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SEX DIFFERENCES IN REACTION TO PREMARITAL  
RELATIONSHIP TERMINATION

by

Alice C. Chatillon

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

September, 1984

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## VITA

The author, Alice C. Chatillon, was born on September 16, 1954 in New York, New York. She is the daughter of Alice I. Hamilton and John F. Chatillon and the stepdaughter of Derek G.C. Hamilton.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A sense of personal identity that includes at least sketchy answers to the questions, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" seems to be basic to adaptive human functioning. Although there is much dissent in the psychological literature on identity, most theoreticians agree that a sense of self provides an individual with meaningful ways to organize reality and to cope with the world. Many also concur that identity is inextricably linked to issues of interpersonal autonomy and relatedness. It is commonly argued that a strong identity allows a person to enter intimate relationships while retaining a sense of the self as an entity that is separate and distinct from others (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Kegan, 1982, Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975).

Judith Bardwick (1971, 1979) deviates somewhat from this popular view of identity in the construction of her theory of the psychology of women. Bardwick contends that there are major sex differences in identity formation due to sex role socialization. She suggests that while the male defines himself through his autonomous actions, the female's sense of self is formed primarily through her relationships with others.

According to Bardwick, the young woman's identity during adolescence is bound up specifically in her relationships with males. This is the time, however, when young men are striving particularly hard to



prove themselves through independent achievements. As a result, Bardwick argues, the experience of romantic involvement is very different for young males and females. This difference may be most apparent when a romantic relationship comes to an end. For the man romantic breakup involves the loss of a partner but for the woman it entails the loss of the self. Bardwick suggests that the psychological consequences are severe emotional distress, loss of self-esteem and identity crisis for the female.

Although sex differences in the experience of romantic involvement have been demonstrated empirically, there has been little focus to date on men's and women's reactions to premarital breakup. The little work that has been conducted in this area has produced equivocal results. If Bardwick's propositions are correct and women are more negatively affected by relationship dissolution than men due to sex differences in identity formation, this would seem to have important ramifications in both the academic and the clinical realms. Academically, such a finding would supplement our current understanding of identity development. Clinically, it would add information that could be vital to the treatment of our clients. It would be important, for example, to recognize that a female suffering from the breakup of a romantic relationship is also suffering a crisis in identity. In couples counseling, it would also be beneficial to understand the differences between the meanings men and women ascribe to breakup.

The present study was designed to test hypotheses derived from Bardwick's theory and to extend our knowledge of sex differences in

reaction to premarital relationship termination. Toward this end, 30 men and 30 women who had recently ended romantic relationships were surveyed for their responses to termination.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

#### Bardwick's Theory of Identity Formation

In developing her theory of the psychology of women, Judith Bardwick (1971) argues that males and females experience premarital romantic involvement differently. Bardwick suggests that women are more invested in perpetuating romantic relationships than men are and therefore suffer greater distress when their relationships terminate. She attributes this sex difference to contrasts between the processes of male and female identity formation.

Bardwick sees identity as the major organizing principle used by the individual for dealing with social and physical realities. She considers identity a relatively stable entity that is recognizable both to the self and others and that includes body image and basic strategies for psychic defense and organismic enhancement, as well as core motivations and gender identification. Bardwick contends that female identity is relational in nature and is formed in adolescence and young adulthood through the establishment of an intimate relationship with a man. Males, in contrast, develop a sense of self through autonomous actions conducted outside the interpersonal sphere.

Bardwick maintains that identity is learned and that gender dif-

ferences are the result of sex role socialization. The roots of the male's autonomous sense of self, in her view, lie in early childhood when the boy is taught to internalize a system for monitoring his own behavior and is encouraged to act as an independent agent. This early social learning allows the boy to look within himself for rewards and self-esteem and he comes to view himself as a being who is separate from his parents by the preschool years.

The girl, in Bardwick's view, is never encouraged to develop this independent sense of self. As a child, she is continually reinforced for relying on others' judgements of her own actions. Her self-esteem remains dependent upon external approval and she tailors her behavior to earn social rewards. Consequently, the young female retains a view of herself as one who is related to others. Her initial sense of self is one that is completed through her relationship with her parents.

During adolescence the boy continues to develop internal controls and values, measuring social input against his own reactions. The male identity crisis during the teen years hinges on issues of independence and autonomy; the boy's identity is contingent upon his ability to separate further from his parents while forming the personal world view that will provide the basis for his adult endeavors. Romantic affiliation may be important in providing the male emotional support and affirmation of his sexual desirability but it is secondary to the instrumental and vocational achievements that aid him in his search for self-definition.

The female adolescent crisis, in Bardwick's view, centers on issues of connection rather than separation. The girl learns that her

affiliation with her family is to be replaced with a heterosexual partnership. Her half sense of self is now to be completed through romantic relations with a male. Bardwick writes:

When we observe girls in highschool and college, we find that they have typically evolved different goals from boys and their perceived crises are notably linked to the interpersonal. The concept of the feminine self has become defined by the girls in terms of relationships with men, with the assumption that the primary tasks will be the nurturant and supportive tasks characteristic of the traditional role. Other sources of esteem derive from peers, parents and teachers - all of whom support this concept. Intimacy issues, the capacity to establish and sustain meaningful, important and nondestructive intimate relationships become the major goal and the most important crisis during adolescence and the college years (p. 209).

Bardwick argues that social influences render even the academically ambitious woman dependent upon romantic affiliation for her sense of self-esteem. Early socialization and prevailing sex role attitudes virtually ensure that the woman's identity will be contingent upon her heterosexual relationships, even if she is enormously successful in other areas of her life. Bardwick (1979) does note that the feminist movement may effect changes in female identity. At present, however, she believes that most young women embrace the traditional values of the female role and are heavily invested in maintaining their romantic involvements.

The woman's experience of relationship termination then is very different from that of the man. The loss of a partner may be emotionally painful for the young male but his sense of self remains unaltered as he continues to pursue self-esteem in independent accomplishments. The young woman, however, simultaneously loses her very identity and confronts the fact that she has failed to meet the most basic expecta-

tions of her societal role. Bardwick suggests that the result is often severe emotional distress, complete loss of self-esteem and identity crisis.

In summary, Bardwick maintains that males and females experience romantic affiliation differently due to sex differences in identity formation. The woman relies on her relationships to define her sense of self while the male's identity is developed through achievements external to the interpersonal realm. As a result, females experience a crisis in identity and suffer comparatively more loss of self-esteem and emotional turmoil than their male partners at the time of relationship termination. Bardwick suggests that these differences stem from sex role socialization and women's acceptance of the traditional female role.

#### Studies of Premarital Relationships

Several studies of premarital relationships offer empirical support for Bardwick's assertion that males and females experience romantic involvement differently. Skipper and Nass (1966), for example, found a discrepancy between the motives for dating among female nursing students and the goals of their dating partners. Women dated primarily in search of a future spouse while men cited recreation as their major goal. White (1981) found that women tend more than men to rely on relationships as major sources of self-esteem and emotional well-being. Finally, studies have consistently shown that college women are more pragmatic and less romantic in their attitudes toward love than their

male counterparts (e.g., Dion & Dion, 1973; Hill, Rubin & Peplau, 1976; Knox & Sporakowski, 1968). By self-report, women in these studies typically stress the effort required and the problems encountered in sustaining long-term relationships while men tend to support more idealistic notions such as "love at first sight" and "true love is eternal".

