partners put in a lot of effort. As another participant, who said the break-up had a neutral
effect on her life, explained:

*Dating they were really close and seemed to be really close...she made a big effort to
make friends with all of his friends. She made friends with me and some of my other
friends, who were girls, which I think can be hard sometimes. So yeah, it (the
relationship) was good.*

Under the theme of “A Serious Relationship,” an interviewee, who also described the
break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, explained that the ex-partner’s relationship was
exclusive and that:

*They did like everything together. They met freshman year and they just broke up this
summer, so they had been dating for two years.*
In addition to the break-up having a neutral effect on the participants’ lives, when the ex-partners’ past relationship fell under the category of “Positive Relational Quality,” 33.4% of the statements illustrated the break-up had a negative effect on the participants’ lives. Here, the same themes emerged, as it seems that the closer the ex-partners were during their relationship, the harder it was for the participant to cope with the break-up.

Understandably, from all of the participants’ statements, none revealed that when the ex-partners’ relationship was of good relational quality, the break-up had a positive effect on the participant.

Overall, from the nineteen statements produced in this category, nine (47.4%) revealed that when the ex-partners’ past relationship was of a negative relational quality, the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives. One participant described his friend Matt’s relationship, which falls under the “Turbulent Relationship” theme:

*I would say it (the relationship) was kind of one-sided. It started out ok, and it later became very tumultuous and not so much a good relationship...very unhealthy; a lot of fighting.*

This relationship also is connected to “An Unfaithful Relationship” theme, as the participant goes on to describe:

*Ultimately, she cheated on him a couple times, he only found out later...*

Because his friends’ relationship was so unhealthy, the participant explained the break-up had a positive effect on his life:

*It had a positive effect just knowing that Matt was in a better position from my estimation.*

In the “Not a Serious Relationship” theme, another participant, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on her life, explained:
They dated for about a month, they went on a few dates, but it didn’t seem like a good relationship, they seemed kind of distant.

Also in the “Negative Relational Category,” 42.1% of all statements revealed that when the quality of the ex-partners’ past relationship was poor; the break-up had a neutral effect on the lives of the participants. One participant’s interview explains how unequal feelings can associate a relationship with the “Turbulent Relationship” theme:

Researcher: And can you describe their relationship?
Participant: Sure, he was very, I think, a little more into it than she was. He was always there, basically at her beck and call, he was always there; always in her room, always taking her places, doing basically everything for her. She wasn’t needy at all, but he basically clung onto her and wouldn’t let go. So she kind of distanced herself a little bit more and more because she wasn’t a girl who needed a guy around all the time.

Another participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, described that his friends’ relationship also fell into the “Turbulent Relationship” theme when they were dating:

A lot of arguments built up, a lot of issues held inside that should have been talked about in the proper manner rather than yelling or arguing with each other…they were always with each other 24/7 so it was always nit-picky over and over.

In reference to the “Not a Serious Relationship” theme and the issue of control, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained:

“Well it (his friends’ relationship) got kind of weird at certain points I guess I’d say. There were times when they were ok with not being exclusive… But part of the reason I started to dislike Megan towards the end of the relationship was because she was the one making those decisions and Ben was just kind of letting her do that.

Additionally, only 10.5% of the statements in reference to the “Negative Relational Quality” category revealed that the break-up had a negative effect on the participants’ lives. This is understandable, as most participants would not be happy seeing their friends in an unhealthy or unfaithful relationship. Therefore, “Not a Serious Relationship” was a major theme as two participants, who said the break-up had a negative effect on their lives, described:
Participant One: *It wasn’t really a long term relationship from what I saw.*
Participant Two: *Well it was sort of off-and-on; they broke up a few times when they got into fights.*

**Effect on Social Network.** Coding for the second research question (the relationship of the ex-partners while they were dating), in regards to how the break-up affected the participant’s social network, revealed similar, yet slightly different results. In the “Positive Relational Quality” category, 66.6% of the participants’ statements described the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, illustrated her friends’ relationship belonged to the theme of “A Good Relationship”:

> *It was a very loving relationship. The fact that it was a gay relationship didn’t bother either of them...I would say overall it was very healthy for both of them.*

Furthermore, 28.6% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the ex-partners’ relationship was of good quality, the social network was negatively affected by the break-up. One participant, who said that the break-up had a negative effect on his social network explained that he felt his friends’ relationship was healthy by the fact that they did not “isolate” themselves as a couple:

Researcher: And can you describe their relationship when they were dating?  
Participant: *Yup, they mostly hung out at school, but it was sort of in a group, they weren’t isolated. They would hang out with me and my friends and Jen (the ex-girlfriend) and her friends; we would all hang out as a group. And then they would go off and do their own thing occasionally, like go on dates and stuff.*

When asked how the break-up affected his social network, the participant explained it had a negative effect:

*We all sort of feel like when we are all together and she (Jen) brings something up (about the break-up), it kind of ruins the evening and we all feel kind of awkward.*
Another participant demonstrated that while her friends were dating, their relationship was loving:

*Dating they were really close, and they seemed really close.*

However, the participant continues on to say that when the couple broke up, her social network was negatively affected:

*I think her (ex-girlfriend’s) group of friends isn’t really going to hang out with us as much, so it’s kind of like a division.*

Of all the participants’ statements, only 4.8% (one participant) revealed that when the ex-partners’ past relationship belonged to the “Good Relational Quality” category, the social network was positively affected by the break-up. As the one participant explained, the relationship belonged to the “Not a Serious Relationship” theme, because:

*They dated for about a month, they went on a few dates.*

The participant explained that the only reason the break-up had a positive effect on the social network was because it brought everyone (except for the ex-boyfriend) a lot closer together. The fact that only one participant revealed that the break-up of a good relationship had a positive effect on the social network shows that friends enjoy seeing their friends in healthy, respectful, and caring relationships.

