

# Handbook of GENDER RESEARCH

Edited by Rick Grandall

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# Handbook of Gender Research

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## Gender, Love Schemas, and Reactions to Romantic Break-Ups

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*A survey was conducted to determine whether men and women and those who possessed different love schemas, differed in their emotional reactions to romantic break-ups or in the strategies they employed to cope with them. Seventy-seven men and 173 women from the University of Hawaii who had been passionately in love, dated, and then broken up were interviewed. Men were less likely to report experiencing joy or relief immediately after a break-up than were women. Men and women also relied on somewhat different coping strategies for dealing with a break-up. Although men and women were equally critical of their own roles in break-ups, women were more likely to blame their partners than were men. Men were more likely to bury themselves in work or sports. Love schemas were also correlated with reactions to break-ups. The more "secure" people were, the easier they found it to cope. The "clingy" suffered the most, while the "skittish," "casual," and "uninterested" suffered the least from relationship dissolution. Love schemas were also found to be correlated with the coping strategies employed in theoretically meaningful ways.*

Recently, social psychologists have become interested in how people react to, and attempt to cope with, romantic break-ups. Researchers have begun to explore the impact of a variety of factors—gender (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987), attributions and cognitions (Weiner, 1985), personality traits (Brennan & Shaver, 1995), and situational factors (McCrae, 1984)—on people's reactions to such break-ups.

This survey was designed to explore two major questions: Do gender and personality affect the kinds of emotions (i.e., joy, relief, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and anger) people feel when love affairs end? Do they affect the coping strategies people employ?

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### Gender and Reactions to Romantic Break-ups

Many theorists have argued that men and women possess different views of almost everything, including passionate love and sex. A slew of popular books insist that *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 1993) or *You Just Don't Understand* (Tannen, 1991). Other theorists (ourselves included) have argued that these commentators tend to exaggerate existing gender differences. They point out that men and women are more similar than different. In most things, it is not gender, but our shared humanity that seems to be important. Generally, in the realm of gender, between-group variability is far smaller than within-group variability. In the United States, even the small gender differences that once existed in the realms of love and sex seem to be rapidly disappearing (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). In theorizing about possible gender differences, then, we want to be careful to keep things in perspective.

Some social psychologists propose that men and women differ in their emotional reactions to romantic break-ups. They disagree, however, as to the nature of these supposed differences. Historically, women were stereotyped as the more emotional sex, especially in their close relationships (Rapson, 1990). Thus, some psychologists argued that women should experience more guilt, anxiety, sadness, and anger after a break-up than do men. Researchers have found some evidence in support of this contention (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezelek, 1983). Most researchers, however, have argued that it is men who suffer most after break-ups. Men tend to have more of their emotional and practical needs met in their love relationships than do women; thus men suffer more when such close relationships end. Researchers have also amassed considerable evidence in support of this contention (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, 1996). In view of this disagreement, we asked:

Question 1: Do men and women differ in the kinds of emotions they typically experience after romantic break-ups?

Men and women have also been found to use somewhat different strategies in attempting to cope with painful emotions and with stressful life events (Brehm, 1987; Thoits, 1984). Sometimes people blame themselves when relationships fail. They worry that their physical appearance, personality, or social skills accounted for existing relationship problems. Sometimes people blame their partners. They accuse them of being emotionally unstable, lazy, or of abusing alcohol or drugs. Some researchers have found that women are more likely to blame themselves for relationship problems, while men are more likely to blame their partners (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993, 1996).

Theorists have also explored a variety of other potential gender differences in coping styles. Some researchers, for example, have found that women are more likely to use cognitive emotion management and ruminative strategies, while men are more likely to rely on emotional distraction to deal with problems (Hochschild, 1981; Kleinke, Staneski, & Mason, 1982; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Men and women have been found to be equally likely to rely on physiological dampening techniques (Carlson & Hatfield, 1992). Several theorists have proposed that gender differences in the way people try to cope with painful life events may have a powerful impact on mental and physical health (Ingram, Cruet, Johnson, & Wisnicki, 1988; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). Thus, in this study we asked:

Question 2: Do men and women utilize similar strategies when attempting to cope with break-ups?