There have been few attempts, however, to empirically document sex differences in young adults' responses to termination of a romantic involvement. The major work in this area was conducted by Hill et al. (1976) as part of a longitudinal study of 231 college student couples in the Boston area. Data for this study were collected on four occasions at six month intervals over the course of two years. At each data point, subjects were individually surveyed about their experiences with their relationships and their feelings and attitudes towards their romantic partners. Because 103 couples terminated their relationships during the course of this investigation, Hill and his colleagues were allowed to examine the termination process closely. The original data were also supplemented with interview material gathered from a subsample of eighteen subjects and with questionnaire data collected from a second subsample of fifteen separated couples. These fifteen couples were the only subjects surveyed for their emotional reactions to the breakup.

Several interesting sex differences in reaction to termination found by Hill and his colleagues were noted in a paper by Rubin, Peplau and Hill (1981). First, women seemed more likely to end a relationship that was unsatisfying to them. According to both male and female reports, women initiated termination more often than men did (51% vrs.

42% of the cases). This was true even when the female's reported depth of involvement was at least as great as that of the male. Males, conversely, tended to end a relationship only when they were the less involved partner. Second, women seemed to be more sensitive to the vicissitudes of their relationships than the men were. While termination often seemed to "come from nowhere" to the males, females usually saw the onset of the breakup as gradual, regardless of who played the initiating role. Women were also able to list several more problems that they believed had precipitated the separation.

Finally, sex differences were found in emotional reactions to termination. Among the 15 couples surveyed for this information, men felt more depressed and lonely and felt less happy and free than their ex-girlfriends. Several of the men also alluded to difficulties in accepting the finality of the separation, expressing disbelief that their love was not reciprocated. This reaction was seen in none of the women.

Rubin et al.'s finding that women adjust better than men to premarital separation is supported by a study of former cohabitators conducted by Mika and Bloom (1980). These investigators interviewed 50 subjects who had recently terminated a relationship with a live-in lover. Questions pertained to information about reactions to the breakup and to several personality, demographic and situational variables. Results from this study showed that separated women felt more independent and happy, and experienced less overall emotional distress than separated men. Poorer adjustment for both sexes was associated with greater divisions between real and ideal self, less reliance upon social



supports, and less satisfying relations with one's ex-partner after separation, as well as employment difficulties, being more oriented toward the family than the self, and being the recipient rather than the initiator of the decision to separate.

Interestingly, Tennov (1979) found sex differences in reaction to termination which directly contradict the findings of Mika and Bloom (1980) and Rubin et al. (1981). Surveying over 500 men and women for their retrospective reactions to relationship dissolution, Tennov found that women seemed to have a harder time adjusting to separation than men. Females in this study reported more emotional turmoil in reaction to breakup and more difficulty in accepting the fact that their ex-partners no longer loved them. Unfortunately, Tennov limits interpretation of her findings by combining data from both divorced and unmarried subjects in the report of her results. She also cautions that males in this study may have denied emotional distress in order to appear congruent with social expectations for the masculine role.

In sum, the few studies which have looked at sex differences in reaction to premarital relationship termination have produced mixed results. While Tennov's (1979) data suggest that females are more negatively affected by breakup than males, both Rubin et al. (1981) and Mika and Bloom (1980) report the opposite effect. The contradictory findings of these three investigations and the disparities between the samples they examined prohibit even tentative conclusions about differences between males' and females' responses to premarital relationship dissolution.

## Divorce Studies

Given the dearth of empirical information on premarital breakup, it is necessary to turn to the divorce literature to gain further understanding of sex differences in peoples' responses to relationship termination. Several studies of divorce have documented that both men and women experience depression, loneliness, anger, self-blame, lowered self-esteem, relief and sometimes euphoria in reaction to marital dissolution (e.g., Kressal, Lopez-Moriallas, Weinglass & Deutsch, 1979; Spanier & Casto, 1979; Spanier & Thompson, 1983; Weiss, 1975). Investigations which have focused on sex differences, however, have yielded less consistent results.

Several studies of divorce self-help groups have found no differences between men's and women's reactions to marital disruption (Berman & Turk; 1981; Gray, 1978; Weiss, 1975). Other investigators have found an effect for gender, but results have varied according to geography, marriage duration, and the materials used for measurement. Urban women, for example, have been shown to be more distressed than urban men while the reverse has been demonstrated with a small town population (Rasche & Barringer, 1977). Similarly, two studies have found that women are more distressed than men during the six months prior to separation and equally distressed after the divorce has been finalized (Chirboga & Cutler, 1978; Green, 1983). A third investigation, however, has shown the opposite effect with a sample of subjects who were ending marriages of 20 or more years duration (Deckert & Langelier, 1978). Males and females in this study reported equal distress during the initial phases

of termination but females reported more subjective stress in the post-divorce period.

Finding an effect for gender also seems to vary according to the dependent measures employed. Zeis, Zeiss and Johnson (1980) discovered that newly divorced women seemed to be better adjusted than their male counterparts when adjustment was assessed with a global measure of emotional and behavioral distress. When specific reactions were examined, however, it was discovered that although women reported less suicidal ideation than men, they also reported more tension, more negative feelings toward their ex-spouses and less sense of stability. Others have found that females also tend to feel more hostile (Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1983).

Sex differences in the divorce experience have additionally been examined through census studies conducted at both the national and local levels. Such studies typically compare the rates of occurrence of stress related events among married and divorced men and women. In a study of Pueblo, Colorado psychiatric inpatient records from 1967 to 1971, for example, Bloom (1975) found that admission rates for males with disrupted marriages were almost nine times higher than the rates for men who were married. Rates for separated females, in contrast, were only three times as high as those found for married women. Although Bloom cautions that these data are merely correlational in nature, he suggests that the findings indicate a stronger connection between divorce and stress reactions among men than among women. Bloom, White and Asher (1978) come to the same conclusion in a recent review of the census lit-

erature. They report that, overall, divorced men show higher rates of private and public psychiatric hospitalization, outpatient mental health care and mortality due to suicide, homicide and disease, than that evidenced by either married men or divorced women.

Several investigators have attempted to delineate factors in addition to gender which are associated with the emotional experience of relationship dissolution. It has been well documented among both men and women, for example, that marital separation is easier for the initiating partner than it is for the recipient (e.g., Brown, Felton, White-man & Manela, 1980; Kitson, 1982; Kressal et al., 1979). It also appears that the quality of a marriage prior to separation may affect adjustment. Recollection of marital discord, low affectional expression and low satisfaction with the relationship have all been linked to more positive psychological outcomes, regardless of gender (Green, 1983; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Thompson & Spanier, 1983). There is also considerable evidence to suggest that, among women, marriages of shorter duration are associated with better post-divorce adjustment (Chiriboga, Roberts & Stein, 1978; Goode, 1956; Hetherington Cox & Cox, 1977; Kurdek & Blisk, 1983) although there is not complete consensus on this issue (Brown et al., 1980; Kitson, 1982).

The divorcee's social environment seems to have an additional impact on his or her reaction to relationship dissolution. Many studies have shown a connection between the approval of family and friends and increased acceptance of the divorce situation (Goode, 1956; Thompson & Spanier, 1983; Weiss, 1975). Social disapproval, or pressure to remain

married, has been found to have a particularly strong association with emotional distress among women (Green, 1983). Finally, a pre-divorce social life that is independent of the spouse has been linked to better post-divorce adjustment for men under 40 and for women over 40 years of age (Chiriboga & Thurner, 1980).

