Towards the Development of a Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Relationship Dissolution Distress

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at

the University of Leicester

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Year of submission: 2014

Declaration

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Leicester. It is based on work carried out by David Beecraft between September 2011 and May 2014. The work in the thesis is the author's original work unless otherwise acknowledge in the text or references. This work has not been submitted as part of any other academic fulfilment.

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Abstract

There is a large body of research demonstrating that the dissolution of a romantic relationship remains a prospective risk factor for the development of a variety of emotional and clinical problems. Nevertheless, research into the factors that contribute to the variance in distress experienced between individuals has been relatively overlooked in terms of systematic enquiry. A literature review was therefore carried out with a view of understanding further those variables most salient in accounting for individual difference reactions following relationship dissolution. 21 studies examining correlates of relationship dissolution distress were reviewed. Results suggested that a range of variables significantly influence the distress experienced following loss including attachment orientation, personality characteristics, cognitive-behavioural variables and relationship-specific factors.

However, it has not yet been examined how such variables may systematically be related and an empirically validated model of relationship dissolution distress has not yet been be proposed within the clinical literature. Twenty-seven participants reporting difficulties adjusting following the dissolution of a relationship were therefore interviewed about their experiences and completed self-report measures pertaining to attachment style and personality characteristics. The aim of the research was to assess for commonality of themes and contribute to the development of a theoretical model of relationship attachment, similar to those available in the research for other emotional disorders.

Research objectives were met. Consistency of themes across individuals led to the proposal of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress. The model is both theoretically and clinically derived and incorporates a number of factors hypothesised to exacerbate and maintain distress over time. The findings have useful clinical implications and point to promising targets of cognitive and behavioural intervention. A critical appraisal contextualises the researcher's motives for wishing to investigate this particular area and provides a reflective account of the antecedents of this research, borne out of 'bottom up' clinical practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Sarah Marchant for her enthusiastic and helpful discussions during the early stages of researching this area. Also to each of the clients I worked with prior to embarking on the DClin Psych course presenting with relationship dissolution problems. You provoked my interest and prompted my decision to formally research this area. This work would not have been possible without you. Thank you.

I would sincerely like to thank all the participants who agreed to take part in this research project and share their experiences for the greater good of research.

Particular thanks to Steve Allan for his academic help and support throughout the duration of this research project.

Word Counts

Literature Review...7055

Research Report...12,195

Critical Appraisal..4790

Total word count for non-mandatory Appendices...4217

Total word count for Thesis...28,253

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Part 1: Literature Review

The correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment: Why do some individuals experience a greater amount of grief and a prolonged duration of psychological distress when a relationship fails?

Date of submission: May 2014

Abstract

Introduction

There is wealth of evidence indicating that the dissolution of a romantic relationship remains a prospective risk factor for the onset of a variety of mental health conditions. However, an examination of the variables that contribute to the distress experienced following a relationship loss remains relatively overlooked in terms of scientific enquiry. This review therefore aimed to examine the research literature pertaining to the correlates of relationship dissolution distress in order to isolate those variables most salient in accounting for distress reactions. In particular, a key objective was to understand further those factors accounting for unique variance between individuals so that some key clinical implications may emerge.

Method

An initial scoping search of the literature was carried out utilizing four main databases. Combinations of search terms were applied pertaining to relationship dissolution. Following the application of inclusion criteria, 21 studies were identified as suitable for review, each examining individual correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment.

Results

The results suggested that a range of variables significantly influence the distress experienced following the dissolution of a relationship. In particular, cognitive and behavioural mechanisms, personality variables, attachment orientation and relationship-specific factors may all be important contributory factors to the variance in distress experienced by individuals following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

Conclusions

Methodological features of the selected studies temper the degree to which the results can be generalized to other populations and the degree to which causal associations can be made with certainty. Nevertheless the results have significant implications in helping clinicians identify those variables most salient in accounting for distress reactions and those individuals most vulnerable to relationship dissolution distress. Furthermore, findings point to promising targets of therapeutic intervention.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The breakup of a romantic relationship constitutes one of the most painful human experiences of loss. Self help books and web sites offering advice on coping with relationship dissolution are abundant within popular culture and indeed at the time of writing, the wikiHow (2014) page "How to get over a breakup", had been read 6,511,379 times. From a clinical perspective, there is body of research consistently demonstrating that the dissolution of a close relationship remains one of the most distressing life events and a prospective risk factor for the development of a variety of emotional and clinical problems (Kendler, Hettema, Butera, Gardner & Prescott, 2003; Sprehcer, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr & Vanni, 1998). Indeed, relationship dissolution is proven to be one of the strongest predictors of first onset of Major Depressive Disorder in young adults and adolescents (Monroe, Rohde, Seely, & Lewinsohn, 1999; Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels & Meeus, 2003).

However, not everyone develops emotional difficulties following the breakdown of a romantic relationship. Indeed, individuals vary considerably in the intensity of their responses to a breakup. Often the dissolution of a romantic relationship causes no lasting "heartache" and recovery is relatively painless (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). In some cases, relationship breakups can even promote perceptions of personal growth and positive psychological change (Helgeson, 1994; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Nevertheless, some individuals report significant difficulties adjusting following the dissolution of a relationship and experience ongoing feelings of depression and despair, resulting in a persistent preoccupation with the lost relationship (Emery, 1994; Kitson, 1982).

Given the variance in distress reactions, an important consideration relates to why some individuals are prone to encountering difficulties when a relationship fails. More specifically, why particular individuals 'bounce back' relatively quickly whereas others experience a greater amount of grief and prolonged duration of psychological distress. In addressing these issues, consideration should be given to the factors that account for relationship dissolution distress, and more specifically, to the variables known to

account for individual difference reactions. Understanding why particular individuals seem more vulnerable to others in the aftermath of a relationship breakup and isolating those variables associated with their distress has important clinical implications and thus forms the focus of this review.

1.2 Current empirical review

An examination of the factors that collectively contribute to relationship dissolution distress remains relatively overlooked in terms of systematic enquiry. This seems somewhat paradoxical given the unequivocal association with poor health outcomes. Indeed, compared to other significant life events romantic relationships remain relatively under-investigated within the research literature (see Hunt and Chung, 2012). In particular, the dissolution of an early dating relationship has traditionally been regarded as inconsequential compared to other loss experiences such as grief or divorce with much of the existing literature traditionally focusing on recovery processes following a martial separation (e.g. Kitson, 1982; Riessman & Gerstel, 1985; Wang and Amato, 2000). Brehm (1987) has suggested that romantic relationships are "invisible" compared to marriages as they do not involve the same documentation and social recognition. Due to such 'invisibility' within a societal context, the distress caused by the breakup of a dating relationship is often disenfranchised and not well understood (see Kaczmarek and Backlund, 1991).

Nevertheless, the breakup of a romantic relationship can be as distressing, if not more so, as the breakup of a marriage (Orbuch, 1992). Indeed, non-marital romantic breakups are frequently cited among life's most distressing events (e.g. Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Kendler *et al.,* 2003) while relationship breakup issues remain among the most common presenting concerns within counselling settings (Benton *et al.,* 2003; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011). However, there is only one current attempt to aggregate the findings looking at the correlates of relationship distress within the published literature (Hunt & Chung, 2012). Given the frequency of non-marital relationship dissolution along with the potential severity of emotional difficulties following relationship loss, research into the factors associated with distress and maladjustment represents an important empirical and clinical endeavour. As such, the aim of this review is to

address a significant gap within the literature by systematically examining the variables known to contribute to the distress one experiences following the breakdown of a romantic relationship. It is hoped that upon review some of the factors that account for unique variance between individuals will emerge which have important clinical implications and point to promising targets of intervention.

1.3 Theoretical considerations

A number of theories have been proposed to account for why individuals experience distress and difficulties adjusting following a relationship dissolution. For example, interdependence theory suggests that the more interdependent people are with their partners, the more susceptible they are to distress due to the disruption of routine interaction patterns, plans and goals brought about by the dissolution (Berschield, 1983). Similarly, Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model of relationships suggests that factors that contribute to relationship commitment such as the extent to which resources have been invested into a relationship predicts the intensity and duration of distress following relationship dissolution. Moreover, in a seminal early study, Simpson (1987) found that specific relationship variables including the closeness of the relationship, relationship duration, and the perceived ease of finding an alternative partner independently predicted the intensity and duration of emotional distress following relationship dissolution.

1.4 Personality and Cognitive theories

In addition, it has been suggested that personality and cognitive variables may play an important role in contributing to emotional difficulties post-breakup. For example, research has considered whether personality factors such as neuroticism and low self-esteem are associated with relationship dissolution distress. Indeed studies have shown that individuals with high self-esteem tend to experience less stressful relationship dissolution and better adjustment compared to those with low self-esteem (Frazier & Cook, 1993). Furthermore, researchers have postulated that cognitive processes, such as negative thoughts and ruminative processes may be central to impeding recovery following relationship loss as demonstrated in other established cognitive models of

emotional problems for loss and trauma (Ehlers & Clark, 2000; Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Dalgleish, 2004). Indeed, evidence from bereavement research indicates that individuals who ruminate more on their loss and dwell on negative thoughts and feelings experience more distress reactions than those who do not ruminate excessively (Nolen-Hoeksema, McBridge & Larson, 1997).

1.5 Adult Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, a perspective from developmental psychology, may also provide insights into understanding why breakups are harder for some people than others. Indeed, the extension of attachment theory to understanding adult relationships is one which has generated a large body of literature and may account for why some individuals may be prone to experiencing more distress when a relationship fails. While originally formulated to explain the function of parent-child relationships (e.g. Bowlby, 1969, 1980), attachment theory has provided researchers with a rich way of understanding the psychology of adult relationships.

Research has found that compared to those with secure attachment styles, individuals with insecure attachment orientations experience greater difficulties following the breakup of a romantic relationship, often vulnerable to ongoing feelings of distress and experiencing poor recovery and adjustment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Sprehcer *et al.*, 1998). More specifically, anxiously attached individuals have a difficult time disconnecting emotionally from ex-partners following a dissolution, often getting stuck in a dysfunctional pattern of prolonged longing for the former relationship (Pistole, 1995; Sbarra & Emery, 2005). In addition, anxious individuals are more likely to display maladaptive coping behaviours following breakups such as engaging in unwanted pursuit behaviours including stalking of the former partner (Davis, Ace & Andra, 2000).

1.6 Previous reviews in this area

Although there is a body of research examining the correlates of relationship dissolution distress as variables in isolation, there have been very few attempts to systematically

review the variables associated with relationship dissolution distress collectively. Hunt and Chung (2012) recently reviewed the available literature around relationship dissolution distress in order to gain a better understanding of the factors accounting for variance between individuals, however their findings were presented more generally as part of a book chapter (see Paludi, 2012) and not in a structured format in keeping with a systematic literature review published in a peer reviewed journal. For example, the review did not contain a structured method, results or discussion section as consistent with a formal academic paper. These drawbacks in combination suggested that a formal review of the literature in this area was warranted.

1.7 Rationale and aims for review

The aim of this review therefore will be to address a significant gap within the research literature by examining the available studies pertaining to the correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment. In particular, the objective is to identify those variables significant in contributing to emotional problems following relationship loss and understand further the factors most salient in accounting for individual difference reactions.

The focus will be on the research pertaining to personality factors, attachment style, relationship-specific characteristics and cognitive and behavioural processes involved in post relationship distress and maladjustment. These variables have not been selected arbitrarily but instead reflect the most commonly researched areas within peer reviewed studies. It is anticipated that upon review a clearer picture of the relevant correlates of relationship dissolution distress will emerge along with a theoretical understanding of why some individuals seem more vulnerable to maladjustment than others. Identifying key correlates of distress may help preventatively identify those individuals most vulnerable to emotional difficulties and point to promising targets of therapeutic intervention.

1.8 Generalisability issues

Within the context of this review, a romantic relationship relates to any non-martial, consensual dating relationship between two adults, encompassing relationships of varying ages, lengths and levels of intimacy. This can refer to both heterosexual relationships and same-sex relationships, although precludes martial relationships, dealt separately within the research literature (see Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kitson & Holmes, 1992; Schneller & Arditti, 2004; Wang & Amato, 2000).

The objective of the current review is to examine the correlates of relationship dissolution distress pertaining to non-martial romantic relationships generally, and not to focus on the findings exclusive to any particular group. However, it is important to note that a significant proportion of studies within this area are carried out within the social psychology domain, making use of undergraduate populations. It therefore remains a facet of the literature in this area that studies tend to sample younger groups. Whilst a useful sample to investigate given the prevalence of breakup events amongst younger individuals (e.g. Field *et al.,* 2009; Sprecher & Fehr, 1998), the current review would ideally wish to investigate the variables associated with relationship dissolution distress as they apply to relationships more generally. Consideration will be given to how such issues affect the generalisability of the findings and the conclusions that can be drawn pertaining to other non-martial romantic relationship breakups.

2. Method

2.1 Search strategy

A systematic review of the literature pertaining to relationship dissolution was conducted using four main electronic databases (PsychInfo, Medline, Web of Science and Scopus). The rationale for utilising these databases was to gain comprehensive coverage of the psychological literature and related disciplines including medicine and psychiatry. In addition, both Google Scholar and the University of Leicester online Library search engine were also searched for relevant articles of interest. Further articles were sought by searching the reference lists of published articles and by emailing a number of reputable authors in the area of relationship dissolution. Scoping searches were helpful in gauging the breadth of the available literature within the area and in identifying any previous reviews.

2.2 Development of search terms

An initial search of the databases included all types of publications and years published. Databases were searched using a combination of search terms. Search terms were not chosen arbitrarily but instead reflected the most common cited 'keywords' in the article summary pages throughout each database. On the basis of identified keywords, a search protocol was developed where the same search items and sequences were applied to each database in the same order (see Appendix A). Search sequences covered all terminology relating to relationship dissolution. For example, keywords selected for searches included terms such as *relationship dissolution*, *relationship breakup* and *relationship preoccupation*. No truncation was applied and all search terms were applied in full.

2.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Papers selected for inclusion related to empirical studies examining the correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladaptive adjustment. Studies were included if they were quantitative studies using a measurable outcome of post-relationship distress. Participants in the studies were adults who had experienced a relationship breakup near

to the time of study. Papers were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles reflecting studies published within the last 12 years. Articles published prior to 2000 were deemed unsuitable for inclusion. This was to ensure that the most recent literature was examined and to safeguard against repetition with older literature. Indeed, research within the area of relationship dissolution distress remains a relatively recent area of investigation, with most articles of interest accumulating within the last decade. As such, selecting a cut off point around the year 2000 adequately captured the relevant articles of interest. Only one slightly older study, Robak & Weitzman (1998), was included given its direct relevance to the area.

2.4 Identification of relevant papers

Search terms were applied within the aforementioned databases between July and August 2013. The combination of search terms produced an abundance of articles. Indeed, a total of 7289 titles were yielded from database searches, including duplicates. Three articles were further sourced from author contacts and by searching the reference lists of published articles, contributing to 7292 articles in total.

All titles and abstracts were then screened for relevance. Indeed, a systematic visual search of all titles was carried out in order to ensure that no article relevant to the area was overlooked or excluded. Most articles were transparently not relevant to the area of interest as ascertained from screening the article title and on some occasions, abstracts. For example, the term *Heart Break* often produced results from the medical literature pertaining to cardiology and heart research while '*relationship dissolution*' often produced results whereby the term *dissolution* featured somewhere either in the title or abstract but had no relevance to the area of relationship dissolution distress. As such, irrelevant articles of this nature were not selected for further screening and database results pages could be pursued with relative ease.

Only articles pertinent to the area of relationship dissolution were screened more fully by examining titles, abstracts and introductions. For potentially relevant studies, full articles were obtained and inspected further and inclusion criteria were applied. From this process, a total of 7199 articles were excluded during the title and abstract

screening stage. 93 articles deemed relevant to the area of relationship dissolution were fully retrieved and selected for further examination, however 17 were subsequently removed as they were either dissertation abstracts or book chapters. The remaining 76 articles were further examined to develop a better understanding of the research literature in this area.

2.5 Short listing

Following database searches, full texts were retrieved and read more thoroughly. Only articles relating to the correlates of post relationship distress were included. Articles not considering factors relating to relationship dissolution distress were excluded. For example, articles relating to some other aspect of relationship dissolution such as recovery processes, dysfunctional post-relationship behaviours or distress characteristics were removed. From the initial 76 articles, 55 were removed in accordance with the set criteria (Appendix B) leaving 21 articles in total. Figure 1 outlines the short listing process.

2.6 Quality assessment

Two quality assessment tools were used to assess the methodological quality of shortlisted studies. The Joanna Briggs Institute Critical Appraisal Checklist for Descriptive/Case series studies (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2008) was used to provide an evaluation of the overall quality of the included studies. The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) was also used as a quality assessment tool to assess the methodological quality of shortlisted descriptive studies.   The Joanna Briggs Appraisal Checklists consists of nine judgements about selection, samples, confounding factors, outcomes and data analysis (Appendix C) whilst the STROBE recommendations consist of a checklist of 22 items pertaining to the studies' background and rationale, methodology, results and discussion in order to facilitate critical appraisal and interpretation of results (Appendix D). These tools were selected given their appropriateness to guide the appraisal of studies employing a variety of different designs. Indeed, the shortlisted articles for review tended to be a

combination of descriptive studies, using cross-sectional design features and longitudinal methodology.

2.7 Appraisal process

The aforementioned appraisal tools were integrated and utilized into a single scoring system to ensure applicability to the design of each study. From each tool a number of quality criteria were identified and a total of 23 criteria were devised to form the scoring system. Criteria forming the scoring system correlated with the items found throughout both quality appraisal tools. All 21 selected papers were then appraised in relation to each, considering their reported methodological features. In particular, studies were rated numerically against the 23 criteria, providing an overall judgement of quality. Scoring pertained to a 2 point rating scale for each item on the checklist (where 0 = not at all reported on/poorly addressed; 1=some elements reported on/Adequately addressed; 2 = fully reported in detail/ well covered).

Overall scores reflected quality of reporting, validity features and other methodological criteria. The higher the overall score, the better the methodological quality of the study, with a maximum achievable score of 46. The results of the quality assessments were used for descriptive purposes to provide an evaluation of the overall quality of the included studies. Appendix E shows the quality appraisal rating for each paper. It should be emphasised that this appraisal tool was used to assign quality rating based on the reporting of methodological features as described within the articles, not to the overall quality of the research itself.

2.8 Data synthesis and appraisal

A systematic review of the remaining 21 articles was carried out using a data extraction form (Appendix F). Each article was examined for its methodology, sampling methods, outcome measures, reliability and validity of results and clinical implications. The quality of included studies was variable and methodological limitations are given coverage in the discussion section. Articles were also appraised in terms of their general stylistic features. A narrative description of the studies was produced covering

summary of the study design, methodology, key findings and methodological limitations. A meta-analysis was not conducted given the heterogeneity of assessment measures and design features used.

Figure 1. Short listing flow diagram

Search Engines utilised →

PsychInfo, Medline, Web of Science and Scopus: Combination of search times applied (including duplicates: 7292)

Further articles sourced (N=3) by researching reference lists of published articles and contacting reputable authors in the area

Titles and abstracts screened for relevance N= 7292

Excluded: 7199 records not relevant to area

Excluded:
• Book chapters: 2
• Dissertation abstracts: 15

Full text screened
N=76

Full papers excluded:

-Papers not pertaining to relationship
 Dissolution: **10**

-Studies not examining correlates of relationship breakup distress: **21**

- Papers pre 2000: **8**

- Studies focusing on relationship dissolution and unwanted pursuit behaviours: **6**

-Methodology issues: **4**

- Repetition:**1**

- Did not relate to correlates chosen for review: **4**

- Paper unavailable: **1**

Studies included in review (**N = 21**)

Attachment variables: N = 6

Cognitive/Behavioural variables: N = 5

Relationship variables: N = 5

Intra-personal variables: N = 6

3. Results

3.1 Summary of Review Studies

21 studies were deemed appropriate to include for review following the application of exclusion/inclusion criteria. All studies examined the correlates of post-relationship breakup distress using quantitative methodology. Of these studies, 16 shared similar design features using non-experimental, cross-sectional designs. Remaining studies used a combination of prospective, experimental and within subjects design features. The results section has been structured according to the type of correlate, namely cognitive behavioural mechanisms, attachment orientation, relationship-specific variables and personality factors. Ideally, further studies considering other variables and making use of differing methodology would have been selected, however the selected articles represent the available empirical literature on the correlates of relationship distress and all suffer from similar methodological limitations which will be documented accordingly.

3.2 Summary of quality appraisal

Appendix E shows the results of the quality appraisal procedure. Some elements of quality remained consistent across all papers. For example, each of the reviewed articles provided a clear scientific background and rationale for the study, contextualising the research within a theoretical and empirical context. Moreover, each study explicitly described their aims and research objectives which were clearly linked to the results in the discussion. Method and design were clearly described across all papers.

For other aspects of quality, there was some variability between articles. For example, sample size was generally variable across studies whilst the tendency to construct a representative sample was generally poor. Whilst the majority of studies used validated outcome measures, some studies did not make reference to levels of reliability and validity for the measures used (Chung *et al.,* 2002; Locker *et al.,* 2010). Statistical results were clearly reported across the majority of studies with all authors reporting significance levels/confidence intervals for results. However, only six studies reported

on effect sizes or made any consideration of whether they had sufficient power to detect effects (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009; Boelen & van den Hout, 2010; Fagundas, 2012; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Locker *et al.,* 2010; Rhodes *et al.,* 2011). All studies provided a summary of the key findings whilst adequate coverage was given to whether the research had addressed the established research question or hypotheses.

Limitations were generally well discussed, with only one paper not making explicit reference to reliability and validity issues (Robak & Weitzman, 1998). Most other studies gave some coverage to issues pertaining to internal and external validity. However, seven of the selected studies made explicitly made no particularly reference to the generalisability of the findings, despite using student samples (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010; Chung *et al.,* 2002; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Park *et al.,* 2011; Robak & Weitzman, 1998; Slotter *et al.,* 2010). Finally, coverage to alternative explanations for findings and suggestions for future research was mixed. For example, three studies made no reference to future research suggestion in light of the findings (Chung *et al.,* 2002; Robak & Weitzman,1998; Sbarra, 2006).

3.3 Cognitive & Behavioural Mechanisms

Five studies examined the role of cognitive and behavioural variables as correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment. For example, Boelen and Reijntes (2009) sought to examine the role of negative cognitions as a contributory factor to post relationship distress. The authors postulated that cognitive processes would be central to recovery following relationship loss as demonstrated in other established cognitive models of emotional problems, particularly for loss and trauma (Brewin & Holmes, 2003; Ehlers & Clark, 2000). Likewise, Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007) investigated how a persistent cognitive focus on a dissolved relationship may be associated with maladjustment in individuals who recently experienced relationship dissolution. The authors pointed to research within the bereavement literature indicating that individuals who ruminate on negative thoughts and feelings of loss experience more distress than those who do not ruminate excessively (e.g. Noelen-Hoeksema, McBride & Larson, 1997).

Fagundes (2011) examined individual's cognitive representations of their ex-partners following a breakup, and how much these representations were associated with subsequent emotional adjustment. In particular, the author hypothesised that the more the individual evaluates the lost relationship as negative and unwanted, the more psychological adjustment they are likely to experience as defined by lower levels of depressive affect.

Focusing on behavioural correlates of distress, Mason, Sbarra, Bryan and Lee (2012) considered whether continued contact with a former partner, including ongoing sexual contact and the degree to which one continues to long for an ex-partner, is associated with poor psychological adjustment following a relationship dissolution. Similarly, Marshall (2012) examined whether ongoing internet surveillance, particularly checking of a former partner's Facebook profile was particularly associated with breakup-related distress, negative feelings and ongoing desire for the ex-partner.