### Love Schemas and Reactions to Romantic Break-ups

Theorists have argued that people possess different love schemas, that is, different cognitive models as to what it is appropriate to expect from themselves and from their partners in love relationships. Recently, Hatfield and Rapson (1996) proposed a schema model intended to integrate the insights of prominent attachment and stage theorists. They proposed that people's love schemas depend on: how comfortable they are with closeness and independence, and how eager they are to be involved in romantic relationships. People who are interested in romantic relationships were said to fall into one of four categories: (1) *The secure* (who are comfortable with closeness and independence); (2) *the clingy* (who are comfortable with closeness but fearful of too much independence); (3) *the skittish* (who are fearful of too much closeness but comfortable with independence); and (4) *the fickle* (who are uneasy with either closeness or independence). Those who were relatively uninterested in relationships were said to fall into one of two categories: (5) *the casual* (who are interested in relationships only if they are almost problem free), and (6) *the uninterested* (who are not at all interested in relationships, problem free or not).

Love schemas may have multiple determinants. In part, they are shaped by children's early experiences and thus are relatively permanent. In part, people's schemas would be expected to deepen as they mature (Erikson, 1982), as they gain romantic experience, and as they confront different kinds of relationships (Napier, 1977). Recently, Baldwin and Fehr (1995) have accumulated considerable evidence that attachment styles (i.e., love schemas) do alter over time.

A number of theorists have argued that people's love schemas (or attachment styles, or developmental stage) should have an impact on their

thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at various transition points in love relationships. Most of this research explored relationship beginnings and maintenance (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1996 for a review of this research). In this study, therefore, we were especially interested in the impact of Love Schemas on people's reactions at the endings of relationships.

Question 3: Do people who endorse different Love Schemas differ in the emotions they typically experience after break-ups?

Question 4: Do people who endorse different Love Schemas utilize similar strategies in attempting to cope with break-ups?

Theoretically, the answers to these questions are not always obvious. Let us provide some examples of the problem:

In Question 3, we asked if people's love schemas would be related to their emotional reactions after a break-up. Theoretically, several possibilities seem reasonable. One might, for example, predict that the secure should be especially upset after a break-up. The secure and the clingy are, after all, unusually capable of companionate love, commitment, and intimacy (Singelis, Choo, & Hatfield, 1995). Thus, for them, a break-up may be a very serious matter indeed and thus unusually upsetting.

On the other hand, the secure have been found to be unusually mentally healthy, socially skilled, and resilient. Thus, they, if anyone, should be likely to have seen the break-up coming and have had time to adapt to it. So here prediction is difficult. For the clingy, prediction is easier. They would be expected to be unusually upset by a break-up. They fear abandonment, are unusually anxious, and possess few social skills for dealing with stress. The casual and uninterested, who are not really invested in relationships, would be expected to be relatively calm after a break-up.

When we attempt to predict how love schemas might be related to coping styles (Question 4), we confront similar difficulties. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have argued that people who endorse the various love schemas differ markedly in how positively they value themselves and others. According to their logic, we might predict that the secure (said to have high self-esteem and high regard for others) would blame neither themselves nor others. The clingy (said to have low self-esteem and high regard for others) might tend to blame themselves.

The skittish (said to have high self-esteem and low regard for others) might tend to blame others. The fickle (said to have low regard for themselves and others) might tend to blame both. Shaver (1994; Brennan & Shaver, 1995) found that the skittish (and fickle) tend to deal with anxiety by acting out—engaging in one-night stands, drinking, or taking drugs. All of these possibilities seem plausible.

The following survey was designed to explore Questions 1–4. We felt that existing theoretical perspectives allowed us to identify some of the variables that might be important in shaping how men and women responded to romantic break-ups, but there was not enough research to tell us whether or not these speculations were likely to be correct. Thus, this exploratory survey was undertaken.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 77 men and 173 women from the University of Hawaii. Respondents filled out questionnaires in groups of four or five. Participants' average age was 23.14 ( $SD = 5.33$ ). As is typical of Hawaii's multicultural population, respondents were from diverse ethnic backgrounds: African- (3.2%), Chinese- (13.6%), European- (18.8%), Filipino- (8.4%), Hawaiian (5.6%), Japanese- (38.8%), Korean- (2.4%), and Other-American (9.2%).

