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# Are You Going to Delete Me? Latent Profiles of Post-Relationship Breakup Social Media Use and Emotional Distress

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## Abstract

When a relationship ends, former partners must make decisions about their online, often public, connections and history, which involve a complex disentangling process. We examined post-breakup behaviors including monitoring, interacting, deleting posts/photos, deleting the former partner, deleting the partner's family/friends, stopping social media (SM) use, and keeping digital possessions. Participants ( $N=256$ ) who had experienced a breakup within the last year completed an online survey. Approximately 38 percent reported experiencing distress over the breakup sometimes or more often. Utilizing latent profile analysis, we identified four latent classes (or profiles) of breakup SM behaviors; we also examined associations between the class and breakup emotional distress. Most participants were *clean breakers* (61.3 percent), who did zero to very little monitoring, interacting, or deleting and were unlikely to delete their ex-partner, stop use, or keep digital possessions. *Wistful reminiscers* (12.9 percent) were similar to clean breakers in terms of engaging in very little of any deleting behaviors, stopping use, or keeping digital possessions; however, they engaged in frequent amounts of monitoring their ex-partner as well as interacting with their ex-partner and their ex-partner's family/friends. *Ritual cleansers* (15.6 percent) were similar to clean breakers in terms of engaging in very little to no monitoring and interacting; however, they engaged in deleting their SM history, their ex-partner's family/friends, and their ex-partner. *Impulsives* (10.2 percent) engaged in high amounts of all the SM behaviors. In terms of emotional distress, *impulsives* showed the highest levels of distress, followed by *wistful reminiscers*, *ritual cleansers*, and then *clean breakers*.

**Keywords:** social media, breakup, romantic relationships, online surveillance, dating

## Introduction

SOCIAL MEDIA (SM) AND SMARTPHONES not only provide constant contact<sup>1</sup> but also add complexity to relationships<sup>2</sup> by enmeshing the online lives of partners.<sup>3</sup> When a relationship ends, former partners make decisions about their online, often public, connections and history, which involve a complex disentangling process.<sup>3</sup> However, disconnection

activity varies across individuals, and the intensity and frequency of post-relationship contact and tracing (PRCT)<sup>4</sup> relate to numerous factors, including breakup distress, jealousy, uncertainty, and desire to reunite.<sup>1,3,5-7</sup> This study extends prior research by characterizing groups of individuals based on PRCT behaviors using latent profile analysis (LPA) and examining differences in post-relationship adjustment.

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*SM use, relationships, and breakup recovery*

Everyday use of SM entangles couples through photos, posts, comments, “friending” mutual contacts, relationship status updates, and displays of affection.<sup>3,8</sup> When relationships end, partners may address their online histories via deleting ex-partner remnants (posts, photos), abandoning/taking no action, blocking/removing a partner, stopping SM use, and/or keeping digital possessions.<sup>3,9</sup> Furthermore, what they do may impact their post-breakup distress.

Post-breakup, individuals decide whether to keep or delete shared content, possibly triggering distressing memories.<sup>10</sup> Partners may retain digital artifacts/possessions to reflect on the relationship, reminisce, or as evidence against the partner (e.g., intimate images).<sup>3,9,11</sup> To gain closure, some delete SM content by untagging themselves or deleting posts or photos.<sup>3,9</sup> Others remove all content post-breakup, often immediately, which may help them adjust.<sup>11</sup> Still others abandon digital possessions rather than saving/deleting, perhaps because deleting is effortful and would not change the past.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals also decide whether to keep digital connections to their ex-partner and their ex-partner’s family/friends. Keeping connections invites post-breakup tracking and social comparison,<sup>12,13</sup> which can portend distress, negative sentiment toward the ex-partner, unrequited desire,<sup>14,15</sup> and worsened mental health.<sup>16</sup> Considering these findings, “unfriending” an ex-partner is often recommended.<sup>15</sup> Individuals who reported no Facebook-related behaviors (e.g., communication, online surveillance, accessing ex-partner’s profile) during or after breakups reported higher levels of post-breakup adjustment when compared with those who were engaged in these behaviors.<sup>17</sup> However, Smith and Duggan<sup>18</sup> found that only 23 percent of SM users deleted a partner post-breakup. Ex-lovers thus struggle between personal adjustment and desire to track the ex-partner.<sup>19</sup>

*Current study*

We examined post-breakup behaviors associated with mental health and post-breakup adjustment: monitoring, interacting, deleting posts/photos, deleting the partner, deleting the partner’s family/friends, stopping SM use, and keeping digital possessions. Unlike previous research, we examined the behaviors simultaneously in an LPA to identify patterns (or profiles) of use. Although individuals may group into various profiles of behavior (e.g., deleting the relationship history, abandoning the history<sup>3,9</sup>), no known studies have examined how these different *profiles of behavior* are related to post-breakup distress.