Methodology

Three of the reviewed studies used similar methodology (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007; Marshal, 2012). Each were non experimental, cross sectional design studies based on samples of undergraduate students (N=79; N=231; N=464). Students who had experienced a recent breakup were required to complete several self-report outcome measures at a single time point. Measures captured post relationship distress or adjustment in addition to the cognitive and behavioural processes of interest (see Table 1, Appendix G).

Mason *et al.* (2012) also made use of cross-sectional design methodology but instead recruited adults participants (N=137) who had experienced a recent maritial separation. Finally, Fagundas (2011) employed a priming methodology to assess implicit negative evaluations about one's former partner. Two groups of undergraduate students (N=65 & N= 68) were recruited to take part in a lexical priming task to investigate whether those who show negative evaluations of a former partner immediately after a breakup show superior post-breakup adjustment.

Findings

Results indicated that cognitive and behavioural mechanisms are important predictive variables involved in emotional adjustment following the dissolution of a relationship. Indeed, Boelen and Reijntes (2009) found that negative cognitions, as measured by the Grief Cognitions Questionnaire (GCQ; Boelen & Lensvelt-Mulders, 2005), were associated with complicated grief reactions, anxiety and depression. Furthermore, consistent with studies on loss and trauma (e.g. Boelen, van den Bout, & van den Hout, 2003), catastrophic misinterpretations about one's own reactions following the breakup were among the strongest cognitive correlates of distress. Negative beliefs about the self were also key correlates of grief whilst cognitions around self-blame emerged as key correlates of anxiety and depression.

Fagundas (2011) found that those who showed more negative evaluations of their former partner immediately after a breakup had better post breakup emotional adjustment as measured by less depressive affect. Likewise Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007) demonstrated that those who ruminated more around the lost relationship reported more negative adjustment after breakup compared to those who reported less rumination. In particular, those who were more pre-occupied and regretful about the lost relationship reported more maladjustment.

Marshal (2012) demonstrated that frequent monitoring of an ex-partner's Facebook page was associated with greater levels of distress, longing for the ex-partner and lower personal growth, suggesting that continued on-line exposure to a former romantic partner may inhibit post breakup recovery. Similarly, Mason *et al.* (2012) found that among individuals reporting less acceptance of the separation, having continued contact with the former partner significantly predicted poorer psychological adjustment relative to those reporting more separation acceptance.

Methodological Issues

Generalisation of the findings should be done with caution. Indeed inclusion criteria didn't make for representative samples. Most studies made use of undergraduate

students who are likely to have had fewer and potentially shorter relationships than older individuals experiencing relationship breakups. Moreover, cross sectional design features did not permit inferences on causal associations between variables. Indeed, since cognitive/behavioral variables and distress were measured at a single time point, it was not possible to distinguish a causal direction of effects. In terms of outcome measures, Boelin and Reijntes (2009) used amended versions of both the Grief Cognitions Questionnaire (GCQ) and Inventory of Complicated Grief Revised (ICG-R; Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001). The altered versions had no reported validity or reliability and adaptation may have compromised the psychometric properties of these scales.

3.4 Attachment

Six studies examined attachment style as an important correlate of relationship dissolution distress. In particular, Barbara and Dion (2000), Davies, Shaver, and Vernon (2003), Gilbert and Sifers (2011) and Fagundas (2011) each examined the association between attachment orientation and emotional adjustment, hypothesising that insecure attachment would be a salient predictive variable of post relationship breakup distress. Davis *et al.* (2003) particularly focused on the association between attachment style and ongoing preoccupation for the lost partner, in addition to a number of other outcome variables including dysfunctional coping following relationship dissolution.

Moreover, Speilman, MacDonald and Wilson (2009) considered whether pessimistic beliefs about the availability of future relationships fostered continued attachment to a former partner, particularly amongst anxiously attached individuals. The authors hypothesised that anxiously attached individuals would display pessimistic beliefs about future relationship prospects compared to more secure individuals, which would in turn predict poorer adjustment following a relationship dissolution. Sbarra (2006) also examined the association between attachment style and emotional recovery, but hypothesised that the association would be mediated by the individual's acceptance of the end of the relationship. In particular, individuals high in attachment anxiety would show greater non-acceptance, which would predict a decreased probability of emotional recovery.

Methodology

Three studies used similar methodological features. Undergraduate students who had experienced a relationship breakup completed self report measures pertaining to attachment characteristics and levels of distress (Barbara & Dion, 2000; Fagundes, 2012; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011).   Davis *et al.* (2003) likewise used a cross-sectional design although surveyed more than 5000 internet respondents ranging from 15 to 50 years as opposed to undergraduate students whilst Gilbert and Sifers (2011) also made use of an online survey (N=1404). Sbarra (2006) examined the relationship between attachment style and emotional recovery using used a daily diary prospective design study whilst Speilmann, MacDonald, & Wilson (2011) examined whether pessimistic appraisals of future relationship opportunities inhibit anxiously attached individuals letting go of a former partner using several methodologies, including a correlational design study and two experimental design studies (see Table 2, Appendix G).

Findings

Results universally revealed that attachment orientations reflecting attachment anxiety were associated with higher levels of emotional distress, greater preoccupation with the lost partner, exaggerated attempts to re-establish the relationship and dysfunctional coping strategies following relationship dissolution (Barbara & Dion, 2000; Davis *et al*., 2003; Fagundas, 2011; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Sbarra, 2006). Moreover, Speilmann *et al.,* (2010) found that individuals with higher levels of attachment anxiety in the pessimism condition in their experimental study continued to demonstrate attachment to former partners, whereas longing for an ex-partner was reduced in the optimism condition. As such, having a more optimistic outlook for future romantic prospects decreases attachment to a former partner for anxiously attached individuals. Sbarra (2006) further revealed that secure individuals seem to enact more adaptive and healthy behaviours for managing emotional distress following a relationship dissolution, while less secure individuals were more likely to get "stuck" in a struggle of non acceptance and disbelief that the relationship had ended.

Methodological Issues

Two studies used internet based methodology. While this allowed for a greater number of respondents and greater sample diversity, samples may be biased towards young computer users or people with a particular interest in relationship issues. Furthermore, Gilbert and Sifers reported small effect sizes in their study. Although the results were significant, the amount of variances accounted for was small, thus an indication that variables not measured in the study may have played a role in the emotional reactions following a relationship dissolution. A lack of a control condition in Speilmann *et al's* (2010) study limits conclusions about which condition (i.e. pessimism or optimism) is responsible for the effects. Indeed, it is uncertain whether feeling optimistic about future relationships helps individuals let go of an ex-partner, or whether feeling pessimistic encourages individuals to cling to ex-partners. Finally people's levels of attachment anxiety may be elevated at the time of assessment given the experience of a recent rejection, thus skewing the appearance of causal associations.

3.5 Relationship-specific variables

Five studies considered a range of relationship variables as correlates of either relationship dissolution distress or emotional recovery. Each study considered multiple variables within their design methodology making extensive coverage to the range of variables under examination within each difficult. Nevertheless, Table 3 Appendix G provides a comprehensive list of those variables investigated and subsequent findings.

Rhoades, Dush, Atkins, Stanley and Markman (2011) particularly focused on factors that were hypothesised to increase relationship investment as being associated with more difficulties adjusting following a relationship breakup. In particular, relationship duration, cohabitation, plans to marry, having children together and continued contact were all hypothesized to correlate with the degree of distress experienced post separation. Similarly, Robak and Weitzman (1998) considered whether relationship closeness and intimacy, in addition to perceived fault for the breakup affected distress reactions post breakup.

Waller and MacDonald (2010) examined the effect of initiator status on post relationship distress (initiator status relates to whose decision it was to end the

relationship). In particular, the researchers examined whether that the effect of initiator status on breakup related distress would vary as a function of self-esteem, hypothesising that individuals with low self-esteem would experience more distress after being rejected by their partners than those with higher self-esteem. Field *et al.,* (2009) and Locker *et al.* (2010) also considered the effects of initiator status, in addition to a range of other relationship specific factors, and sought to identify which factors accounted for unique variance.   For example, Locker *et al.,* considered whether factors such as the length of the relationship, contact with the ex-partner, number of previous relationships and how soon the person started dating again were related to recovery. Likewise Field *et al.* (2009) examined variables including whether the dissolution felt sudden or unexpected, whether the individual had felt betrayed by their partner and whether the individual was in a new relationship as predictive of poor adjustment.

Methodology

Studies examining relationship specific variables used similar methodology and design features. Three used cross sectional studies using samples of undergraduate students (Field *et al.,* 2009; Locker *et al.,* 2010; Robak & Weitzman, 1998). Students who had experienced a relationship breakup participated by completing several self-report outcome measures at a single time point. Measures assessed multiple relationship specific variables and psychological distress and adjustment. Rhodes *et al.* (2011) examined the impact of relationship specific factors using a within subjects design whilst Waller and MacDonald (2010) examined whether self esteem moderates the association between initiator status and psychological distress using multiple methodologies including a prospective, naturalistic design and an experimental design.

Findings

Results indicated that a range of relationship-specific variables are associated with the distress one may feel following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Of note, Rhodes *et al.* (2011) found that relationships that had been characterised by more investment were associated with greater distress reactions following the breakup. In particular, having been cohabiting with the former partner and having plans for marriage were associated with larger reductions in measured life satisfaction. Likewise

Robak and Weitzman (1998) found the more intimate the relationship had been the greater the severity of grief symptoms experienced following the loss. In particular, perceived closeness and the more marriage had been considered was associated with higher levels of grief and depressive symptoms.

In relation to initiator status, Robak and Weitzman (1998) found that individuals were more likely to experience intense feelings of loss and grief and ruminate more when the breakup was initiated by their partner. Field *et al.* (2011) also found a significant relationship between initiator status and psychological distress, in addition to the perceived suddenness of the ending. In particular, those who did not initiate the breakup and those who had experienced the breakup as sudden and unexpected experienced higher breakup related distress. Furthermore, Waller and MacDonald (2010) demonstrated that the effect of initiator status on post breakup distress may vary as a function of low self-esteem. Indeed, the authors found that individuals with low self-esteem experienced more distress after being rejected by a romantic partner in comparison to individuals with high self-esteem, where initiator status did not predict distress.

Locker *et al.* (2010) found that how quickly a person begins dating someone new was a robust predictor or recovery, while relationship length was also related to recovery time, particularly for females but not for men. Likewise, Field *et al.* (2011) reported that individuals with greater distress reactions reported a shorter time since the relationship had ended suggesting that time was one of the most helpful factors in recovery.

Methodological Issues

While results here demonstrate that self-esteem is a moderator variable in initiator status and post relationship distress, design features do not allow comment as to how in particular self-esteem functions as a moderator variable. There are potentially a number of specific processes that are related to self-esteem that were not systematically examined in this research. Moreover, Locker *et al*. (2010) did not indicate how emotional recovery was measured within their study, neither did they make use of any empirically validated measure of distress or adjustment. Furthermore, limitations extend

to both internal and external validity given methodological features. In most studies, participants were young undergraduate students involved in shorter relationships, limiting generalisibility of the findings to other populations or to longer term relationships whilst Field *et al.* (2011) had a high proportion of Hispanic women in the sample.

3.6 Personality variables

Five studies considered personality characteristics as associative factors of relationship dissolution distress. For example, Chung *et al.* (2002) considered whether low self-esteem was an important correlate of distress following the end of a dating relationship, with a particular focus on symptoms aligned with post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, Boelin & van den Hout (2010) examined the degree to which people continue to perceive their identity as "intertwined" with a former partner as being predictive of emotional difficulties following relationship loss. The authors hypothesised that the continued influence of the lost partner on self-identity may be an important mechanism to explain emotional difficulties that persist following a breakup, a finding demonstrated elsewhere within bereavement literature (Boelen, van den Hout & van den Bout, 2006).

Similarly, Park, Sanchez and Brynildsen (2011) considered whether the degree to which individuals invest their self-worth in being in a relationship was related to the severity of distress following relationship dissolution. The authors suggested that those whose self-worth is strongly derived through being in a relationship may be more susceptible to experiencing emotional difficulties post breakup. Likewise, Slotter, Gardner and Finkel (2008) and Mason, Law, Bryant, Portley and Sbarra (2012) each examined self-concept change and self-concept recovery as important intra-personal correlates of distress. In particular, Slotter *et al.* (2008) investigated the impact of a breakup on self-concept change, and how this in turn predicted emotional adjustment following a breakup. Mason, *et al.* (2012) similarly investigated whether self-concept recovery and reorganisation following the dissolution of a relationship was an important correlate of psychological wellbeing. The authors proposed that breakups evoke changes in the content and structure of one's self concepts where individuals are forced to redefine

who they are in the absence of the former partner. These self-concept changes were hypothesised to predict the emotional distress experienced following a relationship breakdown.

Methodology

Four studies shared similar design features using cross sectional designs features (Boelin & van den Hout, 2010; Chung *et al*., 2002; Park *et al*., 2011; Slotter *et al*., 2008). Individuals who had experienced a recent dissolution completed several self-report questionnaire measures at a single time point. These measures pertained to the personality variables under investigation and measures of distress (Table 4, Appendix G). Slotter *et al.* (2019) examined self-concept change and its relation to emotional distress using varied methodologies across three studies, namely a cross sectional design study, text/linguistic analysis study and finally a six month longitudinal study where participants (N=69) completed questionnaire measures every other week for six months assessing variables of interest.

Boelen & van den Hout, 2010 (2010) assessed the extent to which the individual perceived their identity as intertwined with their partner and the association with related distress using two methodological approaches including a cross sectional design study and an experimental reaction time task. Mason *et al.* (2012) also featured an experimental task whereby participants were required to complete a breakup mental activation task measuring their physiological responses to particular items, along with self-report questionnaires measuring self-concept recovery.

Findings

Results indicated that intra-personal variables were significantly associated with the distress experienced following the dissolution of a romantic relationship. For example, self-esteem emerged as an important predictor of post relationship distress. A greater degree of post-traumatic stress symptoms were experienced by people experiencing a dissolution of a dating relationship endorsing low self-esteem (Chung *et al*., 2002). Moreover, Boelen & van den Hout (2010) found that those who reported a stronger sense of their identity feeling "intertwined" with the former partner experienced more

intense symptoms such as yearning for the former partner following the breakup, along with difficulty accepting the dissolution.

Results of structural equation modelling in the study by Park, Sanchez and Brynildsen (2011) revealed that those who strongly based their self-worth on being in a relationship reported greater emotional distress and maladaptive responses following relationship dissolution such as obsessional pursuit behaviours than those who reported low contingent self-worth. Slotter *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that individuals tended to experience self-concept change following a relationship breakup, particularly reduced self-concept clarity, which uniquely predicted the degree emotional distress subsequently experienced. Mason *et al* (2012) similarly found an association between self-concept recovery and wellbeing with individuals who reported poorer self-concept recovery following the dissolution of a relationship also tending to report poorer psychological wellbeing.

Methodological Issues

Several of the studies used relatively small samples sizes (N= 78; N=70; N=60) limiting power to detect significant associations while Chung *et al.* (2002) provided no data pertaining to the psychometric properties of the measures used in their study. Furthermore, Causal associations between variables again need to be reported cautiously given design features. In all five studies, researchers had no index of the personality variables prior to the dissolution of the relationship making it difficult to establish whether variables were causally related to distress or whether they changed following the dissolution of the relationship. It is plausible that experiencing distress could have led participants to report low self-esteem, thus skewing the interpretation of the findings relating to important associations.

4. Discussion

4.1 Overview of findings

The aim of this review was to systematically examine the research literature pertaining to the correlates of romantic, non-marital relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment. A key objective was to understand further those factors most salient in accounting for unique variance in distress so that some key clinical implications may emerge for interventions. The results suggest that a range of variables significantly influence the distress experienced following the dissolution of a relationship, including cognitive and behavioural mechanisms, attachment orientation, personality variables and relationship specific factors.

Cognitive and behavioural variables

Negative cognitions pertaining to the relationship breakup seemed to contribute considerably to the distress reactions post-breakup. Consistent with the research findings with bereaved individuals (e.g. Boelen, van den Bout & van den Hout, 2003), Boelen and Reijntjes (2009) found catastrophic misinterpretations about one's reactions to the breakup, thoughts around self-blame and negative thoughts about the self emerged as key correlates of anxiety and depression. These findings remain consistent with other empirically validated cognitive models of emotional disorders, particularly for loss and trauma which suggest that cognitive processes are central to recovery (e.g. Ehlers & Clark, 200). Furthermore, Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007) found that persistent rumination around the lost relationship was associated with poor adjustment post breakup. Likewise, behavioural processes such as continuing to have contact with a former partner and monitoring activities through social networking channels may also inhibit post breakup recovery by keeping one's focus of attention on the former partner and prolonging emotional distress and maladjustment.

Attachment variables

Furthermore, six studies considered attachment orientation as a key correlate of distress. Results indicated that attachment related anxiety was associated with more emotional distress, greater pre-occupation with the ex partner, heightened attempts to re-establish

the relationship and dysfunctional coping strategies following relationship dissolution. Moreover, anxiously attached individuals tended to present as particularly pessimistic about future relationship prospects. These findings are consistent with attachment theory as Bowlby (1969/1980) proposed that those with insecure attachment styles would experience distress when separated from their partners, varying in magnitude, partly as a function of attachment style and would tend to be "clingy", lacking a sense of personal identity from the other.

Intra-personal variables

Moreover, personality characteristics seem to play an important role in adjustment experiences following relationship loss. Five studies considered a range of intra-personal variables as associative factors of relationship dissolution distress. Results suggested that individuals with low self-esteem, those who derive their self-worth from being in a relationship, and those perceive their identity as being "intertwined" with their former partners experience more emotional difficulties following the breakdown of their relationships. Moreover, changes in one's self-concept and self-concept recovery following a relationship breakup also have significant bearing on post-breakup adjustment.

Relationship-specific factors

Finally, five studies examined relationship variables as correlates of relationship dissolution distress. Results indicated that a range of relationship factors may significantly influence distress reactions following the dissolution of a relationship. Of note, initiator status, relationship length, how soon the person begins dating someone new, perceived intimacy, and suddenness of the breakup were all associated with greater levels of post-relationship distress. Furthermore, factors associated with relationship investment such as the more intimate the relationship had been and the more marriage had been considered were associated with greater levels of grief and depressive symptomatology post-dissolution.

4.2 Quality assessment & suggestions for future research

This review adds to the research base by examining the relatively under investigated area of the correlates of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment. However methodological limitations of the aforementioned studies may temper the conclusions that can be drawn and suggest areas for future research. Firstly, inclusion criteria in each of the reviewed studies did not make for representative samples. Participants were mostly young, undergraduate students and as such, generalisation of the findings should be done with caution. While helpful in providing insight into the experiences of young adults following early romantic relationships breakups, the findings do not necessarily generalise to other populations, particularly individuals in different developmental phases. Relationship dissolution may be a categorically different experience across the age span and future research should investigate whether the correlates of distress reported are exclusive to one developmental phase or not.

The issue of causality is a salient one. The majority of studies employed cross-sectional design features. While a commonly used methodology in this area, cross sectional designs do not permit inferences on causal associations between variables. Indeed, measuring variables one time point means it is unclear to what extent variables influence each other. In most cases, the researchers had no data prior to the dissolution of the relationship and therefore could not determine whether the variables of interest, for example levels of self-esteem, contributed to distress reactions or changed as a result of the dissolution. Moreover, the average time since relationships had broken up was as much as 16.6 months in one study, suggesting that many interfering events could have contributed to distress reported at the time of measurement. Longitudinal studies are required to gain more insight into causal associations between variables and rule out the reverse possibility that distress effects the variables under investigation. Moreover, experimental designs that directly manipulate the variables under examination and assess for corresponding changes in emotional distress may be useful in establishing causal associations.

Several studies used amended versions of outcome measures (e.g. Bolen & Reijntjes, 2009) and in some cases the altered versions had no reported validity or reliability.

Clearly, adaptation of the measures may have compromised the psychometric properties of these scales. Moreover, some of the reviewed studies used relatively small samples sizes thus reducing the statistical power necessary to detect significant associations. Indeed, several studies reported small effect sizes (e.g. Gilbert & Sifers, 2011) suggesting that variables not measured in these studies may play a contributory role in distress reactions As such, future studies should replicate these findings with measures specifically designed and validated for the assessment of breakup-related variables and should make use of larger more representative sample sizes.

A final limitation is that most research examining the correlates of relationship dissolution used retrospective designs where participants were asked to report on their experiences retrospectively, at one particular time point. Though a commonly used methodology, retrospective accounts are more prone to memory biases and other inaccuracies than contemporaneous perceptions and may not accurately portray what the person experienced at the time (e.g. Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Safer, Bonnano & Field, 2001). Given that romantic relationships and breakups are naturally occurring events, future studies would benefit from examining links between the correlates of psychological distress using prospective design studies. In particular, examining how recall of details of past relationships change over time and how much such changes play a role in longing for an ex-partner.

4.3 Clinical implications

Despite these limitations, the studies reported here enhance our understanding of relationship distress and have important clinical implications. In particular, the findings help isolate those factors significant in accounting for ongoing distress and maladjustment so that targeted interventions can be established. Firstly, the findings provide evidence that focusing on maladaptive cognitions and behaviours may be useful in the treatment of individuals who are experiencing difficulties adjusting following a relationship loss. Indeed cognitive interventions that have been successfully applied in the treatment of PTSD (e.g. Ehlers, Clark, Hackman, McManus & Fennell, 2005) and complicated grief (Boelen, de Keijser, van den Hout & Van den Bout, 2007) may be

useful for individuals presenting with emotional and psychological difficulties following a relationship dissolution.

More specifically, findings suggests that inducing optimism about future relationships may be a useful clinical aim given the findings that optimism for future romantic prospects helped alleviate individual's continued longing for ex-partners. Moreover, the findings by Fagundas (2011) suggest that it may be emotionally adaptive to assist the individual in moving towards viewing the former partner negatively following a breakup, since negative evaluations of the ex-partner make it possible to ultimately move away from an undesirable negative state. Clearly therapeutic interventions aimed at targeting particular cognitions and appraisals may be a useful in facilitating the individual's recovery process and initiating them along positive health trajectories.

A greater understanding of how personality variables and attachment dynamcis contribute to post relationship distress has further useful clinical implications. For example, the findings suggest that individuals with anxious attachment styles are particularly susceptible to relationship dissolution difficulties. Therapeutic efforts therefore may be aimed at exploring the potential role of the individual's attachment history in influencing their reactions post breakup and laying foundations for secure attachments experiences. Although attachment theory does not reflect an explicit approach to counselling, suggestions for using it's precepts as part of treatment has been previously proposed (e.g. Slade, 1999). Indeed adults with insecure attachment histories have been able to improve functioning by examining the meaning of childhood attachment experiences (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). It therefore may be helpful to both therapist and client to recognise the developmental roots of the individual's current distress and target interventions accordingly.

4.4 Conclusion

This review aimed to examine the research literature pertaining to the correlates of relationship dissolution distress in order to isolate those variables most salient in accounting for distress reactions and for the variance experienced between individuals. Methodological limitations of the studies limit the degree to which causal associations

between variables can be made with certainty and the extent to which results can be generalised to wider populations. However, findings nevertheless point to salient predictive factors which may have useful implications in helping to identity those individuals most vulnerable to relationship dissolution and point to promising targets of intervention. The next challenge would be to examine how such correlates may be systematically related in order to move towards the development of a theoretical model of relationship dissolution distress, similar to those available in the research for other emotional disorders.

