The Predictors and Consequences of Relationship Dissolution:

Breaking Down Silos

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Nearly 2,000,000 adults are newly impacted by divorce each year (Tejada-Vera & Sutton, 2009) and many more non-marital relationships meet a similar fate, yet relationship science lacks a coherent framework for understanding how the predictors of a separation are associated with adults’ responses to the end of their relationship. Over the last 25 years, we have assiduously erected two silos to house the science of romantic loss. The first silo contains research on the predictors of non-marital breakups and marital separations. What patterns of marital interaction are most predictive of divorce? Which dating couples are most likely to breakup? Why? The second silo examines the psychological and physical health correlates and consequences of relationship separations. When relationships end, who fares well or poorly over time? What intrapersonal and interpersonal factors predict successful coping? Of course, these silos reside in the same general neighborhood of relationship science, but there exists relatively little communication between scientists who conduct the research in each silo. Thus, in the science of romantic breakups, we lack a meaningful integration of the “predictor” and the “consequence” research.

The main goal of this chapter is to review what is known about the predictors and consequences of relationship breakups with an eye toward fostering greater communication and breaking down the silos that contain each body of research. From the outset, we recognize that this dismantling project is incomplete; in order to cover some of the most fundamental work on these topics, it is important to focus deeply within the given silos. To the extent that we can, this chapter highlights ways to think about integrating the disparate lines of research on romantic breakups. We begin by briefly describing a theoretical framework that can be used to integrate research on both the predictor and consequence side of a romantic breakup. We then review key
findings on the predictors and consequences of romantic breakups\textsuperscript{1}. In the third section, we describe research using prospective panel designs that span the transition across the end of a relationship to examine consequences of divorce after accounting for the predictors of the separation itself. Finally, we conclude by outlining future directions for a more integrated study of these topics.

**Guiding Theory: The Social Baseline and Coregulation/Dysregulation Models**

Social baseline theory (SBT; Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2008) provides a new framework for understanding why and how some relationships succeed or fail, as well as the expectable consequences of severing a romantic relationship. At its core, SBT theory suggests social proximity and close relationships constitute the *baseline state* for the human brain. Beckes and Coan (2011) write, “In our view, the human brain is designed to *assume* that it is embedded within a relatively predictable social network characterized by familiarity, joint attention, shared goals, and interdependence” (p. 977). Neuroimaging data demonstrates, for example, that brain regions associated with the regulation of emotion are *less active* during social support conditions relative to control conditions (e.g., Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006). That is, high quality social relationships permit the brain to address the challenges of the environment in a metabolically efficient way by sharing risk and expended physical effort across the social network (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011).

According to the theory, the brain operates as a 'Bayesian bet-making machine' to draw inferences about the risk and load demands in the immediate environment based on one’s

\textsuperscript{1} Overall, we make little distinction between romantic breakups and divorce except where the literature indicates this distinction is important. In some instances, there is more work on one topic than another; for example, studies of romantic commitment tend to be located in the non-marital relationships literature, whereas work on infidelity rests almost entirely in the literature on marriage.
relationship history (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2008). When people have a history of positive social relationships, the brain ‘bets’ that levels of social support will be available in times of need, and thus fewer personal resources are needed to deal with environmental challenges. In contrast, people without a history of positive relationships have relied more on personal resources to face life’s challenges, and thus their brains ‘bet’ that social resources are unlikely to be available when needed. This latter strategy is metabolically costly as it forces people to move away from the default, social baseline condition, and expend additional resources to cope with environmental demands. This perspective provides a neuroscientific account of some of the core principles in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008), including how individual differences in working models of attachment set the stage for detecting threat in the environment and perceptions of threats to felt security within a relationship (see Bretherton, 2005).

In addition to providing a concrete operationalization of how the brain may detect and process environmental threats, the social baseline account is consistent with normative models of adult pair-bonding. Sbarra and Hazan (2008) offered a coregulation/dysregulation framework for understanding the potential consequences of relationship loss in terms of the regulatory functions of an attachment relationship. Central to this model is the idea that coregulation is instantiated by a degree of physiological synchrony that helps maintain emotional wellbeing within intact relationships around a homeostatic set-point. When relationships dissolve, people are faced with many regulatory challenges, and, consistent with SBT, wellbeing hinges on one’s ability to minimize the amount of resources expended to cope with the demands of the loss (Sbarra and Hazan, 2008).
Taken together, SBT and the coregulation/dysregulation framework offer some important ways to think about integrating the predictors and consequences of loss. First, it is reasonable to speculate that when relationships become metabolically costly, we should see an increased likelihood of relationship dissolution. An examination of circulating stress hormones in newlyweds found exactly this: couples who evidenced increased epinephrine, the primary stress hormone of the sympathetic nervous system, during a conflict task were more likely to divorce over a span of 10 years (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1993). Although this is one of the only studies to demonstrate that direct indicators of the biological stress response increase risk for relationship dissolution, when viewed from the perspective of SBT these findings suggest that we can view the predictors of romantic breakups as either (1) indicators or proxies of high effort expenditure within the relationship, or (2) variables that increase the likelihood of high effort expenditure (e.g., attachment anxiety).

If effort expenditure within a relationship (or, indicators of effort expenditure) increase risk for relationship dissolution, it follows that ending a stressful, conflicted, and unsatisfactory relationship should under most circumstances lead to increases in wellbeing. Recent evidence on the association between relationship quality, divorce and emotional distress supports this conclusion. When couples in high-conflict marriages divorce, their life happiness increases, whereas adults in low-conflict marriages report decreases in life happiness following a divorce (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Similarly, in the bereavement literature, positive psychological adjustment to widowhood is associated with lower levels of dependence on a spouse prior to his/her death, whereas greater distress is observed among widows who reported a high degree of marital closeness prior to the loss (Carr et al., 2000). Presumably, this latter finding suggests that the loss of a high quality relationship engenders more regulatory demands
and, from a SBT perspective, is more metabolically costly. Using SBT, we can further hypothesize that the greatest risks for poor post-relationship functioning should be observed in instances that increase environmental demands (and thus the corresponding self-regulatory resource expenditures needed to deal with those challenges—see Sbarra & Hazan, 2008) or among people who have a tendency to engage in metabolically costly emotion regulatory and coping strategies (e.g., people high in attachment anxiety, see Lee, Sbarra, Mason & Law, 2011).