Initially, the questionnaire was administered to 271 social science students. Respondents were asked if they had ever had the experience with which this study was concerned. A full 92% of participants said they had been passionately in love with someone, dated, and then broken up. This group constituted our sample ( $N = 250$ ). Only 8% ( $N = 21$ ) of the participants indicated that they had never had these experiences and were, out of necessity, eliminated from the sample.

Ninety-five percent of the men and 97% of the women indicated that the person they had loved and lost was someone of the opposite sex; the rest said it was someone of the same sex. In response to questions asking how close their love relationship had been before the break-up, 20% of the participants indicated they had been dating only casually, 70% were seriously involved, 6% were engaged, and 4% were married. When asked who had been most eager to end the relationship, 44% of participants said they had wanted it to end; 33% said their partners had been most eager for the break-up; and 23% said they had both wanted it to end. When asked how long ago the break-up had occurred, 11% said within the last month, 8% said within the last three months, 19% said within the last year, and 62% said it had ended more than a year ago.

Finally, the questionnaire asked participants how they currently felt about their ex-partners. When asked how much passionate love they still felt for their ex-partners, 28% said extremely much, 24% said fairly much, 20% said some, 15% said a slight amount, and 13% said none at all. When asked if they were currently in love with someone else, 59% said they were; 41% said they were not.

## Measures

**Assessing Love Schemas.** Participants were asked to complete the Love Schema Scale (LS), a six-item, self-report measure (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). This scale appears in the Appendix. (The first three items of the LS were taken directly from Hazan and Shaver's [1987] Adult Attachment Questionnaire [AAQ]). Respondents were asked to indicate their reactions on a five-point Likert-type scale which ranged from 1 = "0%: Never true of me" to 5 = "100%: Always true of me."

For information on the reliability and validity of the AAQ, see Shaver & Hazan, 1993. There, the authors reviewed 150 studies and cited compelling evidence that the AAQ is a reliable and valid measure of the secure, clingy, and fickle attachment styles. Evidence as to the construct validity of the LS scale itself comes from three previous studies. Singelis et al. (1995), found Love Schema scores to be correlated with Passionate Love and Companionate love scores. In a duo of studies, Singelis and his colleagues (1996) found a correlation between Love Schema scores, partner choice, and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors people reported when contemplating a serious romantic commitment.

**Assessing Emotional Reactions to a Break-up.** In the next section of the questionnaire, participants were asked how they had reacted *immediately after* the break-up. Specifically, they were asked: "How much *joy* did you feel? How much *relief* did you feel? How much *guilt* did you feel? How much *anxiety* did you feel? How much *sadness* did you feel?" and "How much *anger* did you feel?" Respondents were asked to indicate their reactions on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = "None at all" to 4 = "Extremely much." Some information on the construct validity of this measure of emotion, comes from Stockert (1993). In the Stockert study, participants' self-ratings of emotional experience were found to be positively correlated with judges' objective ratings of emotional expression.

To determine whether or not the individual emotion items clustered as we expected they would be, we ran a principal axis factor analysis with a VARIMAX rotation. (We used the SPSS/PC+ The Statistical Package for IBM PC.) We secured three factors, which did seem to make theoretical sense. Factor 1, FeltGood, consisted of the joy and relief items. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ). Factor 2, FeltBad, consisted of the anxiety, sadness, and anger items. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ). Factor 3, FeltGuilty, consisted of the single item, guilt. The three factors accounted for 57.7% of the total variance (FeltGood, 38.5%; FeltBad, 12.8%; FeltGuilty, 6.3%). The factor loadings are presented in Table 1. The items comprising each subscale were summed, and this sum was divided by the number of items to secure a mean item score for each subscale.