Recent studies have also examined the influence of traditional versus non-traditional sex role attitudes on the impact of divorce. Brown, Perry and Harburg (1977) compared psychological status with sex role attitudes for 253 women who were engaged in the initial steps of separation. Attitudes were classified as traditional or non-traditional along the following three factors: (1) Women's role in the home, (2) Family roles and (3) Job inequality. Results from this study indicated that white women with traditional attitudes suffered significantly more distress over marital separation than their non-traditional counterparts. This effect was not seen in black women. Traditional white women additionally enjoyed less well-being, self-esteem, and sense of personal growth and effectiveness. Other investigators have obtained similar findings (Felton, Brown, Lehman & Liberatos, 1980; Granvold, Pedler & Schellie, 1979; Kurdek & Blisk, 1983) but an effect for sex role attitudes has not been found for men (Felton et al., 1980).

Interestingly, however, a link between sex role lifestyle and reaction to separation has been demonstrated for both men and women. Chiriboga and Thurner (1980) interviewed 298 recently separated subjects to determine whether marital lifestyles that deviated from traditional role expectations were related to better post-divorce adjustment. Find-

ings indicated that young men's and women's "happiness" after divorce was associated with previous non-traditional marital lifestyles characterized by shared household labor and decision-making authority. Less traditional marital lifestyles were also connected with happiness for older men but this association was not found for older women.

In summary, the literature comparing men's and women's experiences with divorce is as equivocal as the research on sex differences in reaction to premarital breakup. While some investigators have found that women tend to be more emotionally upset by divorce than men, others have determined that men actually suffer greater distress. A third group of researchers has found no sex difference at all in response to marital disruption. Several factors have been identified, however, which seem to mediate the emotional impact of separation. The quality and length of marriage prior to breakup, the role of initiation in termination and the social environment confronting the divorcee have all been associated with post-divorce adjustment. Interestingly, women's sex role attitudes have also been linked to their response to separation; less traditional women appear to adjust more easily than those with more traditional attitudes. Although this association has not been found among men, males ending marriages characterized by non-traditional sex roles have been shown to be less distressed by divorce than their more traditional counterparts.

#### Coping with the Stress of Relationship Dissolution

Relationship dissolution, and particularly divorce, has received

increasing attention as a life event with stressful consequences (see for example, Bloom et al., 1978; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Holmes & Rahe; 1967). Only one study, however, has attempted to assess specific coping strategies and to delineate differences between men's and women's styles of coping with this event. Berman and Turk (1981) surveyed 106 recently separated subjects about their reactions to separation and for their ratings of the perceived effectiveness of 53 different strategies for coping. The findings indicated that both men and women tended to use social activities, emotional expression and home and family involvement, as well as self-understanding, autonomy and mastery of new activities to ameliorate the stress of divorce. No sex differences were found for the perceived efficacy of these strategies. Social activity and developing autonomy were highly correlated with greater adjustment to separation for both males and females while expression of feelings was found to be related to greater emotional distress. No relationship was found between adjustment and personal understanding or learning new activities.

Richard Lazarus and his colleagues have developed a slightly different perspective on coping that may shed new light on differences between men's and women's reactions to relationship dissolution (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982; Lazarus, 1981). This group defines coping as "the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them" (Folkman & Lazarus, p. 223). They conceptualize coping as a mediator in the ongoing and reciprocal relationship between the individ-

ual and the environment. Coping, in conjunction with a second mediator, cognitive appraisal, is understood to heavily influence the amount of stress an individual will experience in a given situation.

Cognitive appraisal includes the evaluation of what is at stake and the assessment of the resources available for coping. The individual evaluates an event as benign, challenging or threatening and then appraises the likelihood that he or she will be able to manage the situation effectively. The purpose of coping is then two-fold: problem-focused coping works to actively prevent the occurrence of stressful events and to resolve difficult situations when they do take place, while emotion-focused coping serves to reduce internal tension and to restore emotional equilibrium. The individual shifts between these strategies as the status of the situation changes. Problem-focused strategies may be emphasized, for instance, in those cases when the person perceives an opportunity to effect change. If it gradually appears that change is impossible, however, a shift to more defensive strategies may be seen. The relative proportions of emotion and problem-focused coping found at a given time, are referred to as a "pattern" of coping responses (Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982).

To this author's knowledge, the framework of Lazarus has not been applied to the investigation of coping patterns used by men and women to deal with the stress of relationship termination. In a study of 1,332 episodes of daily stress in a middle-aged sample, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) did determine that men tended to be more problem-focused than women in work situations and in circumstances which required more accep-



tance and information. Neither divorce nor premarital breakup were specifically examined, however.

Given Bardwick's (1971) formulation that men and women react differently to pre-marital breakup, it seems reasonable to suggest that males and females might employ different coping strategies for dealing with this event. Females, for instance, may be too depressed at the time of breakup to engage in problem-focused efforts at stress management. This would be consistent with the literature on depression (e.g., Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979), which notes depressed individuals' decreased attempts to modify their environment. If women do tend to use more emotional means of coping with breakup than men, this difference in style would also be consistent with sex role stereotypes. The popular belief is that females are especially affectively expressive while males are more logical and problem-solving in overall orientation (Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman & Broverman, 1968).

#### Summary and Purpose of the Present Study

In summary, there has been little empirical effort to determine sex differences in young adults' responses to premarital relationship termination. In fact, two hypotheses derived from Bardwick's theory of the psychology of women have yet to be tested. Specifically, there is no evidence to date to either support or disconfirm Bardwick's contention that (1) women experience more identity loss or that (2) women experience greater loss of self-esteem in reaction to pre-marital breakup than do men.

Bardwick's third hypothesis, that women suffer comparatively more emotional distress in reaction to this event, has been tested with contradictory results. Rubin et al. (1981) and Mika and Bloom (1980) found males to be more negatively affected by breakup while Tennov's (1979) findings suggest that females undergo more emotional turmoil. These results really cannot be compared, however, due to considerable differences between the samples studied. Subjects in Rubin et al.'s investigation were ending dating relationships, those in the Mika and Bloom study were terminating cohabitating arrangements and Tennov's study included divorcees as well as unmarried subjects.

Although more extensive, the literature on sex differences in divorce yields similarly mixed results. While some studies suggest that females are more negatively affected by breakup than males, others indicate that males are more upset than females by relationship termination. A third group of researchers find no sex differences at all between men's and women's reactions to divorce. Efforts have been advanced to identify factors that might account for these discrepancies, but the findings thus far have been inconclusive.

Research demonstrating that sex role attitudes are related to women's experience of marital disruption offers tentative support for Bardwick's fourth hypothesis; that women's reactions to breakup are influenced by their acceptance of the traditional female role. It is possible that women with non-traditional attitudes derive much of their identity and self-esteem from activities outside the realm of their relationships and thus experience less distress with termination than

their traditional counterparts. Parallels between marital separation and pre-marital breakup should not be overdrawn, however. The divorcee confronts several factors usually absent in pre-marital breakup, such as change in residence, economic difficulties and issues in child care.

Finally, there is a dearth of information concerning the coping strategies employed by men and women for dealing with the stress of relationship termination. According to the theory and research of Lazarus and his colleagues (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), stress is in part a function of the cognitive and behavioral efforts advanced to cope with life events. If men and women do experience premarital breakup differently, delineation of coping strategies for each sex might provide a better understanding of this phenomenon.

