

HEALING FROM BREAKUP BASED ON THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL

Healing from the Rupture of a Romantic Relationship based on the Kübler-Ross Model of Loss
and Grief

Submitted By

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Abstract

A large body of literature pertaining to grief and loss explores the phenomenon in the context of healing following the death of a loved one. Much of this literature focuses on grief in the form of losing a romantic partner to death. Similarly, this field of research also contains literature that focuses on grieving the loss of a romantic partner, but through breakup. Various models of grief have been established as guidelines for the type of experiences a bereaved individual may experience while grieving; however, there exists limited research highlighting the applicability of such grief models to the context of romantic breakup. This paper responds to these limitations by exploring the applicability of the five stages of grief model to instances of romantic dissolution. This paper argues that there exist many parallels between grief experiences suggested by the five stages model and healing from romantic breakup, some of which are contingent on specific qualities of the relationship and the relationship termination, such as attachment style, role of initiation, and the extent of future plans for the relationship.

Keywords: grief, loss, young adults, dating, romantic breakup, relationship dissolution, grief models, stages of grief, attachment, distress, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance

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Healing from the Recent Rupture of a Romantic Relationship based on the Kübler-Ross Model of Loss and Grief

Throughout the history of humanity, there has been a longstanding fascination surrounding death. This attraction to the exploration of death has manifested in topics such as religiosity, spirituality, the afterlife, and other elements pertaining to death. A notable example of this was demonstrated by the ancient Egyptians (Agai, 2015). This civilization performed elaborate mummification processes, impressive burial practices, and worshipped deities such as the god of the underworld, ultimately demonstrating respect and curiosity for the various processes associated with death, thousands of years ago.

The same captivation surrounding death demonstrated by modern man's predecessors has not been lost. The past 50 years have been rich with literature relating to the topic of death. Research on death, dying, and the succeeding experience of grief has been popularized by various researchers, whose names have become commonplace by modern researchers and clinicians alike. Numerous grief models have been developed in this time, include those with a specific focus on grief stage theories. Many of these theories postulate that the grieving experience relative to death occurs in stages (Bowlby, 1961; Horowitz, 1976; Kübler-Ross, 1969). Of the various stage theories, Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages theory (also referred to as the Kübler-Ross model) which was developed in relation to her work with patients who were terminally ill, is considered pivotal to the existing literature. Its significance is in part due to the great popularity of the model, and in part due to its unique consideration of the experience of grief from the perspective of individuals facing death themselves. The five stages theory suggests

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that when facing death, individuals transition through stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Though stage theories such as that of Kübler-Ross (1969) have been explored recently, adequate assessment has yet to be done of the model in relation to alternative forms of grief, such as romantic breakup (Daniel, 2023; Corr, 2019). As there are differences and similarities in the nature of a loss due to death and a loss as a result of breakup, it is valid to consider whether grieving processes following both forms of loss parallel one another or whether they differ. Various authors have discussed the differences in nature of these forms of grief. Wrzus et al. (2013) noted that along with mood disturbances normally associated with bereavement, such as loneliness, individuals experiencing relationship dissolution were more prone to internalizing a sense of a failure as a result of a breakup. Wrzus et al. also highlighted the reduction in a person's social network following a breakup, which is contrasted with the additional social support a bereft person often receives. Other research has discussed anticipatory grief in the case of an individual supporting a romantic partner with a terminal illness (Vanchon et al., 1982). This research found evidence of feelings of attachment and commitment intensifying in the months prior to the death, which varies in comparison to the strength of attachment and commitment prior to many cases of romantic breakup. These are merely a few examples of the differences noted by researchers regarding differences in the experiences of these forms of grief. These differences exemplify factors that may impact a grieving person's outcomes following a loss and the reason the Kübler-Ross model cannot be assumed to apply to instances of romantic grief without being adequately assessed.

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Literature pertaining to the topic of grief in the context of bereavement and breakup addresses a variety of psychological, physiological, and psychosocial effects that frequently occur. Though each unique form of loss has been explored in the literature, there exists a lack of research addressing similarities of bereavement and breakup grieving patterns in a comparative fashion. This demonstrates a noteworthy gap in the literature, hence the need for further examination of the topic.

The current paper is centered on the work of Kübler-Ross. Her book *On Death and Dying* (1969) introduces the five stages of grief theory, which provides the foundation for the question of interest for the current study. The current study seeks to understand whether Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages model extends beyond grief relating to death, specifically, to instances of romantic breakup.

Research Problem

When researching the phenomenon of grief, a large proportion of the literature refers to grief in the form of bereavement: losing a loved one to death. Though death is a reality of life that warrants appropriate exploration, the saturation of grief literature pertaining to death limits the availability of knowledge and information relating to other forms of grief. This prioritization of bereavement-related grief literature contributes to the neglect of other potential causes of grief (e.g., job loss, illness, infertility, dissolution of a romantic relationship, etc.), preserving societal disregard for the impact of such experiences. Doka (1989) refers to disenfranchised grief as a type of grief that a person experiences when the incurred loss is not openly recognized, socially supported, and/or mourned publicly. Bearing in mind this definition, perhaps the distress involved in these experiences would be lessened by additional research on alternative forms of

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writgrief, which in turn may encourage increased public knowledge and recognition of grief in a broader sense. The general problem is the lack of literature addressing romantic relationship dissolution in the context of grief. This results in an absence of research pertaining to best available treatment models for clinicians with clients facing these challenges.

Field (2011) noted that psychological and physiological symptoms following romantic heartbreak and breakup are complex experiences that in many ways parallel bereavement. Field's conclusions underscored the need for more research both before and after breakups. Without more research, best available treatment models for post-breakup grief remain unknown. Now, the available literature does not point to a gold standard treatment for supporting an individual through romantic breakup. Multiple studies discussed the use of compassion-focused therapy for individuals experiencing breakup (Shavandi & Khanjani Veshki, 2021; Soltani & Fatehizadeh, 2022;). Soltani and Fatehizadeh (2022) found compassion-focused therapy to be effective in enhancing feelings of calm, security, and satisfaction, while reducing levels of anxiety. Cognitive behavioral therapy is another modality which was found to help improve self-esteem and the ability to forgive ex-partners in a young adult population experiencing breakup (Krisnamurthi & Hanum, 2021). Despite various therapeutic modalities showing effectiveness in support of individuals experiencing a breakup, the lack of a gold standard treatment remains. Perhaps further research being supplemented by specific models may help encourage this development.

A plethora of studies have highlighted the significant distress individuals experience following a breakup. The specific problem is that there is a lack of information supporting the applicability of pre-existing grief theories to the context of a breakup, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the emotions and processes that a person in this situation may experience. Grief

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theories provide clinicians and individuals healing outside of a clinical setting a basis for understanding the grieving process in a manner that resembles a roadmap. Without a roadmap it may be difficult to interpret when symptoms of grief are progressing in an adaptive fashion or if the grief has escalated to a point of pathology. Shear (2012) refers to complicated grief as a state in which healing is disrupted, and the experience of acute grief becomes intense and prolonged. Though it is considered normal for individuals to experience acute grief in the face of loss, it is possible that at a certain point a person's coping is no longer considered effective and warrants clinical intervention. A better understanding of the applicability of grief models in relation to the context of a breakup would allow individuals insight regarding whether they would benefit from seeking clinical support and would allow clinicians a better understanding of whether a client is progressing towards positive outcomes.

Research Objective and Question

The aim of the current study is to assess the extent to which the five stages theory is applicable to instances of young adult individuals who are experiencing breakup related grief. It is expected that the literature will provide data which demonstrates significant overlap in themes of both death and breakup related grief experiences. It is expected that this will confirm transitional stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance which occur following a breakup, and support the applicability of the stage theory to this type of loss. In specific terms the research question is to explore which of the five stages theory is applicable to instances of young adult individuals who are experiencing breakup related grief.

Significance of the Research Project

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Evidence suggests that by the age of 20 to 25, most individuals have experienced at least one romantic breakup, highlighting the prevalence of experiences of grief and loss of a romantic nature (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). The experience is one that is shared by almost all individuals at some point in early adulthood, with nearly 40% reporting one or more breakups over a period of 20 months (Rhoades et al., 2012). As such, it is reasonable to contest that concrete information regarding what the process of breakup and subsequent steps towards healing looks like would be beneficial.

This research will provide insight into the process of healing from the dissolution of a romantic relationship. This study will emphasize the significant impact that romantic breakup has potential to have on individual functioning and explore whether stages of healing may be appropriately applied. As such, this study will provide awareness regarding common responses to breaking up. In doing so, adolescents and young adults approaching the phase of their life where they may experience their first romantic breakup, as well as others in the dating world, may be better informed as to what anticipate in their unique journeys of healing. Moreover, the findings in this study may allow a sense of normalization and validation to individuals experiencing changes in functioning post-breakup. This normalization may offer a sense of relief from secondary emotional reactions (e.g., being depressed about being depressed), by providing individuals with an understanding that the symptoms they are experiencing are normal and to be expected for many individuals in instances of grieving.

Future researchers may be encouraged to explore whether other grief models (stage theories and other) accurately depict the healing process that one encounters when enduring a breakup. The exploration of the applicability of other grief models may allow for a more

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comprehensive understanding of healing from this type of grief. This would allow for the applicability of models to be compared and contrasted, and suggest which model is best suited for breakup related grief experiences. This paper may also prompt further exploration of the applicability of various grief models to other forms of disenfranchised grief that often go unvalidated and unacknowledged by the norms of society.

Assessing whether the five stages model applies to cases of relationship dissolution provides an evaluation of whether Kübler-Ross' (1969) model acts as an appropriate road map for individuals other than bereaving peoples. Hence, the results of this research will provide beneficial information to clinicians and other mental health advocates in supportive roles for those seeking assistance. The Canadian Psychological Association (2017, Section II.9) mandates that practicing clinicians be current with a broad range of pertinent knowledge, techniques, and research methods. The results of this study may clarify whether treatment plans and models traditionally geared towards bereft individuals can lend themselves to the treatment of individuals who are experiencing a breakup.

Delimitations

This study does not attend to the dissolution of romantic relationships for married couples who are experiencing a divorce. This parameter was implemented in alignment with an existing study by Rhoades et al. (2011) on unmarried couples. These researchers excluded data from married couples under the assumption that a divorce is likely different in nature than an unmarried breakup. Based on the same premise, the following study will solely focus on both non-cohabiting and cohabiting dating couples.

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The focus of this paper is on the grieving patterns of young adults following a romantic breakup. For the purpose of this study, the young adult population includes individuals between the ages of 18 to 30. This definition of young adulthood was established in relation to Erikson's (1975) research on psychosocial development. The chosen age range is appropriate for the current study given that most individuals have experienced one or more romantic breakups by the age of 20 to 25 (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Moreover, the selected age range is appropriate given that the average age of marriage for both men (29.5) and women (26.7) is close to 30, rendering most available data for this age range corresponding to unmarried couples (Statistics Canada, 2015).

