

Extradyadic Involvement and Relationship Dissolution in Heterosexual Women University Students

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Abstract This study examined the role of extradyadic involvement (EDI) in heterosexual dating relationships among young adult females ($N = 539$). A considerable percentage of participants (36 %) reported that they had engaged in an extradyadic emotional or sexual relationship within the last 2 months. Results from logistic regression analyses supported the general hypothesis that emotional and sexual EDI were both significantly associated with relationship dissolution. These associations remained strong even after controlling for participants' age, relationship duration, and relationship quality. The findings also showed that the strength of the association between acts of emotional or sexual extradyadic behaviors and relationship dissolution was linked to relationship quality, gender of the actor, and type of EDI (emotional vs. sexual). Specifically, compared to participants who reported poor relationship quality, those who reported high relationship quality were more likely to end the partnership if they reported emotional or sexual EDI. Findings suggest that individuals in higher quality relationships appear to have considerably more to lose in their relationship when emotional or sexual EDI occurs. This, in part, may be because the more satisfactory the relationship the more disillusionment one may feel when betrayed by their romantic partner. Overall, the present findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the relationships between EDI and relationship

dissolution. We call for more research that rigorously examines what contextual factors influence young adults in dating relationships to dissolve relationships following EDI.

Keywords Sexual relationships · Extradyadic sex · Casual sex · Emotional infidelity · Relationship satisfaction

Introduction

Extradyadic involvement (EDI) is referred to by numerous other terms, including cheating, infidelity, affair, adultery, unfaithfulness, and stepping out. EDI is typically used to describe sexual and/or emotional relationships with a secondary partner(s), while in an exclusive romantic relationship. Sexual EDI may comprise activities such as coitus, oral sex, anal sex, petting, and kissing (e.g., Braithwaite, Lambert, Fincham, & Pasley, 2010). Emotional EDI may be defined as an emotional connection with a secondary partner that threatens the intimacy of an individual exclusive relationship (e.g., Hertlein, Ray, Wetchler, & Killmer, 2003). For the purpose of this study, we defined EDI broadly as having an emotional or sexual relationship with a secondary partner while in an exclusive relationship.

An estimated 90 % of Americans disapprove of EDI and find it immoral (Gallup, 2007) and an estimated 65 % find it unforgivable (Gallup, 2008); yet, a large percentage of exclusive romantic relationships are affected by it (e.g., Allen & Baucom, 2006; Hall & Fincham, 2006a). This is especially true among young adults in dating relationships (Kessel, Atkins, & Furrow, 2007). Estimates suggest that sexual EDI occurs in about 20 % of young adult relationships (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011; Vail-Smith, Whestone, & Knox, 2010). For example, using a college sample, Grello, Welsch, and Harper (2006) found that 21 % of students in exclusive relationships reported having a

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casual sexual experience with a secondary partner. Similarly, Vail-Smith et al. found that an estimated 20 % of young adult females and 27 % of males engaged in sexual EDI (i.e., coitus, fellatio, or anal sex) while in exclusive relationships.

More casual forms of sexual EDI (i.e., caressing, hugging, kissing), however, occur at higher rates. For instance, Braithwaite et al. (2010) found that 44 % of their sample of college students in dating relationship reported caressing and hugging a secondary partner. Also, the reported prevalence of emotional EDI among those in dating relationships varies across studies, with rates as low as approximately 10 % and as high as 60 % in recent years (e.g., Hall & Fincham, 2006b, 2009).

The prevalence of EDI in dating relationships is notable considering its documented association with psychological distress, relational conflict, intimate partner violence, relationship dissolution, and reduced physical health (e.g., Brady, Tschann, Ellen, & Flores, 2009; Hall & Fincham, 2006a, 2009; Kaighobadi et al., 2009; Kaighobadi, Starratt, Shackelford, & Popp, 2008). Despite the deleterious implications associated with EDI, people are motivated to engage in it for various reasons. Some have committed to EDI to punish their partner, because they were seduced or to exercise sexual freedom. Others have committed to it as a response to the sexual and emotional voids in their primary relationship (e.g., Pham, Shackelford, & Sela, 2013; Yeniceri & Kokdemir, 2006).