TABLE 1 Factor Loadings for Coping Style and Emotion Items

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4
EMOTION ITEMS				
<b>FeltGood Subscale</b>				
Joy	.97	-.16	.02	—
Relief	.74	-.20	.03	—
<b>FeltBad Subscale</b>				
Anxiety	-.20	.64	.32	—
Sad	-.43	.63	.16	—
Anger	-.08	.69	-.20	—
<b>FeltGuilt Subscale</b>				
Guilt	.02	.02	.49	—
COPING STYLE ITEMS				
<b>BlameSelf Subscale</b>				
I spent a great deal of time . . .				
trying to figure out what I might have done wrong.	.61	.05	.11	-.00
trying to figure out what I could do to save our relationship.	.67	-.06	.04	.18
talking to my friends, trying to figure out what I had done wrong.	.70	.13	-.03	.04
talking to my friends, trying to figure out what had gone wrong.	.55	.03	.02	.03
talking to my friends, trying to figure out if there was anything we could do to save the relationship.	.59	.04	.03	.07
<b>BlamePartner Subscale</b>				
I spent a great deal of time . . .				
thinking about how badly my partner had treated me.	.13	.62	.04	.09
talking to my friends—almost all of them agreed that my partner was really the one who had problems.	.21	.59	-.03	.04
I told myself: "I'm lucky to have gotten out of that relationship."	-.20	.56	-.03	.09
<b>Physiological Dampening Subscale</b>				
I drank a lot of alcohol.	.06	.06	.79	.04
I took drugs (tranquilizers, sleeping pills, marijuana, etc.).	.04	-.06	.58	.05
<b>Distraction Subscale</b>				
I kept busy (with sports, schoolwork, or my career).	.08	.09	.02	.63
I engaged in physical activities more than usual (I jogged, played basketball, went swimming).	.08	.08	.07	.59

*Assessing Coping Strategies.* Participants were asked how they tried to deal with their feelings and with the practical problems they faced in the week or two after the break-up. They were asked to indicate which of 26 potential strategies they had used.

As we indicated earlier, theorists have suggested that men and women may attempt to cope with romantic break-ups in a variety of ways: they may blame themselves or their partners for the break-up, they may engage in cognitive emotional management, reflection/rumination, physiological dampening, or distraction (see Monat & Lazarus, 1985). The 26 items were selected from previous research exploring men's and women's use of these various coping techniques in after-romantic break-ups (see Orimoto, Hatfield, Yamakawa, & Denney, 1991).

Once again, to determine if the items clustered as we expected them to, we ran a principal axis factor analysis with a VARIMAX rotation, (again utilizing the SPSS/PC+ The Statistical Package for IBM PC). In this survey, four factors seemed to provide the best solution. Factor 1, labeled BlameSelf, included items such as: "I spent a great deal of time trying to figure out what I might have done wrong; I spent a great deal of time trying to figure out what I could do to save our relationship; I spent a great deal of time talking to my friends, trying to figure out what I had done wrong; I spent a great deal of time talking to my friends, trying to figure out what had gone wrong;" and "I spent a great deal of time talking to my friends, trying to figure out if there was anything we could do to save the relationship" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ). Factor 2, labeled BlamePartner, comprised such items as "I spent a great deal of time thinking about how badly my partner had treated me; I spent a great deal of time talking to my friends—almost all of them agreed that my partner was really the one who had problems;" and "I told myself: 'I'm lucky to have gotten out of that relationship'" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .61$ ). Factor 3, labeled Physiological Dampening, consisted of "I drank a lot of alcohol" and "I took drugs." (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .58$ ). Factor 4, labeled Distraction, consisted of two items: "I kept busy (with sports, schoolwork, or my career)" and "I engaged in physical activities more than usual. (I jogged, played basketball, and went swimming)" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .55$ ). The four factors accounted for 41.5% of the total variance (BlameSelf, 18.8%; BlamePartner, 9.2%; Physiological Dampening, 8.2%; Distraction, 5.3%). Again, the factor loadings are presented in Table 1, and mean item scores were obtained.

### Procedure

The questionnaire began by asking participants to provide some demographic information. They were asked to indicate their gender, age, and ethnic background. Then, participants were told:

We are interested in how people react when romantic and passionate love affairs end. Sometimes, love affairs start out well. Couples are passionately in love; perhaps they date for awhile (or even live together or get married), and then (either because he wants to, she wants to, or they both do) they break up. Eventually, both of them may go on with their lives.

