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Breaking Your Own Heart: A Qualitative Study of Grief After Initiating a Breakup

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Breaking Your Own Heart:

A Qualitative Study of Grief after Initiating a Breakup

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Laura P. Finkelstein

August 2014

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Degree Date: August 2014

ABSTRACT

This study explored how young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution experience grief and support through the breakup process. Participants were six female and three male undergraduate students at The University of Idaho, all of whom had initiated a breakup within the past six months. Initiators responded to a variety of questions about their experiences in a semi-structured interview. Based on a qualitative analysis of these interviews, a variety of themes emerged highlighting the often-minimized experience of initiating a romantic relationship breakup in early adulthood. Additional analysis compared themes based on participant gender and age. Results suggest that initiators can and do experience grief after their breakups, that their grief is often disenfranchised, and that they value support from family and friends.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The end of a serious romantic relationship is one of the most universal and

difficult experiences of early adulthood (Robak & Weitzman, 1995), at times comparable

to death loss in its participants' reactions and mental health symptoms (Field, Diego,

Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2009). As a result of romantic relationship dissolution,

adolescents and young adults report problems adjusting (Barbara & Dion, 2000), higher

rates of depression, increased anxiety, insomnia, heightened anger, disorganized behavior

(Field et al., 2009), greater psychological distress, and lowered life satisfaction (Rhoades,

Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011).

Not only is the experience painful, with important mental health sequelae, it is

also common: about two-thirds of college-attending individuals report grief over

romantic relationship dissolution as the most common form of grief they have

experienced (LaGrand, 1989), with over one-third citing at least one romantic

relationship dissolution within the past twenty months (Rhoades et al., 2011). Dissolution

grief may be as varied as it is common, with different versions including simple grief,

complicated (prolonged) grief, and disenfranchised (unsupported) grief. Potentially one

of the most problematic, from an emotional and clinical standpoint, is disenfranchised

grief, which occurs when the loss of a relationship is unrecognized by society and precipitates a variety of mental health problems (Doka, 1989).

Though both initiators and receptors of romantic relationship dissolution experience grief after dissolution (Field et al., 2009), the psychological literature has focused thus far on the experience of the receptor, the person who did not make the decision to end the relationship. What research does exist regarding the experience of the initiator, the person who made the decision to end the relationship, suggests that this participant, too, may suffer as a result of the loss (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Pelaez et al., 2011), but the qualities of this loss are unclear, as initiators have rarely (if ever) been the primary focus of an empirically-based research study. By looking at how initiator grief is informed by initiator status, acknowledgment or disenfranchisement by others, developmental stage and age, and support-seeking behaviors, the proposed study aims to begin the conversation about the initiator experience as well as offer recommendations for future research and ways of helping this population.

<div align="center">Review of the Literature</div>

Romantic Relationship Dissolution Grief

Grief studies and corresponding grief counseling gained interest and popularity in the 1960s (Neimeyer, 2001). Bereavement garnered the first wave of attention, led by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's iconic model of death and dying (Dugan, 2004). In more recent years, the concept of grief has broadened and non-bereavement grief has been examined in the literature. The Dual Process Model (DPM) is widely used in current research on

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grief and loss (Carr, 2010; Cordaro, 2012; Papa et al., 2014). This model puts forth that individuals who grieve go back and forth between loss-oriented (LO) coping, including grief work, intrusion of grief, relocating bonds, and denial of restoration, and restoration-orientation (RO) coping involving attending to life changes, doing new things, distraction, denial/avoidance of grief, and filling new roles (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

The DPM is applicable to a variety of types of loss, and it has helped to expand the grief research beyond bereavement and toward a study of grief in general. Papa, Lancaster, and Kahler (2014), for example, looked at non-bereavement losses such as job loss and divorce and found grief processes comparable to those after death loss. In this study, major depression, posttraumatic stress, and prolonged grief were found to occur in both bereavement and non-bereavement loss, and intensity of grief among both groups was best predicted by time since loss and centrality of loss to identity (Papa et al.). Similar to job-loss and divorce, romantic relationship dissolution is an important, common, and distressing loss that can prompt myriad grief responses (Field et al., 2009).

For both participants in a romantic relationship dissolution, challenges can abound in a variety of areas as individuals cope with the DPM's loss-orientation. Loss might encompass missing a person with whom one has spent much of his or her time and shared meaningful memories (Harvey, 2002; Rhoades et al., 2011), loss of identity (Field et al., 2009), and experiencing a range of negative emotions (Boelen & Reijintjes, 2009). In a review of breakup distress outcomes, Field et al. (2010) found that the most common problematic symptoms following romantic relationship dissolution include intrusive thoughts, depression, sleep disturbance, and anxiety. Additionally, post-dissolution

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partners may experience changes in social standing and a loss of social resources (Harvey, 2002). Important for healthy development throughout the lifespan, the availability of meaningful social support is invaluable to individuals coping with grief over relationship dissolution (Stroebe, Abakoumkin, & Stroebe, 2010). Unfortunately, this is also a time at which many support networks are less accessible. In the aftermath of relationship dissolution, an individual may no longer have access to the same people, things, places, and bonds he or she relied upon during difficult times if they were connected with their partner or status as a couple (Harvey, 2002).

The possibility for reunion may add an additional stressor for post-dissolution individuals. Romantic relationship loss holds the option of a physical or emotional reunion in various forms. Some couples might rekindle or try to rekindle their relationship, complicating their understanding of the loss or compounding losses over time (Dailey, Rossetto, McCrackern, Jin, & Green, 2012). Others might remain romantically separate but continue to interact either deliberately or accidentally if in a small community. Still other ex-partners might never see one another again. In all of these cases, both ex-partners are usually aware that as long as both are living, the physical possibility of reunion- whether through direct or indirect contact- remains. Research indicates that both the possibility and the reality of reunions lead to a disorganization of grief and therefore serve as significant variables regarding recovery (Locker, Jr., McIntosh, Hackney, Wilson, & Wiegand, 2010).

Romantic relationship dissolution grief is associated with negative outcomes, including mental health problems (Field et al., 2009) and suicidality (Fordwood,

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Asarnow, Huizar, & Reise, 2007). In a study of 451 primary care patients between ages 13 and 21, recent romantic breakups were experienced as stressful events and associated with an increased likelihood of a suicide attempt (Fordwood et al.). Results indicated a higher association between breakups and suicidality than between psychopathology and suicidality (Fordwood et al.). A study of 193 individuals who recently experienced breakups showed that a small percentage, more often those partners who had been rejected, made subsequent suicide threats (Perilloux & Buss, 2008). Thus, it appears that romantic relationship dissolution grief may contribute to suicidality and suicide attempts.

The specific factors affecting grief after romantic relationship dissolution have received some attention in the literature. While earlier studies looked at gender, support, and personality characteristics, more recent research has found that depression, feelings of betrayal, less time since the breakup, and a more positive appraisal of the breakup influence the level of grief experienced after dissolution (Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, J, 2011). Newer research on grief after dissolution is rare. Much remains to be learned about how and why individuals experience the levels and type of grief they do after a romantic relationship dissolves.

Young Adults and Romantic Relationship Dissolution

Individuals of many different ages experience grief after romantic relationship dissolution, but adolescents and young adults may be most dramatically affected by this event. According to LaGrand (1989), 24.3% of a college student sample reported that romantic relationship dissolution was their most recently experienced loss. Within this group, 73.5% reported subsequent depression. Reactions of post-dissolution young adults

are intense and emotionally distressing (Field et al., 2010). Why do young adults experience grief from romantic relationship dissolution so acutely? One reason may be that engaging in a romantic relationship at this age allows for growth in a variety of areas, including competence, peer status, ability to be affectionate and form intimate bonds, sexuality, and feelings of self-worth (Grover & Nangle, 2007). Though very little research exists directly linking adolescence and early adulthood with the intensity of relationship loss, conclusions from both developmental and grief studies suggest that relationship loss in early adulthood might be more difficult than at other points in the life cycle, when relationships with others and identity may be more stable.

Erik Erikson's model of psychosocial development, which ascribes differential characteristics and central dilemmas to each age and growth period (Balk, 2011; Beyers, 2010) sheds additional light on this process. Young adults, according to this model, are at a stage in their life in which adolescence (ages 12-18) ends and early adulthood (ages 18-23) begins. Many move away from home during this time, and a large percentage will go to college, in which a new level of independence is necessary. Besides (often) moving away physically, the adolescent begins to move away emotionally from the family unit as the sole source of support, love, and meaning, and toward friendships and romantic relationships for these needs (Hoyer & Roodin, 2009).

According to Erikson, this early adulthood period is defined by the conflict of intimacy versus isolation (Erikson, 1950/1993). Isolation may occur if one or more of the previous developmental stages were not resolved and the individual is left with remaining identity problems such that he or she is not sufficiently individuated to form a close bond

with another person (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). If this is the case, he or she may experience loneliness, fear of forming relationships, and an inability to connect in a meaningful way with peers. If, however, identity is secure, the individual is able to form intimate relationships with friends and romantic partners (Erikson). As this is the task at this age, most individuals will find themselves surrounded by young adults yearning for these connections. Thus, to strive alongside them can potentially bring a sense of community and further opportunities to connect.

Erikson's model speaks not only to specific developmental milestones but also to the nature of romantic relationships during each stage. Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick (2006) studied aspects of romantic relationship satisfaction through Erikson's developmental lens. In their research on 242 adolescents and emerging adults, they looked at individuals' intimacy dating goals as they related to relationship satisfaction. Their hypotheses gained some support: those who had resolved the intimacy versus isolation conflict through developing dating goals were more satisfied with their relationships. The researchers concluded that striving for intimacy during this time of life is a healthy endeavor, resulting in more successful relationships and greater contentment.

Several recent studies have looked more incrementally at Erikson's early adulthood period, examining how individuals develop year to year (Taylor, Barker, Heavey & McHale, 2013; Wright, Pincus, & Lenzenwenger, 2012). In their study on early adulthood development, Wright, Pincus, and Lenzenwenger looked at interpersonal and personality development at three different time points during college; first-year (mean age=18.88), second year (mean age=19.83), and fourth year (mean age=21.70).

Overall, their findings suggest that many traits and processes are stable, such as warmth, extroversion, and sympathy. However, the constructs of assuredness-dominance increased and unassuredness-submissiveness decreased between the three data points. Taylor, Barker, Heavy and McHale (2013) looked at intelligence, affect, and social and executive functioning development between the ages of 17 and 19. Some cognitive abilities were found to change during this time period, whereas social cognition appeared stable. Thus, Erikson's model and these corresponding studies suggest that there may be incremental and important changes for individuals and relationships within the college years.

As individuals develop, friendships and romantic relationships play an increasingly integral role in their health and well-being (Jenkins, Buboltz, Jr., Schwartz, & Johnson, 2005). These relationships are relevant to post-dissolution grief on two levels. First, as noted, romantic relationships and their terminations are often more intense at this age than they are at previous developmental time periods. Second, this period marks a time of differentiation from family of origin, in which normative growth involves a shift in primary social supports from primarily family-based to primarily friend-based (Jenkins, Buboltz, Jr., Schwartz, & Johnson). Thus, support for romantic relationship development should normatively be sought more from friends rather than in the family of origin (Kaczmarek & Backlund). Third, friendships offer mutuality and equality, two components that might contribute to the autonomy and well-being of young adults (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013). Finally, research indicates that the construct of social connectedness is an important variable in college students' adjustment after romantic

relationship dissolution (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003). In sum, friendships and social connections appear to help young adult grievers of relationship loss. However, exactly how this support integrates into the griever's experience and development remains unclear.

Disenfranchised Grief

Among the growing number of grief types identified in the research, disenfranchised grief has been identified as particularly prohibitive to healthy recovery from a loss (Attig, 2004). Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989) is a type of grief in which the griever's experience of loss is not socially acknowledged, mourned, or supported (Cordaro, 2012). Doka states that disenfranchised grief frequently occurs due to one of three situations; the relationship is not recognized by outside persons, the loss is not recognized, or the griever is not recognized. Disenfranchised grief often occurs in scenarios that are not traditionally viewed as losses or generators of grief, or in which the object of the loss is ambiguous. Such circumstances include perinatal death (Lang, 2011), divorce, and death of a gay or lesbian partner (Robak & Weitzman, 1998). In each of these situations, the living relationship, the loss, or the role played by the griever in the event is not accurately recognized by society. These factors may be unattended to by others, or else directly undermined, invalidated, or treated as wrong (Attig). For individuals going through the dual process of loss and restoration coping, undermining of the relation or loss from others can be confusing and upsetting (Attig).

As the research and clinical understanding about grief expands, one point becomes increasingly evident: talking about, processing, and developing a narrative for

grief helps lessen pain and increase growth and meaning-making (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). It makes sense, then, that grief that is bottled up, unrecognized, or actively countered by others is problematic and studies point to a series of negative responses as a result of this disenfranchisement (Diego et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2007).

A number of behavioral concerns and mental health problems can arise as a result of disenfranchised grief (Jones et al., 2007). Perhaps the most common of these is social isolation. Whereas in traditional grieving situations, an individual may seek comfort and support from friends, family, and societal structures, in disenfranchised grieving situations the griever can feel as though he or she does not have the right to grieve (Cordaro, 2012). As a result he or she may feel, or may actually be, unable to seek help from supportive outlets (Spidell et al., 2011). Disenfranchised grievers also experience feelings of stigmatization and increased psychological distress (Jones et al.). They may feel guilty, sad, lonely, hopeless, or numb as a result of the loss and the corresponding feeling that no one can empathize with their experience (Attig, 2004). Thus, the grief cycle can perpetuate and worsen through disenfranchisement. Grievers may feel their experience is inappropriate or unrecognized (Cordaro) and then avoid seeking support and subsequently feel more alone.

Disenfranchised grief has been examined within a variety of populations. A qualitative study of unmarried partners of soldiers who died on active duty (Ben-sefer et al., 2011) indicated that these individuals can experience this type of grief. Themes for this population included: exclusion and involvement, social networks and legitimacy, and the importance of collective remembrance. The families of death row inmates comprise

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another population that experiences disenfranchised grief (Jones & Beck, 2007). These individuals noted feelings of shame, social isolation, increased conflict with family members, despair, and guilt. A version of the above themes can be found in most studies of disenfranchised grief: the griever feels alone, unsupported, and that their experience unrecognized (Jones et al.; Lang, 2011). By studying these populations, researchers give a public voice to those who grieve, helping them to counteract disenfranchisement and paving the way for more awareness, compassion, and helping efforts from others.

Any instance of disenfranchised grief merits both clinical and research attention, as it suggests that there are individuals suffering without adequate recognition or support. Awareness, support, and validation are the cornerstones of psychotherapy and essential interventions (Lehman et al., 1986); thus, the more that is learned about disenfranchised grief and how to enfranchise it, the better friends, family members, and others can serve diverse populations in need of help. Studies by Ben-sefer et al. (2011) and others are recognizing this trend and tailoring their research to not only illuminate the experience of disenfranchised grief but also develop supports for these populations.

Young Adults and Disenfranchised Grief

In addition to their experience of normal grief, young adults dealing with romantic relationship dissolutions are likely to have an increased risk for disenfranchised grief due to society's messages about this population's developmental, relational, and emotional status (Kaczmarek & Backlund, 1991). Applying Doka's definition, this population's disenfranchisement stems from the general devaluing of the legitimacy, persistency, and intensity of young adults' emotional experiences (lack of recognition for

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the griever), misunderstanding of the seriousness and intensity of many young adult

romantic relationships (lack of recognition for the relationship), and the underestimation

of the difficulties young adults experience after romantic relationships dissolve (lack of

recognition for the loss) (Kaczmarek & Backlund). Thus, through three levels of

disenfranchisement, the young adult might be coping with the loss of friends and supports

at a time when these resources are most needed.

Disenfranchisement of young adult romantic relationship dissolution likely begins

with the lack of recognition of the *young adult as a person* with legitimate emotions and

concerns. The emotional experience of young adults is often devalued by parents, older

adults, and even the media- in which the young adult is portrayed as mercurial,

capricious, or still forming his or her identity (Kaczmarek & Backlund, 1991). This is

somewhat ironic given that young adulthood is a period of intense emotions (Silk,

Steinberg, & Morris, 2003) in which support from others may be especially important

and helpful.

Disenfranchisement of this population persists in a lack of recognition of the

young adult relationship. Wolfelt (1990) noted that romantic relationships involving non-

married individuals are often seen as less serious than marriages. Society's legal and

social structures tend to honor kin-based relationships and losses over those that are not

kin-based (Riggle, Rostosky, Prather, & Hamrin, 2005). Themes of disenfranchisement

often emerge after losses within non-married partnerships like divorced individuals

(Robak & Weitzman, 1995) and gay and lesbian partners (Riggle et al.), for example.

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Similarly, young adult romantic partnerships are not kin-based and are thus prone to disenfranchisement.

The third level of potential disenfranchisement of this population stems from others' inability to recognize the *specific loss* as important. Attig (2004) defines this according to Doka's description of taking away a griever's "right" to grieve. This right is taken away by friends and family not validating the significance of a young adult's romantic relationship or not recognizing the impact of its dissolution. It is also taken away by condescending appraisal of the loss by others, including comments about the loss that suggest its triviality or superficiality (Kaczmarek & Backlund, 1991). These reactions from friends and family make it difficult for the griever to understand his or her loss, find support, and work toward recovery from the loss (Kaczmarek & Backlund).

Though many studies on relationship dissolution grief focus on the young adult population, few explore how the developmental stage of this population may relate to the experience of grief and disenfranchised grief of its members. Likely, romantic relationship dissolution at this age involves unique, developmentally-based responses which must be considered carefully in both research and clinical work. According to Erikson (1950), one of the tasks of adolescence is to form healthy, supportive, intimate relationships with others. This task predicts the effectiveness with which individuals face life's challenges and mental health concerns (Adams, Berzonsky, & Keating, 2005). As the adolescent moves through young adulthood during the college years, this work of intimacy likely influences how individuals think about and deal with romantic relationship dissolution.

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Initiators and Receptors of Romantic Relationship Dissolution

Though some romantic relationship dissolutions are mutual, research indicates that these are the minority and that generally one partner initiates and is viewed as more responsible for the relationship dissolution (Merolla, Weber, Meyers, & Booth-Butterfield, 2004). Various terms have been used to describe these two parties, but in this study the term *initiator* is used for the person viewed as responsible for making the dissolution decision and the term *receptor* is used for the person viewed as not responsible for making the dissolution decision. Based on initiator versus receptor status, studies indicate that there may exist difference in post-dissolution adjustment, self-perception, and social support (Locker et al., 2010); however, the literature on initiator distress versus receptor distress lacks clear, unified conclusions (Field et al., 2011; Locker et al.).