In the “Negative Relational Quality” category, 57.9% of participants’ statements revealed that when the relationship between the ex-partners was of poor quality, the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, explained her friends’ “turbulent” relationship:

*I thought their relationship was very unequal. I felt that Elizabeth did a lot more for John than he deserved.*
Additionally, 26.3% of the statements revealed that the break-up of a bad relationship had a positive effect on the social network. One participant, who explained the break-up had a positive effect on her social network, said of her friends’ relationship:

*It didn’t seem like a good relationship, they seemed kind of distant.*

Lastly, only 15.8% of statements illustrated that the break-up of a bad relationship had a negative effect on the social network. One interviewee explained that the feelings between her friends in the relationship, when they were dating, were unequal:

*So she (Caroline) and Mike kind of got really serious and they were hooking up for the rest of the school year and she always said they weren’t officially dating... and Mike was like 'this is my girlfriend.'*

The participant goes on to explain how the break-up had a negative effect on her social network:

*It (the break-up) definitely made it so that when it started getting awkward our guy friends (who lived with Mike) would start doing things separate.*

**Description of the Break-Up**

Coding for the third research question, the reason for the break-up, produced three major categories. The first category, “Commitment Issues,” describes couples who broke up for reasons belonging to the themes of “Infidelity” and “Different Expectations.” The second category, “External Influences,” references the themes of “Distance” and “Family/ Friend Disapproval” for the cause of the break-up. Last, but not least, is the “Flawed Relationship” category in which the couple broke up because there were too many issues in the relationship. Within this category are the themes of “Excessive Differences,” and “Constant Disagreement.”
Effect on Participant. Of the sixteen statements produced by the participants, eleven (68.8%) revealed that the break-up had a neutral effect on the participant when their friends broke up for reasons that belonged to the “Commitment Issues” category. Of five participants who produced statements pertaining to the “Different Expectations” theme, four (80%) said the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. As one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained:

*Amy wasn’t as into Luke as Luke was into Amy...Amy loved Luke but it was clear he was in it for the long run and she realized she didn’t love him as much as he loved her, so she didn’t want it to get worse (and broke up with him).*

Two more participants, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on their lives, explained that because of unequal feelings between the partners and unequal expectations about the relationship, the relationship ended:

Participant One: *He was very, I think, a little more into it than she was...so it was definitely more affection from him than her and she...didn’t want to be in a relationship anymore.*

Participant Two: *Caroline never took the relationship seriously and she was like ‘Yeah, we are not really dating, we are not really dating.’ And Mike was like, ‘This is my girlfriend.’*

Participants also described that when the ex-partners broke up for reasons of infidelity, the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. One interviewee illustrates that when both partners cheated on each other, the break-up only had a neutral effect on her life:

Researcher: And why did they end up officially breaking up?
Participant: *A lot of complicated matters because when they were going out they both hooked up with other people and got offended by that.*

Another participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained that the relationship ultimately ended because one of the ex-partners cheated:

Researcher: Why did they break up?
Participant: *Well he cheated on her half way through the relationship...*
In addition, 25% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the break-up was
categorized for reasons of “Commitment Issues,” the break-up had a positive effect on their
lives. One participant, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on her life,
illustrated the reason for the break-up belonged to the “Infidelity” theme:

_They both went to different schools and they were both secretly cheating on the other,
then they both found out, so it didn’t work._

Lastly, only 6.2% of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a
negative effect on their lives when the reason for the break-up belonged to the “Commitment
Issues” category. One interviewee explained that one of her friends could not commit to the
relationship because of his future plans:

_He is going to be a doctor, so he is going to school for that...then he just kind of ended it._

In the second category, “External Influences,” 66.6% of the participants’ statements
revealed that when their friends broke up for reasons pertaining to this category, the break-up
had a neutral effect on their lives. Relating to the “Distance” theme, one participant, who said
the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, said the reason his friends broke up was because:

_She is going abroad...and she is going to be gone next semester and he is going to be
here, so I think that is why._

In reference to the “Family/Friend Disapproval” theme, another interviewee, who said the
break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained that one of her friends broke up with her
boyfriend because she felt the rest of her friends were unhappy two people in their social
network were dating:

_She was like ‘I think I am going to break up with him when we get back to school, like the
fact that we date throws off everyone’s dynamic as a group’ because there was a lot of
weird tension when they first started dating, like when they saw all our friends. So she
broke up with him literally when they first got to school and she said she thought it just made our group dynamic too weird.

Additionally, in this category of “External Influences,” 33.3% of the participants’ statements revealed the break-up had a negative effect on the participant when the reason for the break-up belonged to this category. As on participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on his life, described:

My friend, Ted, just didn’t think the long distance thing would work, and Jen (ex-girlfriend) really wanted to, but Ted just thought it wouldn’t be possible.

Furthermore, none of the statements the participants produced illustrated that the break-up had a positive effect on the interviewee when it belonged to the “External Influences” category.

In the third and final category, “Flawed Relationship,” 85.7% of the statements illustrated that the break-up had a neutral effect on the participant when the relationship was of poor quality. Along the lines of the “Excessive Differences” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained why his friends broke up:

Participant: He seemed very happy with her; she is a very nice girl, she came from a good family, but there was a distinction between them. She came from a very conservative, Catholic family. She is very conservative Catholic and he is not so it just didn’t seem right. I mean, he really liked her and gave her a lot of respect and treated her really well.

Researcher: So why did they break up?
Participant: Uh, as I said, I think the differences between her family and his family. Like I know to her family something like underage drinking would be totally unacceptable, whereas in his family it wouldn’t. And there was a difference in religion and politics so I think those two things kind of clashed with each other.

In the “Constant Disagreement” category, two participants, who both described the break-up as having neutral effects on their lives, said their friends broke up because they were always fighting:
Participant One: They got along really well, but this past summer they would argue about stupid things. Like, he used to say she wasn’t as touchy-feely as he wanted her to be and stupid things like that.
Participant Two: When the years went on, things just started going downhill, and just the smallest things would have them arguing.

Moreover, 14.3% of participants’ statements revealed that when the break-up was caused by reasons pertaining to the “Flawed Relationship” category, the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives. Alluding to the “Excessive Differences” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a positive effect on her life, explained:

*It didn’t seem like a good relationship, they seemed kind of distant...I just never thought they would go out in the first place because they never seemed compatible.*

Not surprisingly, none of the participants’ statements illustrated that when their friends broke up because they had a flawed relationship, that the break-up had a negative effect on their lives.

**Effect on Social Network.** Coding for the third research question (reason for the break-up), in regards to how the break-up affected the participants’ social networks, revealed that when ex-partners broke up for reasons pertaining to the “Commitment Issues” category, 62.5% of the statements illustrated that the break-up had a neutral effect on the participants’ social networks. Along the lines of the “Infidelity” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his social network, explained:

*Ultimately, she cheated on him a couple times, he only found out later. And when he did find out, he broke up with her shortly after.*

Coding also revealed that 25% of participants’ statements showed that when a couple broke up because of commitment issues, there was a negative effect on the social network. One interviewee, who described the break-up as having a negative effect on her social network,
explained that her friend, Alex, broke up with her other friend, Lisa, because he did not want to commit solely to her:

I think he (Alex) feels like, this sounds horrible, but feels like, I guess, there are some other girls he might want to date or be with.