Participants were asked if this had ever happened to them. If it had, they were asked if the person they had loved and lost was a man or a woman, how close their relationship was, who wanted to end the relationship, and how long ago the break-up had occurred. Finally, participants were asked how much passionate love they still felt for the other and whether or not they were currently in love with someone else.

Then they were asked to complete the Love Schemas questionnaire.

Next, they were asked how they had reacted emotionally to the break-up. They were asked how much joy, relief, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and anger they had felt immediately after the break-up. They indicated their answers on a five-point scale ranging from 0 = "None at all" to 4 = "Extremely much."

Finally, they were asked how they tried to deal with their feelings and the practical problems they faced after the break-up. They were asked to put an "X" by all the coping strategies they had employed.

## RESULTS

In Question 1, we asked if men and women differed in their emotional reactions to break-ups. This question was tested with a  $2 \times 3$  mixed ANOVA with gender as an independent groups variable and emotion type as a repeated factor. Although no main effect was found for gender ( $F(1, 248) = 0.66$ , ns), there was a main effect for emotion type ( $F(2, 496) = 18.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\pi^2 = .05$ ) and an emotion type by gender interaction ( $F(2, 496) = 3.32$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\pi^2 = .01$ ). As can be seen in Table 2, feeling bad was the predominant reaction. The interaction was primarily a function of a significant gender difference in the FeltGood subscale. Men had lower scores on the FeltGood subscale (they felt less joy and relief after a break-up) than did women ( $t(247) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Men and women did *not* differ in their scores on either the FeltBad or FeltGuilt subscales.

In Question 2, we asked whether men and women used different coping strategies in dealing with relationship break-ups. We found that they did (see Table 3). Using a similar  $2 \times 4$  mixed ANOVA, this time with coping strategy as the repeated factor, we found a nonsignificant main effect for gender ( $F(1, 248) = 0.02$ , ns,  $\pi^2 = .00$ ), a main effect for coping strategy ( $F(3, 744) = 90.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\pi^2 = .19$ ), and a gender by strategy interaction ( $F(3, 744) = 9.98$ ,  $p < .0401$ ,  $\pi^2 = .02$ ).

TABLE 2 Emotion Means by Gender and Emotion Type

Gender	Emotion		
	FeltGood	FeltBad	Guilt
Male	1.42 <sub>a</sub>	2.32	1.88
Female	1.82 <sub>a</sub>	2.36	1.65

Note: Means with same subscript indicate significant gender differences at  $p < .05$ .

Fifty-six percent of the participants reported engaging in distraction, 47% blamed their partners, 41% blamed themselves, and 9% reported physiological dampening. The interaction was produced by gender differences in distraction and blaming the other. Men and women were equally likely to blame themselves for the break-up. Men were less likely to denigrate their partners than were women. (They received lower scores on Blame Other than did women,  $t(247) = 3.66$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Men and women did not differ on Physiological Dampening. Men were more likely to lose themselves in sports or work than were women. (Men received higher scores on Distraction than did women,  $t(247) = 2.88$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

In Question 3, we asked whether or not Love Schema scores were related to the emotional reactions people experienced immediately after a break-up. We found that people who differ in love schema scores do tend to differ in their reactions to romantic break-ups (see Table 4). People's scores on the secure, skittish, and uninterested schemas were positively related to scores on the FeltGood subscale (i.e., in the joy and relief they felt after the break-up). Clingy schema scores were negatively related to scores on FeltGood and positively related to scores on FeltBad (i.e.,

TABLE 3 Coping Style Means by Gender and Coping Type

Gender	Coping Type			
	Blame Self	Blame Other	Physiological Dampening	Distraction
Male	.43	.34 <sub>a</sub>	.11	.66 <sub>b</sub>
Female	.41	.52 <sub>a</sub>	.09	.51 <sub>b</sub>

Note: Means with same subscript indicate significant gender differences at  $p < .05$ .