Overall, by combining SBT (Beckes & Coan, 2011) with elements of attachment theory (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008) we can begin thinking about the predictors and consequences of relationship breakups in new and more integrated ways. These frameworks underscore the importance of resource expenditure and self-regulatory effort (including emotion regulation) for determining both how well relationships are functioning and how burdensome it may be to end some relationships. Most research on the predictors and consequences of a romantic breakup is not organized in terms of resource savings and expenditures, but this does not preclude recasting what is known about these topics in terms of SBT principles. We should thrive when we end taxing relationships, and run the risk of suffering when we end relationships that provide some net benefit in terms of resource management.

We note that receiving benefit from a relationship does not mean that the relationship is harmonious; rather, we view resource benefit in terms of appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this respect, the central question is whether the demands of staying in a relationship exceed the real or perceived demands of coping with the end of a relationship. This framework provides a parsimonious way of bridging the transition from an intact to a dissolved relationship. Indeed, this “new” perspective on energy savings/expenditures is reminiscent of a much older position, which was first outlined by the psychobiologist Myron Hofer (1984):
In response to loss, several different processes may be at work having different biological mechanisms. . . . They suggest that we look carefully at the relationship before the loss took place and try to understand more precisely who and what has been lost, rather than beginning our investigation with the disruption of the emotional bond or tie between the two individuals, as if bereavement were simply a stress that was suddenly imposed (p. 194).

The Predictors of Divorce: What Do We Know?

Nearly everyone who becomes partnered envisions a happy and positive outcome for their relationship but, in many cases, this fate is not realized. Among a group of people filing for a first marriage license, 0% estimated that they personally would divorce (Baker & Emery, 1993). This finding illustrates a foundational point: The transition from an optimistic beginning to teetering on the brink of divorce is a developmental process that unfolds over time (Bradbury, 1998). Gottman (1994) referred to this process as the cascade model of marital dissolution. In this section of the chapter we detail the psychological processes within individuals, interactions between partners, and contextual demands and stressors to understand the cascade toward divorce.

Intrapersonal Predictors

Personality and individual differences. The traits or personality characteristics each person brings to their relationship play a pivotal role in its success. People who report low trait levels of positive emotion, high negative emotion and engage in low constraint behaviors are more likely to experience the demise and dissolution of their marriage (Kelly & Conley, 1987), and people with greater negative emotionality and neuroticism can engage in interaction patterns that make their dating relationships vulnerable to distress (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Even a thin-slice indicator of positive emotion— a smile captured during a yearbook photo— can be predictive of likelihood of marriage (see Ambady, Bernieri & Richardson, 2000), as well as
marital satisfaction and divorce (Harker & Keltner, 2001; Hertenstein, Hansel, Butts & Hile, 2009).

Longitudinal meta-analyses find that married people who are neurotic and lack both agreeableness and conscientiousness, evidence a higher rate of divorce across the lifespan (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi & Goldberg, 2007). Consistent with this finding, Caspi (1987) reported that temperamentally difficult children—those who displayed bursts of anger and temper tantrums—were twice as likely to divorce later in life relative to more agreeable children. At the extreme, personality disorders also play a role in marital success with people diagnosed as paranoid, schizoid, antisocial, histrionic, avoidant, dependent, or obsessive-compulsive at greater risk for divorce in epidemiological studies (Whisman, Tolejko & Chatav, 2007).

Romantic partners are more similar in their affectivity and emotional expression than randomly paired couples, and couples with similar personality traits both report, and are judged by others, to experience greater marital satisfaction (Luo & Klohn, 2005). People who experience greater negative emotionality tend to enter into and persist in maladaptive relationships (Robins, Caspi & Moffitt, 2002). Furthermore, personality is enduring and has a transactional effect on a romantic relationship with more satisfying relationships associated with greater positive emotionality and constraint, and poorer relationships associated with increases in negative emotionality (Robins et al., 2002).

**Attachment.** Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first to contend that child-caregiver attachments as conceived of by Bowlby (1969/1982) extend to adult romantic relationships. Attachment style is now widely studied and often cited as a factor in relationship dissolution (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994) and divorce (Kobak, Ruckdeschel & Hazan, 1994). Attachment style evidences moderate stability across the lifespan and has implications for relationship
satisfaction and success (Scharfe & Cole, 2006; see our closing remarks for the chapter). Securely attached people are more likely to remain in their romantic relationship across four years (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Attachment insecurity predicts the likelihood that people remain in unhappy marriages: newlywed couples who reported greater anxiety related to partner abandonment also reported less marital satisfaction initially and across the first four years of their marriage than both their happily married and divorced counterparts (Davila & Bradbury, 2001). Insecurely attached people exhibit a preoccupation with their romantic partner that results in dependence on the relationship for self-validation and a fear of abandonment. Unhappy individuals may persist in a marriage merely to avoid the distress associated with being alone. Furthermore, attachment anxiety appears to moderate the association of partner fulfillment and breakup occurrence (Slotter & Finkel, 2009). People with a high degree of attachment anxiety may feel unworthy of having their needs met and persist in an unfulfilling relationship, whereas an individual low in attachment anxiety would recognize these needs are unmet and be more likely to terminate the relationship.

Parental divorce. The intergenerational transmission of divorce theory hypothesizes that marital distress and risk for divorce may be transmitted across generations through both genetic and environmental mechanisms (Amato & Booth, 1996; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Wolfinger, 2000). Compared to dizygotic twins, monozygotic twins evidence greater concordance of divorce rates, which points to genetics as a factor in the transmission of marital separation (McGue & Lyken, 1992). A follow-up study demonstrated that between 30% (in women) and 42% (in men) of heritable divorce risk was attributable to personality differences (Jocklin, McGue, & Lykken, 1996). In contrast, other work has shown the genetic association with
controllable life events, such as divorce, is entirely explained by differences in personality (Saudino, Pedersen, Lichtenstein, McClearn, & Plomin, 1997).

Beyond static biological differences, a host of environmental factors may make children who experience the divorce of their parents vulnerable to a relationship breakup in adulthood. Amato and DeBoer (2001) found that parental divorce increased the risk of divorce by more than 50% in children. This increased risk is explained by a lack of commitment to marriage, as opposed to factors such as marital discord or poor communication skills. Other samples find that memories of parental discord, but not parental divorce per se, mediated the association of parental reports of marital distress and reports of distress given by children for their own marriages (Amato & Booth, 2001). Perhaps it is not parental divorce that is most harmful, but acquiring a working model of marriage that does not emphasize commitment through observational learning (see Bandura, 1973).