Given the link between EDI and relationship dissolution (Hall & Fincham, 2006a) and the developmental task faced by emerging adults to develop and maintain long-term stable relationships, it is important to study EDI among this population. In general, behaviors that are positively and negatively reinforced in premarital romantic relationships may contribute to later marital behaviors (e.g., Fincham & Cui, 2011). With regard to EDI, at least one study suggested a link between EDI in premarital and marital relationships (Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988). Thus, studying the link between EDI and relationship dissolution among young adults may provide insight on individuals' marital infidelity and divorce trajectory. Moreover, the delay of marriage and growing rate of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage (e.g., Cherlin, 2010) suggests the need for research that examines the function of EDI on relationship outcomes among individuals in dating relationships. Therefore, in the present study, we examined the relationship between EDI and relationship dissolution in a sample of young adults. In particular, we examined the association between EDI and relationship dissolution and the role of relationship quality in this association.

Theoretical Perspectives

From an investment model perspective, commitment is linked with EDI (Rusbult, 1980). EDI can be a result of low commitment, its cause, or both (e.g., Drigotas & Barta, 2001;

Drigotas, Safstrom, & Genitila, 1999). The investment model provides a useful framework for explaining the implications of EDI for relationship dissolution. According to Rusbult (1983), when individuals are highly satisfied and invested in their relationship and have fewer desirable alternatives, they are more likely to be and stay committed. However, when individuals discover that their partner is or was involved in an extradyadic relationship overall commitment to that relationship often diminishes. Knowledge of EDI likely causes the faithful partner to feel betrayed, experience increased emotional distress, and also reduce their investment in the relationship (Fife, Weeks, & Gambescia, 2008). Distress associated with the discovery of EDI may also reduce individuals' satisfaction with their relationship (Whisman & Wagers, 2005) and encourage them to seek revenge by taking comfort in the arms of an alternative partner (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). Diminished commitment that stems from discovering EDI, combined with research that links commitment and relationship dissolution (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010), helps explain why many relationships that involve extradyadic behaviors dissolve.

There are some data on married couples that supports the utility of the investment model in explaining the outcomes of EDI (e.g., Shackelford, 1998). However, no studies were found that utilized the model to study EDI related outcomes among young adult romantic relationships. In accordance with findings in the marriage literature on EDI, we posited that EDI in dating relationships would be positively associated with relationship dissolution.

Extradyadic Involvement and Relationship Dissolution

EDI occurs both in married and dating relationships; yet, most research highlights the links between EDI, relationship quality, and relationship dissolution in marriages (e.g., Buunk, 1987; Previti & Amato, 2004; Shackelford & Buss, 1997). The limited research that does exist on dating EDI indicates a positive link between EDI and relationship dissolution. For instance, Baxter (1986) found approximately 17 % of college students broke up because of complaints about loyalty and EDI. In a study by Harris (2002), 58 % of women and 57 % of men reported that their relationship ended as result of their partners EDI. In a study that examined the aftermath of EDI, Hall and Fincham (2006a) found 75 % of relationships dissolved as a result of EDI. Further, they found young adults with lower levels of forgiveness and who expressed more negative attributions about their partner's EDI were more likely to dissolve their relationship. Therefore, our initial goal was to expand upon the limited research on EDI and dating relationships by separately examining the link between sexual EDI and relationship dissolution and emotional EDI and relationship dissolution. Specifically, we hypothesized a positive association between EDI (sexual or emotional) and relationship dissolution.

Relationship Covariates

First, this study will examine both sexual and emotional EDI on relationship dissolution, and expand and build on earlier work that examined the link between EDI and relationship dissolution (e.g., Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001; Hall & Fincham, 2006a, b; Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002) by identifying relationship factors that may act as buffers against relationship dissolution among individuals who experience EDI. Additionally, the validity of measures used to study differences in EDI related outcomes has been challenged (Harris, 2002). Growing evidence shows hypothetical based responses to EDI differ from responses to actual EDI (e.g., DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002). Harris (2002) found that significant effects from “forced choice” responses to hypothetical scenarios were not replicated when individuals reported real EDI experiences. This study will improve upon prior research by sampling females who actually experienced EDI in their relationships.