This study is limited to research examining early adult breakups in Western society. The vast differences between individualistic Western customs and customs of collectivists societies such as those in Asia have been documented in existing literature. Blair and Madigan (2016) explored these differences in conjunction with dating practices among young adults in China. The authors identified differences in dating behaviours and attitudes, noting what appears to be an integration of traditional Chinese customs with more progressive Western behaviour. This was demonstrated by notable differences regarding attitudes about sex, intimacy, and mate preferences. This data acts as compelling grounds to assume that there may be other differences concerning romantic relationship practices of non-Westernized societies, which would have potential to influence grieving behaviour post-breakup. As such, responses to breakup from individuals of non-Western societies is not the focus of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

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The theoretical framework for this systematic review is the Kübler-Ross model itself (Kübler-Ross; 1969). The research in this review has been interpreted through the lens of the Kübler-Ross model. Each of the primary articles has been carefully assessed through this lens in efforts to understand the model's applicability beyond what it was originally designed for. A detailed explanation of the five stages of grief model is provided in the Literature Review section.

Key Concepts

The following terms were used in this study and relate to the data extracted from the existing literature in the research on grief, loss, and romantic breakups. For the purpose of clarity, operational definitions of these terms are provided.

Romantic Breakup. This term is also referred to as relationship dissolution, relationship termination, and/or rupture of a romantic relationship. Lopez-Cantero (2017) discussed romantic breakup as the ending of a relationship which occurs for a reason other than death. The author sub-categorizes types of breakups as being either chosen or unchosen. The sub-category of chosen can be experienced by both members of the relationship, whilst the sub-category of unchosen can only be experienced by one party who does not wish to end the relationship.

Grief. The term grief is understood as the reaction process following the loss of a loved one, which is primarily emotional and/or affective in nature. The focus of the phenomenon is on its internal, psychobiological qualities (Stroebe et al., 2008). Grief reactions may occur in manners which are considered normal, abnormal, traumatic, complicated, and/or pathologic, based on the effectiveness in which the individual is able to reengage in everyday activities over

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time, and the specific conditions surrounding the loss (Shear et al., 2012). Common grief-related feelings include sadness, shock, numbness, and helplessness (Mughal et al., 2022). Grief can have behavioral effects, causing irritability, aggressiveness, difficulty sleeping, and a loss of interest in regular activities. Somatic symptoms of grief may include feelings of tightness in the chest, shortness of breath, lethargy, nauseousness, and abdominal distress. Psychological and cognitive symptoms often involve restlessness, difficulty concentrating, and confusion (Mughal et al., 2022). Shear et al. highlighted that grief and bereavement are separate phenomena; grief being the response to the experience of bereavement. Bowlby (1961) described that grief denotes a state which is subjective to the individual, either accompanying mourning, or following loss.

Bereavement. Bereavement is a broad term which refers to the objective reality that an individual encounters following the loss of a person of significance by the means of death (Stroebe et al., 2008). An individual who is experiencing bereavement may be referred to as a bereft individual.

Researcher Position Statement

More than 85% of individuals have experienced at least one romantic breakup (Battaglia et al., 1998). I, as the writer of this systematic review, am no stranger to breakup, some which I would consider to be significant events in my life. While I have experienced both more and less serious forms of breakup, I have experienced varying degrees of responses following. For the less serious breakups in my life, my experience with coping following the event tended to involve mild discomfort (i.e., mild anxiety, mild psychosomatic symptoms) which generally only lasted a few days. The more serious breakups that I have experienced, showed me the potential for emotional pain, distress, and grief, which motivated me to explore this topic. The subsequent

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influence that my past experiences have had on my understanding of breakup is undeniable. My preconceived notions of breakup based on these experiences influence my perspective of the breakup experience as one that can be immensely difficult physically and mentally; but also, as one that has potential to result in a new understanding for one's own capacity to withstand the natural challenges and sufferings that are intrinsically part of the human experience.

This study has potential to be influenced by my biases and understandings surrounding breakup, because of my personal experiences. It's possible that my understanding of case study interviews, descriptions of grief symptoms provided by participants, and other data provided in the literature may be skewed because of my personal experiences affecting my ability to interpret objectively. As a means of combatting this, as the writer of this study I intentionally sought out research with various descriptions of experiences. I considered both positive and negative experiences that I have had with breakup through the writing process, in efforts to not inadvertently focus on the negative grief symptoms in the literature and provide a more balanced interpretation.

Methodology of Capstone Project

The following section provides a detailed description of the literature search process which informed the current study. It is intended to define the parameters and criteria of the literature search, by providing transparency of the processes used.

Selection of Articles

Electronic databases through City University of Seattle and the University of Alberta were utilized as sources for the systematic review. The University of Alberta online database has

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access to more than 1600 databases, while the online database from City University of Seattle has access to more than 500. The content provided by these online libraries are considered high-quality, and are offered by licensed, reputable publishers from various disciplines.

Some difficulties were encountered while using the City University of Seattle database. As the City University database is more limited in terms of accessing a large quantity of articles, it was found to be insufficient in terms of accessing suitable articles for the current study. By extending the search to the University of Alberta database, this challenge was overcome.

Articles that highlighted populations with a focus on specific personality disorders or other psychological diagnoses were excluded, not including themes of potential pathology that developed post-breakup. Exclusion criteria also applied to articles that specified romantic breakup in the form of divorce.

Numerous searches were conducted with the following keywords: grief, loss, young adults, dating, romantic breakup, relationship dissolution, grief models, stages of grief, distress, healing, and Kübler-Ross model. Search results relating to the keywords were reviewed by first reading through several hundred titles in the results. Abstracts from more than 100 studies with titles that appeared pertinent were read, to evaluate their relevance for this review. Articles with abstracts that were unrelated to the research topic were removed from the screening process. Of the remaining literature, full-text articles were skimmed through in their entirety to appraise the quality (e.g., ensuring the article is peer-reviewed with well-cited references) and pertinence. Articles that were deficient in quality and/or pertinence were removed. The remaining articles were carefully reviewed. Four studies were removed, as they were not published within the past 10 years, and thus did not meet inclusion criteria. A backward and forward search method was

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also implemented as a means of identifying key literature and identifying new developments related to the topic. Based on the previously described selection methods, 10 primary articles which best related to the research topic were selected. Table 1 provides a reference list of the studies reviewed.

Table 1

Reference List of Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal	Type
Carter, K., Knox, D., & Hall, S.	2019	Romantic breakup: Difficult loss for some but not for others.	<i>Journal of Loss and Trauma,</i>	Quantitative
Crowder, R. J., Acquaye, H. E., Boanca, G., & Thiesen, N. L.	2021	A journey through romantic heartbreak and psychological growth: An exploratory phenomenological study of adult females	<i>Journal of Psychology and Theology</i>	Qualitative
Dailey, R. M., Rossetto, K. R., McCracken, A. A., Green, E. W.	2012	Negotiating breakups and renewals in on-again/off-again dating relationships: Traversing the transitions.	<i>Communication Quarterly</i>	Qualitative
Doering, J.	2010	Face, accounts, and schemes in the context of relationship breakups.	<i>Symbolic Interaction</i>	Qualitative
Field, T., Diego, M., Pelaez, M., Deeds, O., & Delgado, J.	2013	Negative emotions and behaviors are markers of breakup distress.	<i>College Student Journal</i>	Quantitative
McKiernan, A., Ryan, P., McMahon, E.,	2018	Understanding young people's relationship breakups using the Dual Processing Model of Coping and Bereavement.	<i>Journal of Loss and Trauma</i>	Qualitative

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Bradley, S., &
Butler, E.

Morris, C., Reiber, C., & Roman, E.	2015	Quantitative sex differences in response to the dissolution of a romantic relationship	<i>Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences</i>	Quantitative
O'Connor, M-F., & Sussman, T. J.	2014	Developing the yearning in situations of loss scale: Convergent and discriminant validity for bereavement, romantic breakup, and homesickness	<i>Taylor & Francis Group</i>	Quantitative
Randelović, K., & Goljović, N.	2020	Breakup grief: The difference between initiator and non-initiator depending on coping strategies and attachment.	<i>Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Pristini</i>	Quantitative
Verhallen, A. M, Renken, R. J., Marsman, J. C., Ter Horst, G. J.	2019	Romantic relationship breakup: An experimental model to study effects of stress on depression (-like) symptoms	<i>PLOS ONE</i>	Quantitative

Literature Review

The purpose of the following literature review is to provide an overview of the current understanding of grief-related research in relation to experiences of breakup. A thematic discussion of pertinent patterns is offered, which correspond to the question of whether Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages theory is applicable to breakup experiences in young adults. An initial discussion focusing on the foundational literature which informed Kübler-Ross's (1969) grief

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model is provided. The aim of this discussion is to establish a clear foundation for the models and theories which both affect the development of Kübler-Ross's model and come up as influential factors pertaining to the current topic. A discussion follows concerning parallels between loss in the form of bereavement and loss in the form of breakup. This comparison is to establish a basis for why it might be possible that the Kübler-Ross model would be applicable to loss through breakup in addition to its original purpose. The review then highlights sex-differences in response to breakup. An examination of sex-differences is significant, as it suggests that Kübler-Ross's model has potential to better serve an individual depending on their sex, as men and women may grieve these experiences differently. A discussion regarding the role of the individual in initiating the breakup, as well the impact of their attachment style follows. These factors are considered in the review, in acknowledgement of the potential that these variables may have in the way that one responds to a breakup, which may alter the extent to which their grieving processes resemble the five stages theory. A discussion focusing on common behavioral responses to breakup follows as a way of introducing responses that do and do not demonstrate correspondence with the five stages, as described by Kübler-Ross.

Description of the Kübler-Ross model

On Death and Dying was most widely known for its identification of the five stages of grief which were said to occur for terminally ill patients anticipating death soon (Kübler-Ross, 1969). From her interviews with more than 200 terminal individuals, Kübler-Ross used her collection of case studies to derive information relating to five stages of grief that the patients experienced and moved through. The interviews followed a non-directive style. This allowed the interviewer the flexibility to modify questions specifically for each patient. Some examples

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questions included inquiring about the patient's stay at the hospital, their specific illness, what gives them strength, and their families' handling of the prognosis, among others. More direct questions were also included, such as, "How else do you think we can help? How is dying for you? What does it mean to you?" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 184). It was found that the stages of grief consisted of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Kübler-Ross (1969) described denial as the refusal to believe information provided about one's death (e.g., believing that someone has made a mistake, and the X-rays are incorrect or belong to another patient). It involves having a sense of false hope, and/or numbness. Denial is considered to be a temporary defense, similar to a state of shock. By initially denying their approaching death, the individual subject to the grief may be less overwhelmed, and more capable of accepting the reality through a gradual staggering of processing. Kübler-Ross suggests that it is essential for patients to be allowed time to experience denial, as it serves a useful purpose for the individual. As such, health care providers and other supporters are advised not to argue with these patients about their futures.