Also in the “Commitment Issues” category, 12.5% of participants’ statements revealed that when ex-partners broke up because of commitment problems, there was a positive effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a positive effect on her social network, explained:

It was very abrupt and sudden. He just said, ‘I don’t think I’m ready for this’…he just kind of stopped talking to her after a while.

In the second major category for the third research question, “External Influences,” 55.5% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the break-up was caused by outside forces, there was a negative effect on the social network. In regards to the theme of “Distance,” one participant, who described the break-up as having a negative effect on her social network, explained that one of her friends (Paul) broke up with her other friend (Lauren) because he was going away to medical school:

He felt it wouldn’t be fair for her for him to be at school and not giving her the attention she deserved, and not having the relationship that they want.

Also in the “External Influences” category, 33.3% of the participants’ statements disclosed that the break-up had a neutral effect on their social networks when the reason for the break-up pertained to this category. One participant, who also said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, explained the reason why her friends’ break-up belonged to the “Family/Friend Disapproval” theme. She said that when one of her friend’s mothers found out
her daughter was in a lesbian relationship, her mother’s reaction negatively affected the relationship, and ultimately ended it:

It (the break-up) had to do with Maura’s mom and her reaction to their relationship. Danielle visited Maura over the summer and something happened during the visit that didn’t sit well with either of them, I guess. I don’t know exactly, but I think it was something that her mother said about the relationship.

Lastly in the “External Influences” category, 11.1% of participants explained that when the cause of the break-up was related to outside influences, the break-up had a positive effect on their social network. In reference to the “Family/Friend Disapproval” theme, one participant explained that the reason the break-up had such a positive effect on his social network, was because the social network influenced the break-up. He said the social network was:

…pushing Ben pretty hard to break up with Megan for a long time…the social network affected the break-up.

In the final category for the third research question, “Flawed Relationship,” 71.4% of all participants’ statements revealed that when the ex-partners’ relationship was of poor quality, the break-up had a neutral effect on the participant’s social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his social network, explained that the issue of control was a major problem in his friends’ relationship, illustrating the “Constant Disagreement” theme:

Sue (the ex-girlfriend) was very dominant in the relationship and had absolute interest in controlling basically every aspect of Matt’s life... a lot of fighting whenever the subject of control came up because she wanted to keep things the way they were and he wanted to break free from that.

Moreover, 14.3% of the participants’ statements in this category showed that when the break-up was caused by a flawed relationship, it had a negative effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her social network, described that her friends broke up because they never got very close:
I mean, sometimes they would hold hands and hug every once in a while in public, but it wasn’t really like that… it wasn’t really like a long term relationship.

Another 14.3% of the participants’ statements showed that the break-up had a positive effect on the social network when the cause of the break-up was related to the “Flawed Relationship” category. An interviewee, who said the break-up had a positive effect on his social network, described his friends’ relationship as controlling and explained that Megan broke up with Ben because:

She started getting annoyed that he wasn’t doing whatever she said anymore.

Description of the Social Network

Coding for the fourth research question, description of the social network the participant and ex-partners belonged to, produced two major categories. The first category, “Unified Social Network,” is composed of two themes. The first theme, “Integrated,” describes social networks that were very close and equal. The second theme, “Common Interest,” describes social networks in which the members had a lot in common. The second category, “Divided Social Network,” focuses on the theme of “Inequality Between Members.”

Effect on Participant. When the participants’ statements for the category of “Unified Social Network” were coded, it became apparent that when the individual’s social network was united, 71.4% of the statements illustrated the break-up had a neutral effect on the participant. In reference to the “Common Interest” theme, two participants, who explained that the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives, described their social networks as centering around sports:

Participant One: We all hang out, we are all on the athletics team here, and we predominantly hang out with all athletes. We have very few non-athlete friends.
Participant Two: Well, I play on the football team, so that’s my social network...
Interestingly, four of the five (80%) participants, whose social networks centered around athletics, said the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives, while only one participant (20%) said the break-up had a negative effect on her life. As another interviewee, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, illustrated, her social network centered around a common interest that was not athletics:

Participant: They (the ex-partners) were in the marching band with me.
Researcher: And can you describe the social network that the three of you were a part of?
Participant: Ok, it’s a group of maybe like thirty people, so it’s pretty big, and we all have a common interest (marching band), so we hang out pretty much all the time.

Pertaining to the “Integrated” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained that his social network was very close and inclusive:

It’s actually a very interesting social network, like I said my family is very close with Greg’s (the ex-boyfriend) family. I’ve been going to St. Thomas with his family probably every summer since like seventh grade. And every summer we go, we go with them and I’ll like bring one of my friends and they’ll bring some of their friends, so it has kind of created a big network where we are almost family. And their friends will become my friends and vice versa. And like honestly, I’ve known Blair (Greg’s sister) since kindergarten, she was like my first girlfriend in third grade so I know these people very well.

Also in the “Unified Social Network” category, 19.1% of participants’ statements explained that when the social network fit into this category, the break-up had a negative effect on their lives. Pertaining once again to the “Common Interest” theme, one participant, who described the break-up as having a negative effect on her life, said her social network was the basketball team:

Well it (our social network) definitely centers around sports because he (the ex-boyfriend) was a practice player and all the practice players are friends. He actually quit being a practice player so they could date, because they thought it was a team rule that a player can’t date a practice player, so he quit halfway through the season last year so they could be together.
Additionally, only 9.5% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network was unified, the break-up had a positive effect on the participant. Under the “Integrated” theme, one participant, who explained the break-up had a positive effect on his life, described the social network:

*She (the ex-girlfriend) had an equal amount of friends in the group, and they (the ex-partners) were friends with the same people. It was very much enmeshed; there wasn’t much inequality there.*

Another participant, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on her life, explained:

*Well, we all had the same friends; there were probably a group of ten or twelve of us...and we all just mingled around with the same people.*

In the second category, “Divided Social Network,” for the fourth research question, 80% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network consisted of divisions, the break-up had a neutral effect on the participants’ lives. Alluding to the “Inequality Between Members” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained that her girl friend, Amy, brought her boyfriend, Luke, into her social network, so even though they were friends with him, the social network was not as close to Luke as Amy:

*They weren’t really in the same social network until they started dating, and then they became in the same social network.*

Also in this “Divided Social Network” category, 20% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network was divided, the break-up had a negative effect on the participant. One interviewee, who described the break-up as having a negative effect on his life, explained that within his social network, the group of girls was not as close to him as his friend, Ted:
Well me and Ted (the ex-boyfriend) are really close. I'll just call him up on a random weekend and we will hang out, we are really close, we hang out a lot. And with Jen (the ex-girlfriend), it is mostly if we are getting together as a big group to do something at night like a movie or if we are all going to the beach or something then we will invite all the girls also. But I definitely hang out with him more.