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Von Elm, E., Altman. D. G., Egger, M., Pocock, S. J., Gotzsche, P. C., & Vandenbroucke, J. P. (2007). The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) Statement: Guidelines for reporting observational studies. *Preventative Medicine, 45(4),* 247-251

WiKiHow: How to Get Over a Break Up (2014) www.wikihow.com/Get-Over-a-Break-Up

*Articles included in final review

Literature review Appendices

Appendix A

Databases searched

PsychInfo	For comprehensive coverage of the psychological literature and related disciplines including medicine, Psychiatry and Social work.
Medline	For bibliographic and abstract coverage of the biomedical literature
Web of Science	For coverage of major scientific journals covering disciplines including Psychology, Psychiatry and medicine
Scopus	For coverage of psychological articles published in journals not included in PsychInfo

Database search

A thorough exploration of the databases was conducted between July and August 2013. In order to gain a comprehensive overview of the type and breadth of available literature in the area, and to identify previous reviews, no limiters were placed pertaining to years searched. In the subsequent shortlisting process, articles were discriminated against if they pre-dated 2000, however the initial scoping exercise included all published hears in order to identify the available research in this area, inform later search terms and shape the focus of the review.

The same search items and sequences were applied to each data base in the same order (see below). Some databases were more fruitful than others yielding more relevant articles. On this occasion, more success was observed sourcing both the PsychInfo and Web of Science data base, moderate success with the Scopus database and poorer success with the Medline data base.

Main search terms used

Relationship breakup / Relationship breakdown

Relationship preoccupation

Broken Heart

Relationship grief

Relationship dissolution

These terms were searched in various combinations across all data bases (see table below). No truncation was used and all search terms were applied in full

Terms used	PsychInfo	Web of Science	Scopus	Medline
Relationship Breakup				
+				
Cognition	6	3	3	25
Appraisal	2	3	2	15
Attachment	22	39	42	55
Grief	7	5	6	10
Broken Heart	2	2	1	0
Distress	26	32	20	54
Pain	6	1	27	20
Mental health	15	14	13	49
Emotion	52	27	26	29
Romantic Love	1	21	20	5
Coping behaviour	19	16	14	39
Preoccupation	2	3	25	22
Dissolution	24	55	38	45
Relationship Dissolution				
+				
Cognition	8	15	18	-
Appraisal	4	0	8	36
Attachment	37	92	71	130
Grief	11	7	7	16
Broken Heart	0	0	0	0
Distress	40	67	34	150
Pain	5	29	22	45
Mental health	30	43	21	103
Emotion	83	74	37	78
Romantic Love	5	37	18	14
Coping behaviour	29	20	22	95
Preoccupation	2	6	6	21
Dissolution	-	-	-	-
Relationship Grief				
+				
Cognition	6	12	50	1
Appraisal	1	5	13	6
Attachment	47	106	183	14
Breakup	2	5	7	-
Broken Heart	1	4	5	1
Distress	32	123	143	23
Pain	22	56	118	18
Mental health	105	85	211	21
Emotion	137	223	252	10
Romantic Love	1	6	7	0
Coping behaviour	74	139	263	24
Preoccupation	9	2	6	9
Dissolution	3	7	7	0
Broken Heart				
+				
Cognition	2	5	5	14
Appraisal	0	1	4	15
Attachment	7	11	8	24
Grief	24	14	21	47

Broken Heart	-	-	-	-
Distress	6	19	14	82
Pain	13	78	115	241
Mental health	8	17	20	39
Emotion	28	94	24	42
Romantic Love	3	3	1	3
Coping behaviour	9	11	8	14
Preoccupation	0	0	-	8
Dissolution	0	3	4	5
Relationship Breakdown +				
Cognition	6	21	52	13
Appraisal	1	8	10	12
Attachment	22	52	66	21
Grief	6	4	10	14
Broken Heart	0	4	1	1
Distress	12	22	34	92
Pain	5	40	58	46
Mental health	48	41	83	141
Emotion	37	37	36	21
Romantic Love	1	27	2	5
Coping behaviour	10	14	27	63
Preoccupation	1	2	5	5
Dissolution	11	57	66	21
Relationship preoccupation +				
Cognition	6	15	40	0
Appraisal	1	8	12	1
Attachment	32	61	76	3
Grief	1	3	6	1
Broken Heart	0	0	-	0
Distress	5	38	43	5
Pain	2	28	29	2
Mental health	25	30	62	0
Emotion	33	85	60	2
Romantic Love	2	10	6	0
Coping behaviour	7	34	46	3
Preoccupation	-	-	-	-
Dissolution	2	6	6	1

A full search of Medline was discontinued as preliminary searches of this database yielded inappropriate results. Moreover, sufficient articles had been sourced from PsychInfo, Web of Science and Scopus.

Google scholar searches were conducted with the above cited terms. Inevitably, a number of articles were duplicated across databases. Those articles deemed relevant were examined (Appendix B)

Appendix B

Key inclusion criteria

Given the broad scope of this area, it was necessary to establish inclusion criteria in order to facilitate the shortlisting process. Priority was given to recent research papers, although consideration was given to papers outside of these criteria if they were considered relevant to the question. The following limiters were used:

Limiters

- Studies examining correlates of relationship dissolution and distress
- Empirical studies – not review papers or meta-analysis.
- Studies using a measurable outcome of post relationship distress
- Current research (post 2000 research studies)
- English Language literature (US and UK)

Shortlisted Articles and Evaluation of Relevance

The following articles were reviewed and highlighted articles selected

	Author & Date	Title	Type of study	Inclus ion	Reason for inclusion/exclusion
1	Ayduk et al (2001)	Rejection Sensitivity and Depressive Symptoms in Women	Longitudinal study	No	Study examines the construct of 'Rejection Sensitivity' as a correlate of depressive symptom in women. Focus of study exclusively on gender, lack of generalisation precludes inclusion
2	Barbara and Dion (2000)	Breaking up is hard to do, especially for strongly "Preoccupied" lovers	Non experimental, correlational design study	Yes	Study examined the association between *preoccupied* attachment style and post relationship distress. Met inclusion criteria
3	Boals and Klein (2005)	Cognitive-emotional distinctiveness: Separating emotions from non-emotions in the representation of a stressful memory	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study investigated the structure of traumatic and stressful autobiographical memories using a sample of participants who had recent experienced relationship dissolution. Did not look at correlates of post relationship distress.
4	Boelen and Reijntes (2009)	Negative Cognitions in Emotional problems following romantic relationship break-ups	Non experimental, correlational design	Yes	Study examined the role of negative cognitions as a correlate of emotional problems following relationship dissolution. Met inclusion criteria
5	Boelen et al (2010)	Inclusion of Other in the Self and Breakup-Related Grief Following Relationship Dissolution	One group, correlational design	Yes	Study examined 'inclusion of the former partner in the self' as a correlate of post relationship

					breakup grief. Met inclusion criteria
6	Boelen et al (2011)	Factors Associated with Outcome of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy for Complicated Grief: A Preliminary Study	Randomised Control Trial	No	Study investigated the efficacy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in the treatment of complicated grief. Treatment outcome study for grief, not specifically related to relationship grief
7	Bullock et al (2011)	Can We Be (and Stay) Friends? Remaining Friend After Dissolution of a Romantic Relationship	Cross sectional design	No	Study looks at the association between satisfaction with the dissolution of a relationship with staying friends. Does note examine correlates of distress
8	Chung et al (2002)	Gender differences in love styles and post traumatic stress reactions following relationship dissolution	N/A	No	Study explores gender differences in post traumatic stress symptoms following relationship dissolution and gender differences in love styles adopted during the relationship. Full article not available.
9	Cheung Chung et al (2002)	Self-esteem, personality and post traumatic stress symptoms following the dissolution of a dating relationship	Non experimental, correlational design	Yes	Study looked at self esteem as an important correlate of distress following a relationship dissolution. Met inclusion criteria and appropriate for review
10	Cheung Chung et al (2003)	Coping with post-traumatic stress symptoms following relationship dissolution	One group, correlational design	No	Study examines post-traumatic stress symptoms resulting from a relationship dissolution and coping style. Not focused on correlates of distress
11	Chen et al (2009)	Emotional and Behavioural Effects of Romantic Relationships in Chinese Adolescents	Non experimental, correlational design	No	Study focused on emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by Chinese adolescents involved in romantic relationships. Study does not pertain to relationship breakups
12	Collins et al (1989)	Reponsibility and rumination: The trouble with understanding the dissolution of a relationship	Cross sectional design	No	Looks at the role of responsibility as a factor in helping individuals adapt to relationship dissolution. Year of study precluded inclusion
13	Collins and Gillath (2012)	Attachment, breakup strategies, and associated outcomes: the effects of security enhancement on the selection of breakup strategies	Correlational design study	No	Study examines the factors related to breakup strategies, not correlates of relationship distress following a breakup
14	Cooper et al (2000)	College Student Recovery From a Broken Heart	Survey design study	No	Study looked at recovery from a romantic relationship breakup. Did not focus on correlates of distress.
15	Cupach et al (2011)	Persistence of Attempts to Reconcile a Terminated Romantic Relationship: A Partial Test of Relational Goal Pursuit Theory	Correlational/descriptive design study	No	Study investigated correlates of behavioural attempts by individual's to reconcile romantic relationships post breakup. Does not focus on correlates of distress
16	Davis et al (2000)	Stalking Perpetrators and Psychological Maltreatment of Partners: Anger-Jealousy, Attachment Insecurity, Need for Control, and Break-Up Context	Study 1 & 2: Cross sectional design study	No	Studies examine the correlates of courtship persistence, stalking behaviours and psychological maltreatment of partners following a relationship breakup.

17	Davis et al (2003)	Physical, Emotional, and Behavioural Reactions to Breaking Up: The Roles of Gender, Age, Emotional Involvement, and Attachment Style	Large internet based questionnaire survey design	Yes	Study examined association between attachment style and other variables as a correlate of distress following relationship dissolution. Met Inclusion criteria
18	Daily et al (2011)	On-Again/Off-Again Dating Relationships: What keeps Partners Coming Back?	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study investigating why individuals persistently renew relationships following breakup. Not about post relationship distress
19	Deeds et al (2009)	Breakup distress in university students	Correlational design study	No	Research examined symptoms and experiences related to post relationship distress amongst a sample of college students, but not predictors or correlates of distress.
20	Deeds et al (2011)	Breakup distress in university students: a review	Review paper	No	Review of above
21	Del Giudice (2011)	Sex Differences in Romantic Attachment: A Meta-Analysis	Meta-analytic review	No	Meta-analysis exploring sex differences in the avoidance and anxiety dimensions of adult romantic attachment.
22	De Smet et al (2011)	Effect of the Breakup Context on Unwanted Pursuit Behaviours Perpetration Between Former Partners	Non randomised, correlational design study	No	Study focused on unhelpful/maladaptive behaviours (i.e. Unwanted pursuit Behaviours) post relationship breakup and not on correlates of distress.
23	De Smet et al (2012)	Post-Breakup Unwanted Pursuit: A refined Analysis of the role of Romantic Relationship Characteristics	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study examined the role of relationship characteristics in unwanted pursuit behaviours (UPB's). Does not look at the correlates of relationship breakup distress
24	Drigotas and Rusbult (1992)	Should I stay or Should I Go? A Dependence Model of Breakups	Longitudinal design study	No	Study examined the association between dependence characteristics and staying in a relationship. Did not examine correlates of post relationship distress. Year of publication precluded inclusion
25	Dutton and Winstead (2013)	Predicting unwanted pursuit: Attachment, relationship satisfaction, relationship alternatives, and break-up distress	Correlational design study	No	Study examines attachment and relationship variables as predictors of unwanted pursuit behaviours (UPBs) as reported by targets of pursuit and pursuers. Does not examine correlates of relationship distress.
26	Fagundes (2011)	Implicit negative evaluations about ex-partner predicts breakup adjustment: The brighter side of dark cognitions	Priming methodology (lexical priming task)	Yes	Study investigated whether individuals who show negative evaluations of a former partner following a relationship breakup show better post-breakup adjustment. Met inclusion criteria and relevant for review
27	Fagundes	Getting over you: Contributions	Correlational	Yes	Study looked at attachment style

	(2012)	of attachment theory for postbreakup emotional adjustment	design study		as a correlate of distress following a relationship breakup. Met inclusion criteria.
28	Feeney (1992)	Attachment style and romantic love – relationship dissolution	Cross sectional study	No	Looks at attachment style as a correlate of distress. Year of study precluded inclusion for review
29	Felmlee et al (1990)	The Dissolution of Intimate Relationships: A Hazard Model	Longitudinal design study	No	Study investigated the variables predictive of relationship breakups within premarital relationships
30	Field (2009)	Breakup Distress in University Students	Correlational design study	Yes	Study considered a range of relationship specific variables as correlates of distress following a relationship dissolution. Met inclusion criteria and appropriate for review
31	Fine (1997)	Predictors of distress following relationship termination among dating couples	Correlational design study	No	Looks at factors associated with distress but year of study precluded inclusion.
32	Gilbert and Sifers (2011)	Bouncing Back from a Breakup: Attachment, Time Perspective, Mental Health, and Romantic Loss	Internet survey design. Correlational study	Yes	Study examined correlates of attachment history and time perspectives with post relationship distress. Met inclusion criteria
33	Gillath et al (2004)	Attachment-style differences in the ability to suppress negative thoughts: Exploring the neural correlates	One group, correlational design study	No	Study examined association between attachment style (attachment avoidance/attachment anxiety) and post relationship distress, as measured by activation in emotion related areas of the brain (e.g. the anterior temporal lobe). Met inclusion criteria but not consistent with other studies chosen for review
34	Herbert and Popadiuk (2008)	University Students' Experiences of Nonmarital Breakups	Qualitative grounded theory methodological design study	No	Study focused on changes individuals reported following the dissolution of a nonmartial relationship breakup.
35	Kelly (1981)	Loss of Loving: A Cognitive Therapy Approach	n/a	No	Authors reflections on working with individuals suffering from emotional difficulties following relationship breakups using a cognitive therapy approach
36	Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994)	Attachment Style, Gender, and Relationship Stability: A longitudinal Analysis	Longitudinal design study	No	Study investigated the association between attachment styles and relationship stability. Did not focus on relationship dissolution distress.
37	Le et al (2010)	Predicting nonmarital romantic relationship dissolution: A meta-analytic synthesis.	Meta Analysis	No	A meta analysis of predictors of nonmarital romantic relationship dissolution.
38	Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al (2000)	Breaking up is Hard to Do: Unwanted pursuit Behaviours Following the Dissolution of a Romantic Relationship	Non experimental, correlational design	No	Investigation of predictors of unwanted pursuit behaviours post breakup, not correlates of post relationship distress

39	Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Rohling (2000)	Negative Family-of-Origin Experiences: Are they Associated With Perpetrating Unwanted Pursuit Behaviours?	Non experimental, correlational design	No	Study investigated family of origin experiences as predictors of unhelpful behavioural responses post relationship breakup (i.e. unwanted pursuit behaviours)
40	Leung et al (2011)	Romantic Relationships, Relationship Styles, Coping Strategies, and Psychological Distress among Chinese and Australian Young Adults	One group, correlational design	No	Study examined association between relationship styles, coping strategies and post relationship distress, thereby meeting inclusion criteria. However, methodologically weak and mixed results would not have contributed significantly to the review
41	Lewandowski et al (2006)	Losing a self-expanding relationship: Implications for the self concept	Non experimental correlational design	No	Study examines the effects of relationship dissolution on self concept, however now measure of distress used within methodology.
42	Locker et al (2010)	The Breakup of Romantic Relationships: Situational Predictors of Perception of Recovery	Non experimental correlational design	Yes	Study examined association between a range of situational factors and post relationship recovery and distress. Met inclusion criteria
43	Lepore and Greenberg (2002)	Meding Broken Hearts: Effects of Expressive Writing on Mood, Cognitive Processing, Social Adjustment and Health Following a Relationship Breakup	2 group, experimental design study. Repeated measures design.	No	Study examined the effectiveness of expressive writing as an intervention in the recovery from post relationship distress.
44	Madey and Jilek (2012)	Attachment Style and Dissolution of Romantic Relationships: Breaking up is Hard to Do, Or Is It?	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study investigated the correlation between attachment and attitudes and behaviours and distress following relationship dissolution. Not included due to issues of repetition
45	Marshall (2012)	Facebook Surveillance of Former Romantic Partners; Associations with Post Breakup Recovery and Personal Growth	Non experimental, correlational design study	Yes	Study investigated online surveillance of former partners following a relationship breakup as an important correlate of continuing emotional distress. Met criteria for review
46	Mason et al (2012)	Facing a breakup: Electromyographic responses moderate self concept recovery following a romantic seperation	Experimental design study	Yes	Study examines self concept recovery as an important intra-personal correlate of distress. Met inclusion criteria and appropriate for review
47	Mason et al (2012)	Staying connected when coming apart: The psychological correlates of contact and sex with an ex-partner	Non experimental, cross sectional design study	Yes	Study examined whether continued contact with a former partner is an important correlate of psychological adjustment following a relationship breakup. Met inclusion criteria and Appropriate for review.
48	Mayseless et al (1996)	Adults' attachment patterns: Coping with seperations	Abstract only: methodology not stated	No	Study looks at attachment style and coping with separations in general, not exclusive to relationship separations
49	McCarthy et al (1997)	Structural Model of Coping, Appraisals, and Emotions After	Non experimental,	No	Researched focused on the relationship between coping

		Relationship Breakup	correlational design study		resources and cognitive appraisals to emotions produced at the end of a romantic relationship. Year of publication precluded article from inclusion
50	Mearns (1991)	Coping With a Breakup: Negative Mood Regulation Expectancies and Depression Following the End of a Romantic Relationship	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study investigated the impact of 'generalised expectancies' for negative mood regulation on the severity of depression experienced by individuals following the end of romantic relationships. Year of publication precluded article from inclusion
51	Moller et al (2003)	Relationship of Attachment and Social Support to College Students' Adjustment Following a Relationship Breakup	Non experimental correlational design study	No	Study examined association between parental attachment and social support with adjustment following a relationship breakup. Met inclusion criteria, but replicated findings of other studies chosen for review. Furthermore, study was related to social support as a correlate of distress, and did not fit with the chosen group of correlates selected for review (i.e. attachment, personal, situational, cognitive-behavioural)
52	Monroe et al (1999)	Life Events and Depression in Adolescence: Relationship Loss as a Prospective Rick Factor for First Onset of Major Depressive Disorder	Epidemiological design study	No	Study looked at the romantic relationship breakups as a risk for the onset of Major Depressive Disorder. Study did not focus of the correlates of distress
53	Murray (2001)	Loss as a universal concept: A review of the literature to Identify common aspects of loss in diverse situations	Systematic literature review	No	Review of the theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to common elements of loss associated with advise life events and situations exclusive to relationship loss
54	Najib et al (2004)	Regional Brain Activity in Women Grieving a Romantic Relationship Breakup	One group, non experimental design study	No	Study investigated regional brain activity in women suffering with depression following breakup of a romantic relationship
55	Park et al (2011)	Maladaptive Responses to Relationship Dissolution: The Role of Relationship Contingent Self Worth	Internet survey design. Correlational study	Yes	Study examined self worth as a correlate or post relationship maladaptive responses. Met inclusion criteria
56	Rhoades et al (2011)	Breaking Up Is Hard to Do: The Impact of Unmarried Relationship Dissolution on Mental Health and Life Satisfaction	Within subjects design methodology	Yes	Study focused on factors that were hypothesised to increase relationship investment as important correlates of distress post breakup. Met inclusion criteria and appropriate for review.
57	Robak and Weitzman (1998)	The Nature of Grief: Loss of Love Relationships in Young Adulthood	Correlational design	Yes	Study investigated the association between relationship intimacy and levels of relationship grief post breakup. Met inclusion criteria
58	Ruvolo et al (2001)	Relationship experiences and change in attachment characteristics of young adults:	Non experimental, longitudinal	No	Study examined whether relationship experiences were predictors of change in

		The role of relationship breakups and conflict avoidance	design study.		individual's attachment styles post relationship
59	Saavedra et al (2010)	Clarifying Links Between Attachment and Relationship Quality: Hostile Conflict and Mindfulness as Moderators	Correlational survey design	No	Study examined self reported conflict and mindfulness as moderators of the links between attachment and relationship quality. Study not related to relationship dissolution
60	Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007)	When thinking hurts: Attachment, rumination, and postrelationship adjustment	Non experimental, correlational design study	Yes	Study examined the association between rumination and adjustment following relationship breakup. Met inclusion criteria
61	Sbarra and Ferrer (2006)	The Structure and Process of Emotional Experience Following Nonmarital Relationship Dissolution: Dynamic Factor Analysis of Love, Anger, and Sadness	Pre-test, diary, post test design study.	No	An examination of emotional experiences and recovery processes following relationship breakup.
62	Sbarra (2005)	The emotional sequelae of nonmarital relationship dissolution: Analysis of change and intraindividual variability over time	Daily diary study	No	Study examining the sequences of emotional journey following a relationship breakup, not examining correlates of distress.
63	Sbarra (2006)	Predicting the Onset of Emotional Recovery Following Nonmarital Relationship Dissolution: Survival Analysis of Sadness and Anger	Correlational design study	Yes	Study examined the association between attachment security and acceptance of the terminated relationship, with post relationship distress. Met inclusion criteria
64	Sinclair and Hanson Frieze (2005)	When Courtship Persistence Becomes Intrusive Pursuit: Comparing Rejecter and Pursuer Perspectives of Unrequited Attraction	Survey design	No	Study examined participant's experiences of unwanted courtship behaviours. Study was not in relation to post relationship distress.
65	Simon and Barrett (2010)	Nonmarital Romantic Relationship and Mental Health in Early Adulthood: Does the Association Differ for Women and Men?	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	Study examined the association between nonmarital romantic relationships and mental health and the differences between gender. Did not investigate correlates of distress
66	Simpson (1987)	The dissolution of Romantic Relationships: Factors Involved in Relationship Stability and Emotional Distress	Cross sectional design study	No	Looked at a range of situational factors involved in distress following a relationship breakup but year of study precluded inclusion
67	Slotter and Finkel (2009)	The Strange Case of Sustained Dedication to an Unfulfilling Relationship: Predicting Commitment and Breakup From Attachment Anxiety and Need Fulfilment Within Relationships	Study1 : Longitudinal design Study2: 2 group, experimental design study	No	Study investigated whether 'need fulfilment; within relationships moderates the association of attachment style with relationship commitment. Not about correlates of distress post relationship breakup.
68	Slotter and Gardner (2012)	How Needing You Changes Me: The Influence of Attachment Anxiety on Self-concept Malleability in Romantic Relationships	Study 1: cross sectional design Study 2: experimental design study Study 3: Cross sectional design	No	Study looks at attachment anxiety as a moderator of self concept malleability following a relationship breakup. Not about correlates of relationship breakup distress

69	Slotter et al (2010)	Who Am I Without You? The Influence of Romantic Breakup on the Self Concept	Study 1: cross sectional design study. Study 2: linguistic analysis design study; Study 3: longitudinal design study	Yes	Study examines self concept change as an important intra-personal correlate of distress. Met inclusion criteria and appropriate for review.
70	Spielmann et al (2009)	On the Rebound: Focusing on Someone New Helps Anxiously Attached Individuals Let Go of Ex-Partners	Correlational design study	Yes	Study investigated the association between focusing on attaining a new partner and levels post relationship distress for individuals who had recently experienced a relationship breakup
71	Sprecher et al (2006)	The Principle of Least Interest: Inequality in Emotional Involvement in Romantic Relationships	Longitudinal design study	No	Study investigated whether unequal emotional involvement between romantic partners had implications for relationship stability. Not about correlates of post relationship distress
72	Sprecher et al (2010)	Choosing Compassion Strategies to End a Relationship	Non experimental, correlational design study	No	An investigation of the strategies used to terminate romantic relationships
73	Tarabulsy et al (2012)	Attachment states of mind in late adolescence and the quality and course of romantic relationships in adulthood	Longitudinal study	No	Looks at the association between attachment style in adolescence with later relationship quality. Not about current correlates of breakup distress
74	Tashiro and Frazier (2003)	"I'll never be in a relationship like that again": Personal growth following romantic relationship breakups	Non experimental, correlational design	No	Study investigated the correlates of personal growth following romantic relationship breakups, not correlates of distress
75	Waller and MacDonald (2010)	Trait Self-Esteem Moderates the Effect of Initiator Status on Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Romantic Relationship Dissolution	Correlational design and One group, experimental design	Yes	Study looked at the effect of initiator status and self esteem as a correlate of post relationship distress. Met inclusion criteria
76	Wenik (2011)	Mending Broken Hearts with a throw of the dice	Three case studies from therapy presented.	No	Study examined the effectiveness of particular therapeutic techniques in the recovery of post relationship distress