Regarding the impact of initiator versus receptor status, some studies focus on quantitatively comparing levels of grief and recovery between parties (Field et al., 2009; Locker et al., 2010; Perilloux & Buss, 2008). Based on these studies, there is some evidence that initiators may recover more easily and quickly than their receptor counterparts. Perilloux and Buss, for example, found that following romantic relationship dissolution initiators, whom they termed *rejectors*, endorsed lower rates of the following than did receptors, whom they termed *rejectees*: experience of negative emotions such as anger and sadness, experience of depression, rumination on issues related to the relationship and ex-partner, and decreases in self-esteem. Similarly, looking at complicated grief among individuals post-relationship dissolution, Boelen and Reijintjes

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(2009) examined demographic, personality, and cognitive factors, and found evidence that initiator status was correlated with better recovery. Field et al. (2009) surveyed 192 university students who indicated that, in general, they experienced greater breakup distress as receptors than as initiators.

Despite the implication from these studies that initiator distress is less acute or enduring than receptor distress, other research suggests that these two experiences are comparable in terms of level of emotional pain. Locker et al. (2010) surveyed college students in order to identify predictors of recovery after the end of a serious romantic relationship. Predictors included: amount of time spent with a partner during the relationship, how frequently the partners saw one another after the relationship ended, social support, number of previous partners in the year before the relationship, length of relationship, initiator status, how much in love the partners were, and how quickly the partners started dating after the relationship ended. Initiator status was not shown to be correlated with recovery time, indicating that initiators did not recovery more quickly, as a whole, than receptors.

A small body of literature suggests that initiators may experience additional problems not experienced by receptors that make their post-dissolution grief uniquely difficult. For example, Perilloux and Buss (2008) found evidence that social supports are less sympathetic to initiators than receptors after dissolution. In this study, initiators reported being seen as "mean" or "uncaring" by former peers who, after relationship dissolution, allied with receptors. Another empirical study indicated that rumors and

negative attributions such as coldness and cruelty were found to exist in the initiator experience and not the receptor experience (Buss, 2008).

The distinctive and problematic experience of the initiator was also illuminated by Baumeister, Wotman, and Stillwell (1993). The researchers looked at 71 autobiographical accounts of college-student initiators and receptors. Their definition of these two groups was broader than in other relationship dissolution studies; initiators, whom they termed *rejectors*, were any individuals who rejected a partner or potential love interest (the relationship did not have to be defined as such) and receptors, whom they termed *would-be lovers*, were any individuals whose romantic advances had at some point been dismissed by a partner. Rejectors reported intense, varied grief problems as a result of initiation. In fact, results indicated that rejectors felt more negative emotions as a result of the experience of romantic disappointment than did the would-be lovers (Baumeister et al.).

Rejectors reported a host of problems unique to their experience of initiation (Baumeister et al., 1993). Guilt, for example, was a common theme among rejectors, as was the experience of dealing with (and putting energy into deflecting) persistence on the part of the receptor. The authors identified among initiators themes of *scriptlessness*, defined in this study as lack of knowledge of how initiators *should* or *do* act because initiator roles were not adequately portrayed in the media or overtly recognized by society. Rejectors also indicated that they experienced uncertainty regarding whether or not to initiate dissolution, as well as how to execute the dissolution. They reported fear of hurting the would-be lover's feelings. Additionally, rejector stories reflected grappling

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with a moral dilemma: hurting the would-be lover by breaking up or hurting/leading on the would-be lover by staying together (Baumeister et al.).

Given the current state of psychological literature on romantic relationship dissolution, it remains unclear how initiator or receptor status affects that quantity and quality of the post-dissolution grief experience. While several studies point to a greater intensity experienced by receptors, others suggest equal levels of intensity among receptors and initiators. Further, the quality of the grief experience felt by each is largely unknown, even more so for initiators.

Gender, Other Cultural Differences and Dissolution

There is a dearth of literature on gender differences regarding levels of grief after romantic relationship dissolution. Two studies are of note in this area, one suggesting that there are no gender differences in dissolution reaction (Robak & Weitzman, 1998) and the other putting forth that there may be differences related to recovery (Locker et al., 2010). Differences emerged in a study of 267 undergraduate students recovering from romantic relationship dissolution. Recovery periods were measured by looking at how many months it took after the breakup for individuals to feel as good as they had before entering the relationship. The researchers found that, for women, more time spent with their partner during the relationship was correlated with a shorter recovery period, while for men, the opposite was true: more time spent with the partner during the relationship correlated with more time needed to recover from the relationship after it was over (Locker et al.).

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Gender differences in other heterosexual relational realms have been noted (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Perrin, Heesacker, Tiegs, Swan, Lawrence, Smith, & Mejia-Millan, 2011). For example, gender has been shown to influence the initiation of romantic intimacy, with men initiating intimacy more frequently than women (Eryilmaz & Atak). Gender differences also may affect desires within relationships, with women seeking more relationship support or sense of security and safety within the partnership (Perrin et al.). Finally, gender variables may contribute to how individuals approach attitudes toward relationships and breakups, with some research suggesting that women do so more pragmatically and objectively than do men (Locker et al., 2010). The apparent influence of gender in at least some relationship realms, as well as the potential for gender to alter responses to dissolution, makes this variable relevant to the discussion and study of initiator grief.

No known studies on romantic relationship dissolution grief among young adults have addressed racial, ethnic, or other cultural factors as they may relate to this experience. In addition, research on sexual orientation as it relates to dissolution is notably absent. The closest related research on the topic suggests that adolescents may have differing views on relational concepts based on race, ethnicity, and culture (Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009). Given that research dedicated to these factors is scarce, there is little guidance in the literature regarding how culture may or may not affect the post-dissolution experience.

Support for Initiators

Given the importance of social support and connectedness for young adults (Hoyer & Roodin, 2009) and for grieving individuals (Benkel, Wijk, & Molander, 2009), it seems apparent that help from friends and family would be impactful for young adult initiators and receptors grieving the loss of a serious romantic relationship. However, studies show that social support is not always helpful for these individuals. Moller et al. (2003), for example, found that perceived social support from friends and family did not significantly account for the variance of grief responses after dissolution but that social connectedness, defined as closeness within one's social world, enhanced coping after dissolution. These findings suggest that having close relationships with social supports, rather than experiencing specific supportive behaviors, are most helpful to young adults grieving the end of a romantic relationship.

Perhaps this phenomenon is explained not by the impossibility of support from family and friends but from its inaccuracy. Friends and family members' attempts at behaving supportively are sometimes perceived by grievers as ineffective (Lehman et al., 1996). Even if well-intentioned, friends and family tend to give advice on what grievers should do or encourage them to , both of which have been reported by grievers as feeling premature or unhelpful (Lehman et al., 1996). Other studies have demonstrate the helpfulness of friends, family, and other supports in response to grief (Benkel, Wijk, & Molander, 2009; Diamond, Llewelyn, Relf, & Bruce, 2012). A noted well-received form of support is when others express that they have gone through a similar experience to the griever (Benkel et al.). Perhaps, then, it is not the intention but the delivery of support that is most relevant to the griever's well-being.

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Though social supports may lack guidance or knowledge about what is helpful to grieving initiators, counselors and other mental health professionals may be uniquely positioned to provide support that helps. Individual and group counseling for grief-related issues have been shown to be effective for college students (Balk, Tyson-Rawson, and Colletti-Wetzel, 1993; Fajgenbaum, Chesson, & Lanzi, 2012). Therapeutic components such as "providing the opportunity to ventilate" and "presence or 'being there'" have been shown to be particularly helpful as individuals navigate through their grief experiences (Lehman et al., 1986). Validating and normalizing the grief process is also a significant part of grief counseling work (Lenhardt, 1997). This is consistent with the literature that talking about loss is often helpful in navigating and moving through grief. The counseling setting may provide a place where many individuals can get the grief and perceived social support that they need to make changes and move forward (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003).

Though grief issues are as common among college students as other populations, seeking counseling support for these problems may be more complicated due to a variety of factors. College students are often adjusting to life without family of origin and past supports in close proximity (Fajgenbaum et al., 2012). They also feel some pressure to conform to the social and, at times, superficial college environment as well as juggle the various demands of this stage of life- academic tasks, social desires, and new independence. College-attending males are particularly reluctant to seek mental health support, though this phenomenon of counseling-aversion affects both genders and all grade-levels of individuals in this setting (Fajgenbaum et al.). Finally, due to

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misunderstanding or feelings of stigmatization, many college students may not perceive grief issues to be mental health concerns appropriate for counseling (Vickio, 2008).

Robak and Weitzman (1995) found that the main factor influencing help-seeking behaviors from counselors is time: the longer post-dissolution young adults remain grieving for their lost relationship, the more likely they are to seek this type of help. The mean amount of time spent grieving a relationship loss after which individuals sought counseling was 11.9 months (Robak & Weitzman). This time period- almost a year- can involve significant changes, particularly in the life of a college student. During this time, grades may drop, depression may intensify, and other changes in routine and mental health may occur. It is of interest to find out more about those who take a more preventative or proactive approach and seek counseling at an earlier stage (less than seven months). Does counseling during this period help or are time and individual coping skills more effective in helping individuals to move forward from their loss?

The length of time between dissolution and the decision to see a mental health counseling suggests a potential reluctance of initiators and receptors to seek help. Initiators may be especially hesitant to seek help due to their disenfranchisement and corresponding feelings that their grief is not acceptable, abnormal, or not warranting of attention or counseling (Jones & Beck, 2007).

Regarding family members, friends, counselors, and other sources of support, there seems to exist a block between young adult initiators' experiences of grief and their pursuit of help. At the same time, the literature suggests that support from others has the potential to relieve some of these individuals' anguish. The challenges and possibilities

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regarding supportive bodies for initiators of romantic relationship dissolution is a ripe topic for further research.

Chapter Summary

Research indicates that romantic relationship dissolution often precipitates grief symptoms and other problematic repercussions. Young adults are at an increased risk for these problems, due to the increased importance of social relationships during this developmental period. Disenfranchised grief is also a concern for post-dissolution young adults, as their relationships and needs are often devalued or underappreciated by those around them. Of the two members of a dissolved romantic relationship- initiators and receptors- receptors have received significantly more attention in the literature. What little research does exist that focuses on initiators, however, suggests that they experience problems after dissolution as well. Though support from others may be helpful to young adults after romantic relationship dissolution, it is likely underutilized and not as effective as possible, particularly with regard to initiators.

Statement of Problem

Grief may be experienced by both partners of romantic relationship dissolution (Robak & Weitzman, 1995). Due to its unique qualities of social isolation, lack of recognition, and undermining of the grief experience, disenfranchised grief may be experienced with greater intensity by initiators. How, why, and when initiators experience grief and disenfranchised grief after romantic relationship dissolution are important lines of inquiry that have not yet been explored in the psychological literature.

College-attending young adults are in Erikson's developmental stage of intimacy versus isolation, facing the task of moving away from familiar supports and forming relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). As they move toward the latter years of college, young adults' relationships with peers and other intimate connections often assume a primary role. In understanding and conceptualizing the grief and disenfranchised experiences of initiators, age and the increasing importance of relationships during young adulthood is a vital component about which the current research says very little.

It is the nature of grief that talking about the experience often helps (Fajgenbaum, Chesson, & Lanzi, 2012; Balk, Tyson-Rawson, & Colletti-Wetzel, 1993). However, many individuals who experience disenfranchised grief feel alone in their experience, that their grief is not warranted, or that it will not be understood by others. Thus, the initiator experience of support is likely to be different than the experience of receptors or other individuals who feel that their grief is a legitimate entity. A basic understanding of initiators' views of, participation, and experiences with support networks will allow social supports and clinicians to begin to assist this population in helpful ways.

<center>Definition of Terms</center>

Likely due to the paucity of research in the area of initiator grief, a consensus on appropriate terms for the initiating and receiving parties of romantic relationship dissolution has not been reached. In order to provide clarity of concepts used in this study, these and other relevant terms and their definitions are provided below.

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Bracketing. According to the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the qualitative researcher must be immersed in the research topic, and therefore likely will have presuppositions about the topic that must be acknowledged. Acknowledging and laying aside these presuppositions for an objective perspective on the data is referred to as *epoche* or *bracketing* (Creswell, 2007).

Breakup. While the term *romantic relationship dissolution* will be employed throughout this paper, the word *breakup* will be used to signify the same phenomenon, particularly during discussions with participants. The purpose of this alteration is to use a more casual, commonly understood term for participants, so as to help them feel more comfortable during the interview process.

Disenfranchised grief. In 1989, Kenneth J. Doka first identified and labeled disenfranchised grief as a grief experience in which the griever is not seen by society as having the right to grieve (Attig, 2004). Subsequent research has explored this concept and generated the definition that will be used in this study: the particular experience of grief in which the griever's experience of loss is not socially acknowledged, mourned or supported (Lenhardt, 1997).

Horizonalization. Per Creswell (2007), horizonalization is a component of the hermeneutical qualitative approach that consists of highlighting important statements from participants' stories in order to derive clusters of meaning or themes.

Initiator, *receptor*, and *partner*. Studies have shown that most individuals involved in romantic relationship dissolution perceive one person to be primarily responsible for its termination; perception of a mutual dissolution decision is rare

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(Merolla et al., 2004). Thus, one member- termed initiator in this study- is perceived to initiate the dissolution decision, and the other member- termed receptor or partner in this study- is perceived to receive the dissolution decision.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology. This study will be conducted using a phenomenological approach, in which participants' stories are reviewed and salient themes are extricated in order to begin to form a picture of a phenomenon. The Hermeneutic phenomenological approach places particular emphasis on topics of interest and importance, individual stories as thematic, and the acknowledgement and extrication of presuppositions and biases (Creswell, 2007).

Member checking. Member checking is a strategy in which the researcher seeks feedback from participants on the data. The researcher solicits participants' opinions and perspectives as a way to increase credibility of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Post-dissolution and *pre-dissolution*. The term post-dissolution will be used to refer to the time period after the relationship has dissolved, as indicated by each participant. The term pre-dissolution will be used to refer to the time period when participants were in the relationship and before dissolution took place.

Romantic relationship dissolution. In this study, romantic relationship dissolution refers to the end of a romantic relationship between two, non-married partners. No constraints on the definition of the relationship, the seriousness of the relationship, or the nature of dissolution will be placed by this researcher. The existence and parameters of both the relationship and the dissolution will be defined by the participant in the relationship.

Serious romantic relationship. Perhaps because young adults' emotional experiences are often misunderstood or disenfranchised (Kaczmarek & Backlund, 1991), there exists no prevailing definition for what constitutes a serious romantic relationship for young adults. It is assumed that grief around dissolution is connected to perceived seriousness of the romantic bond. In order to avoid further disenfranchisement or make presumptions about young adults' emotional experiences, in this study the seriousness of the relationship will be defined simply as, that which the participants deem to be serious.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the grief experience of young

adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolutions. Though this topic has been

examined in quantitative studies comparing initiators with receptors, the initiator

population has never been the sole subject of a qualitative inquiry in which initiating

individuals are able to tell their own stories in depth.

Because of the gap in the literature regarding initiators, little is known about their

experience. This study sought to illuminate this experience. It also aimed to uncover

several initiator issues of particular concern to support entities, including

disenfranchisement of grief, age-related factors, and support-seeking behaviors and

experiences of initiators. The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. How do young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution experience
    grief and relationship loss?

2. How do young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution experience
    disenfranchised grief?

3. How do young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution cope and
    think about, seek, and experience support after dissolution?

4. What similarities and differences exist among the grief experiences of male and female students?

5. What similarities and differences exist among the grief experiences of younger student and older student initiators?

Conceptual Framework

Data from this study was analyzed using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a qualitative research approach (Dowling, 2007). Philosophically, phenomenology as put forth by Husserl and Moutakas considered human experience the key source of human knowledge and wisdom (Creswell, 2007; Dowling). It posits that human experience is conscious and intentional; in other words, it is understood best by those who experience it (Creswell). This philosophy suggests that getting at the essence of human experience is a worthy endeavor as it helps us to better understand ourselves and the world around us (Creswell).

As a research approach, phenomenology aims to uncover the meaning or essence of a lived experience of multiple people by examining without presuppositions commonalities between the worlds constructed by individuals (Creswell, 2007). It is an appropriate approach for research topics for which an element or process has not yet been explained but has been experienced by multiple individuals (Creswell). It has been the method of choice for such relational topics as how individuals with psychosis understand relationships (Redmond, Larkin, & Harrop, 2010), how women with anorexia nervosa deal with intimacy (Newton, Boblin, Brown, & Ciliska, 2006), and how romantic partners experience jealousy (Mullen, 1990).

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Phenomenology as a research approach is diverse, encompassing multiple and divergent strategies (Dowling, 2007). The approach employed for this study was hermeneutical phenomenology, derived from the concept of hermeneutics that suggests personal stories are like texts from which certain themes can be extricated, interpreted, and explained (Creswell, 2007). According to this approach, interpretation of these themes can be used to better understand the full picture of a phenomenon. To derive this full picture, the strategy is both descriptive and interpretive. It requires first gleaning information from individuals who have lived a common experience and then making connections, comparisons, and ultimately interpretations from these stories (Creswell).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is flexible, but is guided by several principles (Creswell, 2007). The first is that the topic of interest is of serious concern to the inquirer or researcher. The second is that close examination of the texts, or interviews, of participants is the method by which the meaning of their experiences is extricated. The third is that the researcher hears, describes, and then interprets these experiences with awareness and bracketing of his or her personal perspective on the topic (Creswell, 2007).

<div align="center">The Researcher's Role</div>

The grief experience of the romantic relationship dissolution initiator is well-suited to the hermeneutical phenomenological approach. It is a phenomenon shared by some, not all, participants in romantic relationship dissolution. It is an important experience to this author as well as others who experience it, and its essence touches such universal issues as connections with others, autonomy, grief, isolation, and growth. It is

an event that links individual experience with a larger reality; of how we experience loss

and support. That is, in better understanding the experience, we may further understand

how to help, think about, and support initiators of romantic relationship dissolution. By

employing a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, this study aimed to uncover the

meaning of these components and the essence of the initiator perspective in general and

to derive a framework from which we can further study and provide support for

individuals who have experienced this phenomenon.

