

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2009

Department:Psychology

Degree:MA

Title:Sex on the rebound: Motivations for sex and sexual experiences following a relationship breakup.

Despite widespread belief in the rebound phenomenon, few studies have examined sexual experiences after relationship loss, including what is popularly called being "on the rebound." The present study uses a longitudinal, online diary methodology to examine emotional and sexual responses to the loss of a romantic relationship among 170 undergraduate students who had experienced a recent breakup. Consistent with popular belief and previous research, individuals were more distressed and had lower self-esteem after a breakup, especially if they were "dumped" or had a higher quality or longer-lasting relationship, but these effects dissipated within 5-6 months post-breakup. Counter to belief, however, individuals were not more likely to have sex right after the breakup vs. later. However, when they did have sex it was often for unhealthy reasons, including to get over or get back at the ex-partner. Overall, although rebound sex was uncommon after a breakup, it still exists and is no less potentially harmful to those who engage in it. Not only does this study provide ground-breaking research on the motivational and behavioral consequences of a breakup, but it also highlights an important misconception about popular rebound lore. Specifically, although people appear to be vulnerable to poor sexual decision making in the aftermath of a breakup, as rebound lore suggests, actual occurrences of rebound sex appear relatively rare either because of lack of opportunity or experience, or because of restraint exercised at the individual level.