The anger phase is well-illustrated by the question, "why me?" Kübler-Ross (1969) noted that the failure of the individual to maintain the initial phase of denial is replaced by feelings of anger, resentment, envy, and rage. Individuals in the anger stage often displace their anger towards family, friends, and other loved ones. Hospital staff such as nurses and doctors also become targets for this redirected anger. This phase is a result of the realization that the individual will not be able to carry out the plans they had hoped to in their life. Despite the discomfort of anger by the individual and their loved ones, it is discussed as useful for binding the individual to the reality of the death. Kübler-Ross recommended that granting these patients

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as much control as possible in their current situations is useful for allowing a sense of being in charge of the remainder of their time.

The bargaining stage is described as an attempt at postponing death. Kübler-Ross (1969) stated that this phase focuses on the individual making an implicit promise in exchange for the desired postponement of death being granted. Kübler-Ross described that the bargains made in this stage tend to be with God (e.g., “if you cure me God, I will have a life dedicated to worshipping you.”) and are often kept as a secret. Notably, it is argued that the promises made tend to have some association with some form of quiet guilt. For that reason, it would be beneficial for patients to explore these bargains with their available supports.

The fourth stage in the model is that of depression, which Kübler-Ross (1969) characterized as influenced by multiple factors. Many individuals facing death are also subjected to additional challenges, such as unavoidable financial burdens related to hospitalization and general medical care. Immense sums of money can be required for medical treatment. Often individuals are no longer able to work, resulting in job loss. These patients may end up being forced to sell the possessions they once loved (e.g., homes, vehicles). Though these are not the primary losses, they can be understood to result in reactive depression to an environment that they cannot control. In addition to reactive depression, the dying individual will also undergo preparatory depression. This fourth stage involves social withdrawal, a sensation of living in fog, numbness, and a lack of motivation to engage in regular daily activities. Kübler-Ross explained this preparatory depression as a means of undergoing a final separation from the world. It prepares the dying individual for the imminent loss of all things they once loved, and as a means of initiating acceptance.

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It is argued that by the time a dying individual reaches the point of acceptance, they have mourned the looming loss of many meaningful places and loved ones to the point that they are no longer angry or depressed about the reality of their fate (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Kübler-Ross emphasized that the phase of acceptance is not synonymous with happiness. More so, the individual has become void of feelings, to the point that most emotional pain surrounding dying has gone. By this point the dying individual views the struggle as almost over and has come to terms with it. At the acceptance stage, the individual has begun to re-stabilize following the difficulties of the previous stages, allowing the patient to re-enter reality.

Influential Factors and Patterns in Breakup Outcomes

A number of factors are relevant to relationship dissolution. Among those, the degree to which reactions differ based on gender is important to consider. In addition, the role that an individual plays in breakup initiation, as well as their attachment style has been found to be influential on outcomes following the breakup. Moreover, patterns have emerged in the literature relating to parallels between bereavement and loss due to breakup, as well as common behavioral responses to breakup.

Parallels Between Bereavement and Breakup Loss

Grief as a result of bereavement is a universal experience which most individuals will experience at some point in their life. Acute grief is understood as a typical response to the pain of losing a loved one (Shear et al., 2012). It is explained as an erratic blend of sadness and yearning, which is accompanied by thoughts and memories which can take over the bereft individual's ordinary life. Acute grief tends to be intensely painful but differs from the

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experience from depression. While depression is a mental disorder, acute grief is not (Shear et al., 2012). Despite the challenge of navigating death, most individuals can navigate healing and ultimately restore a life with meaning and happiness, but not all bereft individuals practice effective coping. Approximately seven percent of these individuals become entangled in complicated grief, which hinders the healing process, and interferes with the bereft individual's ability to re-engage in life in a healthy manner (Shear et al., 2012). The literature reveals that complicated grief is not an experience that is unique to bereavement (Peterson, 2019; O'Connor and Sussman, 2014). Relationship dissolution also has potential to result in complicated grief disorder, also known as persistent complex bereavement disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Factors which render a person more likely to experience complicated grief disorder following a death include having an insecure attachment style, having low levels of support, and being high in neuroticism (Burke & Neimeyer, 2012). It may be possible that one of more of these factors which predispose an individual to non-adaptive forms of bereavement apply in the context of grieving a breakup as well.

The literature demonstrates that breakups are endorsed by college students as the most significant experiences of loss (apart from death) in their lives (Cooley, 2010). Some findings highlight direct ties between bereavement and relationship dissolution, noting that bereavement symptoms are often experienced in individuals who have experienced a breakup (Field, 2011). Symptoms such as insomnia, intrusive thoughts, and physical and emotional distress are shared between both instances of loss. Field's (2011) research suggests that individuals experiencing either instance of loss are prone to immune dysfunction as well as broken heart syndrome, a condition characterized by pain in the chest which mimics a heart attack that is common when

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experiencing loss (Field, 2011). A common response to bereavement is rumination. Rumination is suggested to be used as an automatic reward response with the goal of maintaining a tie with the deceased (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Research has found that rumination is common in individuals protesting a breakup (Fisher et al., 2005). O'Connor and Sussman's study (2014) contributed to the literature by examining a variety of online respondents who reported mourning the death of a loved one, had a breakup experience, or were experiencing homesickness. They found evidence that yearning could be measured in all three cases of loss and could be assessed as a phenomenon separate from loneliness, anxiety, and/or depression.

Sex-Differences in Responses to Breakup

Sex-differences in coping and well-being following a breakup have been noted by multiple studies. For example, Carter et al. (2019) found that women were more likely to report a perceived sense of feeling damaged following a breakup. Additionally, it was found that women are more inclined than men to be relationship-oriented, which results in a tendency for women to initiate more discussions about relationship concerns and conflict. According to this study, women are more likely to experience happiness and less anxiety following the termination of a dysfunctional relationship. However, the authors noted that this same relationship-orientation has the potential to affect women's perception of the breakup in a manner which causes these types of breakups to be perceived as failure, resulting in greater sadness. Although women may be more likely to initiate the breakup, which can mitigate damage following the breakup, they are also more likely to internalize the ending of the relationship as a form of personal failure (Carter et al., 2019). Similar findings regarding relationship-orientation were established in Davis et al.'s

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(2003) study, which found that women demonstrated more emotional involvement with their partners than men prior to a breakup.

Other research found that both men and women reported high intensities of emotional responses post-breakup (Morris, 2015). It was found that although participants demonstrated both emotional and physical responses, that emotional responses were significantly more prominent. Like previous findings, though both sexes experienced high levels of emotional and physical symptoms, women were found to experience higher levels of both. A common physical symptom shared by men and women is high rates of insomnia following the breakup. Symptoms more commonly expressed by women included fears around unwanted contact with the ex-partner as well as weight gain and/or weight loss (Morris, 2015).

Other research found additional differences in responses to breakup based on sex. Specifically, depression scores were higher in women than men following a breakup (Verhallen et al., 2019; Perilloux & Buss, 2008). It was found that women were more likely to report difficulty experiencing positive emotions post-breakup. In the face of breakup, both men and women have been found to face similar costs, such as the loss of shared friends, a loss of sexual access, and increased depression (Perilloux & Buss, 2008). However, findings highlight additional costs for women, such as a higher possibility of being stalked, and a loss of protection. For both sexes, the time following a breakup often involves experiences of sadness, anger, confusion, vengeance, happiness, indifference, jealousy, fear, guilt, remorse, and regret (Perilloux & Buss, 2008).

Though numerous studies highlighted findings which may indicate that women tend to experience more physical and emotional symptoms following breakup, there exists opposing

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findings in the data. Chung et al.'s (2002) research demonstrated that there were no notable gender differences in the manifestation of post-traumatic stress symptoms following experiences of breakup. Another study found that men reported struggling more through the course of the breakup, noting higher levels of devastation than female partners (Knox et al., 2000). These same findings were echoed in Choo et al.'s (1996) study, which found that men were less likely than women to report experiences of relief or joy immediately following the breakup.

Findings are mixed when considering the variable of sex in relation to initiating a breakup. While some studies suggested that women were more likely to initiate a breakup (Carter et al., 2019; Knox et al., 2000; Morris, 2015), findings by Bronfman et al. (2016) demonstrated more male initiators than female. Moreover, findings revealed that of those who did not initiate the breakup, female partners were more likely to report hostility and anger than their male counterparts (Davis et al., 2003).

Lastly, the literature revealed gender was not found to be a significant factor concerning the attachment style of the individuals in the relationship (Davis et al., 2003). This information is relevant as attachment style is addressed a significant factor in breakup responses, as discussed later.

Role of Initiation in Response to Breakup

Multiple studies consider the role of initiation as a potential variable which may relate to the intensity and manner that an individual responds to breakup (Bronfman et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2003; Morris, 2015; Perilloux and Buss, 2008; Randelović and Goljović, 2020). A common trend from the literature is the emphasis on the role of initiation as a significant factor in overall

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responses. While it is discussed that both initiators and non-initiators find the experience of breakup to result in significant distress, rejected individuals experience the highest intensity of post-relationship grief (Morris, 2015; Randelović and Goljović, 2020). However, Davis et al.'s (2003) study suggests that non-initiators may experience some benefits regarding emotional responses following the breakup. Though non-initiators experience greater emotional and physical distress, they also tend to experience fewer symptoms of guilt and self-blame than do initiators. Though they may be more likely to avoid feelings of guilt, Perilloux and Buss (2008) found that non-initiators reported higher levels of depression, rumination, and hindered self-esteem following relationship dissolution. This finding is contrasted by previous research, which found that depression was only a symptom of romantic breakup for individuals who had been broken up with, and not for initiators (Ayduk et al., 1991).

While most findings among the literature have found that both initiators and non-initiators experience some form of distress in the event of a breakup and that non-initiators tend to be most subjected to negative emotional and physical experiences in the aftermath, there is varying information available (Davis et al., 2003; Morris, 2015; Randelović and Goljović, 2020). A study by Waller and MacDonald (2008) suggested that the role of initiation in a breakup was not related to the level of distress felt by the involved parties afterwards. Rather, the researchers reported that distress was attributed to self-esteem and that those with lower trait self-esteem experienced greater distress in the breakup. Those with higher trait self-esteem did not have levels of distress differing as a function of their role in the initiation of the breakup. A second study by Sbarra (2006) reported similar findings, failing to observe differences in emotional distress in accordance with the role of initiation. The findings reported by Waller and

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MacDonald as well as Sbarra were unique in comparison to most studies that considered the role of initiation in a breakup.

Role of Attachment Style in Response to Breakup

Research has found attachment style to influence adjustment following a breakup (Davis et al., 2003; McKiernan et al., 2018; Randelović and Goljović, 2020). Research such as that of Randelović and Goljović (2020) which focused on whether the role of initiation was the primary factor in outcomes post-breakup, found that whilst initiation status was not indicative of distress levels, attachment style was. It was found that individuals who did not initiate the breakup and who were not high in attachment anxiety did not differ from partners who did initiate the breakup in terms of distress. Individuals who were high in attachment anxiety experienced significant levels of distress post-breakup regardless of initiation status, though those who did not initiate the breakup experienced greater distress levels. In Davis et al.'s (2003) study, participants with higher degrees of attachment anxiety demonstrated substantially higher levels of emotional distress following the breakup and were found to be more reactive and experience more intense rumination. Anxiously attached participants were also found to be more rejection sensitive, which was activated following the breakup. Davis et al. note that these findings align with theoretical suggestions by Ainsworth (1978), who found that when infants were separated from their parents, the reactions characterized by the most distress came from children who demonstrated anxious attachment patterns.

