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## The Art of Breaking Up: Ending Romantic Relationships

Emma Salzwedel

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The University of South Dakota  
Undergraduate Honors Thesis

**THE ART OF BREAKING UP:  
ENDING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

By Emma Salzwedel

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
University Honors Program

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Department of Criminal Justice  
The University of South Dakota  
September 2021

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed  
to examine the thesis of Emma Salzwedel  
find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted

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## ABSTRACT

### The Art of Breaking Up

Emma Salzwedel

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This thesis reviews research on the most difficult aspect of dating: the breakup. The process of ending a romantic relationship follows a particular pattern which begins when problems begin to arise in the partnership and ends when both individuals have accepted the breakup and received closure. Using various peer-reviewed studies, the literature review deliberates the common predictors of a breakup, common methods of breaking up (and how each is perceived by the other person), common reactions to the breakup based on gender, and finally, the aftermath of the breakup. It is determined that personal and individual relationship factors ultimately decide the fate of a breakup; however, there is no single correct answer. Therefore, comprehension of the breakup model is beneficial for those seeking to end their partnership as it takes into account contextual differences and advises the course of a breakup.

*Keywords:* breakups, relationships, breakup model, attachment styles, mediated breakup

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## INTRODUCTION

So, you think that you want to break up with your significant other? The good news is that there are many academic and professional studies to guide you along the way. However, the bad news is that breaking up a romantic relationship is often much more complicated than people often imagine. After taking account of the positive and negative aspects of your relationship, you may decide that it is time to separate. There are potential risks of ending a relationship, both personal and general, which need to be accounted for. Once you have decided to terminate the partnership, it is then time to decide the breakup format, how and where it will occur, and what you will say. Will you break their heart in a public area to prevent a big scene or instead surprise them at home so that you can leave immediately afterward? Or, is a text message sufficient enough to end the relationship? Believe it or not, the next step is commonly the hardest: the aftermath. Learning how to cope after ending a relationship, or having been broken up with, often comes with a finite period of depression, distractions, and eventually learning to move on. Those who initiate the breakup are referred to as the “dumper”, and those who are broken up with are the “dumpees”. Regardless of if you are the heartbreaking dumper or the heartbroken dumpee, breakups are hard on everyone. It is not always easy to carry out a breakup; however, understanding the breakup process and developing a clear plan is the best way to safely end a romantic relationship.

## WE NEED A BREAK

### **Predictors of a Breakup**

According to a 2002 study on nonmarital breakups, there are three broad categories of predicting the end of a relationship: individual factors, relationship factors, and external factors (Le et al., 2010). Individual factors can be both personal and/or specific to the relationship, such as poor self-esteem, incompatible personalities, or toxic attachment styles. There are four types of attachment styles based on four relationships between one's self and others: secure, with positive models of self and others; fearful, with negative models of self and others; preoccupied, with a negative model of self and positive model of others; and finally, dismissing, with a positive self-model and negative model of others (Barbara and Dion, 2000). Understanding the attachment style of both partners in a romantic relationship can be a vital predictor of why a relationship did not work out, as well as how either party may react to the breakup.

According to the Rusbult investment model, the higher the level of commitment to a relationship, the less likely a partner is to initiate a breakup, so those who have a preoccupied or "clingy" attachment style have difficulty being apart from their partner and are therefore the least likely to end the relationship (Barbara and Dion, 2000). Those with secure individual factors and attachment styles are more likely to practice positive self-esteem, commitment, intimacy, and passion, and will likely end their relationship only if their partner practices insecure attachment (Madey and Jilek, 2012). Simply analyzing attachment styles cannot be used as a prediction of whether or not romantic



partnerships will work out; however, it can be a tool to understand why it is that the relationship did or did not work.

An additional explanation for predicting the end of a relationship includes relationship factors, which are commonly used to predict relationship stability. Examples of this could include an examination of relational quality, interactions between partners, experiences within the relationship, cognitive representation, and structural features of relationships (Le et al., 2010). While relationship factors are broad and vary greatly from an individual standpoint, the decision to leave a partnership can ultimately be drawn from the investment model. As per the investment model, individuals choose to stay in a romantic relationship when they feel sufficiently dependent on the relationship for the fulfillment of important personal needs, including satisfaction, investment, and quality of alternatives (Joel et al., 2018). When the rewards of a relationship, such as love, affection, and companionship, outweigh the costs, such as time, money, and effort, relational satisfaction indicates a stronger romantic relationship. On the other end, if the costs outweigh the rewards, individuals will feel that they are putting more into the relationship than their partner and will likely decide to leave the relationship. Similarly, according to the interdependence theory, successful relationships require that both partners make decisions with the needs of their significant other in mind so that both partners feel as if their needs, goals, and motivations are being met (Joel et al., 2018). When one or both partners do not feel their needs have been sufficiently met, they will have low relational satisfaction.

The third and final predictor of a breakup includes external factors, which is essentially anything else that could negatively affect a romantic relationship. This could

include common relational strains, such as financial struggles, long-distance, family attitudes, or lack of quality time. Additionally, there may be outside involvement, such as one partner cheating or perhaps a close friend who does not like the partner so they interject themselves into the relationship. According to a 2010 study conducted by Le et al. on the three predictors of terminating a nonmarital relationship, feeling supported in a relationship resulted in less dissolution, which is marginally disproportionate between the two genders tested; women are much more likely to report dissolution with low levels of network support. The 2010 study reported that of the included 137 studies of various methodologies, the prediction of a breakup can be summarized by the following formula:

$$\hat{Y} = .079X_1 - .101X_2 + 37.529.$$

As Le et al. detail in their findings,

$\hat{Y}$  is the anticipated breakup rate,  $X_1$  is the time lag between Time 1 and Time 2 (in weeks), and  $X_2$  is the average relationship duration of the sample at Time 1 (in weeks). For example, using the formula above, if researchers sampled participants with an average relationship duration of 26 weeks at the beginning of a study and waited 26 weeks before assessing breakup, they would expect 36.96% of their sample to have broken up. However, if their sample had been involved for only 6 weeks on average at Time 1 and they waited 2 years (104 weeks), 45.14% would be expected to have broken up.