A profile model affords theoretical and practical efficiencies. Theories of social cognition, for example, suggest that people evaluate others in largely categorical ways<sup>20</sup> (e.g., “My now-ex really was a jerk.”). This comports with Meehl’s<sup>21</sup> concept of environmental molds—beliefs, assumptions, and biases that organize categorically in people’s minds and impact how they relate to others. Profile patterns are tantamount to the environmental molds associated with PRCT. Practically, an omnibus label for the collection of post-breakup behaviors and distress facilitates reflection and/or diagnosis; dysfunctional patterns can be triaged and functional patterns can be encouraged.<sup>22</sup> As prior research had already identified individuals who directly engaged with

the relationship history and others who abandoned it, we hypothesized:

**H1: At least two profiles of individuals would emerge (i.e., those who continued to engage and those who stopped).**

Additionally, as previous research has shown that interaction with a past partner’s profile (e.g., monitoring) is related to delayed grieving<sup>9,11</sup> and greater distress,<sup>14,15</sup> we expected that:

**H2: Profiles of individuals who engaged in more frequent monitoring or interacting with their past partner’s SM would exhibit greater post-breakup distress.**

**Methods***Participants and procedure*

U.S. participants ( $N=256$ , 53 percent male, 83 percent heterosexual, 72 percent Caucasian,  $M_{\text{age}}=29.42$  years, range 18–40 years,  $SD=5.11$ ) who experienced a breakup within the last year and used SM completed an online survey. The study was IRB-approved. Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk and were paid \$0.50US. The median income was \$40,000 ( $SD=\$36,204$ ), and 20 percent currently attended college. Most (66 percent) were exclusively dating, 8 percent nonexclusive, 11 percent engaged, 14 percent married, and 1 percent other; 41 percent felt their partner cheated; 47 percent lived together; the median relationship length was 2 years ( $SD=2.79$ ), and they averaged about 6 months since breakup ( $SD=3.19$ ). About 25 percent were in new relationships. To ensure data quality, we removed 186 participants who failed attention checks, typed nonsense in open responses, or did not provide us a valid code generated upon survey completion, leaving an analytic sample of 256.

*Measures related to SM behaviors post-relationship breakup*

**Monitoring and interacting.** Participants responded to 17 items regarding their SM behavior since breakup on an 8-point scale (0 = *Never*, 7 = *More than once a day*). Items tapped both passive (e.g., looking) and active (e.g., commenting) behaviors.<sup>9,15,23,24</sup> We also examined active behaviors with ex-partner’s family/friends. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (varimax rotation) revealed three factors accounting for 86.80 percent of the variance. Items and rotated loadings are shown in Table 1. (a) *Monitoring ex-partner* (5 items;  $\alpha=0.96$ ): looking at an ex-partner’s posts, photos, and so on. (b) *Interacting with ex-partner* (6 items;  $\alpha=0.97$ ): liking, commenting, sending messages, and so on. (c) *Interacting with ex-partner’s friends and family* (6 items;  $\alpha=0.97$ ): same 6 items but referred to ex-partner’s friends/family. Items within each scale were averaged.

**Deleting ex-partner.** Participants responded *yes* (1) or *no* (0) to “Post relationship breakup, did you ever delete or block your ex-partner on social media?”

**Deleting SM history.** Participants first responded *yes* or *no* to “Post relationship breakup, did you delete/remove any posts, photos, and/or chats involving your ex-partner from

TABLE 1. ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS FOR POST-BREAKUP SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING AND INTERACTING BEHAVIOR