More recently, D’Nofrio and colleagues (D'Onofrio et al., 2007) used a Children of Twins design (CoT; discussed more completely later in the chapter) to disentangle the genetic and environmental contributions to the intergenerational transmission of divorce. In a study of over 2,300 adult offspring of twins, the authors found that 66% of the variability in risk for divorce among the offspring was accounted for directly by environmental experiences. This finding is consistent with a social causation explanation— i.e., divorce among adults operates through environmental processes to increase risk for subsequent divorce among adult offspring, whereas the remaining 34% of risk was due to genetic selection effects (D’Nofrio et al., 2007). What is not yet known is precisely how parental divorce increases risk for divorce in the next generation, but this finding suggests reducing the stress and strain of marital dissolution among parents may also act to decrease the risk for subsequent divorce by children.
**Premarital cohabitation.** The discovery that people who choose to cohabitate prior to marriage are more likely to divorce was surprising and garnered considerable media attention in the 1990's (DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Teachman & Polonko, 1990). It is now clear that people who choose to live together without a marital union may possess certain traits that also make them more likely to divorce (e.g., self-selection; Lillard, Brien & Waite, 1995). People who cohabitate are also more accepting of divorce and may view marriage with less commitment (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). When analyses correct for these self-selection traits, the chances of marital dissolution are no more likely for couples who lived together prior to marriage.

Cohabitation may result in social pressure to marry due to the 'inertia' associated with living together (Stanley, Rhoades & Markman, 2006). Couples are more likely to become married within a year of living together, or may dissolve their relationships completely (Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin, 1991). The reasons people provide for choosing to live together may also be telling of the cohabitation-divorce association. For instance, Rhoades and colleagues (Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2009) identified 'testing' of the relationship as a primary factor for both partners in heterosexual relationships, though this was more predominant in men. Testing of the relationship was strongly associated with lower confidence in and less dedication to the relationship, more negative communication and physical aggression, and greater endorsement of depression and anxiety symptoms (Rhoades et al., 2009). Overall, the association between premarital cohabitation and marital dissolution is explained by multiple forces, many of which appear to select people at risk for divorce into cohabitation.
Interpersonal Predictors

Communication patterns and marital interactions. Gottman (1994) described the process by which couples move from a happy union towards dissolution as a cascading event that unfolds over time. Two patterns of interaction between spouses differentially predict the timing of divorce. The emotionally inexpressive pattern, characterized by conflict avoidance behaviors, is associated with divorce later in marriage and the emotionally volatile attack-defend pattern, characterized by frequent arguments and make-ups, is indicative of divorce earlier in marriage (Gottman & Levenson, 2002). During conflict conversations in the laboratory, levels of husband interest, husband contempt/disgust, wife interest, and wife sadness predicted divorce four years later. More surprising, greater wife anger, husband contempt/disgust, and more wife affection during the positive interaction correctly classified later divorce with higher accuracy (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Couples who demonstrate an emotionally inexpressive pattern have a more difficult time rebounding from the effects of conflict, which results in a spillover effect from the conflict to positive conversations. Wife affection was also greater in these couples, which is counterintuitive. This affection may occur in response to husband contempt, representing a derogation of the wife's emotional response, which, over time, may illustrate an emotionally abusive marriage (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

Gottman and colleagues have identified what he calls the Four Headed Horsemen, which, when studied together, can predict a future divorce with a high degree of accuracy (Gottman, 1999). The interaction patterns that define the Four Headed Horsemen make it difficult to successfully initiate repair attempts during arguments. Repair attempts are those actions that are meant to diffuse the situation and deescalate conflict before couples become emotionally over-involved. These attempts may or may not be verbal, and are characterized by the successful
interruption of negativity during an argument. Gottman (1994) described the Four Headed Horsemen as follows:

**Horseman 1: Criticism** typically occurs in the context of discussing a relationship problem. Criticism takes a complaint about a partner's actions and exaggerates it into a personality or character flaw. Criticism is usually accompanied by a harsh startup, or an introduction to discussing the relationship problem that makes the issue more global than the specific situation at hand.

**Horseman 2: Contempt**, the expression of disapproval and disgust for a partner, occurs verbally via sarcasm and patronizing, or through body language (e.g., rolling eyes and a sneering expression), and this Horseman is the most predictive of eventual divorce. This interaction style arises out of general negative regard for a spouse. Contempt can also disguise itself in belligerence, which escalates negative regard by direct threatening or challenging of the spouse.

**Horseman 3: Defensiveness** rears its ugly head when spouses attempt to protect themselves from a real or perceived attack by their spouse. While defending oneself is intended to interrupt the assault, it actually escalates conflict by refusing blame and directing negative emotion back towards the attacking spouse.

**Horseman 4: Stonewalling** is unresponsiveness to conflict and often follows the three prior horsemen. A stonewaller is a spouse who responds to marital distress by behaviorally disengaging and portraying an air of uncaring. Surprisingly, according to Gottman (1999), stonewalling actually occurs because the stonewaller is so overwhelmed (flooded) by emotional arousal and shock that shutting down feels as though the only safe way to escape/negate the attack. This horseman appears more frequently in men, and this is believed to occur because the male cardiovascular system may be more reactive to stress than the female system (Levenson,
Carstensen, and Gottman, 1994). The physical feelings associated with stress, may make it virtually impossible for people to engage in productive conversation. Stonewalling is a factor in the well known demand/withdraw interaction pattern (Christensen & Shenk, 1991) in which wives make increasing demands for husbands’ attention or involvement and husbands demonstrate increasing withdrawal, which serves to increase wife demand behavior (the gender roles can be reversed in demand/withdraw, but men are the ones who typically withdraw from marital interactions).

The final sign of a deteriorating relationship, and eventual divorce, is the presence of negative attributions about a partner’s behaviors. These negative views develop when spouses interpret bad behavior by their partner as a stable and unchangeable trait (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Unhappy couples are more likely to rate their relationships/partners as having more negative attributes, to hold unreasonable standards for how their relationships/partners should be, and to expect more negative outcomes for themselves and their relationship than their happy counterparts (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989).