A condition of phenomenological work is the researcher's investment and interest

in an important topic (Creswell, 2007). Likely, an individual who is deeply interested in a

topic has a specific perspective on it. Unlike in quantitative research, this perspective is

not ignored in phenomenology. Instead, it is considered relevant to the work and also

necessary to acknowledge and mediate (Creswell) so that the researcher's own

perspective does not interfere with information obtained from the study's participants.

The process of understanding and then separating one's own views is called bracketing

and is the responsibility of the phenomenological researcher.

The experience of ending a serious romantic relationship is one I know intimately

as I have initiated such dissolutions several times in my adult life. My first initiation was

the most difficult. I was 25 years old and had been dating my partner for 2 years. I loved

him in many ways, particularly as a friend, but I did not feel the romance or attraction

that I hoped to feel toward in life-long partner. He did not experience the same doubts

and began talking about cohabitating and referencing marriage and other components of a

future together. I had not been planning to break up with him; the words just came out in

a phone conversation and felt right. Soon after, however, I lost this conviction. My partner insisted this was the wrong decision, and I wondered if I had made a hasty and irrational choice. I felt confused as to why I would deliberately remove someone from my life about whom I cared so much. I felt a sharp pain knowing I was hurting someone so deeply. I was lonely, sad, and utterly confused.

During painful times, I have always sought and received support from several close friends and from my immediate family members. The initiation of this breakup was the first time that these supports provided little solace. None of my friends nor my sister had undergone a similar experience, and they struggled to understand why I was so upset from a decision I had made. My parents had ended serious relationships, many years before, and voiced the attitude that I would eventually "get over it." "This too shall pass" was a line I remember hearing. I did not think to consult a counselor at this time. I felt disenfranchised (though, at the time, I did not know the word for it) as if no one could understand or relate to my experience. I felt it was not okay to be feeling as I did, extremely sad due to a separation that had been my choice.

Gradually, with time and self-reflection, my pain lessened. I became more confident, even proud of my decision, which I recognized as a difficult but appropriate one. Still, the experience remained with me long after others expected. I thought often of my partner, who had set a standard for how I wanted to be treated in a relationship and who had also influenced me in significant and lasting ways, such as by suggesting I pursue a career in psychology. My experience of the dissolution remains with me today

in the way I think about endings, about relationships, and about initiating a painful

immediate experience in the pursuit of long-term satisfaction.

Approaching this research, then, I had a specific and personal perspective on the

cognitive and emotional processes involved in ending a serious romantic relationship. For

me, it was a sad, confusing, anxiety-provoking, but ultimately confidence-building

experience. This perspective fueled my work. It is a part of me; one that helped me

connect with my participants and allowed them to more comfortably share their stories.

At the same time, from a phenomenological perspective, it was important that I bracketed

my own experience and not let it color my interpretations of participant experiences. To

this end, I engaged in several specific bracketing efforts. The first was acknowledging my

own experience, both to me and, in this section, to readers of this research. The second

was to develop in my interview questions a balance between appropriate self-disclosure

and non-leading questions. It was important that my questions did not make participants

feel as though they were expected to answer in a certain way but instead were allowed to

tell their unique stories. The third was the consistent practice of keeping my own

experience separate from my interpretation of my participants'. To promote this, I was

cognizant of my own experiences throughout data collection and analysis, and consulted

with my advisor and others in the field as needed when I felt that my personal perspective

on this phenomenon might color my interpretation of the data.

Procedure

Participants

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Participants in this study were undergraduate students at the University of Idaho who had initiated the dissolution of at least one serious romantic relationship within the six months prior to participation. Initially, participants were to be recruited from the University of Denver; however, when I moved to Idaho for my clinical internship mid-study, the participant population changed so that I would be able to conduct the interviews in person. This study was approved by the International Review Board (IRB) at the University of Idaho (Appendix Q).

Most studies on dissolution grief are retrospective (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1993; Robak & Weitzman, 1998). This study aimed to enhance the dissolution grief literature by obtaining information about participants' recent grief experiences. *Recent* was defined by first looking at the research, which indicates that the grieving period for individuals after romantic relationship dissolution is approximately 6-11 months (Robak & Weitzman, 1995). Restricting this timeline in hopes of gathering richer data, participation in this study required dissolution within the short end of this window: 6 months. Thus, qualified participants experienced romantic relationship dissolution within 6 months prior to the interview. After proposing this study, my dissertation committee suggested tightening my timeframe to 3 months. I originally approached recruitment with this timeframe in mind, and it is reflected in my recruitment flyer (Appendix G). However, due to the difficulties recruiting male participants, I returned to my original timeframe of a within-6-month dissolution. All subsequent recruitment efforts reflected this 6 month target. Male and female participants ranged in breakup proximity from 1 day to 6 months.

With a lack of unified conclusions on gender differences in the literature, the impact of this factor on dissolution grief is unclear and merits further attention. Thus, participants in both the younger and older groups were divided between men and women. Data between these two groups was compared and contrasted in order to see if gender plays a role in initiator grief.

My original intention was to recruit 12 participants, six women and six men, which is an appropriate number for phenomenological work, which recommends between 5 and 25 participants (Creswell, 2007) and also achieves a gender split that would aid in my comparison. It quickly became clear that women were easier to recruit than men. In total, 23 women and 12 men responded to my advertisements despite my rewriting a later version of my flyers to target men specifically (Appendix H). Of these interested individuals, six women and five men were screened out due to not meeting study qualifications, generally because their breakups had occurred more than 6 months before they contact me. An additional eight women were placed on a waitlist after the full number of female participants had been achieved. This produced six female participants and three male participants to be included in the study.

Demographic requirements were as follows: individuals had to be 18 years or older to participate. Students whose age was atypical for their grade (freshmen and sophomores younger than 18 or older than 21 and juniors and seniors younger than 20 or older than 23) were excluded from the study.

To examine developmental differences, my goal was for half of my participant population to be traditionally-aged freshmen or sophomores and half to be traditionally-

aged juniors and seniors. Similar to gender, due to the difficulties of recruitment an even split was not obtained. However, each group is represented in the sample, which is comprised of four freshman/sophomore women (two 18 years old and two 19 years old), two junior/senior women (one 20 years old and one 22 years old), one freshman/sophomore man (20 years old), and two junior/senior men (both 22 years old).

Due to little information in the literature regarding the potential effects of race, ethnicity, and culture on grief after romantic relationship dissolution, participants were not excluded or chosen specifically on the basis of these factors. Sexual orientation has also been neglected in the literature as a factor that may influence how individuals react to relationship dissolution. Without evidence for either similarities or dissimilarities in this phenomenon between individuals identifying as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and other sexual orientations, no participant was excluded from this study on the basis of this component. Eight of the students who contacted me and were screened in identified as heterosexual, and one identified as bisexual. Eight participants identified as Caucasian and one participant identified as Hispanic.

Though participants were not excluded due to ethnic background or sexual orientation, these demographic factors were documented in order to give some background on participants and incorporated into data analysis if participants voiced these as relevant to their experiences. Gender, age, sexual orientation, and ethnic background information are included in the description of each participant to give a fuller context for their stories.

Participants were screened for suicidality and homicidality and were to be referred to emergency mental health care facilities or to a counselor should threats to self or others have been a concern. No interested participant endorsed active suicidal or homicidal ideation, thus none were disqualified on this basis.

No specific questions regarding psychosis or cognitive deficits were included in the screening. However, I was attuned to these potential issues and prepared to exclude and refer individuals exhibiting these problems. None of the potential participants displayed or were excluded from the study based on psychosis or cognitive deficits.

Participants were given a $10 gift card to a local store or restaurant of their choice for their participation, excluding exclusively alcohol-serving institutions as some of the participants were not of legal drinking age. This amount was chosen to provide some compensation for participants' time and not a larger amount that could result in individuals volunteering to participate who otherwise would not have done so.

Recruitment

Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling; that is, they were chosen specifically and deliberately, based on their age, relevant experience, and ability to shed light on the research topic. I advertised through the following methods: professors speaking to their classes, the Counseling and Testing Center's Outreach Coordinator speaking to students in fraternities and sororities, an e-mail advertisement disseminated to multiple University of Idaho organizations and colleges (The Women's Center, the College of Art and Architecture, the College of Business and Economics, and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences) (Appendix E), a printed flyer, and a later male-targeted

version of the printed flyers posted in buildings on campus and in the community (Appendices F and G).

Recruitment followed "snowball" sampling whereby "cases of interest" (those in the target demographic) are identified both through advertising and through people who know cases of interest (Creswell, 2007). That is, the first strategy was the direct recruitment of initiators through flyers, list serves, and class announcements. The second strategy was for students, faculty, and other people who learned of the study to refer any initiators they might know. Care was taken to advertise and insure participant confidentiality and autonomy. Several participants stated they would refer a friend to my study; however, all participants reported learning of the study through the list serve e-mails or posted flyers.

Data Collection

Pilot Study

Because I developed the measures for this study, a pilot study was conducted to ensure face validity. Pilot study participants were one female and one male recruited via e-mail list serves for the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education Counseling Psychology master's and doctoral programs. They were given and asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix J). They participated in the initial interview with their responses audiotaped. After the interview was conducted, feedback was requested from these participants regarding clarity of questions and concepts (Appendix J). Verbal interview responses were examined to ensure that content was relevant to the desired research questions.

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Pilot study participants were older than participants in the primary study; however, it was assumed that their age did not preclude their ability to assess cohesiveness, clarity, and validity of measures in a similar way to younger adults. The criterion for pilot study participation differed from that of the primary study both for ease of pilot study recruitment and so as to not take pilot study participants out of the pool of potential participants in the primary study.

In order to be able to respond appropriately to the interview, pilot study participants had to have initiated the dissolution of at least one serious romantic relationship; however, the dissolution need not have occurred within the 6-month timeframe expected for primary study participants. This alteration made pilot study participants easier to obtain while allowing for interview questions to remain relevant. As with the primary study, pilot study participants were to be screened out if they disclosed suicidality, homicidality, severe impairment or other safety issues and immediately connected to emergency mental health resources on campus. Neither pilot study participant endorsed any of these disqualifications.

According to feedback and reflection from the pilot study, I reconsidered and modified my study in several ways. Pilot study participants noted errors in the informed consent form regarding time commitment and incentive; these were clarified before the primary study began. One participant noted that his feelings about the breakup would have been fresher had his breakup occurred more recently which solidified the within-6-month breakup timeframe I had developed for the primary study. He also indicated that participants may have experienced more than one recent breakup of a serious romantic

relationship, and that I should ask them to have in mind the specific breakup they would like to discuss. As a result of this feedback, at the beginning of each initial interview the participant and I briefly labeled the initiation experience he or she felt was most important to discuss. The other pilot study participant described many difficult emotions involved in her breakup, some of which I had not directly solicited. This prompted me to increase and vary the questions I asked in the primary study regarding the emotional experience of initiators.

Initial Contact and Screen

Potential participants for the primary study notified me of their interest via e-mail. In response to these emails, I contacted participants by telephone or email to ask their age, year in school, and if they initiated a breakup within the past 6 months as an initial screening process. If they met this initial criterion, I described the time and participation requirements and, per their continued interest, we arranged to meet for the second screening and initial interview (one meeting). If they did not meet initial criteria, an explanation of exclusion was given as well as a referral to the University of Idaho's Counseling and Testing Center and a brief explanation of services. I followed this procedure until the female sample was met and until about a month after I stopped advertising for male participants. Female students who qualified for the study but contacted me after the female sample was filled were asked if they could be put on a wait list. Each of these students consented, and one student from the wait list was ultimately included when one original participant did not respond to my follow-up e-mails regarding meeting. My e-mail responses to each type of contact are included in Appendix I.

Qualifying and consenting participants were each asked to meet in a private room in the Commons (a central meeting space) on the University of Idaho campus. Meeting with participants in a convenient, private setting was important to insure participant confidentiality as well as help participants to feel at ease as they discussed personal issues. Appropriateness of interview setting is a key element of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007), as it promotes comfort and a corresponding richness of stories.

Before the interview began, the second screening was conducted. This included questions about suicidality, homicidality and a request for full demographic information. No participants were screened out due to these factors. However, during this discussion one participant disclosed that his breakup had taken place more than 6 months before the interview (he had indicated otherwise in our initial contact), and was disqualified on this basis. After I interviewed my first participant, it became clear that the screening questions on suicidality and grief were best delivered orally in order to build rapport and explore potentially important issues such as suicidality. Thus, for the remainder of the study participants filled out only the demographic portion of this Questionnaire, and the other topics were addressed verbally.

After the full screening was complete, I reviewed with each participant that the study included two audiotaped interviews with me. I described the initial interview as an hour and a half meeting in which they would be given an overview of the study, asked for their informed consent, and then asked to answer questions and provide any information they deem important regarding their experiences of initiator grief (Appendix C). I

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described the second interview as a half-hour follow-up meeting to insure clarity and accuracy of the transcript as well as invite participants to add any information they would like to their story.

Informed Consent

At the beginning of the initial interview, I assessed for suicidality and asked clients to fill out the demographic questionnaire. A written informed consent form (Appendix B) was given to each participant. I then verbally reviewed with them the purpose and procedures of the study and obtained written and verbal consent for the study and the audiotaping of our interviews.

A question on the demographic questionnaire asked if participants would like to receive a summary of the study's results, and the majority indicated that they did. Several participants asked me follow-up questions about the date of dissertation publication, my interest in the topic, and my degree and qualifications. I responded to these inquiries as they came up. In discussing my interest in the topic, I disclosed that I had been through breakups and was curious about how others experienced them. This served to humanize me as interviewer and establish rapport without guiding participants in a particular direction regarding their stories. One participant asked if I had a hypothesis for my study, and I explained that I did not and was not sure what I would learn from the interviews.

Included in informed consent was a discussion of the potential risks of participation in the study. This study inquired about the personal and at times difficult stories of the participants and thus the possibility existed that participants would experience negative emotions that might make them want to discontinue participation.

Risks were perceived as minimal, however participants were given my e-mail and encouraged to contact me should any questions or concerns arise for the duration of the study. No participants contacted me for a non-logistical reason during the study. Participants were also encouraged to set up an appointment at the University of Idaho's Counseling and Testing Center if they experienced any problems. They were told that seeking counseling or withdrawing from the study would not preclude them from receiving the gift card incentive. No participants withdrew from the study after initial inclusion.

Interviews

After informed consent was discussed, I explained that because there is little information on the topic of initiating a breakup, I was interested in hearing as much about the participant's experience as he or she was willing to share. I encouraged the participant to elaborate on any topic they wished and to bring up new topics that felt relevant to their initiation experience.

It felt very important to establish solid rapport with each participant. Rapport building is an important part of both clinical work and qualitative research as it helps individuals to speak openly about intimate experiences (Creswell, 2007). This process began during our first contact, when I thanked participants for their interest, and it ran throughout both interviews. I built rapport by verbalizing my appreciation for their willingness to share, by minimally disclosing my own experiences with breakups when relevant and unobtrusive, and by validating and expressing genuine empathy for each participant's story. Several debriefing questions were built into the interview protocol

which allowed participants to reflect on the interview process, ask any relevant questions, and process the interview experience so as to avoid any type of psychological harm. During this debriefing, five participants stated that it was helpful or enjoyable to speak with me about their experience.

The initial interview (Appendix C) was semi-structured, and I incorporated follow-up questions and probes as relevant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) in order to ensure that I captured the depth and detail, vividness, nuance, and richness of each participant's response. The semi-structured interview is appropriate for a phenomenological study, as it implements some structure for participant narratives while also allowing for autonomy in describing their experiences. Disenfranchised grief populations, by definition, often lack a voice in their own stories, which have been told, instead, by social supports and general societal messages (Kaczamarek & Backlund, 1991). Thus, giving participants relative independence in telling their story of initiation had the added benefit of creating a therapeutic, or at least comfortable, space.

My goal was to direct participants to the interview topics, while also allowing them the freedom to explore that which was important about their experience and may not have been directly addressed in the interview questions. Because each participant's initiator story was unique, follow-up questions differed with every interview. Sometimes I encouraged a new area of exploration indicated by a particular answer; other times, the participant did. My basic approach was to ask, explore, encourage and validate until the participant indicated through silence or verbal conclusion that the specific area of inquiry was exhausted.

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The second meeting took place after each participant had reviewed the transcript of their initial interview. Participants were asked before this interview to examine the transcript for accuracy and mark any areas that were confusing and to consider if they had left out any information they had wanted to share. These issues were discussed, and I also asked participants if they had experienced and could share any important changes to their story during the lapsed time such as a different perspective on the breakup or any changes in their post-dissolution relationship with their ex-partner.

Due to varied time constraints on both the participants and myself, these meetings took place any time from the day after the initial interview (in one instance) to several months after the initial interview. Of the nine participants, eight were able to participate in the follow-up interview in person, while one had left school to go home for the summer and thus had to give her follow-up answers over the phone.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

Data for this study were obtained primarily through demographic information and the semi-structured interviews with each participant. The goal of the interviews was to gently guide participants through telling their stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview was comprised of five topic areas: the general experience for young adult initiators of grief after relationship loss; disenfranchised grief among young adult initiators, experiences thinking about, seeking, and getting support; similarities and differences between male and female experiences, and similarities and differences between younger and older initiators.

Before data analysis took place, two interviews were conducted with each participant. The first involved questions regarding the initiation experience. Within a week of our first meeting, I transcribed this interview. After sending participants their transcripts, I asked them to read through the interview. We then met a second time as a member check so that participants could review and confirm accuracy of their first interview transcript, add any additional information they had not included about their experience, and if desired provide a brief update regarding their adjustment to the breakup.

Generally, participants stated their transcripts were accurately worded and representative of their experiences. One participant noted, however, that because he tended to trail off mid-sentence, his meaning was at times lost. We reviewed instances in his transcript where this was the case, he explained his meaning, and I made notes accordingly. Several participants added qualitative information in the second interview such as a different perspective on the breakup after some more time had passed and a relevant update on the status of their relationship with their ex-partner. These comments were added to the data set for additional information and to help craft the participant profiles. They were not included in the main theme analysis as they were often provided more than six months after the breakup occurred and there was not a standardized amount of time between the first and second interviews.