As this study was longitudinal, Time 1 would include data collected at the initial assessment, and Time 2 represents the follow-up in order to predict how, why, and when a nonmarital relationship will end. Of course, many unpredictable or immeasurable variables could lead to dissatisfaction or the end of a relationship, so the calculated

formula is not meant to be a definitive tool when used by non-researchers outside of an experimental environment.

## THIS IS TOXIC

### **The Risk of Dissatisfaction:**

How do you know whether you are satisfied with your romantic relationship? It can be difficult for professionals to study satisfaction as relationships appear to be unique to each individual and can therefore be perceived differently person-to-person. There are several methods used to measure relational satisfaction in order to predict key relationship outcomes. A relatively easy approach would be to analyze satisfaction at a single point in time through surveys or interviews. To calculate average satisfaction rates in either the dumper or the dumpee, one could measure satisfaction between two time periods and use this to predict the future status of the relationship. The current trend in research uses longitudinal research to assess change over multiple time periods (Arriaga, 2001). If relational dissatisfaction is present, there is a strong indication that the relationship will eventually come to an end; however, what many do not prepare for are the risks following a breakup. Once the decision has been made by one or both parties to end the relationship, there are many opportunities for things to go wrong; conflict is likely to arise, feelings are likely to get hurt, and the situation can easily get out of control.

Interestingly, studies have been done on predicting how different individuals may react to a breakup. The most influential variables that can predict one's reaction include

demographic variables, such as age or gender, characteristics of the relationship, such as duration and personal history, and personality factors, such as attachment style or habits (Boelen and Reijntes, 2009). This information is especially important for those in the midst of planning a breakup to be aware of how their partner will react to the bad news. Generally speaking, nobody enters a romantic partnership expecting to break up. Whether you are the ‘dumpee’ or the ‘dumper’, most individuals should expect to experience a period of depression, anger, sadness, and/or despair following the typical pattern of grieving. Heartbreak is difficult for everyone, so preparing for the symptoms of a breakup is important. According to research from psychologist Dr. Tiffany Field in 2011, such “symptoms” can vary across cultures and individuals, but the most frequently reported symptoms of romantic breakups include sleep disturbances, intrusive thoughts or attempts to control intrusive thoughts. Less common and more deadly post-breakup symptoms include “Broken Heart” syndrome and endocrine/immunity dysfunction.

According to Field’s research, onset insomnia is connected to nighttime ruminations about the loss of the relationship, as seen in as many as 43% of test subjects. This can also be related to the reports of intrusive thoughts, which commonly cause high levels of anxiety and make it difficult for many to fall asleep. Although it is very rare and typically only seen in elderly individuals, there are possible morbidity factors of initiating a breakup. Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, or the broken heart syndrome, inspires the term “died of a broken heart”, in which sudden or prolonged stress, such as an emotional breakup or death, causes overwhelming heart attack-like symptoms (Van Der Wall, 2012). Broken heart syndrome will often present itself as a heart attack, including cardiac contractile abnormalities and heart failure, however, death from heartbreak will not

include clogged arteries as it would in a heart attack case (Field, 2011). Women are reportedly 7-9 times more likely to suffer from takotsubo cardiomyopathy than men. According to a 2007 study, 90% of broken heart cases were female patients (Van Der Wall, 2012). However, these cases are much more prominent in older generations with pre-existing conditions after their spouse passes away, so those who may be planning a breakup do not need to worry about their ex-partner dying in the process. Another possible death-by-breakup symptom as reported by Dr. Tiffany Field includes endocrine and immune system dysfunction, as elevated stress levels from the “fight-or-flight” response may increase heart rate and blood pressure, accompanied by increased cortisol and norepinephrine levels, which can have negative effects on the immune system. Again, this is typically seen in older generations with pre-existing health conditions and is unlikely to occur following a romantic relationship ending.

However, once an individual decides that they have had enough and are ready to terminate the relationship, some may experience the expression, “looking through rose-colored glasses”. This phrase has been demonstrated by many optimists and people looking to end their relationship because they begin to only see the positive side of people, memories, and the overall relationship. Consequently, the poorer qualities of each variable will often get overseen, which can lead some individuals to change their minds and continue in their romantic relationships. This is also known as a deterrent, in which obstacles to intense emotions produce paradoxical effects on one’s emotions, to the point where the deterrent outweighs the original emotion, thus causing the emotion to drop to a minimum level of intensity (Sciara and Pantaleo, 2017). Essentially, individuals are willing to overlook their desire to end their relationship because of a type of nostalgia

that they would miss if they broke up with their partner. According to Boelen and Reijntjes (2009), the perceived fear of loneliness or abandonment is a strong deterrent for a potential dumper, as they determine a broken relationship is better than being alone and hope that the relationship can be fixed. Unfortunately, this commonly leads to negative addictive behaviors used as a distraction, such as binge eating or retail therapy (Russo, 2016). However, in the dumper's mind, the dumpee is their support system and they do not want to lose that support.