The purpose of the present study is to test hypotheses derived from Judith Bardwick's theory of the psychology of women and to extend the current literature on sex differences in reaction to pre-marital relationship dissolution. Toward this end, 30 males and 30 females recently involved in pre-marital breakup will be surveyed for their responses to this event. Hypotheses for this study are that:

- 1) Females will report more of a negative emotional impact than will males;
- 2) Females will report more lost identity than will males;
- 3) Females will report more loss of self-esteem than will males;
- 4) Females will report more emotion-focused coping strategies than will males;

5) Males will report more problem-focused coping strategies than will females; and

6) Sex role attitudes will be related to identity, self-esteem and emotional impact for females.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Subjects

Subjects were 30 male and 30 female undergraduates recruited from the Psychology 101 subject pool at Loyola University. Subjects were selected from a group of 99 volunteers who reported having experienced the termination of a romantic relationship with a member of the opposite sex within the previous 4 months. Further selection criteria for inclusion in the final sample were as follows:

- 1) Indication that involvement had been serious as measured by a score of 5 or more on an adapted version of Levinger, Senn and Jorgensen's (1970) scale of emotional involvement.
- 2) Indication that involvement in the terminated relationship had continued for at least 1 month prior to termination.

The purpose of these criteria was to ensure that the relationship had been characterized by a greater degree of involvement than that found in casual, short-term dating.

Subjects' ages ranged from 17 to 23 years with a mean age of 18.52 years ( $SD = 1.02$ ). Sixty-seven percent of the sample was white, 13% black, 10% hispanic and 2% oriental. Eight percent did not indicate their race.

Subjects' reported depth of involvement ranged from 5 (serious

involvement in an exclusive relationship) to 9 (definite date set for wedding) on the adapted scale from Levinger et al. Mean depth of involvement was 5.45 ( SD =0.9), indicating serious involvement in an exclusive relationship but without commitment to marry. The duration of relationships prior to termination ranged from 1 month to 72 months, with a mean duration of 16.48 months ( SD =13.86). The mean time that had elapsed since termination at the time of testing was 8.97 weeks ( SD =5.03) with a range that extended from 1 to 16 weeks.

To test for between group differences that could potentially confound future analyses t -tests were conducted on these demographic variables (see Table 1 for results of all t -tests). The results revealed that the males in this study were significantly older than the females, t = 2.67, p <.05. Male subjects were also found to have terminated their relationships significantly more recently than female subjects, t = 2.35, p <.05. Finally, t-tests indicated that females were involved in their relationships for a significantly longer period of time than the males were, t = 2.89, p <.05. No further between group differences were determined to be statistically significant.

### Materials

Descriptive Questionnaire. A 6-item questionnaire was administered to obtain descriptive information about the relationship and to obtain the information necessary for decisions regarding subject selection. This measure includes the following short answer items: (a) Briefly describe the nature of this relationship, (b) How long were you involved in this relationship? (c) How long ago did this relationship

TABLE 1

Relationship Characteristics for Male and Female Subjects

		Males	Females
Age (years)	M	18.83*	18.17
	SD	1.45	0.75
Depth of Involvement	M	5.50	5.57
	SD	0.94	0.89
Length of Involvement (months)	M	11.60*	21.37
	SD	9.16	16.06
Time Since Termination (weeks)	M	8.32*	9.63
	SD	5.83	4.08

\* $p < .05$

end? (d) Whose decision was it to end this relationship? and (e) Have you become romantically involved since the breakup of this relationship? If yes, how long ago did this new relationship begin? It also includes an adaption of Levinger et al.'s (1970) scale of emotional involvement, a 9 point scale ranging from "no involvement" to "definite date set for wedding".

Impact on Self. The Impact on Self Questionnaire was designed by the investigator to measure changes in self concept that occur after relationship termination. It includes the following open-ended questions: (a) Did you feel differently about yourself in the weeks immediately following breakup as compared to the way you felt about yourself while the relationship was ongoing? If yes, how? and (b) Do you feel that you changed during the weeks immediately following the breakup in comparison to the person you were while the relationship was ongoing? If yes, how?

A coding system was developed for this measure based on pilot data from 7 graduate students in psychology (see Appendix A for complete coding system). The coding categories and their rating scales are as follows: introversion/extroversion (1-introversion, 2-indeterminate/no mention, 3- extroversion); sexual desirability (1-decreased desirability, 2-no change/no mention, 3-increased desirability); self-esteem (1-decreased self-esteem, 2-no change/no mention, 3-increased self-esteem); identity (1-lost identity, 2-no change/no mention, 3-found identity); blame (1-blame self, 2-blame nobody/no mention, 3-blame partner); support (1-turned to others, 2- turned to no one/no mention) and



faith in others (1-lost faith in others, 2-no change/no mention). The following affects were also scored as either '0' (absence) or '1' (presence): joy, excitement, surprise, anger, fear, sadness, guilt and shame.

A male graduate student and a female undergraduate who were blind to the purposes of the study coded responses to this questionnaire. Inter-rater reliability was assessed for categories with continuous rating scales using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Cohen's Kappa was used to assess reliability for categories with nominal rating scales. Inter-rater reliability was established for 14 of the 15 categories (see Table 2 and Table 3 for results). Because reliability was not attained for the category 'faith in others', it was dropped from the system.

Profile of Mood States (McNair, Lorr & Droppleman, 1971). An adapted version of the Profile of Mood States (POMS) was used to assess the emotional impact of relationship termination. It contains 65 adjectives describing moods and feelings, each followed by 5 response alternatives ranging from "not at all" to "extremely". Subjects were asked to indicate how strongly they had experienced each mood or emotion during the weeks immediately following the breakup. Responses were scored according to the 6 factors identified by McNair and Lorr (1964): Tension-Anxiety, Depression-Dejection, Anger-Hostility, Vigor-Activity, Fatigue-Inertia and Confusion-Bewilderment. A Total Mood Disturbance Score was also calculated by summing the raw scores across the 6 factors with a negative weighting assigned to Vigor-Activity.

Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress. A 10-item Likert-type scale

TABLE 2

Inter-Rater Reliability for Coding Categories with Continuous Rating Scales

Coding Category	Pearson r
Introversion/Extroversion	0.73
Sexual Desirability	1.00
Self-Esteem	0.77
Identity	1.00

TABLE 3

Inter-Rater Reliability for Coding Categories with Nominal Rating Scales

---

Coding Category	Cohen's k
Blame	0.77
Support	1.00
Faith in Others	0.60
Joy	1.00
Excitement	1.00
Surprise	1.00
Anger	0.80
Fear	0.90
Sadness	0.80
Guilt	0.80
Shame	0.90

---

was administered to measure fear of rejection and emotional responses to termination. This scale includes 8 statements found by Tennov (1979) to be differentially endorsed by males and females (e.g., "I was afraid that \_\_\_ would stop loving me") and 2 statements added by the investigator. Each statement has 5 response alternatives ranging from "not at all" to "extremely". Items are scored individually with scores ranging from 0 (no fear of rejection/emotional distress) to 4 (extreme fear of rejection/emotional distress).

The Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). An adapted version of The Ways of Coping Questionnaire was administered to delineate the thoughts and behaviors used in coping with relationship termination. It contains 65 thoughts and behaviors utilized by people dealing with stressful life events (e.g., "Just took one step at a time", "Made a plan of action and followed it"). Subjects were asked to indicate the strategies they had employed in coping with relationship termination by marking "Y" (Yes) or "N" (No) after each item. Responses were scored according to 2 scales developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980): a 24-item Problem-focused scale and a 40-item Emotion-focused scale.

Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich & Strapp, 1973). The short form of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) was used to assess attitudes toward females' rights and social roles. It contains 25 statements about women, each followed by 4 response alternatives ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Items were scored from 0 (traditional attitude) to 3 (non-traditional attitude). A total

score was derived from a summation across items.

### Procedure

Subjects were tested in small groups in a classroom at Loyola University. Prior to test administration, subjects were informed of the procedure of the study and told that the purpose of the investigation was the examination of people's reactions to the breakup of a romantic relationship. They were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to leave the session at any time without penalty. Consent forms were distributed and signed. Subjects then completed the 6 paper and pencil questionnaires in the order presented above.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Demographic Information

Because previous research has demonstrated an association between initiation of breakup and the impact of relationship termination, frequencies were calculated for the number of subjects represented in each of four initiation subgroups. The four subgroups were: breakup initiated by subject; by subject's partner; by mutual agreement; by neither subject nor subject's partner. A chi square statistic was additionally computed to determine whether initiation was related to gender. Table 4 presents frequency data on the initiation of relationship termination. One third of the total sample reported that they had initiated the breakup of their relationships, 35% said that their partners had initiated the breakup, 28% said that their breakup had been mutually initiated and 3% attributed the breakup to neither partner. The computation of the chi square statistic provided no evidence that initiation was related to gender,  $\chi^2(3)=4.56$ , n.s.

In order to extend our understanding of subjects' backgrounds further, frequencies were also tabulated for percentage of subjects who had become involved in new relationships since the breakup. There were no sex differences in rate of reinvolvement, exactly one third of the males and one third of the females had become involved in new relationships.

TABLE 4

Invitation Subgroup Frequencies

		Males	Females	Total
Subject	N	9	11	20
Initiated	%*	15	18	33.3
Partner	N	14	7	21
Initiated	%	23	12	35
Mutually	N	7	10	17
Initiated	%	12	16	28
Neither	N	0	2	2
Initiated	%	0	3	3

\* Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

As noted in the "Subjects" section of Chapter III, the females in this study were involved in their relationships for a significantly longer period of time than the males. In fact, mean length of involvement for females was almost twice that found for males ( $\bar{M}$  =21.37 months for females;  $\bar{M}$  =11.60 months for males). Because this difference between groups represented a potentially confounding factor, length of involvement was used as a covariate in all tests for sex differences on the continuous dependent variables. This procedure allowed involvement length to be statistically controlled while the main effect for sex was assessed.

### Sex Differences

The first three hypotheses for this study concerned sex differences in reaction to the termination of a romantic relationship. These hypotheses were tested by analyses of covariance which were employed to assess differences between group means on the the Emotional Distress/Fear of Rejection Scale, the POMS and the continuous data from the Impact on Self Questionnaire. Mean scores for these measures, unadjusted and adjusted for the covariate length of involvement, are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Contrary to the predictions of hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, analyses of covariance showed no significant sex differences for negative emotional reaction, identity loss or loss of self-esteem. Specifically, females reported no more of a negative emotional impact, loss of identity or loss of self-esteem than did males.

Although there were no apparent sex differences in reaction to breakup, the analyses of covariance provided evidence that length of



Table 5

Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress Group Means: Unadjusted and  
Adjusted for Length of Involvement

Fear of Rejection/ Emotional Distress		Unadjusted for Length of Involvement		Adjusted for Length of Involvement
		M	SD	M
1. Was afraid that _____ would stop loving me	Male	1.83	1.26	1.87
	Female	1.38	1.24	1.34
2. Thought I'd never get over it	Male	1.93	1.53	2.07
	Female	2.33	1.29	2.19
3. Felt I'd tried almost everything	Male	2.73	1.17	2.71
	Female	2.47	1.38	2.49
4. Was jealous when involved	Male	1.77	1.25	1.76
	Female	1.13	1.25	1.14
5. Felt angry and humiliated	Male	1.67	1.54	1.68
	Female	1.97	1.71	1.96
6. Couldn't accept that _____ no longer cared	Male	1.53	1.50	1.51
	Female	.90	1.29	.92
7. Figured I'd just find someone else	Male	1.20	1.24	1.19
	Female	1.40	1.33	1.41
8. Was insecure in the relationship	Male	1.20	1.16	1.13
	Female	1.37	1.52	1.43
9. Felt guilty when re- lationship ended	Male	1.73	1.34	1.72
	Female	1.93	1.46	1.92
10. Didn't bother me when relationship ended	Male	1.33	1.56	1.39
	Female	1.67	1.75	1.61

Table 6

POMS and Impact on Self Group Means: Adjusted and Unadjusted for Length of Involvement

		Unadjusted for Length of Involvement		Adjusted for Length of Involvement
		M	SD	M
<b>POMS</b>				
Tension/Anxiety	Male	18.50	8.93	19.66
	Female	19.55	9.10	18.35
Fatigue	Male	12.20	7.23	12.41
	Female	13.58	8.00	13.36
Anger/Hostility	Male	22.77	13.40	23.57
	Female	22.48	14.17	21.66
Depression/Dejection	Male	29.50	16.72	30.86
	Female	33.38	15.84	31.98
Confusion/Bewilderment	Male	15.43	6.58	15.58
	Female	16.41	5.53	16.27
Vigor	Male	13.13	7.21	13.08
	Female	10.48	6.62	10.54
Total	Male	185.27	51.44	188.86
	Female	191.48	47.38	187.76
<b>IMPACT ON SELF</b>				
Introversion/Extroversion	Male	1.90	.48	1.91
	Female	1.90	.40	1.89
Sexual Desirability	Male	1.93	.25	1.92
	Female	1.96	.32	1.95
Self-Esteem	Male	1.73	.52	1.72
	Female	1.67	.43	1.68
Identity	Male	1.83	.38	1.82
	Female	1.90	.30	1.92
Negative Affects	Male	.73	.74	.78
	Female	.87	.81	.82

involvement was related to degree of emotional response. Involvement length was found to covary with Item 2 of the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress Scale ("When the relationship ended I thought I would never get over it"),  $F(1,58) = 4.94$ ,  $p < .05$ . Involvement length was also found to covary with tension/anxiety,  $F(1,57) = 7.69$ ,  $p < .01$ , and depression/dejection,  $F(1,57) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .05$ , on the POMS.

The fourth and fifth hypotheses for this study predicted that females would report more emotion-focused coping strategies than males, and that males would report more problem-focused coping than females. Analysis of covariance was employed to test for sex differences in coping responses. The unadjusted and adjusted group means for the Ways of Coping Questionnaire are presented in Table 7. No significant differences were found between the strategies men and women used to deal with the stress of termination.

Sex differences in reaction to breakup were further explored through comparisons between males' and females' solicitation of emotional support after breakup and between males' and females' assignation of blame. As these data were categorical, they were analysed using the chi square statistic. Table 8 presents the crosstabulations for support and blame. No significant relationship was found between sex and support or between sex and target assigned blame.