Clouded by their relationship’s current issues, the view of one's spouse becomes distorted and the optimistic outlook the couple once shared becomes enshrouded in negative expectations (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

**Commitment.** A deep level of commitment to a romantic partner and relationship is the foundation of a successful union— when fluctuations in commitment occur satisfaction suffers and confidence in the union wanes. From an interdependence framework, greater within person variability in feelings of satisfaction and dependence are key predictors of the survival of a new romantic relationship (Arriaga, 2001). Satisfaction is measured by balancing expectations and outcomes such that satisfaction will be high in a relationship if interactions between partners
yield positive outcomes that exceed either partner's expectations (see Kelley, 1979). Dependence differs from satisfaction in that it is the degree to which a partner believes the most positive outcomes will come from interactions within the relationship, as opposed to alternative partners (see Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). The success of a romantic relationship rests on interaction patterns where people experience the most demonstrable positive outcomes that they believe cannot be replicated with alternative partners.

Using an interdependence framework, Arriaga (2001) examined newly formed romantic relationships over 10-weeks and found greater within person variability in satisfaction leading to relationship dissolution, which was also associated with waning levels of commitment to the relationship. These fluctuations were most harmful for those people who experienced high initial and increasing levels of satisfaction, which suggests it is the stability of satisfaction and the dependence upon the relationship for positive outcomes that reinforces a pro-relationship interaction style and relationship longevity (Arriaga, 2001). Perceptions of partner's commitment to the relationship are just as important, if not more important, to a romantic relationship as one's own feelings (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend & Agnew, 2006). The actions of a romantic partner, especially when considered as a broad-based inference of how invested the partner is in the relationship, can tint the relationship in a less positive light (Kelly, 1979; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster & Agnew, 1999). Arriaga and colleagues (2006) investigated the role of partner perceptions of commitment and found fluctuations in perceived partner commitment predict whether a relationship will end above and beyond initial levels of commitment, initial perceptions of partner commitment, and fluctuations in reported levels of commitment, satisfaction and in partner's positive behavior.
Inequality in emotional experience. As discussed, matching or similarity in positive regard and emotional investment for a partner set the stage for mutuality within the relationship. A recent study examined implicit partner affect (i.e., automatic and spontaneous feelings, thoughts and emotions about one's romantic partner) in non-marital romantic relationships by measuring reaction time to preferential choice of letters that included their partner's initials, as well as their self-reported ratings of relationship satisfaction and commitment (LeBel & Campbell, 2009). Implicit positive affect was associated with their ratings of relationship satisfaction, but not with levels of commitment. In a follow up, implicit partner affect was found to have an indirect effect on relationship status through measures of relationship satisfaction (LeBel & Campbell, 2009). In the short-term, spontaneous positive feelings for a partner have a direct association with how rewarding a relationship feels but in the long-term, and perhaps more importantly, are telling about the likelihood of relationship success.

Imbalances of emotional experience also occur in how emotionally involved partners are in their relationship. Sprecher and colleagues (Sprecher, Schmeckle & Felmlee, 2006) report perceptions of inequality in emotional involvement are present in 76% of the couples studied, which is positively correlated with perceptions of which partner controls the relationship (Sprecher et al., 2006). Greater equality was associated with more relationship satisfaction by both partners. When men experience greater positive and less negative emotion, they report more balanced perceptions of emotional investment within their relationship, while women show more negative emotion if they reported being the more involved partner. Perceptions of greater involvement also predicted significant decreases in relationship satisfaction at follow-up for women, and this inequality further predicted dissolved and intact couples at two other follow-up occasions (Sprecher et al., 2006).
Contextual Factors and Processes

Relationships do not exist in a vacuum, and both day-to-day and chronic stressors can impact relationship quality (Amato, 2010; Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Karney & Bradbury, 2005). In this section, we examine how factors outside the marital or romantic relationship impact relationship satisfaction, quality and longevity.

**Economic and Work Strain.** Income, spousal employment, job loss and work stress all play central roles within a marriage, and when these domains of functioning are endangered, a substantial burden is placed on the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Lavee, McCubbin, & Olson, 1987). Financial strain is believed to affect marital relations through the family stress model (Conger & Conger, 2002), whereby financial issues alter individual wellbeing that, in turn, alters martial satisfaction. Men may be more susceptible to the pressures of financial strain, but the evidence on this topic is mixed. Some findings demonstrate that men instigate more marital disputes relative to finances and are traditionally perceived as the economic provider in the marriage (Crowley, 1998), but more recent evidence shows that financial strain contributes equally to both spouses' reported emotional distress and mediates couples’ disagreements and individual judgments of marital instability (Gudmunson, Beutler, Israelsen, McCoy & Hill, 2007). Further, financial strain also decreases the resources that might help the couple better cope with other contextual stressors such as childcare or unemployment (Story & Bradbury, 2004).

Strain can also occur due to increased hours spent outside of the home or stressful experiences at work. The *negative mood spillover model* (Neff & Karney, 2004) theorizes that stress experienced outside of the home at work carries over into the interactions an individual has with their spouse upon returning to the home (Story & Repetti, 2006). Daily work-related
stressors may precipitate poorer communication, increase hostility and overtime deteriorate marital quality. Alternatively, the *social withdrawal model* theorizes that occupational stress may cause people to withdraw from spousal interaction in the home (Story & Repetti, 2006). Turning to watching television or surfing the internet may be an effective emotional coping strategy (for dealing with work demands), but this approach also decreases spousal communication. A formal test of these models found that wives may be more sensitive to these effects. On days where people reported greater workload, they also reported greater marital anger and withdrawal from their spouse, but only wives were able to perceive these behaviors (Story & Repetti, 2006). Negative mood mediated the associations of work strain and both marital anger and social withdrawal, but only for wives.

**Transition to Parenthood.** One of the most well-studied contextual factors impacting marital satisfaction is the transition to parenthood, especially for couples having their first child (Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Cowan and Cowan (1995) reported that following the birth of a first child about 15% of men and women move above the threshold for clinically significant marital distress on standard self-report assessment instruments. A meta-analysis of the studies on parenthood and marital satisfaction found that parents report lower marital satisfaction compared to nonparents and that marital satisfaction was negatively correlated with the number of children (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). However, the effect sizes obtained from the meta-analysis were small in magnitude and were moderated by individual differences: the effect of parenthood on marital satisfaction was stronger for younger couples and people from higher socioeconomic groups (also see Mitnick, Heyman & Smith Slep, 2009).