## WE CAN STILL BE FRIENDS

### **Media and Breaking-Up:**

One modern method of ending romantic relationships, while certainly not the preferred method for those being broken up with, involves today's technology. This can include text messaging, phone calls, social media, or even email. When asking her students about their opinions regarding mediated breakups, Dr. Ilana Gershon (2008) found that generally, young people (18-22) find phone calls or online messages to be more appropriate than those of older generations, especially if it is a long-distance relationship. While this research was done in 2008 and contains somewhat outdated technological information, such as text messaging including a maximum of 160 characters, the overall outcome of her interviews with college-aged students finds that younger generations who regularly use cell phones tend to consider a breakup via mediation to be acceptable (Gershon, 2008). However, more recent data suggests otherwise; when communication between partners ends abruptly or decreases, there tends

to be confusion about the relationship status for one or both partners (Meenagh, 2015). While it may be easier for young individuals to rely on technology to terminate their relationships, such confusion can be risky; to the other person, “we need to talk” could indicate a variety of possibilities, where an in-person conversation would indicate bad news due to the accompanying facial expressions, body language, or other nonverbal cues (Gershon, 2008). Generally, researchers agree that unless deemed necessary, dumpers of any age should avoid using technology to end a romantic relationship. In an analysis of online discussion boards and interviews of individuals between 18 and 25 years old, Meenagh found that:

The ambiguity created by mediated communication makes it an appealing medium for use in flirting... Dominant discourses about mediated communication claim it is less authentic or ‘real’ than non-mediated – or in-person – communication, in part because of the lack of non-verbal cues. However, when they understand how to interpret the second-order information surrounding a message, young people can develop a more nuanced understanding of mediated messages (2015).

However, Meenagh maintains that there is no such thing as a set of ‘rules’ when it comes to breaking up with somebody, and while an in-person confrontation is ideal to societal standards, it is ultimately up to the individual terminating the relationship to decide the when, where, and why.

While the younger and older generations may disagree about mediated breakups, there is one thing that they agree on in regards to breaking up and feeling rejected: a study conducted by Cornell University consisted of four experiments on 600 participants

to determine the most hurtful breakup (Deri and Zitek, 2017). In the first experiment, two women were placed in a room with one man. The women were aware of the experiment and were working with the researchers. One of the women was instructed to solve a puzzle with either the man, the other woman, or alone. The researchers secretly had the woman choose between the other woman or by herself, leaving the man to feel “comparatively rejected”. (Deri and Zitek, 2017). In the other experiments, Cornell researchers had participants recall previous times they had been rejected, ultimately determining that people felt the most hurt when being rejected in favor of another person as opposed to other reasons where no one else was involved. This was concluded to be due to an “increased sense of exclusion and decreased belonging” (Deri and Zitek, 2017). When an individual feels as if someone else is deemed “better” than them, rejection hurts worse as they begin to compare themselves to the other person. Cornell researchers recommend that when ending a romantic relationship if there is somebody else, keep it to yourself. If there is not, it is kinder to reassure your partner that there is nobody else.

A 2016 study asked 271 young adults between the ages of 18-25 to determine breakup characteristics in young adults, as well as which individual and relationship characteristics could predict the outcome after a breakup, including post-relationship contact and tracking (PRCT) behaviors. Belu et al., (2016) determined the following statistics regarding young adult breakups:

Breakups occurred regularly throughout the year, although interestingly, more breakups occurred in January and September. Participants also often reported expecting the relationship to last a lifetime, but in fact most relationships only lasted a few months to less than a year, with relatively few lasting 5–10 years...



over half (60%) reported having been both a user and a target of PRCT behaviours following a recent breakup, indicating that trouble adjusting to a breakup is common; and indeed, only 9% said they had not engaged in any PRCT behaviours. Aside from women being more likely to experience PRCT, there were no other gender or age differences in reports.

Due to the modern-day romantic relationship revolving around technology in the initiation, communication, intensification, and termination of a partnership, many rely on PRCT methods to check up on or communicate with ex-partners. A common example would include checking the social media accounts after a breakup to continuously see if they have moved on from the relationship, which can be quite harmful to one's mental health. PRCT does not legally count as stalking, however, experts advise that it is best to stay away from online checking-up during a breakup (Belu et al., 2016).

## IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME

### **The Break Up:**

No matter how long the duration of a romantic relationship, breakups are challenging and can be emotionally draining on both parties. Regardless of which individual is being broken up with, breakups can commonly change aspects of each person's identity. According to Kunkel et al. (2003), there are two "faces" behind every individual: a positive face, desiring approval from others, and a negative face, seeking autonomy from constraint. However, a face threat occurs when such matters are being challenged, which has been known to occur after heartbreak. In order to identify potential

face threats in regards to initiating, intensifying, or terminating romantic partnerships, Kunkel et al. (2003) conducted multiple studies on 274 college students at a midwestern university using a “romantic relationship goals” questionnaire with the following question regarding ending romantic partnerships:

You have been seriously dating Chris for several months. You are starting to realize that things are not the same as when you started dating. In fact, you are very unhappy with how the relationship has been going. Every time you talk to Chris, you find the conversations uninteresting and boring. Lately, you have been trying to avoid contact with Chris and it’s starting to get very awkward. It seems like it might be time to end this relationship. So, you finally have the courage and you are ready to try to get out of this relationship. You speak to Chris.

Using LISREL and multiple Likert scale questions, shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the following eight face threats were determined:

1. Pressuring Other
2. Preclude Future Relationships
3. Lose Desirable Current Relationship
4. Make Other Appear Inadequate
5. Appear Attractive
6. Not Appear Too Forward
7. Not Look Overly Dependent
8. Not Look Insensitive.