Additionally, in the “Divided Social Network” category, none of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network consisted of divisions, the break-up had a positive effect on the participant.

**Effect on Social Network.** In the first category, “Unified Social Network,” relating to the fourth research question (description of the social network), 57.1% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network was united, the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, explained that her social network belonged to the “Common Interest” theme:

> All three of us are part of the ‘athletic’ social network. We know a lot of the same people because of athletics and we see a lot of the same people because, you know, going into Conte (the gymnasium) and going into the weight room and athletic events and stuff.

Furthermore, 33.3% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the social network belonged to this category, the break-up had a negative effect on their social network. One participant, who explained that she was really close to both ex-partners and their friends within the social network, said the break-up had a negative effect on her social network because the group of guys and girls were living right next to each other:

> Well he (the ex-boyfriend) is probably one of my best guy friends. We live in Mod 11A and he lives in Mod 11B, so he is probably one of my closest guy friends here. And she (the ex-girlfriend) has been one of my best girl friends on campus; we have lived together for the last three or four years...when we first decided to all live in the Mods together, they were dating.
Finally, in the first category, “Unified Social Network,” 9.5% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network was connected to this category, the break-up had a positive effect on the social network. One interviewee, who said the break-up had a positive effect on her social network, illustrated that although her network was small, they were all really close and equal and belonged to the “Integrated” theme:

*My main group of friends is Ashley, Sammy, Jared, Brian, and Molly...we used to just hang out...on the weekends, we would go to the movies.*

In the “Divided Social Network” category, 40% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network was divided, the break-up had a negative effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her social network, explained her social network consisted of different groups:

*Well it’s a big group of guy friends I guess, and then there are lots of girls who are friends with different boys within that group. And then there is kind of a group of girls too who are all friends with them. Lisa (the ex-girlfriend) is not necessarily a part of our group of girl friends but she is friends with me through the guys.*

Another 40% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network belonged to this category, the break-up had a positive effect on the social network. Alluding to the “Inequality Between Members” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a positive effect on his social network, explained that when his friend, Ben, brought his girlfriend, Megan, into the social network, the rest of the social network was not very fond of her:

*Well, I gave Megan a chance, but pretty much everybody else gave her a pretty quick judgment and they were all pretty much negative because the way she was making Ben act, and just the type of girl she was.*

Lastly, in the “Divided Social Network” category, 20% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network consisted on divisions, the break-up had a neutral effect on
the social network. As one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, described:

"It’s (the social network) really divided actually. The guys are more friendly with John (the ex-boyfriend), it was always that way. And the girls weren’t really friendly with John, mostly Elizabeth (the ex-girlfriend)."

Another interviewee, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, illustrating the “Inequality Between Members” theme, said he was closer to some members of his social network than others:

"I am a very sociable person, so I talk to a lot of people. I don’t necessarily call them all friends, but I am friendly."

**Current Relationship Between Ex-Partners**

Coding for the fifth research question, which addressed current contact between ex-partners, produced two main categories. The first category, “Amiable Relationship,” is composed of two themes. The first theme, “Still Friends,” describes ex-partners who were able to remain friends after the break-up. The second theme, “Dating Again,” describes ex-partners who got back together after they broke up. The second category for the fifth research question is “Unfriendly Relationship.” The two themes produced from this category are “Loss of Contact,” in which the ex-partners speak less post-break-up, or not at all, and “Unhealthy Relationship,” in which the ex-partners no longer get along.

**Effect on Participant.** Coding for the first category, “Amiable Relationship,” illustrated that unanimously, all (100%) of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives when the ex-partners’ maintained a good relationship. One
participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained that the ex-partners’
belonged to the “Still Friends” theme:

   Researcher: And are Adam and Tara friends now?
   Participant: Yeah they are now.

   Another participant, who also said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, said the
same thing:

   Yeah, they are friends; they get along, but they don’t spend excessive time together.

   Interestingly, in reference to the “Dating Again” theme, one interviewee, who said the
break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained that her friends actually got back together:

   And they are dating again now, but they were broken up for most of first semester.

   Interestingly, another participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social
network, said that while the ex-partners are currently friends:

   I honestly think it might be possible for them to date again, I think this is just kind of a
   period for them to cool off, get space, and figure out where they want to be in life in
general, but I can see something happening in the future.

   As stated before, in this first category, “Amiable Relationship,” none of the participants’
statements revealed that, when the ex-partners were on good terms following the break-up, the
break-up had a negative or positive effect on the participant.

   Coding for the second category, “Unfriendly Relationship,” of the fifth research question
illustrated that 56.3% of the participants’ statements showed that the break-up had a neutral
effect on their lives when the ex-partners’ were not amicable to each other. One participant, who
said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, illustrated that the relationship between the ex-
partners fell into the “Loss of Contact” theme:
Researcher: And are the ex-partners still talking to each other now?
Participant: Not really, I don’t think so.

Another interviewee, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his social network, said his friends (the ex-partners) also were not speaking anymore.

*I really think it is very childish, you know, I feel like two grown people should be able to talk to each other no matter what the situation is. You know, they would be around each other and just sit and look at each other. I’ll be like ‘What you’re not going to speak? You talked to everyone else in the room.’*

One participant, who also described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, showed that the ex-partners’ current relationship pertained to the “Unhealthy Relationship” theme:

Researcher: And do they still talk to each other?
Participant: Yeah, I think they still do talk to each other. She was texting him yesterday.
Researcher: And how do you feel, that they can still talk?
Participant: Well I don’t think they were really talking, it was kind of almost fighting. She was just like ‘I’m not going to bother you with my existence anymore,’ like texts like that. So I don’t think they are being friendly and speaking to each other. I still feel like it is hurt feelings and animosity maybe.

Furthermore, in this category, 37.5% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the contact between the ex-partners was poor, the break-up had a negative effect on the participant. Illustrating the “Loss of Contact” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her life, explained that her friend, Lauren (the ex-girlfriend), completely cut off contact with her ex-boyfriend, Paul:

*Well, Lauren with friends is really bad. She is like ‘If you don’t want anything to do with me, I’m just going to cut you out.’ She erased his number from her phone, he tried to be nice and say ‘good game’ after a game and she didn’t respond. She just tried to cut him out and it was just so much for me!*

Another participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on his life, illustrated that the contact between the two ex-partners had diminished greatly since their break-up, and that
it belonged to the “Unhealthy Relationship” theme because the ex-girlfriend had unresolved feelings:

They talk a little bit, but it’s a little awkward because I think she still wants to get back together because he has moved on and has another girlfriend now...she should be moving on, but she really isn’t.