Previous research by Davis et al. (2003) found various responses to breakup which differed as a function of attachment style. Participants who were high in attachment anxiety experienced more intense physical and emotional distress, more effort to re-establish the lost

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relationship, angry and vengeful behaviour, and greater preoccupation with the former partner. Those who were characterized as attachment avoidant demonstrated less distress than their counterparts with differing attachment styles. Those high in attachment avoidance were also found to engage in coping strategies considered to be avoidant and self-reliant. Participants with insecure attachment styles were also found to use alcohol and other substances as a coping tool. In contrast, those considered to have secure attachment styles were found to primarily use social coping strategies, such as relying on friends and family as means of support.

Findings among the literature, such as those of Randelović and Goljović (2020) and Davis et al. (2003) support the idea that when considering whether Kübler-Ross's (1969) is applicable to instances of breakup, it may be important to consider attachment style as an influential variable.

Common Responses and Trends Relating to Breakup

Overall, a primary reoccurring finding is the greatly unpleasant and distressful nature of breakups for the majority of those who experience them. In each study that was examined, marked psychological and emotional distress was acknowledged as normal and expected response by researchers. There are numerous negative symptoms of breakup, including sadness, depression, loneliness, guilt, anger, bitterness, vulnerability, a decrease in life satisfaction, a loss of self-esteem, anxiety, insomnia, jealousy, and rumination (McKiernan et al., 2018; Perilloux and Buss., 2008; Rhoades et al., 2011; Crowder et al., 2021). While the literature reveals that not everyone who experiences a breakup experience all of these symptoms, a combination of at least some of these symptoms appears to be reported in most instances of this type of loss. Some findings suggest that the greater the investment an individual has in the relationship (e.g., having

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children, cohabitating etc.), the more the individual may experience a decline in life satisfaction (Rhoades et al., 2011). That said, studies with a focus on younger participants (such as those in high school or who are recently graduated) who do not typically have that level of investment, still reveal the same pattern of negative emotional and physical responses being experienced following the rupture of a dating relationship (McKiernan et al., 2018).

Alternative information was brought forth by Carter et al. (2019), whose research differed from much of the available literature in the sense that a focus on positive responses to breakup was highlighted. Carter et al.'s study found that one-third of respondents reported feelings of happiness and reduced anxiety. Moreover, half of the sample noted feelings of relief and freedom following their most recent breakup. More in alignment with the common trends previously mentioned, two-thirds of the sample reported feelings of sadness, jealousy, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem. The varying experiences from within this study speak to the complicated mixture of emotions following this type of loss. Carter et al. were not the only researchers to speak to positive experiences following breakup. Participants in Crowder et al.'s (2021) described romantic breakup as a phenomenon comparable to death; however, some participants reported feelings of relief and freedom resulting from the breakup. Though there is evidence for both positive and negative reactions to breakup, previous research highlights that negative responses such as anger, depression, and loneliness occur more frequently than potential positive responses, like relief or happiness (Monroe et al., 1999).

Summary of Influential Factors and Patterns Involved in Breakup

It is clear that the experience of romantic breakup is a common, significant life event which affects the lives of young adults in distressing manners. The literature provides evidence

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that romantic breakup results in experiences of grief which parallel the pain experienced with death (Cooley, 2010). This grief has potential to escalate to a point at which it could be considered a pathology and shares many symptoms that one would experience when mourning the death of a loved one (Shear, 2012). It is apparent that men and women may respond differently to instances of romantic breakup, though notable inconsistencies exist pertaining to these sex differences (cf. Bronfman, 2016; Knox et al., 2000). However, most of the available research suggests that women experience more intense emotional distress in instances of breakup (Carter et al., 2019; Bronfman et al., 2016; Morris, 2015; Verhallen et al., 2019). The literature suggests that regardless of the role the individual plays in the initiation of the breakup, distress is a likely outcome in varying degrees (Randelović and Goljović, 2020). However, the individual initiating the breakup tends to have more positive outcomes (less intense grief) following the event and the non-initiator is likely to experience more emotional suffering (Davis et al. 2003; Morris, 2015). Based on the evidence of multiple studies, it is also likely that individuals with insecure attachment styles will also likely have worse outcomes in these cases (Davis et al., 2003; Randelović and Goljović, 2020).

The most common responses to breakup, as evidenced in the literature, include but are not limited to depression, loneliness, sadness, anger, guilt, bitterness, vulnerability, rumination, loss of self-esteem, decreased life satisfaction, and other forms of psychological distress (Crowder et al., 2021; McKiernan et al., 2018; Rhoades et al., 2011).

Despite the painful experience of romantic dissolution being unique to each couple, and individual within the couple, it is demonstrated that there are more commonalities between

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experiences of breakup than one might expect. Likewise, despite the distinct nature between the phenomena of breakup and death, ample overlap in pain responses to such events are irrefutable.

Methodological Analysis

The following section provides a critical analysis of the methodological approaches that were employed in the studies reviewed. Strengths and weaknesses of the utilized methodological techniques are discussed as well as recommendations for improvement.

Data Analysis Procedures

The selected articles have been divided into categories based on the data collection methods used in the research (i.e., quantitative and qualitative). Of the 10 studies, six were quantitative nature, while four were qualitative. A thematic analysis was conducted by examining the chosen articles and grouping information related to the design, paradigms, measures, and findings of the studies, with the goal of uncovering potential patterns. Sampling methods (e.g., recruitment methods, sample sizes), participant information (i.e., all demographic information), data collection methods (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, surveys), and data analysis methods (e.g., thematic analysis, analysis software) were each considered in terms of methodological rigour. A variety of peer-reviewed sources that highlight strengths and weaknesses of the many methodological elements found in the selected articles were used to inform the critique. I took note of the articles that were present with methodological elements that could be considered limitations, and which utilized techniques which could be considered methodologically robust. The following section discusses these findings.

Research Paradigms

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Among the quantitative studies, four of the six articles utilized a positivist lens, and two demonstrated a pragmatic paradigm. The positivist paradigm operates under a deterministic philosophy, upholding the necessity to identify causes that have the ability to influence specific outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Positivist paradigms function in a reductionist fashion, reducing areas of interest into small and explicit concepts, to facilitate empirical testing and methods. Carter et al. (2019), Field et al. (2013), Morris et al. (2015), and Randelović and Goljović's (2020) all relied heavily on empirical observation, measurement, and numerical values to study behaviour.

Two studies operated from a pragmatic lens (O'Connor & Sussman, 2014; Verhallen et al., 2019). A pragmatic worldview highlights the necessity for determining solutions to problems that are functional in real-world practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The authors questioned in which way yearning could be measured. The research resulted in the development of the Yearning in Situations of Loss Scale, a solid system of measurement, with real-world applicability. The problem-focused nature of this article is strongly in alignment with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) description of pragmatism. Verhallen et al.'s (2019) article was similar in nature, with its problem-centered focus.

Of the qualitative studies, all four demonstrated a constructivist paradigm (Crowder et al., 2021; Dailey et al., 2012; Doering, 2010; McKiernan et al., 2018). Each of the qualitative articles demonstrated an attempt at understanding some element related to heartbreak, which was derived from discussion with participants regarding their daily lives. The reliance on meaning making from participant dialogue is a key feature of constructivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, each article also had an element of theory generation based on patterns detected in

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participant discussions, also typical of the constructivist paradigm. Crowder et al. (2021) sought to explore the shared experiences of participants who were experiencing heartbreak. The authors emphasized the idea of posttraumatic growth, which is considered to occur when the experience of a significant traumatic event results in the development of a positive outlook on life through shifting one's worldview (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Crowder et al. rely on the concept of posttraumatic growth as a foundation for theory generation, prompting the authors to explore participant's emotional journeys pre- and post-breakup. The constructivist paradigm is demonstrated through the authors attempt at making meaning of the experience of breakup. Crowder et al., Dailey et al. (2012), and Doering (2010) each demonstrated the use of broad interview questions, typical of a constructivist fashion, with the goal of constructing meaning forged from discussion. While McKiernan et al.'s (2018) differed in the sense that participants were not verbally interviewed, as data was acquired on an online forum, moderators did create a number of discussion topics with a similar goal in mind.

Critiquing of Methodology

Though the ten articles that were selected as the primary means of informing the current review were chosen with consideration of the quality of the research design and the resulting data, there exists limitations that require attention in order to provide a holistic report of existing data.

Among the six quantitative studies, three utilized convenience sampling. Though convenience samples are cost-effective, they also have inherent disadvantages. Convenience samples are highly susceptible to selection bias, as well as influences that cannot be controlled for by the researcher (Andrade, 2021). The possibility of selection bias would infer that the

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results provided by the participants may have been distorted by factors that have not been accounted for. Convenience samples also demonstrate a higher level of sampling error, signifying that the participants are not accurately representative of the target population (Andrade, 2021). A sampling error would indicate possible over- or under-representation of the population. Multiple studies used convenience sampling to recruit participants that were easily accessible on campus (e.g., participating for course credit). It is important to consider whether the incorporation of data from young adult individuals who have not attended post-secondary studies would have had a significant impact on the results. The exclusion of participants who have not attended post-secondary studies opens the possibility for nonresponse bias.

Also noteworthy, O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) use of voluntary response sampling brings about similar criticisms in terms of limitations. Because studies relying on this method of sampling consist of persons who have self-selected, it is possible that these participants are more inclined to have strong feelings regarding the subject matter than the average member of the population (Murairwa, 2015).

Despite the aforementioned limitations of the sampling methods used, the researchers utilized methods which met the objectives of acquiring individuals who were willing to provide information about the intimate experience of heartbreak. Nevertheless, according to Andrade (2020) research that is based on the use of convenience samples is only generalizable to the population that the sample was selected from. Field et al. (2013) relied on university students as the population that was conveniently accessible. As such, their findings are most generalizable to university students. Morris et al.'s (2015) study used a convenience sample from across 96 countries. With 5,705 participants, this study has participants from very diverse backgrounds.

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Due to the wide range of location and demographic information, this study would be more generalizable to the general population than Field et al.'s work. Randelović and Goljović (2020) failed to provide any information concerning where their convenience sample was located, which results in gaps regarding the generalizability of their study. The researchers reported that it was a convenience sample and mentioned that data was collected using computer-aided testing; however, the ambiguity surrounding actual recruitment is a significant methodological limitation for this study. It is possible that the sample was recruited online, in accordance with the mention of computer-aided testing, but this information was not explicitly provided.

Participant Sampling

Overall, the sample sizes involved in the quantitative studies were quite large, ranging between 181 to 5705 participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that many researchers attempt to reach 10% of the target population for their participant sample size. That said, the authors highlight that this method is not always optimal. It is suggested that a power analysis plan be utilized to estimate an appropriate target sample size. Of the quantitative studies, there is no mention of a power analysis for sample size determination in any of the articles. It is thus unknown what consideration was paid to detecting possible effects in the study design.

