

Impulsivity and the Dissolution of Romantic Relationships

Stephanie M. Smith, Jerika C. Norona, M.A.,
Jennifer L. Bishop, M.A., Deborah P. Welsh, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology,
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Email: ssmit240@vols.utk.edu

Introduction

Emerging adults (18-25 years old) have the ability to develop a personal identity and explore various possibilities in life independently, or for the first time without interference from parents or guardians. Emerging adults tend to base their decision making during this time period on the fulfillment of *independence* and/or *interdependence* needs.

There has been very little research conducted regarding the impact of impulsivity on romantic relationship dissolution. Therefore this is an exploratory study and no hypotheses were made.

This study tested whether there are differences in reasons for breaking up with romantic partners based on impulsivity scores.

Methods

Participants

- 113 emerging adults who all experienced a breakup within the last 6 months

Survey Measures

- Romantic Experiences Questionnaire
Asked participants to provide a narrative of the story of their breakup
- UPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale^{1**}

¹Whiteside & Lynam, 2001
^{**}Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

•Participants' open-ended responses to the Romantic Experiences Questionnaire were dummy coded (1 = *present*, 0 = *absent*) for references of independence and/or interdependence needs in the rationale for dissolving their romantic relationship.²

Results

Independence

Independent samples t-test revealed a lack of significant differences between the impulsivity levels of those who expressed a need for independence and those who did not. In examining the subcategories of impulsivity, none of the variations in impulsivity seemed to play a role in participants' decision to dissolve their relationship under the guise of independence needs.

Interdependence

Independent samples t-test revealed significant differences between the impulsivity levels of those who expressed a need for interdependence and those who did not. Participants who expressed a need for interdependence as an explanation for the dissolution of their romantic relationship scored higher on the negative urgency and positive urgency subsets of the UPPS than those who did not, which was trending significance.

²Norona, Olmstead, & Welsh, under review

		T-test for Equality of Means				
	Presence of Independence	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Degrees of Freedom	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Urgency	No	2.4833	.58224	1.061	99	.291
	Yes	2.3513	.66465			
Lack of Premeditation	No	2.1236	.44641	1.198	99	.234
	Yes	2.0036	.55416			
Lack of Perseverance	No	2.1120	.55352	.737	99	.463
	Yes	2.0255	.62317			
Sensation Seeking	No	2.7083	.56626	-.072	99	.943
	Yes	2.7173	.67968			
Positive Urgency	No	2.3000	.65751	.826	99	.411
	Yes	2.1905	.67486			

		T-test for Equality of Means				
	Presence of Interdependence	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Degrees of Freedom	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Urgency	No	2.0947	.66333	-2.823	99	.006*
	Yes	2.5063	.58816			
Lack of Premeditation	No	2.0289	.73555	-.356	99	.722
	Yes	2.0725	.42500			
Lack of Perseverance	No	1.8909	.63539	-1.612	99	.110
	Yes	2.1177	.56902			
Sensation Seeking	No	2.7727	.74277	.508	99	.613
	Yes	2.6962	.58971			
Positive Urgency	No	2.0130	.80530	-1.870	99	.064*
	Yes	2.3092	.61111			

Discussion

Results of this study suggest a connection between emotional reactivity and the dissolution of romantic relationships for *interdependence* reasons. This is due to the social connection desired in establishing interdependence and the propensity to react when those needs are not met.