In addition, in the “Unfriendly Relationship” category, only 6.3% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the ex-partners were on bad terms, the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives. One interviewee, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on her life, revealed how her friends belonged to the “Loss of Contact” theme after their break-up:

Researcher: And are Steven and Ashley still speaking?  
Participant: Sometimes they will speak, but not that much.

Effect on Social Network. Coding for the “Amiable Relationship” category for the fifth research question (description of the ex-partners’ current relationship), showed that 76.9% of the participants’ statements described the break-up as having a neutral effect on their social network when the ex-partners were currently on good terms.

As one participant explained, because the ex-partners (Maura and Danielle) were able to remain friends, her social network was not affected at all by the break-up:

As a whole, I think it (the break-up) didn't really change the way anyone was friends with anyone else. Like, it wasn’t like splitting up and choosing camps, it wasn’t like ‘Team Maura’ and ‘Team Danielle.’ Because it was civil between them, it remained civil between everyone else.

Another participant, who explained the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, also revealed that the ex-partners remained in the “Still Friends” theme:
Yeah, they (the ex-partners) are friends…it was a pretty clean break-up; everyone wanted to remain friends.

Furthermore, 23.1% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the ex-partners had a good post-dissolutional relationship, the break-up negatively affected the social network. One participant, who explained that the break-up had negative effect on her social network, said that when her friends broke up, it was good they were both civil to each other:

_I never felt like one of them was like ‘You can’t be friends with the other one!’_

Additionally, none of the participants’ statements in the “Amiable Relationship” category revealed that when the ex-partners’ current relationship was good, the break-up had a positive effect on the social network.

In the second category, “Unfriendly Relationship,” of the fifth research question, 62.5% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the ex-partners’ current relationship was of negative quality, the break-up had a negative effect on their social network. One interviewee, who described that the break-up had a negative effect on his social network, illustrated that his friends fell into the “Loss of Contact” theme:

Researcher: And how do you feel that Jen and Ted can’t speak normally?
Participant: _I mean it’s a shame that that happened because I have known both of them for so long and am friends with each of them. I think they could be friends with each other, but it is just sort of too bad that they don’t think that could happen._

Also, 25% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the ex-partners’ current relationship was of poor quality, the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network. Alluding to the “Unhealthy Relationship” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, explained that after the break-up, it took one ex-partner lot longer than the other ex-partner to get over it:
So he (John) needed her (Elizabeth) initially, but in the long run, John was so up and down that Elizabeth missed what John was like originally, so she was really hurt because he moved on and had someone else and she didn’t.

Lastly, 12.5% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the ex-partners’ post-dissolutional relationship belonged to the “Unfriendly Relationship” category, the break-up had a positive effect on the social network. One participant, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on his social network, said that his friend, Ben, no longer speaks to Megan since they broke up, because:

*She didn’t care about us (the social network), because she knew how we felt about her...she didn’t want anything to do with us anymore.*

**How the Break-Up Story Was Told**

Coding for the sixth research question, how each ex-partner described the break-up to the participant, produced two categories. The first category, “Same Story,” describes how the participant got the same break-up story from both ex-partners. The theme this category centers around is “Validity,” in which the participant believed he/she got the true break-up story since the same one was produced by both ex-partners. The second category, “Dissimilar Stories,” explains that some participants got different break-up stories from each ex-partner. Three themes emerged from this category. The first theme, “Hurt Feelings,” illustrated that many participants felt hurt when their two friends produced different stories and were not honest friends. The second category, “Trusted Only One Side,” reveals that while many participants got both sides of the break-up, they only believed the story one ex-partner told them. The third and final theme for the “Dissimilar Stories” category, is “Did Not Hear Both Sides,” in which the participant either only heard the break-up story from one ex-partner, or from neither of the ex-partners.
Effect on Participant. The first category, “Same Story,” illustrated that when the participants got the same break-up story from both ex-partners, 60% of their statements revealed that the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. One participant, who described that the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, said she believed she got a valid story because both ex-partners told her the same thing, yet one ex-partner was a lot more emotional about it:

*I basically got the same story, but it was definitely a lot more emotional for James; he took it a little harder and couldn’t cope with it.*

Moreover, 40% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the participants received the same break-up story from both ex-partners, the break-up had a negative effect on their lives. One participant, who explained the break-up had a negative effect on his life, illustrated that he got the same break-up story because it was pretty straightforward:

Researcher: And when they broke up, did you get different stories about why they broke up?
Participant: *Not really, I mean, at the time it was just that they were going away to college, so that was the reason.*

Additionally, none of the statements revealed that when the participants received the same story of the break-up, that the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives.

As a whole, many more participants explained that they obtained two different break-up stories from the ex-partners. In the “Dissimilar Stories” category, 78.6% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the participants received diverging stories from the ex-partners, the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. As one participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, illustrated:

Researcher: And did you get different stories of the break-up?
Participant: *Yes, different stories.*
Researcher: How did they differ?
Participant: *Well, the guy blamed it on the girl, and the girl said it was just bound to happen.*
Another interviewee, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained that his situation belonged to the “Hurt Feelings” theme:

Researcher: So when they broke up, did you get the same story of the break-up?
Participant: No, not at all. Both of them had different reasons on why, you know? I guess you could say once you broke it down and analyzed it, it was actually the same reasons, but when you heard them telling it to you it was just so many different reasons of ‘Oh, he doesn’t treat me this way’ or ‘She always accuses me of this’ or other things.
Researcher: And why do you think you got a different story from them? And how did that make you feel?
Participant: Well, I think I got two different stories because neither of them wanted to be in the wrong. And I felt like that’s why I got two different stories, you know, play the blame game...Just as their friend I wanted to be like ‘You know, tell me the same story.’ I kind of knew they were both going to come with different stories, but I was kind of hoping they would come to me with the same one.

A participant, illustrating the “Did Not Hear Both Sides” theme, who also said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained:

I didn’t talk to both of them, she broke up with him pretty much right before we went on vacation with him and his family. So you could obviously tell he wasn’t exactly himself on vacation, I definitely didn’t talk to her though.

Another participant, who had a similar story relating to this theme and said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained he only got one side of the story because he felt it was not his business to pry into:

Researcher: So when they broke up, did you get a different story for why they broke up?
Participant: Umm, not really. I didn’t really ask Megan because by that time I didn’t really like her anymore and, frankly, that’s their business so I didn’t really want to push it.