**Stress.** The term ‘stress’ reflects an aversive state that is accompanied by diffuse negative affect, and it is well known that stress can encompass financial, familial, and daily (i.e.,
transient) issues impacting both spouses. As with work strain, spillover processes of external stressors can interfere with the marital relationship. Neff and Karney (2004) assessed 82 newlywed couples every 6 months for the first 4 years of marriage and found that wives who experienced the highest levels of stress spillover demonstrated the greatest declines in marital satisfaction over the study. Importantly, as reported stress levels increased, wives reported a corresponding increase in perceptions of specific relationship problems, and these negative cognitions mediated the association between stress and relationship quality. Building on this research, Neff and Karney (2007) also found evidence for a dyadic crossover effect, whereby husbands reported lower satisfaction when their wives experienced higher stress. This finding demonstrates that mediating processes linking contextual variables and relationship quality must be considered in terms of moderating processes that include different effects for husbands and wives.

Bodenmann (2000) classified stress along both internal and external dimensions, and posited that external stress might be more harmful to marriages because it may not be automatically identified as affecting the relationship. A formal test of this theory used an actor-partner mediation model, findings supported the idea that when either spouse reports external stressors are present, greater tension occurs within the dyad (Bodenmann, Lederman & Bradbury, 2007). That is, transient relationship annoyances are effectively handled in times of calm but will be more salient during tumult. In terms of gender, women reported greater stress across all domains and were more susceptible to the tension relative to men. This finding suggests that women may be adept at not only providing support, but also identifying external stressors as independent of the dyad (Bodenmann et al., 2007).
One specific form of external stress may come from the physical distance that separates romantic partners due to occupational and educational pursuits (Guldner, 1996; Guldner & Swensen, 1995). Non-marital relationships may be vulnerable to this contextual factor, especially as physical separation relates to the transition to college (Van Horn et al., 1997). Several studies have shown that long-distance relationships are no more likely to end than close-proximity relationships (Guldner, 1996; Stafford & Reske, 1990), but those who experience the breakup of a long-distance relationship cite distance as the main cause (Van Horn et al., 1997). Long-distance relationships violate assumptions about what maintains satisfying romantic unions, and less proximity may impact feelings of closeness and intimacy (Pistole & Roberts, 2011). Further, periods of separation may require relationship maintenance behaviors to buffer the added stressor of being apart (Dindia & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Gilbertson, Dindia, & Allen, 1998). These acts might prepare partners for physical separation, maintain contact during the separation and reaffirm the relationship when partners are reunited (Pistole, Roberts & Chapman, 2010).

**Infidelity.** Commitment plays a central role within a marriage, and when the foundation of commitment is shaken by infidelity many marriages dissolve (Amato & Previti, 2003; Amato & Rogers, 1997). Although extramarital affairs are rare, they are still cited as the one of most common issues addressed in marital therapy (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson 1997). Does infidelity increase the likelihood of divorce or is it merely an indicator of a failing marriage? To understand this question, Previti and Amato (2003) examined marital happiness and divorce proneness (factors indicative of marital instability and thoughts of divorce) as predictors of infidelity and marital dissolution 17-years later. Marital happiness was negatively correlated with extramarital affairs but did not predict infidelity in a path model, although divorce proneness did
predict an affair. The association of marital unhappiness and infidelity appears to be mediated by marital instability (Previti & Amato, 2003). A conceptual replication of this effect found extramarital affairs were no more likely in high-conflict marriages than low-conflict couples (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Infidelity increased divorce proneness by three-fourths (.74) and decreased marital happiness by two-thirds (.67) of a standard deviation (Previti & Amato, 2003). Proportional hazard analysis also indicated that extramarital affairs double the likelihood of divorce. Taken together, these findings suggest that infidelity is not just an indicator of a declining marriage, but that the event can be predicted by factors indicative of marital instability and thoughts of divorce (Previti & Amato, 2003).

The Correlates/Consequences of Romantic Breakups: What Do We Know?

Although non-marital breakups and divorce increase risk for a variety of poor outcomes, most people fare well over time following a romantic separation (Mancini, Bonanno & Clark, 2011), which is consistent with a general human tendency toward resilience in the face of stressful events (Bonanno, 2004). In this section of the chapter, we review what is known about the correlates and putative consequences of romantic separation. In the final section, we discuss the topics of resilience and post-traumatic growth as an important new direction for the field.

Mental Health. Romantic breakups in young adulthood are associated with the development of mood disorders, as well as increased rates of suicide and substance abuse (Asarnow et al., 2008, Monroe, Rohde, Seeley & Lewinsohn, 1999; Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels & Meeus, 2003; Vajda & Steinbeck, 1999). One large epidemiological study suggests breakups may increase vulnerability, but not cause the onset of a major depressive episode (Monroe et al., 1999). Using a diathesis-stress model, Fordwood and colleagues (Fordwood, 2008).

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2 A discussion of the consequences of divorce on children are outside the scope this the current chapter (see Amato, 2010 for a review)
Arsanow, Huizar & Reise, 2007) found that young adults who attempted suicide reported a greater number of stressful life events in the preceding 6-months. The breakup of a romantic relationship evidenced a trend-toward significance ($p = .08$). After controlling for all other stressful events and predisposing pathology, depression severity moderated the association of experiencing a romantic breakup and a later suicide attempt in those with the lowest depression severity (Fordwood et al., 2007).

A great deal of correlational evidence suggests that divorce increases risk for poor mental health outcomes. For example, using data from the US National Comorbidity Study, Afifi, Cox, and Enns (2006) found that separated or divorced mothers evidenced significantly higher rates of clinically significant major depression and generalized anxiety disorders after controlling for demographic and family variables (also see Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Bruce & Kim, 1992; Wade & Prevalin, 2004). Other research demonstrates that life satisfaction drops precipitously in the years prior to a divorce and, on average, does not recover to pre-divorce levels up to 6 years after the divorce (Lucas, 2005). Divorce is also associated with increased rates of psychological distress after accounting for levels of pre-divorce distress (Johnson and Wu, 2002; Mastekaasa, 1994).