The multidimensional relationship between relationship quality and several factors, including psychological distress, communication patterns, and the onset of infidelity (e.g., Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Oikle, 2003; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Weinstock, 2004), have been well documented. Nonetheless, with the exception of a few studies (e.g., Brand, Markey, Mills, & Hodges, 2007; Hall & Fincham, 2009), relationship quality in the context of EDI related outcomes has been underexamined. Specifically, little is known about the extent to which relational satisfaction or dissatisfaction prior to the discovery of EDI in dating relationships influences relationship dissolution after EDI is exposed. What we do know is that individuals succumb to feelings of disappointment and disillusionment after discovering EDI, despite their feelings for their partner prior to the discovery (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). Thus, given that: (1) many individuals experience disillusionment after discovering EDI, (2) individuals who have greater satisfaction and investment in a relationship experience greater disillusionment after discovering EDI, and (3) studies suggest a positive relationship between relational disillusionment and dissolution (e.g., Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000; Huston, Niehuis, & Smith, 2001), our second objective in this study was to examine the role relationship quality had on the link between EDI and relationship dissolution.

Research on the link between relationship dissolution, relationship duration, and age has also gone virtually unexamined in the dating EDI literature. The research on relationship duration and age that does exist has typically examined them as precursors to EDI, rather than examine their function in the context of EDI (e.g., Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; McAlister, Pachana, & Jackson, 2005). Unique to this study, relationship duration and age were used to

control for the relationship between sexual and emotional EDI and relationship dissolution.

In sum, based on the investment model and prior research, we predicted there would be a positive association between EDI and relationship dissolution (Hypothesis 1). We also predicted that individuals who reported highly satisfactory and long-term relationships would be more likely to break up in the face of EDI as compared to those who reported low satisfactory relationships (Hypothesis 2).

Method

Participants

Participants were female undergraduate students recruited from an introductory family and child science course at a large Southeastern University. Students received course credit for their participation. Participants were asked to complete a survey about personal characteristics and relationships at the beginning of the semester, then again after 7 weeks, and finally at the end of the semester (14-week period). Of the 1,668 students in the original sample, 724 were young adults females in a heterosexual dating relationship. Of the 724 females, 539 provided complete data.

Procedure

At Time 1, participants reported their age, current relationship duration, relationship quality, and whether or not they and their male partner engaged in sexual and emotional EDI. At Time 2 (7 weeks later), they were asked again about their sexual and emotional EDI and whether or not their exclusive relationship had ended. At Time 3 (14 weeks later), participants were also asked to report whether or not their exclusive relationship had ended.

Measures

Relationship Status

At each time interval, participants were asked “Are you currently in an exclusive romantic relationship (e.g., have a boyfriend/girlfriend, engaged, married)?” Responses were coded 0 = *yes* and 1 = *no*. Participants were also asked whether their current relationship was with “an opposite sex partner” or “a same sex partner.” Given literature that shows differences between how same sex couples and heterosexual couples react to EDI (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2012), only data from female participants who reported being in an opposite sex partnership were included in this study.

Relationship Dissolution

At Time 2 and Time 3, participants who reported being in a relationship were asked “Were you in this romantic relationship (with this same person) when you completed the last survey?” A dichotomous variable was constructed to assess for those whose relationship continued (0 = in same relationship from Time 1 to Time 3) and those whose relationship ended (1 = no longer in the same relationship from Time 1 to Time 2 or Time 3).

Extradyadic Involvement

At Time 1 and Time 2, participants were asked about their EDI and that of their male partner. Participants were asked, “Thinking of your current relationship, during the past 2 months: Have you done anything that you consider to be physically unfaithful?” Responses were coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. To assess for their partner’s EDI, participants were asked, “Thinking of your current relationship, during the past 2 months: Has your partner done anything that you consider to be physically unfaithful?” Responses were coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. Participants were also asked about their emotional EDI using the same set of questions (substituting *physical* for *emotional* EDI in each item). Responses were also coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. The variables for emotional and sexual EDI were separately created by combining responses to both questions from T1 and T2, so 1 = emotional or sexual EDI by either one or both partners at either one or both times and 0 = no emotional or sexual EDI by either one or both partners at either one or both time points.