In order to examine the relative degree of traditionalism between men's and women's sex role attitudes, analysis of covariance was conducted between group scores on the AWS. The unadjusted and adjusted group means are shown in Table 9. Females' sex role attitudes were found

Table 7

Ways of Coping Questionnaire Group Means: Unadjusted and Adjusted for  
Length of Involvement

WAYS OF COPING		Unadjusted for Length of Involvement		Adjusted for Length of Involvement
		M	SD	M
Emotion-focused	Male	23.47	5.33	23.22
	Female	23.40	5.51	23.64
Problem-focused	Male	11.97	3.86	11.94
	Female	12.43	3.09	12.46

Table 8

Crosstabs on Support and Blame


---

	SUPPORT		
	<u>Turned to Others</u>	<u>Didn't Turn to Others/No Mention</u>	<u>Row Total</u>
Male	3	27	30
Female	0	30	30
Column Total	3	57	60

$\chi^2 (1) = 1.40, p = .24$

---



---

	BLAME			
	<u>Blame Self</u>	<u>Blame No One/No Mention</u>	<u>Blame Partner</u>	<u>Row Total</u>
Male	4	25	1	30
Female	5	25	0	30
Column Total	9	50	1	60

$\chi^2 (2) = 1.11, p = .57$

---

Table 9

AWS Group Means: Unadjusted and Adjusted for Length of Involvement

AWS	Unadjusted for Length of Involvement		Adjusted for Length of Involvement
	M	SD	M
Male	49.67	11.91	49.57
Female	56.24	8.62	56.34

to be significantly less traditional than those of males,  $F(1,57) = 5.26, p < .05$ .

In summary, none of the sex differences hypothesized in this study were supported by the data. Men and women were not found to respond differently to relationship dissolution or to employ different patterns of coping responses in dealing with termination. Other non-hypothesized findings, however, were determined to be statistically significant. Analysis of covariance provided evidence that women's sex role attitudes were less traditional than men's and that involvement length was related to degree of emotional response to breakup.

#### Relationship Between the AWS and the Dependent Variables

The sixth and final hypothesis for this study predicted that sex role attitudes would be related to emotional distress, loss of identity and loss of self-esteem among females. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between attitudes and reactions to breakup among both men and women. Table 10 presents the results of correlation analyses between the AWS and the POMS, the Fear of Rejection/ Emotional Distress scale, and the Impact on Self questionnaire for both sexes. An inverse relationship between female subjects' sex role attitudes and Item 2 on the Fear of Rejection Emotional/ Distress scale ("When the relationship ended I thought I would never get over it") was found to be marginally significant,  $r = -.33, p = .079$ , as was an inverse relationship between females' attitudes and Item 5 ("When the relationship ended I felt angry and humiliated"),  $r = -.36, p = .059$ . These findings indicated that women with more

Table 10

Correlations Between the AWS and the POMS, the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress Scale  
and the Impact on Self Questionnaire

	AWS	
	Male <u>r</u>	Female <u>r</u>
POMS		
1. Tension/Anxiety	-.231	-.052
2. Fatigue	-.026	.306
3. Anger/Hostility	-.337*	-.256
4. Depression/Dejection	-.106	-.129
5. Confusion/Bewilderment	-.132	-.145
6. Vigor	-.124	-.005
7. Total	-.165	-.089
FEAR OF REJECTION/EMOTIONAL DISTRESS		
1. Was afraid that ___ would stop loving me	-.056	-.035
2. Thought I'd never get over it	-.128	-.331*
3. Felt I'd tried almost everything	.253	-.127
4. Was jealous when involved	-.172	-.065
5. Felt angry and humiliated	-.441*	-.355*
6. Couldn't accept that ___ no longer cared	-.550***	-.098
7. Figured I'd just find someone else	-.219	.297
8. Was insecure in the relationship	-.247	.200
9. Felt guilty when relationship ended	-.155	.243
10. Didn't bother me when relationships ended	-.001	-.097
IMPACT ON SELF		
Introversion/Extroversion	-.090	-.002
Sexual Desirability	-.019	-.213
Self-Esteem	-.109	-.258
Identity	-.003	.143
Negative Affects	-.044	-.117

\*p &lt; .10

\*\*p &lt; .05

\*\*\*p &lt; .01



traditional attitudes felt both more angry and humiliated and a stronger conviction that they would never recover from the breakup than women with less traditional attitudes. There was no evidence to suggest, however, that degree of traditionalism was related to either identity or self-esteem change in women.

An inverse relationship between males' sex role attitudes and their feelings of anger, as measured by the POMS, was determined to be marginally significant,  $r = -.34$ ,  $p = .068$ . A significant negative correlation was also found between males' sex role attitudes and their feelings of anger and humiliation, as measured by Item 5 of the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress Scale,  $r = -.44$ ,  $p = .015$ . It appears that men with more traditional attitudes felt more angry and humiliated at the time of breakup than those with less traditional attitudes. An inverse relationship between males' attitudes and Item 6 on the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress scale ("I knew that \_\_\_ no longer cared, but I couldn't accept it") was also found to be significant,  $r = -.55$ ,  $p = .002$ . Men with more traditional attitudes reported more difficulty accepting the fact that their ex-partners no longer cared.

To explore the possibility that sex role attitudes might be related to strategies used for coping with termination, a potential association between the AWS and The Ways of Coping Questionnaire was assessed through additional correlational analyses. These results are presented in Table 11. A significant inverse relationship was found between females' attitudes and their utilization of problem-focused strategies for coping with breakup,  $r = -.45$ ,  $p = .015$ . Specifically,

Table 11

Correlations Between the AWS and The Ways of Coping Questionnaire

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	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
WAYS OF COPING	<u>r</u>	<u>r</u>
Emotion-focused	-.102	-.280
Problem-focused	-.124	-.446*

---

\*p < .05

traditional females seemed to use more problem-focused strategies than non-traditional females. No other relationship between the AWS and this measure was found to be significant.

In summary, the predicted relationship between women's sex role attitudes and their reactions to breakup was minimally supported by the data. Only a marginally significant inverse correlation was found between degree of traditionalism and emotional response and there was no evidence for a relationship between women's attitudes and loss of identity or self-esteem. In contrast, males' attitudes did seem to be related to their reactions to breakup; more traditional men apparently suffered more emotional distress. A final correlation was demonstrated between women's sex role attitudes and their patterns of coping. More traditional women appeared to employ more problem-focused coping strategies than their non-traditional counterparts.

### Initiation

Past research has found distress over marital disruption to be greater for the non-initiating partner than for the partner who initiates the separation (e.g. Kressal et al., 1979). For this reason, analysis of variance was utilized to assess initiation subgroup differences on the dependent variables. Subgroups for this analysis were 1) subject initiated ( $\underline{n}=20$ ), 2) partner initiated ( $\underline{n}=21$ ) and 3) mutually initiated ( $\underline{n}=17$ ). The fourth subgroup, separation initiated by neither partner, was not included due to small n size ( $\underline{n}=2$ ).