TABLE 4 Correlations Between Love Schemas, Emotional Reactions, and Coping Styles

Love Schema	Emotional Reactions		
	FeltGood	FeltBad	Guilt
Secure	.10*	-.04	-.06
Clingy	-.14*	.14*	.02
Skittish	.14*	-.02	.06
Fickle	-.07	.09	.05
Casual	.09	-.02	.00
Uninterested	.11*	-.07	-.13*

  

Love Schemas	Coping Styles			
	Blame Self	Blame Partner	Physiological Dampening	Distraction
Secure	.03	.07	-.11*	.08
Clingy	.21*	.05	-.01	.00
Skittish	-.14*	-.12*	.11*	-.07
Fickle	.07	-.07	.15*	.01
Casual	-.06	-.09	.07	.07
Uninterested	-.14*	-.06	-.08	-.05

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

feeling anxiety, sadness, and anger after a break-up). Finally, the higher people's scores were on the uninterested schema, the less Guilt they felt after a break-up.

In Question 4, we asked whether people's Love Schema scores were related to the way they attempted to cope with break-ups. In Table 4, we find that they were. After a break-up, the more clingy people were, the more likely they were to blame themselves for the break-up. The more skittish or uninterested people's love schemas were, the less likely they were to receive a high score on BlameSelf. The more skittish people's love schemas, the less likely they were to blame their partners (i.e., the less likely they were to receive high scores on BlamePartner). The more secure people were, the lower they tended to score on the third subscale, Physiological Dampening (i.e., the less likely they were to drink or take drugs after a break-up), while the more people endorsed the skittish or fickle schemas, the higher they tended to score on this subscale. None of the love schemas correlated with the use of Distraction as a strategy.

TABLE 5 Correlations Between Love Schemas, Emotional Reactions, and Coping Styles for Males and Females

	<i>Emotional Reactions</i>					
	<i>FeltGood</i>		<i>FeltBad</i>		<i>Guilt</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Love Schemas						
Secure	-.10 <sup>a</sup>	.20 <sup>**a</sup>	.01	-.07	-.17	.00
Clingy	-.20 <sup>*</sup>	-.10	.15	.15 <sup>*</sup>	.24 <sup>**b</sup>	-.09 <sup>b</sup>
Skittish	.27 <sup>**</sup>	.10	.01	-.03	.19	-.01
Fickle	.15 <sup>c</sup>	-.13 <sup>*c</sup>	.11	.09	.11	.01
Casual	.26 <sup>†</sup>	.08	-.06	.00	-.04	-.01
Uninterested	.30 <sup>**</sup>	.04	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	.00	-.18	-.12

  

	<i>Coping Styles</i>							
	<i>Blame Self</i>		<i>Blame Partner</i>		<i>Physiological Dampening</i>		<i>Distraction</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Love Schemas								
Secure	.20 <sup>*</sup>	-.04	-.01	.11	-.17	-.08	.33 <sup>****a</sup>	-.04 <sup>a</sup>
Clingy	.21 <sup>*</sup>	.21 <sup>**</sup>	.02	.11	-.09	.02	.02	-.05
Skittish	-.15	-.13 <sup>*</sup>	-.08	-.12	.15	.09	-.10	-.07
Fickle	.11	.05	.13	-.11	.16	.14 <sup>*</sup>	.11	-.06
Casual	-.01	-.09	-.14	.00	-.04	.11	.11	-.01
Uninterested	-.14	-.15 <sup>*</sup>	.11	-.11	-.22 <sup>*</sup>	.01	-.13	-.06

Note: Correlation pairs with same superscripts are significantly different.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Gender $\times$ Love Schemas and Reactions to Romantic Break-Ups

We did not have any theoretical basis for predicting a gender  $\times$  love schema interaction in emotional experience or coping strategies. Nonetheless, we did attempt to determine whether or not any significant interactions existed (see Table 5).

To determine whether or not gender and love schemas interacted in influencing our dependent variables, we ran separate correlation matrices for men and women. Then we conducted Fisher  $r$  to  $z$  tests to determine if these pairs of comparison correlations differed as a function of gender. We found that only four of the 42 comparisons were significantly different. Secure women (as compared to men) were especially likely to feel relieved after a break-up. Clingy men (as compared to women) were especially likely to feel guilty. Fickle men felt better after a break-up than

TABLE 6 Correlations Between Coping Style and Emotion Type Coping Type

<i>Emotion Type</i>	<i>Self Blame</i>	<i>Other Blame</i>	<i>Physiological Dampening</i>	<i>Distraction</i>
FeltGood	-.47 <sup>**</sup>	.31 <sup>**</sup>	-.12 <sup>*</sup>	-.03
FeltBad	.47 <sup>**</sup>	.25 <sup>**</sup>	.26 <sup>**</sup>	.14 <sup>*</sup>
Guilt	.06	-.06	.07	-.01

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

did women. Secure men were more likely to try to lose themselves in work and sports than were women. There is, of course, a possibility that these few significant interactions were simply due to chance.