Item	Factor 1 Monitoring ex-partner	Factor 2 Interacting with ex-partner	Factor 3 Interacting with ex-partner's friends and family
Instructions: Post-relationship breakup, how often have you looked at the following items on your ex-partner's social media?			
1 Posts	<b>0.86</b>	0.23	0.26
2 Photos	<b>0.86</b>	0.26	0.25
3 Friends list	<b>0.81</b>	0.39	0.25
4 Relationship status	<b>0.82</b>	0.34	0.27
5 Events they attended	<b>0.78</b>	0.38	0.28
Instructions: Post-relationship breakup, how often did you do the following with your ex-partner on social media?			
6 "Liked" their posts	0.35	<b>0.70</b>	0.47
7 Commented on their posts	0.36	<b>0.76</b>	0.45
8 Commented on their photos	0.39	<b>0.77</b>	0.42
9 Posted on their timeline or profile	0.41	<b>0.74</b>	0.43
10 Sent them a direct message	0.47	<b>0.69</b>	0.34
11 Tagged them in photos	0.42	<b>0.72</b>	0.42
Instructions: Post-relationship breakup, how often did you do the following with friends/family members of your ex-partner on social media?			
12 "Liked" their posts	0.20	0.29	<b>0.85</b>
13 Commented on their posts	0.27	0.29	<b>0.86</b>
14 Commented on their photos	0.25	0.31	<b>0.86</b>
15 Posted on their timeline or profile	0.31	0.38	<b>0.79</b>
16 Sent them a direct message	0.27	0.30	<b>0.83</b>
17 Tagged them in photos	0.28	0.37	<b>0.81</b>

Bold values indicate those items which were included in that specific factor when creating variables.

social media?" *Yes* responses were shown "How many posts, photos, and/or chats did you delete/remove?" and they responded to three items: (a) posts, (b) photos, and (c) chats/online messages using a 5-point scale (0 = *None of them*, 4 = *All of them*). For participants who responded *no*, zeros were recorded across all items. We averaged items to produce an overall deleting amount ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

**Deleting ex-partner's family and friends.** Participants first responded *yes* or *no* to "Post relationship breakup, did you delete/remove any of your ex-partner's friends/family members on social media?" *Yes* responses answered "How many friends/family members did you delete/remove?" and responded to two items: (a) friends and (b) family members, using a 5-point scale (0 = *None of them*, 4 = *All of them*). For participants who responded *no*, zeros were recorded on these items. We then averaged items to produce an overall amount of deleting family/friends ( $r = 0.89$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

**Keeping of digital possessions.** Based on Herron et al.,<sup>3</sup> we asked a single item, "Post relationship breakup, did you privately keep, save, or screenshot any digital possessions such as photos, messages, etc.?" Participants responded with (1) *yes* or (0) *no*.

**Stop SM use.** We asked "Post relationship breakup, did you completely stop using social media for a while?" Participants responded with (1) *yes* or (0) *no*.

#### Measure of emotional distress over the breakup

We utilized the Breakup Distress Scale,<sup>25</sup> which contains 16 items regarding current distress over their breakup (e.g.,

"I feel like crying when I think about the person") on a 5-point scale (1 = *Never*, 5 = *Almost all the time*). Items were averaged ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ).

#### Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, the above EFA, and correlations were conducted in SPSS 26. The search for profiles of SM behaviors utilized LPA<sup>26</sup> in Mplus 8.5. We entered all eight SM behaviors into the model (e.g., monitoring, interacting). LPA explores models with an increasing number of classes, starting with the one-class model, moving to two, and so on. Researchers determine the appropriate number of classes based on the fit statistics and substantive interpretation.<sup>27,28</sup>

After selecting our final model, we employed a manual BCH three-step procedure<sup>29,30</sup> to compare participants' levels on each of the following relationship and breakup characteristics: whether they (a) felt their partner cheated, (b) lived with their past partner, (c) are in a new relationship, (d) were engaged/married to their past partner, and (e) months since breakup, (f) length of prior relationship, and (g) who initiated the breakup. The BCH three-step procedure estimates a measurement model for latent profiles, saves the imprecision of the classification estimates, and then uses a weighted multiple group analysis to make between-class comparisons. In this procedure, we evaluated omnibus Wald statistics for model fit differences when means were held constant across all profiles and pairwise Wald statistics for model fit differences when two profile means were constrained to be equal. Given between-class differences in relationship and breakup characteristics, we included these as controls and compared levels of emotional distress for each of the profiles.<sup>31</sup>

## Results

Descriptives and correlations are shown in Table 2. Approximately 38 percent experienced distress over the breakup sometimes or more often. At least once every few weeks or more often on SM, about 30 percent monitored ex-partner, 22 percent interacted with ex-partner, and 28 percent interacted with ex-partner's family/friends; 58 percent deleted at least some shared SM history (e.g., photos); 32 percent deleted at least some of ex-partner's family/friends; 51 percent deleted ex-partner; 34 percent stopped using SM for a while; and 39 percent kept digital possessions. Emotional distress was significantly correlated with all the SM behaviors ( $r=0.22-0.56$ ,  $p$ 's  $<0.001$ ), although associations appeared larger for monitoring/interacting with the ex-partner ( $r=0.55-0.56$ ,  $p$ 's  $<0.001$ ).

