

# Romantic relationship and young adulthood psychology essay



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Romantic relationship can be characterised by a free will between two individuals to interact and associate together with special connection for each other. Romantic relationships between two individuals is a personal choice, hence the relationship could be tenuous. One major component of falling in relationship can be identified as attraction between two individuals which is not necessarily all the times, besides being intense and passionate in nature. A relationship could be having elements of care and tenderness, intimacy and companionship and a special bond of friendship. As the relationship turns to be prolonged, the relationships usually involve some level of commitment and exclusivity, and attachment and care-giving processes become salient.

These relationships play an important role in adolescents' day-to-day lives, and have a significant impact on their current mental health, their ongoing development and future romantic relationships. The quality these romantic relationships can have life long effects on self-esteem and may also personal values regarding romance, intimate relationships, and sexuality (Barber & Eccles, 2003).

## **Break-up and Effects**

The influence of adolescent romantic relationship is not always positive. One of the most painful events that the young adults experience is the termination

of a romantic relationship. Individuals vary considerably, however, in the intensity of their responses to romantic breakup. While it is easy for some people to get over termination quickly and move on, others experience

significant emotional distress and engage in harassing, aggressive behaviours toward their ex-partner to cope with the loss (Cupach, & Spitzberg, 2004). Breaking up of these relationships may also lead to behavioural problems. Studies have shown that breaking up of these romantic relationships are often associated with poorer psycho-social adjustment, including escalated mood swings, poorer self-esteem, lower academic achievement, more alcohol and substance abuse.

Breakup distress among these young adults may also take the form of complicated grief, i. e. an extreme and prolonged period of grief following a loss (Horowitz, Siegel, Holen, Bonanno, Milbrath, & Stinson, 1997).

Complicated grief involves symptoms such as intensive intrusive thoughts, pangs of severe emotion, distressing yearnings, feeling excessively alone and empty, unusual sleep disturbances, and loss of interest in personal activities.

Researches conducted on this area have indicated that the break up distress among late adolescents or early adults are related to different factors, such as, global negative beliefs about the self and cognitions reflecting self-blame. Studies also reported that breakup distress has been greater for those who attributed the breakup to the other person (e. g. the partner's mood or insensitivity) or to environmental factors (e. g. work stress or friends being disruptive to the relationship). Similarly, the closeness and the duration of the broken relationship well predicts the intensity and the duration of emotional distress following the breakup.

Recently, social psychologists have become interested in how people react to, and attempt to cope with, romantic break-ups. Researchers have begun to explore the impact of a variety of factors, such as gender, attributions and cognitions, personality traits and situational factors on people's reactions to break up.

## **Coping**

Lazarus and Folkman defined coping as a “ constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. In other words, coping is an the effort to control, reduce, or learn to tolerate the threats that lead to threat. When confronted with stress, we have lot of ways to deal with it. However these coping strategies can be usually categorised onto three main categories: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and meaning-focused coping.

### **Problem- focused Coping.**

Problem-focused coping attempts to modify the stressful problem itself and source of the stress. They lead to changes in behaviour or to the development of a plan of action to deal with stress.

### **Emotion- focused Coping.**

In emotion-focused coping, people try to manage their emotions in the face of stress, seeking to change the way they feel about or perceive a problem.

## **Meaning- focused Coping.**

Meaning-focused coping occurs when people take their negative circumstances, and find enriching elements and experiences within them.

Young adults are likely to use a wide variety of ways to cope with the distress following a break up. Researchers have indicated that acceptance, understanding why it ended, grieving and mourning the loss, directing your energies elsewhere dealing with rejection and growing emotionally from the experience are the amongst the most common coping strategies that these adults are likely to use.

## **Gender and Reactions to romantic break-up**

Many theorists have argued that men and women have different views about everything, even including passionate love. Therefore the factors related to relationship and break up distress are likely to affect men and women in different manners. Some social psychologists propose that men and women differ in their emotional reactions to romantic break-ups. It is always believed that women are more emotional and sensitive in comparison to men.