### Emotions and Coping

We also explored the association between reported emotions and the ratings of the coping strategies (see Table 6). The worse our participants reported feeling, the more likely they were to utilize each of the four coping strategies. Higher scores on FeltGood were associated with less SelfBlame and Physiological Dampening, but more OtherBlame. Guilt was not significantly correlated with coping strategies.

Finally, because there was substantial variance in the time since the break-up, we correlated the time since ending with each of our dependent variables. The correlations were uniformly small and only two were significant. Scores on FeltBad and OtherBlame ( $r = .11$  and  $.12$ , respectively) were positively related to time.

## DISCUSSION

In this survey, we found that men and women do tend to react somewhat differently to break-ups.

Men received lower scores on the FeltGood factor (i.e., they said they experienced less joy and relief immediately after a break-up) than did women. There are several possible reasons for this difference. First, researchers have found that women are generally aware of relationship problems earlier than are men (Baxter, 1984; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1979). Thus, women may have been preparing for the inevitable for some time, while men were caught by surprise. For women, the actual break-up may come as a relief rather than as a shock. Second, men generally rely almost entirely on their mates for the satisfaction of emotional and practical needs, while women possess a wider circle of



intimates (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). Thus, men's lives may tend to change more dramatically after a break-up than do women's.

We do not want to exaggerate existing gender differences, however. The reader should note that we did not secure significant gender differences on either the FeltBad or Guilt factors, and effect sizes were generally small—only 1% of the variance. This certainly contradicts the traditional mythology suggesting that men are more likely to feel angry after a break-up than are women.

Men and women were also found to rely on somewhat different coping strategies in dealing with break-ups. Early researchers found that women tended to blame themselves, while men tended to blame their partners for one type of relationship problem—extra-relationship affairs (Clanton & Smith, 1987). Previous researchers have assumed that this was a general gender difference.

In this study we did not replicate these findings. In fact, although men and women were found to be equally likely to blame themselves for the break-up, women were *more* likely to blame their partners for the break-up than were men.

We can think of several reasons for this failure to replicate. Perhaps social norms have changed in the 20 years since most of studies exploring gender differences in reactions to jealousy were conducted. Perhaps in the 1990s, it is simply more socially acceptable for women to engage in “male bashing” than for men to blame their mates. Perhaps men feel constrained to behave more “chivalrously.” Or, perhaps men really were more to blame for the relationship break-ups than were women. In our college-age sample, women may have been more ready for commitment and intimacy than were men (Buss, 1994) and thus worked harder to maintain the relationship than did men. Then, too, surveys generally find that both men and women agree that, generally, women contribute more and receive less in their close love relationships than do men. In this sense, then, men may be more “to blame” for the break-up. Men, on the other hand, have been found to invest more in their careers than do women (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Rapson, 1990; Sprecher & Schwartz, 1994).

Men and women were equally likely to rely on Physiological Dampening after a break-up (they were equally likely to indulge in alcohol and drugs). Men, however, were more likely to rely on Distraction techniques (burying themselves in work or sports) than were women. This latter finding is consistent with that of other investigators (Hochschild, 1981; Kleinke et al., 1982; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987) and with the finding that men are more invested in their work than are women (Rapson, 1990).

Next, we explored the impact of Love Schemas on people's reactions to break-ups. People's emotional reactions to break-ups did tend to be

related to their love schemas. Scores on the secure, skittish, or uninterested schemas were positively related to the tendency to feel joy and relief after a break-up. Scores on the clingy schema were negatively correlated with FeltGood scores and positively correlated with the tendency to feel anxiety, sadness, and anger after a break-up.