Relationship Quality

Relationship quality was limited to subjective assessments of the relationship at Time 1 following Fincham and Bradbury’s (1987) recommendation. Four items from an item response theory analysis of the Couple Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007) were used to measure relationship quality, including: (1) quality (from 1 = *worse than all others/extremely bad* to 6 = *better than all others/extremely good*), (2) reward (from 1 = *not at all* to 6 = *very much or extremely*), (3) warmth and comfort (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*), and (4) happiness (from 1 = *extremely unhappy* to 7 = *perfect*). These items demonstrated adequate reliability and validity and had a Cronbach α of 0.92. Items from this measure also correlated with the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (-0.79) (Kurdek, 1994) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (0.87) (Spangler, 1976).

Relationship Duration

Relationship duration was calculated by asking participants, “How long have you been in this relationship?” A 6-point

Likert scale was used ranging from “less than 2 months” to “3 years+.”

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Participants ranged in age from 17 to 26 with a mean age of 19.47 ($SD = 1.40$). The relationship length of these individuals was: 10.2 % 3+ years, 20.8 % 2 years, 29.3 % 1–2 years, 15.3 % 7–12 months, 7.2 % 5–6 months, 9.8 % 3–4 months, and 7.4 % less than 2 months. Their mean score of relationship quality was 21.38 ($SD = 3.43$). Of the 539 women who completed the study, 195 (36 %) reported having an extradyadic relationship. More specifically, 110 reported engaging in sexual EDI, while 178 reported engaging in emotional EDI. In addition, 124 (23 %) reported having knowledge of their partner’s EDI. Forty-five participants reported that their male partners engaged in sexual EDI. One hundred nine reported that their partner engaged in emotional EDI. Reports of sexual and emotional EDI patterns at Time 1 are displayed in Table 1. There was a positive correlation between female

Table 1 Descriptive information with sexual and emotional EDI reports ($N = 539$)

Variable	N (%)
Sexual EDI	
No both partners	439 (81.4)
Yes both partners	18 (3.3)
Yes female; no male	71 (13.2)
No female; yes male	11 (2.0)
Emotional EDI	
No both partners	381 (70.7)
Yes both partners	45 (8.3)
Yes female; no male	84 (15.6)
No female; yes male	29 (5.4)
Sexual & emotional EDI (engaged in both)	
No both partners	466 (86.5)
Yes both partners	11 (2.0)
Yes female; no male	54 (10)
No female; yes male	8 (1.5)
Sexual & emotional EDI (engaged in either or both)	
Yes female sexual EDI; yes male emotional EDI	30 (5.6)
Yes male sexual EDI; yes female emotional EDI	18 (3.3)
Yes female sexual & emotional EDI; yes male sexual EDI	13 (2.4)
Yes female sexual & emotional EDI; yes male emotional EDI	26 (4.8)
Yes male sexual & emotional EDI; yes female sexual EDI	13 (2.4)
Yes male sexual & emotional EDI; yes female emotional EDI	13 (2.4)

Table 2 Summary of logistic regression analysis for sexual EDI predicting relationship dissolution in college students, controlling for background variables

Predictor	Females						Male partner					
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Sexual EDI	1.75	0.31	5.73***	−4.63	4.20	0.01	1.57	0.43	4.81***	−6.32	4.22	0
Rel. quality	−0.16	0.04	0.85***	−0.25	0.06	.78***	−0.19	0.04	.82***	0.23	0.04	0.79***
Rel. duration	−0.20	0.08	0.82**	−0.22	0.11	.81*	−0.23	0.08	.79**	−0.20	0.09	0.82*
Age	−0.04	0.10		−0.22	0.17	0.80	−0.04	0.11	0.96	−0.12	0.12	0.89
× Rel. quality				0.18	0.08	1.20*				0.17	0.08	1.31**
× Rel. Duration				0.06	0.16	1.06				0.17	0.16	0.77
× Age				0.33	0.22	1.39				0.04	0.22	1.66
−2 Log likelihood	321.52			313.84			338.09			329.87		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

sexual EDI and partner sexual EDI, $r(537) = .29$, $p = .01$ and a positive correlation between female emotional EDI and partner emotional EDI, $r(537) = .35$, $p = .01$.