Appendix C

JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Descriptive/Case Series

	Yes	No	Unclear
Reviewer: **Author:** **Article Title:**			
1. Was study based on a random or pseudo- random sample?			
2. Were the criteria for inclusion in the sample clearly defined? ☐			
3. Were confounding factors identified and strategies to deal with them stated? ☐			
4. Were outcomes assessed using objective criteria?			
5. If comparisons are being made, was there sufficient descriptions of the groups?			
6. Was follow up carried out over a sufficient time period?			
7. Were the outcomes of people who withdrew described and included in the analysis? ☐			
8. Were outcomes measured in a reliable way? ☐			
9. Was appropriate statistical analysis used? ☐			

Overall Appraisal: **Include**   **Exclude**   **Seek further Info**

Comments (Including reasons for exclusion)

Appendix D

STROBE Statement—checklist of items that should be included in reports of observational studies

	Item No	Recommendation
Title and abstract	1	(*a*) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract
		(*b*) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found
Introduction		
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any pre-specified hypotheses
Methods		
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection
Participants	6	(*a*) *Cohort study*—Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up
		Case-control study—Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of case ascertainment and control selection. Give the rationale for the choice of cases and controls
		Cross-sectional study—Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants
		(*b*) *Cohort study*—For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed
		Case-control study—For matched studies, give matching criteria and the number of controls per case
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable
Data sources/ measurement	8	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why
Statistical methods	12	(*a*). Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for

confounding

(*b*). Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions

(*c*). Explain how missing data were addressed

(*d*). *Cohort study*—If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed

Case-control study—If applicable, explain how matching of cases and controls was addressed

Cross-sectional study—If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of sampling strategy

(*e*) Describe any sensitivity analyses

Results

Participants	13	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed
		(b)Give reasons for non-participation at each stage
		(c)Consider use of a flow diagram
Descriptive data	14	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest
		(c) *Cohort study*—Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)
Outcome data	15	*Cohort study*—Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time
		*Case-control study—*Report numbers in each exposure category, or summary measures of exposure
		Cross-sectional study—Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures
Main results	16	(*a*) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included
		(*b*) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized
		(*c*) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period

Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses

Discussion

Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives
Limitations	19	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results

Other information

Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at http://www.plosmedicine.org/, Annals of Internal Medicine at http://www.annals.org/, and Epidemiology at http://www.epidem.com/). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

Appendix E: Quality appraisal of selected studies

Quality criteria	Article number																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Scientific background and rationale for the study clearly stated	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
Theoretical and research context provided	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
Aims and hypothesis clearly stated.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Method and study design clearly described	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2
Sample clearly described (i.e. details of sample demographics)	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2
Randomised sampling?	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Inclusion criteria clearly stipulated	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Methods of participant selection clearly stated	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	1	2	2	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	2
Adequate sample size	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2
Representativeness of sample	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Was possible bias addressed?	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Outcomes assessed using objective measures	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	2
Reliability and validity of measures reported	2	2	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	0	2

Statistical results clearly reported (outcomes reported)	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2
Descriptive data reported (characteristics of study participants	2	2	n/a	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	2
Significance levels/confidence intervals provided for results?	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Effect Size calculated and reported	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Summary of key results provided?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Are reliability and validity considered (internal and external validity)	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	2	2
Study question/hypotheses answered?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Generalisability of the findings discussed	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	2	2
Alternative explanations for results considered	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	2
Limitations considered	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	2
Suggestions for future research	2	2	2	1	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	1	1
Total score	39	36	32	28	33	32	33	27	32	35	28	26	29	30	25	28	34	25	21	29	43

Cognitive/behavioural articles: 1: Boelen and Reijntes (2009) 2: Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007). 3: Fagudas (2001). 4: Marshall (2012) 5: Mason et al (2012)
Attachment articles: Davis et al (2003) 7: Speilmann et al (2009).   8: Barbara and Dion (2000): 9: Gilbert and Sifers (2011) 10: Fagundas (2012) 11: Sbarra (2006)
Personality articles 12: Chung et al (2002) 13: Boelen and van den Hout (2010) 14: Park et al (2011) 15: Slotter et al (2010) 16: Mason et al (2012)
Situational variables 17: Waller and MacDonald (2010) 18: Field et al (2009) 19: Robak and Weitzman (1998) 20: Locker et al (2010) 21: Rhodes et al (2011)

Appendix F. Data extraction pro forma

Article Number:		
Title:		
Author (1st only):		
Publication Date:	**Place of publication:**	
Journal:		
Volume:	**Number:**	**Pages:**
Keywords / Definitions		
Aims:		
Sampling / Participants: (Total number of participants? Age range, who was studied, how was the sample recruited? Response rate?)		
Study Type / Design: (Randomized allocation? Is a control group used?)		
Outcomes and Measures: (What outcomes are being measured? What measurements are used? Are measures validated? At what time points are measures completed self-report or clinician-rated?)		
Intervention: (Type of intervention? Control group comparable? Format of the intervention? Staff delivering it?)		
Analysis: (What statistical methods were used? Was power calculated? Intention-to-treat?)		
Findings:		
Controls/ Validity / Reliability:		
Conclusions: (What do the findings mean? Generalisability? Implications & Recommendations?)		
Additional Comments:		

Appendix G

Table 1: The impact of cognitive and behavioural variables on distress following the dissolution of a romantic relationship

Study	Design	Sample	Variable	Outcome Measures	Findings
Boelen and Reijintjes (2009)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=79)	Cognitions	**Variable Measure**: Boelen and Reijntes (2009) used an adjusted version of the Grief Cognitions Questionnaire (GCQ) to assess negative cognitions following breakup. The GCQ is a 38 item measure capturing negative cognitions involved with emotional problems following loss. Items were altered so that references to death of a loved one were replaced by references to a relationship breakup. GCQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity, α =0.91 (Boelen & Lensvelt-Mulders, 2005). **Distress Measure:** Boelen and Reijntjes (2009) measured post relationship distress using an adjusted version of the Inventory of Complicated Grief Revised (ICG-R; Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001), and the Symptom checklist-90 (SCL-90) depression and anxiety scale (Derogatis, 1983; Dutch version by Arrindell & Ettema, 2003).	**Results** Negative cognitions following relationship dissolution, as measured by the GCQ, were associated with complicated grief, anxiety and depression, except for global beliefs about life, which was associated with complicated grief only. Catastrophic misinterpretations about one's own reactions to the breakup were among the strongest cognitive correlates of distress. Negative beliefs about the self were also key cognitive correlates of grief whilst cognitions about self blame emerged as key correlates of anxiety and depression.
Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=231)	Rumination (cognitive)	**Variable Measure**: Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007) used the General Rumination Scale (GRS; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2005), a 12 item scale modelled after Nolen, Hoeksema and Morrow's (1991) rumination	**Results** Those who ruminated more about their lost relationship reported more negative adjustment after breakup, compared to those who reported less rumination.

				response scale	Those who were more pre-occupied and regretful about the lost relationship reported more negative adjustment after breakup. Reflection, a more positive form of rumination, was associated with more positive adjustment.
				The Relationship Preoccupation Scale (RPS; Davis *et al.,* 2003), a 9 item scale that assesses the extent to which individuals focus on their los partner and relationships, The Global Regret Scale (Roese, 2003) a 6 item measure that assesses the extent to which individuals experience regret oriented thinking, to assess severity of rumination. **Distress Measure:** Researchers used the Mood and Anxiety Symptoms Questionnaire (MASQ), a 90 item with good psychometric properties, α =0.95 (Keogh & Reidy, 2000), to assess general distress, anxiety and depression along with a self devised relationship specific adjustment measure. The alphas for the positive adjustment and negative adjustment indices were .93 and .88 respectively	
Fagundas (2010)	Priming methodology	Undergraduate students (N=65; N=68)	Negative evaluations (cognitive)	**Variable Measure:** Fagundas (2010) utilized a subliminal priming methodology to assess negative evaluations about one's former partner **Distress Measure:** Adjustment was measured using the negative affect portion of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegan, 1988), a measure shown to have stable	**Results** Individuals who showed more implicit negative evaluations regarding their former partner immediately after a breakup had better post breakup emotional adjustment as measured by less depressive affect. Individuals who did not initiate the breakup demonstrated less negative implicit negative evaluations of their former partner as well as

				psychometric properties over a two month time period. Cronbach's alphas for negative affect over the two testing times was .93 and .88 respectively.	more depressive affect and poorer post breakup adjustment. Increases in negative evaluations about one's former partner over a 4 weeks period were associated with improvements in adjustment, as gauged by decreased depressive affect.
Mason, Sbarra, Bryan, and Lee (2012)	Cross sectional	Adults in community (N=137)	Ongoing contact, and sexual contact (behavioural)	**Variable Measure:** Mason et al (2012) used several self devised questionnaire measures with no reported psychometric properties used to capture continued *Contact with an Ex-Partner (CWE)* and continued *Sexual Contact with an Ex-partner (SWE)* Acceptance of Martial Termination (AMT) was used to assess for continued longing for, and degree of acceptance of the loss of, a former romantic partner. The internal consistency of the AMT scale in the sample was high (α = .91). **Distress Measure:** Mason et al (2012) used the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997) as an index of psychological adjustment in their sample with high reported internal consistency (α =.93)	**Results** Among individuals having continued contact with a former partner, those reporting less separation acceptance reported significantly poorer psychological adjustment relative to those reporting more separation acceptance. Among people reporting more separation acceptance, those who were having continued contact reported better adjustment than those not having a contact. Among people not having sexual contact, those reporting less separation acceptance reported poorer adjustment than those reporting more acceptance. Furthermore among those reporting less separation acceptance, those having continued sexual contact reported better adjustment than those not having sexual contact.
Marshall (2012)	Cross Sectional	Undergraduate students (N=464)	Facebook surveillance (Behavioural)	**Variable Measure:** Marshal (2012) utilised a self-devised questionnaire assessing participant's surveillance behaviours of former partners via facebook. Items rated on a 9 point scale ranging from *Never to Several times a day.*	**Results** Facebook surveillance was correlated with negative post breakup adjustment. Notably, frequent monitoring of an ex-partner's Facebook page and list of friends was associated with greater distress over the breakup, negative

| | | | | **Distress Measure:**
Marshall (2012) measured current distress over the breakup using a Six item self-devised measure. Also measured personal growth following the breakup using a modified version of the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeshchi & Calhoun, 1996) to ask how much life change they had experienced in different areas as a result of the breakup. | feelings, sexual desire, longing for the ex-partner and lower personal growth.

Those who remained facebook friends with an ex-partner experienced lower negative feelings, sexual desire and longing for the former partner than people who were not facebook friends. |

Table 2: The impact of attachment style on distress experienced following the dissolution of a romantic relationship

Study	Design	Sample	Variables	Outcome Measures	Findings
Davis et al. (2003)	Cross sectional	Adult internet respondents (N=5248)	• Attachment Style	**Variable measures:** Davis *et al.* (2002) used a 9 item attachment measure taken from the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) measure (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) with good levels of reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$), **Distress/adjustment measures:** Davis et al made use of a self devised questionnaire to measure emotional reactions and post-breakup experiences following the dissolution of a relationship. Davis et al provide alpha coefficients for all items included in their survey questionnaire (see page 876)	**Results:** Davis et al (2003) found individuals reporting anxious attachment styles experienced greater emotional and physical distress, more self blame, guilt and anger reactions and exaggerated attempts to re-establish the relationship,
Barbara & Dion (2000)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=115)	• Attachment style	**Variable measures:** Measured attachment style using a 40 item Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) proven to have good reliability and validity (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994). **Distress/adjustment measures:** Dion and Barbara made use of a self devised questionnaire to measure emotional reactions and post breakup experiences following the dissolution of a relationship. The researchers provide no psychometric	**Results:** Barbara & Dion (2000) reported that those with a strongly preoccupied style of attachment were least likely to have initiated the breakup and most likely to report more negative emotions following a relationship dissolution. Moreover, preoccupied individuals were least likely to be in a new relationship, suggesting that they may cling obsessively to past relationships rather than move on and make themselves open to forming new attachments.

				properties for their self devised tool	
Fagundes (2011)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=108)	• Attachment style	**Variable measures:** Fagundas (2012) measured attachment orientation using the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (Frayley, Waller & Brennan, 2000), a 36 item self report measure with good psychometric properties (α = .93). **Distress/adjustment measures:** Depressive symptoms were assessed with the 20 item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Cronbach's alpha for the measure were α=.91 Positive and negative affect were assessed using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegan, 1988). Cronbach's alpha for positive affect scale was α=.91 and for negative affect scale was α=.89 Researchers also used a composite index for emotional adjustment, representing the average of standardised positive affect and standardised negative affect and standardised and reflected depressive symptoms. The α for the composite index were .85 and .86.	**Results:** Fagundas (2011) found that anxiously attached individuals showed lower levels of emotional adjustment compared to less anxiously attached individuals. The author also found that those who reported a greater desire to utilize their ex-partner has an attachment figure exhibited less emotional adjustment immediately after the breakup compared to those who reported less desire to utilize their ex-partner as an attachment figure. However, attachment avoidance was not associated with post-breakup adjustment. People who did not choose to terminate their relationship reported less emotional adjustment immediately after the breakup, and this association was mediated by their greater desire to utilize their former partner as an attachment figure. Results indicated that more anxiously attached people exhibited lower levels of initial emotional adjustment compared to less anxiously attached people. Furthermore, people who reported high levels of reflection about the breakup reported less initial emotional adjustment compared to people who reported low levels of reflection about the breakup. Moreover, people who reported higher levels of reflection about the breakup reported

					less improved emotional adjustment in the following month if they also reported being more anxiously attached.
Speilmann, MacDonald, & Wilson (2009)	Study 1: cross sectional Study 2&3: experimental designs	Undergraduate students Study 1 (N=69) Study 2 (N=82) Study 3 (N=83)	• Attachment style • Degree of optimism/pessimism for alternative partners	**Variable measures:** Measured attachment style using a 40 item Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) proven to have good reliability and validity (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994). **Distress/adjustment measures:** Speilmann *et al.* (2011) did not measure distress per se but instead measured for continued feelings of attachment for the previous partner as a index of maladjustment. This was assessed using an adaptive version of Wegner and Gold's (1995) hot versus cold-flame questionnaire of continued Emotional Attachment Scale (α=.80).	**Results:** Speilmann *et al.,* (2010) found that individuals in the pessimism condition in their study with higher levels of attachment anxiety continued to demonstrate attachment to former partners, whereas longing for an ex-partner was reduced in the optimism condition. As such, having a more optimistic outlook for future romantic prospects decreases attachment to a former partner for anxiously attached individuals. In their correlational study, for participants with an anxious attachment style, being in a new relationship following a breakup was associated with less emotional attachment to a former partner than remaining single. Moreover, results of study 2 & 3 indicated that feeling optimistic about finding a new partner encouraged anxiously attached individuals to let go of a former partner.
Gilbert and Sifers (2011)	Cross Sectional	Undergraduates (N=1404)	• Parental bonding	**Variable measure:** Gilbert and Sifers (2010) used the parental bonding instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979) a 25 item scale examining participant's relationships with their caregivers. **Distress measure:** The Mental Health inventory (MHI; Veit &	**Results:** Individuals with secure parental bonding reported less distress after breakup whereas individuals with insecure attachments to parents in childhood experienced significantly more distress when their relationships ended. In particular, insecurely attached individuals reported significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression and loss of behavioural and emotional control while a secure

				Ware, 1983), a 38-item measure assessing various dimensions of psychopathology, including subscales for anxiety, depression, loss of behavioural/emotional control and affect. with strong internal reliability (Veit & Ware, 1983)	parental attachment with either parents provides protection and leads to resilience in coping following relationship dissolution.
Sbarra (2006)	Prospective design study, daily diary methodology	Undergraduate students (N=58)	• Relationship style	**Variable measure:** Sbarra (2006) used the relationship Styles Questionnaire (RSQ) to measure attachment style, a 30 item measure yielding four continuous attachment style subscales consistently found to have strong test-retest reliabilities and discriminant validity (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000). **Distress measure:** The Mood and Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire (MASQ; Watson and Clark, 1991), a 90 item measure of symptoms associated with depression and anxiety with good psychometric properties (Watson et al., 1995). In the current study, the reliab**ility was .88**	**Results:** Sbarra (2006) examined emotional recovery and found that attachment anxiety was associated with decreased probability of sadness recovery while attachment security was associated with increased anger recovery. Findings also revealed that that secure individuals seem to enact more adaptive and healthy behaviours for managing emotional distress following a relationship dissolution. They were significantly less likely to report high levels of non acceptance and continued longing, which in turn, enabled them to let go of breakup related sadness. In contrast, less secure individuals were more likely to get "stuck" in a struggle of non acceptance and disbelief that the relationship had ended.

Table 3: The impact of relationship specific variables on distress experienced following the dissolution of a romantic relationship

Study	Design	Sample	Variables	Outcome Measures	Findings
Robak and Weitzman (1998)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=148)	• Relationship intimacy and closeness • perceived fault for breakup	**Variable measures:** Robak and Weitzman (1998) used a self devised Questionnaire to assess the relationship variables of interest **Distress/adjustment measures:** Several measure of grief, including the "loss version" of the Grief Experience Inventory (GEI) which measured emotional responses to loss with reported good reliability and validity, $\alpha = 0.87$(Sanders, Mauger & Strong, 1985), and an adapted version of the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG) with no reported psychometric properties.	**Results:** Robak and Weitzman (1998) found the more intimate the relationship had been, the greater the severity of grief symptoms experienced following the loss. In addition, perceived closeness and the more marriage had been considered during the course of the relationship, was associated with higher levels of grief and more depressive symptomatology. Furthermore, talk about marriage had a significant impact on the length of time required to recover from the loss. However, no relationship was found between attributions relating to whose fault it was for the breakup and grief experienced. In other words, whether one believes that was their fault or the other's fault, the same grief was experienced. Robak and Weitzman (1998) also found that respondents were more likely to have intense feelings of loss and grief and ruminate more when the relationship breakup was initiated by their partner. In addition, those who had not initiated the breakup also seemed so experience higher levels of anger, greater feelings of loss of control and ruminated more. Surprisingly, who initiated the breakup did not affect the length of time needed to get over the loss.

| Waller and MacDonald (2010) | Prospective design (study 1) Experimental design (study2) | Undergraduate students (N=266 study1) (N=190 study 2) | • Initiator status as moderated by self esteem | **Variable measures:** Self esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, a 10 item scale with high inter-item reliability, α = 0.89 (Rosenberg, 1965) and with the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), a 20 item self report questionnaire with high inter item reliability (α = .94).

Initiator status report assessed the extent to which participants received themselves, relative to their partner, as having been responsible for the decision to end the relationship.

Distress/adjustment measures: Mood questionnaire, 12 item measure with good reliability (α=.91)

Breakup distress questionnaire, partly derived from a questionnaire created by Thompson and Spanier (1983) and partly self devised. The overall scale had high inter item reliability (α=.87)

Self evaluation questionnaire with high inter item reliability (α=.96)

Positive and Negative Affect Sacles (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). A questionnaire designed to assess mood state. The scale demonstrated high inter item reliability | **Results:** The effects of initiator status on post breakup distress varied as a function of low self esteem. Individuals with low self esteem reported more distress after partners initiated the breakup, or after imagining a romantic rejection, compared to individuals who had initiated the end of the relationship. In essence, individuals with low self esteem experienced more distress after being rejected by a romantic partner, in comparison to individuals with high self esteem, where initiator status did not predict distress. |

				(Cronbach's α = .94)	
Locker et al (2010)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=267)	• Initiator status • Contact with former partner • Relationship length • Number of previous relationships • Length of time before dating someone new • Social support	Locker *et al.* (2010) used a self devised survey to assess the relationship variables of interest, in addition to participant's subjective ratings of how long it took them to recover from a relationship breakup in months. As such, no empirically validated measures of distress or psychological adjustment were used.	**Results:** Locker et al. (2010) found that how quickly a person begins dating someone new was a robust predictor or recovery from a breakup. Moreover, relationship length was also related to recovery time, particularly for women but not for men. The authors found no relationship between social support and recovery. Other situational variables were not significantly related to recovery. In particular, lack of social support is often cited as a central reason as to why individuals may have difficulties adjusting following a relationship breakup, and yet having friends and family to confide in following a breakup seemed to have little bearing on how long it took participants to recover.
Rhodes et al (2011)	Within subjects design	Unmarried adults, age 18-35yrs. (N=1295)	• Relationship duration • Cohabitation • Plans to marry • Having children with former partner • Continued contact	**Variable measures:** Rhodes et al (2011) employed a number of self devised measures with no reported psychometric properties to assess for relationship specific variables of interest including relationship length, cohabitation status, plans for marriage, children, continued contact, desire to breakup and dating someone new. **Distress/adjustment measures:**	**Results:** Rhodes et al (2011) found that relationships that had been characterised by more investment were associated with greater distress following the breakup. In particular, having been cohabiting and having plans for marriage were associated with larger reductions in life satisfaction. Moreover, cohabitation makes it harder to adjust following a breakup. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Soon

| | | | | Distress was measured using items from the Mood and Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire (Clark & Watson, 1991). Previous research has valued the sue of the chosen items in measuring distress (α = 0.94; Wortel & Rogge, 2010). Rhodes et al also used a measure of life satisfaction as a measure of adjustment following relationship dissolution, notably the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This scale has demonstrated validity and reliability (Pavot & Diner, 2009) | et al., 2009) dating someone new was associated with smaller declines in life satisfaction. Interestingly, having a child together, which was hypothesised to be a salient relationship investment factor, was not related to the magnitude of psychological distress post dissolution.

Furthermore, having higher perceived relationship quality before the breakup was associated with a smaller declines in life satisfaction after the breakup of the relationship.

Researchers also found an association between contact with the former partner following the dissolution of the relationship and greater declines in life satisfaction.

However, the relationship specific characteristics were only related to changes in life satisfaction, not to changes in distress. In other words, no relationship specific characteristic was significantly associated with the magnitude of psychological distress following a breakup. Although these two indices of wellbeing are moderately correlated, they measure different aspects of functioning, which may explain why relationship characteristics related to more changes in life satisfaction rather than psychological distress |
| Field et al (2009) | Cross sectional | Undergraduates (N=192) | • Initiator status
• Whether it felt | **Variable measure**
Field et al (2009) employed a 120-item questionnaire assessing for a range | **Results:**
Field et al (2011) divided their sample into high versus low breakup distress from scores |

81

| | | | | sudden/unexpected
• Whether the person had felt betrayed
• Whether the person had felt rejected
• Relationship duration
• Time since breakup
• In a new relationship | relationship specific variables of interest

Several other empirically validated measures were used to assess other related variables including the Intrusive Thoughts Scale (ITS), the Difficulty Controlling Intrusive Thoughts Scale (DCITS), the Sleep Disturbances Scale, the Epidemiology Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D) and the State Anxiety Inventory (STAI)

Distress measure:
A number of measures were used to assess for psychological distress. These included the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) which was adapted from the Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG) (Prigerson et al., 1995). The final ICG scales demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's α =0.94). Moreover, the ICG total score showed a fairly high associations with the BDI total score (r=0.87). | on the Breakup Distress Scale. They found no effect for initiator status or the suddenness of the relationship ending on psychological distress. Equal numbers in both the high and low distress groups reported that they had initiated the breakup compared with those reporting that the other person had initiated the breakup.