Along the lines of the “Trusted Only One Side’ theme, another participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, explained:

Participant: Adam just said that they were just fighting and things weren’t the same as they were before. Tara just went into more detail.
Researcher: And how did you feel about the discrepancies in the stories?
Participant: *Well, I was more inclined to believe Tara because I knew her longer.*

Furthermore, 21.4% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the participant received different stories from the ex-partners, the break-up had a positive effect on their lives. One participant, who said the break-up had a positive effect on his life, explained:

*I heard mostly one side. I heard some aspects of Sue’s side. I suppose you can say I got both perspectives; Matt’s more strongly. Sue’s perspective was that ‘Matt was very irrational and why couldn’t he just enjoy everything and what’s the big deal and why does he have to break-up with me?’ Very upset, very insecure about it. Matt was very much more like ‘I have to get out of this and this needs to end now.’*

Alluding to the “Only Trusted One Side” theme, another interviewee, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on her life, illustrated:

Researcher: So when they broke up, did you get the same story from both of them?  
Participant: *No, I got different stories because John is crazy. Sorry, I don’t mean to refer to him that way...*  
Researcher: But that’s how you feel?  
Participant: *Ya, that is how I feel and Elizabeth, I thought, had a much more valid side to the story at least from what I saw.*  
Researcher: So how did you feel that you got two different stories?  
Participant: *I just felt like John was crazy and I just didn’t trust what was going on in his head.*

Furthermore, in reference to the “Did Not Hear Both Sides” theme, a participant, who said the break-up had a positive effect on her life, explained:

*I just talked to her about it (the break-up).*

**Effect on Social Network.** Coding for the sixth research question, how the break-up story was told, revealed that for the “Same Story” category, 60% of the participants’ statements explained that when they received the same break-up story from both ex-partners, the break-up had a neutral effect on their social network. One participant, who described the way the story was told by both ex-partners belonged to the “Valid” theme, and had a neutral effect on her social network, said:
I would say Luke was more closed about it, so he didn’t talk about it as much, but they had similar stories.

Also, 40% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the participants were told the same break-up story from both ex-partners, the break-up had a negative effect on their social network, and none of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a positive effect on the social network when the participants were told the same story by both ex-partners.

One again, there were many more participants who disclosed that they were told different break-up stories by the ex-partners, than those who were told the same story. In the “Dissimilar Stories” category, 67.9% of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a neutral effect on their social network when they did not receive the same story from both ex-partners.

One participant, whose story related to the “Did Not Hear Both Sides” theme and said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, explained why she only got one side of the story:

Researcher: And who did you hear the break-up story from?
Participant: I got it from Danielle.
Researcher: And how did it make you feel that Maura wasn’t really telling you anything about it?
Participant: I wish that our relationship is one that we are very close. But when either one of us has a problem it is not something we talk out, we want to figure it out on our own and deal with it on our own. So, I wanted her to know I was there for her, but I wasn’t going to push the issue. So ya, I wanted to hear from her, but it didn’t bother me that much.

Additionally, 17.9% of the participants’ statements in this category revealed that when they got diverging break-up stories from the ex-partners, the break-up had a negative effect on their social network. In reference to the “Did Not Hear Both Sides” theme, one participant, who described the break-up as having a negative effect on her social network, explained:
I never really got the side from Paul because I haven’t really seen him enough but what I got from Lauren, what I told you about the break-up, is what I got from her.

In reference to the “Hurt Feelings” theme, another interviewee, who also said the break-up had a negative effect on her social network, revealed:

Researcher: So when they broke up, did you get the same story of the break-up or a different one?
Participant: Well I only really got half of her story. She asked me ‘Why is he being so mean? I don’t understand what is going on.’ And he would tell me one story and be like ‘She is so annoying, I need to get out of this.’ But then he would tell different friends different stories, so it was hard to really know what was going on.
Researcher: So how did you feel about that, did you feel like you were torn?
Participant: A little, not so much because I was better friends with him, but it still kind of sucks to have to talk to the two people and get different sides of the story.

Lastly, in the “Dissimilar Stories” category, 14.3% of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a positive effect on their social network when the participant received different break-up stories from the ex-partners.

How the Break-Up Affected the Participant and the Participant’s Social Network

Overall, results from this study revealed that ten (66.6%) of the participants described the break-up as having a neutral effect on their lives, while three (20%) said the break-up had a positive effect on their lives, and 2 (13.3%) said the break-up had a negative effect on their lives. Furthermore, eight (53.3%) of the participants explained that the break-up had a neutral effect on their social network, while five (33.3%) said the break-up had a negative effect on their social network, and two (13.3%) said the break-up had a positive effect on their social network.

While many categories and themes for these two research questions have already been addressed, there are still three categories pertaining to how the break-up affected the participant and the participants’ social network that are pertinent to the conclusions drawn from this study. For the seventh research question (how the break-up affected the participant), two new categories
were created. The first category, “Choosing Sides,” is composed of three themes. The first
theme, “Coercion,” refers to participants who felt they had to choose sides when the ex-partners
broke up. The second theme, “No Obligation,” refers to participants who were not forced to
choose sides. And lastly, the theme, “Loyalty,” describes participants who knew which ex-
partner’s side they were on. In the second category for the seventh research question, “Feelings
About Break-Up,” three more themes were created. The first theme, “Pleased,” refers to
participants who were happy and relieved the ex-partners broke up. The second theme,
“Unhappy,” describes participants who were upset or frustrated that the ex-partners broke up.
And, the third theme, “Indifferent,” refers to participants who said the break-up made no
difference to them.

Only one additional category, “Social Network Support,” was created by the eighth
research question in regards to how the break-up affected the social network. This category was
composed of two themes. The first theme, “Support Provided,” refers to social networks that
provided support to the participant and other members of the social network during the break-up.
The second theme, “Support Unnecessary,” refers to when members of the social network did
not need support during the break-up.

Coding for the seventh research question, in respect to how the break-up affected the
participant, revealed that in the “Choosing Sides” category, when the participants felt they had to
choose sides, 75% of their statements revealed the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives.
One participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, illustrated the
“Coercion” theme:

Researcher: And did you ever feel like you needed to choose sides?
Participant: *Umm ya, I did, because I got both sides of the story from each of them, but I told them both that I didn’t want to be involved so I got myself out of that one (laughs).* Researcher: And how did you feel about that, that you felt like you were forced to pick? Participant: *I didn’t like it because I understood where both of them were coming from and I wanted to be there for both of them and hear what was going on and offer some advice. But then, I thought, ‘This is between them and I don’t want to be involved,’ because I didn’t want them to be mad at me or hold grudges because I was friends with the other.*

Furthermore, 25% of the participants’ statements in the “Coercion” theme illustrated that the break-up had a negative effect on their lives. As one participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her life, explained:

Participant: *Yeah, I feel like I have to choose sides depending on who I’m with.* Researcher: And how does that make you feel? Participant: *It’s annoying because Paul (the ex-boyfriend) never really did anything wrong to me or to her (the ex-girlfriend).*

Not surprisingly, none of the participants’ statements revealed that when the participants felt they had to choose sides between the ex-partners, the break-up had a positive effect on their lives.