Table 12 shows the mean scores and standard deviations on the POMS and the Fear of Rejection/Emotional scale for each of the three initia-

Table 12

Initiation Subgroup Means on the POMS and the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress Scale

	Subject Initiated		Partner Initiated		Mutually Initiated	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<u>POMS</u>						
1. Tension/Anxiety	18.05	9.24	20.38	9.16	17.76	8.58
2. Fatigue	11.05	6.95	14.90	8.68	13.00	6.75
3. Anger/Hostility	17.63	11.61	25.47	14.88	22.76	13.16
4. Depression/Dejection	26.42	16.21	36.67	16.73	29.47	12.63
5. Confusion/Bewilderment	12.47	5.70	18.24	5.59	16.18	5.41
6. Vigor	15.68	7.61	9.62	5.63	10.94	40.74
7. Total	169.95	50.99	201.29	51.42	188.24	40.74
<u>FEAR OF REJECTION/EMOTIONAL DISTRESS</u>						
1. Was afraid ___ would stop loving me	1.20	1.28	2.00	1.12	1.41	1.17
2. Thought I'd never get over it	1.95	1.43	2.62	1.46	1.70	1.65
3. Felt I'd tried almost everything	2.30	1.42	2.95	1.16	2.41	1.23
4. Was jealous when involved	.90	.85	2.09	1.22	1.41	1.50
5. Felt angry and humiliated	1.15	1.46	2.70	1.40	1.88	1.16
6. Couldn't accept that ___ no longer cared	.26	.65	2.00	1.61	1.18	1.24
7. Figured I'd just find someone else	1.65	1.53	.95	1.17	1.35	1.17
8. Was insecure in the relationship	1.25	1.45	1.09	1.26	1.53	1.33
9. Felt guilty when relationship ended	2.15	1.59	1.95	1.32	1.29	1.16
10. Didn't bother me when relationship ended	2.30	1.59	1.09	1.58	1.00	1.46

tion subgroups. Significant differences among subgroup scores on the POMS were found for confusion/bewilderment,  $F(2,54) = 5.42$ ,  $p < .01$ , and vigor,  $F(2,54) = 4.51$ ,  $p < .05$ . The a posteriori Duncan's multiple range test was conducted to compare all possible pairs of subgroup means for each of these significant findings. This test allowed a specific assessment of which subgroup means were significantly different at the .05 level of significance. For confusion/bewilderment, the partner initiated ( $M = 18.24$ ) and the mutually initiated ( $M = 16.18$ ) subgroups were found to be significantly more confused and bewildered than the subject initiated subgroup ( $M = 11.85$ ). The level of vigor was significantly greater for the subject initiated ( $M = 14.90$ ) subgroup than for those who broke up by their partners' initiation ( $M = 9.62$ ).

Analysis of variance also revealed significant group differences on the Fear of Rejection/Emotional Distress scale for Item 4 ("I was jealous when \_\_\_ and I were involved"),  $F(2,55) = 5.09$ ,  $p < .01$ , Item 6 ("I couldn't accept that \_\_\_ no longer cared"),  $F(2,54) = 9.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , and item 10 ("When the relationship ended, it didn't bother me"),  $F(2,55) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .05$ . Duncan's multiple range test indicated that for Item 4, the partner initiated subgroup ( $M = 2.09$ ) was significantly more jealous than the subject initiated subgroup ( $M = .90$ ). For item 6, the partner initiated subgroup was found to feel less able to accept the fact that their partners no longer cared ( $M = 2.00$ ) than either the mutually initiated ( $M = 1.18$ ) or the subject initiated subgroup ( $M = .26$ ). The mutually initiated subgroup mean for this item also differed significantly from the subject initiated mean. For Item 10, the subject

initiated subgroup ( $\underline{M} = 2.30$ ) was found to be significantly less bothered when the relationship ended than either the partner initiated ( $\underline{M} = 1.09$ ) or the mutually initiated group ( $\underline{M} = 1.00$ ).

Mean scores and standard deviations for the continuous variables of the Impact on Self Questionnaire are presented in Table 13. Analysis of variance revealed significant differences on introversion/extroversion among initiation groups,  $\underline{F} (2,55) = 3.25$ ,  $p < .05$ . Duncan's multiple range test showed that the mutual initiation subgroup ( $\underline{M} = 2.05$ ) was significantly more extroverted after break-up than the partner initiated subgroup ( $\underline{M} = 1.71$ ). The chi square statistic was also calculated to determine the relationship between initiation and the two categorical variables on the Impact on Self questionnaire. Neither blame,  $\chi^2 = 2.61$ , n.s. nor support,  $\chi^2 = 1.88$ , n.s. were found to be related to initiation.

Analysis of variance was additionally conducted to assess initiation group differences for the Ways of Coping Questionnaire and the AWS. No significant group differences were found for emotion-focused coping,  $\underline{F} (2,54) = 1.24$ , n.s.; problem-focused coping,  $\underline{F} (2,54) = .25$ , n.s.; or sex role attitudes,  $\underline{F} (2,54) = 1.31$ , n.s.

Overall, it appears that it is easier to be the partner initiating the breakup than it is to be either part of a mutual decision or the recipient of a unilateral decision to terminate. The results indicated that the initiators in this study felt more vigorous at breakup and less jealous when their relationships were ongoing, than the recipients did. Furthermore, initiators were found to be less bewildered, bothered and confused and more able to accept that their ex-partners no longer loved

Table 13

Initiation Subgroup Means on the Impact on Self Questionnaire

IMPACT ON SELF	Subject Initiated		Partner Initiated		Mutually Initiated	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Introversion/Extroversion	1.95	.39	1.71	.46	2.05	.43
Sexual Desirability	1.95	.22	1.95	.38	1.94	.24
Self-Esteem	1.80	.41	1.62	.59	1.71	.59
Identity	1.80	.41	1.86	.36	1.94	.24
Negative Affects	.65	.67	.86	.79	.82	.73

them than either recipients or those participating in bilateral decisions. Those who terminated by mutual decision, however, were also found to be more extroverted than recipients and better able to accept that their love was not reciprocated.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to test several hypotheses derived from Judith Bardwick's theory of the psychology of women and to extend the current literature on sex differences in reaction to the termination of a premarital relationship. Toward this end, mens' and womens' responses to breakup were examined and the potential association between sex role attitudes and reactions to termination was explored. Coping strategies used to deal with the stress of relationship dissolution were additionally assessed for sex differences.

Contrary to Bardwick's predictions, no differences between males' and females' responses to termination were found to be statistically significant. Specifically, females did not report experiencing more negative emotional impact or more loss of identity or self-esteem. Furthermore, only tentative support was found for Bardwick's contention that a woman's experience of relationship dissolution is related to her acceptance of the traditional female role. Marginally significant correlations indicated that women with more traditional sex role attitudes felt more angry and humiliated and had stronger convictions that they would not recover from the breakup than their less traditional counterparts. There was no evidence to suggest that sex role attitudes were related to either identity or self-esteem.

Although these findings seem to indicate that Bardwick's formulations concerning sex differences in identity development and response to breakup are ill-founded, there are alternative explanations for these data. It is possible, for example, that the hypothesized results could not be obtained due to the age of the sample studied. In a review of the literature on identity in adolescence, Marcia (1980) suggests that the period of late adolescence is crucial to identity formation. It appears, in fact, that many males and females do not develop a fully formed sense of self until they are 20 or 21 years old. Subjects' ages in the present investigation ranged from 17 to 23 years with a mean age of 18.52 years. It is possible that most of the young men and women studied did not possess a consolidated sense of self prior to the dissolution of their relationships. If this is true, it is understandable that no sex differences were seen in identity loss or in the concomitant emotional distress and loss of self-esteem.

A second point which deserves attention concerns the quality and the intensity of adolescent relationships. Although the inclusion criteria of this study were designed to ensure that subjects had terminated relationships that were serious by their own standards, it is clear that adolescent involvement differs from marriage or long term adult commitment. Erik Erikson (1968), in fact, suggests that romantic involvement prior to identity formation is qualitatively different from the intimacy that can be attained after identity has developed. He argues that adolescent involvement is characterized most frequently by a narcissistic search for self definition as it is reflected in the partner. Termina-

tion of such a relationship might easily result in less intense reactions than the breakup of a more deeply committed and intimate partnership.