Moreover, equal numbers also suggested that the breakup felt sudden and unexpected compared to others suggesting it was not.

Differences were observed on important relationship specific variables. More participants in the high distress group reported they did not agree with the breakup, had felt a sense of betrayal and had thought the relationship was permanent and no longer saw or talked to the former partner.

Those in the high distress group reported a shorter time since the relationship had ended. In essence, time was one of the most helpful factors in recovery.

Those with higher breakup distress also scored higher on the intrusive thought scale, whilst the Difficulty Controlling Intrusive Thoughts Scale scores were also higher for those in the higher distress group. High scores were also found on the sleep disturbances scale for the high distress group. |

Table 4: The impact of personality variables on distress experienced following the dissolution of a romantic relationship

Study	Design	Sample	Variables	Outcome Measures	Findings
Chung et al (2002)	Cross sectional	Undergraduate students (N=60)	• Self esteem • Neuroticism	**Variable measures:** Self esteem was measured using the Self Esteem Rating Scale (SERS), a 40 item instrument which aims to measure both positive and negative aspects of self esteem in clinical practice Neuroticism was measured using the Eysenck personality questionnaire-R short scale (EPQ-R; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991) **Distress/adjustment measures:** Impact of events scale (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alverez, 1979) General health questionnaire (GHQ-28; Goldberg & Hillier, 1979)	**Results:** Self esteem was an important predictor of distress following the dissolution of a relationship. A severe degree of post traumatic stress symptoms were experienced by people who had experienced the dissolution of a dating relationship endorsing low self esteem. However, following relationship dissolution, the participants did not appear to be particularly neurotic. Nevertheless, neuroticism did predict the total impact of the dissolution, going someway to confirm the hypothesis that personality factors, including neuroticism are associated with post traumatic stress symptoms following the dissolution of a dating relationship.
Park, Sanchez and Brynildsen (2011)	Cross sectional	Adult participants (N=312)	• Relationship contingent self worth	**Variable measures:** Measures of self worth from being in a relationship were measured using the relationship Contingency Self worth Scale (CSW) developed by Sanchez and Kwang shown to have consistently high reliabilities, $\alpha = 0.89$ (Sanchez & Kwang, 2007). **Distress/adjustment measures:** Emotional distress was assessed using a revised short form of the Multiple	**Results:** Results of structural equation modelling revealed that those who strongly based their self worth on being in a relationship reported greater emotional distress and maladaptive responses such as obsessional pursuit behaviours following relationship dissolution than those who reported low contingent self worth. Furthermore, emotional distress partially mediated the link between relationship contingent self worth and obsessive pursuit following a breakup. In other

					Adjectives Affect Check List (MAACL-R; Zuckerman & Lubin, 1985). Reliability for the overall scale was α=.90 Obsessive pursuit was measured using an extended version of the Obsessive Pursuit Scale (Davis et al., 2000), a 36 item scale. Reliability for the sample was (α =.93)	words, the more participants based their worth on being in a relationship, the more distressed they felt following the breakup, which in turn partially accounted for their increased likelihood of engaging in obsessive pursuit behaviours towards their former partner.
Boelin & van den Hout (2010)	Cross sectional Experimental task	Undergraduate students (N=78)	• Identity intertwined with partner		**Variable measures:** The extent to which the participant perceived their intensity to be 'intertwined' with the former partner was assessed using the Inclusion of Other Scale (IOS), a single item, pictorial measure of relationship closeness with adequate test-retest reliability, predictive and discriminant validity (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). **Distress/adjustment measures:** An adjusted version of the revised Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG-r; Prigerson and Jacobs, 200) was used to assess symptoms of complicated grief. Specifically, references to death were replaced by references to a breakup. Cronbach's alpha for the sample was α=.95	**Results:** Boelen & van den Hout (2010) found that scores on the IOS scale were positively correlated with the severity of breakup related grief. Therefore those who reported a stronger sense of connection between self and former partner experienced more intense symptoms such as yearning for the former partner, along with difficulty accepting the dissolution. These findings are consistent with grief studies among bereaved individuals which demonstrated that grief severity is stronger when the lost person is more central to self identity (Boelen, 2009; Maccallum & Bryant, 2008).
Slotter, Gardner and Finkel (2008)	Study 1: Cross sectional Study 2: Linguistic analysis Study 3:	Undergraduate students Study1a N=72; Study 1b N=66;	• Self concept change		**Variable measures:** Study 1a-b & 3, Slotter et al (2010) assessed self concept change (study 1a & b) through a series of questionnaires, particularly a self-concept content change measure consisting of five items, each tapping a different	**Results:** Results indicated that the loss of a romantic relationship subsequently impacts upon various types of self concept change. After a breakup, individuals experienced self concept change and also a reduction in self concept clarity. Moreover,

| | Longitudinal design | Study 2 N=76) Study 3 N=69 | | domain of the self that the breakup could influence, particularly appearance, activities, social activities, future plans and values. Self concept clarity was assessed using a 12 item scale developed by Campbell et al. (1996) which measures the degree to which individuals feel that they have a strong sense of themselves and that all part of their self concept fit together into a cohesive self unit.

In study 3 participants also completed a one item measure of time varying self concept clarity, a one item measure of felt rejection

Distress/adjustment measures:
Study 1-2, Slotter et al measured distress using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Steer, Ball & Ramieri, 1996), a 20 item measure of the intensity of depressive symptoms (α=.80)

In study 3 distress was measured using the Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Measure (CES-D; Radloff, 1977), a 20 item measure (α=.91) | individuals felt that their selves were subjectively smaller following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

Results indicated that reduced self concept clarity following a relationship breakup and that reduced self concept clarity uniquely predicted emotional distress following a breakup. In particular, when remembering a recent breakup, individuals reported self concept change and reduced self concept clarity after the breakup. As such Reduced self concept clarity predicted the emotional distress suffered in the wake of romantic breakup, demonstrating the unique contribution of self concept clarity to the emotional distress that individuals experience post breakup.

Regression analysis further revealed that both higher levels of self concept change and lower levels of self concept clarity predicted higher levels of emotional distress. However, when entered simultaneously in the model, only self concept clarity emerged as a significant predictor. This loss of self concept clarity was robust enough to appear in naturalistic writing samples, and on validated measures of self concept clarity. |
| Mason et al (2009) | Experimental design | Undergraduates (N=70) | • Self concept recovery | **Variable measure:**
Self concept recovery as a correlate of distress was measured using a composite of the Loss of Self (LOS) and rediscovery of self (ROS) scale respectively (LOSROS). LOS items were designed to measure feelings of loss in the context of the self concept, and the ROS items were designed | **Results:**
An association between self concept recovery and psychological wellbeing was demonstrated in that participants reporting poorer self concept recovery following the dissolution of a relationship tended to report poor psychological wellbeing. |

| | | | | to measure the extent to which participants felt they had become reacquainted with aspects of the self. The LOS and ROS scales were negatively and positively associated with each other and, respectively, negatively and positively correlated with self reported psychological growth following a romantic dissolution (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). The internal consistency of the LOSROS scale in the present sample was good (α =.82)

Distress measure:
Mason used and a modified version the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale, a 22 item scales capturing variability in well being among individuals with strong alpha coefficients (α = .91). | Results also indicated that greater reported love for the former partner at each point of testing was associated with poorer self concept recovery. These findings are consistent with previous research which highlights the association between continued love for an ex-partner and poorer psychological wellbeing (e.g. Sbarra, 2006; Simpson, 1987)

Psychophysiological data revealed that increased physiological activity while thinking about an ex-partner was associated with poorer self concept recovery and strengthened the negative association between love for a former partner and self concept recovery |

Part 2: Research report

Towards the Development of a Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Relationship Dissolution Distress

Date of submission: April 2014

Abstract

Background
There is a consistent body of research suggesting that the breakup of a romantic relationship can contribute to the development of a variety of psychological and emotional difficulties. The severity of these emotional reactions, along with the prevalence of individuals presenting in mental health services for adjustment difficulties following relationship loss, makes research into relationship dissolution distress an important empirical endeavour. However, despite the clear association with clinical outcomes, an empirically validated model has yet to be developed for clinicians treating individuals presenting with a prolonged and ongoing duration of distress following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

Aims
The objective of this research was to gain a richer understanding of the cognitive and behavioural experiences of individuals reporting difficulties adjusting following relationship loss. In particular, to assess for commonality of themes across individuals in order to contribute to the development of a theoretical model of post relationship attachment, similar to those available in the research for other emotional disorders.

Method
Twenty-seven individuals reporting difficulties adjusting following the dissolution of a relationship took part in qualitative interviews about their experiences and completed self-report measures pertaining to attachment style and personality characteristics. Qualitative data was recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed using a template analysis approach.

Results
The consistency of themes across individuals suggested that the proposal of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress was a realistic empirical endeavour. The proposed model incorporates pre-disposing vulnerability factors, relationship breakup factors and cognitive and behavioural variables hypothesised to be systematically related and known to exacerbate distress over time. The model is both clinically and theoretically derived, based on integrated cognitive-behavioural and attachment dynamics.

Conclusion
The findings have useful implications for clinicians working with individuals experiencing relationship dissolution difficulties and may point to promising targets of cognitive and behavioural intervention. The next challenge is to test the applicability of the model through further empirical investigation

1. Introduction

There is a consistent body of research demonstrating that the dissolution of a romantic relationship remains one of the most distressing life events and a prospective risk factor for the development of a variety of emotional and clinical problems (e.g. Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). Nevertheless, research into the factors that collectively contribute to the emotional difficulties experienced following a relationship loss has been relatively overlooked in terms of systematic enquiry. This seems somewhat paradoxical given the clear empirical association with clinical distress and prevalence of individuals presenting in counselling and psychology services for adjustment difficulties following the breakup of a significant relationship (e.g. Benton *et al.,* 2003).

Much of the existing research within the area of relationship dissolution focuses on isolated variables of distress within the context of quantitative research methodology. A recent literature review was carried out with a view of understanding further those factors most salient in accounting for individual difference reactions following a relationship dissolution. In particular, why some individuals recover relatively quickly while others seem prone to experiencing a greater amount of grief when a relationship fails. The review suggested that a range of variables significantly influence distress reactions following loss. In particular, cognitive and behavioural variables, personality characteristics, relationship-specific factors and attachment style all seem to play a significant role in adjustment experiences following the breakup of a close relationship (e.g. Boelen & Reijntes, 2009; Chung *et al.,* 2002; Davis *et al.*, 2003).

1.2 Gaps within the literature

It has not yet been empirically examined how such variables may be systematically related, particularly through any qualitative research examining individual's experiences. Furthermore, an empirically validated model has yet to be developed accounting for individuals presenting with a prolonged and ongoing duration of distress following the dissolution of a close relationship. The objective of this research was therefore to investigate whether such variables, borne out of quantitative studies, were

collectively present in the qualitative experiences of individuals reporting significant adjustment difficulties following a relationship dissolution. Furthermore, to consider how these factors, along with new emergent themes, may be systematically related in order to contribute to the development of a cognitive-behavioural conceptualisation of relationship dissolution distress.
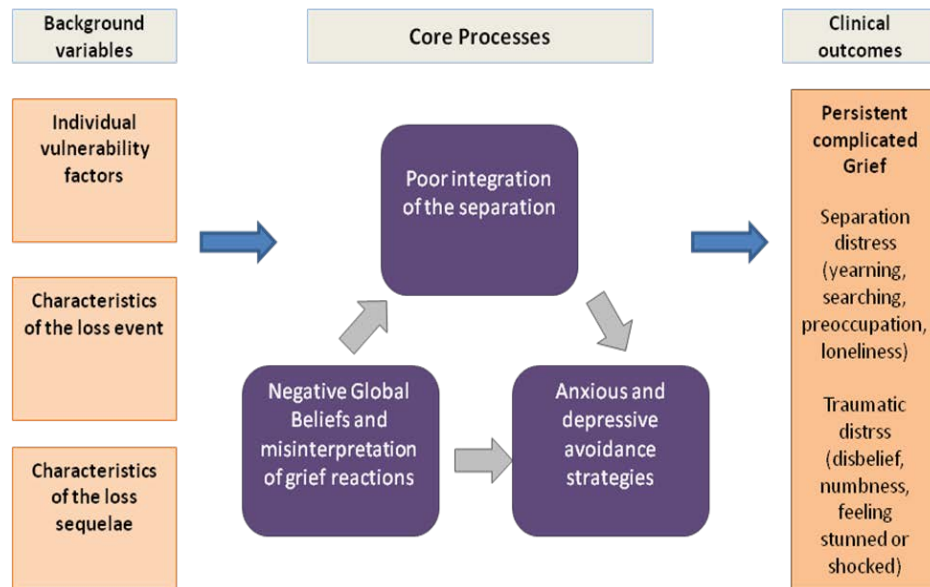
1.3 A Cognitive-Behavioural Model of grief

Recently Boelen, van den Hout, and van den Bout (2006) developed a cognitive-behavioural model of complicated grief following the loss of a loved one. However the extent to which this model may generalise to relationship loss has yet to be established. The model proposes that three interrelated cognitive and behavioural processes underline complex grief reactions following loss and are hypothesised to directly contribute to prolonged grief symptoms. These processes relate to;

- *Poor integration of the loss into autobiographical knowledge;*
- *Persistent negative thinking, specifically negative cognitions about the self, life and the future and catastrophic misinterpretations of one's own grief reactions;*
- *Avoidance behaviour.*

Similar to romantic relationship dissolution, the model suggests that individuals with attachment difficulties have an elevated tendency to experience negative cognitions and more inclined to engage in unhelpful behaviours following a loss, which in turn leaves them vulnerable to becoming stuck in a process of mourning (Boelen *et al*., 2006). In particular, the model postulates that negative thoughts about the self, life and the future directly contribute to a persistent focus on the lost relationship, whereas catastrophic misinterpretations of grief reactions contribute to distress and avoidance behaviours that inhibit adjustment (for a full explanatory account see Boelen & Klugkist, 2011).

Figure 1: Cognitive – Behavioural model of Grief (Boelen *et al.,*2006)

1.4 The development of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress

The extent to which this model may generalise to romantic loss has yet to be established and a similar conceptualisation accounting for relationship dissolution distress has not yet been proposed.   As stated, much of the existing research to date focuses on individual correlates of distress as isolated variables such as attachment style, cognitive variables or relationship specific variables. However, it has not yet been established how these factors may systematically 'link up' to provide a working model of relationship dissolution distress.

A recent study by Boelen and Reijntjes (2009) represents the only study to have systematically examined the cognitions, beliefs and appraisals that contributes to emotional distress following relationship dissolution. Consistent with Boelen *et al's* (2006) cognitive model of prolonged grief, cognitive variables significantly predicted the variance in emotional problems between individuals following relationship dissolution, over and above the variance explained by demographic, relationship and personality variables. In the particular, negative beliefs about the self and the future,

thoughts of self blame and catastrophic misinterpretations of grief reactions were important correlates of breakup related distress.

These findings therefore point to similarities with other established cognitive models of emotional disorders and suggest that the development of cognitive model of relationship attachment may be a realistic empirical endeavour. Indeed, central to other cognitive models of emotional distress is the notion that the variations in the cognitions people experience after difficult events partly account for the differences in emotional reactions they experience (e.g. Ehlers & Clark, 2000).

Furthermore, maladaptive behavioural responses may also contribute to the emotional problems experienced following the dissolution of a relationship. Indeed, Salkovskis (1991) argues the importance of behaviours as maintenance factors in other emotional disorders such as anxiety and panic. Consistent with in Boelen *et al's* (2006) model of grief and more traditional cognitive-behavioural models of anxiety disorders such as Health Anxiety (Salkovskis, 1989; Warwick & Salkovskis, 1990) Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (Salkovskis 1985) or Body Dismorphic Disorder (Veale, 2004), individuals may potentially engage in unhelpful and maladaptive ways of coping following the dissolution of a relationship that serves to keep focus of attention on the lost partner and inhibit recovery. It is hypothesised that such cognitive and behavioural processes may therefore play a significant role in contributing to emotional difficulties following relationship dissolution.

1.5 Adult Attachment theory

The extension of attachment theory to understanding adult relationships has provided valuable insights into understanding why breakups are harder for some people than others. Indeed, a great deal of research has focused on 'attachment style' as a moderator of post-relationship distress (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 2003; Barbara & Dion, 2000; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Sbarra, 2006). Implications of these findings indicate that any proposed model of relationship dissolution distress would be misguided if it did not also consider attachment dynamics as a significant underpinning process involved in the onset and maintenance of symptoms.
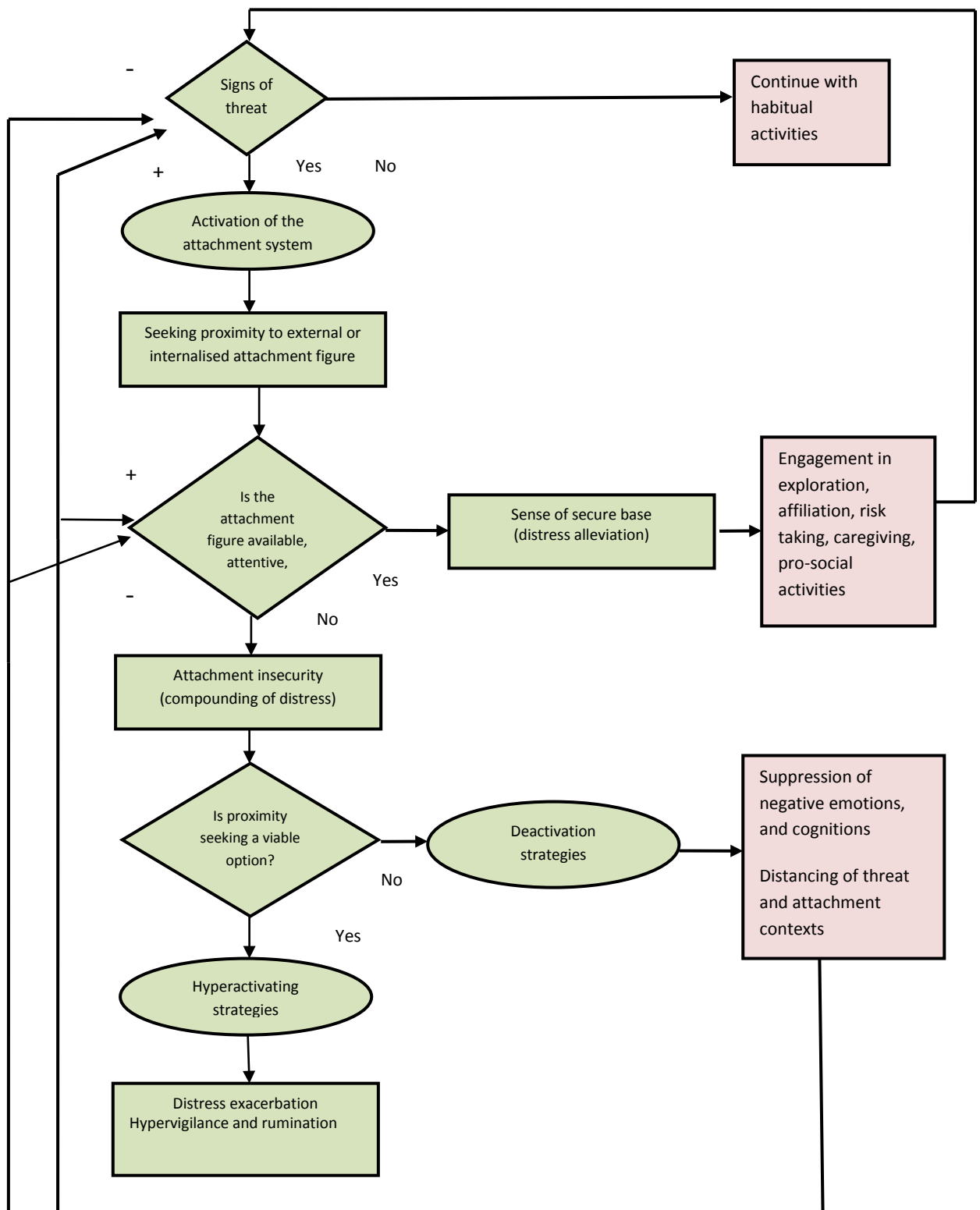
Research suggests that those with an insecure attachment style, notably an 'anxious' attachment style, have a particularly difficult time disconnecting emotionally from ex-partners and experience greater levels of distress and maladjustment following the loss of a relationship (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 2003; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Sbarra, 2006). Furthermore, anxious attachment may predispose individuals to engage in cognitive processes that can maintain elevated rates of emotional distress following relationship loss (Mikulincer, Gillath & Shaver, 2002), and also engage in maladaptive coping responses such as excessive rumination (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007) proximity seeking (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 2003) and even stalking the former partner (Davis, Ace & Andra, 2000). Further understanding of these cognitive and behavioural processes within the context of an attachment framework may be important in the theoretical development of a cognitive-behavioural conceptualisation of distress.

1.6 Model of Attachment Activation (Shaver and Mikulincer, 2002)

Building on Bowlby's (1969/80) theoretical proposals, Shaver and Mikulincer (2002) sought to account for why individuals with an 'anxious' attachment style are particularly vulnerable to relationship difficulties by presenting a model of *attachment-system activation, hyperactivation and deactivation*. This model provides a working conceptualisation of the 'attachment system', a biological mechanism responsible for the monitoring of safety and availability of attachment figures. Further understanding of the attachment system may also provide insights into some of the cognitive and behavioural processes experienced in the wake of relationship dissolution, important within the context of this research.

The attachment system is said to function to promote safety by activating during times of attachment threat or uncertainty, motivating individuals to seek out others as attachment figures (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). If attachment figures are unavailable, the attachment system becomes 'hyperactivated' and the individual is motivated to attempt to gain proximity to others whilst maintaining hypervigilance to continuing threats (see figure 2; Mikuliner & Shaver, 2002).