Of the six quantitative articles, Carter et al.'s (2019), Field et al.'s (2013), Morris et al.'s (2015), Randelović and Goljović's (2020) and Verhallen et al.'s (2019) all demonstrated great diversity in the selected participants in terms of demographic information. That said, O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) research did not provide any demographic information pertaining to the sample, which hinders the generalizability of the data. Without information regarding the traits

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of their respondents, it is unknown if the results are applicable for the broader population of the current study, or if they may only be applied to a narrow population.

A final consideration regarding the quantitative articles relates to the use of interviews by Carter et al. (2019) and O'Connor and Sussman (2014). Though clinical interviews offer many advantages (e.g., flexibility, depth of information), this method grants the possibility of interviewer bias, which can affect participant responses and the interpretation of answers. As this possibility renders objectivity and consistency difficult to achieve, validity and reliability may be negatively affected (Targum, 2011). That said, both Carter et al. and O'Connor and Sussman's research was supplemented by additional methods, such as surveys and affect scales, which balances these studies with more objective data analysis procedures. While diverse methods being utilized within these studies could be considered to a strength, as they could be understood to offer more robust data collection, previous research has found otherwise. Harris and Brown (2010) found that though structured questionnaires/surveys and semi-structured interviews are often used to generate confirmatory results, they tend to result in consistency and consensus statistics being weak between methods.

Of the four qualitative studies, one utilized non-probability convenience sampling, one utilized purposeful sampling, and one used voluntary response sampling. Doering's (2010) study had no mention of the manner in which participants were recruited. As previously discussed, the convenience sampling utilized by McKiernan et al. (2018) renders the study more susceptible to factors such as selection bias and sampling error (Andrade, 2021). Murairwa's (2015) research on voluntary response sampling is relevant regarding Dailey et al.'s (2012) study, by highlighting that individuals who volunteer for specific studies tend to have significant feelings

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regarding the chosen topic. As such, Dailey et al.'s work has the potential of being negatively affected by response bias. The lack of information provided by Doering pertaining to participant recruitment is significant as a limitation. Having information surrounding recruitment methods allows readers to assess the potential for sampling design errors. Not having this information leaves readers unsure of the extent to which the sample is representative of the target population (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). It prompts uncertainty regarding whether the findings are generalizable to the larger population, and whether the results may be affected by factors such as a sampling bias. In contrast, some of the qualitative researchers, such as Dailey et al. (2012), had samples that were close to 50% college student and 50% community members. By having a sample population that was more diverse, concerns about nonresponse bias are diminished.

As is typical of qualitative studies, the four sample sizes were small. Crowder et al.'s (2021) study had eight participants, Dailey et al.'s (2012) study had 65, Doering's (2010) study had six, and McKiernan et al.'s (2018) had 31. Though it is common for qualitative studies to have smaller samples for a multitude of reasons, there are limitations associated with this (Sandelwoski, 1996). Having small sample sizes can be associated with low reproducibility, low statistical power, inflated false discovery rate, and an inflated effect size estimation (Button et al., 2013). Each of these potential consequences of a smaller sample size negatively affect the validity of researchers' findings. Vasileiou et al. (2018) discuss that while the quantitative research world has specific statistics-based guidelines as a means of determining a sample size, that these set guidelines do not carry over in the qualitative world. Vasileiou et al. state that qualitative research involves intricacies of ideological pluralism, which does not lend to precisely established guidelines for qualitative sample sizes. Vasileiou et al.'s work highlights

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countless theories regarding determining a sample size for qualitative research. Despite the many discussions that exist surrounding this topic in academic literature, all four of the selected qualitative articles fail to directly address the topic of sample size determination. The failure to confront this topic acts as a more significant limitation than the small samples sizes themselves. Many researchers have argued that saturation can be obtained in qualitative research via smaller sample sizes comparable to those informing the current study. That said, in these cases, a discussion around the processes which allow the sample size to be sufficient is warranted.

Data Collection Approach

Of the research which informed the current study, a common theme which emerged pertains to the research approaches and procedures when considering data collection. It is important to note that 9 out of 10 studies gathered data retrospectively. The one study that gathered prospective data is that of Dailey et al.'s (2012). In Dailey et al.'s research, which focused on partners that were considered on-again off-again (cycling through relationship development and dissolution numerous times), 59% of the participants were no longer in relationships with their partners at the time of reporting. In this group, time since the breakup varied between two to 252 months (21 years) prior to the study. Several studies indicated that the breakups had occurred within zero to five months prior to the collection of data from the participants, demonstrating a more immediate retrieval of data following the experience (Field et al., 2013; O'Connor & Sussman, 2014; Verhallen et al., 2019). Six studies did not report the time that had passed since the breakup (Carter et al., 2019; Crowder et al., 2021; Doering, 2010; McKiernan et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2015; Randelović and Goljović, 2019). The pertinence of the data being retrieved retrospectively relates to concerns over accurate reporting of data. Dailey

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et al. noted that several participants struggled to recall certain details about their account of romantic breakup. It is also relevant to inquire whether data collection of a retrospective nature results in evaluations regarding the experience which were true to the experience at the time it was occurring or if the reported accounts are attributions based on the participant's current appraisals of the experience. Dailey et al., Carter et al. (2019), and Verhallen et al. (2019) spoke to the need for longitudinal research on this topic for numerous reasons. One reason that longitudinal research relating to romantic breakup would be beneficial is to capture the full range of experiences during and following the event, which research of a retrospective nature may not achieve as accurately.

Another pattern relating to data collection pertains to the fact that all 10 highlighted articles and other available literature only provided the perspective of one of the individuals in the relationship, not both parties in the couple. I was not able to find any research which provided dyadic accounts (descriptions of the experience by both members of the couple) or descriptions provided by external sources who were close to the individual experiencing the breakup. For reasons relating to ethical considerations and confidentiality, solely utilizing the individual may be easier for researchers in this domain to navigate. However, the information that could be provided by dyadic accounts or third-party resources (e.g., supporting friends, family) would offer a more comprehensive description of the emotional and physical impact of experiencing a breakup.

Control of Variables

Among the articles which inform the current study, each study had uniquely developed inclusion criteria for the purpose of optimizing validity and reducing the possibility of

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confounding. All 10 studies either solely included participants who had experienced a breakup or had a manner of specifying which participants had and had not experienced romantic dating. All the selected studies specified that the study data was based on romantic (non-married) relationships. Carter et al.'s (2019) study had specific exclusion criteria, which did not allow anyone who had ever been married to participate. The remaining studies were not overt in addressing whether the participants in their study had been married at some point but suggested that the accounts of romantic breakup were based on dating experiences.

A common pattern among the studies was the fact that there existed great variability in the time that had passed since participants had experienced the breakup. While most of the studies that provided information about when the breakup occurred were within a window of several months before, Dailey et al.'s (2012) study highlighted accounts of breakups which ranged from one to 240 months prior to the study, suggesting that some participants were reporting events which transpired 20 years prior. Field et al.'s (2013) and O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) participants had experienced the breakup approximately four months prior to the study. Verhallen et al.'s (2019) participants' breakups ranged from zero to four months prior to the study. The remaining six studies did not disclose the length of time that had passed since the breakup. Several of the researchers spoke to the failure to account for time since the breakup in their limitations. By not accounting for this variable, and/or controlling for it, the possibility of the confounding effect is heightened (Allen, 2017).

Similarly, a limitation which was highlighted by Randelović and Goljović (2020) pointed to the failure to account for the length of the relationship that was being reported on. Four of the studies provided information regarding the length of relationship duration, and six did not.

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Crowder's (2021) participants reported on relationships that lasted between six months to nine years. Dailey et al.'s (2012) participants had a dating duration of between two to 252 months (21 years). The average length of dating in Morris' (2015) study was approximately two and a half years, but a full range of the duration of the relationships was not provided. Verhallen et al.'s (2019) participant's relationships ranged from 6 to 81 months. Of the studies which provided a range for the duration of the represented relationships, it is apparent that every study has a significantly large range. It is essential to consider whether the confounding effect may impact the validity of the data due to extraneous factors. For instance, according to Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, over the course of a relationship factors such as intimacy, passion, and commitment are likely to shift. Given that these three elements may present to varying degrees at different points in a relationship, it is possible that responses to breakup may also be different depending on which point the relationship is terminated. As such, a general lack of control for this variable demonstrates a recurrent limitation in the literature.

Generalizability of Results

For the current study, the intended target population is young adult men and women (i.e., from 18 to 30 years of age). Four of the informing articles lacked detail in providing information regarding the participant's age range (e.g., the mean age of the group). Based on the available data, the participants from these studies varied from 16 to 52 years of age. Though the age bracket of the studies extends well beyond the writer's targeted age range, all the studies that included participants in their forties and fifties highlighted that only a very small percentage of the sample was older. For example, O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) quantitative study included individuals between the ages of 18 to 45, but only 10.5% of participants who were older than 22

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years of age. Although the majority of the individuals who participated in these studies are within the targeted age range, it is possible that the age bracket may render the results less generalizable to the larger young adult population as the inclusion of older participants may skew the data.

An interesting pattern which emerged in the studies was the finding that of 10 studies, eight had sample groups that were more highly concentrated by women than men. This occurred to varying degrees. It is worth noting that generalization is a quality standard in quantitative research, which exists differently in the context of qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2010). As such, this pattern of female saturated sample groups and resulting limitations apply more so to numerous quantitative studies which demonstrate this pattern. For instance, Carter et al.'s (2019) sample group consisted of 84% women, while Verhallen et al.'s (2019) study was very closely divided, with 52.2% women. There are many reasons that women may be more heavily represented in this data. Verhallen et al.'s findings supported that men are less likely to report difficulties experiences positive emotions, which may play a factor in their decision to participate in a study relating to romantic breakup. Nonetheless, all but two studies had sample groups composed primarily of women, which lessens the generalizability of the results to the larger young adult population.

A final theme which warrants consideration is the origin of the works which have informed the current study. Almost all the studies were conducted by researchers who are faculty of Western universities, and whose samples were members of Western populations. One study by Randelović and Goljović (2020) offers data provided from authors belonging to Southern European universities, and a sample group that appears to be from the same geographical

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location. Additionally, McKiernan et al.'s (2018) study utilized an internet-based response system which enabled the reach of the study to include individuals from 96 countries. These countries primarily included (but were not limited to) the United States, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The remaining studies were primarily conducted by American researchers and informed by American participants. As such, it is important to recognize that the data has been primarily analyzed and interpreted via a Western lens. Moreover, the cultural context of the participants who have provided the data may have impacted their responses. It is possible that culture is a significant variable that has the ability to influence perceptions surrounding romantic breakup as well as the experience as a whole. Results should be considered regarding a Western perspective.