To analyze the data, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach involving four steps: highlighting important statements from the text (horizonalization), developing themes, writing a textural description or summary, and presenting the essence of the

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phenomenon through a composite description (Creswell, 2007). In the first step of

analysis, horizonalization, I used an open coding approach (Esterberg, 2002). This

involved two stages: in the first, I read through the transcripts in random order without a

sense of what I would find. Both within each transcript and on a separate excel

spreadsheet; I noted those statements that appeared emotionally salient or central to the

participant's experience. The second phase of coding was embedded in the first, and

involved noting when a participant discussed a similar concept to one described in a

previous transcripts I had read. When this occurred, I added an "x" to their initials under

the originally mentioned theme in the spreadsheet. When he or she discussed a new

concept, I added a new statement to the list. When themes were added during the follow-

up interview, I marked them on the data sheet as "2x" (Appendix J).

In the second step of data analysis, I looked at these statements through a broader

lens, organizing them to develop clusters themes that appeared integral to participants'

experiences. For example, multiple statements suggested participants experienced

negative feelings in the relationship before the breakup. These statements such as, "I felt

trapped," or "I felt crazy," were categorized under the theme of "Negative Emotions" in

the relationship (Appendix J).

According to the qualitative method, themes are derived from the researcher's

sense of pattern and meaning (Creswell, 2007; Esterberg, 2002) rather than on a specific

number of statements within or among participant stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In the

absence of hard guidelines, I relied on several strategies to generate themes: getting

intimate with the data (Esterberg); integrating, checking, and modifying (Rubin &

Rubin,); considering the word "theme"; and reviewing clusters of meaning for face validity. In reading through the stories multiple times, I became intimate with the data, meaning I had a sense of what participants were "saying," on a broad level, and which of their specific statements best captured this. Integrating, checking, and modifying involved member checking my perceptions in the second interview and making any relevant updates to the data. A consideration of the word "theme" and consultation about its meaning with my dissertation advisor reminded me that one or two statements do not make a theme. Finally, I looked back at clusters of statements, asking myself, "how many of these statements combined feel and look like a theme, an important element of the initiation story?" I arrived at the conclusion that a theme was constituted when the majority of participants provided an important statement relating to the same concept. Thus, themes discussed in this work are phenomena experienced by more than half of the participants.

After each theme was noted, I stepped back from the work. I spent time away from the transcripts and my study for several days. I then returned to the themes and wrote a summary of the meaningful elements of each participant's story, the third step, which was used for their participant profile as well as to create a context for their themes.

In the final step, essential structuring, I compared the themes and textural descriptions of all participant stories. I then considered the essence of these breakup stories, taken together. I generated a summary of what was important and common among participants regarding the grief and overall experience of initiating a romantic relationship dissolution. Essential structuring was framed by my research questions and

therefore conducted within three separate frameworks: structuring of the entire data set, structuring through comparison of female and male stories, and structuring through comparison of younger and older participants.

To analyze themes based on gender and age, I sorted the general themes based on the gender and ages of participants who endorsed them. This is a qualitative study with nine participants and thus does not have the numerical power nor intention to yield statistically significant results. This holds true particularly for when the small data set was divided by gender and age. My intention, then, was only to look for general trends among participants' stories. So, as with the previous research questions, I defined themes intuitively as those ideas expressed by the majority of participants in a group.

For themes based on age, I analyzed the data in two ways. First, I divided participants by grade in school, with a freshman/sophomore group (five participants) and a junior/senior group (four participants). Because age varies within each grade, I then examined participants by age, with an 18-19 year old group (four participants) and a 20-22 year old group (five participants). Essentially, the 20-year-old sophomore participant was in the younger group in the first analysis and the older group for the second analysis. Even a tentative majority-driven analysis of age was problematic because I could not use the same percentage for both groups to determine the majority. That is, in the four-person group the majority was three out of four participants, or 75%, and in the five-person group the majority was three out of five, or 60%. What made sense to me, then, was to look for discrepancies between the two group of three or greater; for example, if one

theme was endorsed by four freshmen/sophomores and only one junior/senior, or another theme was endorsed by five 20-22 year olds and no 18-19 year olds.

Besides reflections from participants on their transcripts, I was the sole reviewer of participant data. This is typical of phenomenological work; one researcher, immersed in the topic and with personal experience of it, takes on the role of evaluating the data (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is, by definition and necessity, a subjective experience (Creswell). This was evident throughout my process, particularly so as I read through the transcripts and decided which parts seemed most meaningful and important.

To bracket my biases, I did two things. First, I noted my own biases and perspective based on my own initiation experiences, so as to be more aware of issues that might influence my analysis and to approach my transcript review with as much unpresumptuous curiosity as possible. Second, I tried to stick as closely to the text as possible. When an aspect appeared important to me, I asked myself, "why do I think this is important?" I looked at how the idea was phrased, recall how the participant had said it, and consider the text as a whole and its meaning. I considered my own breakup experiences and made sure that it was the participant's experience and not my own that made a theme rise from the page. While these strategies cannot fully extricate my personal biases, they served to mediate them.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. The Demographic Questionnaire was created by this author and patterned after questionnaires included in other grief studies about romantic relationship dissolution (Robak & Weitzman, 1995; Robak & Weitzman, 1998). This

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questionnaire is comprised of two portions: a section on basic demographic information including participant age and grade level (the latter two demographics were obtained during the initial screening), ethnicity, and contact information, and a section with screening questions including time since relationship dissolution, grief after dissolution, and suicidality (Appendix A), which were delivered verbally.

Semi-structured Initiator Grief Experience Interview. The Semi-structured Initiator Grief Experience Interview is a measure created by this author and aimed at exploring the initiator grief experience among young adults who have experienced recent relationship dissolution. It contains general topic areas relating to the research questions, as well as several follow-up questions within each area. It also includes several debriefing questions to help participants understand and process their interview experience. Finally, it includes a structure for setting up the second interview. To develop this interview, I looked at examples of semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007; Esterberg, 2002). I developed a draft of the interview which I used for the pilot study. I received feedback from pilot study participants, then revised the measure according to this information.

Initiator Grief Experience Follow-up Interview. The Initiator Grief Experience Follow-up Interview is a measure created by this author and designed to check in with participants to learn if what they said and what they meant had been accurately captured in the transcript of their first interview. Member checking measures are designed to solicit participants' opinions on the accuracy of data (Creswell, 2007). To this end, questions were posed asking each participant to highlight any inaccuracies in the first interview transcript, as well as offer any additional information he or she thinks is

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necessarily in order to create a complete and appropriate description of the experience. The follow-up interview also included a question about the latest status of the relationship to learn if anything significant in terms of the relationship or the participant's feelings since the initial interview.

Dissemination of Information

Inherent to the phenomenological approach is the goal of research being useful to the population studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In this study, it is hoped that the themes and meaning that emerged will be relevant in understanding and helping young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution. One way in which this may occur is by results given directly to initiators, thereby normalizing their experiences as well as offering different perspectives that may empower and help them in dealing with this stressful life event.

Another way in which this information may be useful will be to offer it to mental health professionals. If this grief process is better known by to mental health professionals, it may be incorporated into practice, and therapists will have a better understanding of how to help illuminate this path for college students, friends, and families, involved in the romantic relationship dissolution process. To these ends, at the conclusion of this study, information gleaned from participants will be disseminated to mental health professionals and to the participants themselves who indicated an interest in receiving a copy of the study's results.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

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This study sought to illuminate the experience of grief after initiating a breakup. A hermeneutical qualitative approach was employed, which focuses on uncovering themes and meaning in the stories of individuals who have experienced a similar phenomenon. According to this approach, the researcher picks a topic in which he or she is invested. My interest in this topic and personal experience initiating a breakup led to my desire to create this study, and both were relevant to the work but important to bracket so as to minimize bias. A pilot study at the University of Denver was conducted in order to obtain feedback regarding the interview protocol and procedures. Nine participants from the University of Idaho were recruited through snowball sampling and screened into the study. Each participant responded to a semi-structured interview and follow-up interview. Data were then transcribed and analyzed for important statements and themes. The results will be disseminated to the participants and mental health professionals.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

Participant Profiles

To arrive at the essence of the initiation experience, it is helpful to understand

each participant's demographic context and broader story as well as themes endorsed by

the sample as a whole. Therefore, before results are presented, participant profiles are

described. To maintain anonymity, participants were asked if they would like to be

identified by a pseudonym. Most initiators chose this option and provided me with their

preferred identifier, which was used. Several asked that I choose a pseudonym for them.

Two participants said they would like their actual names to be used. Where a pseudonym

is used, it is denoted by an asterisk in the participant profile heading.

Samantha

Samantha identified as a 19-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, freshman female.

In her initial contact with me in response to a flyer, she wrote, "I don't know how you

found me," which struck me as poignant, as if she was surprised and pleased that

someone would discover her and ask about her story. Samantha had dated her boyfriend

on and off for about 4 years and our initial interview took place about 1 month after their

breakup. She described feeling very close to her partner when they were dating and

disappointed when their relationship did not work out. Despite these hopeful beginnings,

several years into their relationship she became frustrated and hurt that her partner no longer took her on dates and seemed less interested in the relationship than in playing video games and spending time with friends. The two lived together, and Samantha said she continually felt as if her boyfriend was not putting the same amount of effort into their relationship as she was. She described them arguing about this issue often, until one evening she came home and told him she wanted to break up. She said her partner cried and protested. She said the following time period was hard for her as well, but that she felt she had grieved the loss of her partner more leading up to the breakup than after she made her decision. She stated that she sought support from her best friend and that, over time, she started to feel like herself again and enjoyed engaging in new activities.

Allison*

Allison identified as a 19-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, freshman female who was very thoughtful in her answers and interested in psychology. She dated her boyfriend of 10 months before initiating their breakup 1 month prior to our interview. Allison described her relationship as exciting in the beginning, borne out of common experiences. In looking back, however, she indicated that the relationship moved too quickly and got serious before she realized how she really felt about her partner. Two problems she highlighted were not being as attracted to her partner as she would have liked and having difficulty figuring out her feelings due to the long distance nature of the relationship. She said that deciding to initiate the break up was very hard for her, and she "put it off" and avoided it before following through. She discussed feeling badly about hurting his feelings, wondering if she was making the right decision, and feeling

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generally confused about how to approach breaking up with someone. With the support

of friends and family, as well as reinvesting herself into her religion, Allison slowly

became more confident in her decision to break up. By our second interview she seemed

resolved and content. She described hopefulness about new relationships and a better

understanding of what she was looking for, including shared values and a slow start to a

relationship in which she could really get to know the other person before committing to

him.

Scarlett*

Scarlett identified as an 18-year-old, Hispanic, bisexual, freshman female. She

indicated coming from a traditional Hispanic family and faced some resistance from her

parents when she dated Caucasian partners. She discussed her parents' lack of support

with both humor and independence, indicating she was able to make her own decisions in

choosing partners. Scarlett was engaged to her partner of about 1 year when she broke up

with him 4 months before the initial interview. The relationship had been long distance

and she said that this, along with her desire to focus on and prioritize school, led to her

decision to initiate a separation. Scarlett initiated what she believed would be a temporary

breakup with her partner because she experienced her relationship as adding stress to her

life. During this time apart from him, she felt sad but also intuited that this was the right

decision for her, and she described breathing a sigh of relief after the temporary break

was established. She initiated an official breakup shortly thereafter. Scarlett stated she

was already in counseling for other issues when the breakup occurred, and she spoke to

her counselor about her breakup grief and confusion. She indicated that speaking to

someone who did not judge her situation was helpful for her. She ultimately came to the conclusion that it is okay to break up with someone. At the first interview, she stated that she still continued to experience some sadness but that talking to others about her experience continued to help her move forward.

Heather*

Heather identified as an 18-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, freshman female. She was excited about the study as she felt she had learned a lot about herself from her breakup that she wanted to share with other women. Heather's described her two-month relationship, which ended about 2 weeks before our first contact, as full of mixed messages. Her boyfriend would sometimes sneak her into his fraternity house, apparently not wanting to reveal their relationship to his friends, and at other times he told her he pictured the rest of his life with her. Heather initiated her breakup after she received her first semester grades. Passionate about school, she said her grades slipped due to spending more time with her partner and less time studying and going to class. She explained this to her partner when she broke up with him, and he said he did not want to break up but understood her reasoning. Heather said she likes to deal with problems on her own, and as such she did not seek help from friends or family. Instead, she coped alone, describing a new sense of independence and direction after the breakup. She indicated being previously enthralled by the status she felt by dating someone in a fraternity and recognizing this as unimportant after the breakup. In addition, she reprioritized school and her future career, which she felt was a better path for her. She

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said she felt more confident after the breakup and aware that she did not need to be in a relationship to feel good and be happy.

Jean*

Jean identified as a 20-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, junior female. She had a close-knit family and group of friends which she described as important supports throughout her breakup. Jean and her boyfriend had dated for about 4 months. She broke up with him 3 months before our initial interview. She met her boyfriend online and described the beginning of their relationship as fast and full of intense feelings. Soon it became apparent to her that her partner was more serious about their relationship than she was, and she voiced to him her discomfort with him talking frequently about their future together. He continued to talk about his plans for them until Jean felt overwhelmed by this and initiated the breakup. She described dreading the initiation and feeling guilty and confused once the relationship was over. Her partner contributed to this by continuing to try to get back together and by telling her he would be single forever without her. Jean had frequent doubts about whether or not she had made the right decision. She and her partner went back and forth for months between communicating and taking space from one another, which led to frequent ups and downs in her mood. During this time, she sought help from friends and family and reported they were supportive of her. At the follow-up interview she seemed more content with her breakup decision and excited about a new potential romantic interest.

Lily*

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Lily identified as a 22-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, senior female. When she first contacted me, she indicated wanting to talk about her break up with someone two months prior. The day before the initial interview, however, she had initiated a breakup with her boyfriend of the past month. Lily considered this relationship serious and was devastated by the breakup, which became the focus of her interview. She described meeting her partner when he came up to her after class, told her he was attracted to her, and said he was interested in dating her. His direct approach appealed to Lily, but soon after she began to experience him as deceptive and untrustworthy. She gave him the benefit of the doubt on these occasions because she felt they had a strong connection. She questioned whether she was doing something wrong in the relationship that contributed to his behavior until she found tangible proof of him lying and ended the relationship. At our first interview, she was strongly questioning her initiation decision; tearful, grieving, and confused. She reported her friends had helped her by distracting her, but that she still felt unhappy. At the follow-up interview two months later, she said she had gotten back together with him briefly and then ended it again. During this second meeting, she was confident and resolved. She reported she learned new things she did not like about her ex-partner during their second attempt at dating, she had sought counseling for relationship issues, and she felt certain she was making the right decision to separate from him.

Curtis

Curtis identified as a 20-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, sophomore male. His responses to the first interview were direct and unemotional, and he seemed more than others to be resolved in his decision to break up. He indicated that "thinking [the

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relationship] out" by himself and with family had been the most helpful piece of his process. Curtis had broken up with his girlfriend of 11 months about 6 months before the initial interview. He described multiple problems in the relationship, most relating to his partner being "clingy" and overly dependent on him while also complaining about parts of Curtis's personality. He stated he finally came to the realization that he was not in love with his partner anymore, at which point he initiated the breakup. He said he felt "surprisingly lighter" when it was over. Curtis said friends told him they were shocked he had stayed in the relationship as long as he did, which emphasized for him that he made the right decision. Curtis stood out among participants as the individual who reported the most relief and least amount of grief as a result of initiating a breakup. He indicated that any grief or sadness he experienced likely occurred for him before the breakup, when he realized what he needed to do, rather than afterward. At the second interview, he indicated not much had changed for him, and he appeared just as solid in his decision as he had in the initial interview.

Doug*

Doug identified as a 22-year-old Caucasian, heterosexual, junior male. He had a good sense of humor throughout the interviews, even when he was discussing the difficult aspects of his relationship and breakup he seemed to also recognize a lighter side to his struggles. Approximately 4 months before our initial interview, Doug had broken up with a woman he had known for years before dating for about 9 months. He stated that when he first met her, the two did not get along, and he attributed the breakup to having different values and opinions on things as well as the frequent arguments that arose

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because of these differences. Doug reported he initiated the breakup spontaneously when he was frustrated with his girlfriend one day. He said the breakup conversation did not go as he predicted. He reported thinking he was going to "win," to step away from the discussion feeling that he was right and his partner was wrong. Instead, both partners talked about traits that bothered them in the other person. Doug said that though he believed that breaking up was the right decision, his partner's comments affected him deeply. He spent time just after the break up reflecting, understanding his ex-girlfriend's perspective, and then deciding he wanted to work on not being as selfish. Doug said he felt "happier" after the relationship was over, but that the process "sucked," and he was grateful to have been able to rely on his friends and family for support. He stated that, after what he went through, he hoped that no one had to go through a break up alone.

Malcolm*

Malcolm identified as a 22-year-old, Caucasian, heterosexual, senior male. He had dated his girlfriend for 6 months before breaking up with her 4 months before the initial interview. Getting ready to graduate, the future appeared to be on Malcolm's mind, especially with regard to relationships. He stated that the relationship with his partner had been good and he had often found himself trying to decide between breaking up and being with her for the rest of his life. Contemplating the future and discussing it with his partner made him start to feel "trapped," and after putting it off for some time, he initiated the breakup. Malcolm described confusion and uncertainty about his decision for months after the breakup, and some of these emotions reappeared during our interview. He stated he went to his brother and friends during the acutely painful period after the

breakup, which felt at times like grief after a death. He described some of their attempts at supporting him as helpful, and others not, such as when friends disparaged his ex-partner. Malcolm felt he became stronger and more independent as a result of the breakup. He stated it continues to feel easier and more comfortable for him to be single again. Still, the "aftermath" and negative emotions around the breakup still come up for him at times, especially as he and his ex-partner have tried to remain friends.

<div align="center">Overview of Themes</div>

Each participant's story was unique, informed by their narrative voice, cultural background and contextual factors, and specific experience. While some of these differences are highlighted in the participant profiles as well as the spreadsheet including their important statements, the purpose of this study was to identify the themes that emerged as salient or common. As discussed, themes were identified when related statements were made by a majority of participants: at least five out of nine. Within each theme, specific types of important statements differ. Thus, important statements within a theme may be highlighted even if noted by fewer than five participants.