Each identified face threat was determined to strongly correlate with the three goals of initiating, intensifying, and terminating romantic relationships, with the exception of “not

appear too far forward” which appeared to be less important for participants (Kunkel et al., 2003). The conclusion of this study finds that a breakup challenges both positive and negative faces as individuals fear being insensitive and that the other person would feel inadequate, as well as a fear that both individuals may one day regret the breakup.

This is precisely why there are numerous studies intended to answer the popular question, what is the best way to break up with your significant other? According to the Duck breakup model, the short answer is that there is no “best way” because relationships are contextual and will vary from person to person. There are numerous methods of ending a relationship, varying between relationships, which is why no research can determine a singular winning method. The original breakup model was constructed by Steve Duck in 1982, which he then updated in 2005 to include the consideration of active daily communication. The breakup model (Duck, 2005) can be summarized by the following:

*Intrapsychic Processes:* One partner feels burdened with resentment and no longer benefits from the relationship. This is typically followed by social withdrawal from their partner and those they may typically associate with.

*Dyadic Processes:* The partner discloses to their significant other that they are unhappy, which allows the potential for the relationship to ultimately end or improve. A resolution must occur between both partners with proper communication methods.

*Social Processes:* Word of the distress of the relationship is made known to those outside of the relationship, making it difficult to step back to fix the problem(s).

*Grave-Dressing Processes:* Once the relationship is over, individuals will likely speak negatively about their ex-partner to others and begin the process of moving past the relationship.

*Resurrection Processes:* After moving on, individuals will reflect on the actions of themselves and their ex-partner to determine potential changes for future relationships. This could include awareness of their own mistakes and how they will change for their next romance or traits they may want to avoid while searching for a partner.

Duck recommends that the most vital aspect of the breakup model is to be prepared, as preparedness will allow those planning a breakup the knowledge to intervene or change their behavior before it is too late (2005).

Imagine you are in a romantic relationship and one day, with seemingly no warning, you never hear back from your partner. Whether the relationship consisted of one day or one decade, being broken up with by being ignored is almost as hurtful as being rejected in favor of somebody else (Deri and Zitek, 2017). While planning to end a relationship, it is important to take into consideration the personal history between both partners and to be empathetic of how the other person may feel. Of course, because context matters, maybe ghosting the other person or a mediated breakup is the most appropriate method; it is ultimately something that only the person ending the relationship can determine. Those in long-term relationships should consider the duration of the partnership before choosing to end the relationship in this manner. If the

relationship is deemed worthy of an in-person breakup, according to research, there are ten “rules” to follow to have an ideal breakup (Manson, 2021):

1. Always break up in person and, if possible, *not* in public.
2. Avoid making a scene and control your emotions.
3. Do not feel as if you have to make the other person feel better.
4. After the breakup, cut all contact until everything has settled.
5. Talk about it to those you are close to.
6. You can be sad, angry, or upset, but don't blame just one person or thing.
7. Recognize that the relationship did not work and that you are both better off apart.
8. Re-discover who you are as an individual.
9. Do not start dating again until you are truly ready.
10. Only attempt to be friends with your ex-partner if you are both over the idea of dating.

Of course, these rules cannot be applied to every individual, because, for example, it is not realistic for many ex-partners to resume contact and build a friendship following a breakup, even if both partners have moved on. Relationship coach and expert Mark Manson (2021) warns that the aftermath and emotional complications following a breakup can be messy, particularly due to the vulnerable state immediately afterward, so creating a plan beforehand is essential.

## WE WANT DIFFERENT THINGS

### **Coping of Men Versus Women:**

Men and women tend to process information in vastly different ways, with breakups being no exception. While there are some similarities in how each gender reacts to the end of the relationship, regardless of which gender did the breaking up, researchers have found nearly opposite reactions to coping with breakups. Women tend to be more selective when choosing a partner because she tends to plan for the long-term for a family, so she will search for someone with the potential to raise a family (Perilloux and Buss, 2008); this may include access to resources, physical fitness, and emotional commitments. Such selectiveness can often develop into too selective, making women more subject to rejection. On the other end of the spectrum, men tend to be far less selective, so if he finds a long-term partner and the relationship ends, he is far more likely to face heavy costs (Perilloux and Buss, 2008). In an exploratory study to determine if gender affects how men and women respond to a romantic breakup, 77 men and 173 women received a questionnaire on various measures, including disclosure of their relationship history, a love schema scale, and an assessment of emotional reactions to a breakup (Choo et al., 1996). The study found that men feel less joy and relief following a breakup compared to women (FeltGood scale), but that men and women do not score differently on the FeltBad or FeltGuilty scales which would indicate levels of anxiety, sadness, anger, or guilt following a breakup. Men and women were found to blame themselves for the breakup, however, women are more likely to blame their partner for

the problems and men were more likely to distract themselves with work or sports following the breakup (Choo et al., 1996).

A similar study was conducted by Perilloux and Buss (2008) to explore the differences between male and female reactions to romantic breakups. Participants included 98 males and 101 females who were given a Likert scale to answer questions about their previous breakups in regards to the emotions experienced, the costs of the breakup, and any strategies they used after the breakup. Perilloux and Buss (2008) discovered the following statistics to be true: men are more successful than women at preventing a breakup by increasing their level of commitment, males who plan on ending their relationship are more likely to have intercourse with another individual before the breakup has occurred than females, women who were broken up with report feeling sad or confused while men may feel happy or indifferent, and women report higher costs including stalking or loss of protection after breaking up with their partner. The overall consensus of both studies indicates that, as social stigmas imply, women tend to react impulsively with higher emotions when broken up with, while men tend to be more violent or ignore their emotions completely.