Ethical Considerations

An imperative component and legal requirement of ensuring ethical research is the process of acquiring informed consent. The process of informed consent should inform a participant about the components of the study which are significant in making a knowledgeable decision regarding whether or not to participate (Nijhawan et al., 2013). Six of the ten studies overtly discussed the process of informed consent that took place, while four studies failed to report on it. As multiple studies recruited students from specific university courses for extra credit, it is especially significant that the voluntary nature of the studies was discussed with the participants prior to participation. As consent cannot be granted under instances of coercion, it is significant that potential participants are made aware that participation is not a required component of the course. It is also significant to consider the evidence that suggests that offering extra credit has the potential to limit the generalizability of the findings (Padilla-Walker, 2005).

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Padilla-Walker's (2005) study stressed that recruiting university students alone has potential to impact generalizability negatively, and that offering extra credit for participation appeared to intensify this effect. As such, this is a possibility for the numerous studies which utilized an extra credit incentive.

Principle II of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists highlights responsible caring, of which includes the requirement to do no harm (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). In considering ethical issues that could arise in the context of research, an important question is raised pertaining to the psychological impact of revisiting the breakup. As ample research has established, the experience is associated with significant trauma, as demonstrated by Morris et al.'s (2015) findings that 96% of participants who recently experienced a breakup reported high or unbearable levels of emotional distress. A lack of attention was given to reporting this ethical matter in the literature that was examined for the purpose of this paper. This raises a significant question is relating to the extent of training of the individuals facilitating the data collection sessions. Given the sensitive nature of discussing traumatizing events, ensuring responsible caring would include making certain that the data collectors had sufficient training and knowledge relating to crisis management. This would allow data collectors to safely de-escalate situations in which individuals become emotionally activated. Not reporting whether data collectors have been trained and what type of training they have had has implications concerning future research. It creates a barrier for future researchers who are seeking to replicate the study, a strategy used to determine whether consistent results are achieved and contribute to reliability of the research (Peels, 2019).

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A final ethical consideration relates to whether appropriate resources were provided to participants following the study. Appropriate resources may include on-campus mental health services, community counselling services, 24-hour crisis line information, and/or peer support services. McKiernan et al.'s (2018) study utilized an internet-based data collection system, and as such had designated forum moderators as points of referral for participants seeking support outside of the forum. The forum moderators for this study represent an excellent protective measure for the participants in the study, and exemplary adherence to Principle II of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists. A similar use of resource informed moderators would have been beneficial in the other informing studies, though no evidence of this was found.

Findings

The aim of the current study is to examine the degree to which Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages theory applies to contexts of young adult romantic breakup. The findings provided by the 10 primary studies highlight the presence of Kübler-Ross' proposed five stages (i.e., denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) in the context of breakup to varying extents. Other vital considerations are addressed, such as parallels between breakup-related grief and mourning a death, as well as the implications of gender, and the role of initiation and attachment style.

Denial

The experience of denial was discussed by Kübler-Ross (1969) as a temporary defense which allows grievers to be less susceptible to becoming emotionally overwhelmed by the gravity of the loss. Typically, denial involves the refusal to believe the reality of the loss. Consistent with the experience of denial, Doering et al (2010) found that both non-initiating and initiating

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individuals experiencing breakup demonstrated multiple denial strategies as a means of defending themselves from potential threats to their identities resulting from the breakup. The authors assessed denial as a prominent theme in their participant's accounts of breakup experiences through the development of a typology based on biographical interviews. Both initiators and non-initiators utilized denials of injury, which either downplayed the damage that was done to their former partner (for initiators) or minimized the individual's own pain about the breakup (for non-initiators). Initiators and non-initiators also both utilized externalizing the responsibility of the breakup strategies, which involves the denial of the individual's own role in the breakup and portrayed the breakup as solely due to the former partner. Non-initiating individuals demonstrated other denial strategies, which involved the exaggeration of the extent to which the individual also wished to the end the relationship. The various denial tactics demonstrated by the breakup participants mirrors Kübler-Ross' description of denial in bereavement contexts. The participants in Doering's study were better able to accept the reality of the breakup, by denying various factors of the breakup which had potential to harm their self-image. Doering's study offers tentative evidence of a demonstration of denial in the context of relationship termination.

Anger

The anger phase is characterized by feelings of anger, rage, and resentment, which assists in binding the bereaved individual to the certainty of the death (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Expressions of anger relating to the context of romantic breakup were demonstrated in four of the primary studies (Field et al., 2013; McKiernan et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2015; Verhallen et al., 2019). In Field et al.'s study, the authors found that individuals who were experiencing breakups that

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resulted in high levels of distress scored high on scales measuring depression, anxiety, and anger. Feelings of anger were also noted in the low distress group but were not as prominent as the high distress group. McKiernan et al., who derived data from an online breakup forum found that anger was a common component of emotional distress following breakup. Themes of anger were frequently referred to in young adult's posts on the forum. The data from Morris et al.'s study revealed anger to be one of the most common responses to breakup for both men and women, alongside depression and insomnia. Verhallen et al.'s (2019) study also overtly referred to the occurrence of anger. The researchers referred to anger as one of the principal components of heartbreak, which was suggested to be accompanied by feelings of betrayal, and rejection. Anger, which is generally understood as an intense feeling of displeasure and dissatisfaction, is clearly articulated by both Kübler-Ross and the various listed researchers regarding both contexts of bereavement and romantic breakup.

Bargaining

Kübler-Ross' (1969) third stage of grief, bargaining, was demonstrated in the literature through findings by Dailey et al. (2012). Dailey et al.'s study focused on the phenomenon of on-again/off-again relationships. The trend of couples dating, breaking up, and cyclically repeating this routine is a behaviour commonly exhibited in romantic relationships. The authors found that in the context of romantic breakup, many partners found themselves negotiating and bargaining multiple aspects of the relationship. Factors that were being bargained about included questions relating to the type and amount of contact that ex-partners would have with each other following the breakup, as well as whether other potential boundaries were necessary. Sometimes bargaining occurred surrounding whether partners who have already broken up should remain

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friends or reconcile the romantic relationship. Another common demonstration of negotiation or bargaining occurred relating to couples that were unsure of whether they wanted to permanently breakup. In these instances, bargaining frequently took place in the form of “taking a break” in the relationship. This negotiation technique allowed partners time apart to assess whether they wanted to remain permanently broken up or resume the relationship. Similarly, some partners who were unsure of whether to fully re-engage in the romantic relationship with their former partner used negotiation strategies to establish a trial period for the relationship. Kübler-Ross’ bargaining stage was described as a desired postponement at death being granted. For partners in rocky romantic relationships, it is possible that the various bargaining strategies described by Dailey et al. serve a similar function; the postponement of the death of the relationship.

Depression

The fourth stage of Kübler-Ross’ (1969) five stages of grief model, depression, is the stage most often discussed in the literature on romantic breakup. Seven of the 10 primary resources which informed the current study demonstrated evidence of depression following instances of romantic breakup. Carter et al. (2019) found depression to be an outcome that was significantly associated with breakup, alongside numerous other negative (e.g., loss of self-esteem, insomnia, appetite loss) and positive (e.g., happiness, freedom, relief) outcomes. Likewise, participants in Crowder et al.’s (2021) study reported significant symptoms of depression following experiences of relationship dissolution. Field et al.’s (2013) study which divided participants in categories based on their level of distress following the breakup, found that depression was common in both the low distress group and the high distress group. However, participants who experienced more intense levels of distress demonstrated

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significantly higher scores on a measure of depression than the low distress participants.

McKiernan et al.'s (2018) study found that young adults posting messages on an online breakup forum frequently referred to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and depression which accompanied the experience of breakup. Morris et al.'s (2015) study revealed that depression was the second most common emotional response for women, after anger. Depression levels for men were also one of the most common emotional responses, though depression levels were equally as high as anger, both ranking as the primary male emotional response. O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) study which focused on the expression of yearning in situations of breakup also confirmed the presence of depression. The study demonstrated that yearning and depressive symptoms were correlated in various instances of loss, including bereavement, romantic breakup, and homesickness. Moreover, Verhallen et al.'s (2019) study determined that the participant group that had experienced romantic heartbreak had significantly higher levels of depression than the reference group (who had not recently experienced a breakup). The heartbreak group demonstrated higher scores based on the Major Depression Inventory, 26.8% of respondents scores reflecting depression symptoms ranging from mild to moderate and 14.1% of respondents scores reflecting depression symptoms ranging from moderate to severe.

Acceptance

The fifth and final stage of Kübler-Ross' (1969) grief model, acceptance, was highlighted in various themes and findings within five of the 10 primary articles. The acceptance phase, as described by Kübler-Ross, entails a process of coming to terms with the reality of the loss. Reaching the phase of acceptance does not imply that one will not have days or moments comprising distress. However, it involves processes of adjustment, stabilizing, and reengagement

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with life. Carter et al.'s (2019) revealed accounts of participants describing eagerness to move on with life, and expressing an awareness that there was no way the relationship could have continued. Though the author's research revealed the presence of negative emotions in post-breakup situations, it also confirmed numerous positive outcomes, such as relief, a sense of freedom, happiness, and reduced anxiety. Carter et al. described that having time to heal, participating in new dating experiences, and having support from loved ones were factors that allowed participants to accept the reality of the loss and the recovery process. Crowder et al.'s (2021) study illustrated the lived experiences of individuals navigating romantic heartbreak. The study revealed that through the pain of romantic heartbreak emerges changes, such as a redefinition of the self, priorities, and life. The authors discuss that following breakup, participants endured phases which were described as an evolution, shift, end, and productive rumination. The researchers argue that the progression through the various phases allowed participants to reach a point of renewal. Renewal was referred to as a state in which individuals were able to accurately appraise their former partners and the relationship which was shared with them. Through renewal, participants experienced a changing of life priorities, an enrichment of spirituality, as well as an enhanced appreciation for life. In Dailey et al.'s (2012) study, the expression of acceptance was demonstrated in multiple ways. The authors referred to processes of evaluation, where individuals who had recently experienced a breakup described accounts of recognizing that they deserved better and that they could no longer continue in the relationship. Evaluations were determined as means of rationalizing about the necessity of the breakup and as a productive method for coming to terms with the reality of it. Evaluation was explained as a cognitive process of making sense about the breakup, which either took place internally to move forward following the breakup or took place in a communicative and external manner with the

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partner prior to breaking up. Field et al.'s (2013) study demonstrated the existence of posttraumatic growth following experiences of romantic breakup. Posttraumatic growth was described as a new understanding derived from a traumatic experience, which allows an individual to live more meaningfully than prior to the incident. The authors found that both participants who exhibited low distress and those who exhibited high distress following a breakup both demonstrated notable levels of posttraumatic growth. In alignment with the expression of posttraumatic growth, participants demonstrated a degree of acceptance regarding the way the relationship turned out as well as the development of new interests. The theme of acceptance was also demonstrated in McKiernan et al.'s (2018) study. The study contains a section which describes a common theme that was derived from the researcher's online breakup-related forum, which was the act of coming to terms with the breakup. Young people who participated in the forum described accounts of learning a great deal from the experience. Participants commonly described the development of self-insights as well as developing a better understanding for others. These findings related to the notion of posttraumatic growth, as described by Field et al. McKiernan et al. revealed that young people frequently disclosed that having time was a significant factor in healing and adjusting to the breakup process. The results of the all five studies demonstrated significant parallels to the acceptance phase, as described by Kübler-Ross. Through the evidence provided by these authors, trends of awareness of the reality and necessity for the breakup, themes of adjustment to a life without the former partner, and themes of growth and self-development emerging as a result of the breakup are made apparent. Though not all five of the studies explicitly referred to these processes as acceptance, the themes directly align with Kübler-Ross' narrative of the acceptance phase.