The themes are organized in response to the five research questions. The first research question asked about the general experience of grief among young adults initiating breakups. This is addressed by examining the process chronologically, which fit well with both the interview format and participants' natural tendencies to tell their stories as they evolved over time. As such, themes relating to the first research question are divided into chronological categories: the relationship before the breakup; the breakup process; after the breakup; and lessons learned and reflections.

The second research question asked, how young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution experience disenfranchised grief? Themes of disenfranchised grief by both other people and self were noted by participants and are presented.

The third research question focused on how young adult initiators of romantic relationship dissolution cope and think about, seek, and experience support after dissolution. Participants' stories revealed themes relating to both helpful and unhelpful examples of coping and support, which are described.

The fourth and fifth questions looked at similarities and differences existing between gender and age groups. For gender, similarities are discussed as well as themes endorsed by the majority of women only and the majority of men only. For age, similarities are discussed as well as the absence of notable differences.

The Experience of Grief among Young Adult Initiators (Research Question 1)

Participants noted that the experience of relationship dissolution and grief involved feelings, thoughts, and behaviors beginning during the relationship, occurring during the breakup process, and persisting after the relationship was over. These themes are presented chronologically, organized by time period.

The Relationship before the Breakup

The experience of dissolution began with participants feeling dissatisfied with their relationships. Within the relationship, themes leading to the desire to break up included: problematic relational dynamics, a change in feelings, or negative emotions.

Problematic Relational Dynamic. For eight participants, the breakup was preceded by a dynamic between themselves and their partner that felt unhealthy or

problematic to them. The most common of these complaints was that the relationship became too serious or moved too quickly, which was expressed by six initiators. Jean said her partner "started becoming more serious in the relationship than I was or at least faster than I was so that kind of became the issue." Malcolm described a similar problem:

> We would start discussing a lot of future plans together and, yeah that kind of just made me feel really like boxed in like I would never like, you know, get another girl or anything and always be with this girl. So I think that just colored my mood and like my experiences with her, and I started feeling really trapped. And then I started, like when I was with her started like kind of wishing I wasn't with her.

The speed at which partners became serious about the relationship seemed to be an important factor in relationship dissatisfaction, bringing into awareness partners' different feelings on the future of the relationship. It is worth noting that speed was particularly highlighted as a problem by the three initiators whose relationships were long distance. Participants said that because of long distance, their relationships did not follow a traditional trajectory and that they therefore got to know their partners in intense spurts, which may have contributed to the sense that the relationship moved too quickly or became too intense too early.

Problematic relational dynamics were experienced in a variety of other ways, including being better as friends, noted by Allison, Scarlett, and Heather; arguing nonstop, noted by Scarlett, Doug, and Samantha; a general sense of the match being "not right," noted by Curtis and Malcolm; and the initiator not seeing a future with partner,

noted by Doug and Heather. "I wasn't attracted to him in that way, and I just wanted to be friends," Allison described as the major problem in her relationship. She stated it was difficult to come to terms with this idea but once she did she felt pushed to break up with her partner. Doug offered another type of problem that he felt was insurmountable. "We just stand on different sides on like a just a few like major [things]," he said. He described frequent arguments as a result of these different perspectives, which ultimately helped him realize, "I love her but I'm not in love with her," which led to him initiating the breakup.

The final problematic dynamic described was that of initiators "losing" themselves in the relationship, or losing track of their priorities such as doing well in school. Three participants discussed this loss of self as their primary problem in the relationship. Heather said:

> I definitely didn't need to sacrifice my grades [for the relationship]. And I think a lot of women have that issue, as they get so attached to a man they just, you know, they depend on him and then they can't focus on their schoolwork and stuff and pretty soon, you know, they've got like a 1.0 GPA and they're pregnant. So it's like it didn't really come into perspective for me until I was almost that girl and then it was like, a little bit of a wakeup call.

Scarlett echoed this sentiment, saying that her priority of doing well in school was negatively affected by her time investment in the relationship. Samantha noted that, once her relationship was over, she realized how many personal interests and activities they had forgone in order to maintain the relationship. While in their relationships, these

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initiators' identities seemed wrapped up into being partners, rather than individuals, which ultimately led to their dissatisfaction.

Feelings Changed. In addition to problematic relational dynamics, six out of nine initiators stated their relationships had been good and happy initially, and then their feelings changed. "I just stayed up one night and started thinking, 'am I still happy with this?'" Curtis said. "And I really couldn't find a reason, it was just becoming so draining." Samantha and Malcolm also noted that the relationship was happy for a while, but that over the course of the relationship their feelings changed and they realized the relationship no longer brought them satisfaction. Allison stated her feelings changed when she realized she was not attracted to her partner. Scarlett said she was so happy in the beginning of the relationship that she thought her partner was "the one"; however, as she began school and her priorities shifted, her feelings did as well. Some of these participants reported difficulty adjusting to the change in feelings and a hope that initial positive feelings could be regained. However, each found that ultimately their new and different feelings persisted.

Negative Emotions. Another salient concern noted by participants with regards to their relationships was that being with their partners caused them to experience negative emotions. This was discussed by six out of nine participants. One such emotion was self-doubt, which Lily noted several times was at the core of her relationship and her reason for initiating the breakup. "It made me feel crazy," she said of being in the relationship, "[I] just kinda maybe wonder if he treated like his other girlfriends like that. Or if it was just me." Another negative emotion was worry. "I felt stressed all the time, I felt

worried," Scarlett said of her relationship. Negative emotions emerged as pervasive among initiator stories.

The Breakup Process

Despite all nine participants experiencing a problematic relational dynamic, changed feelings, negative emotions, or a combination of these factors in their relationships, initiating the breakup was almost unanimously described as difficult and complicated. What made initiating hard was different for each initiator, but generally was attributed to worry about hurting the other person, uncertainty about self or the decision, or grief and sadness experienced by the initiator before the breakup.

Worry about Hurting Receptor. Initiators' worry about hurting receptors was a consistent theme throughout the transcripts, discussed explicitly by six of the participants. Jean described how crippling and upsetting this fear was for her:

> One of the biggest reasons I didn't want to do it is was I just knew it would hurt him a lot, and so I'm like, I just can't. And even though like towards the end everyone, like my roommates were like, 'you're not happy right now cause you're just worrying about it so much,' and so I'm like, 'yeah I'm not happy but I don't want to hurt him at the same time, so, it's just hard.

While this account explicitly describes the pain of hurting a partner, other descriptions indirectly suggested this feeling. Malcolm described the breakup process as full of dread and anxiety, saying he was scared because he knew how hard it would be for his partner to hear that he wanted to break up with her.

Worries about hurting partners often led initiators to feel guilty. Four initiators described experiencing guilt before and during their breakup process. Scarlett asked her friends, "is this the right thing? I feel guilty about it." She described her friends normalizing her decision, which helped to assuage some of her guilt. Jean's partner told her he would never find another partner, which contributed to her guilt. "I'm like this is my fault," she said. Generally, especially during and just after the breakup occurred, initiators tended to feel badly about ending the relationship and to blame themselves for causing pain to their partners.

Uncertainty about Self or the Decision. Despite feeling a sense of unrest in the relationship, seven initiators experienced some form of wondering whether or not he or she had made the right decision by initiating the breakup. "I wasn't sure for like months," Malcolm said, "if I'd made the right decision or not…I just really didn't know if I did the right thing." The sense of uncertainty about the breakup was persistent for initiators, who reported this both during the breakup process and long afterward. "Every now and then I'll like think about it," Scarlett said 4 months after the breakup occurred. "Like, oh I shouldn't have done that, I should have tried to fight for it more." Confusion over whether or not breaking up was the right decision emerged in six out of nine participant stories. As Doug succinctly put it, "It wasn't just cut and dry."

Uncertainty often led initiators to take time to gather their thoughts and feelings, as well as to seek others' feedback regarding whether or not they were making an appropriate decision. Scarlett noted needing time to finalize her decision. She initiated a temporary breakup, initially planning to get back into the relationship after taking some

space from her partner, but then she followed through with the official breakup. Curtis discussed thinking things through as the most important step in his decision to initiate. Malcolm consulted with friends and family, whom he said repeatedly told him he was doing "the right thing" by breaking up with his partner given his dissatisfaction in the relationship. Reflecting on the decision, both internally and with external supports, seemed to help initiators gain perspective on why they ended the relationship. Still, it was hard for most initiators to feel confident in their choices. "[I was] just hoping I was making the right decision," Allison said.

Preemptive Grief. In addition to worrying about hurting their partners and uncertainty about making a good decision by breaking up, initiators described a grief process before the breakup process. Six initiators reported experiencing some form of grief or sadness around the time of their breakup, often before the verbal initiation process began. "Probably the week or two before breaking up [was the hardest]" Doug said, "figuring out how you're gonna break up with someone, and when, and just like the part where both people aren't happy." Allison discussed that, until she met friends at college, grief over the relationship ending was tied to a general sense of loneliness without her partner. "Part of like the grieving process I think," she said, "was being sad up here and not having anyone until I met [friends] to figure out what was making me sad." Curtis noted that his grief occurred predominately while thinking, "'do I still really love her?' and that was before I really broke up with her." Samantha, who experienced grief more as anger, said, "I was mad at [my partner] for not trying." She recalled wanting their relationship to work and often being angry, sad, and frustrated by how the

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relationship had evolved before initiation. Though experienced as different emotions, preemptive grief was a salient experience for these six initiators.

After the Breakup

After the breakup, preemptive grief transitioned into post-dissolution grief and mourning of the loss. Instead of grieving the impending end of their relationship, they grieved the reality of not having their ex-partners or the relationship in their lives anymore. Initiators also reported navigating new relationships with receptors. Finally, they expressed positive emotions and thoughts regarding dissolution.

Post-dissolution Grief. After initiating the breakup, eight out of nine participants reported grief symptoms including confusion, anger, sadness, annoyance, guilt, loneliness, and awkwardness. In addition to these emotions, initiators described feeling like failures, feeling responsible for receptors feelings, missing receptors, questioning themselves, feeling "horrible," and feeling "bad." "I started off really sad and mad then it just kind of went to sad," Samantha said. Jean also described a range of negative emotions after the breakup was over. "Every time he talked to me I just felt like a weight," she said, "I'm like, I feel guilty…it's just really hard…it just was like a weird emotional thing." These emotions were hardest just after the breakup, two participants noted, and lessened over time. They were revived when initiators thought about their stories, and they seemed at times fresh during the initial interviews.

A significant piece of initiators' post-dissolution grief was a sense of loss, noted by five out of nine participants. Samantha described the multiple losses she felt after breaking up with her partner:

Like you were with someone for four years, you really feel like you have that

person, but it's like, you just, you get so settled with somebody and you feel like,

like that's my person, I can tell that person anything and, he'll always be there

and support me…I don't know, it was just, it was okay it was just like a long and

horrible process where I was just feeling pretty crappy.

Heather described her loss as less about her specific partner and more about no longer

being in a relationship. "Watching everyone else cuddle with their boyfriend during

movies and being alone," she said, "that was pretty much the only grief I went through is

just not having someone to cuddle with." Allison echoed this sentiment of missing a

partner, if not her specific partner. "I miss like having someone to tell everything to,

cause he did listen when I needed him to," she said. Regardless of their conviction about

initiation, missing their partners was a common experience among participants. In a

poignant description of his loss, Malcolm said a friend told him breakups were similar to

losing someone from death, which resonated with him. "Like you really lose someone,"

he said. "Like losing a close relationship's almost like, like not as bad but it's close to

like losing a family member [from death]."

Navigating New Relationship. As part of adjusting to the loss of the relationship,

initiators indicated navigating if and how to maintain contact with ex-partners. Eight out

of nine initiators said they had to figure out how to transition from a couple to a new

relationship. Jean said in that bumping into her boyfriend on campus after the breakup

was difficult for her:

I've seen him two or three times [since the breakup] and it's just really hard. And

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I didn't realize it would be that hard to actually like see him again but like the first

time I saw him I just cried and I was just like, I'm not even really sure why.

She reported that she and her ex-partner had been in touch on-and-off since the breakup,

and he repeatedly suggested that the two should get back together. She indicated she

finally insisted they take space from one another, a decision about which she felt good.

She and two other initiators mentioned needing space just after their breakups, noting that

it was helpful to take time away from their partner. Three initiators decided that no new

kind of relationship between initiator and receptor made sense. Allison discussed this. "I

kind of like was okay being like friends with him [initially after the breakup]," she said,

"and now I don't really want to talk to him at all…my perspective has changed a little bit

on that."

Four participants stated they maintained a friendship or other kind of relationship

with their ex-partner after the relationship was over, which was not always easy for the

initiator. "There's a lot of post relationship phases," Malcolm noted. "There's a lot of

jealousy which is strange cause there wasn't jealousy during the relationship." He

reflected that he was glad he and his ex-partner could be in one another's lives but that

figuring out how to do this was sometimes confusing or difficult. He said he was looking

forward to her moving soon, which he felt would clarify their relationship even more for

him. Doug was more optimistic about his post-relationship friendship. "I accept her for

who she is and she's not gonna change," Doug said, "so I accept that and I love her as a

person so we're friends." Thus, initiators had different perspectives and took varied

actions regarding a post-relationship dynamic with receptors. Generally, it appeared that

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those who reported more acute or current grief, such as Malcolm, Lily, and Jean, struggled more with navigating a new relationship, whereas those who felt less grief, such as Doug, Heather, and Samantha, were better able to re-engage with their ex-partners in a new way.

  Positive Emotional Responses. Though they encountered challenges and negative emotions after breaking up, all nine initiators described experiencing positive emotions as well. Relief was the most common positive emotional theme, expressed by five initiators. "I felt surprisingly lighter," Curtis said of the day after he broke up, "Like, uh, a huge burden was lifted off my shoulders." In addition to relief, initiators described many other positive feelings; one mentioned pride about the choice, another said he felt happier, and another said she felt more active and motivated. "I'm happier now," Doug said 4 months after his breakup. These emotions tended to increase as time passed since the breakup; Lily, Jean, Scarlett, Malcolm, and Samantha all noted they felt better as more time passed since the breakup.

Lessons Learned and Reflections

  Each participant noted reflecting and learning lessons about initiation, relationships, or themselves as a result of the breakup process. Particular lessons noted by initiators included: how hard initiation can be, acceptance of the initiation and breakup processes, new perspectives gained, personal growth, and the significance of and strategies for supporting someone who has initiated a breakup.

  Initiation is Hard. One aspect of the process that seemed to surprise participants was just how difficult initiating a breakup could be, noted by seven participants. "It was

hard," Malcolm said, "yeah that's not, it's not fun to break up with someone." He indicated looking back and realizing that he had to grieve to get through his breakup. Samantha gave a similar assessment: "it was very, very hard," she said. "Even if you break up with somebody, um, and it's, you know it's for the better you can still be very sad about it and feel a good amount of loss." The word "hard" was the most frequently used adjective by participants when asked to describe their initiation processes.

Four participants disclosed having been the receptor of a break up in the past, yet reflected that initiating was hard, at times even harder than receiving news that a partner wanted to break up with them. The idea that initiation is not only hard, but potentially harder than being broken up with, was noted by two participants. Jean said:

Like if you're the one getting broken up with it always seems like it might be harder but I actually think that, at least in some cases, the one who breaks up is in the harder position. Cause I know there's the element of surprise and hurt from the other side but like not only am I hurt from like breaking up the relationship but I'm also hurt cause I know I'm hurting someone else, and I think that's really hard, almost harder than just being hurt yourself.

Allison reflected:

I guess before I would have said that I'd rather break up with someone than be broken up with but I've never really had to break with someone before this so I feel like my perspective on that has changed and like breaking up with someone I feel like in a sense is a lot harder than being broken up with because when you're broken up you have a reason to be angry and when you break up with someone

you have no reason to be angry and you're still sad and still hurting just like

having been broken up with.

Acceptance of the Process. Despite their reflections on the difficulties inherent in

breaking up with someone, over the course of both interviews each of the nine

participants indicated some type of acceptance of their process. Acceptance came in

different forms. One variation was the initiators' acceptance of their decision as the right

one for them, which was noted by six initiators. "I think it was a good decision,"

Samantha said. Lily indicated the same sense of satisfaction with her decision. "It still

sucks but I'm glad that I feel this way about it, instead of feeling like 'oh, I can change

him'…I've kind of realized that at least I don't have to live with it." Though three

participants noted that initially after the breakup they were confused and that they still

sometimes wished the relationship had turned out differently, after time and reflection

they seemed to shift to feeling they had done the right thing by initiating the breakup.

Scarlett indicated she had accepted her decision, and after she had answered the initial

interview questions, she felt she should have ended the relationship earlier than she did.

Part of acceptance was realizing that feelings of dissatisfaction in the relationship

were valid, shared by three participants. Allison said:

> 'I just don't like you anymore,'…you feel [initially] like that's not a good enough
>
> reason to break up with someone when it's like it is a good enough reason it's just
>
> hard to, like hard to make yourself realize it I guess.

Doug noted that being "right" should not be the priority in breaking up with someone. "The big thing I learned [about initiation]" he said, is you don't have to be right….it's not a competition or anything." Some participants like Allison and Doug seemed to think that initiation had to be right by some objective measure; however, after going through their breakups they had a more accepting view on why and how breakups can occur. As Heather put it, "I guess every relationship and breakup has its own story."

Beyond accepting the decision, two initiators felt particularly good about their initiation. Curtis shared:

I always try to think of my experiences as learning opportunities. And to be able to share with [you], I kind of solidify my own, my own ideas…to know exactly how I feel about it…[after the breakup] I felt a lot better in general about things.

Heather also indicated that going through difficult breakups and moving forward made her recognize her own strength. Referencing a breakup that she had initiated years before, she said, "that's part of what makes us stronger," she said. "You go through your experiences and you move on." Thus, acceptance as described by participants encompassed not only coming to terms with the decision but, at times, emerging proud, strong, and having grown from the experience.

New Ideas about Relationships and Breakups. In addition to accepting their breakup process, six out of nine participants disclosed that going through this experience prompted them to change their perspectives on relationships and breakups. One shift involved participants clarifying their needs within romantic relationships. For example, two initiators mentioned wanting a relationship that moves more slowly in the beginning.