The true danger of ending a relationship comes after a breakup, when one partner, typically the dumpee, acts out in violence. Stalking, assault, and even murder are some of the deadly risks of breaking up with an unstable individual. In fact, according to a 2011 survey, approximately 50% of stalking cases were conducted by a partner or ex-partner, with 62% of such cases including female victims (Logan, 2011). Statistically speaking, men tend to be the aggressors in post-breakup violence, especially in sexual assault and domestic abuse cases. Stalking will typically lead to more violent crimes and will go on

for a duration averaging 1-2.2 years, and includes physical surveillance, unwanted phone calls, property invasion/damage, or proxy stalking (Logan, 2012). Because stalking occurs over a long period of time, an obsession with the other person builds until confrontation happens, often leading to violent behavior. When such behavior arises, endangered individuals are urged to involve law enforcement immediately before the situation gets dangerous. While men are statistically more likely to react in violence following a breakup, ex-partner crimes occur every day with both female and male victims.

Physical violence following a breakup has been connected to demographic variables, including age and gender, and duration of the relationship. Adolescents and young adults have higher rates of victimization than older individuals, particularly females in long-term relationships. On average, approximately 3 out of every 10 adolescents between ages 12 and 21 in relationships averaging 18 months have experienced partner violence victimization (Halpern et al., 2001). This indicates that there is a likely correlation between age, duration of the relationship, and violence during or following a breakup. Interestingly, the 2001 study on partner violence (Halpern et al.) indicates the following:

Given the importance of the number of relationships a respondent has had within a limited time period, the higher prevalence of victimization in older age groups may be partly a function of the greater dating experience that generally accumulates with age... Among *Add Health* respondents, the prevalence of psychological and physical victimization is similar for males and females. Although there are exceptions, prevalence figures for psychological, minor



physical, and severe physical violence victimization for males are often found to be slightly higher than for females.

These findings assert that both men and women are equally victimized by partner violence, especially amongst younger generations, however, men will experience verbal or psychological violence while women are victimized by physical (or sexual) violence.

## I'M NOT RIGHT FOR YOU

### **The Aftermath:**

Once the relationship is officially terminated and both partners have accepted the breakup, the healing process begins to cycle between both partners. According to Duck's (2008) breakup model, the "grave-dressing process" suggests that healthy coping requires individuals to process why the relationship ended to ultimately move on from the relationship. It is important that neither partner attempts to "get back" at the other, such as rushing into a new relationship before they are ready, pulling pranks on the other person for revenge, or threatening the other with harm or physical violence. Regardless of the events that took place during the relationship or the breakup, both parties should desire to move past the heartache by coping in healthy ways. Maertz (2008) recommends twenty healthy methods of coping, including:

1. Embrace your feelings.
2. Be willing to openly discuss your emotions.
3. Write down how you are feeling.

4. Understand that breakups are, at times, inevitable.
5. Do not take the loss personally.
6. Prioritize your needs and emotions.
7. Develop or re-discover a routine.
8. Take time to yourself and remember to pamper yourself.
9. Give yourself some slack.
10. Maintain your faith in others and relationships.
11. Let go of hope for getting back together with your partner.
12. Do not attempt to maintain a friendship with your ex.
13. Avoid unhealthy people or coping strategies.
14. Keep a list of your ex-partner's worst qualities.
15. Do not attempt to get revenge.
16. Learn from the failed relationship.
17. Remember the benefits of being single.
18. Get closure for yourself, by yourself.
19. Do not forget that you can survive by yourself.
20. Start dating again when you are ready.

For those who may have trouble letting go of a past relationship, excessive rumination is easy to occur and difficult to move past until they receive an explanation for the relationship dissolution (Belu et al., 2016). When a breakup is not properly coped with, individuals are left feeling unsettled by the conclusion of the romantic partnership, frequently playing a critical role in the onset of depression, psychological distress, and reduced life satisfaction (Sciara and Pantaleo, 2017). This can not only affect the

individual and their well-being, but their overall perception of romantic relationships can be altered or ruined completely as well.

For some relationships, walking away from the other person is too difficult to handle, especially if both partners choose to stay in contact after a breakup. When the relationship continues in a seemingly platonic manner after the romance has ended, individuals tend to see through the rose-colored glasses once again and take their ex-partner back, regardless of the troublesome past they may share. This is especially prominent in younger couples, with a 2012 study indicating that the average age for on-and-off-again relationships was found in 14 to 19-year-olds in longer relationships lasting approximately one year (Matson et al., 2012). This may be attributed to a lack of emotional and/or sexual maturity, but there has not been a confirmed explanation for why this statistic may be. One partner may promise to change their previous habits or otherwise resolve past conflicts that caused the breakup, overall convincing the other person that there is potential for the relationship to grow stronger or return to a previous state. However, habits are difficult to break, so many couples who break up once due to past behaviors and get back together before the coping process has completed enter an on-again/off-again relationship (Arriaga, 2001). Each time a breakup occurs, there is a natural expectation for the couple to either renegotiate or redefine the terms of the relationship to avoid breaking up an additional time, which creates a continually evolving agreement of the relationship terms (Dailey et al., 2012). While this does allow room for both partners to express their needs and adhere to the other individual's requests, further increasing the likelihood of avoiding a breakup, problems with communication tend to be one of the largest indicators of a breakup which furthers the barrier between both partners

(Duck, 2005). Although on-again/off-again partners report lower relational quality, factors such as lingering feelings, developing better communication skills, negative experiences with other relationships, and visible changes in the partners or the relationship continue to drive couples to continue renewing the relationship (Dailey et al., 2012). The difficulty with on-off relationships is that such couples often do not allow the time and space that is required after a breakup to cope, heal, and come to terms with why the relationship failed and what is required of each partner to adjust before making another attempt at a partnership. To avoid the continuous heartbreaks and emotional exhaustion that an on-off relationship causes, it is important to give the other person space and cut all ties of communication, grow as separate individuals, learn from past mistakes, and when both partners feel ready, maybe it is time to try again. However, not every relationship is meant to be long-term, which is completely normal.