Other Thematic Findings

In addition to the findings which address the presence of Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages within the literature, other significant themes which were derived from the studies relate to additional factors that have the potential to influence post-breakup. Moreover, numerous ties were made which directly express parallels between the experience of romantic breakup and the experience of mourning a loved one.

Role of Initiation

The role that the individual takes on pertaining to initiating the breakup (i.e., initiator, non-initiator) and the impact of said role on post-relationship functioning is a common theme that was addressed in four of the 10 primary studies. Carter et al. (2019) established that individuals who initiated the breakup were more likely to experience positive outcomes than those in the non-initiator role. Though the studies found that the initiators still experienced undesirable side effects, typically the number of positive outcomes outnumbered the number of negative ones. These included feelings of happiness, freedom, relief, and overall better adjustment. Morris et al.'s (2015) found that individuals who were broken up with were more likely to experience post-relationship grief than the initiating partner, or instances of mutual breakup. Despite these findings, Morris et al. affirm that post-relationship grief was moderately high for both initiating and non-initiating parties. O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) study sought to explore yearning in instances of loss. The authors demonstrated that breakup initiating individuals experienced the lowest level of yearning, non-initiating individuals experienced the highest level of yearning, and mutual breakups resulted in a middle level of yearning symptoms. The participants in O'Connor and Sussman's study reported that 37.5% of breakups were self

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initiated, 43.8% were initiated by the former partner, and 18.8% were mutually initiated. Other studies reported similar results (Carter et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2015; O'Connor and Sussman, 2014; Randelović and Goljović, 2020) in that both initiators and non-initiators reported distress. However, those who did not initiate the breakup consistently reported higher comparative levels of distress overall.

Gender Differences

The consideration of whether gender had the potential to affect a multitude of factors within the breakup process was examined by Morris et al. (2015) and Verhallen et al. (2019). Morris et al.'s findings revealed that of the most reported responses to breakup, in most instances there were significant differences based on the sex of the partner. The authors determined that emotional responses were more frequent than physical responses for both partners, but women revealed significantly higher scores in terms of both physical and emotional responses than men. The most commonly reported emotional responses included anger, anxiety, depression, emotional numbness, fear, a general loss of focus, and an inability to focus on work or school. It was demonstrated that women had more intense emotional responses involving anger, anxiety, depression, fear, and an inability to focus, while men had more intense responses involving emotional numbness and a general loss of focus. Relating to physical responses, women had more intense responses involving nausea and/or in the inability to eat, panic attacks, compromised immune system functioning, insomnia, and unwanted weight gain or loss. Men did not demonstrate greater physical responses to any of the assessed responses. Morris et al. revealed that women-initiated breakups more often than men, with the decision being reported as mutual approximately 24% of the time. Other findings from the study assessed the reasons for

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the breakup, with regards to sex differences in reporting. Both women and men frequently reported infidelity, distance, a lack of communication, actions of others, and non-listed reasons (other) as commonly occurring reasons for terminating the relationship. Women more frequently reported infidelity, lack of communication, and other as the cause; whereas men more frequently reported distance in the relationship and the actions of others. Verhallen et al.'s (2019) study affirms that while both men and women experience significant depression while enduring heartbreak, that there exist no notable gender differences in the intensity of depression. That said, the authors found that women experienced greater challenges with experiencing positive affect. Based on these findings, the authors affirm that men are not as likely to report or demonstrate difficulties with experiencing positive emotions during periods of stress as are women.

Attachment Style

Attachment style is an element which has been found to be influential pertaining to individual responses to breakup (Davis et al., 2003; Randelović and Goljović). Randelović and Goljović (2020) demonstrated that having an anxious attachment style was a significant predictor for breakup distress following the termination of a romantic relationship. Having higher levels of attachment anxiety resulted in more intense distress particularly in cases where the individual was the initiating partner. The researcher's study found that those with lower levels of attachment anxiety tended not to experience significant distress post-break, regardless of whether they initiated the breakup or not. Non-anxious attachment styles were correlated with calm and composed responses, with a greater ability to make sense of the breakup. The authors assessed that those who utilized avoidant coping mechanisms also experienced distress following breakup, but to a significantly lesser extent than those with anxious attachment styles.

Bereavement and Breakup Parallels

Various findings highlighted similarities between the experience of bereavement and enduring a romantic breakup. Four of the primary 10 articles explicitly highlighted this correlation in the findings, while several others did in a less overt fashion. A major emerging theme of Crowder et al.'s (2019) research related to participants describing the period of processing the breakup in a manner comparable to death. Interviews were comprised of participants describing romantic breakup as a landmark event in the grand scheme of life experiences, which had the ability to shape participants as individuals. The interviews revealed that breakup experiences consisted of a complexity of feelings, such as anguish and relief, in a manner that was described as similar to bereavement. Frequent themes of death were confirmed, as participants expressed that breakup felt like the death of hope and future aspirations, the death of a relationship, and the death of a person who they would no longer have in their lives. Participants reported the painful experiences of saying goodbye, feeling traumatized, and feeling depressed in a manner which was classified as akin to experiencing death. The fourth major theme of Crowder et al.'s study, which was rumination, also demonstrated themes linking to death. The authors found that participants' periods of rumination were sometimes characterized by personally developed metaphors, with allusions to death. One participant referred to breakup as similar to the death of winter, which brings the promise of spring and hope, while another, described it as similar to walking through fire and not dying. Findings from McKiernan et al.'s (2018) revealed that the Dual Processing Model (DPM), which was initially developed as a grief model for experiences of death, can effectively be applied to instances of romantic breakup. This finding is significant, as it demonstrates that grieving processes between the two phenomena are

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sufficiently similar that grief models which were initially death-focused have the ability to apply to instances of grief other than bereavement. O'Connor and Sussman's (2014) study highlighted parallels between death and romantic breakup through the development of the Yearning in Situations of Loss (YSL) scale. The authors identified that the emotional state of yearning was commonly demonstrated across three instances of loss (i.e., bereavement, breakup, homesickness), and validated the scale for measuring yearning in all instances. From the development of the YSL scale, the authors were able to establish the significance of yearning as a central component of complicated grief. Lastly, Verhallen et al.'s (2019) study referred to the significance of the sudden loss component of romantic heartbreak. It was found that more sudden instances of breakup related to higher depression scores for both women and men. The authors highlighted that these findings paralleled findings by Keyes et al. (2014), who demonstrated that more unexpected deaths of loved ones were correlated with psychiatric problems, such as clinical depression.

Clinical Applications

With the information provided from the current study, key take aways for clinicians include the idea that individuals may experience breakup in physical and psychological manners comparable to bereavement. When working with clients, the current study encourages clinicians to be aware and mindful of the potential for heightened feelings of anger and depression (among other complex emotional experiences). As such, therapeutic tools and modality geared towards these specific experiences may be found essential in treatment.

There are various ways in which the findings from this literature review may translate into a clinical setting. It should be noted that there currently are few established early

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intervention resources geared towards supporting individuals experiencing heartbreak as well as well-established clinical models to guide clinicians in treating these individuals (McKiernan et al., 2018; Price et al., 2016). The findings from this study highlight the seriousness of romantic heartbreak and breakup for young adults. The negative psychological and physical symptoms that follow and the fact that young people are especially vulnerable to complicated grief disorder speaks to the need for the development of evidence-based interventions (Onrust et al., 2007). The current study offers those interested in studying the processes involved in navigating romantic breakup a preliminary template outlining the natural process of healing from this form of grief in both clinical and non-clinical settings. Individuals seeking to gain insight pertaining to their breakup related grief may benefit from the availability of a preliminary template. Young adults are one of the most vulnerable populations to experiencing loneliness, with approximately half of those lonely young adults reporting transitions between life stages (e.g., relationship breakups) as the primary cause (Farghassemi & Joffe, 2022). Having a model available for young adults experiencing breakup that normalizes various phases of grief, may also contribute to lessening stigma surrounding the experiencing of negative psychological symptoms (e.g., anger and depression), and potentially lessen the perception of being alone in grief.

Understanding that grief as a result of romantic heartbreak has many parallels with bereavement in terms of emotional and physical outcomes provides a rationale for implementing evidence-based models that have traditionally been used for grief in the context of death. Numerous researchers, such as Crowder et al. (2021) and McKiernan et al. (2018) recommended the appropriateness of modalities traditionally geared towards death-related grieving for individuals experiencing heartbreak. Psychotherapy modalities that might be considered for

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clients presenting with disturbances in functioning as a result of romantic heartbreak include complicated grief therapy (CGT), which is a structured form of psychotherapy, developed to help promote a bereaving person's natural responses to loss (Wetherell, 2012). CGT is specifically designed for forms of complicated grief, which is known to ensue following breakup (Petersen, 2019). CGT is an attachment-based form of therapy, which integrates elements of cognitive behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy. It involves exposure therapy techniques while also emphasizing personal relations and goals. CGT is grounded in attachment processes, which is appropriate as complicated grief disorder is viewed as a form of attachment disorder (Lobb et al., 2010). CGT enables the individual to move through the initial acute grief as a result of a disruption in the attachment system, to integrated grief, which acknowledges the trauma of the loss while focusing on readjustment of life goals (Petersen, 2019). Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual processing model is involved in CGT, which achieves healing by moving through a loss-oriented approach, as well as a restoration-oriented approach. The loss-oriented approach involves coming to terms with the loss of attachment figure in the former relationship, while the restoration-oriented process involves establishing new meaning in life, in the absence of the ex-partner.

Petersen (2019) provides a break down of what an 11-to-16-session CGT treatment plan may look like for those coping with breakup. According to Petersen, in the first three sessions the clinician may spend time welcoming the client to therapy, and discussing the client's interpersonal relationship history, as well as other significant losses. Between sessions the client will begin recording upsetting moments in a grief diary, which will be discussed in the next session. An individual who is supportive to the client may be invited to join the session, in

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efforts to lessen the sensation of being disconnected from the world, which sufferers of complicated grief disorder often experience (Petersen, 2019). In sessions four and five, imaginal revisiting is introduced. The clinician will guide the therapist to visualize and describe the moment they realized they were breaking up with their partner, which is recorded on a tape recorder for approximately five minutes. The purpose of imaginal revisiting is to encourage the client to come to terms with the end of the relationship, by incorporating logic with the emotional processes of breakup. The client and therapist debrief concerning the emotions that are brought to surface. The client will listen to the recording once a week and will select a reward of their choosing in return for listening to the recording. The therapist will also introduce situational revisiting, which involves the client describing specific people and places which they may have begun avoiding as they trigger painful memories surrounding the former relationship. Sessions six to nine will involve continuing discussing the grief diary, as well as the imaginal and situational revisiting activities. These sessions may involve guided discussion about the ex-partner, where the client is asked to describe positive and negative memories and/or characteristics involving the former partner and relationship. Petersen notes that it may be useful for clients to bring in photos of the ex-partner for these sessions. In the 10th session, the therapist may utilize the Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG; Prigerson, et al., 1995). The ICG includes 19 statements, which can be answered ranging from 'never' to 'always'. Scores over 30 after the six month point from the breakup are indicative of CGD. The client and therapist will collaborate on what will be focused on in the remaining sessions. The final sessions will continue analyzing the client's grief diary and focusing on the situational revisiting exercises. The therapist may prompt the client to engage in imaginal conversation, where the client imagines that the breakup experience is occurring in the moment and speak for both them and their former partner. The

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client may engage in asking questions to their former partner through the imaginal conversation, which is often a powerful exercise (Petersen, 2019). Lastly, the therapist will work with the client to appropriately terminate therapy.