These differences do seem to make theoretical sense. In a number of other studies, the secure have been found to be well-adjusted, calm, and socially skilled; they have an easy time in love relationships. Now, it appears that the secure have a fairly easy time dealing with relationship endings as well. In previous studies, the clingy have been found to be insecure, anxious, and fearful of abandonment. It should come as no surprise, then, to discover that they suffer more than others after a break-up. Again, not surprisingly, the skittish, casual, and uninterested (who have reservations about getting involved in relationships in the first place) seem to suffer relatively little when their relationships dissolve. Lastly, we found that scores on the uninterested schema were negatively related to feelings of guilt after a break-up.

Finally, we asked whether people who differed in their Love Schemas would also differ in the way they tried to cope with break-ups. We found that they did. The burgeoning research literature presents a vision of the secure as well-adjusted, calm, and eminently sensible. After a break-up, the secure tended to rely less on Physiological Dampening—drinking or taking drugs—than did others.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) argued that the clingy are primarily characterized by low self-regard and high regard for others. In this study, we found that the clingy were more likely to BlameSelf—to blame themselves for the break-up—than were others. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) also argued that the skittish are primarily characterized by high self-esteem and low regard for others. This led us to expect that the skittish might tend to secure high scores on BlameOther. They did not. The more skittish people were, the less likely they were to blame anyone—themselves or others—for the break-up. What the skittish and the fickle did do was resort to Physiological Dampening—drinking and taking drugs. (It is not too encouraging to imagine that men and women who go to singles' bars in the hope of finding someone to love, may well bump into the skittish and the fickle, recovering from their last blighted love affair.) Finally, those who were uninterested in relationships were less likely than others to blame themselves for the break-up. None of the love schemas correlated with the use of Distraction as a strategy.

We should end by pointing out that this exploratory study was only a first step in exploring the relationship between love schemas and reactions to break-ups. First, the questionnaire required participants to de-

scribe *past* feelings and behaviors. Subsequent research might employ a longitudinal design, surveying participants before and immediately after break-ups. This procedure would give us more confidence in our results.

Second, college-aged students may differ from their older, more committed, counterparts in both how upset they get when relationships break up and in the strategies they use to try to cope with break-ups. Subsequent research should survey a wider range of people.

Finally, our results do not allow us to draw any conclusions as to the best way to try to cope with relationship break-ups. Future research might explore the consequences of relying on one type of technique or another. Such information would contribute immensely to our understanding of the best way of survive the emotional pain and disruption caused by this difficult life event.

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## How to Submit Papers

### APPENDIX

#### Romantic Feelings and Experiences

People have different experiences in their romantic relationships. Some people prefer to be involved in a romantic relationship, but deep down they know that, if things fall apart, they will be able to manage on their own. Others need to be close to someone; they are miserable when they are forced to be on their own. Still others need a great deal of time on their own. Some people aren't quite sure what they *do* want. (They *think* they want a relationship, but somehow they always seem to fall in love with someone who isn't interested in them.) Finally, some people are just very casual about relationships...or uninterested in them.

Please take a moment to think of the times you have been romantically and/or passionately in love. (It doesn't matter whether or not your feelings were reciprocated). Please read the following six descriptions, and indicate to what extent each describes *your* feelings and experiences in romantic and passionate love affairs.

**\*1. [Secure]: I Am Comfortable With Closeness and/or Independence:** I find it easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

**\*2. [Clingy]: I Need a Great Deal of Closeness:** I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.

**\*3. [Skittish]: I Need a Great Deal of Independence:** I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

**4. [Fickle]: I Am Not Quite Sure What I Need:** Sometimes, I don't know *what* I want. When I'm in love, I worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. When people get too interested in me, however, I often find that I'm just not interested in them—I end up feeling bored, irritated, or smothered. Either I fall in love and the other person doesn't or the other person falls in love and I don't.

**5. [Casual]: I Am Fairly Casual About Relationships:** I like having someone, but I don't want to have to get *too* committed or to have to invest *too* much in a relationship.

**6. [Uninterested]: I Am Uninterested in Relationships:** I don't have time for relationships. They are generally not worth the hassle.

Respondents are asked to indicate their reactions to all six questions on the following scale:

	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Never true of me			True of me about 50% of the time		Always True of me

\*Based on Hazan and Shaver (1987), p. 515.

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