"I need a relationship that's a little slower…to be able to be more comfortable where we're on the same page," Heather said. "It's okay starting off slowly or like starting off as friends." Allison agreed, stating, "I'm gonna be a lot more cautious. I'll get to know the person I think a lot better before I just want to jump into [a relationship]." Samantha's new needs included not arguing as much with partner and enjoying the relationship. "I feel like you should be able to have a conversation and not argue," she reflected. "I guess my perspective on relationships is just they should be more fun than I guess aggressive." Heather made a similar point when she said, "people should find someone they get along with. Somebody they can be friends with and go and do stuff together." Priorities such as moving slowly, enjoying partner, increased communication in relationships, and being friends with partner emerged as a result of these participants' breakups.

Another idea developed by initiators was that they could and should prioritize their own feelings in a relationship and breakup, described by four initiators. Initiators became more comfortable with making decisions based on their desires. "I feel like I just need to let myself be picky [in choosing a partner]," Malcolm said, "…cause there's no reason not to. I've got time, I don't need to lock myself down." Jean also discussed putting herself first as a result of friends and family encouraging her to do so. "You need to look out for yourself sometimes," Jean said, "and [after a breakup is] one of those times." Scarlett summarized this lesson:

It's okay to feel bad about [initiating]…but you don't need to feel bad about it. I mean it's your life. You don't have to, I mean it's obviously a, a great human

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ability if you can worry about someone else, but it's something you don't feel is

right for yourself you have to put a stop to it and live your own life.

As initiators moved forward through their grief, they seemed to shift focus from concerns

about the other person to a sense that it was normal and good to prioritize themselves.

Personal Growth. As they clarified new ideas about relationships and breakups,

all nine initiators also seemed to gain a new sense of self after the relationship had

dissolved. Four initiators noted recognizing that they were more independent than they

had thought. "I learned that I really need to, to be independent, like that's a really key

thing for me," Malcolm said. Samantha discussed another personal realization: "I learned

I'm a lot more ambitious than I thought I was," she said, noting that she became more

focused on school and her career after her breakup. Heather discussed a new sense of self

after reflecting on the reasons people get into relationships. She said she often sees

women in college dating to be "cool" or fit in, and she almost did the same. However,

getting out of the relationship helped her clarify who she was and what she wanted. "It

took me a while to understand that…college is about figuring out who you are and what

you want to do...it's about what you've done, not what you look like the entire time," she

said.

Five out of nine initiators indicated that, looking back, their concerns about their

relationships were important and persistent, and they planned to trust their feelings more

in the future. As Allison put it:

You should take [your feelings] seriously…I think if you take them lightly and

then you can just push them back in like the back of your mind…try to pay

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attention and understand…that's probably most important like I mean cause those

feelings aren't there for no reason, and that's something I had to realize slowly.

Doug also discussed the significance of trusting feelings and "staying true to yourself."

Curtis agreed that trusting feelings was important, and noted that this can be difficult at

times. "Perhaps I was lying to myself [about my feelings] at times," he said. "I learned

how to notice when I'm feeling uncomfortable about something." It seemed that for

initiators, accepting their processes and realizing they had made the right decision for

themselves in breaking up allowed them to recognize in a new way the value of their

feelings.

For five initiators, personal growth coincided with a desire to take time off from

dating after their breakups. They discussed taking a dating hiatus, giving diverse reasons

including: needing more time to move through grief (one participant), wanting to focus

on academics or future career rather than relationships (two participants), wanting to deal

with other personal issues (one participant), and wanting to take time to self-reflect (one

participant). "I don't want to be in a relationship myself right now," Scarlett said, "…I

don't want the extra stress right now. I mean, I got 18 credits, trying to focus on that."

Two initiators indicated that eventually they would like to date again, Doug noting that

he still wanted to get married one day; however, for the time being most were content to

be single after going through their breakups.

How to Support an Initiator. As they told about their personal journeys, five

initiators revealed what they needed during the hard times and gave recommendations for

how to best support someone who has initiated a breakup. One reflection was shared by

three of these five participants: initiators need to seek support from others. Scarlett said that speaking with friends and a counselor about her experience was most helpful for her. Malcolm said that speaking to certain friends was helpful to him. "I feel like it's really important to, um, go to friends and family and like to people you actually really trust," he said, "…there's people that won't give you the best support I guess. Uh yeah, and just kind of stay away from those ones." Selectively seeking support appeared to be a helpful component for initiators working through their post-dissolution grief.

So what makes one support person more helpful than another, according to these initiators? One quality is appreciating the seriousness of initiator loss, three participants said. Malcolm discussed having friends and family attune to his sadness as an important aspect of the support he received. He reflected that, through this process, he has also become a better support person to others. Malcolm said:

> I take [breakups] more seriously [now]…and their affects that they can have on
> people. Cause like I see the affects it has on me, and how down I can get, even if
> I'm the one doing it...I don't do the shrug it off type of thing anymore at all. I
> don't feel like that's a good idea.

Samantha discussed the tendency to fall into unhealthy coping skills after a difficult breakup. She expressed her appreciation for friends and family being aware of this possibility and supporting her by promoting healthy coping.

The Experience of Disenfranchised Grief (Research Question 2)

Societal norms dictate that it is the receptor, rather than the initiator, who has a right to grieve the end of a relationship and this idea was reflected in six out of nine

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participants' stories. These initiators noted that their loss was not honored, validated, or recognized by others in a way that felt fitting or helpful. Three out of six of these initiators additionally indicated that they internalized this disenfranchisement in such a way that they devalued and underestimated their experience of grief.

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchisement by Others and Self. Five initiators described disenfranchisement from friends who minimized their experiences, and one described disenfranchisement from her mother. Doug said that some of his friends "weren't super helpful…so yeah they just said, 'yeah well that's too bad, she was nice, but as long as you're happy." Malcolm conveyed that several of his female friends had been jealous of his relationship and their support consisted of demeaning his ex-partner. They would say, "she wasn't even hot," which felt unhelpful to him. "It's kind of like a discount of your feelings," Malcolm said. "I was like, 'that's supposed to make me feel better?'" Lily felt that friends minimized the nature of her relationship, and accordingly her grief. Someone said to her, "let's just go out and do something and it'll be okay, you've only known/seen this guy for a month so it'll be fine." She laughed in describing this exchange, indicating that it was "weird" and unhelpful. When friends minimized their relationship or ex-partner, initiators tended to feel unsupported, disenfranchised, and unable to express their feelings. Malcolm discussed this phenomenon when he said, "I think there's so much stereotypes and stigma about the person doing the breakup, and I feel like it's important to know that the person doing the breakup hurts too….goes through a lot of grief."

Scarlett was the only participant to note disenfranchisement from a parent: her

mother. Her mother said, "'oh I told you so,'" after Scarlett told her she had broken up

with her partner. "That was really bad," Scarlett recalled, "I didn't like that at all. I hung

up on the phone with her a couple times when she, if she brought it up like that." She said

her mother's comments felt hurtful. "Having your mother gloat about it," she said, was

not helpful in dealing with her grief.

Lily, Allison, and Malcolm noted internalizing this disenfranchisement, de-

legitimizing their own feelings because they had initiated their breakups and therefore did

not feel that they should grieve. Lily noted a general perspective of feeling badly for

receptors rather than initiators:

It's hard to be strong…when you hear about someone breaking up with another

person you always feel, kinda, for the person who got broke up with. And…I

don't know. Like their, I feel like the person who gets broken up with feels like

they look like the weak one or the wrong one.

Allison expanded on this idea in her story. She described her own feelings of confusion

over experiencing the grief and loss she felt as simultaneously legitimate and illegitimate.

When you break up with someone you have no reason to be angry and you're still

sad and still hurting just like having [been] broken up with…like you feel like

[it's] not a good enough reason to break up with someone when it's like it is a

good enough a reason it's just hard to, like hard to make yourself realize it I

guess.

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Whether through comments from friends or internalized views, the experience of disenfranchised grief after the breakup was not uncommon and was painful for those initiators who experienced it.

<center>Coping and Support (Research Question 3)</center>

All nine initiators described different types of experiences coping as well as seeking and receiving support after their breakups. It seems that the first instinct for many (five initiators) was to cope alone, after which point they started to distract themselves with activities and discuss the relationship with friends and family members. These social interactions were helpful for eight initiators and other times not helpful (as noted under the disenfranchisement theme). Seeking counseling was generally either not considered by initiators or else deemed unappealing (six initiators), though two initiators did report discussing their feelings with a counselor and finding it helpful. Speaking with me about their experiences seemed to offer a final wave of support, for which five participants expressed gratitude.

Coping

Spending Time Alone. Just after initiating the breakup, five participants sought to spend time alone. "[I] just sat and thought for a while," Doug said. Malcolm expanded on a similar experience:

> I was kind of reclusive, and then I uh for days was just like, just played video games and that was about it and didn't talk to very many people. And a few people, like no one really asked about it either, like they just knew I, I think I, I think they just knew I needed some time.

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It seems as though taking time to be alone was important for the majority of initiators as they experienced their initial reactions and grief. This time served both to distract them from what had happened and to allow them to process the experience. Malcolm's comment suggests that time alone was both what he needed and the best way for friends to support him immediately after the breakup.

Support

Family and Friend Responses. All but one initiator noted that either family members or friends provided some kind of response to their grief that felt positive. "My mom and I talked a lot about it, and she was really supportive of everything, so that was nice," Jean said. She reported her mother helped by emphasizing that Jean would be okay and that she was doing the right thing. "[She] was just like, 'you need to do what's best for you,'" Jean said. Malcolm indicated his brother was a good source of support for him after the breakup, "'It sucks I've been there too but like you'll find a better one, like not necessarily better but someone more suited to you,'" his brother said, which Malcolm found helpful. Generally, initiators said that listening, normalizing, emphasizing that the initiator made the right decision, and providing hope were among the most helpful ways family members supported them.

Friends offered different types of support for initiators. As with family member support, validation and normalizing were cited by initiators as a helpful way for friends to support them. Scarlett said she asked her friends if she had done the right thing by breaking up with her partner, to which one friend said, "you're good, don't worry, it's your life. It's your decisions.'" She also mentioned, as did four others, that friends

anticipated and were glad about the breakup decision. This seemed to additionally validate initiator's decisions for them. A final way in which friends supported initiators was providing them with distractions or help in not thinking about the problem. For Malcolm and Lily, this came in the form of activities such as rock climbing or going out to a bar. Samantha found optimal support in her best friend, who briefly validated her feelings and then allowed her the space to move away from the problem. "She let me talk…she just wants me to be happy and I know where she's coming from," Samantha said. "[But] I really only talked to her about it the first night…it helps for me to not really talk about it." Initiators described two categories of positive friend support: diving into the subject and moving away from it. While these are opposing strategies, participants reported that the most supportive friends were generally able to intuit or hear initiators' unspoken requests regarding what would be most helpful. Overall, it seemed that friends and family's presence and efforts, rather than specific types of comments, were what initiators valued most.

Counseling. Participants had varied and often strong reactions to the idea of going to counseling to deal with problems arising because of the breakup. Two initiators disclosed that they sought a counselor's help after the breakup and found it helpful. Two initiators stated they did not seek counseling but were open to the idea of getting help from a counselor. However, most (six) participants noted being uninterested in counseling. These participants indicated that they could not see themselves seeking help from a counselor for their breakups or any other issues. Samantha reported an invalidating experience with a counselor when she was a child that had turned her off to

the idea of seeking help in this way. Heather also indicated that she was unlikely to ever go to counseling for help. Honestly, I probably wouldn't ever," she said. "I have a bit of a pride issue with counseling…it's who I am, I don't really like other people to try to help I guess…but I can usually work through my own problems." Malcolm also referred to "pride" as the reason he was not interested in counseling. "I don't have any problem with counseling," he said, "…I encourage people to do it. But it's a different thing when it comes to yourself." When the topic of counseling arose in initial interviews, it tended to prompt some surprise and defensiveness.

For the two initiators who did seek counseling, the experience was reported as positive. Scarlett said she was seeing a counselor for family issues when the breakup occurred. She said she spent one session focusing on breakup issues, which was helpful. "[The counselor] would repeat what I said and just add like a little question to it," she said, "how he just worded everything helped me a lot, like oh yeah, that is right if I think about it." Scarlett said having an objective person listen to and reflect her story was the most helpful part of counseling for her: "there's not as much judgment…like your family…or your friends," she noted. Despite these two reports, the majority of initiators viewed counseling as either an unappealing or unnecessary option for initiators.

Participation in this Study. Five out of nine participants noted that speaking to me during the course of this study was helpful to them. These seemed to come as a surprise to these participants, who insinuated that they had not known how answering questions about their breakups would feel. Speaking to me about her experience, "some of my old breakup stuff came up," Jean said. She, and others, indicated that this generated a range

of feelings, most of them positive. "It's actually been kind of nice to talk things through," Lily said. Allison indicated that responding to the interview questions helped clarify the breakup process for her. "It's just making me feel like I made the right decision more cause I am comfortable talking about it," she disclosed. Doug made a similar point. "It's good to think about it again," he said, "think about what you learned." The general consensus among participants was that talking about their breakups helped them sort through their feelings and trust their initiation decisions.

Malcolm offered an additional perspective. Talking with me seemed to highlight for him that support from friends was perhaps not as in depth as would have been helpful for him:

> I'm a fairly open person, but sometimes you have to be asked the questions in order to tell people and not a lot of people just want to dive that deep and think they're, uh, overstepping their bounds.

Thus, being asked detailed questions about their experience for this study was identified as helpful for the majority of participants.

<div align="center">Gender Analysis (Research Question 4)</div>

This study also sought to explore how initiator themes might differ or converge by gender. For this comparison, themes were derived when a majority of participants in each group endorsed a concept; that is, when they were noted by at least four out of six female participants and at least two out of three male participants. Results from this analysis show some similarities and differences between female and male experiences of breakup initiation.

Similarities

The majority of both female and male participants endorsed the same 12 themes. Three of these themes were endorsed by all six women and all three men: acceptance of the breakup process, positive emotions after the breakup, and personal growth. These three themes touch on the neutral or positive aspects of breaking up. Heather indicated her acceptance of the process by saying, "you go through your experiences and you move on." Curtis noted the experience of positive emotions: "I didn't realize how good I felt after…I didn't feel the responsibility to help her." Regarding personal growth, Allison indicated she discovered, "you have to learn how to make yourself happy before you can make somebody else happy." Thus, each participant indicated some acceptance, positivity, and growth as a result of their initiation process.

Other themes noted by the majority of both the female and male groups were: a problematic relational dynamic in the relationships (five women and three men), negative emotions in the relationship (four women and two men), worry about hurting receptor during breakup (four women and two men), uncertainty about self and decision to break up (four women and three men), the difficulty of initiation (five women and two men), post-dissolution grief (six women and two men), disenfranchised grief (four women and two men), issues navigating the new relationship (six women and two men), and that friends and family were helpful (five women and three men).

Problematic relational dynamics and negative emotions were salient reasons for both males and females to initiate dissolution, noted by initiators like Samantha who said, "we just were arguing a lot, I just realized like I wasn't happy." Worry about hurting

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receptor, uncertainty about the decision, and the difficulty of initiation ran through the

majority of both genders' stories as well. Malcolm touched all three of these issues when

he said, "breaking up with someone or telling people bad news in general is really

hard…it was a lot of confusion, like I just really didn't know if I did the right thing."

These negative experiences extended to the post-dissolution period, when the majority of

both genders reported grief ("I miss like having someone to tell everything to," Allison

said), disenfranchised grief ("it's a lot harder than people think when you make the

decision. Just because they're like, 'well why are you so upset about it'?" Samantha

noted), and navigating the new relationship ("It's pretty hard to be together [now],"

Malcolm said).

　　　　While struggling with these issues in the relationship and during and after the

breakup, friends and family were helpful for both females and males. Of getting help

from friends and family, Scarlett said, "it's a good thing to do it…it helps so you're not

drowning in it so long." Doug agreed: "it's just good to talk to somebody." Thus, from

feelings in the relationship to support experiences, it appears that there are some

similarities between female and male experiences of initiation.

Differences

　　　　Female-Majority Themes. In sorting by gender, only one theme emerged for the

majority of women and not men: the breakup generated new ideas about relationships and

breakups (five women and one man). These five women discussed issues ranging from

revising their needs in relationships to a stronger sense of self. Scarlett, for example,

noted learning, "if you're unhappy [in the relationship] just fix it yourself and make yourself happy, but if you're really unhappy it's okay to just walk away from it. It's not a bad thing to do it." As Allison described, "before it was just like I didn't know what I wanted and now I know what I think I want." For this participant group, these types of new perspectives were mentioned more frequently by women than by men.

Male-Majority Themes. Six themes were endorsed by the majority of males but not the majority of females: changed feelings led to the breakup (three men and three women), preemptive grief before dissolution (three men and three women), spending time alone after the breakup (two men and three women), lack of interest in counseling (three men and three women), opinions on how to best support an initiator (two men and three women), and the helpfulness of participating in this study (two men and three women). Of changed feelings and preemptive grief, Curtis noted that he realized he was not in love anymore and that "before I really broke up with her, that was probably all the grieving I really did." Doug and Malcolm discussed spending time alone just after the breakup, and all three men expressed a disinterest in seeking counseling. Regarding opinions on how to best support an initiator, both Malcolm and Doug recommended being with others instead of being alone. These same two initiators said speaking with me for the study was helpful. Of our initial interview, Doug said: "it was good to talk about this stuff, think about stuff, it was a good experience."

Based on the gender analysis, it appears that men and women converge and diverge on different themes regarding the initiation experience. Because of the small sample size, it is difficult to generalize these gender-based themes to the larger initiator

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population; however, they offer some initial considerations for how men and women experience this phenomenon.

Age Analysis (Research Question 5)

The fifth research question looked at what similarities and differences might exist between the initiation experience of younger and older students. These data were compared twice, first by grade (freshman/sophomore and junior/senior) and then by age (18-19 years old and 20-22 years old). Unlike with the gender comparison, the number of participants in both the grade comparisons (five freshman/sophomores and four juniors/seniors) and age comparison (four 18-19 year olds and five 20-22 year olds) prevented a standard majority percentage from being used for comparison. I looked instead for any large discrepancies (a difference of three participants or more) to compare these groups.

Similarities and Differences

Using this strategy, there were no salient differences between themes endorsed by freshmen and sophomore and those endorsed by juniors and seniors. There were also no differences between themes endorsed by 18-19 year olds and those endorsed by 20-22 year olds. Participants in every grade and age group endorsed the 19 general initiation themes described above. No large discrepancies pointed to qualitatively different experiences between younger and older initiators.