Another potential problem is the use of the Impact on Self questionnaire as the measure of identity and self-esteem in this study. Subjects were asked to respond to two general and open-ended questions concerning changes they had undergone immediately after the breakup of their relationships. Neither identity or self esteem were mentioned specifically. Subjects' responses, however, were scored according to criteria that were very narrowly defined. To be scored for identity, specific mention of a modification or crisis in "identity" or "the sense of self" was necessary. Similarly, self-esteem was scored only for articulated evaluations of self-worth or competence (see Appendix A for complete scoring system). It would seem quite possible that loss of identity or esteem might have occurred in some cases and not been noted simply because the experience was not articulated in words which match this scoring criteria. The narrow scoring range (1-3 points) might have additionally restricted the likelihood of attaining meaningful correlations between these variables and sex role attitudes.

The predicted differences between coping strategies of males and females were not supported by the data. Females did not report using more emotion-focused coping strategies than males for dealing with the stress of termination, and males did not report the use of more problem-focused strategies. It appears, rather, that men and women used similar patterns of coping responses, attempting to modify the external situ-

ation while striving to regulate internal tension. Although these results contradict popular sex role stereotypes, they are consistent with Folkman and Lazarus' (1981) findings which indicate that sex differences in coping strategies are usually not seen outside the workplace.

Finally, although the five hypotheses tested by the current investigation were not supported by the results, several other findings were determined to be significant. Females' sex role attitudes were found to be significantly less traditional than males' attitudes, an effect that is consistent with the normative data reported for the AWS (Spence et al., 1973). Males' sex role attitudes, furthermore, were correlated with their emotional reactions to breakup. Traditional men reported more anger and humiliation and more difficulty in accepting the fact that their ex-partner no longer cared. This association is appealing intuitively. One would expect men with egalitarian sex roles attitudes to adjust more easily to a woman's move toward independence than more traditional men who maintain a belief in male dominance.

More difficult to explain, however, is the association found in this study between women's sex role attitudes and their strategies for coping with the stress of termination. Women with more traditional attitudes reported using significantly more problem-focused coping responses than their less traditional counterparts. Conventional wisdom would predict just the opposite; that traditional women would be less adept at modifying the external environment and better qualified in the emotional realm. If, however, traditional women are truly more interpersonally focused, as Bardwick suggests, these results make sense. Tradi-

tional women may be more motivated to direct their efforts outwards toward effecting interpersonal change (whether this entails breaking up or conflict resolution) while less traditional women may prefer turning inward to moderate their own affective responses. Further research is needed to clarify these issues.

The results of the present investigation also indicate that duration of involvement prior to termination is associated with the emotional impact of relationship dissolution for both men and women. Analysis of covariance showed that involvement length covaried with anxiety and depression and with subjects' beliefs that they would "never recover" from the breakup. These results supplement previous research which has repeatedly demonstrated an association between longer marriages and poorer post-divorce adjustment among women (e.g., Chiriboga, Roberts & Stein, 1978).

Finally, the results of this study indicate that it is easier to be the partner initiating the breakup than it is to be involved in a bilateral decision or the recipient of a unilateral decision to separate. Men and women who were left by their partners felt significantly more confused and bewildered, more bothered, less vigorous and less able to accept the fact that they were no longer loved than those who had initiated the breakup. Although subjects who had been involved in a mutual decision felt somewhat better about termination, they were still significantly more distressed than those who had unilaterally initiated a breakup. These results parallel the findings of numerous studies of divorce (e.g., Brown et al., 1980).

In summary, the five hypotheses tested by this investigation were not supported by the results. No statistically significant differences were found between men's and women's reactions to premarital relationship termination or between the coping strategies they used to deal with the stress of this event. In addition, a correlation of only marginal significance was found between women's sex role attitudes and their emotional responses to breakup. Several findings that had not been predicted were statistically significant, however. Men's sex role attitudes were found to be more traditional than women's and associations between men's attitudes and their reactions to breakup, and between women's attitudes and their patterns of coping were demonstrated. Finally, the results of this study indicated that adjustment to breakup is easier for both men and women who take the initiating role in termination and for those who are ending relationships of relatively short duration.

Interpretation of these findings should be approached with caution. First, because the data are correlational in nature, conclusions may not be drawn about causation. Although men's sex role attitudes were found to be associated with adjustment to termination, we do not know whether attitudes actually had an impact on reactions to breakup. Conclusions about correlations are similarly limited by the retrospective nature of this study. It is impossible to discern, for example, whether men with non-traditional attitudes responded better to breakup than traditional men, or whether men who responded well to breakup later went on to develop non-traditional attitudes. Finally, retro-

spective reports are subject to distortions wrought by the passage of time and the benefits of hindsight. The memory of termination may differ radically from the actual experience of the event. These issues should be taken into consideration in interpreting the findings of the present study, and need to be addressed in future research concerning sex differences in the dissolution of romantic relationships.

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APPENDIX A

## CODING SYSTEM FOR IMPACT ON SELF QUESTIONNAIRE

## A) AFFECTS

Score 0 for absence or 1 for presence for each affect. Score only for affect word; don't infer that subject feels something because it seems that way to you. However, affect word need not be stated exactly as listed below (e.g. 'ticked off' would be scored anger/disgust/ contempt - 1. Terrified would be scored fear/anxiety - 1).

Score either:

	0=absence	1=presence
joy/happiness		
excitement	"	"
surprise	"	"
anger/disgust/contempt	"	"
fear/anxiety	"	"
sadness/depression/hurt	"	"
guilt	"	"
shame	"	"

## B) BLAME

Blame involves whose fault it was that the relationship didn't work. Differentiate from guilt; guilt is self-blame which specifies regret. Blame may be scored with or without regret.

Differentiate from who initiated breakup; blame is whose fault it was that the relationship didn't work, not necessarily who ended it.

Score either:

Blame self	1
Blame nobody/no mention	2
Blame partner	3

## C) INTROVERSION/EXTROVERSION

Score introversion for mention of spending time alone; extroversion for social time spent with others.

Differentiate from support. Introversion/extroversion scored for how time is spent: generally alone/withdrawn or in company of others. Support is scored specifically for turning to others for help dealing with stress of breakup (e.g. subject who stops going out with friends but who talks with one person about breakup would be scored: introversion/extroversion - 1; support - 1).

Score either:

Introversion	1
Indeterminate/no mention	2
Extroversion	3

## D) Support

Score either:

Turned to others for support	1
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Didn't turn to others for support/ no mention	2
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#### E) SEXUAL DESIRABILITY

Score for perceived change in desirability to members of the opposite sex; mention of bodily appearance, physical attractiveness, sexual issues. For males, include references to 'stud' or 'macho' qualities.

Score either:

Decreased desirability	1
No change/no mention	2
Increased desirability	3

#### F) SELF-ESTEEM

Score for perceived change in sense of worthiness, competence, self-confidence.

Score either:

Decreased self-esteem, self worth	1
No change/no mention	2
Increased self-esteem, self worth	3

## G) IDENTITY

Score for loss or gain of identity, sense of self. Does not include learning about self or self-awareness. Score only for words pertaining to identity, sense of having a self, knowing or not knowing 'who I am'. Be especially careful to score only for changes occurring soon after breakup (e.g. 'At first I was devastated but I grew from the experience and now have a better sense of who I am' would be scored: identity - 2).

Score either:

Identity crisis/Lost sense of self	1
No change/no mention	2
Found identity/sense of self	3

## H) LOST FAITH IN OTHERS

Score for doubt, lost trust in, questioning of motives of members of the opposite sex.

Score either:

Lost Faith	1
No change/no mention	2



APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Alice Chatillon has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

November 29, 1984  
Date

Patricia A. Rupert  
Director's Signature