Inspecting fit index trends and overall substantive interpretation,<sup>27,28</sup> we identified four latent profiles of breakup SM behaviors. Entropy (0.98) indicated that profiles were well differentiated. Table 3 shows the model fit for models with various numbers of classes.

We labeled the profiles: clean breakers, wistful reminiscers, ritual cleansers, and impulsives (Fig. 1). The estimated values of the SM variables by class and between-class comparisons are shown in Table 4. Most participants were *clean breakers* (61.3 percent), who did zero to very little monitoring, interacting, or deleting and were very unlikely to have deleted their ex-partner, stopped use, or kept any digital possessions. Clean breakers were 0.31 to 0.58 *SDs* below average on these variables ( $z$ -scores range).

*Wistful reminiscers* (12.9 percent) were similar to clean breakers on engaging in very little deleting behaviors, stopping use, or keeping digital possessions; however, they frequently monitored (about once a week on average) ex-partner and interacted with ex-partner and ex-partner's family/friends. They were 1.59 to 1.93 *SDs* higher than clean breakers on monitoring and interacting.

*Ritual cleansers* (15.6 percent) were similar to clean breakers with little to no monitoring and interacting; however, they deleted their SM history (1.14 *SDs* greater than clean breakers), their ex-partner's family/friends (2.29 *SDs* greater than clean breakers), and their ex-partner (0.58 greater probability than clean breakers). Their average fell in between deleting "most" and "all" SM history (posts, photos, chats) and family/friends, and the model estimated a very high probability (0.93) for deleting their ex-partner.

*Impulsives* (10.2 percent) engaged in high amounts of all SM behaviors. On average, they monitored and interacted with their ex-partner "once every few days," interacted with their ex-partner's family/friends around "once a week" to "once every few days," deleted most of their SM history (posts, photos, chats) and their ex-partner's family/friends, were very likely at some point to have deleted their ex-partner (probability=0.96), stopped all SM use (probability=0.69), and kept digital possessions (probability=0.81). Impulsives were 0.71 to 1.88 *SDs* above average on monitoring ex-partner, interacting with ex-partner, interacting with ex-partner's family/friends, deleting history, and deleting ex-partner's family/friends. Impulsives' SM behavior scores were 1.02 to 2.38 *SDs* greater than clean breakers.

As noted above, we also explored differences across the classes in their relationship and breakup characteristics. The estimated values of these variables by class and between-

class comparisons are reported in Table 4. No differences emerged for months since breakup or length of prior relationship. Overall, *clean breakers* were less likely than all other classes to have felt like their partner cheated and less likely to have lived with their partner, to have been engaged/married, and to be in a new relationship compared with *impulsives*. Moreover, *impulsives* were more likely than all other classes to be in a new relationship and less likely to have been the one to initiate the breakup. *Wistful reminiscers* were more likely to have been engaged/married and to feel their partner cheated compared with *clean breakers*.

After controlling for these factors on emotional distress, *impulsives* showed the highest levels of distress (estimated  $M=3.06$ ;  $z=0.83$ ), followed by *wistful reminiscers* ( $M=2.60$ ,  $z=0.38$ ), *ritual cleansers* ( $M=1.89$ ,  $z=-0.31$ ), and *clean breakers* ( $M=1.72$ ,  $z=-0.48$ ). Unstandardized effects for the control variables on distress are also shown in Table 4 (see unstandardized effects column). Omnibus distress levels differed by class (Wald=83.28,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). All distress levels were significantly different, except clean breakers and ritual cleansers experienced similar levels of low distress. In other words, impulsives showed 0.45 to 1.31 *SDs* greater distress than other groups, whereas clean breakers and ritual cleansers showed the lowest distress. Wistful reminiscers showed 0.45 *SDs* less distress than impulsives, but 0.69 to 0.86 *SDs* greater distress than clean breakers or ritual cleansers.

## Discussion

We extend the literature on PRCT using LPA to uncover profiles of post-breakup SM behaviors, which we mapped onto post-relationship adjustment. Results yielded four patterns of SM behavior: *clean breakers*, *wistful reminiscers*, *ritual cleansers*, and *impulsives*. Even after controlling for characteristics that might contribute to post-breakup distress (whether partner cheated, who initiated the breakup, etc.), there were still significant differences by class in emotional distress, suggesting the classes are meaningful.