Chapter Summary

Initiators' stories shed light on the five research questions: the general experience of grief after initiating a breakup, the experience of disenfranchised grief after initiation,

coping and support after a breakup, similarities and differences by gender, and similarities and differences by age. Regarding their general experience, initiators reported grief before, during, and after the breakup, as well as lessons learned and reflections on the process. Six initiators discussed some type of disenfranchised grief. Twelve themes were reported with similar frequency by women and men, six themes were reflected more often by men than women, and one theme was reflected more often by women than by men. Based on two different age analyses, one by grade and one by age, no thematic differences emerged between age groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

Synthesis

The purpose of this study was to explore the grief experience of young adult initiators of a serious romantic relationship dissolution, which has previously been given minimal attention in the literature. The hermeneutical qualitative approach proved well-suited to this purpose, as the semi-structured interview prompted participants to give detailed and in-depth descriptions of their initiation grief. Based on these interviews, it seems clear that initiators can and do experience grief after breakups. All nine participants, three male and six female undergraduate students at the University of Idaho, reported some type of grief experience.

Several components of this grief experience are important to highlight. First, initiators in generally felt a loss similar to other grievers, shifting between loss-orientation and restoration-orientation coping (Carr, 2010). Loss-orientation for these participants included missing their partner, feeling the absence of support provided by their partner, and feeling sad, angry, or confused. Initiators also indicated feeling guilty and feeling badly about hurting receptor, both of which are consistent with the literature (Baumeister, 1993). Restoration-orientation included trying to navigate a new

relationship with ex-partner, focusing on school and other interests, and reconsidering their views on relationships and breakups.

Second, initiators indicated they experienced grief not only after the relationship ended, but also before initiation. They discussed feeling preemptive grief as they worked through their decisions to break up, questioned and doubted themselves, and imagined life without their partners. Six initiators discussed preemptive grief, and eight initiators discussed post-dissolution grief. Thus, it appears that initiators may experience grief both after and before the breakup. Extant relationship dissolution grief literature focuses on grieving after the relationship is over (Baumeister et al., 1993; Buss, 2008). Results from this study suggest that researchers may have ignored another time period during which grief occurs: before the breakup. By illuminating this additional time period of grief, it may be possible to better understand when and how initiators struggle with their decision, and how better to validate their mourning.

An additional purpose of this study was to look at experiences of disenfranchised grief among initiators. Disenfranchised grief can occur when the relationship, loss, or griever's position is underemphasized or not fully legitimized by others (Doka, 1989). Six of these nine initiators indicated experiencing some form of disenfranchised grief. They noted various ways in which their grief had been unsupported, ignored, or unrecognized by others and even by themselves. Friends and family minimized the loss, telling initiators that they "should" not feel badly because they chose to end the relationship, the relationship was short or not serious, the receptor had been a poor match for them, or their grief was otherwise unmerited. Beyond these specific statements,

disenfranchisement came in the form of others not asking questions about initiators' experiences or else suggesting that distraction should be enough for initiators to quickly move on and stop thinking about their grief. These approaches were noted as unhelpful and disappointing by initiators.

Another form of disenfranchisement came from within initiators themselves, informed by societal messages about the parameters of grief. Participants referenced stereotypes, stigma, and personal beliefs that suggested to them that they were doing something wrong, either by breaking up or by grieving the outcome of the breakup. These results demonstrate that society, support networks, and even initiators themselves may not fully appreciate the grief experience of initiators. Previous research in this area has emphasized the intensity of receptor grief (Field et al., 2009; Perilloux & Buss, 2008). However, the themes from these participants suggest that grief faced by initiators is intense and complicated and, as participants noted, may at times be more difficult than that faced by receptors. The implication of these stories is that initiators experience disenfranchised pain warranting increased attention.

This study addressed disenfranchisement not only by asking if participants had experienced it, but also by, in its purpose, treating initiators' experiences as important and worth knowing. The fact that five participants noted their pleasure at being asked these questions, with two mentioning that friends and family did not inquire about their experience in as much depth, seems to underscore their experience of disenfranchisement and the potential value for this population of giving voice to their concerns. It seems apparent from this study that initiation support is appreciated and needed. In addition to

friends and family, on a college campus support can be provided by faculty advisors, residence directors, and counselors, all of whom may benefit from better understanding the initiation process and corresponding grief reactions.

In addition to the research question asking if initiators might experience grief and disenfranchised grief, this study was concerned with initiators' experience of support, which has been previously noted as lacking by grieving individuals (Lehman, 1996). The literature suggests that peer support is particularly important for young adults experiencing problems (Hoyer & Roodin, 2009); consistent with this, the support of friends was noted by eight out of nine participants. Looking at amount and type of support, family ranked second in terms of helping initiators work through their grief. Counseling ranked a distant third. This hierarchy has implications for how to further help initiators. The approach of friends and family should be considered in more depth because the same initiators who noted positive support also indicated that they had at times been disenfranchised by friends and family after initiation. Based on the frequency of their support efforts, friends and family appeared to *want* to help initiators. However, some education for parents and friends of young adults on how to best support individuals who have initiated a breakup could be welcome and beneficial.

Another goal of this study was to compare the initiation experience of women and men, and interviews with the participants yielded several important findings. In heterosexual relationships, gender difference is a popular area of study (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Perrin at al., 2011) and there is some research suggesting that men and women look for and expect different things in relationships (Perrin et al., 2011, Shackelford, Buss, &

Bennett, 2002). What was striking in this analysis, however, was how many themes were endorsed with similar frequency by both men and women. Both men and women described grief and disenfranchised grief experienced after dissolution. Both groups discussed similar reasons for initiation, uncertainty about their decision, importance of support after their breakups, and personal growth as a result of the process. One male participant seemed to directly address the anticipation of differences yet existence of similarities when he said that the initiator's grief should be taken seriously, "even if they're a guy."

Despite these similarities, differences emerged between genders. In total, six themes were noted more frequently by the male majority than the female majority, including feelings changing as a breakup reason, preemptive grief, taking time alone after breakup, and disinterest in counseling. Though these emerged as top themes for men and not women, it is important to note that the gender split of the study may have confounded these results. For example, though participation in this study was noted as a supportive factor by the male majority and not the female majority, it was actually a theme noted by more women (three) than men (two). The small sample of this study makes it difficult to generalize to the larger population. Still, given the prevalence in the literature of gender differences regarding relationships and breakups (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Perrin at al., 2011; Shackelford et al., 2002), it is likely that some (and perhaps more) differences would emerge if the sample was larger. Thus, while the existence of similarities were clear, more research is needed to illuminate gender differences in the initiation process.

In regards to initiator age, another factor explored in this study, similarities were again apparent. It seems evident from these data that family members, and particularly friends, were sought out for support by all participants as might be expected of individuals in this developmental stage (Hoyer & Roodin, 2009). Despite noting disenfranchisement from some peers and family members, most initiators stated that they received helpful support as well. This support came in a variety of forms, including distracting initiators, listening to their experiences, and reinforcing that initiators made the right decision. Their impression of support seemed related to their frustration with disenfranchisement: they wanted others to recognize how sad they were, to express concern, and to not underestimate their pain.

Differences among age groups were not salient, and when discrepancies existed they generally were only differentiated by one or two participants. There is much evidence to support the existence of incremental developmental changes during the college years (Taylor et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2012). With a larger number of participants in each age group, it is anticipated that differences would emerge between the initiator experiences of individuals between the ages of 18 and 22. This could provide further information on how to conceptualize and support young adults at different stages of personal and relational development.

In addition to this study's focus on grief; lessons learned, reflections, and personal growth were also explored and yielded several important results. All nine participants in this study indicated that they had undergone some form of personal growth and change as a result of initiating breakups. These changes included becoming more independent,

becoming more ambitious, and having a new perspective on relationships. A more long-term look at initiators' self-appraisals would help clarify the nature and extent of personal growth and change among young adults as a result of initiation.

Researcher Reflections

My role as researcher was inherent in every aspect of this work. As discussed, my personal experiences with initiating romantic relationship dissolution both in early and later adulthood prompted my interest in this study. My familiarity with the breakup process, with grief and disenfranchisement, with seeking and receiving support, and with reflection and personal growth, informed my research questions. That said, as I approached these interviews, I did not know what I would find. I had in mind a general framework based on my own experiences (and notably not based on previous research on this topic, which I have mentioned several times is lacking). Still, my experience felt like an island before I began this work, which made it both exciting and unpredictable.

I could not have hoped for a more engaged set of participants. Each initiator told his or her story with such enthusiasm, reflecting a depth of emotion and reflection that I had hoped for but not entirely expected. Each initiator disclosed to me both doubts and assuredness in a way that touched me, striking me as specific to the young adult perspective. I loved hearing about each initiator's process and discovering that many, like me, had experienced breakup initiation as an undervalued experience. I relished hearing about the common themes as well as the unique details of each breakup narrative.

As a future psychologist, I believe in the power of the relationships and in this experience I learned about a new kind of relationship- that between qualitative researcher

and participant. In this relationship, I as researcher held some power, which I worked to diffuse by conveying the letter and spirit of informed consent and by disclosing pieces of my own experiences as relevant. Like the therapeutic relationship, the research relationship is greatly benefited by strong rapport. I found my participants willing to build this rapport with me, trusting that they could tell their stories without judgment. I feel honored that these nine men and women were willing to share their experiences with me with such trust and enthusiasm.

Hearing these stories was not always easy for me as it evoked thoughts, feelings, and reflections on my own breakups. After some of the interviews, I spoke with a friend or colleague about my feelings in order to take care of myself and not let my personal reactions detract from or shape the work. The theme of support is woven throughout this study, and it was not only important for initiators but for me as researcher as I listened to and synthesized these stories of grief and loss. Several participants noted seeing things differently after talking with me for this study. My experience of this process reflects theirs, and I am changed because they let me into their worlds and allowed me to help tell their stories.

Study Limitations

The nature and scope of this study included several limitations that must be considered in conjunction with its results. My role as researcher was, as mentioned, integral to the work. My experiences and personality informed the study's purpose and execution, as did my perception of what was meaningful within each participant's story. Another approach would be for a team, rather than the investigator alone, to code the

data. Due to my personal experience with the phenomenon and in accordance with the hermeneutic approach, coding by myself alone was appropriate. This strategy added a richness to the data in that I had a relationship with participants that allowed me to understand not only their specific statements but the tone of their stories. At the same time, I sought to minimize my impact on the study in several ways. Primarily, I maintained awareness of how my own perspective might influence the work and made corresponding changes. For example, my original interview questions invoked what I felt was important from my own experience. By consulting with colleagues and conducting the pilot study, I gained a broader awareness of potential areas of importance and restructured the initial interview to reflect this. Regarding themes, I was the sole reviewer of each story. This is a common limitation among qualitative studies but can contribute to researcher bias. Should this research be replicated, it is recommended that multiple researchers review transcripts and themes if possible.

A second limitation to this study was the small number of participants. Men were more difficult to recruit than women, which led to a smaller-than-desired male group as well as a substantial difference between the size of the male and female groups. Small sample sizes are recommend for qualitative work (Creswell, 2007), as they allow for the researcher to spend considerable time and focus on each participant's stories. At the same time, qualitative work can be difficult to generalize because it highlights a phenomenon as told by only a small group of people. This is a limitation in that another small group of initiators might have a different story to tell. For example, initiators who chose not to volunteer for this study might be less outgoing or less introspective, which would affect

their initiation experiences. Non-college-attending initiators of the same age as this sample would not be interested in focusing on school, which would indicate different types of post-dissolution priorities. There are multiple ways in which initiators' personalities, and experiences, might differ. Thus, the purpose of this study is not to arrive at conclusions about the initiation experience but to set the stage for psychological interest and future research.

Besides being small, the sample was relatively homogenous regarding race and sexual orientation, with all but one participant identifying as Caucasian and heterosexual. Though this study did not seek to examine differences based on cultural factors, this homogeneity may have caused individual experiences to have been more similar than if a heterogeneous sample had been obtained. In addition to cultural background, questions about relationship history, such as number of previous relationships and number of previous initiations, were not asked nor integrated into the findings.

The sample was also homogeneous in that participants shared the experience of negative emotions as a result of their breakups. Advertisements called for initiators who had experienced sadness, grief, or confusion since initiation. Thus, it is possible that this group of initiators shared the experience of post-dissolution grief and other groups of initiators would not feel grief, or as much grief, as a result of initiation. Initiators who did not grieve would likely have described a different type of breakup experience.

An additional limitation relates to the location of this study in Moscow, Idaho. Whenever the location of participants is centralized, there is potential for data limitations. Moscow is a small town, and its inhabitants are predominantly politically conservative,

middle class, and religious. Students at the University of Idaho reflect a similar cultural

background plus share the experience of being college educated and often, as with my

participants, mentally healthy. This specific background profile likely impacted

participant experiences, and was sometimes addressed specifically during the interviews.

For example, Malcolm noted that he has many Mormon friends who married young as it

was encouraged by their religion. He stated that this phenomenon struck him as unhealthy

and influenced his decision to wait until he is older to get married. The effect of Idahoan

culture on these participants' stories is both inevitable and hard to extricate. However, it

remains as a limitation regarding the generalizability of these results to young adult

initiators from different cultural backgrounds.

Areas for Future Research

The results of this study suggest the complex nature of initiating a romantic

relationship dissolution in early adulthood. Because this topic had not been a subject of

qualitative inquiry, it is my hope that it will lay the groundwork for future, more directed

research on this topic.

One way in which to further illuminate the experience of grief from initiating a

breakup would be to examine demographic and cultural variables, relationship variables,

personality variables, mental health variables, and developmental factors as they relate to

the initiator experience. A different version of this work might focus on the experience of

older initiators in a different, more marriage-focused, developmental stage. This type of

research would begin to move beyond illuminating the existence of an initiator grief and

toward providing a more detailed understanding of what factors might contribute to or cause this experience.

Two themes noted by initiators were disenfranchised grief and preemptive grief. Both of these concerns are likely more relevant to the initiator experience than to the receptor experience, and as such they have not received attention in the receptor-focused literature. A more detailed study of these two types of grief would help fill a gap in the grief literature.

Yet another area for further examination is how initiation grief compares to other forms of grief, such as that of losing a loved one. One participant noted he saw these two experiences as comparable, while others described an intensity of grief and difficulty after initiation they had not expected or previously experienced. A study looking at grief symptoms across different types of losses, including initiation, would help to legitimize the experience of initiators and provide a more detailed description of this specific type of grief process.

Support for initiators has been initially examined in this study and merits further investigation. In addition to looking at how to improve support for initiators, exploring perspectives of family, friends, and psychologists or other mental health professionals on the initiation process would provide more information on this topic. For example, interviews with friends and family on their understanding of the initiation experience would be informative, as would a survey of how mental health professionals conceptualize and enact treatment for initiators. Like initiators themselves, support persons have perspectives and biases that interact with their ability to provide helpful

support. A further investigation of these perspectives would add to our understanding of the initiator experience within the context of social and professional support.

Chapter Summary

This study was one of the first to focus on the experience of initiators of romantic relationship dissolution. An almost ignored topic in the past, initiator grief emerged in these narratives as common, difficult, and meriting a larger focus by researchers and social supports. The work was personal for me, and I felt privileged to hear participants' stories and help give a voice to this understudied population. Despite several limitations, this study yielded important initial findings on which future research can build. The possibilities for continued exploration into this topic are many, and it is my hope that this study inspires further interest and inquiry into the experience of initiator grief.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Introduction:

Hi, my name is Laura Finkelstein. Thank you for your interest in my study. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how initiators of breakups experience grief after breaking up with their partners. To see if you are qualified to be a part of the study, I first need to ask you a few general questions, would that be okay? (yes/no) [If no, screen out].

Initial Screening Questions

Have you initiated a breakup in the past four months (yes/no)? [If no, thank student for phone call and screen out]

When did you initiate this breakup?

Have you experienced some sort of grief (sadness/stress/concern) as a result of the breakup (yes/no)? [If no, thank student for phone call and screen out]

Are you currently having any thoughts of harming yourself and others (yes/no)? If so, please explain. [Assess for suicidal and homicidal intent; if student endorses, refer to emergency or counseling services]

What is your current age? [If under 18, thank student for phone call and screen out]

What is your current year in school? [If a freshman or sophomore, must be between ages of 18 and 20. If junior or senior, must be between ages of 20 and 23. If not within qualifying school year/age bracket, thank student for time and screen out]

Background and Contact Information

Full name: _____

Gender: _____Ethnicity: _____

Sexual orientation: _____

Phone number: _____E-mail address: _____

Street address: _____

May I contact you regarding this study by phone (yes/no) or e-mail (yes/no)?

Interview Scheduling Information

Are you available to meet two times in the next six months to discuss your experience as a breakup initiator? The first meeting will be about an hour and a half, and I will ask you some general questions about your experience. The second meeting will be about a half an hour, where I will check in to make sure I really got at what you were trying to say. Does this sound okay (yes/no)? [If no, screen out].

[If all screening criteria met]:

Thanks for talking with me today. You seem like a great candidate for my study. If it is alright with you, I'd like to schedule a time and place for our first meeting. We could meet in a room in the Morgridge College, on campus, or else whatever place you pick that would feel comfortable for you.

First interview scheduled for (date/time/location): _____

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Breakup Study

The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board has approved this project. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience of grief after breaking up with someone. The study is being conducted by Laura Finkelstein, M.A. (tel: 347-572-3405) and supervised by Maria Riva, Ph.D. (tel: 303-871-2484).

If you decide to participate, we will meet two times in person; the first for about 90 minutes and the second for about 30 minutes. In the first interview, I will ask you about your experience. Then, I will send you a transcript of this interview and ask you to look it over for accuracy. In our second meeting, I will ask for your feedback regarding your first interview. Although I expect that the risk of participation is minimal, you may experience some discomfort at being asked to describe personal experiences. Participation is completely voluntary and you can choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and also to discontinue to participate anytime without penalty. There is no direct benefit to you in participating; however, many people find it helpful to share their story. If you would like a copy of the results, I will be happy to provide one for you. Additionally, you will be given a $10 gift certificate as thanks for your participation.