With regards to relationship dissolution, 69 (10 %) women reported that their relationship ended at some point between Time 1 and Time 3. Of the 69 reports of break up, 53 (77 %) were participants who reported sexual or emotional EDI in their dating relationship. Among those participants who reported breaking up, 54 and 64 % were females who admitted to engaging in an extradyadic sexual or emotional relationship, respectively. Relationship dissolution also occurred in 20 and 36 % of cases where participants reported that their male partner engaged in sexual or emotional EDI, respectively. Of those in relationships where both partners reportedly engaged in an extradyadic sexual or emotional relationship, 26 (38 % of total reported break ups) stated that their relationship dissolved.

Logistic Regression of Extradyadic Involvement on Relationship Dissolution

Logistic regression was used to test Hypothesis 1. First, we included participants' reports of EDI as a predictor of relationship dissolution. Other covariates and control variables, including age, relationship quality, and relationship duration were also added. In the second step, interactions between relationship quality and EDI on dissolution were examined to test Hypothesis 2.

Table 2 shows the findings for sexual EDI and Table 3 shows the findings for emotional EDI. As shown in Model 1 (see Table 2), females who reported committing sexual EDI were 5.73 times more likely to report relationship dissolution than those who did not report sexual EDI. Control variables, including relationship quality and duration, both had significant effects on the likelihood of relationship dissolution, suggesting

that, among females in general (i.e., not accounting specifically for those who engaged in sexual EDI), relationships that were reported by females as long and happy were less likely to end.

In Model 2, interactions were added to further examine the role of relationship quality on the association between sexual EDI and relationship dissolution. Results indicated a significant interaction effect between relationship quality and female committed sexual EDI on relationship dissolution, $Exp(B) = 1.20$, $p < .05$. Thus, relationship dissolution was 20 % more likely to occur among females who reported engaging in an extradyadic sexual relationship and who reported higher relationship quality as compared to those who engaged in extradyadic relationships and reported lower relationship quality.

Models 3 and 4 shows the results for female reported partner sexual EDI. The findings were similar to the findings for females in Models 1 and 2. In sum, reported partner sexual EDI was 4.81 times more likely to predict break up, and such break up was more likely among participants who reported having more satisfactory relationships.

Similar patterns were found with emotional EDI, for both females and partners (see Table 3). As shown in Model 1, females who reported committing emotional EDI were 4.19 times more likely to report relationship dissolution than those individuals who did not report emotional EDI. Control variables, including relationship quality and duration, both had significant effects on the likelihood of relationship dissolution, suggesting that, among females in general (i.e., not accounting for emotional EDI), relationships that were reported by females as long and happy were less likely to end in relationship dissolution.

As shown in Model 2, relationship quality did not moderate the link between emotional EDI and relationship dissolution, $Exp(B) = 1.14$. Models 3 and 4 illustrate the results for reported

Table 3 Summary of logistic regression analysis for emotional EDI predicting relationship dissolution in college students, controlling for background variables

Predictor	Females						Male partner					
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Emotional EDI	1.43	0.31	4.19***	-3.92	4.17	.02	0.91	0.33	2.50**	-0.21	4.22	0.81
Rel. quality	-0.16	0.04	.85***	-0.24	0.06	.79***	-0.19	0.04	.83***	-0.26	0.50	0.78***
Rel. duration	-0.17	0.08	.84*	-0.21	0.12	0.81	-0.21	0.08	.81**	-0.26	0.96	0.77**
Age	-0.02	0.10	0.98	-0.19	0.18	0.83	-0.07	0.11	0.94	-0.07	0.13	0.94
× Rel. quality				0.13	0.08	1.14				0.17	0.08	1.19*
× Rel. duration				0.07	0.16	1.07				0.17	0.16	.19
× Age				0.27	0.22	1.31				0.04	0.22	1.04
-2 Log likelihood	330.27			326			345.01			338.78		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

partner emotional EDI. Findings for partners were similar to the findings for females in Model 1. However, there was an interaction between relationship quality and reported partner emotional EDI $Exp(B) = 1.19$, $p < .05$. Hence, relationship dissolution was 19% more likely to occur among those who reported partner emotional EDI and higher relationship quality.

