

SEX ON THE REBOUND: MOTIVATIONS FOR SEX
AND SEXUAL EXPERIENCES FOLLOWING A RELATIONSHIP BREAKUP

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ABSTRACT

Despite widespread belief in the rebound phenomenon, few studies have examined sexual experiences after relationship loss. 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, but when they did it was often for unhealthy reasons, including to get over or get back at the ex-partner. In sum, although rebound sex was uncommon after a breakup, it still exists and is no less potentially harmful to those who engage in it.