Each profile invites interesting description and warrants future study. For example, profiles might be arrayed on a two-dimensional grid with the first dimension representing the *level of activity toward prior relationship*. Broadly, this reflects the extent to which individuals act toward maintaining or prohibiting/ceasing contact with past partners. Borrowing concepts related to uncertainty reduction,<sup>32</sup> activities may be interactive—communicating with ex-partner; active—talking to ex-partner's friends; or passive—surveilling ex-partner's SM. These constitute activity that focuses on the prior relationship. The second dimension represents a *relative orientation to the past or future*: the extent to which the individual dwells psychologically on their own past, present, or future.<sup>33</sup>

To illustrate this potential model, the *clean breakers* walked away without dwelling on the past (more future-oriented), with little evidence that they wished to remain connected. Clean breakers were also least likely to have been engaged/married and least likely to have experienced cheating, which might make moving on easier. We expect *clean breakers* might be secure in their attachment.

*Wistful reminiscers* may feel melancholy (moderate distress) and cling to the past (did not delete memories), while

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVES AND CORRELATIONS FOR MAIN STUDY VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	<i>Emotional distress</i>	<i>Monitoring ex-partner</i>	<i>Interacting with ex-partner</i>	<i>Interacting with ex-partner's family/friends</i>	<i>Deleting social media history</i>	<i>Deleting ex-partner's family/friends</i>	<i>Deleting ex-partner</i>	<i>Stop social media use</i>	<i>Keeping of digital possessions</i>
1 Emotional distress	1	0.55***	0.56***	0.49***	0.24***	0.22***	0.27***	0.30***	0.29***
2 Monitoring ex-partner		1	0.78***	0.62***	0.09	0.21**	-0.03	0.10	0.20**
3 Interacting with ex-partner			1	0.79***	0.14*	0.21**	0.01	0.08	0.20**
4 Interacting with ex-partner's family/friends				1	0.10	0.11	0.07	0.07	0.15*
5 Deleting social media history					1	0.48***	0.56***	0.14*	-0.02
6 Deleting ex-partner's family/friends						1	0.54***	0.22**	0.15*
7 Deleting ex-partner							1	0.21**	0.19**
8 Stop social media use								1	0.16*
9 Keeping of digital possessions									1
<i>Mean</i>	2.21	1.86	1.25	1.50	1.78	0.88	0.51	0.34	0.39
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	1.02	2.01	1.92	1.92	1.69	1.42	0.50	0.47	0.49

Variables 1 through 5 are continuous variables. Variables 7 through 9 are dichotomous variables coded as 1=yes, 0=no. Correlations between continuous variables are Pearson's coefficients, between continuous and dichotomous variables are Point Biserial coefficients, and between dichotomous variables are Phi coefficients.  
 \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

TABLE 3. LATENT CLASS FIT STATISTICS

No. of classes	Log-likelihood	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Entropy	LMR p value	LRT p value
1 Class	-3038.46	6102.91	6149.00	6107.78	—	—	—
2 Classes	-2728.67	5501.33	5579.32	5509.58	0.975	0.000	0.000
3 Classes	-2614.78	5291.56	5401.46	5303.18	0.963	0.039	0.000
4 Classes	-2472.21	5024.41	5166.22	5039.41	0.983	0.014	0.000
5 Classes	-2407.17	4912.33	5086.05	4930.70	0.975	0.046	0.000
6 Classes	-2345.94	4807.88	5013.50	4829.62	0.978	0.485	0.000

Lower Information Criteria scores indicate better fit. Higher entropy values indicate better classification in the model. Based on the substantive interpretability, the bend in the trend of the log-likelihood, AIC, BIC, and SABIC, and the higher entropy value,<sup>28</sup> a four class solution was selected.

AIC, Akaike Information Criterion; BIC, Bayesian Information Criterion; LMR, Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test; LRT, log-likelihood ratio test bootstrapped; SABIC, sample size-adjusted BIC.