Therefore it is also more likely to believe that women are likely to experience guilt, anxiety, anger, sadness more than men after their break ups. Whereas men are often believed to be hard-hearted and rational, therefore likely to experience less emotional distress following a break up.

Level of distress is also likely to influence the kinds of coping strategies being employed to deal with the distress. Men and women have also found to use similar strategies in attempting to cope with painful emotions and with stressful life events (Brehm, 1987; Thoits, 1984).

Sometimes people blame themselves when relationships fail. They worry that their physical appearance, personality, or social skills accounted for existing relationship problems. Sometimes people blame their partners. They accuse them of being emotionally unstable, lazy, or of abusing alcohol or drugs. Some researchers have found that women are more likely to blame themselves for relationship problems, while men are more likely to blame their partners (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, 1996).

Theorists have also explored a variety of other potential gender differences in coping styles. Some researchers, for example, have found that women are more likely to use cognitive emotion management and ruminative strategies, while men are more likely to rely on emotional distraction to deal with problems. Men and women have been found to be equally likely to rely on physiological dampening techniques (Carlson & Hatfield, 1992). Therefore the present research would aim at examining if men and women react differently to heterosexual romantic relationship breakups. It also aims exploring if there is a significant gender difference in the in the level of distress after breaking up of their first romantic relationship. In addition it also aims at understanding the differences in the coping strategies adopted by both the sexes in dealing with the break up distress.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Gender and Emotional Reaction to Break-up**

Historically, women have been considered more emotional than men, especially in their close romantic relationships. It is always believed that people think women should always be more warm and expressive than men.

Secondly studies have suggested that women report that they are more emotional i. e experiencing more emotions whether love or anger in their close relationships than do men( Sprecher and Hatfield, 1987). Women also get into depression more often than men (Nolen and Hoeksema, 1987) and report more loneliness when break up meaningful relationship with the opposite sex partner (Wheeler, Reis and Nezlek , 1983). Thirdly, men and women are inherently different in expressing their emotions.

Some other recent studies conducted in this area also showed similar findings. A study was conducted by Perilloux and Bus (2008) to examine the gender difference in the costs experienced after a break up. The study involved 98 males and 101 females who had experienced at least one romantic breakup, with mean age of all the participants was 20. 58 years. The results indicated that women more than men, are likely to experience more costly consequences following the break up. They reported feeling more sad, confused and scared. However the study indicated that some of the cost experiences by both the sexes are similar as: loss of concentration, loss of ex-partner's resources or skills, loss of protection etc. But the women are likely to be more distressed due to the loss of the mate's physical protection.

On the similar line, another study was conducted by Field et al (2010) to see the break up distress and reasons for break up amongst 119 university students who had experienced a recent break up of romantic relationship. The findings of the study indicated that women experience significantly greater distress following a break up. Women are notably more reactive to

interpersonal stress and therefore more likely to become depressed following an interpersonal stressor.

Another attempt was made by the researchers Miller and Maner (2008) to understand the sex differences in response to partner infidelity. It was based on the hypothesis that infidelity leads to different negative consequences for men and women, and men and women display different emotional and behavioural reactions aimed to overcome the costs of infidelity. Findings suggest that, in response to partner infidelity, men display greater feelings of anger and a greater tendency to engage in violent act (particularly toward the male interloper), whereas women display greater feelings of sadness and a greater inclination for social affiliation (particularly from existing friendships). For women, romantic infidelity may raise doubts pertaining to the satisfaction of affiliative goals. This need for affiliation, however, may be particularly important for women because of the substantial resources and support needed to rear offspring (Taylor et al., 2000). Indeed this may be the reason why women report greater distress in response to infidelity. (Buss et al., 1992).

However not all researches agree that women are more emotional than men, in fact several researches have argued that men are more emotional following a break up. A study conducted by Choo and his colleagues (1996) have indicated that it is men who suffer more after break ups. In support of his findings he said that men tend to have more of their emotional and practical needs met in their love relationships than do women, and therefore suffer more when this relationship ends. He also opined that women are more aware of the difficulties in their relationship and therefore can prepare

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themselves for the potential breakup. In addition women share their emotions and feelings more readily with their friends and thus making it little easier to cope with their feelings, whereas men, on the other hand, do not typically like to share their feelings with their friends, and usually keep these feelings to themselves.