In the “No Obligation” theme for this category, 81.8% of the participants’ statements illustrated that when the participants did not feel like they had to choose sides, the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. One participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, explained:

Researcher: And did you ever feel like you had to choose sides when they broke up? Participant: *Umm, not really, I never felt like one of them was like ‘You can’t be friends with the other one!’ But I kind of feel like I was lumped on the girls side, but I could be like ‘Mike, I understand why you are upset.’*

Additionally, 18.2% of the participants’ statements revealed the break-up had a positive effect on their lives when they did not feel they had to choose sides. And, none of the participants’ statements showed that the break-up had a positive effect on their lives when they were not forced to choose sides.
The “Loyalty” theme in this category of “Choosing Sides,” revealed that 66.6% of the participants’ statements illustrated the break-up had a positive effect on their lives when they knew which ex-partner’s side they were on. As two participants, who described the break-up as having positive effects on their lives, explained when they were asked if they felt they needed to choose sides:

Participant One: *Umm, not really, because by that point I was definitely closer to Ashley, and she was a girl so I could see her point of view.*
Participant Two: *Umm...I knew which side I was on.*

Another 33.3% of the participants’ statements pertaining to this “Loyalty” theme revealed that when participants chose what side they were on, the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her life, explained:

Researcher: So when they broke up, did you feel like you had to choose sides?
Participant: *Well, I kind of did choose sides because I was better friends with Mike, but I didn’t really feel pressure to choose sides.*

Another participant, who also described the break-up as having a neutral effect on his life, illustrated:

Researcher: Did you ever feel you needed to choose sides?
Participant: *No. Well, the side I always chose was Ben’s side.*

Also, none of the statements showed that the break-up had a positive effect on the participants’ lives when the participants already knew whose side they were on.

In the second category, “Feelings About Break-Up,” of the seventh research question, in regards to how the break-up affected the participant, 83.3% of the participants’ statements revealed the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives when they were happy the ex-partners broke up. In regards to the “Pleased” theme, one participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his life, explained:
Researcher: And how did you feel when they broke up?
Participant: I was happy...we were all happy to see her go.

Two more participants, who said the break-up had neutral effects on their lives, said the break-up made them feel:

Participant One: Relieved, because they were so rocky for a long time.
Participant Two: A little bit relieved because they complained about each other a lot, so it was like, ‘This is finally over!’

Also, 16.7% of the statements in the “Pleased” theme revealed that the break-up had a positive effect on participants’ lives when the participants were happy the ex-partners broke up. Relief was also a prominent feeling in this theme as two more interviewees, who described the break-up as having a positive effect on their lives, explained:

Participant One: I was relieved because this kid (the ex-boyfriend) wasn’t right.
Participant Two: I was very relieved and happy for Matt. I thought the relationship had dragged on for too long. Yeah, I was very relieved and happy for him.

Naturally, none of the participants’ statements showed that the break-up had a negative effect on the participant when the participant was pleased the ex-partners broke up.

According to the “Unhappy” theme, 69.2% of the participants’ statements illustrated that the break-up had a neutral effect on the participants’ lives when the participants were displeased by the break-up. One participant, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her life, explained:

I was disappointed when they broke up, because they seemed like a very, very happy couple. So it was a little sad to see a couple you like seeing together break up.

Another participant, who said the break-up also had a neutral effect on her life, said:

I was really surprised and I was sad for both of them. I was confused too, I guess.

In addition, 30.8% of the statements produced from this category revealed that when the participants were unhappy about the break-up, it had a negative effect on their lives. One
participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on her life, explained why she was displeased about the break-up:

*I think I was more angry than anything, because of how he (the ex-boyfriend) did it and the timing of which he did it. He did it the night before a big game of ours, we were on the road, it wasn’t in person, and I definitely think he went about it the wrong way. It was just like, ‘Wow, you’re dumb, why did you do that? You’re just messing with someone who has a big thing the next day.’ Like, you don’t do that to someone.*

Understandably, none of the participants’ statements revealed that when they were unhappy about the break-up, it had a positive effect on their lives.

The final theme for the “Feelings About Break-Up” category for the seventh research question is the “Indifferent” theme. In this theme, 66.6% of the participants’ statements revealed that the break-up had a neutral effect on their lives when they did not care that the ex-partners broke up. Two participants, who explained the break-up as having neutral effects on their lives, described:

Participant One: *I really didn’t care, I felt neutral...when they broke up I saw it coming from a mile away, so I knew it was going to happen.*
Participant Two: *I didn’t really care if she wanted to be broken up with him.*

Also, 33.3% of the participants’ statements in reference to this “Indifferent” theme illustrated that the break-up had a negative effect on the participants’ lives when they said they were indifferent about the break-up. One participant, who said the break-up had a negative effect on his life, explained:

*When they first broke up, I was sort of indifferent because they didn’t get into a fight or anything. It was just kind of logical and they both seemed to be ok with that, about the long distance thing.*
Furthermore, none of the participants’ statements revealed that when their attitude towards the break-up belonged to the “Indifferent” theme, the break-up had a positive effect on their lives.

As previously stated, for the eighth research question (how the break-up affected the participant’s social network), one more category was produced. This category, “Social Network Support,” revealed that 87.5% of the participants’ statements on the subject of social network support illustrated that social network support was necessary following the break-up.

Interestingly, in the theme of “Support Necessary,” 100% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network provided support, the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network. One participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on his social network, explained that after the break-up:

Participant: There was definitely a support group between all of our friends, like I talked to his sister, Blair, and I talked to my parents, his parents talked to me.  
Researcher: And how did you feel having that support?  
Participant: How did that make me feel? Well, I mean, I guess it, like I know all these people would do the same thing for me if I were in that situation, so I guess I felt well supported.

Another interviewee, who described the break-up as having a neutral effect on her social network, said of social network support:

Yeah, it did help. One of our other really good friends, Jessica, and I had a two hour conversation and we talked about how we were going to handle it (the break-up) because we were all such good friends. I mean, it worked out because they were civil, but it was good to have Jessica there.