An essential question for this line of research is whether the mental health issues correlated with divorce predates the separation, or whether these outcomes constitute a causal consequence of the stress associated with the end of a marriage? Co-twin control designs are especially suited to answer this question because monozygotic (MZ) twins are genetically identical and when sets of twins who are discordant for divorce (or any life event) are studied, the observed differences in mental health outcomes between twins are presumed to be causal in nature. Osler and colleagues (Osler, McGue, Lund, & Christensen, 2008) found significantly
higher rates of depression among both male and female MZ twins who experienced divorce or widowhood, suggesting that the end of marriage exerts a causal effect of mood symptom severity (independent of the way mood symptoms may predict the end of marriage). Findings from this study should be interpreted with caution, however, as the process of recovering from widowhood and divorce are assumed to likely be quite different.

**Self-identity disruptions.** An emerging area in the study of separation adjustment is how people reorganize their self-concepts following a breakup. It is well known that romantic relationships provide an important opportunity for self-expansion by exposing us to our partner’s knowledge, interests, and resources (Aron, Mashek & Aron, 2004). Our self-concept becomes defined, in part, by who we are with our partner and in the context of the relationship. This process is often referred to as “including the other in the self” (Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron & Norman, 2001).

When love relationships end, people must reorganize their sense of self. Specifically, recent evidence confirms that whereas forming a new relationship is associated with self-expansion, it is posited that terminating a relationship may lead to self-contraction (Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis & Kunak, 2006). Following a breakup, relationship elements that promote cognitive interdependence, such as greater commitment, cause people to exhibit both greater disruptions in their self-concept and identify less concrete aspects of their self-concept, and ultimately, to fare worse (Slotter, Gardner & Finkel, 2010). Changes in psychological wellbeing following divorce result from changes in self-concept clarity (and not the other way around), suggesting that how people think about their self-concept and how certain they are about their self-concept may play a leading role in adjustment to a relationship loss (Mason, Law, Bryan, Portley & Sbarra, 2011). Consistent with these findings, other research indicates
that terminating a low-quality, low-expansion romantic relationship may function to promote identification of 'lost' components of the self-concept; in this situation, the breakup precipitates post-relationship growth through rediscovery of the self (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007).

**Mental health: Mechanisms of action.** One surprising fact about the association between divorce and psychological distress is that almost no studies focus on the mechanisms, or psychological processes, that connect the end of marriage with subsequent emotional distress; mechanistic research of this nature is almost absent in the literature. This lack of empirical research on mechanisms is surprising, given observations that divorce can induce shame, longing, loneliness, humiliation, rumination, identity disruptions, and prolonged anger or grief (Emery, 1994; Weiss, 1975). Presumably, it is these emotional experiences that give rise to, or at least covary with, more severe forms of psychopathology.

Using a dyadic model of child custody disputes, Sbarra and Emery (2008) recently showed that fathers who reported the greatest levels of conflict were previously married to mothers who reported the greatest acceptance of the separation. Prolonged co-parenting conflict following divorce may operate as an attempt to promote a reunion with an ex-partner who is no longer invested in the relationship. In a prospective analysis over 12-years, Sbarra and Emery (2005) also reported that mothers who continued to show regrets about the separation experience (i.e., low levels of acceptance) also reported the highest rates of depression immediately following the custody mediation. A potentially adverse effect of helping parents cooperatively renegotiate their separation relationship may be to prolong feelings of grief. Although these studies provide some insight, we still have a great deal to learn about both the mechanisms of recovery (i.e., variables associated with changes in psychological adjustment) and the variables that explain the association between marital status and mental health outcomes.
One inconsistent finding within the divorce and dissolution literature is whether being the person who initiates the end of the relationship alters the course of emotional recovery. Some studies of divorce have found that the emotional trajectories of initiators and non-initiators are similar, but vary in timing with initiators experiencing distress soon after the separation (Buehler, 1987) and entering into subsequent unions more quickly (Sweeney, 2002). Others have found this relationship is moderated by the number of members in the initiator’s social network (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1991). Still other studies find no relationship between initiator status and adjustment to divorce (Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001). For non-marital romantic breakups, partners are generally in agreement about who was the initiator, though not about wanting the relationship to end or their emotional reactions to the breakup itself (Sprecher, 1994).

**Gender differences.** Women, who most frequently initiate divorce (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995), experience the greatest rates of distress prior to the separation; whereas, men report increased distress after the union dissolves (Jacobson, 1977). This observation is bolstered by evidence that women are more adept at assessing and responding to the 'emotional pulse' of the marriage (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Women also are more likely to receive custody of children, and, as such, men's distress may follow from changes in family structure and lack of access to their children following the separation (Myers, 1989; Riessman, 1990). Men also may lack an awareness of their emotional dependence on their wives; when the relationship ends, these difficulties may emerge for men because their spouses serve a primary emotion regulatory role (Baum, 2003; Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). The behaviors associated with mourning and grief are also exhibited differently: women, on average, report more affective responses and men become more active and self-medicating with substances (Mandell, 1995; Umberson & Williams, 1993), or engaging in more sexual relations with new partners (McKenry & Price, 1991). These action-
based coping behaviors may occur due to lack of recognition from others (i.e. friends) about the impact of the divorce (Murray, 2001) or constraints associated with male emotional expression. As such, men may feel compelled to alleviate distress in more gender-acceptable ways (Baum, 2003).

Economic strain also differentially affects women and men post-divorce, and research is almost exclusively focused on women (for an exception, see Braver, 1999). Findings are consistent that divorce is associated with anywhere from a 23% - 40% decrease in financial resources for women in the first-year post-divorce (Bianchi, Subaiya, & Khan, 1999; Galarneau & Sturroch, 1997). Results are mixed as to when/if financial strain alleviates, studies find income generally corrects within 5 years (Galarneau & Sturroch, 1997), whereas other research identifies a lifetime trajectory of poverty and hardship (McDonald & Robb, 2004). Recent research also indicates wives' perceptions of the financial impact associated with divorce mediate the association between their marital satisfaction and the decision to divorce (Dew, 2008), suggesting that the perception of having a less comfortable lifestyle post-divorce may actually prevent the divorce from occurring. While separating from a spouse may lessen relationship distress, the increased likelihood of financial impairment creates a new type of strain. As such, some women may be more motivated to re-partner or re-marry, rather than to enter the workforce or increase labor, in order to regain financial stability (Jansen, Mortelmans & Snoeckx, 2008).