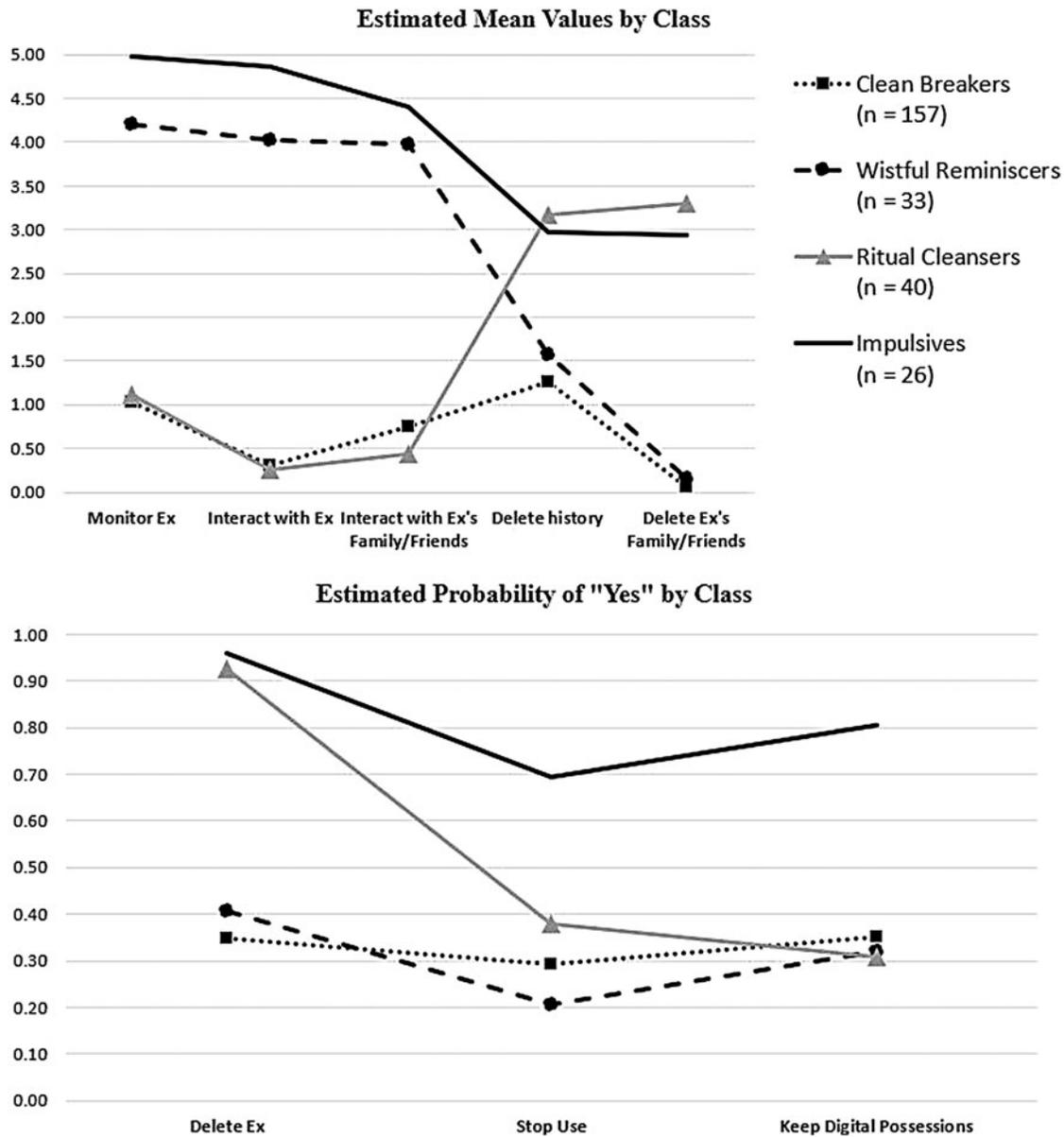


FIG. 1. Estimated means and probabilities by class membership. Monitor Ex, Interact with Ex, Interact with Ex's Family/Friends scales range from 0 to 7. Delete History and Delete Ex's Family/Friends scales range from 0 to 4. Delete Ex, Stop Use, and Keep Digital Possessions are reported in probability of Yes scale units (0–1).

TABLE 4. POST-BREAKUP SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIORS, DISTRESS, AND BREAKUP CHARACTERISTICS BY CLASS