Also, another participant, who said the break-up had a neutral effect on her social network, illustrated:

Researcher: So talking to your other friends in your social network about the break-up, did that make it easier?
Participant: *Yeah, because we were all going through the same thing; they all saw the same reactions from both of them (the ex-partners), so it was kind of nice to know they were going through the same things I was going through.*

Additionally, in the theme of “Support Unnecessary” in the “Social Network Support” category, 100% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the members of the social network did not need support during the break-up, it had a positive effect on the social network:

*Well, there wasn’t much to deal with, because Ben (the ex-boyfriend) wasn’t depressed, and we (the social network) were all happy to see her go.*

**Discussion**

This study presented many interesting results which have been enforced by previous literature. Parks and Adelman (1983) discovered that approval of a person’s romantic partner within his/her network was positively associated with remaining friends after the break-up. This was discovered in the study as participants, who had always been friends with both ex-partners, produced statements in which 61.9% illustrated the social network was not affected by the break-up. It became apparent that many of the participants who said the break-up had neutral effect on their social network were glad it did not alter any friendships.

Foley and Fraser’s (1998) research implies that if an ex-couple’s social network wants to stay together and remain unchanged, the ex-couple’s friends will be very supportive. This was discovered in the theme of “Support Necessary,” in which 100% of the participants’ statements revealed that when the social network provided support, the break-up had a neutral effect on the social network.

In addition, Harvey and Fine (2006) concluded that individuals develop account-making (story telling which explains and describes emotional events in our lives) to present a socially acceptable story of the termination to people in the individual’s social network. This alludes to the sixth research question in the present study of how the break-up story was told. Interestingly,
the majority (59.6%) of the participants’ statements revealed that they got two separate break-up stories from the ex-partners.

In Foley and Fraser’s (1998) interviews, some participants claimed to have never lost contact with their ex-partners, while others said the transition to friendship was not easy. The participants in this study, who said redefining the relationship could be difficult, explained that many times they reported feeling awkward or uncomfortable.

Furthermore, Johnson and Milardo (1984) discovered that couples who had the highest break-up rate over the course of one year, had the highest levels of interference from friends and family. In addition, parental disapproval of the relationship was inversely related to the development of romance within that relationship. This was illustrated by one participant who explained the reason why her friends’ break-up belonged to the “Family/Friend Disapproval” theme. She said that when one of her friend’s mothers found out her daughter was in a lesbian relationship, her mother’s reaction negatively affected the relationship, and ultimately ended it.

In their study, Parks, Stan, and Eggert (1983) discovered that romantic involvement was positively associated with perceived support from the participant’s own social network, perceived support from their partner’s social network, attraction to the partner’s social network, the number of people the participant met in his/her partner’s social network, and communication with his/her partner’s social network. In the present study, a few participants made it apparent that romantic involvement was negatively associated with poor integration into the other partner’s social network.

Also, Agnew, Loving, and Drigotas (2001) conducted a study in which they found that social networks were good a predicting when their friends would break-up. This ability is related
to what is referred to as “couple disclosure” (p. 1046), and the more a couple discusses their relationship with their social network, the easier it is for the social network to predict the fate of that relationship. In this study, multiple participants said they could see their friends’ break-up coming from “a mile away.”

**Limitations**

While this study was successful in producing valuable results, there were some limitations to it. Due to the fact that this was an interpersonal study based on interviews by one participant about their anonymous friends’ relationship, there was no way to know if the participant was giving an accurate account of what happened in the relationship and how the break-up actually affected everyone in the social network. There is also the problem of retrospect; the participant may have tried to describe feelings he or she had during, and right after, the break-up, but this opinion could have been tainted by a number of factors, such as length of time since the break-up. Furthermore, another problem of hearing from only one member of the social network is the fact that each member may have a completely different opinion of how the break-up affected the social network. Also, there is no way of knowing how close the participant was to the ex-partners in relation to every other member of the social network. It is very likely that the ex-partners are closer to some members of the social network than others, and therefore, could have approached various members of the social network differently. For example, the ex-partners might have confided more in the friends they were closer to, and the closer friends may have been affected differently than the less close friends.

While the study was based on how the dissolution of pre-marital relationships affects social networks, the entire sample was made up of college students. The fact that college
students basically have no choice but to live in close proximity with each other means that the members of the social networks tend to have more frequent interactions than members of social networks that are functioning outside of a college environment. For this reason, a break-up would be more noticeable in a college social network and may have a greater impact than a break-up would have in another type of social network.

The sample of participants also consisted on a number of limitations. One limitation was the sample size in general. The availability of willing participants relevant for the study was limited, and while many reoccurring themes and trends did present themselves from the fifteen participants interviewed, results tend to be more accurate when more participants are used. Also, all the participants were Communication majors, and by participating in the study, they got credit for one of their Communication classes. This leads to questions of their true motivations and validity of their stories. In addition, fourteen of the fifteen interviewees described the break-up of heterosexual relationships, while only one described the break-up of a lesbian relationship. It is possible that more conclusions and themes would have emerged if there was more variety in this area. In addition, because there is scarce literature on this subject, there were few studies available for reference.

**Future Research**

If I could do further research, I would make the study much more expansive. Instead of interviewing only one member of the social network, I would interview several of them. Not only would this ensure the credibility of the study, but it could also lead to insight about how the degree of friendship between each member and the ex-partners is related to how the member is affected by the break-up.
As previously stated, by interviewing more participants, I could receive more accurate results, as well as more diversity. I believe it would be interesting to compare the effects of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual break-ups on their social networks. I think this would also generate valuable information on how social networks perceive each type of relationship differently.

While still focusing on the effects of pre-marital relationships on social networks, I think it would be fascinating to see how non-collegiate social networks were affected by break-ups. I could interview people from any type of social network, whether that be middle school, high-school, the work place, or any type of group of friends. And, the fact that there would be no age limit, as long as the participants had friends who were capable of being in a relationship, could make it all the more interesting.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, findings from this study revealed that ten (66.6%) of the participants described the break-up as having a neutral effect on their lives, while three (20%) said the break-up had a positive effect on their lives, and two (13.3%) said the break-up had a negative effect on their lives. Furthermore, eight (53.3%) of the participants explained that the break-up had a neutral effect on their social network, while five (33.3%) said the break-up had a negative effect on their social network, and two (13.3%) said the break-up had a positive effect on their social network.

While the majority of participants reported that, overall, the break-up had a neutral effect on their own lives, as well as on their social networks, each individual did report changes in their lives and social networks as a result of the break-up. This clearly illustrates that the dissolution
of pre-marital romantic relationships within the college environment has significant consequences for the members of the ex-partners’ social networks.
References