Just because a relationship ends does not mean that it has failed. Compatibility is known to fluctuate over time as each partner grows individually, so it is completely normal for two individuals to grow apart. There are three stages of romantic relationships, including (1) romantic love, (2) discouragement and distraction, and (3) separation, adjustment with resignation, or adjustment with contentment (Harris, 2018). Romantic love begins in the early period of the relationship, also known as the honeymoon phase. This period involves plentiful romance, passion, and overall attraction, where compatibility will appear to be at its highest. After this initial stage, couples in the second relationship stage will feel a strain on their compatibility as the relationship is tested; the romance subsides as distractions (such as work, children, school, etc.) come up, arguments arise, and the rose-colored glasses begin to fall off. The

relationship may feel less exciting or easy at this point, so couples will frequently feel discouraged and will not make it past stage two. The final stage will be the deciding period, where the relationship will end or continue. Those who choose to stay together will either grow with resignation or content (we stayed together because we felt we had to versus we stayed together because we want to fix the relationship), ultimately leading to a happy life partnership or an eventual breakup. Researchers encourage individuals to resolve stage two conflicts through healthy methods, such as therapy or rekindling the romance, before ending the relationship as over 90% of couples who faced the third stage were grateful that they stayed together (Harris, 2018). The three stages of romantic relationships were intended for married couples but can be applied to any long-term partnership due to the extensive research conducted by relationship experts to determine relationship phases.

## **CONCLUSION**

Breaking up with a significant other is a difficult task that a majority of the world's population has to go through at some point in their lifetime, so researching the breakup process is the easiest way to be prepared. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are being broken up with, who will walk away from the relationship, likely with a broken heart, who may need guidance on how to cope following the loss of a partnership. The "dumper" will often begin by feeling dissatisfied with the terms or events of the relationship, beginning the intrapsychic process of the breakup model, and will feel obliged to disclose their resentment to their partner. As this is among the first of

the predictors of an upcoming breakup, the “dumpee” is responsible for identifying their partner’s dissatisfied needs and renegotiating the terms of the relationship so that they are no longer unfulfilled. If the individual factors, relationship factors, and external factors which are threatening the relationship are not resolved, the breakup goes into the dyadic phase of the breakup model in which the dumper continues to feel unhappy and the dumpee seemingly ignores their needs. Such dissatisfaction, when left unresolved, continues to a breakup, and the social process requires that people outside of the relationship are made aware of the impending breakup. There are risks, however, to ending a relationship, including more common symptoms like depression, sleep disturbances, or intrusive thoughts, or less common and deadly symptoms like broken heart syndrome or endocrine and immunity dysfunctions. Partner violence is amongst the most dangerous risks of a breakup and can victimize both men and women. Grave-dressing, the final straw and end to the relationship, involves the beginning of the healing process where both partners decide what went wrong on both sides of the relationship.

Breakups are unique to each couple based on factors such as the duration of the relationship and the personal and combined histories of each partner. Therefore, while there is no “perfect” way to end a relationship, researchers have determined that the popular method of online breakups is widely acceptable by young adults as opposed to older generations, and the least favored method of breaking up regards being rejected in favor of another individual. Researchers have determined that the most ideal way to terminate a relationship is to avoid making a scene while in person, cut all contact with one another, heal independently, and never begin a new relationship or attempt to

rekindle an old relationship until the coping process is completed. Men and women tend to cope in different ways, as women tend to be more selective in their partnerships than men. Women are found to feel joy or relief more often than men following a breakup, while men feel happy or indifferent. In addition, men will commonly distract themselves with work or sports, while women react emotionally and blame their partner once it is over. Breakups do not equal failure as it is natural for relationships to end; compatibility can fluctuate over time as the three phases of romantic relationships include the initial honeymoon phase of romantic love, discouragement as life's distractions arise, and the final make-or-break phase where partners must decide to stay together or break up. Not every relationship is meant to be long-term, but researchers encourage couples to try healthier alternatives before ending the relationship. The aftermath of a breakup can be challenging and lonely; however, surrounding oneself with loved ones, rediscovering routines and enjoyments, and appreciating the single life while allowing time and space away from relationships is the perfect formula to concluding an ideal breakup.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

Table 1

*Constitutive Rules for Requests and Potential Face Concerns Associated With Three Goals*

Rules	Initiating	Intensifying	Terminating
Need for Action	Is there a “real” need to start a relationship at this point in time? Why? How does this reflect on the message source and/or potential partner?	Is there a “real” need to formalize the relationship at this point in time? If not, how does this reflect on the message source?	Is there a “real” need to end the relationship at this time? Why? How does this reflect on the message source and/or partner?
Need for Directive	Why did the message source need to say this now? Does/should the potential partner already know about the source’s desire to date? How does this reflect on both parties?	Did the source need to say this? Would it have just happened “naturally?”	Did the source need to say this? Why isn’t the partner already aware of the problems?
Ability	Is the potential partner able to get involved in a relationship at this point in time? If not, what does this say about the potential partner’s feelings about the source and/or relationships?	Is the partner able to formalize the relationship? If not, what does this say about the partner’s anxiety about relationships?	Is the partner able to end the relationship now? If not, how will the source and target look?
Willingness	Is the potential partner willing to	Is the partner willing to formalize	Is the partner willing to end the

	go out? If not, how does this reflect on the source and/or target?	the relationship at this point? If not, how does this reflect on the source and/or target?	relationship? Is the partner “heroically committed,” “delusionally committed?”
Rights	Does the source have the right to ask out this potential partner? Does doing so violate organizational or cultural rules?	Does the source have the right to formalize the relationship at this point in time?	Does the source have the right to unilaterally “end” the relationship?
Sincerity	Does the source really want to go out? Too much so? If so, why? [e.g. Is he or she lonely or desperate?]	Does the source really want to formalize the relationship? Too much so? If so, why? [e.g. Is he or she insecure?]	Does the source really want to end this relationship? If so, what does this say about the source and/or target?