Variable	Clean breakers (a)	Wistful reminiscers (b)	Ritual cleansers (c)	Impulsives (d)	Omnibus Wald test for differences by class	Unstandardized effects of control variables on distress
Breakup social media behaviors as indicators of the classes						
Monitor ex-partner	1.03 <sup>b,d</sup>	4.21 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	1.12 <sup>b,d</sup>	4.97 <sup>a,b,c</sup>	358.19***	—
Interact with ex-partner	0.31 <sup>b,d</sup>	4.02 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	0.25 <sup>b,d</sup>	4.86 <sup>a,b,c</sup>	621.99***	—
Interact with ex's family/friends	0.76 <sup>b,d</sup>	3.97 <sup>a,c</sup>	0.45 <sup>b,d</sup>	4.40 <sup>a,c</sup>	279.48***	—
Delete history	1.26 <sup>c,d</sup>	1.57 <sup>c,d</sup>	3.17 <sup>a,b</sup>	2.98 <sup>a,b</sup>	131.96***	—
Delete ex's family/friends	0.06 <sup>c,d</sup>	0.15 <sup>c,d</sup>	3.30 <sup>a,b,d</sup>	2.93 <sup>a,b,c</sup>	1406.42***	—
Delete ex	34.7% <sup>c,d</sup>	40.6% <sup>c,d</sup>	92.6% <sup>a,b</sup>	96.0% <sup>a,b</sup>	38.07***	—
Stop use	29.3% <sup>d</sup>	20.5% <sup>d</sup>	38.0% <sup>d</sup>	69.3% <sup>a,b,c</sup>	16.69***	—
Keep digital possessions	35.0% <sup>d</sup>	32.1% <sup>d</sup>	30.8% <sup>d</sup>	80.6% <sup>a,b,c</sup>	16.87***	—
Differences by class in distress						
Emotional distress	1.72 <sup>b,d</sup>	2.60 <sup>a,c,d</sup>	1.89 <sup>b,d</sup>	3.06 <sup>a,b,c</sup>	83.28***	—
Differences by class in relationship and breakup characteristics						
Partner cheated	32.5% <sup>b,c,d</sup>	50.4% <sup>a</sup>	49.5% <sup>a</sup>	70.6% <sup>a</sup>	15.54**	0.49***
Lived with past partner	41.9% <sup>d</sup>	37.0% <sup>d</sup>	55.5% <sup>d</sup>	76.8% <sup>a,b</sup>	12.22**	0.05
In a new relationship	20.2% <sup>d</sup>	19.2% <sup>d</sup>	24.8% <sup>d</sup>	64.2% <sup>a,b,c</sup>	19.23***	-0.35***
Engaged/married to past partner	17.9% <sup>b,d</sup>	41.6% <sup>a</sup>	23.1% <sup>d</sup>	52.9% <sup>a,c</sup>	18.58***	0.32*
Months since breakup	7.05	6.79	6.62	7.49	1.67	-0.01
Length of prior relationship	3.11	3.22	3.12	2.86	0.43	0.01
Who initiated breakup	2.64 <sup>d</sup>	2.60 <sup>d</sup>	2.49 <sup>d</sup>	3.41 <sup>a,b,c</sup>	12.26**	0.11**

Significant differences at  $p < 0.05$  between classes on a variable are marked with superscripts. Differences between classes were not examined if the overall Wald test was not significant. Variables are coded as follows: Monitor Ex, Interact with Ex, Interact with Ex's Family/Friends scales range from 0 to 7. Delete History and Delete Ex's Family/Friends scales range from 0 to 4. Delete Ex, Stop Use, and Keep Digital Possessions are reported in probability of Yes scale units (0–1). Partner cheated, Lived with past partner, In a new relationship, and Engaged/married to past partner reported in probability of Yes scale units (0–1). Months since breakup (No. of months), Length of prior relationship (No. of years), Who initiated breakup (1=I did, 2=Mostly me, 3=We both did, 4=Mostly my partner, 5=My partner did). \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