Interview data are strictly confidential. Our meetings will be audiotaped and the tape will be kept in a locked cabinet. Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. Only I will have access to your individual data. Though direct quotes and themes from your story may be used, I will be careful not to attach them to any identifying information. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Idaho might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, I am required to let you know that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have questions about the study or interview, you can ask the investigator during the interview, when the interview is complete, or at a time you feel is appropriate. My contact information is:

    Laura Finkelstein
    Counseling and Testing Center
    Moscow, ID 83844-3140
    Ph. 347-572-3405

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You may keep this page for your records. Please sign this form if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have. Should you have any questions or concerns in the future regarding your participation or experience in this study, please feel free to contact me at the number provided above.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of this study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

_____ I agree to be audiotaped

_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

Appendix C

Semi-structured Initiator Grief Experience Interview

I am going to ask you some questions regarding your experience initiating a breakup. Please feel free to include in your responses any information that you think will help me better understand this experience.

[As needed, based on judgment of participant's comfort level, minimal self-disclosure will be given, e.g. "I have been through some breakups too, and I know it can be a complicated process," or "I can understand that completely," etc.].

1. I'd like to first ask some background information about your relationships, before getting into the main one we are going to talk about.
   a. How many serious relationships have you had in the past?
   b. What is your parents' marital status?
   c. How would you describe your parents' relationship with one another when you were growing up and now?
   d. How does your family support or not support you and your decisions?
   e. How do friends support or not support you and your decisions?

2. What were the circumstances that lead to your breakup?
   a. What was the relationship like before the breakup?
   b. How did you come to your decision to break up?
        i. When and did you start thinking about doing it?
       ii. What made you start thinking about doing it?
   c. Please describe to me the process of the breakup, and feel free to use examples of what you said and how your partner reacted.
        i. How did you do it?
   d. How did you feel before and during the breakup?

3. Please describe to me your experience after the breakup.
   a. How did you feel?
   b. What did you do; can you give me some examples?
   c. What was your thinking process afterward? Can you remember any specific thoughts you had at the time?
   d. Did you go through a grief process; if so, please describe it to me.
   e. If you felt grief, are you still grieving?
   f. How has your experience of the breakup changed over time?

4. Did you seek support from anyone after the breakup?

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       a. If so, how did you decide who to tell?
       b. What were their reactions; can you give me some examples?
       c. Did you find their responses helpful? Why/why not?
       d. How did you feel about the way others responded?
       e. Did you consider getting counseling?
       f. If you received counseling, what was that experience like for you?
       g. If you received counseling, can you give me examples of what was helpful or not helpful?

5. What did you learn about yourself from this process?
       a. How have you changed?
       b. Has your perspective on relationships and breakups changed? If so, how?
       c. What is your view now on romantic relationships and breakups?
       d. What is your view now on seeking support after breakups?

6. What would you like others to know or understand about your experience initiating a breakup?

7. What issues have I not addressed, that you think are important regarding your experience?

Debriefing

1. How was it being asked questions about this experience?

2. How are you feeling now, having talked with me about this?

3. Do you have any questions for me?

4. Is there anything you would like to talk about?

Second Interview Information

I will be transcribing what we talked about today, then I will send to you what I've written. After you've looked at the transcript, I will get in touch and we will set up a time to meet for the second interview.

Appendix D

Initiator Grief Experience Follow-up Interview

In our first interview, you described to me your experience initiating the breakup of a romantic relationship. You have had a chance to review a transcript of that interview. Now, I'd like to make sure I accurately represented what you said and what you meant.

1. Is your transcript worded accurately?

2. Do you feel that it captured what you wanted to say? Were there parts I didn't get quite right?

3. Now that you've had some time to think about this topic a bit more, was there anything you wanted to add?

4. What is the status of the relationship now? How have things been going for you with this since we last spoke?

Appendix E

Request for List Serve Advertising

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral intern at the Counseling and Testing Center and am working on my dissertation about what happens when students break up with romantic partners. The project has been IRB-approved at U of I, and I was wondering if I would be able to look for participants via a list serve or newsletter for the _____ school/group.

Please let me know if this would be possible. I am including the blurb of my study below, which can be used as recruitment material.

Thanks so much!

Laura Finkelstein, M.A.

Seeking Participants for a Research Study on Break-ups
Did you recently end a relationship with a serious romantic partner? Do you still feel sadness, confusion, or mixed feelings about the process? If you've initiated a break-up in the past 6 months and are a student, I would love to hear your story as part of my research study on what happens when you break up with someone. Participation is a 1.5-hour interview and brief follow up by phone. It is voluntary and confidential, and you will receive a $10 gift card to Starbucks or a local coffee shop/restaurant of your choice for participating! Please contact Laura Finkelstein if you are interested at: Breakupcontact@gmail.com or lauraf@uidaho.edu, or call (347) 572-3405.

Appendix F

E-mail Advertisement

Seeking Participants for a Research Study on Break-ups
Did you recently end a relationship with a serious romantic partner? Do you still feel
sadness, confusion, or mixed feelings about the process? If you've <u>initiated a break-up</u> in
the past 6 months and are a student, I would love to hear your story as part of my research
study on what happens when you break up with someone. Participation is a 1.5-hour
interview and brief follow up by phone. It is voluntary and confidential, and you will
receive a $10 gift card to Starbucks or a local coffee shop/restaurant of your choice for
participating! Please contact Laura Finkelstein if you are interested at:
Breakupcontact@gmail.com or lauraf@uidaho.edu, or call (347) 572-3405.

Have you just BROKEN UP WITH SOMEONE?

Was the experience DIFFICULT, SAD, and/or UPSETTING?

If you've <u>initiated a breakup</u> in the past 3 months, I would love to hear your story as part of my research study on what happens when you break up with someone.

Participation is <u>voluntary</u> and <u>confidential</u>.
$10 gift card to a local spot of your choice for participating!

<u>Please contact Laura if you are interested at:</u>

Breakupcontact@gmail.com or

Lauraf@uidaho.edu or

347-572-3405

Male-Targeted Printed Flyer

Did you recently break up with someone?

Do you feel sadness, confusion, or mixed feelings?

If you've **initiated a break-up in the past 6 months** AND are a **male undergraduate student** at **U of I**, I would love to hear your story as part of my research study on what happens when you break up with someone. Participation is a 1 hour interview and brief follow up. It is voluntary and confidential, and you will receive a **$10 gift card** to any local coffee shop/restaurant of your choice for participating!

Please contact Laura Finkelstein if you are interested at: Breakupcontact@gmail.com OR lauraf@uidaho.edu, or call (347) 572-3405.

Appendix I

E-mail Responses to Participant Inquiries

To potential participants:
Hi _____,
Thanks so much for your interest and willingness to speak to me about your experience. I have a couple of initial questions to see if you're in the specific demographic I currently need for the study:

       When did you break up?
       Were you the initiator of the breakup?
       How old are you?
       What year in school are you?
       What is your gender?

If you want to get back to me on e-mail with those things, we can go from there. Thanks again, I really appreciate it.
Laura

To students who screened out:
Hi _____,
Thanks so much for getting in touch. Unfortunately, right now I'm looking for people who have _____ and it sounds like _____. Breakups are hard. While this isn't a fit for the study, counselors at the CTC are always here to talk at the counseling center if that would be helpful for you.
Thanks again for your interest.
Laura

To students who screened in after female sample was met:
Hi _____,
Thanks so much for your interest and willingness to share your story. Right now, I have gotten enough participants for the study. However, I am wondering if I could put your name on my wait list in case anyone who has signed up is unable to complete the study? Thanks again for getting in touch.
Laura

Appendix J

Pilot Study Informed Consent Form

A Qualitative Study of Grief after Dissolving a Serious Romantic Relationship

You are invited to participate in a pilot study to help develop a study aimed to better understand the experience of grief after breaking up with someone. The pilot and actual study are being conducted by Laura Finkelstein, M.A. (tel: 347-572-3405) and supervised by Maria Riva, Ph.D. (tel: 303-871-2484). These studies were approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research.

If you decide to participate, we will meet once in person, for about 90 minutes. I will ask you questions about your experience and then ask for your feedback regarding the interview process. Although I expect that the risk of participation is minimal, you may experience some discomfort at being asked to describe personal experiences. Participation is completely voluntary and you can choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and also to discontinue to participate anytime without penalty. There is no direct benefit to you in participating; however, many people find it helpful to share their story. If you would like a copy of the results, I will be happy to provide one for you.

Interview data are strictly confidential. Our meetings will be audiotaped and the tape will be kept in a locked cabinet. Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. Only I will have access to your individual data. I will be careful not to attach them to any identifying information. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. I am required to let you know that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or you may email du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs or call 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign this form if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have. Should you have any questions or concerns in the

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future regarding your participation or experience in this study, please feel free to contact me at the number provided above.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of *A Qualitative Study of Grief after Dissolving a Serious Romantic Relationship*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this pilot study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

_____ I agree to be audiotaped

_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

Appendix K

Pilot Study Follow-up Questions

Thanks for participating in my pilot study. I am interested in hearing about your experience with each piece so that I can make the process as coherent as possible. I have questions I would like to ask, and then please feel free to speak openly about your experience (positive and negative) with the pilot study.

1. Did you understand all the questions on the demographic questionnaire? Was any part confusing?

2. In the interview, how did you feel when I asked you the questions? [Prompt if needed to ascertain comfort level]

3. Did you think the interview asked important questions about your experience?

4. Were there any questions you wished I had included? If so, what were they?

5. Is there any other information you can tell me to help improve any parts of the interview or process?

Appendix L

Pilot Study E-mail Advertisement

Dear Students,

I am seeking volunteers to participate in a pilot study for my dissertation. The study involves interviewing you for about an hour about your experience initiating the breakup of a serious romantic relationship, then asking for your feedback on the interview questions.

If you have initiated a breakup and are willing me to speak to me about it, I would be extremely grateful. Please contact me, and thanks so much!

Laura Finkelstein

laurafinkelstein@gmail.com

347-572-3405

Important Statement and Theme Spreadsheet

Themes/Important Statements	Participants								
RELATIONSHIP BEFORE	L	C	A	J	D	Sa	H	M	Sc
Problematic Relational Dynamic									
Relationship moved too fast, we jumped in too soon, too serious			x	xx x		x	xx x	xx	xx x
Did not see a future in relationship					xx x		x		
Frequent arguments contributed to decision to break up					x	x			x
We were more like friends							x		x
Lost myself in relationship, focus was on school						x	x		x
Not right for each other		x						x	
Total:		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Feelings Changed									
Not in love anymore		x			x				
Realized I was not attracted to partner			x						
Relationship was happy for a while					x	x		x	
Felt partner was "the one" at beginning of relationship									x
Total:		x	x		xx	x		x	x
Negative Emotions									
Felt crazy/stupid in relationship	xx								
Relationship was draining		x							
Long distance component to relationship made it harder			x	x					x
Felt stressed during relationship									x
Questioned partner's trustworthiness	xx								
Despite negative emotions, felt comfortable				x				x	
Felt trapped in the relationship								xx xx x	
Total:	x	x	x	x				x	Sc
BREAKUP PROCESS									
Worry about Hurting Partner									
Felt guilty about wanting to break up			x	xx				x	x
Dread before breakup				x				x	
Scary leading up to breakup								x	

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Nervous about breaking up							x	
Worry about hurting partner with breakup		x	xx	xx			xxx	
Total:		x	x	x			x	x
Uncertainty about Self/Decision								
Avoid/denial of need to break up			xx				xx	
Decision to break up was not obvious					x			
Mental rehearsal of the breakup before it occurred		x			x			
Concerns about if breakup was justified	x							
Wondered if breaking up was the right decision	x	x	xx	x			xxxx	xxx
Took a break before official breakup								x
Talked to friends before breakup to help make my decision								x
Questioned if breaking up was a rational decision								x
Needed time to finalize decision to break up								x
Total:	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Preemptive Grief								
Grief about the breakup before it occurred/sad/planning		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Total:		x	x	x	x	x	x	
AFTER BREAKUP								
Post-dissolution Grief								
Did not anticipate being as upset as I was							x	
Breakup was like having someone die							x	
Felt unsure about how to go on			x					x
Lost support partner provided							x	xx
Wondered if it was me who messed up relationship	x							
Felt unhappy (sad, mad, awkward, horrible, confused, like a failure)			x	x		xxxxxx	xxxx	xx
Missed person after breakup			x	x, 2x	x		x	x
Felt the worst just after breakup						x		
Felt tempted to get back together with partner							x	
Grief about the breakup after it occurred	x		x				x	x
Total:	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Navigating New Relationship								
No relationship after	x		2x					x
Needed space after breakup				x		x	x	

Friends after					x	x	x	xx	
Hard to see partner after breakup				xxx				xx	
Total:	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Positive Emotional Response									
Relief after breakup		xx	xx	xxx			x		x
Proud of following through with break up		x							
Exciting after breakup				x					
Felt happier after					x				
Felt better over time	x			x		x		x	x
More active after breakup, felt good						xx			
Total:	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
LESSONS LEARNED/REFLECTION									
Initiation is Hard									
Initiating a breakup is hard	x		x	xxxx		x	x	xxxx	
Initiating a breakup is harder than being broken up with			x	x					x
Total:	x		x	x		x	x	x	x
Acceptance of Process									
Every relationship and breakup is different							x		
It's okay to initiate a breakup; don't have to be right				x	x				x
Sharing story solidifies that breaking up was the right decision		x	x						
Reflection led to clarification about decision to breakup	xx		x	xx, 2x		x, 2x		x	xx
Wished things had turned out differently			x			x	x		
Have to grieve to get through breakup								x	
Initiating a breakup makes you stronger							x		
Total:	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
New Ideas about Relationships and Breakups									
Take breakups more seriously now								x	
Have to put yourself first			x	xx				x	xxx
Relationships should be fun						x			
Need a relationship that goes slower			x	x					
Communication key in relationships				x		x			
Total:			x	x		x	x	x	x
Personal Growth									
Don't want to settle				x		x	x	xx	

Not interested in dating or relationships after	x	x				x		x	xx
You should trust your feelings	x	x	xx	x	x				
Learned I'm more ambitious than I thought						x			
Learned I'm independent and don't need a relationship				x		x	x	x	
Don't have to date to be cool							x		
Don't have to date to fit the norms							x		
Total:	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
How to Support an Initiator									
Good to not be alone just after breakup	x					x			x
Unhealthy coping after breakup						x			
Should be taken seriously by others	x					x		x	
Total:	x				x	x		x	x
DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF									
Disenfranchisement by Others and Self									
Disenfranchisement by others	xx		xx xx		x	x		xx x	x
Minimizing own loss	x		x					x	
Others surprised by the breakup								x	
Parents said "I told you so"									x
Total:	x		x		x	x		x	x
COPING									
Time Alone									
Spend time by myself after	x				x	x		xx	x
Total:	x				x	x		x	x
SUPPORT									
Friends and Family									
Friends distracting me helped	x				x	x		x	
Friends said "it's normal to break up," which helped									x
Felt good to talk to friends and family about breakup	x	x	xx x	x	xx x			x	xx
Parents, mom not helpful									x
Total:	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Counseling									
Would consider counseling for breakup issues, did not go				xx					
Counseling helped	x								x
Did not receive or consider counseling for breakup issues		x	x		x	x	x	x	
Total:	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Participation in this Study										
Nice to be asked questions about the breakup or in counseling	x, 2x		x, 2x		x, 2x		x	x, 2x	
Total:	x		x		x		x	x	

Note. Participants are denoted by the first letter of their first name

Appendix N

Gender Analysis

Theme	# of Participants		
	Female	Male	S/M/F
Acceptance of Process	6	3	S
Disenfranchised Grief by Others and Self	4	2	S
Friends and Family	5	3	S
Initiation is Hard	5	2	S
Navigating New Relationship	6	2	S
Negative Emotions	4	2	S
Personal Growth	6	3	S
Positive Emotions After	6	3	S
Post-Dissolution Grief	6	2	S
Problematic Relational Dynamic	5	3	S
Uncertainty about Self/Decision	4	3	S
Worry about Hurting	4	2	S
Counseling-No	3	3	M
Feelings Changed	3	3	M
How to Support an Initiator	3	2	M
Preemptive Grief	3	3	M
This Study	3	2	M
Time Alone	3	2	M
New Ideas about Relationships and Breakups	5	1	F

Note. S/M/F = Similarity/Male-Majority/Female-Majority

Appendix O

Age Analysis by Year in School

Theme	# of Participants	
	FS	JS
Acceptance of Process	5	4
Counseling-No	4	2
Disenfranchised Grief by Others and Self	3	3
Feelings Changed	4	2
Friends and Family Helped	4	4
How to Support an Initiator	2	3
Initiation is Hard	4	3
Navigating New Relationship	4	4
Negative Emotions	3	3
New Ideas about Relationships and Breakups	4	2
Personal Growth	5	4
Positive Emotional Response	5	4
Post-dissolution Grief	4	4
Preemptive Grief	3	3
Problematic Relational Dynamic	5	3
This Study	2	3
Time Alone	2	3
Uncertainty about Self/Decision	3	4
Worry about Hurting	4	2

Note. FS = Freshman/sophomore. JS = Junior/senior.

Appendix P

Age Analysis by Chronological Age

Theme	# of Participants	
	18-19	20-22
Acceptance of Process	4	5
Counseling-No	3	3
Disenfranchised Grief by Others and Self	3	3
Feelings Changed	3	3
Friends and Family Helped	3	5
How to Support an Initiator	2	3
Initiation is Hard	4	3
Navigating New Relationship	4	4
Negative Emotions	2	4
New Ideas about Relationships and Breakups	4	2
Personal Growth	4	5
Positive Emotional Response	4	5
Post-dissolution Grief	4	4
Preemptive Grief	2	4
Problematic Relational Dynamic	4	4
This Study	2	3
Time Alone	2	3
Uncertainty about Self/Decision	2	4
Worry about Hurting	3	3

Note. 18-19 = 18-19 years old. 20-22 = 20-22 years old.

Appendix Q

IRB Approval Letter

University of Idaho

October 1, 2013

To: Martha Kitzrow
Cc: Laura Finkelstein

From: Traci Craig, PhD
           Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
           University Research Office
           Moscow, ID 83844-3010

Title: 'Breaking Your Own Heart: A Qualitative Study of Grief after
           Initiating a Breakup'
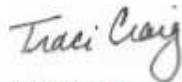
Project: 13-231

Approved: 09/27/13
Expires: 09/26/14

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for the above-named research project is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this memo. Should there be significant changes in the protocol for this project, it will be necessary for you to resubmit the protocol for review by the Committee.

Traci Craig

Traci Craig