Figure 2: Shaver and Mikulincer (2002) model of attachment system activation

- **Signs of threat**
  - No → Continue with habitual activities
  - Yes → **Activation of the attachment system**
    - Seeking proximity to external or internalised attachment figure
    - **Is the attachment figure available, attentive,**
      - Yes → Sense of secure base (distress alleviation) → Engagement in exploration, affiliation, risk taking, caregiving, pro-social activities
      - No → Attachment insecurity (compounding of distress)
        - **Is proximity seeking a viable option?**
          - No → Deactivation strategies → Suppression of negative emotions, and cognitions / Distancing of threat and attachment contexts
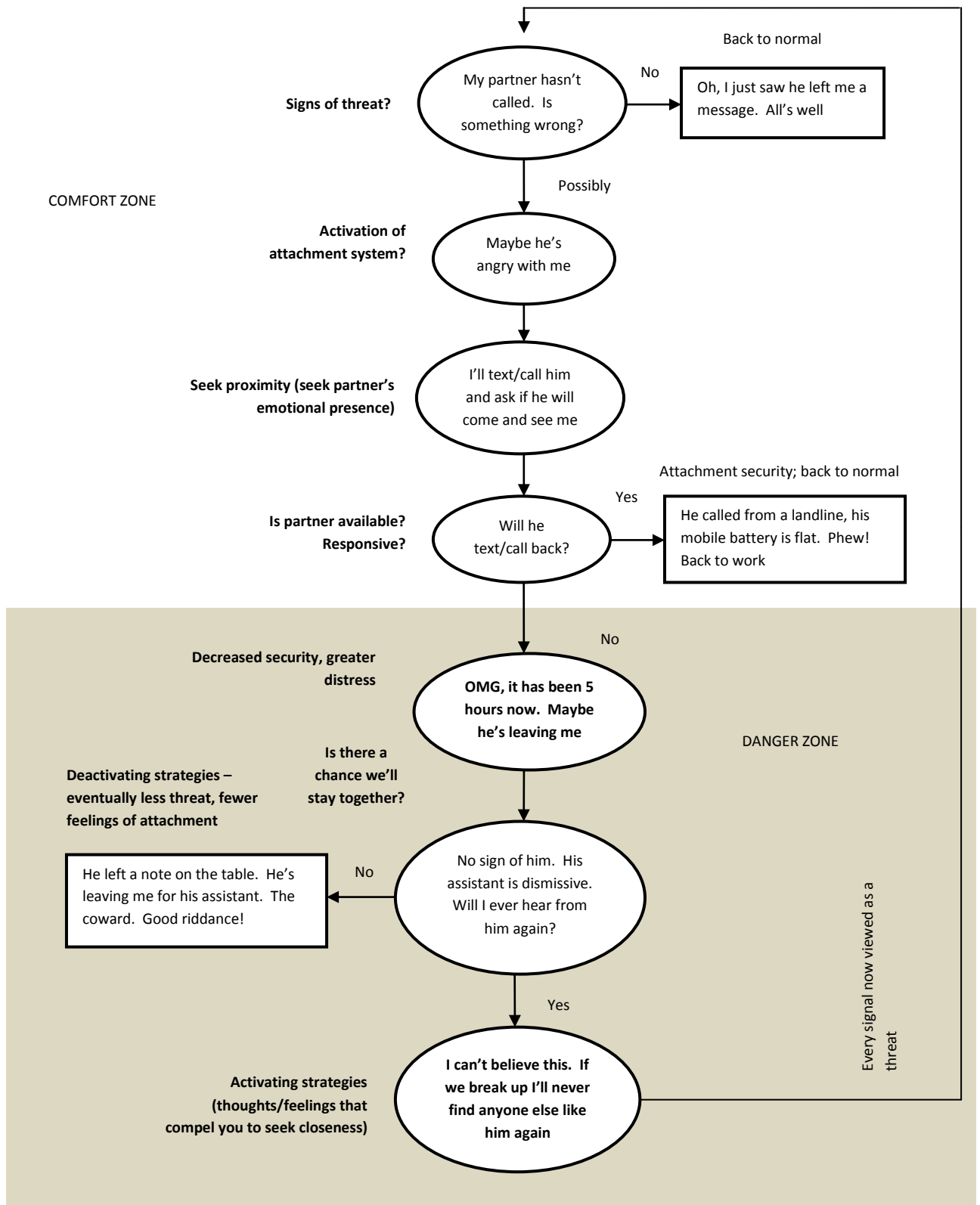   - Yes → Hyperactivating strategies → Distress exacerbation Hypervigilance and rumination

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Research suggests that individuals with an anxious attachment style have an extremely sensitive attachment system and a unique ability to sense relationship threats (e.g. Fraley *et al.,* 2006). Moreover, they are particularly sensitive to rejection (e.g. Feldman & Downey, 1994) and experience chronic activation of the attachment system in response to even relatively minor relationship threats and disturbances. Even a slight sense that something may be wrong within the relationship will activate the attachment system.

Once activated, the individual may experience intense feelings of distress, strong desire for safety and reassurance, preoccupation with the attachment figure and hypervigilance to further signs of threat. Furthermore, they will be unable to feel a reduction in distress until they experience a clear indication from their partner that they are available and the relationship is safe. Reconciling with the partner consequently brings about *deactivation* of the attachment system and restores the individual to psychological adjustment.

Figure 3 provides an illustration of how the attachment system works within the context of this research. As the figure reveals, the anxious individual feels almost a constant sense of threat to relationship abandonment and often lives within the '*danger zone*' (taken from Levine and Heller, 2011) anxiously struggling to maintain emotional equilibrium as they oscillate through cycles of activation with brief feelings of respite, before the system is activated again. Thoughts, feelings and behaviours become consumed with relationship threats and the notion that their partner may not be available to them. Such preoccupation subsequently leads to further vigilance of threat detection, heightened mental rumination and an amplification of emotional distress.

Figure 3: Working example of the attachment system (based on Shaver and Mikulincer's 2002 model of attachment system activation)

Signs of threat?

My partner hasn't called. Is something wrong? → No → Oh, I just saw he left me a message. All's well (Back to normal)

COMFORT ZONE

Possibly

Activation of attachment system?

Maybe he's angry with me

Seek proximity (seek partner's emotional presence)

I'll text/call him and ask if he will come and see me

Is partner available? Responsive?

Will he text/call back? → Yes → He called from a landline, his mobile battery is flat. Phew! Back to work (Attachment security; back to normal)

No

Decreased security, greater distress

OMG, it has been 5 hours now. Maybe he's leaving me

DANGER ZONE

Is there a chance we'll stay together?

Deactivating strategies – eventually less threat, fewer feelings of attachment

He left a note on the table. He's leaving me for his assistant. The coward. Good riddance! ← No ← No sign of him. His assistant is dismissive. Will I ever hear from him again?

Yes

Activating strategies (thoughts/feelings that compel you to seek closeness)

I can't believe this. If we break up I'll never find anyone else like him again

Every signal now viewed as a threat

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1.7 Application of attachment activation model

Relationship dissolution is hypothesised to expose the anxious individual to chronic activation of the attachment system. With a reconciliation unlikely, deactivation of the system remains outstanding leaving some individuals vulnerable to an amplifying cycle of distress and still pursuing the lost partner in order to deactivate the attachment system. However, directing attachment needs to ex-partners is said to interfere with post-breakup adjustment since the former partner can no longer be relied on to meet such needs (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). Nevertheless, some individuals continue to pursue the former partner and keep thoughts of the partner or a reconciliation alive in order to provide temporary alleviation of the activated attachment system.

1.8 Attachment and cognitive behavioural processes

The model of attachment system activation may shape our theoretical understanding of some of cognitive and behavioural processes the individual may experience following the dissolution of a relationship. Once the attachment system is activated following a relationship loss, the individual is said to be preoccupied with thoughts of re-establishing closeness with the partner. These processes are known as *activating strategies*. They are any thoughts, feelings or behaviours that motivate or compel the individual to pursue closeness, physically or emotionally, to the partner. Once the partner responds in a way that re-establishes a sense of security, a reduction in anxiety is achieved. Common thoughts and behaviours that compel the individual to seek closeness to their partner are provided in table 1.

Table 1: Thoughts and behaviours as activating strategies (taken from Levine & Heller, 2011)

- Preoccupation with the partner, difficulty concentrating on other things (Rumination)

- Remembering only the partner's good qualities (idealisation)

- Putting the partner on a pedestal: underestimating their own talents and abilities and overestimating the partners (idealisation)

- An anxious feeling that only goes away when the individual is in contact with them

- Believing this is their only chance for love, as in

  "I'm only compatible with very few people – what are the chances I'll find another person like him/her?

  "It takes years to meet someone new; I'll end up alone"

The anxious individual may also engage in *protest behaviours* following a relationship separation. Protest behaviours are thought of as any action or response aimed at re-establishing contact or getting the former partner's attention in a way they respond. However, engaging in both *protest behaviours* and *activating strategies* long after the partner has gone may potentially inhibit post relationship recovery. It is hypothesised that such processes may be found in the individual's experience of a relationship dissolution and may contribute to ongoing distress and difficulties adjusting. Further understanding of these processes is necessary to the development of a theoretical model of relationship dissolution distress, with particular focus on the interrelated attachment and cognitive and behavioural processes

1.9 Rationale for current study

In sum, there is extensive evidence suggesting that the breakup of a romantic relationship may contribute to the development of a variety of psychological and emotional difficulties. The severity of these emotional reactions, along with the prevalence of individuals presenting in mental health services for adjustment difficulties following relationship loss makes research into relationship distress an important empirical endeavour. However, despite the research literature looking at correlates of relationship dissolution distress as isolated variables, little empirical work has ensued examining how such correlates may be related with a view to developing an empirically validated theoretical account.

Previous studies have largely been quantitative studies using cross-sectional design features. Unfortunately these studies have not provided the richness of information pertaining to the individual's unique experience of relationship dissolution. Indeed, there is currently little qualitative research that looks to gain a fuller understanding of the individual's experience of relationship dissolution, but more interestingly, to see whether some of the known variables associated with distress are collectively present in their reported experiences so that a clinical conceptualisation can be proposed.

1.10 Aims and Objectives

The objective of this research was therefore to gain a richer qualitative understanding of the cognitive and behavioural experiences of individuals reporting difficulties adjusting following a relationship loss. In particular, the aim was to examine for commonality in themes across individual accounts and to investigate whether some of the variables of distress, borne out of quantitative studies, were collectively present in the individual's qualitative experiences. Moreover, to consider how these factors, along with new emergent themes, may be systematically related in order to contribute to the development of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress, similar to those available in the research for other emotional disorders. The administration of self-report questionnaires measures pertaining to attachment orientation and personality characteristics would also ascertain the presence of potential vulnerability factors, hypothesised to be related to distress reactions and significant to the proposal of a theoretical conceptualisation.

2. Method

2.1 Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design study in order to explore its research objectives. Data was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were proposed as the most useful method to capture data as they allow access to the individual's subjective experience and the exploration of meaning. Self-report measures pertaining to personality variables and attachment orientation were also administered as a supplementary feature to the research methodology in order to ascertain the presence of pre-existing vulnerability factors.

A qualitative analytic approach was selected for a number of reasons. As stated, there are currently no qualitative research studies within the literature examining the correlates of relationship dissolution distress. Therefore this research looked to address a significant 'gap' within the literature. Furthermore, a qualitative approach would provide rich descriptions of the individual's unique cognitive and behavioural experiences and also indicate whether particular themes were consistent with previous research findings within the area, necessary for the validation of a proposed theoretical model.

Template analysis (King, 2004) was considered a suitable method of data analysis given the research objectives of this study. A phenomenological research approach was adopted on the assumption that it was possible to locate the experiences of the participants within the existing concepts highlighted in previous research, particularly the research looking at the mechanisms associated with relationship dissolution distress. The philosophical position was therefore more aligned to a 'critical realist' position, in that it is possible to locate individual's experiences within established frameworks.

2.2 Participants

Those eligible for participation were individuals reporting difficulty adjusting following the dissolution of a dating relationship and were sought either through clinical services, student populations or from volunteer participation. A total of thirty-one participants

(N=31) took part in the research study overall with interviews taking place over the course of a year. The initial sample consisted of twenty two female participants and nine male participants (Female = 21; Male =9), although four participants were later excluded from analysis either due to not meeting inclusion criteria or due to other ethical issues. This resulted in a final sample size of twenty seven participants (N=27; Female = 19; Male = 8).

2.3 Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Individuals reporting a prolonged duration of emotional distress and ongoing preoccupation with a former partner following the dissolution of a dating relationship were eligible for participation. No criteria for exclusion of participants on the basis of ethnicity, sexuality, occupational status, or any other socio-demographic characteristic were imposed. However, individuals were excluded if they reported difficulties adjusting following divorce. Divorce was considered a qualitatively different area of research and is dealt with separately in the research literature. Individuals with a known Axis II diagnosis were not eligible for this study.

2.4 Sample size

The sample size was partially determined by the method of data analysis and the epistemological assumptions that underlie the use of this particular form of analysis. Template analysis (TA) is considered a flexible analytic method with fewer specified procedures than other qualitative techniques such as IPA or grounded theory (King, 2004). As such, TA is generally less time consuming than such approaches, permitting the use of larger sample sizes. While IPA or grounded theory studies are commonly based on samples of 10 or fewer, template analysis studies are able to handle larger data sets more comfortably, with 20 to 30 participants being common.

2.5 Materials/Resources

2.5.1 semi-structured questionnaire

A semi structured interview schedule was devised for the purposes of this study. The interview schedule was designed around investigatory themes of interest. Indeed, areas for exploration were partially derived from previous research findings to ascertain the presence of certain cognitive and behavioural phenomena. The schedule contained fifteen specific questions in total pertaining to three key areas including; general issues relating to the relationship and the breakup, cognitive features including key thoughts and appraisals, and behavioural and maintenance factors.

Questions were deliberately structured given the research aims made explicit at the start of the study. For example, the research was interested in examining whether particular phenomena, as alluded to within the research literature (i.e. particular thoughts, appraisals or behaviours), were evident in the reported accounts of individuals experiencing a recent relationship dissolution. As such, it was important that questions were deliberately structured and specifically focused around these areas in order to ascertain their presence or not. However, the research was also interested in exploring new emergent themes. As such, several questions on the questionnaire remained general, open-ended questions inviting the participant to relay particular aspects of their relationship experience they felt were relevant to them. This was to give the participant an opportunity to contribute to the research in a meaningful way without their responses being in anyway constrained or influenced by structured questionnaire items.

In sum, the interview schedule was therefore sufficiently structured to maintain focus around the key areas but not overly rigid to inhibit emerging themes. The interview schedule was developed and shared with an academic supervisor and subsequent revisions lead to the final version which was used throughout all participant interviews (Appendix A). Upon reflection, a pilot questionnaire may have been administered to participants prior to formal data collection and subsequently modified accordingly throughout the research process. However, given the time constraints associated with a DClin Psy research project, along with the uncertainty of knowing whether the

researcher would recruit the targeted sample size in the time frame available, suitable participants meeting inclusion criteria were interviewed immediately upon referral.

2.5.2 Self report measures

Participants were required complete a questionnaire measure examining the way they related to others in the context of intimate relationships, namely the Experiences in Close relationships-Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000).   The ECR-R is a 36 item self-report attachment measure designed to assess attachment orientations in romantic relationships and represents the most sophisticated and empirically validated measure of adult attachment to date (see Sibley & Liu, 2004;   Appendix B). Participants were required to rate how strongly they agreed with a number of items on a 7 point scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*agree strongly*).   The questionnaire items are grouped into two dimensions of attachment (anxious and avoidant) and ratings are combined to provide an attachment score along specific attachment dimensions, classifying people into four adult attachment styles, *secure, preoccupied, dismissive* and *fearful* respectively. As such, scores do not look to classify individuals into 'discrete' categories, but instead place individuals along attachment dimensions (see figure 4)

Figure 4: ECR-R attachment dimensions (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000)
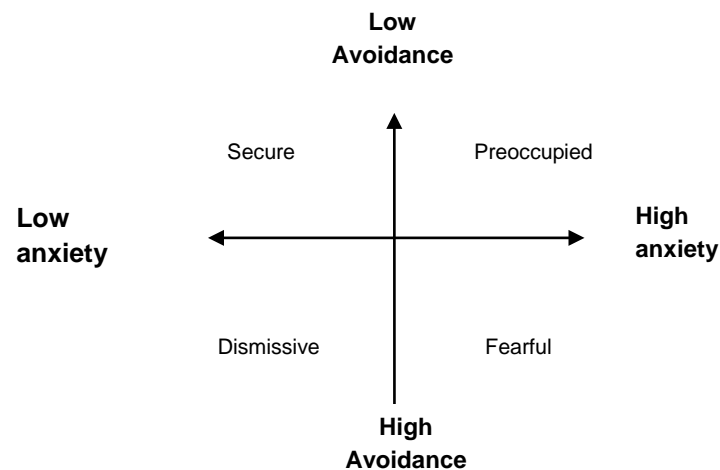
Participants were also required to complete a personality questionnaire, namely the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ–S3). The rationale for this was to determine

whether negative schemas were a potential vulnerability factor in the development of relationship attachment issues as demonstrated in other cognitive models of emotional disorders (e.g. Garety, Kuipers, Fowler, Freeman & Bebbington, 2001). More specifically, to identify which particular schemas may be significant in accounting for the variance in distress experienced between individuals. The Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ; Young & Brown, 1990, 2001) is a valuable clinical tool for the investigation of core beliefs and negative schemas and has good psychometric properties with high levels of internal consistency, reliability and discriminant validity (Waller, Meyer & Ohanian, 2001).

2.6 Procedure

2.6.1 Recruitment procedure

Early contacts were made with a number of local counselling and psychology services where participants were initially sourced. Services were either approached by letter (Appendix C) or some other form of written correspondence (i.e. email) and meetings were organised with respective heads of services to outline the research and discuss referral pathways. In particular, initial contacts were made with two local IAPT services, a secondary care CBT service, three student counselling services and four adult counselling and psychotherapy services. The researcher later attended several team meetings and a series of presentations were made about the research project including how therapists could refer potential participants or encourage self-referral (see Appendix D).

In relation to student and volunteer recruitment, a number of research posters were placed around the University campus encouraging participation (Appendix E). Moreover, the study was also advertised on the study on the University of Leicester's Experimental Participation Requirement (EPR) system where students had the option of self-referring in return for research credits.

Participants initially contacted the researcher and were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study. Individuals were later encouraged to provide some basic

anonymous details of their breakup to ensure they met inclusion criteria. A Participant Information Sheet containing further details of the study was then provided containing all relevant information pertaining to the project (Appendix F). Participants were subsequently contacted to determine whether they still wish to participate and whether they have any questions or concerns about the process. Upon feeling happy proceed, an interview date and location was arranged.

2.6.2 Interview Process

Interviews were conducted on a one to one basis by the researcher. An appropriate location was used so that the privacy of participants could be ensured. Upon arrival, participants spent 10 to 15 minutes completing both the ECR-R and YSQ before interviews commenced. Some time was spent prior to interviewing checking that participants had understood the nature of the research and to address any concerns that may have arisen. Issues relating to participant consent and confidentiality were addressed and participants were required to read and sign a written consent form (Appendix G). Interviews then commenced and audio recording was carried out. Approximately 60 minutes was then allocated for interview. Some time was spent following interview reflecting on the process in order to monitor client well-being. Information relating to further help and support was made available upon request.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

BPS and NHS codes of conduct were consulted regarding the involvement of participants in a research study and the handling of confidential information. The study was approved by an NHS regional ethics committee and was granted Leicester University Ethics approval.

Consent forms were developed in collaboration with the academic supervisor and informed consent was gained from individuals prior to their participation in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary and withdrawal from the process was an option at any time. Participants were made aware of this both prior to interview and from the

participant information sheet. Participants were also made aware that should they wish to withdraw at that point, all data relating to them would be destroyed.

Measures were taken to support individuals in the event of them becoming distressed. Participants were made aware that they could request a break any time during the interview. Furthermore, contact details of relevant support services were available in the event of the participant requiring further support following the study. Should the participant have been engaged in therapy at the time of interview, any relevant information would have been passed on to the allocated therapist/worker with the participant's consent. Participants were informed that all data would be anonymised and were briefed as to what would happen to all relevant materials such as tapes and transcripts upon conclusion of the research. No personal data was held electronically during the process of data collection and analysis.

3. Analysis

3.1 Template Analysis

Template Analysis, a method used to thematically analyse narrative and textual data, was adopted as the most appropriate method of analysis and used to explore concepts and themes within participant's accounts. Template Analysis was considered the most suitable method of analysis given the research objectives of this study and was selected over other forms of thematic analysis for several key reasons.

Firstly, template analysis allows the researcher to identify the presence of phenomena in light of pre-existing theory and thus lends itself to analysing the data in respect to *'a priori-themes'*. In other words, themes strongly expect to be present in the data, whilst not precluding the possibility that new themes may emerge. Given that previous research suggests the presence of certain cognitive and behavioural phenomena in the individuals reported post-relationship experiences (i.e. thoughts of self blame, pessimistic appraisals of future romantic opportunities), template analysis represented a suitable analytic method that allowed for such themes from previous research to be explored, identified, and accommodated within the current data set.

Furthermore, template analysis can be used to analyse descriptive data from range of methodological and epistemological positions and is not inconsistent with the 'realist' orientation this study locates itself within. The process also emphasises hierarchical coding of data i.e. broad themes that encompass successively narrower ones.   Themes in the data therefore could be organised efficiently to accommodate both *'a priori'* and new emergent themes. Additionally, this method also avoids the creation of alternative or subjective labelling of themes, given themes may already have a label as derived from the literature.

Moreover, template analysis is flexible analytic technique that allows the researcher to tailor the analysis to match their requirements. Given the current study aimed to construct a relatively large qualitative sample size, template analysis represented an appropriate analytic method given its capacity to handle larger data sets more comfortably.   As stated in section 2.3, template analysis has fewer specified procedures

than other qualitative techniques, permitting the use of larger sample sizes with 20 to 30 participants being acceptable for studies employing TA.

3.2 Process of template analysis

Template Analysis allows the researcher to organise data in a hierarchy of broad and narrow themes by means of a coding template. The process begins with the researcher developing an initial 'template' which looks to capture themes expected to be present in the data. This template may be developed after coding has been carried out on all of the transcripts in the data set, or may be developed after initial coding on a sub-set of the data. The initial template may also be influenced by *'a priori'* themes, that is, themes highlighted by the researcher as important and likely to be present in the data. The researcher is therefore permitted to define a number of themes expected to be present in the data set and significant to the aims of the research prior to the process of constructing a coding template.

The process then involves grouping identified themes into higher order codes which describe broader themes in the data. The template at this point summarises the main themes identified within a data set and is developed by being applied to all the data set. Whenever a relevant piece of text does not fit with an existing theme, a modification to the template may be required. For example, new themes are added and the hierarchy is modified as necessary. A such, themes remain provisional and open to modification or even deletion as the coding template is developed from its initial form to the final version. The "final" template is then used as a basis for interpretation of the data. See Appendix H for the thematic templates developed over the course of analysis.

3.3 Reflexivity

Whilst attempting to remain reflexive during the research process it was acknowledged that an awareness of the previous findings in the field of relationship dissolution research may have influenced the collection and interpretation of the data. Moreover, consideration was given to how personal beliefs, values and assumptions influenced all stages of the process and particularly, data interpretation. The researcher was therefore

aware of the potential for bias during the research process and attempted to objectively question and challenge interpretations in the context of pre-existing knowledge. Furthermore, a number of quality assurance procedures were followed during the process of data analysis.

3.4 Quality assurance

Firstly, the method of template analysis was systematically applied according to its protocols. Indeed the researcher attended several workshops delivered by Professor Nigel King who developed template analysis as a way of thematically analysing descriptive data. The workshops included an overview of the development and theory of TA, along with guidance around its application and some practical exercises pertaining to the coding of data in accordance to its procedures. Moreover, the researcher consulted a website developed by Professor King exclusive to template analysis including guidelines around its process and procedures. Further one to one consultations were later sought with Professor King, particularly pertaining to the suitability of TA as an analytic method given the design and epistemological position of the research project and also pertaining to quality assurance procedures.

3.5 A priori themes

Acquaintance with the literature in the area of relationship dissolution suggested that a number of themes were expected to be present in the data. Indeed, it was suggested that some of the correlates of relationship dissolution distress explored within the literature review and from wider reading around the literature in general would be present in participant's accounts of their experiences. Indeed, it was anticipated that for the initial coding template these correlates would form some of the significant themes and higher level codes. Moreover, it was anticipated that new themes emerging from interview transcripts would form further higher level codes (broad themes) and lower level codes (narrow themes).