Another evidence-based modality which has shown to be effective for grief recovery includes cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT works to facilitate the acceptance of loss, diminish avoidance behaviours that enable grief reactions of a pathological nature, and adjust maladaptive grief cognitions (Rosner et al., 2018). Similarly, based on the well-supported findings that symptoms of anger and depression are particularly prominent following romantic breakup, the incorporation of modalities typically geared towards managing anger and depressive symptoms may be considered fundamental in the treatment of clients experiencing breakup. CBT is not only effective in dealing with grief but has also been assessed as effective for treating depression and anger (Beck, 2011; Beck & Fernandez, 1998). Clinicians may choose to utilize modalities such as CBT, which have been demonstrated as effective for the various presenting challenges associated with breakup (i.e., grief, anger, depression).

The literature has supported that individuals who adaptively move through the grieving processes often come to a point of acceptance, characterized by coming to terms with the events and a perceived sense of self-growth (Crowder et al., 2021; Dailey et al., 2012; Field et al., 2013). As such, clinicians may consider therapeutic modalities which incorporate themes of acceptance. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is centered on the fundamental principle that grief, pain, and discomfort are inevitable components of the human experience. One of the many goals of ACT is to support the client in facing painful feelings, experiences, and thoughts (Dindo et al., 2017). A modality such as ACT may offer benefits to individuals

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struggling with the many complex emotional experiences that are associated with breakup.

Knowing that acceptance tends to mark a milestone in the healing process for these individuals, a modality like ACT that highlights this end goal may work harmoniously with the natural progression of healing.

Limitations

This review identified a number of gaps and limitations on the topic of young adult romantic breakup. Primary factors that were assessed relates to limitations associated with collecting data regarding the experience retrospectively. Moreover, there was a common pattern of a failure to control for significant variables such as the duration of the reported relationship and the time that had past since the breakup. This resulted in a large variation in participant reporting with some individuals reporting on relationships that were only a couple months long and others reporting on relationships that were over 20 years long. This same pattern occurred in the context of time that had passed since the breakup. These limitations raised significant questions regarding the validity of the results. Additionally, a reoccurring limitation presented relating to a significant percentage of the studies having a disproportionate female to male participant ratio, which also causes challenges for validity and generalizability.

The current study was informed by researchers and participants primarily in North America and other Western regions of the world. As such, the data collected from this study is most appropriate when considering a Western population. Future research should focus on exploring breakup related grief in diverse cultures, as the cultural variable has the potential to play a significant role in outcomes and behaviours. As many of the limitations of this review are

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integrated with the fact that data was collected retrospectively, future research should consider a longitudinal research design. This would allow for better control over numerous variables.

Recommendations

A primary recommendation for future research which was underscored by multiple researchers is the necessity for longitudinal research exploring romantic breakup. Carter et al. (2019), Dailey et al. (2012), and Verhallen et al. (2019) all emphasized the need for longitudinal research as a means of capturing the full emotional transition from healthy functioning, to grieving, and the healing transition back to regular functioning. Though the retrospective nature of the available research was able to provide an abundance of data, questions relating to the validity of research due to potential lapses in memory recall would be circumvented. Moreover, collecting data while participants are in the midst of experiencing outcomes from the breakup would potentially allow interviewers and data collectors to acquire data that would not otherwise be available after the participant is no longer grieving. A benefit of a longitudinal design, as discussed by Carter et al., is that researchers may have access to data that would provide insight regarding what factors were most associated with positive or negative outcomes following the experience. A final benefit of a longitudinal design was emphasized by Dailey et al., who highlighted that this would possibly allow for responses from both partners and offer a dyadic narrative to the data. Dailey et al. suggested that this could be achieved by interviewing former partners individually at multiple points throughout the process of breaking up. Exploring the full emotional transition of breakup, factors relating to outcomes following breakup, and a multifaceted narrative of the breakup are all considerations that could be made possible in future research with a longitudinal design.

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A noteworthy limitation which was highlighted was the failure for certain variables to be accounted for, such as the length of the reported relationship, as well as the time that has passed since the breakup. Future research would profit from accounting for these variables through measures such as more specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The use of longitudinal research designs may also be beneficial for managing the control of these variables.

Furthermore, a significant limitation and pattern which was noted was the over-concentration of female participants in the majority of the literature. Future research would benefit from implementing data sampling methods that would acquire a more natural representation of the larger young adult population. Specifically, ensuring that the selected samples have a gender composition closer to the gender makeup of the general population. First, the fact that the available data is skewed towards female results is problematic for the generalizability of the data. Moreover, it reinforces societal patterns which may interfere with the ability of men to feel comfortable reporting emotional difficulties during times of stress by under-representing men in the data (Verhallen et al., 2019). On a similar note, future research may choose to focus on expanding sampling beyond university campuses in order to achieve better generalizability. Future researchers may benefit from exploring participant recruitment from environments beyond academic setting, such as community recreation centers.

Further research would benefit from conducting similar studies with researchers and participants from diverse cultures. Though the saturation of breakup related literature from a Western lens benefits the generalizability of the results when considering a North American larger population, it leaves much to be known regarding the potential influence of culture on one's responses and outcomes following romantic breakup.

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Lastly, bearing in mind the evidence from the current study which demonstrates notable parallels between Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages of grief theory and the emotional outcomes individuals experience following breakup, future research should focus on exploring the applicability of other grief theories in the context of breakup. Doing so may help to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the processes that follow breakup, and a more complete awareness of treatment options.

As discussed in the Methodological Limitations section, more than half of researchers utilized a non-probability convenience sampling method, which is associated with threats of selection bias (Andrade, 2021). A more diverse method of data sampling methods by researchers in this field would lessen the potential problems that accompany this technique. Random sampling methods (i.e., simple, systematic, stratified, cluster) have been cited as more reliable methods of obtaining data from the target population (Sharma, 2017). Stratified sampling was also highlighted and discussed as a beneficial option for reducing the possibility of human bias, increasing generalizability, and consequently external validity. A heavier future reliance on the aforementioned sampling methods is recommended in future research for these reasons.

Future researchers should ensure that sampling methods that are employed are appropriately discussed in their methods sections of their researcher. The non-disclosure of significant components of research methodology, as exemplified by Doering's (2010) failure to disclose sampling methods puts into question the validity and reliability of the research.

The topic of sample sizes in qualitative studies is one that has garnered attention in the context of academic writing. Dworkin (2012) speaks to questions that have been raised in terms of producing a rigorous Methods section; specifically, ensuring an adequate sample size for

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qualitative works and achieving saturation. Some academic journals such as the Archives of Sexual Behavior, have established policies to provide clarity to authors regarding the matter of adequate sample sizes for qualitative studies utilizing interview data collection procedures. The policy of this journal recommends that for these types of studies, a sample of 25 to 30 participants is the minimum size necessary in order to reach redundancy and saturation. Authors such as Crowder et al. (2021) and Doering (2010) who both utilized less than 10 participants for data collection, should consider adhering to recommendations such as those put forth by the Archives of Sexual Behavior. Adding more participants to samples such as these may assist in ensuring that relevant data is not being missed due to the selection of participants.

Conclusions

This review has explored the literature relating to the romantic breakup experiences of young adult individuals, and the extent to which Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages theory is applicable in these instances. The literature was assessed for evidence of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance in the experiences following breakup. In assessing the main findings from the studies for the current review, there is evidence for the experiences of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, as discussed in Kübler-Ross' (1969) grief model. Of the five stages, three (i.e., anger, depression, acceptance) are well supported in the primary studies, while two (i.e., denial, bargaining) are not widely supported by multiple studies, though are still evidenced in single studies. The review identified various key themes pertaining to the presentation of the five stages, as well as the overall progression of the breakup. The most commonly supported theme among the five stages that was found to present in instances of romantic breakup is depression. Most of the available literature relating to romantic breakup

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highlights the commonality of depression resulting from the experience. Kübler-Ross' final stage, acceptance, was also a prominent theme in the literature. Numerous authors referred to the process of coming to terms with the reality of the of the previous relationship, in a manner that bolstered confidence in the decision, as well as personal growth (Dailey et al., 2012; Field et al., 2013; McKiernan et al., 2018). Of the five stages, anger, depression, and acceptance were most well supported among the literature. Though themes of denial and bargaining were noted, these emotional experiences appear to occur to a lesser extent than the aforementioned stages. In the context of romantic breakup, many of the emotional experiences appear to occur concurrently, rather than as distinct feelings which occur independently from the others. Kübler-Ross' theory suggests that the stages are non-linear, and that not every stage is experienced by every person. Taking this information into account, it is possible to understand the apparent concurrent nature of the emotional experiences as a non-linear expression of the stages. On the contrary, these findings could be interpreted as evidence that denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance do not present as stages following breakup, but more so as fluid emotional experiences that have the ability to co-exist.

This review highlighted a number of additional themes that appeared as significant factors in the experience of romantic breakup. It was found that the role of initiation had a notable impact on outcomes following breakup. Most of the literature that explored this theme concluded that while both parties tended to experience some degree of distress after the breakup, that non-initiators tended to be worse off in terms of distress and ability to function (Carter et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2015; O'Connor & Sussman, 2014; Randelović and Goljović, 2020). The exploration of gender differences was found to be a common theme that was addressed by the

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various authors. Though there were some mixed findings relating to gender, a common consensus was that regardless of gender, both men and women are significantly impacted by romantic breakup. There are numerous studies discussing the role of attachment in outcomes following a breakup. Overall, evidence supports that having an anxious attachment style is a key factor in outcomes characterized by intense levels of distress (Randelović & Goljović, 2020). Many parallels have been drawn between the experience of breakup and bereavement, and this theme was directly discussed numerous times. Crowder et al. (2021) highlighted this phenomenon, describing the end of a dating relationship as a landmark of event like death, characterized by anguish, pain, and sometimes even relief. Verhallen et al. (2019) spoke to the sudden loss component of loss via both breakup and death and highlighted its significance positive influence on the likelihood of psychiatric problems like complicated grief, and clinical depression.

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