

What do psychologists have to say about self-sabotage in romantic relationships?

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The term self-sabotage is not well explained in current relationship literature. Self-sabotage is thus far explained mainly as a physical barrier (i.e., derived from the effects of alcohol consumption or high level of stress; Jones & Berglas, 1978; Rhodewalt, 2008) which does not fully encompass intrinsic behaviours. In romantic relationships, the term self-sabotage is better explained as behavioural expressions of individuals' intrapersonal struggles (Post, 1988). As it stands, a major gap in the literature exists regarding the effect of relationship break-ups on the mental health of individuals (Mirsu-Paun & Oliver, 2017). Therefore, the aim of the current study was to explore the theme of self-sabotage in romantic relationships as viewed by psychologists. A series of 15 semi-structured interviews with psychologists specialising in romantic relationships around Australia revealed that relationship difficulties are not always clearly identified in the counselling context and are sometimes first treated as anxiety or depression. Surface and core issues contributing to self-sabotage in romantic relationships were identified. Surface issues relate to reasons why clients present to therapy, while core issues relate to reasons why clients self-sabotage. Future studies will need to be conducted to develop a model to empirically test self-sabotage in romantic relationships.