Discussion

Results of our analyses indicated that sexual and emotional EDI significantly increased the likelihood of women breaking up with their dating partner within 14 weeks. Consistent with our first hypothesis, females who engaged in emotional and sexual EDI or who were aware of their partner doing so were more likely to experience relationship dissolution, even after controlling for age, relationship quality, and relationship duration. In accordance with our second hypothesis, findings also indicated an interaction between relationship quality and female sexual EDI on dissolution, as well as an interaction between relationship dissolution and perceived partner emotional EDI on relationship dissolution. In both cases, relationship quality moderated the association between EDI and dissolution. Compared to those who reported lower relationship quality, participants who experienced higher relationship quality were more likely to experience a break up when EDI occurred.

Findings supporting our first hypothesis were consistent with prior research on the link between EDI and relationship dissolution (e.g., Hall & Fincham, 2006a) and illustrate the important role that emotional and sexual EDI play on relationship stability. It is also essential that we highlight this link given the ubiquitous nature of EDI among young adults and the interpersonal distress associated with relationship dissolution (e.g., Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003).

Support for our second hypothesis suggests that even though individuals in low quality relationships were more likely to

break up in general, those in high quality relationships have considerably more to lose in their relationship. It may appear surprising, then, that EDI in high quality relationships was more likely to lead to relationship dissolution than EDI in low quality relationships. The disparity between this particular finding and those of other studies that indicate a positive link between relationship quality and forgiveness of partner transgressions (e.g., Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004) serves to highlight how particularly hurtful and deleterious sexual and emotional EDI may be for individuals in higher quality relationships. It is well documented that more hurtful offences are much harder to forgive (e.g., Fincham, Jackson, & Beach, 2005).

Our findings may also be explained by examining the link between relationship expectations and relationship outcomes. Researchers suggest that relationship expectations contribute to individuals' experience of negative emotional reactivity and disillusionment within relationships (Sabatelli, 1988). Individuals who, despite being in a poor quality relationship, stay in their relationship may grow to have lower expectations of their partner. They may experience more emotional distress, arguments, and even withdrawal-reactions, eventually leaving them feeling desensitized. Although discovering EDI may exacerbate these reactions, it may be perceived as more of the same and not be enough to elicit a change in relationship status.

On the other hand, individuals in higher quality relationships may expect more from their partners. As suggested by the investment model, individuals tend to stay invested in a relationship until they no longer find it beneficial. The factors (e.g., trust, communication, and social support) that influence individuals' ability to maintain high quality relationships may dissipate after EDI is discovered, thus prompting them to end the relationship (e.g., Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998; Rochlen, McKelley, Suizzo, &

Scaringi, 2008). In other words, in the context of a high quality relationship, sexual or emotional EDI may give rise to particularly strong feelings of anger, insecurity (Shackelford et al., 2002), jealousy (e.g., Buss et al., 1999), and mistrust (e.g., Duba, Kindsvatter, & Lara, 2008). Consequently, jealousy (“the injured lover’s hell”) (Milton, 1928) can lead to greater relational conflict and uncertainty (e.g., Puente & Cohen, 2003; Theiss & Solomon, 2008). Also, when trust is broken, individuals may adopt new feelings of anxiety and resentment, leaving them unsettled and dissatisfied.

