Staying friends with an ex: Sex and dark personality traits predict motivations for post-relationship friendship

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ABSTRACT

Compared to motivations for cross-sex friendship, little research has examined motivations for friendship between ex-partners after romantic relationship dissolution (i.e., post-relationship friendship; PRF). In Study 1, participants ($N = 348$) act nominated reasons for why someone might remain friends with an ex-partner. In Study 2, participants ($N = 513$) rated the importance of staying friends with an ex-partner for each reason given in Study 1 and completed the PID-5-BF and HEXACO to measure domains of clinically relevant and non-pathological personality. Principle component analysis identified seven categories of reasons for staying friends. Reasons that indicated that an ex-partner is reliable, trustworthy, and of sentimental value (i.e., *reliability/sentimentality*) were given the highest importance ratings whereas reasons that indicated that continued friendship was practical (i.e., *pragmatism*) were given the lowest ratings. Men rated *pragmatism* and *sexual access* reasons as more important than women did. Furthermore, antagonism scores on the PID-5-BF, and the Honesty–Humility and extraversion scores on the HEXACO predicted importance ratings for *pragmatism* and *sexual access*. Our findings are consistent with previous research and suggest that PRF may provide opportunity for ex-partners to exchange desirable resources (e.g., love, status, information, money, sex) after romantic relationship dissolution.

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1. Staying friends with an ex: sex and dark personality traits predict motivations for post-relationship friendship

Friendship is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relationships in humans (reviewed in Hruschka, Hackman, & Macfarlan, 2015) that has likely solved a number of adaptive problems during social evolution through the formation of cooperative alliances (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009) and exchange of material or social resources (Barclay, 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Same- and cross-sex friendships (CSFs) confer similar benefits (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009; Lewis et al., 2011). However, CSFs also facilitate mating opportunities (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000). Indeed, although both men and women tend to keep their friendships and sexual relationships separate, sexual feelings and tensions still exist in many CSFs (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009) and nearly half of college students have engaged in sexual activity with otherwise platonic cross-sex friends (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000).

The benefits and costs of CSFs prior to and during a romantic relationship have been studied extensively (e.g. Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001; Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Reeder, 2000, 2003; Tan, Agnew, VanderDrift, & Harvey, 2014). Comparatively little research has examined motivations for friendship between ex-

partners (i.e., post-relationship friendship; PRF). PRFs can have positive and negative consequences on stress, coping, and general health depending on the types of coping strategies used by each partner (Chung et al., 2003; Perilloux & Buss, 2008), the extent to which each partner engages in friendship maintenance behavior post-break-up (Dailey, McCracken, Jin, Rossetto, & Green, 2013), perceptions of control over the break-up (Gray & Silver, 1990), separation acceptance (Mason, Sbarra, Bryan, & Lee, 2012), and the extent to which friendship continues to provide valuable resources (Busboom, Collins, Givertz, & Levin, 2002). Ex-partners are more likely to remain friends after a break-up if they were friends prior to romantic involvement (Metts, Cupach, & Bejlovec, 1989), if the disengager used de-escalation tactics (see Banks, Altendorf, Greene, & Cody, 1987), if the relationship was characterized by romantic commitment (Tan et al., 2014), if an ex-partner is still perceived as desirable (Banks et al., 1987), or if an individual reported satisfaction with the relationship (Bullock, Hackathorn, Clark, & Mattingly, 2011). Likewise, neglect and avoidance, lack of support by friends and family, and a partner's involvement in a new romantic relationship are barriers to PRF quality (Busboom et al., 2002). Together, this evidence suggests that PRFs serve similar functions to that of platonic CSFs insofar as PRFs are maintained, or dissolved, depending on the perceived value of the friendship and the extent to which ex-partners engage in mutual friendship maintenance.

PRFs also resemble other platonic CSFs in that they may involve continued romantic or sexual interest. Previous romantic involvement predicts sexual attraction in platonic CSFs (Kaplan & Keys, 1997), and ex-

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partners are rated low on friendship quality (but high on romantic desirability) compared to friends with no romantic/sexual history (Schneider & Kenny, 2000). Women are more likely to make in-person contact with an ex-partner who has desirable qualities (DeLecce & Weisfeld, 2015) and dissolved relationships are more likely to renew when partners report lingering feelings or have not dated others since the breakup (Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, 2011). Interestingly, individuals who receive more resources from an ex-partner (e.g., love, status, services, information, goods, money) report higher PRF quality, particularly if they are satisfied with these resources (Busboom et al., 2002). This suggests that PRF formation may permit relationship renewal or future exchange of valuable resources.