An initial organising framework was therefore developed on the basis of such *a priori* themes emerging from the research literature around the correlates of relationship dissolution distress. As analysis progressed themes could either be dropped, modified

or hierarchically reorganised and further themes developed. *A priori* codes incorporated into the initial coding template are shown in table 2

Table 2: A priori codes forming initial coding template

Level 1 codes	Level 2 codes	Level 3 codes	Source
Vulnerability factors	Relationship investment factors	Relationship duration/length	Field, *et al.,* 2009; Locker *et al.,*2010; Rhoades, Dush, Atkins, Stanley and Markman, 2011; Simpson, 1987
		Cohabitation	Rhoades *et al.,* 2011
		Plans to marry	Rhoades, *et al.,* 2011; Robak and Weitzman,1998
		Children	Rhoades, *et al.,*2011
	Relationship variables	Degree of closeness/intimacy	Robak and Weitzman,1998; Simpson, 1987
		Number of previous relationships	Locker *et al.,*2010
	Breakup variables	Initiator status	Locker *et al.,* 2012; Robak and Weitzman, 1998; Sbarra, 2006; Sprecher, Felmless, Metts, Fehr and Varnni, 1998; Waller and MacDonald, 2010
		Sudden unexpected	Field, *et al.,* 2009
		Partner in a new relationship	Field *et al*., 2009
Personality variables (vulnerability factors)	Attachment style	Pre-occupied/fearful in relationships	Barbara and Dion, 2000; Davies *et al.,* 2003; Gilbert and Sifers, 2011; Fagundas, 2011; Frazier and Cook, 1993; Pistole, 1995; Sbarra, 2006; Sbarra & Emery, 2005.
	Personality variables	Low self esteem	Chung *et al.,* 2002; Frazier and Cook, 1993
		Identity as 'intertwined' with partner	Boelin and van den Hout, 2010; Shear and Shair, 2005
		Sense of self worth on being in a relationship	Park, Sanchez and Brynildsen, 2011

		Self concept change	Mason, Law, Bryant, Portley and Sbarra, 2012; Slotter, Gardner and Finkel, 2008
cognitive/maintenance variables	Negative Cognitions	Negative thoughts of self	Boelen and Reijntes, 2009; Boelen, van den Bout and van den Hout, 2003;
		Pessimistic future appraisals	Speilmann MacDonald, and Wilson, 2009
		Self blaming	Boelen and Reijntes, 2009; Robak and Weitzman, 1998
		Catastrophic thoughts about recovery	Boelen and Reijntes (2009)
		Negative evaluations of former partner	Fagundes (2010)
	Behavioural	Rumination	Nolen-Hoeksema, McBridge & Larson, 1997; Robak and Weitzman, 1998; Saffrey and Ehrenberg, 2007
		Ongoing pursuit behaviours	Davis *et al.,* 2003; Davis, Ace and Andra, 2000; Cupach and Spitzberg, 2003;
		Proximity seeking	Davis, Ace and Andra, 2000
		Internet checking	Chaulk and Jones, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Lyndon, Bonds, Raake and Cratty, 2011.
		Continued contact with former partner	Field *et al.*, 2009; Mason, Sbarra, Bryan, and Lee, 2012; Rhoades, Dush, Atkins, Stanley and Markman, 2011; Sbarra and Emery, 2005;
		Social support	Davis, Morris and Kraus, 1998; Florian, Mikulincer and Bucholtz, 1995; Locker *et al.,* 2010; Moller *et al.,* 2003;
Emotional/physical reactions	Depressive symptoms, and anxiety and anger reactions	Low mood	Mearns, 1991; Monroe, Rohde, Seely, and Lewinsohn, 1999; Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels & Meeus, 2003; Sprehcer, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr and Vanni, 1998; Simpson, 1987.

Sleeplessness	Lagrand, 1988; Mearns, 1991
Suicidal ideation	Lagrand, 1988; Mearns, 1991
Weight loss	Mastekaasa, 1994
Anxiety	Lagrand, 1988; Mason *et al.,* 2012
Feelings of hatred, betrayal, injustice	Field *et al*., 2009; Lagrand, 1988; Robak and Weitzman, 1998

3.6 The final template: developing and modifying themes

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and transcriptions were produced before the initial stage of coding. Having the opportunity to transcribe the interviews allowed for familiarisation of the data prior to any formal coding. The data was then analysed by highlighting themes or codes consistent with *a priori* themes expected to be present in the data, and by generating codes for new themes emerging from the data. An initial template was therefore created reflecting a combination of new emergent themes and *a priori* themes.

A significant number of *a priori themes* highlighted from the research literature were found to be present within the data. However, some *a priori* themes, notably relationship length as a correlate of distress, partner being in a new relationship and other relationship investment factors such as length of time before dating someone new were not significantly supported within the data set and were not included in the initial template.

Themes emerging from over the course of analysis were aligned and related to established *a priori* themes if possible. For example, several significant themes emerged relating to relationship-breakup factors which had not been previously highlighted from the literature. In particular, reasons for the breakup feeling 'unclear or ambiguous', subsequent partner avoidance and having 'unanswered questions' all emerged as significant factors contributing to the distress the participant experienced post-dissolution. These themes therefore linked with other breakup-related variables highlighted in the literature as significant correlates of distress, particularly suddenness of the breakup and having been non-initiated. New themes were therefore aligned with other *a priori* 'relationship breakup factors' and the template was subsequently expanded and developed.

Moreover, several significant themes arising from the data could be clustered together and new over-arching themes formed reflecting each related sub-theme. This also involved moving several *a priori* themes into new over-arching themes. For example, 'negative evaluations' of former partner had been highlighted as an *a priori* theme from

the literature (e.g. Fagundas, 2010) and was indeed present in the data set. It was initially grouped within the over-arching theme 'Negative cognitions' along with a series of other related sub-themes including 'negative thoughts/evaluation of self', 'pessimistic appraisals of future' 'appraisals of self blame' and 'catastrophic interpretations of grief reactions' (see Table 2).

However, subsequent analysis revealed a number of further sub-themes which the theme 'negative evaluation of former partner' was more suitably clustered with, forming a separate over-arching theme. This was labelled 'reappraisals over time' and incorporated other sub-themes including 'shifting emotional experiences' and 'reductions in self-blaming and negative evaluations of self'. Indeed it was felt that 'negative evaluations of former partner' better belonged as part of this over-arching theme and not a generic 'negative cognitions' theme given the empirical link between forming negative evaluations of the former partner and a subsequent reduction in distress and changes over time (Fagundas, 2010).

Finally, *a priori* themes that were not supported within the data were removed and not included in the final template, whilst themes were collapsed into one theme and codes were renamed to effectively represent the data. For example, the initial template included the sub-theme 'catastrophic thoughts about recovery' as part of the over-arching theme 'Negative cognitions'. This sub-theme had been an *a priori* theme highlighted from the literature (Boelen & Reijntes, 2007). However, subsequent analysis revealed further reported distressing and unwanted thoughts and images following the breakup. Instead of itemising each thought/cognitive theme individually, all were collapsed to form a sub-theme 'distressing and unwanted thoughts and images' under the over-arching theme 'cognitions/appraisals of which 'catastrophic misinterpretation' was part of.

3.7 Final Template summary

In sum, the template was reorganised to best represent the scope and commonality of themes. This involved both the introduction of new sub-themes to be aligned with pre-existing *a priori themes* highlighted from the literature, or sub-themes moving to be clustered with other themes to form new over-arching themes. The revised template

was then applied to subsequent transcripts and the same process was adhered to until a final template was produced that best captured the data across all transcripts. The final template was then used to recode all the transcripts. The final template is given in Table 3 along with a diagrammatic thematic map in figure 5. Appendix 8 shows an example of the evolution of themes over the course of analysis.

3.8 Presenting results

The final coding template served as an effective framework that aided the interpretation of the data. The proceeding section documents the presentation of the findings under over-arching thematic headings and the sub-themes that comprise them. Direct quotations and extracts from interview transcripts and will be presented to evidence the findings.

Table 3: Over-arching themes and related sub-themes forming final coding template

Broad themes (main over-arching themes)	Narrow themes (related sub-themes)	*A priori* or new emergent theme
Vulnerability factors	Relationship committed/serious	*A priori theme* (Field *et al.* 2009) and theme from current sample
	Plans/talk of marriage	*A priori theme* (Rhoades *et al.* 2011; Robak & Weitzman,1998) and theme from current sample
	Relationship investment factors (e.g. cohabitation, children, financial investment)	*A priori theme* (Rhoade *et al.* 2011) and theme from current sample
	Few previous relationships	*A priori theme* (Locker *et al.,* 2010) and theme from current sample
	Low-self esteem	*A priori theme* (Chung *et al.,* 2002; Frazier & Cook, 1993) and theme from current sample
	Self-concept 'intertwined'	*A priori theme* (Boelin & van den Hout, 2010; Boelen, van den Hout & van den Bout, 2006; Shear & Shair, 2005) and theme from current sample
Relationship breakup Characteristics	Non-initiated	*A priori theme* (Locker *et al.* 2012; Robak & Weitzman, 1998; Sbarra, 2006; Sprecher, Felmless, Metts, Fehr & Varnni, 1998; Waller & MacDonald, 2010) and theme from current sample
	Sudden unexpected	*A priori theme* (Field *et al.* 2009) and theme from current sample
	Reasons for breakup unclear and ambiguous	New emergent theme
	Mixed messages	New emergent theme
	Unanswered questions	New emergent theme

	Little opportunity for further dialogue	New emergent theme
	Partner avoidance	New emergent theme
Post relationship autopsy	Stand alone theme	Partly informed by *a priori* theme (Nolen-Hoeksema, McBridge & Larson, 1997; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007) but emergent theme
	Analytical disposition	New emergent theme
Cognitions/appraisals	Negative appraisals of self	*A priori theme* (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009; Boelen, van den Bout & van den Hout, 2003) and theme from current sample
	Appraisals of self blame	Partly informed by *a priori theme* (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009), but substantiated in sample to form emergent theme
	Pessimistic appraisals of future	*A priori* theme (Speilmann MacDonald, & Wilson, 2009) and theme from current sample
	Idealisation of former partner (rose tinted glasses)	New emergent theme
	Distressing/unwanted thoughts and images	Sub-theme including *a priori themes* such as catastrophic interpretation of grief reactions (e.g. Boelen & Reijntes, 2009) but new emergent theme
Maintenance factors	Internet surveillance/checking	Sub-theme including *a priori themes* such as Facebook surveillance (e.g. Marshall, 2012) but incorporating other internet checking behaviours thus forming a new emergent theme
	Continued contact with former partner	*A priori* theme (Mason, Sbarra, Bryan & Lee, 2012; Rhoades *et al.* 2011) and theme from current sample
	Ongoing pursuit/contact behaviours	*A priori* theme (Davis *et al.,* 2003; Davis, Ace & Andra, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003) and theme from current sample

	Rumination (cognitive and behavioural)	Partly informed by *a priori* theme such as cognitive rumination (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007)
	Limited social support	Partly informed by *a priori* theme (Locker *et al.,* 2010; Moller *et al.,* 2003) but new emergent theme
	Making comparisons with former partner	New emergent theme
	External triggers/Reminders	New emergent theme
	Avoidance (online and in vivo)	New emergent theme
Emotional/physical reactions	Depressive symptoms (upset, sadness, depressed)	*A priori* theme (Monroe, Tohde, Seely, & Lewinsohn, 1999; Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels & Meeus, 2003; Simpson, 1987) and theme from current sample
	Feeling lost	New emergent theme
	Feeling shocked	New emergent theme
	Sleep disturbances	*A priori* theme (Lagrand, 1988; Mearns, 1991) and theme from current sample
	Suicidal ideation	*A priori* theme (Lagrand, 1988; Mearns, 1991) and theme from current sample
	Feelings of death	New emergent theme
	Reduced activity/social withdrawal	New emergent theme (although linked with depressive symptomology known in cognitive literature)
	Loss of appetite/weight loss	Partly informed by *a prior theme* (e.g. Mastekaasa, 1994) validated in sample

| Reappraisals over time	Negative evaluations of former partner over time	*A priori* theme (Fagundes, 2010) and theme from current sample
	Shifting emotional experiences	New emergent theme
	Reductions in self blame, negative evaluations and pessimistic appraisals of future prospects	New emergent theme
	Wary of future relationships/shattered beliefs	New emergent theme

Figure 5: Final coding template (thematic map)

Sudden/unexpected

Non initiated breakup

Reasons for breakup unclear and ambiguous

Breakup Characteristics

Little opportunity for dialogue

Unanswered questions

Partner avoidance

Relationship investment factors

Few previous relationships

Abandonment/ attachment anxiety

Vulnerability factors (relationship and personality variables)

Self concept 'intertwined'

Serious /committed relationship

Low self esteem/self worth

Post-Relationship Autopsy

Distressing & unwanted thoughts/images

Appraisals of self blame

Cognitions appraisals

Negative evaluations of self

Negative evaluations of former partner

Re-appraisals over time

. Reduction in self blame, negative evaluation of self over time

Ongoing pursuit behaviours

Continued contact with former partner

Maintenance factors

internet checking

Revisiting destinations previously shared together

Rumination

Pessimistic appraisals of future

Idealisation of former partner

Down, depressed, upset

Anger

Injustice/unfair ness

Emotional / Physical reactions

Sleep disturbances

Anxiety

Lost

Appetite changes/weight loss

122

4. Quantitative Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Referral sources

Participant's involvement in the research project came from a number of referral sources. Eleven participants were either in, or had recently been undertaking psychotherapy at the point of interview. Of these eleven participants, seven (N=7) had been involved in private counselling/psychotherapy, three (N=3) were from local IAPT services while one participant (N=1) had been in a NHS secondary care CBT service.

Fourteen participants (N=14) were undergraduate students who had either seen research posters around the University campus and wished to volunteer, or had seen the research advertised on the Leicester University Experimental Participation Requirement (EPR) system. Undergraduates were from a variety of academic disciplines including psychology, law, media and engineering. Finally, two (N=2) participants had volunteered independently having seen posters around the university campus. Both were employees at the University.

Figure 6: Referral sources
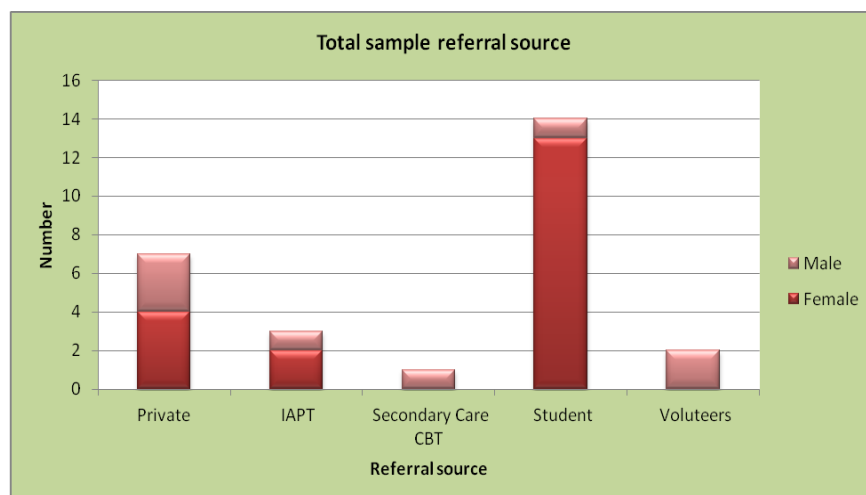
Demographic statistics

Figure 7 shows ages of participants across the sample. Ages ranged from 18 years to 44 years. Eighteen participants were between 18-24 years of age, while five participants were between 25-30 years of age. Three participants were between 31-35 years of age and one participant was 35+ years of age.

Figure 7: Sample ages
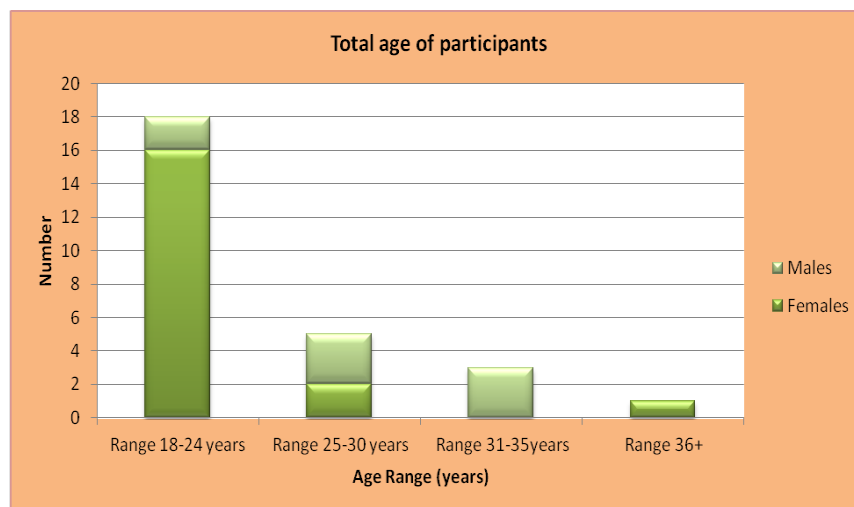
Figure 8 reveals the ethnic composition of the total sample. Nineteen of the sample were White British, one participant was British Asian, one participant was Black British, while one participant mixed White African. Three participants were white European, originating from Cyprus, Italy and Austria respectively, while two participants classified themselves as Chinese originating from China and Singapore.

Figure 8: Sample ethnicity
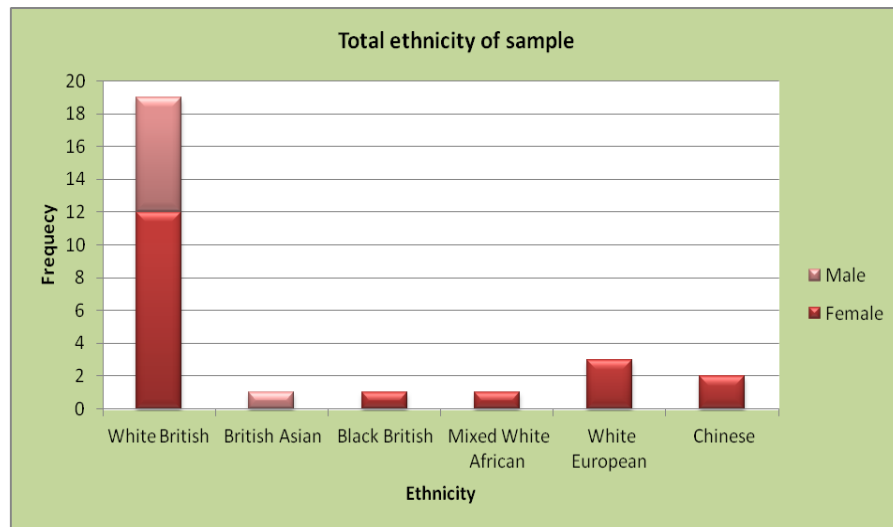
4.2 Self-report results

Attachment style

Results of analysis of ECR-R questionnaires revealed that twenty two participants in the sample (82%) endorsed an 'anxious' attachment style at the time of interview, notably *pre-occupied* and *fearful* attachment styles respectively. Specifically, fifteen participants endorsed a pre-occupied attachment style (56%) while seven participants endorsed a 'fearful' attachment style (26%). Five participants (18%) endorsed a secure attachment style at the time of interview. No participants endorsed an avoidant (dismissive) attachment style. These results lend support to previous research findings suggesting that those with an anxious style of attachment are particularly vulnerable to experiencing difficulties following the dissolution of a relationship (e.g. Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

Figure 9. Total sample attachment style

Attachment style across total sample

■ Preoccupied ■ Fearful ■ Secure
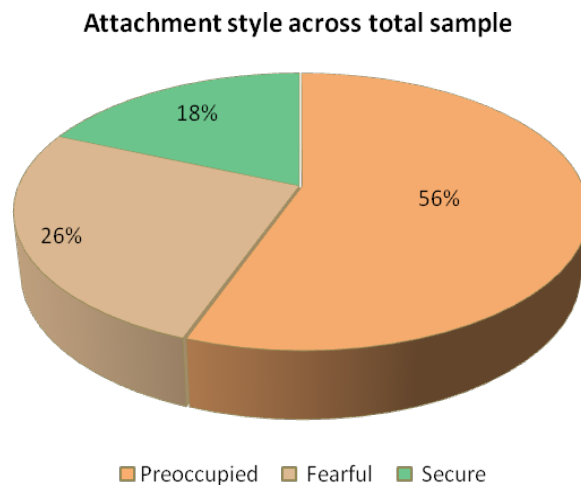
Table 10 shows further breakdown of attachment style across clinical and student/volunteer samples.

Table 10: Clinical and student attachment styles

	Preoccupied (anxious)	*Fearful* (anxious/avoidant)	*Secure*	*Dismissive* (avoidant)
Clinical Sample	6 (55%)	2 (18%)	3 (27%)	0
Student and Volunteers	9 (56%)	5 (31%)	2 (13%)	0

Schema profiles

Participants completed the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSC-S3) to determine whether negative schemas were a further vulnerability factor underlying distress reactions. Results revealed that participants commonly endorsed schema profiles on the questionnaire, suggesting that negative schemas may be an important vulnerability factor in contributing to distress reactions following a relationship breakup. Figure 11 shows those schema profiles most frequently endorsed by participants across the total sample.

Figure 10: Schema profiles across sample
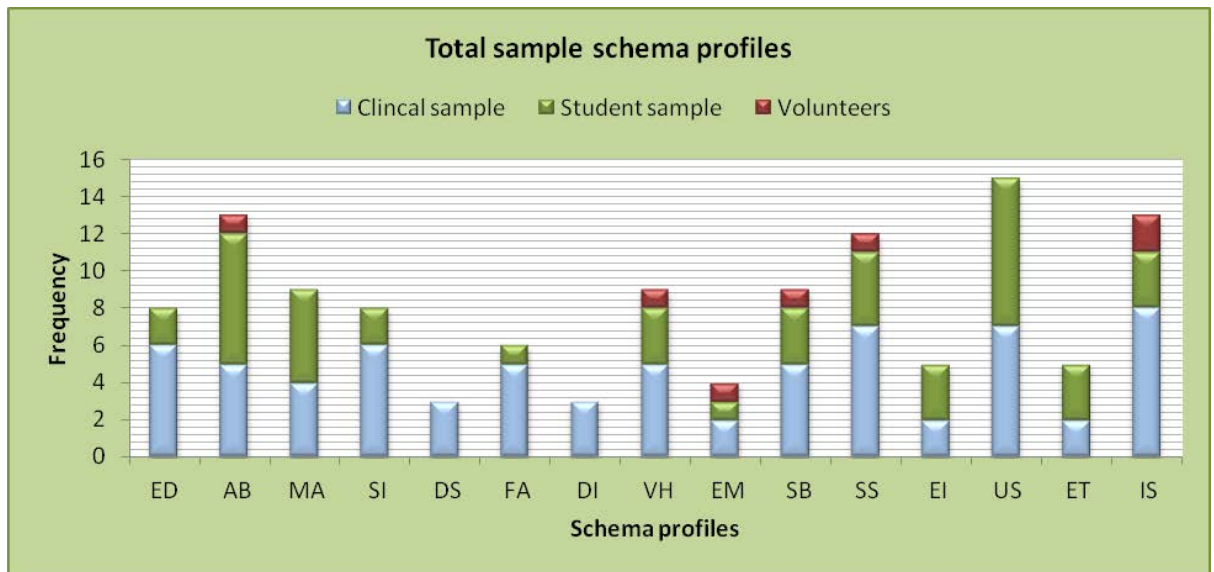
(ED = Emotional Deprivation; AB = Abandonment; MA = Mistrust/Abuse; SI = Social Isolation; DS = Defectiveness/Shame; FA = Failure; DI =Dependence/Incompetence; VH= Vulnerability of harm; EM = Enmeshment; SB = Subjugation; SS = Self Sacrifice; EI = Emotional Inhibition; US = Unrelenting Standards; ET = Entitlement; IS = Insufficient Self Control)

The most commonly endorsed schemas were Abandonment (13 endorsements over the sample), Self Sacrifice (12 endorsements), Unrelenting standards (15 endorsements) and Insufficient Self Control (13 endorsements). These were the mostly commonly endorsed schemas across both the clinical and student samples and also were endorsed by the volunteer participants. See appendix I for definitions of schema profiles.