To remove or reduce unfamiliar negative feelings, they may eliminate the presence of whatever initially triggered their emotional distress; hence dissolving their relationship. Said differently, for those individuals who report having high quality relationships, the feelings and reactions that emotional or sexual EDI elicit (e.g., disappointment, anger, arguing) may create enough of a change in homeostasis to evoke a break up. Indeed, the more satisfactory the relationship, the more disillusionment may occur by the betrayal reflected in an extradyadic emotional or sexual relationship. This, in combination with findings that suggest that disillusionment precedes relationship dissolution (e.g., Huston et al., 2001) provides support for our findings. Nonetheless, the partner involved in the extradyadic behavior may be under the erroneous impression that their otherwise high quality relationship will encourage the faithful partner to give them a *courtesy* pass for their EDI. Again, our findings suggest the opposite. Individuals in high quality relationships may be at less risk of EDI (e.g., McAlister et al., 2005; Oikle, 2003), but in greater jeopardy of their exclusive relationship dissolving when EDI actually occurs.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was not without its limitations. Traditional problems with self-report and overreliance on convenience samples (i.e., using college students) may limit the generalize ability of these findings. Moreover, gender in this study was not examined because of the use of only female participants. Therefore, it is not clear whether the results will hold for males. Although findings from this study provide important information, qualitative studies and more sophisticated methodologies (i.e., dyadic data analysis, mediation models) are needed in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the link between EDI and relationship dissolution, especially among those in higher quality relationships. Also, relationship quality is a broad ranging concept, affected by a plethora of simple and complex environmental, psychological, and relational factors. Insight into the multifaceted nature of relationship quality, recent advances in technology, and improved variation in research methods call for research to replicate this study using two-dimensional measures of relationship quality that capture both positive and negative subjective perspectives of relationship quality (e.g., Fincham &

Linfield, 1997; Mattson, Rogge, Johnson, Davidson, & Fincham, 2012).

Direction of effects cannot be inferred with confidence from these data. There is a potential bi-directional association between EDI and relationship dissolution. That is, EDI may lead to dissolution, but anticipated or impending dissolution may also increase the probability of EDI. Thus, the extent to which EDI is the reason for relationship dissolution or “symptomatic of existing individual or relationship vulnerabilities” (Hall & Fincham, 2006a, p. 156) needs to be further examined. Despite research that identifies commitment as a precursor to EDI (Drigotas et al., 1999; Le, Korn, Crockett, & Loving, 2011), measures of relationship commitment and investment were not included in this study. Future studies should examine whether or not commitment mediates the relationship between EDI and relationship dissolution. Also, replicating this research using other groups (i.e., community samples, men, gay and lesbian individuals, divorced couples) would further strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

In spite of the many negative outcomes associated with extradyadic relationships some primary partners grow closer after working through the EDI (Olson, Russell, Kessler, & Miller, 2002). Additionally, the adverse link between EDI and relationship dissolution detected in this study may not apply to couples that have *open agreements* (couple agrees to sex outside the relationship without the presence of a partner) or *monogomish agreements* (i.e., couple agrees to have sex outside the relationship only while the partner is present). Some researchers suggest that there is lacking evidence to suggest that monogamous agreements between heterosexual couples are more beneficial to their primarily relationship than open agreements (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013). Research on the topic of same sex couples however indicates no significant differences in relationship satisfaction between couples with open versus monogamous agreements (Bricker & Horne, 2007; Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, & Grov, 2012). The aforementioned studies and our American culture’s embedded and biased assumptions about monogamy, underscored to some extent throughout this article, are sufficient to warrant some caution when interpreting this studies findings. Accordingly, in future studies researchers are encouraged to assess how expectations about monogamy (i.e., sexual agreement between couples) influence the association between sexual EDI and relationship stability.

Conclusion

Findings from this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of EDI and illustrate its powerful and deleterious influence on relationship dissolution among women in romantic relationships, especially those who report being in good relationships. It also suggests that relationships dissolve more as a function of EDI than underlying preexisting

maladaptive relational processes within young adult relationships, particularly in the context of sexual EDI. These findings, together with the aforementioned rate of EDI among young adults (Kessel et al., 2007), and the large number of people in the United States choosing to exercise long-term relational commitments outside the realm of marriage (e.g., Cherlin, 2005), presents a need for research to devote greater attention on contextual factors that influence young adults in non-marital relationships to dissolve relationships following EDI.

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