**Contact with Ex-Partners.** Research is limited when examining contact between former romantic partners, and focuses primarily on post-relationship friendships, and says little about the potential emotional consequences of maintaining contact with one’s ex-partner. In the few studies that have addressed this topic, contact with former partners slow decreases in feelings of love (for one’s ex-partner) and sadness (Sbarra, 2006; Sbarra & Emery, 2005) as well as
increases the likelihood of engaging in on-again/off-again relationships (see following section; Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009; Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester & Surra, 2009). Much remains to be understood about the mechanisms through which contact causes distress and two important substantive questions remain to be answered. First, what is the direction of the association between contact and emotional recovery? Does contact lead to distress? Or, do feelings of sadness (or other forms of psychological distress) drive contact seeking behavior? Second, what forms of contact are associated with the greatest levels of emotional distress? Is resulting emotional distress affected by the type (i.e. written versus in-person), valence (positive or negative), presence of sexual intimacy, or duration of contact? And, if the contact is reciprocal (e.g. having coffee together), is this associated with same level of distress as non-reciprocal contact (i.e. writing an e-mail and receiving no response)? Future research would benefit from examining these potential associations, and including more modern forms of social networking contact (Rhoades et al., 2011).

On-again/Off-again. Post-relationship contact research assumes that people are not reestablishing their relationship when contact occurs and the work of Dailey and colleagues (2009a; 2009b) has started to explore the correlates of on-again/off-again relationships. From a qualitative perspective, partners who eventually rekindle their relationships report reasons for the initial dissolution that are similar to those who remain uncoupled: conflict, characteristics about the partner or the self, and more attractive alternatives (Dailey et al., 2009b). Among the reasons listed for rekindling the relationship were increased communication skills, renewed effort (i.e. increased time spent together), and intimacy (Dailey et al., 2009b). Contact with an ex-partner was also reported to play a role in returning to the union, with people reporting pursuing post-dissolution friendships. In this context, contact may be serving to keep ex-partners attached to
each other, and prevent the pursuing of alternative novel partners (Dailey et al., 2009b). Follow-up work show people in an on-off relationship reported less positive characteristics during the initial phase of their relationship, as well as in their current rekindled relationship (Dailey et al., 2009a). Surprisingly, even after rekindling, people also reported less feelings of validation from their partners, relationship satisfaction and feelings of love for their partner (Dailey et al., 2009a).

**Physical Health.** Research on the physical health outcomes following divorce is less well developed than the literature on mental health outcomes, but work in this area is growing rapidly (Sbarra, Law, & Portley, 2011). Given space limitations, we discuss the broad population level effects and the role of psychological stress on health outcomes and the mechanisms that potentially explain these effects, but we point the reader to other sources for the most current information on the study of marital status and health.

One of the most consistently replicated effects in the social relationships and health literature is the epidemiological finding that marital status is associated with risk for early death. A recent meta-analysis of 32 prospective studies (involving more than 6.5 million people, 160,000 deaths, and over 755,000 divorces in 11 different countries) revealed that compared to their married counterparts, separated/divorced adults evidenced a significant increase in risk for early death controlling for age, as well as a variety of sociodemographic, health, and health behavior covariates (Sbarra et al., 2011). The effect size estimate is consistent with the magnitude of association observed in other large-scale studies, and divorced men appear to have the highest death rates among unmarried adults (for a review of evidence from 16 developed countries see Hu & Goldman, 1990).
A more specific literature also focuses on suicide. For example, in a 10-year, prospective epidemiological study of mortality risk in 471,922 non-institutionalized adults living in the U.S., Kopsowa (2000) found that men who were separated or divorced at the start of the study were 2.28 times more likely to kill themselves during the follow-up period than their married counterparts, whereas no significant association was found between marital status and suicide for women. In a follow-up analysis, Kopsowa (Kposowa, 2003) reported that divorced men were more than 9 times more likely to kill themselves than were divorced women.

What do we know about the mechanisms linking the end of marriage and risk for poor health outcomes? First, social selection explains some of the physical health outcomes observed following divorce; that is, the variables that increase risk for divorce also appear to increase risk for poor health. Earlier in the chapter we described work by Osler and colleagues (2008) that used a co-twin control design to investigate rates of health outcomes between twins who were discordant for widowhood or divorce. The results indicated that depression and rates of smoking may follow from the ending of a marriage, but that differences in many other health outcomes (e.g., self-rated health, alcohol use, body mass index [BMI]) may be due to underlying genetic explanations and not the stress of a relationship transition. In addition, the association between divorce and physical health may be explained by third variables that both increase the risk for divorce and increase the risk for poor health, such as hostility and neuroticism, but the evidence for this hypothesis is relatively scant. Using data from the Terman Life Cycle study, Tucker and colleagues (Tucker, Friedman, Wingard, & Schwartz, 1996) reported that the risk associated with having ever experienced a divorce and early mortality could be reduced (by 21% for men and 15% for women) after accounting for childhood conscientiousness and a history of parental divorce.
Beyond social selection processes, separation and divorce can instantiate changes in social resources, health behaviors, and psychological stress that have long-term implications for physical health (for a description of each process, see Sbarra et al., 2011). Only a handful of studies have examined how the psychological responses to marital separation/divorce may be associated with biomarkers that have health implications. The work in this area began in the 1980s with a series of now seminal studies by Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987; Kiecolt-Glaser, Kennedy, Malkoff, Fisher, & et al., 1988). More recently, Sbarra and colleagues (Sbarra, Law, Lee, & Mason, 2009) found that participants who reported greater divorce-related emotional intrusion (e.g., dreaming about the separation, experiencing waves of sudden emotion about the separation) evidenced significantly higher levels of resting systolic and diastolic blood pressure (BP). In addition, during a task in which participants mentally reflected on their separation experience, men who reported that the task required a great deal of emotion regulatory effort (i.e., feeling upset combined with a need to exert control of one’s emotions in order to prevent a worsening of distress) evidenced the largest increases in BP, and these effects were in addition to those observed for baseline functioning.