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Appendix B

Table 2

*Summary of Themes in Open-Ended Responses for Study 1 (N = 141)*

Category	Initiating	Intensifying	Terminating
General concerns	1) Rejection 2) Other person already in relationship/Interested someone else 3) Not knowing other/Only knowing by looks and personality in classroom/Unsure of other's likes/dislikes 4) Worried other doesn't feel same way/Other not interested 5) Being together in class if things went badly/Awkward 6) Other not attracted to me/Appearance issues	1) Other might not have same feelings/Lack of reciprocation 2) Might lose other person altogether/Being dumped/Scaring other person off 3) Rejection/Denial 4) Hurt relationship/Getting hurt/Things will take turn for the worse 5) Rushing things/Jumping the gun/Other not ready to commit/Coming on too strong/Freak other out 6) Might not be what I want/Feeling trapped/Restricting own autonomy	1) Hurting or upsetting other/Making other feel bad/Breaking other person's heart 2) Concerned about other's reaction/Other may go "psycho"/Things could get "heated" or Overly emotional/Other may yell or get angry or cry or try to hurt me 3) Worried about making right choice/Doing the right thing/Regret 4) Maintaining/Losing friendship 5) Other may hate me or think poorly of me/Never talk to me again/Gaining an enemy 6) Uncertainty – Does he or she feel the same way?

<p>Concerns about how you would appear</p>	<p>1) Outward appearance/"Good looking"/Attractive/Smelling nice  2) Appearing pushy/Too forward/Overbearing/Aggressive/Coming on too strong/Overzealous  3) Appearing desperate/Looking too interested or needy  4) Appearing like a psycho"/ Crazy/Weirdo/Strange/Creep  5) Looking like an idiot or fool/Say something or look stupid  6) Appearing like a loser/Pathetic</p>	<p>1) Appearing needy/Too attached or involved/Clingy  2) Appearing Pushy/Too Forward/Coming on too strong  3) Moving too quickly/Impatient  4) Appearing desperate  5) Other might not have same feelings  6) Taking the relationship too seriously</p>	<p>1) Appearing hurtful/Harsh/Hateful/Me an/  Heartless/Cold  2) Being viewed as a "dickhead," "dick," "bitch," "asshole," "jerk," or "the devil"  3) Appearing uncaring/Ungrateful/  Inconsiderate/Insensitive  4) Selfish  5) Looking like the bad guy/girl  6) Rude</p>
<p>Other person's concerns about how they would appear</p>	<p>NOTE: Several people said since they were doing the initiating, the other didn't have many concerns about how they would appear (either the person would want to or not want to).  -Others indicated these concerns (or that they were unsure):  1) Depends/Can't say/Probably/Maybe/Unsure  2) Worried about sharing true feelings/How to react appropriately  3) How to tell you</p>	<p>1) Unsure/Depends/Perhaps/Probably  2) Differences in opinion about relationship  3) Afraid to express true feelings/Worried about how to respond  4) Getting too serious/Moving too quickly  5) Giving wrong impression  6) Readiness for commitment</p>	<p>1) Unsure/Depends/Maybe  2) "Why is other person doing this to me?"/"What is not working?"/Confusion  3) Concerns about getting dumped  4) Other might want to look strong/Not weak  5) Appearing like a loser/Wimp  6) Appearing inadequate/Unworthy</p>

	they are not interested 4) Not looking dumb/Like an ass		
Own feelings	1) Nervous/Anxious 2) Uneasy/Uncomfortable/Awkward/Weird/Strange 3) Good that relationship was at least attempted 4) Fear/Afraid/Scared 5) Excited 6) Courageous/Taking a big step/Risk taker/Outgoing/Bold/Gutsy/Proud/Out on a limb	1) Nervous/Anxious 2) Good/Great (if agree); Bad (if don't agree) 3) Scared/Fearful of reaction/It's a risk 4) Excited 5) Strange/Awkward / Weird/Uncomfortable/Embarrassed 6) Happy if things worked out	1) Bad/Terrible/Not good/Awful/Horrible 2) Sad/Unhappy 3) Relieved 4) Nervous/Anxious 5) Good 6) Uncomfortable/Uneasy
Other's feelings	1) Hopefully flattered 2) Either they want to or they don't/Depends/Unsure 3) Surprised/Caught off guard/Put on spot/Shocked 4) Awkward/Weird/Strange/"Creeped out" 5) Uncomfortable/Uneasy/Intimidated 6) Good/Great	1) Depends on what other person's feelings are 2) Good/Great, if feelings are the same and it worked out 3) Rushed/Pressured / Obligated to say yes/ Pushed into it 4) Nervous/Anxious 5) Happy 6) Scared of commitment	1) Hurt/Upset 2) Depends/Unsure 3) Sad/Miserable 4) Bad/Not good 5) Confused/Wonder what he or she did wrong 6) Relieved

