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# Dealing With Romantic Break-Up and Rejection: Understanding the Nature of Relationships and Romantic Break-Up

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# Dealing With Romantic Break-Up and Rejection



Understanding the Nature of Relationships and Romantic Rejection

Boyan Robak  
(mentored by Dr. Paul Griffin)

# Abstract



- ❧ The following study sought to better understand the psychological variables affecting romantic break-up and romantic rejection. Individuals who reported higher self-esteem, less rejection sensitivity, and lower levels of attachment anxiety reported less adverse effects to break-up. Contrary to predictions, who initiated the break-up did not result in significant differences in adverse symptoms. Moreover, no gender differences were found for response to break-up, nor rejection. Comparing grief symptoms for romantic break-up and those who experienced a loss through death indicates that in a normal population of young adults the former experience plays a more pronounced role in their lives.

# Introduction



- ❧ Romantic relationships are a common part of most people's lives.
- ❧ So, too, are romantic break-ups and, in some cases, romantic rejection.
- ❧ Recently there is an increasing amount of attention being paid to the connections between romantic relationships and a number of psychological variables .
- ❧ We know that the ways people relate to relationships differ across individuals, which yields multiple forms of attachment.
- ❧ We also know that the manner in which people think and react to rejection varies across individuals.
- ❧ Even with recent understandings of the way people engage in romantic relationships, much remains to be understood—especially in the context of break-ups.

# Hypotheses



- ❧ We sought to investigate a number of issues in our study.
- ❧ What psychological variables affect the way individuals process romantic break-ups and rejection?
- ❧ Related to this point we made the following hypotheses:
  - ❧ Individuals measuring high in rejection sensitivity would experience more distress to break-up
  - ❧ Individuals measuring high in attachment anxiety would experience more distress to break up
  - ❧ Individuals measuring high in self-esteem would experience less distress to break-up

# Hypotheses



- ❧ Due to cultural influences and social norms, we also expected gender differences
  - ❧ We hypothesized that females would report greater distress to break-up than males
  - ❧ We hypothesized that males would be more likely to reject their partners than females
- ❧ Finally, given the population we were studying—young adults—we expected total grieving symptoms for break-up to be just as high as that for loss due to death.

# Method

## *Participants*



- ❧ Participants consisted of:
  - ❧ 162 adults (primarily college students) between the ages of 18-28
  - ❧ Approximately 85 women, 77 men
- ❧ All participants were required to have been in a romantic relationship of no less than 3 months that subsequently ended.
- ❧ Participants completed an anonymous questionnaire containing a number of measures (see below)
- ❧ Participants provided demographic information as well information pertaining to the quality and length of relationship they were describing.

# Method

## *Measures*



- ❧ The measures used in this study included:
- ❧ The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
- ❧ Rejection Sensitivity Scale (Downey & Feldman, 1996)
- ❧ Experiences in Close Relationship Scale Revised (Fraley et al., 2000).
- ❧ Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)
- ❧ Texas Inventory of Grief Revised (Faschinbauer, 1981)
- ❧ We revised the TRIG in order to assess symptoms related to the break-up of relationship

# Results



- ❧ To uncover relationships, a series of statistical analyses were conducted (correlation, ANOVA, Chi-square, regression)
- ❧ As predicted, individuals who scored higher on self-esteem reported less distress after break-up
- ❧ As predicted, individuals measuring high in rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style experienced the most adverse effects to romantic break-up and rejection.
- ❧ In contrast, those measuring higher in avoidant attachment styles reported less adverse effects to break-up and rejection.

# Table 1 - Correlations



		1. Self-Esteem	2. Rejection Sensitivity	3 Attachment Anxiety	4 Attachment Avoidance	5 Romantic Break-Up Symptoms
1	Self-Esteem	1.0				
2	Rejection Sensitivity	-.53**	1.0			
3	Attachment Anxiety	-.41**	.38**	1.0		
4	Attachment Avoidance	-.25**	.25**	.08	1.0	
5	Romantic Break-Up Symptoms	-.41**	.25**	.51**	.07	1.0

☞ \*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

☞ \*\*. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

# Results



- ❧ Against predictions, there were hardly any notable differences in results across the genders.
  - ❧ Although women did report higher symptoms in recovering from break-up, not statistically different
  - ❧ No statistical difference in who initiated the break-up
  - ❧ Women measured significantly higher in anxiety attachment style
  
- ❧ Against predictions, whether one initiated the break-up or was rejected did not lead to differences in adjustment

# Gender Differences



	Females	Males
Self-Esteem	32.4	33.5
Rejection Sensitivity	8.2	7.8
Total Anxiety	23.5*	21.3*
Total Avoidant	16.5	17.5
Break-Up Symptoms	26.3	24.8

\*. Significant at less than  $p < .05$

# Results



- ❧ In trying to determine best predictors of break-up adjustment, a hierarchical regression indicated the following variables: (1) importance of relationship (2) anxious attachment, and (3) self-esteem.
- ❧ Rejection sensitivity was no longer significant when controlling for these variables
- ❧ Total symptoms for adjustment to romantic break-up were higher than grief symptoms due to loss

# Results



- ❧ Responsibility for the break-up played no notable role.
- ❧ Interestingly, individuals with an Avoidant Attachment Style experienced less symptoms after break-ups.
- ❧ This makes sense given that avoidant individuals tend to:
  - ❧ Restrain emotions in social/romantic relationships
  - ❧ Often keep thoughts and feelings to themselves

# Discussion



- ❧ These findings suggest an important connection between an individual's self-image and his/her ability to overcome romantic rejection.
- ❧ However, while individuals with higher self-esteem tend to resist rejection symptoms more easily, they also tend to place less emphasis on the importance of their romantic relationships.
- ❧ It is evident that attachment styles play an important role in recovering from romantic break-up and rejection .

# Discussion



- ❧ The lack of gender differences may suggest that rejection is experienced more similarly than might be argued based on theories of socialization and gender norms.
- ❧ With choice as an option, are 21<sup>st</sup> century women just as likely to reject as men?
- ❧ Finally, our research points to the common experience of romantic break-up in young adults' lives.
- ❧ In fact, it seems that recovering from break-up is a harder experience for most young adults than is grief due to death– if only because the latter is less likely to happen to someone we have a very intimate relationship with.

# Discussion



- ❧ One important limitation of this study: its correlational design makes it impossible to attribute causation.
- ❧ Future research should:
  - ❧ Use a longitudinal method to uncover changes
  - ❧ Reexamine gender differences to check for potentially unseen factors.
  - ❧ Examine for differences across age cohorts.
  - ❧ Consider the role of attachment styles regarding rejection more closely.
  - ❧ Examine the intricacies of self-esteem to further understand its role in rejection and life satisfaction