To further understand motivations for PRF, the current study used an act nomination procedure to identify reasons for staying friends after a break-up (Study 1). We then used an act frequency procedure to categorize items generated from the act nomination (Study 2). We also examined the extent to which clinically relevant (e.g., dark) and non-pathological personality features and sex predict rated importance of these reasons. Dark personality features are a collection of antagonistic behaviors and interpersonal styles that are associated with disagreeableness (e.g., Egan & McCorkindale, 2007), manipulativeness and callousness (Jones & Figueredo, 2013), and exploitativeness (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). Individuals who score higher on measures of dark personality tend to choose friends for strategic purposes (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012), rate friendship as lower in importance (Lyons & Aitken, 2010), and prefer short-term versus long-term romantic relationships (Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011; Koladich & Atkinson, 2016). Thus, it is likely that these traits will be associated with valuing friendships for utilitarian or instrumental reasons, such as to maintain sexual access.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants ($N = 348$; 243 female; age: $M = 21.43$, $SD = 11.88$; range = 18–51) were recruited from an Eastern United States university and from various social media websites (e.g., Reddit, Twitter). Most participants were exclusively heterosexual (96%, 3.4% bisexual, 0.6% exclusively homosexual) and White (77.6%, 9.2% Black, 4.6% Asian, 2.9% Hispanic/Latino, and 5.7% other), and roughly half were currently in a romantic relationship (55.7%).

Following previous act nomination procedures (e.g., Buss & Craik, 1983), participants responded to the following prompt:

> In this study, we are interested in the reasons people continue to be friends with a romantic partner after they break-up. Please think of a time when you or someone else decided to stay friends with a romantic partner after a break-up. Below, please write down at least five reasons someone might stay friends with an ex. We are interested in specific reasons. One should be able to answer the following questions about each of your reasons: Have you ever stayed friends with someone after a break-up for this reason? How often has this been the reason for staying friends with an ex?

Materials were presented using the online survey software program Qualtrics.

2.2. Results

Participants provided 2302 act nominations. Redundant responses (e.g., still in love; I still loved him) were collapsed into 186 unique act nominations. Vague responses (e.g., power; benefits) were also eliminated. A final list of 153 acts was compiled for use in Study 2.

3. Study 2

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Participants ($N = 513$; 358 female; age: $M = 21.03$, $SD = 4.62$; range = 18–48) were recruited as per Study 1. University students who participated in Study 1 did not participate in Study 2. The majority of participants were White (78.6%, 6.8% Black, 6.2% Asian, 4.1% Hispanic/Latino, 4.1% other), exclusively heterosexual (96.3%, 3.1% bisexual, 0.6% exclusively homosexual), and currently in a romantic relationship (62.4%). All reported having experienced at least one break-up.

3.1.2. Materials and procedure

Participants provided demographic information and were given the following prompt:

> In this study, we are interested in how romantic partners interact after a break-up (i.e., after their romantic relationship has ended). Sometimes, two ex-partners will continue to remain friends after their romantic relationship has ended. For example, they might still openly communicate with one another from time to time, seek each other out for advice, want to spend time with one another, etc.

Next, participants rated the importance of each of the 153 act nominations (anchors: 1 = unimportant, 5 = extremely important). Finally, participants completed the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Brief Form (PID-5-BF; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and the HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009). The PID-5-BF measures several pathological personality features (Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2012) and interpersonal styles (e.g., manipulativeness, hostility) that are associated with other measures of dark personality (Southard, Noser, Pollock, Mercer, & Zeigler-Hill, 2015), such as the Dark Tetrad (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013) and spitefulness (Marcus, Zeigler-Hill, Mercer, & Norris, 2014). It measures five dimensions of pathological personality: negative affect (i.e., the tendency to experience negative emotions), detachment (i.e., introversion, social isolation, and anhedonia), antagonism, (i.e., aggression accompanied by assertions of dominance and grandiosity), disinhibition (i.e., impulsivity and sensation seeking), and psychoticism (i.e., disconnection from reality and illogical thought patterns). Similarly, the HEXACO measures dimensions of personality that resembles the Big-5 and includes a sixth honesty–humility factor which shares common variance with measures of the Dark Triad (Lee et al., 2013), disordered personality traits (Crego, Gore, Rojas, & Widiger, in press), and unethical decision-making (De Vries & van Gelder, 2015).

3.2. Results

Principle component analyses (PCAs, followed by promax rotation) were performed on participants' evaluations of the act nominations. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977) indicated that our sample size was adequate for performing PCA (KMO = .957). An exploratory PCA extracted eleven components with an eigenvalue >1.0 (Kaiser–Guttman criterion, see Jackson, 1993). Because only seven of these components predicted unique variance, we re-ran the PCA and fixed the number of extracted factors to seven (see Table 1 for component loadings). Following O'Connor (2000), an eigenvalue Monte Carlo simulation (i.e., parallel analysis) was performed, which confirmed that extraction of seven factors was optimal.

Items with component loadings of at least 0.40 were included. Cross-loaded items were assigned to the component with the highest loading value, or excluded if the difference was <0.20. The seven components included (in order of variance explained): *reliability/sentimentality* ($\alpha = .97, R^2 = 28.80$; e.g., "They made me a better person"), *pragmatism* ($\alpha = .91, R^2 = 7.01$; e.g., "They had a lot of money"), *continued romantic*