This finding was also supported by a previous study conducted by Rubin et al (1981). They hypothesised that women fall out of love more easily than men. This longitudinal study on 213 college dating couples indicated that women are more cautious than men about getting into a relationship and more likely to end a relationship that seems predestined, and thereby better able to cope with break ups. Whereas men are likely to suffer more after break up. Men tended to report that they felt more depressed, more lonely, unhappy, and lack freedom. The data obtained from the study pointed to two conclusions: first, a woman's love was a better predictor of whether the relationship would continue; and secondly, women's love tended to diminish faster than men's when the relationship ends. The authors suggested that that women tended to be more sensitive than men to problem areas in their relationship, and that women were more likely than men to compare the relationship to alternatives and this enables them to prepare themselves in advance for the potential break up and therefore can deal better.

Another study was conducted by Chen et al (2009) in China to examine the effect of romantic involvement and breakups on adolescent's depressive symptoms and externalizing problems. The research findings indicated that girls reported higher levels of depressive symptoms than did boys, while boys reported higher levels of externalizing behaviour. Females tend to <https://assignbuster.com/romantic-relationship-and-young-adulthood-psychology-essay/>

manifest their maladjustment problems more in the domain of internalizing problems while boys in the domain of externalizing problems. It also indicated that the negative emotional experience related to romantic relationships may stem from different elements of the relationship. Boys are slightly more depressed because of breakups, while girls are more depressed because of other elements of romantic relationships.

## **Gender and Coping**

Previous literature have indicated that men and women utilize different coping strategies in dealing with the emotional distress experienced after relationship break-ups. Studies have indicated that men respond to stress and depression by engaging in activities that help them distracting them from their feelings, whereas women respond in a 'ruminative' and 'reflective' fashion that encourages them to focus on their feelings (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Men tend to engage more in physical exercise, taking drugs, ignoring their problems and thinking about other things for dealing with depression. Women were more apt to endorse strategies, such as confronting their feelings, thinking of reasons why they might be depressed, talking to other people about their feelings and blaming themselves for being depressed ( Kleinke et al, 1982).

Another study conducted by Hochschild (1981) reported that women work harder at changing the emotions they feel by utilising cognitive emotion management strategies. Emotion management refers to the act of trying to change in degree or quality of an emotion or feeling. It is thought to be fundamental coping response for women since it enables individuals to control their emotional response to stressful demands.

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Another study by Soreson et al (1993) also indicated similar kinds of results. These authors found that females were more likely to use confiding in good friends as a form of coping with a breakup than males, and that they are more likely to use female as confidantes. Males were more likely than females to begin dating soon after the breakup. The researchers also found similarities in coping strategies between genders. Those who felt that the relationship was over experienced higher levels of closure. Those who felt that they had a better control over their own recovery were more likely to cope better.

On a similar kind of study conducted by Carin and David (2008) indicated that both sexes use a wide variety of strategies to cope with break up. The most common strategies used by both the genders were discussing the break up with friends, crying spells, threatening suicide etc. Loss of a romantic partner is often associated with overt expressions of grief such as crying, as well as internal emotions that serve to prevent future occurrences of the aversive event. Crying may act as a signal to others that elicits sympathy and help, and can serve to strengthen alliances between the distressed person and those who provide comfort. Sadness also can prompt the individual to avoid similar situations in the future by bringing the features of the failure into the forefront for encoding and analysis (Keller and Nesse, 2005). The research finding showed that women are more likely to engage in such strategies. The largest sex difference in coping strategies indicated by the study was centred on the act of shopping used by women.

Thus on the basis of the above mentioned researches, it can be indicated that there is a significant difference in the way male and female react to

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break up of their romantic relationships. It also signifies the differences in the kinds of coping strategies they use to deal with break up distress.