A follow-up to this study also found that the way an individual speaks about their marriage and divorce moderates the association of attachment anxiety and BP (Lee, Sbarra, Mason & Law, 2011). Speaking in a more present-oriented and involved manner, a behavioral measure of a hyperactivating coping strategy, was associated with the highest BP in anxiously attached people who were about to engage in a relationship reflection task (Lee et al., 2011). These findings were interpreted within the capability model of physiological responding (Coan, Allen & McKnight, 2006); responses to emotionally salient stimuli are the result of the interaction between an individual trait and the evoked emotional state, such that trait-level
propensities are best evoked using state manipulations designed to assess the emotional system in question.

In summary, marital separation and divorce are associated with a statistically reliable increase in the probability of early death, yet we still know little about the mechanisms that explain this association. Only a few studies have examined emotional response to divorce and associations with biomarkers that have distinct implications for end-point health outcomes. Despite the nascent nature of this work, divorce-related subjective emotional experiences are consistently associated with heightened biological stress responses Future research is needed to see if these emotional responses predict clinically meaningful health outcomes over the long term.

**Social Selection and Causation: The Transition from Intact to Dissolved Relationships**

We began the chapter by noting that very few psychological studies span the transition from intact to dissolved relationships. However, a handful of sociological studies address this gap in the literature (see Amato, 2010). Most of the work in this area is focused on understanding whether the association between romantic separations and health outcomes are due to social selection or social causation. Social selection process may operate in two primary ways: (1) Mental health problems and psychopathology increase risk for both divorce (e.g., Chatav & Whisman, 2007; Kessler, Walters, & Forthofer, 1998), poor health outcomes, and/or, (2) The outcomes of divorce are better explained by marital processes (e.g. large decreases in marital quality) that predate the separation (e.g., Overbeek et al., 2006). Evidence from these large, prospective panel studies provide an excellent illustration of the knowledge to be gained from study designs that span the transition from intact to dissolved relationships. For example, Overbeek and colleagues (2006) found that the association between DSM-III-R diagnosed
dysthmic disorder and divorce was entirely eliminated when accounting for marital discord preceding the divorce (a selection effect), whereas the association between divorce and substance abuse problems was not accounted for by marital quality providing evidence for a causation effect.

Consistent with these findings, Mastekaasa (1994) demonstrated that the effects of psychological wellbeing on the future likelihood of divorce decrease with time (since the measurement of wellbeing) but do not go to zero; this observation indicates the presence of both short- and long-term selection, with the former presumably representing distress associated with the end of marriage. In a conceptual replication of this short-term selection effect, Blekesaune (2008) demonstrated that levels of distress decrease prior to divorce but also abate at the same rate post-dissolution. Other studies that control for social selection have found the putatively causal effects of divorce to linger over a longer period of time (Johnson & Wu, 2002; Mastekaasa, 1994). Cheung (1998) examined the social class, education, health, and mental health predictors of divorce 10 years later; the significant predictors of divorce were then entered into models examining physical and mental health differences between the divorced and non-divorced. The predictors of divorce eliminated small differences between married and divorced men, but not differences between married and divorced women (Cheung, 1998).

Overall, this literature indicates that while the predictors of romantic separations explain some of the observed correlates/consequences of these separations, they cannot account for the entirety of the association between the experience of marital separation/divorce and increased risk for poor outcomes. Furthermore, because these studies are largely conducted within a sociological framework and tend to include relatively crude predictor and outcome measures, they do not provide information about the continuities and discontinuities of wellbeing or
distress over time. For this, we need psychological research studies to address the transition from intact to dissolved relationships. This review of panel study designs also underscores that the fact the predictors and consequences of a breakup might not be as distinct as current research suggests. One of the best empirical examples of this idea is found in a study by Lucas (2005), which investigated changes in life satisfaction in the years prior to and following divorce. The key finding from this study is that life satisfaction following a divorce is merely a continuation of life satisfaction leading up to the divorce.

**Future Directions: More Bridges, Less Silos**

The experience of a divorce or relationship breakup does not sentence one to exclusively poor outcomes; a considerable amount of evidence now indicates that even intense emotional reactions can give way to increased wellbeing and improved future relationships (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007; Mancini et al., 2011; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Precisely how people become resilient in the face of a breakup remains to be discovered, and doing so is an important next step in the research on divorce and relationship breakups. Can we learn more about resilience (the experience of relatively few problems after a breakup), recovery (the experience of moderate to severe problems that abate relatively quickly and steadily over time), and the psychosocial mechanisms that underpin resilience and recovery by building better bridges between studies of the predictors and the consequences of romantic separations?

Not only is it possible to build a better science of romantic loss by breaking down the predictor and consequence silos, but we believe it is imperative to do so. The science of romantic loss needs theory-driven research that studies distressed couples before they actually separate. Blending more traditional studies of relationship functioning (e.g., including standardized
interaction tasks in the laboratory) with innovative neuroimaging paradigms derived from social baseline theory (e.g., see Coan et al., 2006) would provide insight into the neurophysiological correlates of relationship distress. In such a 'high-risk' sample, it is reasonable to assume a large percentage of couples will breakup over time and follow-up studies could then map the neurophysiological correlates of relationship dissolution in any participants who have ended their relationship.

Using this approach we can successfully follow people across the relationship transition using more complete measurement designs. A very important bridge can be created if we conduct more complete and psychologically-informed measurements with small samples. One of the major problems maintaining the silos is that research on the predictors of divorce tends to be very dyadic whereas, with just a few exceptions (see Sbarra & Emery, 2008), research on the consequences of romantic separation focuses exclusively on intrapersonal processes. Studies that span the transition from intact to dissolved relationships have the potential to be entirely dyadic, both in terms of what we know about the prediction of as a separation as well and the pre- and post-relationship dyadic processes that are associated with better or worse coping following the separation.

Finally, because most marital dissolution studies do not span the separation transition, the field knows much more about the correlates of divorce than about the psychological processes associated with recovering from the end of marriage. Said differently, the field should be studying marital separation (i.e. the end of a relationship defined by the people who were in that relationship) instead of divorce (i.e., the formal termination of a legal contract that may occur months or even years after couples’ physical separation). Researchers would have the best potential to capture and study how people grieve the end of relationships and the moderators of
good or poor outcomes in a recently separated sample. The research design we proposed above would be an ideal means of staying close enough to participants to capture their lived experiences as they transition out of their relationships. If the field can begin to view this transition period and study the correlates/consequences of romantic breakups as a function of the processes that predicted the end of the relationship, it is only a matter of time before we have more bridges and fewer silos in the study of romantic breakups.
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