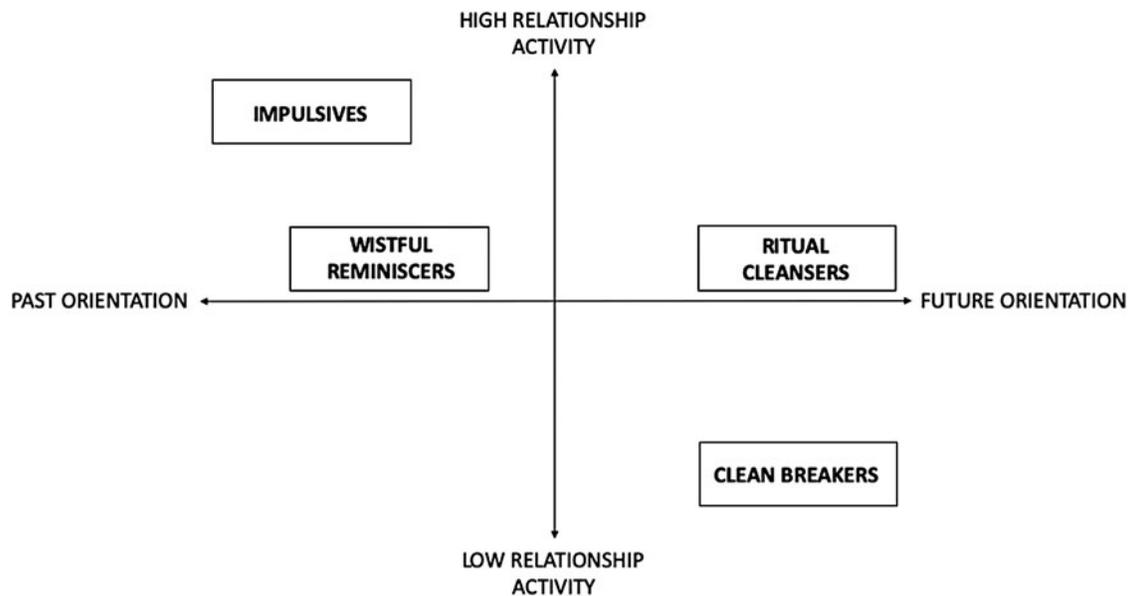


FIG. 2. Hypothetical profiles of post-relationship breakup as a function of relationship activity on social media and time focus.

staying connected to their ex-partner. They thus displayed moderate relational activity after breakup. Interestingly, this group was more likely to have been engaged/married than clean breakers, which may make disentanglement more challenging. Clinging behaviors and feelings of enmeshment suggest that wistful reminiscers would feel more insecure following the relationship.

*Ritual cleansers* may or may not be secure. Ritual cleansers not only moved on after the relationship but also preferred intentional closure, ritually dismantling, and deleting the digital history. They were moderately relationally active as they decoupled. If decoupling behavior reflects avoidant tendencies to prevent contact and/or reminders, this profile may reflect insecurity. Alternatively, their intentionality may reflect a secure way to mark a turning point. Their level of security deserves future study.

Finally, *impulsives* appear the most insecure. We suspect that this post-relationship profile would overlap some with the manic love attitude,<sup>34,35</sup> correlating positively with anxiety. That impulsives evidenced all behaviors (interacting, deleting, keeping digital possessions, monitoring, etc.) suggests that they may act on whims. We observed high levels of relationship activity, and impulsives appear somewhat obsessed with the past. Impulsives were more likely to claim their ex-partner cheated, to have lived with their now-ex, and to have begun a new relationship. These may reflect an anxious lover whose desperation for acceptance and affection combined with low self-worth creates a cycle of entering relationships quickly, getting hurt, starting a new relationship, and so on.

Additional theoretical connections are possible. For example, in the hyperperception model,<sup>36</sup> observing relationship dyads through SM sites invites exaggerated positive perceptions—called hyperperceptions. For example, one may monitor an ex-partner and the ex's interactions with attractive others. Hyperperceptions may exaggerate judgments that the ex is flirting with another, which invites surveillance/rumination, leading to negative emotions such as jealousy.<sup>37</sup> That we observed *impulsives* engaging in frequent monitoring, combined with higher distress, suggests that impulsives may be susceptible to a hyperperceptual feedback loop; this possibility deserves research. To accelerate follow-up studies, we provide Figure 2 as a proposed model of how the four profiles may map onto these dimensions, and we look forward to testing this.

Examining profiles of SM behavior offers organization for researchers and practitioners. For example, although attachment scholarship recognizes a two-dimensional framework (anxiety/avoidance), the notion of attachment “styles” appeals for certain research, particularly clinical applications.<sup>38–40</sup> Additionally, we controlled for covariates that might relate to emotional distress. For example, certain kinds of people do tend to be in the different classes—for example, *clean breakers* were least likely to have experienced their partner cheating; *impulsives* were most likely to report a cheating ex-partner. However, differences in emotional distress by class remained even after controlling for these prior relationship/breakup factors. Thus, how individuals process their relationship history on SM affects distress independent of situational factors.

Limitations first include our reliance on self-reports. Second, our two-dimensional model of the profiles remains speculative, as it emerged after seeing the results. We plan to test this model. Third, we did not explore the potential con-

founding factor of closeness to the ex-partner's friends. It is possible that an ex-partner's friends could have been close friends of the participant, which was the reason for sustained communication. Closeness and motivations for contact deserve future research. Fourth, although we asked whether individuals kept digital possessions, we did not include follow-up questions regarding the extent of this. Finally, compensation was limited by budget constraints, and future work should pay participants closer to a normal wage.

Nonetheless, these novel data can organize scholarship on post-relationship adjustment in the SM age. These profiles may benefit researchers, educators, and practitioners in the fields of health, wellness, and communication. Because digital communication has increased, researchers should continue investigating how people manage their relational lives through digital communication, which also includes after a relationship's end.

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