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Appendix C

Table 3

*Summary of Directness Coding Categories for Study 2 (N = 274)*

Category	Directness Level	Verbal Action Taken	Verbatim Example
Initiating	1 = avoid mentioning relational goal	Avoid mentioning initiation.	None.*
	2 = very inexplicit, using mild hints	Asking a general social question about what partner is doing.	“Hey, how are you doing? I wanted to introduce myself before our class is over. My name is _____.”
	3 = inexplicit, using strong hints	Providing suggested actions for partner with no specific timeframe.	“Hey Chris, how you doing today? I was just wondering if we could go out sometime. Nothing fancy, maybe just ice cream or coffee or something.”
	4 = explicit, with request following preliminary information	After initial dialogue, providing suggested actions for partner with a specific timeframe.	“Hey Chris, how is it going? Do you have plans this weekend? My friend’s having a party Friday and I wondered if you’d like to go with me.”

	5 = very explicit, with request appearing immediately in dialogue	Expressing request or desire in first sentence.	“What are you doing Friday because my friends and I are going to a Royals game and we’re drinking at my place before the game and I was just seeing if you wanted to come.”
Intensifying	1 = avoid mentioning relational goal	Avoid mentioning intensification.	None.*
	2 = very inexplicit, using mild hints	Offering general observations or feelings about partner.	“Chris, you are always so nice and sweet. You’re always here for me and support me, encourage me. You know I like you a lot, right?”
	3 = inexplicit, using strong hints	Asking general questions about status of relationship.	“Chris I would really like to know where you think our relationship is going.”
	4 = explicit, with request following preliminary information	After initial dialogue, asking partner a specific question if they are ready for the next level.	“Chris, I really like you. You are a really cool person and we get along really well. I was wondering whether you would be interested in being exclusive.”
	5 = very explicit, with request appearing immediately in dialogue	Expressing request or desire in first sentence.	“Chris, I like you a lot, you are the only person I want to be with, and I would like to take this relationship a little further and make it exclusive.”
Terminating	1 = avoid mentioning relational goal	Avoid mentioning termination.	“I would enter the situation prayerfully.”

	2 = very inexplicit, using mild hints	Offering general, nonnegative feelings about the relationship.	None.*
	3 = inexplicit, using strong hints	Offering general negative feelings about the relationship with a request to de-intensify.	“Things aren’t the same as when we first started dating. I don’t think I know what I want right now, so I think it would be best if we spend some time apart for a while. I don’t know whether we’ll get back together or not, but I need some time to think about things.”
	4 = explicit, with request following preliminary information	After initial dialogue, offering a specific request to (re)define or end the relationship.	“Chris, is it just me or do you think things between us have changed? I’m starting to feel that we’re in this relationship still because we’ve been together for so long. I don’t feel the same way about you anymore. I think it’s time for us to end our relationship now before it gets any worse.”
	5 = very explicit, with request appearing immediately in dialogue	Expressing request or desire in first sentence.	“I think we need to split up. We aren’t communicating anymore. I used to really like you, but we have grown apart.”

Note. None.\* = indicates that there were no examples of this category (across coders).

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## Appendix D

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Eight Types of Face Threats Across Three Goals*

<i>Type of Face Threat</i>	<i>Relational (Re)Definition Goal</i>					<i>Goal Comparisons</i>		
	<i>Initiating</i>	<i>Intensifying</i>	<i>Terminating</i>	<i>Across Goals</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial <math>\eta^2</math></i>	
(1) Pressure Other	3.31 <sup>a</sup> (1.32)	4.19 <sup>b</sup> (1.34)	4.75 <sup>c</sup> (1.20)	4.07 (1.42)	26.03	.001	.16	
(2) Preclude Future Relationships	2.38 <sup>a</sup> (1.25)	4.13 <sup>b</sup> (1.39)	2.36 <sup>a</sup> (1.22)	2.95 (1.54)	54.88	.001	.29	
(3) Lose Desirable Current Relat.	2.99 <sup>a</sup> (1.33)	4.28 <sup>b</sup> (1.19)	4.36 <sup>b</sup> (1.34)	3.87 (1.43)	28.98	.001	.18	
(4) Make Other Appear Inadequate	1.80 <sup>a</sup> (0.83)	2.05 <sup>a</sup> (1.01)	3.49 <sup>b</sup> (1.51)	2.42 (1.37)	68.71	.001	.29	
(5) Appear Attractive	5.22 <sup>a</sup> (1.28)	4.32 <sup>b</sup> (1.61)	2.60 <sup>c</sup> (1.57)	4.06 (1.84)	68.17	.001	.34	
(6) Not Appear Too Forward	3.33 (1.45)	3.79 (1.22)	3.37 (1.25)	3.50 (1.32)	4.79	.061	.02	
(7) Not Look Overly Dependent	2.37 <sup>a</sup> (1.27)	4.14 <sup>b</sup> (1.32)	2.43 <sup>a</sup> (1.09)	2.98 (1.48)	58.77	.001	.31	
(8) Not Look Insensitive	1.84 <sup>a</sup> (0.92)	2.10 <sup>a</sup> (1.04)	4.41 <sup>b</sup> (1.55)	2.78 (1.66)	121.86	.001	.48	
Across Face Threats	2.91 <sup>a</sup> (0.87)	3.62 <sup>b</sup> (0.83)	3.48 <sup>b</sup> (0.83)		17.67	.001	.12	

*Note.* *N*'s = 92 for initiating, 91 for intensifying, and 90 for terminating. Means are outside parentheses, standard deviations are within parentheses. Within each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$  by the Tukey post-hoc procedure.