5. Qualitative results

Results of analysis and the consistency of themes across individuals suggested that the proposal of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress was a realistic empirical endeavour. The model presented, a clinical illustration of the previous thematic map, attempts to provide a working conceptualisation of a specific presentation; notably the individual who has found it difficult to 'move on' following a relationship breakup and continues to experience an ongoing duration of emotional distress. The model is derived from integrating results of extensive qualitative analysis with theory regarding attachment dynamics and may have useful clinical implications.

5.1 Overview of model

The model proposes that a number of pre-existing factors, demonstrated in previous research and expanded here, may make the individual vulnerable to adjustment issues following the breakup of a romantic relationship. These factors pertain to attachment style, personality and relationship-specific variables respectively. Furthermore, features of the relationship breakup, such as how it was communicated and how it was experienced may contribute to the individual being unable to fully integrate and process the loss, thus exacerbating ongoing distress.

In the context of an *'activated attachment system'* following the dissolution (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2002), a number of cognitive and behavioural processes ensue. Firstly, the individual seems to conduct an "autopsy" on the relationship, seeking to analyse the breakup and come up with definitive reasons for what may have happened. This is hypothesised to lead to a number of distorted cognitive appraisals, including thoughts of self-blame ("it was my fault...if I hadn't have done x, y, & z), negative thoughts of self ("I wasn't good enough"), and negative pessimistic appraisals around future romantic prospects ("I'll never meet anyone like that again"). Moreover, individuals commonly experience a number of distressing and unwanted thoughts or images pertaining to the former partner which may exacerbate distress further.
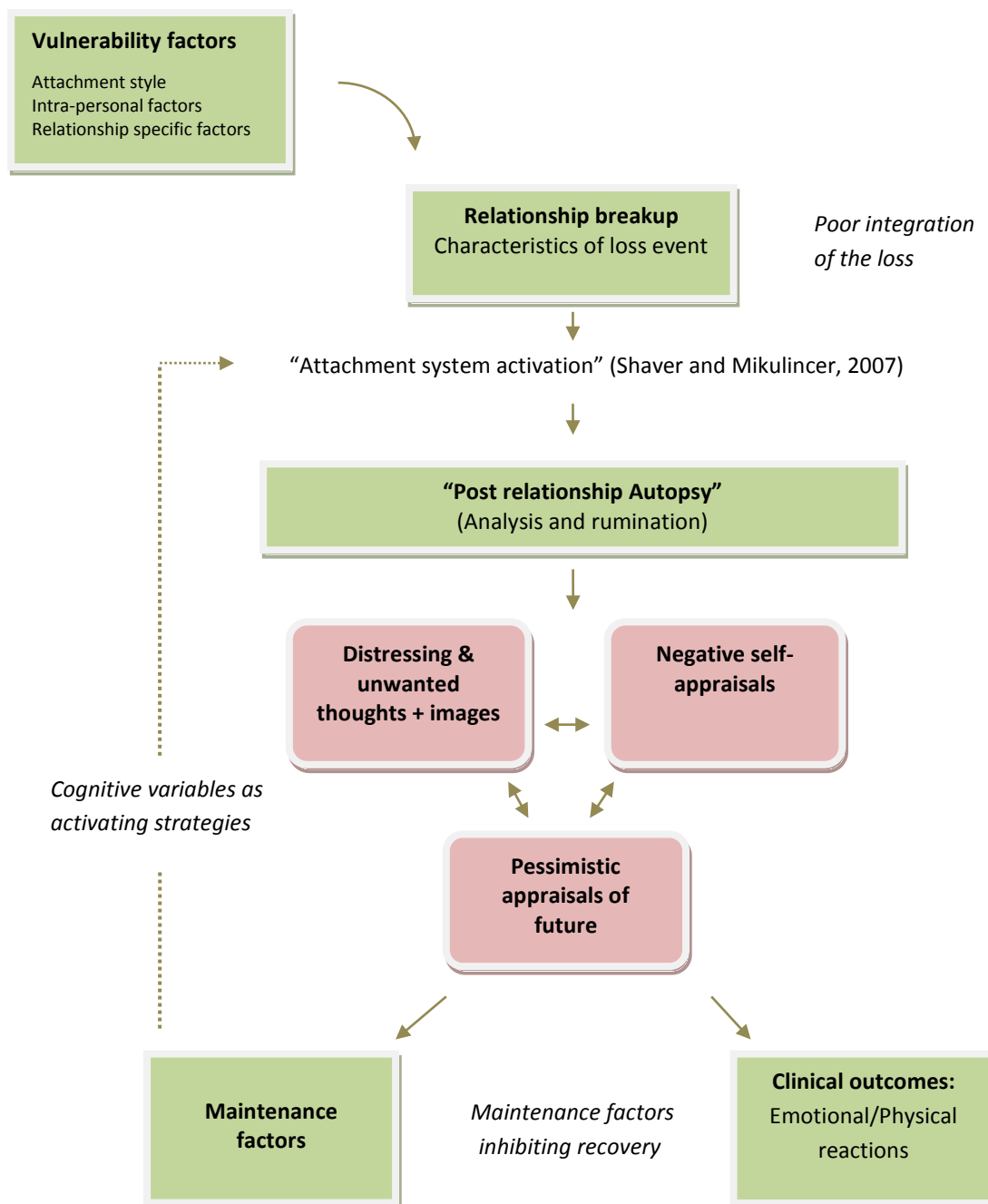
The cognitive processes alluded to may directly contribute to distress reactions by virtue of their content, reflecting typical Beckian thought distortions. However, the

thoughts and appraisals as highlighted may also be considered examples of misplaced *activating strategies* within the context of an *activated attachment system.* For example, it is hypothesised that such processes may compel the individual to continue to pursue closeness to the former partner as an attachment figure, only serving to prolong distress reactions and preoccupation given the former partner is no longer available to meet their attachment needs. Theoretical coverage as to how the highlighted cognitive processes may be conceptualised as *activating strategies* is provided in the critical appraisal section 6.12.

Moreover, the individual may engage in a number of behaviours, or be exposed to a number of factors that serve to keep focus of attention on the former partner and inhibit recovery over time. Again, such behaviours may be seen as *activating strategies* or *protest reactions* within an attachment framework. However, within the context of a reconciliation being unlikely and the former partner being unavailable as an attachment figure, the individual may be exposed to a prolonged duration of distress and experience difficulty adjusting.

A template of the model is provided in figure 11. This may be used to refer to when reading through the subsequent results section.

Figure 11: **Cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress: template**

Vulnerability factors

Attachment style
Intra-personal factors
Relationship specific factors

Relationship breakup
Characteristics of loss event

Poor integration of the loss

"Attachment system activation" (Shaver and Mikulincer, 2007)

"Post relationship Autopsy"
(Analysis and rumination)

Distressing & unwanted thoughts + images

Negative self-appraisals

Cognitive variables as activating strategies

Pessimistic appraisals of future

Maintenance factors

Maintenance factors inhibiting recovery

Clinical outcomes:
Emotional/Physical reactions

5.2 Results of analysis

The following is a description of the themes and related sub-themes according to the final coding template or 'thematic map' forming the above model. Themes were remarkably consistent over the course of participants leading to the robustness of the model illustrated. The major themes are;

- Vulnerability factors
- Relationship breakup characteristics
- Post relationship autopsy
- Cognitive appraisals
- Maintenance factors
- Emotions/physical reactions
- Reappraisals over time (Appendix 10)

The themes are described in the above order as they reflect the sequence of experiences as described in the proposed model. Attachment style and negative schemas as vulnerability factors are not detailed in this section as they were investigated in the quantitative component of the study, but nevertheless remain a central component of the model.

5.3 Vulnerability factors

Participants made reference to a number of relationship-specific factors during interview which were clustered into a broader theme of 'vulnerability factors'. It is hypothesised that such factors may be a significant in pre-disposing the individual to experiencing a greater degree of distress following the breakup of a romantic relationship.

Relationship as committed and serious

Participants consistently made reference to their relationship having seemed serious and committed prior to the breakup. This remains consistent with previous research findings suggesting that degree of relationship commitment and how serious the

relationship was perceived to be is a significant vulnerability factor to the distress later experienced (e.g. Field *et al.,* 2009).

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Relationship serious/committed	*"It got very serious, very quickly. It was my first serious relationships...I think about four months in I was convinced that was it now, I was done. He said the same things to me as well which made me assume that it must be true....we even planned what we were going to do when we both graduated because we lived three hours away from each other. We planned moving in together and how it was going to work" HA*

Relationship investment factors

Consistent with Rusbult's (1980) investment model of commitment and more recent research suggesting that factors that increase relationship investment are associated with greater difficulties adjusting to a dissolution (Stanley, Rhoades & Markham, 2006), several participants made reference to having significantly invested in the relationship prior to breakup. For example, some participants were co-habiting with their former partner, while three participants had had children with their former partner, citing this as significant to their distress when the relationship ended.   Other participants made reference to further relationship investment factors such as emotional or financial commitments.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Relationship investment factors	*"I think it was the fact that I'd given everything to, you know, emotionally, physically, financially...everything. You know, I'd let go and I thought "well that's it, you know, this is the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. A hundred percept committed to it and I think that was probably the key, the original key". RN* *"We bought this place, that was in September last year. She adored this house. I thought we were happy, I honestly thought we had it made. For me, that was my commitment, this was a forty year mortgage, and this is a legal document saying*

Talk of marriage/future plans

Similarly, individuals frequently made reference to particular relationship variables such as discussing future plans with the former partner over the course of the relationship and the idea of marriage. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Robak & Weitzman, 1998), it is hypothesised that such factors may act as further vulnerability factors to the distress subsequently experienced following the breakdown.

Theme	Supporting Data
Talk of marriage/future	*"we definitely spoke about the future a lot which I think made it hard when we broke up because then it was like all these sort of things in my head had just gone. We did used to say things that we would do, like we'd go on holiday or do this.... But probably nothing as extreme as marriage, but certainly quite a few things that we'd talk about doing in the future" FJ*
	"It was a committed relationship...yeah. We made future plans, we talked about eventually one day getting married. It wasn't a priority for either of us, but we talked about doing that. We talked about having children". PV

Few previous relationships

Seventeen participants indicated that the relationship from which they had struggled to recover from had either been their first serious relationship or alluded to having had few previous relationships. Furthermore, although other participants relayed having been involved in several previous relationships, some nevertheless noted that the relationship for which they were interviewed was the first relationship they had felt serious about.

Low self esteem

Consistent with previous research investigating self-esteem as a correlate of relationship dissolution distress (e.g. Chung *et al.*, 2002; Frazier & Cook, 1993), several participants made reference to having "low self-esteem" during interview or having self-esteem issues in general which they brought to the relationship

Theme	Supporting Data
Low self-esteem	"I have had, really have had, and probably still have, really low self esteem about myself. I might be ok confidence wise on a social perspective, on a social platform, but when you dig deep, I'm not very confident about who I am as a person. I have a feeling that thinks I don't have that much to offer, and so I'm not worth it in terms of "she could do better than me". HN

Self-concept 'intertwined' with former partner

Furthermore, several participants reported feeling a merged sense of identity with their partner both prior and following the breakup. This remains consistent with previous research demonstrating that the degree to which the individual continues to perceive their identity as "intertwined" with the partner is associated with the severity of emotional difficulties experienced following a breakup (Boelin & van den Hout, 2010).

Theme	Supporting Data
Self 'intertwined' with former partner	"...when I'd go and meet up with friends and they'd ask "alright, how are you?", my response would always be based on how the relationships was. So if things are alright between me and (partner) and someone asks how I am, I say "oh yeah, things are really good", but you weren't answering how you were, me as an individual, I was answering on behalf of the relationship" HN

5.4 Relationship Breakup Characteristics

Participants made reference to a number of factors relating to how the breakup was experienced during interview. It is hypothesised that these factors may be related to difficulties in being able to process the loss and significant in contributing to ongoing distress reactions following the breakup. These factors suggest that dissolution related distress is not always related to factors intrinsic to the person (i.e. attachment style) but also attributable to relational dynamics including communication, ex-partner behaviour and the breakup strategies employed.

Initiator status

The majority of participants reported that they had not initiated the breakup, relaying it had been the former partner decision to terminate the relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that 'non-initiators' may be more vulnerable to poorer adjustment following a relationship breakup than 'initiators' (e.g. Davis *et al.,* 2003). Moreover, for those who had initiated the breakup, most reported having later regretted the decision and had desires to reconcile, which had not been reciprocated by the ex-partner. Such participants subsequently reported feeling a sense of rejection despite it being their decision to end things. Upon exploration, participants revealed that the former partner's reactions to the ending, in particular showing little sense of being overtly upset and/or moving on relatively quickly, was interpreted by initiators as a sign that they were not important enough or worth fighting for, and thus perceived as 'rejection'.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Initiator status	***Researcher***: *so in some ways did if feel like you'd been rejected still?*
	Participant: *At the time, because he didn't fight. He just said "yeah ok".*
	Researcher: *So what were your thoughts about that?*
	Participant: *well at the time I didn't like it, because if you feel strongly for someone, you want them to care. And even though I'd broken up with him, it wasn't because I didn't love him anymore. It was because I didn't feel it was right. But at the same time, you still want to feel like you are wanted. So it was upsetting when he went "oh ok", then kind of left. He didn't fight. Then he was sleeping with one of my friends, well ex- friends now, pretty soon after, within a week......I did think "I'm not even worth fighting for then", or "the whole relationship wasn't worth fighting for"...I did feel like "ok, do I not mean anything then" KE*

Breakup perceived as sudden and unexpected

Participants consistently reported that the breakup had felt unexpected, sudden or "out of the blue" for them. It is hypothesised that perceived suddenness may be related to difficulties processing the loss and coping following the breakup. Indeed, previous research suggests that suddenness remains a significant correlate of distress (Field *et al.,*

2009) while Barry, Kasl and Prigerson (2001) found that lack of preparation for loss was a important risk factor underlying complicated grief reactions. Moreover, Kurdek (1997) argues that expecting the break-up might be positively linked with adjustment.

Theme	Supporting Data
Sudden/unexpected	"I wasn't expecting the ending, the ending was unexpected...all of a sudden he told me "I don't' know anymore what I want and I want to be on my own...there were no warning signs because he was supposed to come and stay here, so there were no direct warning signs.." BA
	"I don't think there was a particular reason..I think that was what confused me, especially the first time because I felt like it was out of the blue" PN
	"..it was very abrupt. It was very kind of car crash in the sense of, bang, it just happened...I would probably say the abruptness of it was a massive part (of participant later experiencing prolonged distress). It wasn't a gradual process, it was literally 'bam'" RH

Reasons unclear and ambiguous

Furthermore, participants commonly relayed feeling they were given no definitive reasons for the breakup, or that the reasons offered by the former partner seemed vague or unclear. Indeed, participants often reported that the reasons they were given did not feel like the 'real' or 'genuine' reasons and that something underlying had remained undisclosed. Moreover, participants felt that the reasons offered by the ex-partner were not concrete enough for them to be able to process the loss and fully understand what had happened.

Theme	Supporting Data
Reasons unclear, ambiguous	"The way he said it to me, he did give reasons, they just didn't make sense at the time, because he didn't fully explain them. He gave a half hearted explanation" HA
	"I think he was hiding something. He didn't give me that reason. I thought there

was an underlying reason. He just said he couldn't find a job so he needed to focus on doing that...(I had) a lot of unanswered questions" RC

Unanswered questions

In relation to the breakup seeming sudden and reasons offered as vague or unclear, participants universally reported feeling left with a number of unanswered questions following the breakup, again potentially associated with difficulties processing the loss.

Theme	Supporting Data
Unanswered questions	*"(I had) millions of unanswered questions. I felt like any time I spoke to him I was bothering him....I was floundering. I didn't understand why it was happening at all. My understanding eventually increased but I'm still, now I still feel like, I don't feel like the reasons he gave me for breaking up are the actual reasons. And I feel like he's hiding. Hiding why he actually wanted to breakup" HA* *"I never got any answers and it was the first time someone had actually ended a relationship on me. He walked away and I was left standing. I think the hardest thing I had to accept that it was over. I couldn't accept it was over until I got some answers." LR* *"It's the unanswered questions, the inability to think about why. And what possessed her to do such a thing. These are unanswered questions that are conflicting. I think what's torturing me so much because I've lost someone who I loved incredibly with all my heart. I wanted to get married, I wanted to get engaged and the whole nine yards. And again, it was just ripped away" PR*

Brehm (1992) pointed out that poor adjustment following a relationship breakup is often associated with a lack of understanding as well as control. Indeed, perceived rejection tended to be associated with poor adaption, especially when people did not really understand why the breakup occurred.

Partner avoidance

Furthermore, participants consistently relayed that the former partner, having made the decision to end the relationship, seemed evasive and avoidant following the breakup. More specifically, they were not available for further dialogue to clear up the unanswered questions and provide insight into why things had ended. While the former partner's tendency to become avoidant following the breakup may be seen as a *detachment strategy*, this nevertheless seemed to contribute to participant's experiencing a "lack of closure" in the wake of the breakdown and may be further related to difficulties being able to process the loss.

Theme	Supporting Data
Partner avoidance	"…(there has) never been a real exchange. He always withdrew or didn't want to talk. He started to work a lot (and) play, because he played hockey. He started to become more interested in his play time. He didn't answer my calls. He didn't call me back and I tried to send texts and occasionally we would chat and skype, but every time I was trying to get something from him he would just put the phone down" BA
	"I asked to see her, (I said) "I want to see you, we need to meet up. I need to hear some home truths. I need to know why this has happened". And (partner) refuses to see me. Each one of her emails was getting more and more business like. All of her emails are to the point. More and more business like. I am getting more and more hurt by her lack of emotion, her lack of empathy for me......" GS

5.5 Post relationship-autopsy/rumination

Within the context of having few clear reasons following the relationship breakup, participants reported engaging in excessive rumination, seeking definitive answers as to why the relationship had failed. Indeed, this emerged as a universal theme across analysis. Over the course of interviewing this became collaboratively known as conducting an "autopsy" on the relationship, reflecting the participant's tendency to analyse and churn over every aspect of the relationship in order to understand why the relationship had failed.

Theme	Supporting Data
Post relationship autopsy	*"I've dissected every single aspect of the relationship. What I did, what I had done that could possibly effected why we broke up. Was it elements about me, was it something I ever said? Was it the way I acted. Did I not do enough of this, did I not do enough of that...... "...all the time, why did this happen, if if, maybe I should have done this, maybe I should have done this. Trying to find solutions....I wanted to understand it...it was an enormous exercise, an impossible task because he wasn't cooperating at all. And I was only becoming more obsessional really....if I hadn't of reacted, if perhaps I would have put up with all his family, if I wouldn't say to his brother..you know, if if if if. " HA*
	"every minute, every day, even now. I still reflect on it to this day. I would think "why did he breakup with me?", then it would be a blame game, most of the blame would be put on myself to be honest. So you try and piece it together because you don't know the answer to the question without him being there (to have dialogue with). You just go round in circles" RC
	"...I'd look back at absolutely every little dates, when we weren't ok and when were absolutely great. I was like "oh that must have happened, that causes that, and that correlation" and all that kind of stuff...because it was such a car crash, it felt like there were no signs. I think I had to, in my head give myself reasons for it" RH

Research suggests that following a relationship dissolution, some people cope by attempting to understand what went wrong in the relationship (Weber & Harvey, 1994). For example, after a martial separation, some people frequently ruminate over the causes of the separation (Weiss, 1975) and feel a sense of relief after they have constructed an account explaining the separation.

5.6 Cognitions and appraisals

In the process of analysing the relationship seeking definitive reasons and explanations, participants reported a number of salient cognitions and appraisals. Within an attachment perspective, such appraisals and thoughts may be directly related to distress symptoms but also considered misplaced *activating strategies* (see Critical Appraisal

6.12)*, thoughts motivating the individual to continue to pursue the lost partner as an attachment figure, but ultimately prolonging distress given their unavailability.

Self-Blame

One of the most consistent themes emerging over the course of analysis was the participant's tendency to engage in self-blame following the end of the relationship. Indeed this theme emerged throughout every single participant's account of their experience, even initiators who had internalised the experience as one of 'rejection'. Participants commonly expressed sentiments to the effect of "it was my fault", "If I hadn't have done x, y & z, we would still be together". Thoughts of self blame emerged even when the participants had not appeared to have acted inappropriately or contributed to the demise of the relationship.

Moreover, participants would often cite particular reasons as 'evidence' they had been to blame. Common factors cited was the perception of having been too "clingy" or having behaved in a particular way that had contributed to the end of the relationship. For example, starting arguments was commonly reported as a reason they had been to blame. Furthermore, some individuals found themselves scrutinizing the most minor aspect of their behaviour as being significant for why the relationship had ended.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Self blame	*"I thought I was too loving for her. She was always like "you do too much for me". I thought maybe I was too encroaching on her. I did so much for her....then we'd have arguments I'd always thought I started. I'd always think "well I felt really bad for starting that argument and bringing something I shouldn't have" SP*
	"Maybe if I hadn't have started that argument about this, that wouldn't have happened. It's silly things, like "maybe if we went to the cinema to see that film" maybe it wouldn't (have caused us to breakup). I don't know, anything kind of pops into your head" CR

It is hypothesised that thoughts of self blame may be related to having few clear and definitive reasons regarding the breakdown. In attempting to find answers for the

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breakup, participants attributed the reason to something internal.   Indeed, research suggests that people with low self-esteem have a tendency to respond to personal failures with internal, global attributions i.e. blaming themselves for the event and evaluating themselves negatively (Brown & Smart, 1991; Kernis, Brockner & Franketl, 1989).

Theme	Supporting Data
Self blame	*"..I felt like it had to be something internal, it had to be something I'd done, because I couldn't see any logical or reasonable explanation as to why it would have ended. I just assumed it was me" AH*

Negative evaluations of self

Participants consistently reported negative evaluations of themselves following the breakup, commonly relaying that they were "not good enough" for the former partner following the dissolution or "not good enough" generally.   Moreover, participants often attributed the relationship having ended due to them ultimately "not being good enough" for the ex-partner.   The findings remain consistent with previous research demonstrating that negative beliefs about the self were key cognitive correlates of complicated grief following a relationship dissolution (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009).

Theme	Supporting Data
Negative evaluation of self	*"I felt like I wasn't good enough. But I couldn't put my finger on what exactly it was, why I wasn't good enough. Maybe he felt superior to me. I don't even know how to articulate it. There was something about me that wasn't good enough for him" HA*
	"...I doubt myself. Clearly I'm a bit crap. And that's just the conclusion I've come to and I sit there thinking about it". SP

Thoughts of not being "good enough" extended to perceptions of looks or physicality, perceived intelligence and one's personality. For example, participants commonly

reported not being "good enough" for their ex-partner in terms of not being attractive enough or citing their personality as not being good enough, either being "too boring" or interesting enough for the former partner.

Theme	Supporting Data
Negative evaluations of self ("I'm not good enough)	*"..definitely I didn't feel good enough for him, he was really clever. I'm not ridiculously clever, but he was properly clever. I felt he, I looked up to him. I was looking up to him. I definitely felt like I was the second one in the relationship. We weren't equal. He was higher than me". RL*
	"I always thought I wasn't good looking enough for her....no part of me I felt was good enough (for her), body strength, nothing was good enough" PS
	"..I also feel like I wasn't good enough for him personality wise. I feel like I'm an ok person, but I just feel like I didn't measure up to him. Now I don't feel like that, but at the time I did" CG

Pessimistic appraisals of future

A central theme emerging from analysis was the tendency for individuals to report extremely pessimistic appraisals about future relationship prospects following the breakup. This was most often verbalised as "I will never meet anyone like him/her again". Pessimistic appraisals either related directly to the former partner, or were expressed more generally with the participant feeling pessimistic about meeting anyone again.

Theme	Supporting Data
Pessimism appraisals	*"I was adamant from the beginning that I would never meet anyone else again...still to this day I feel that she was perfect for me". SG*
	I've come to the acceptance that anyone I meet will be second best. And you know, that is so much how I feel. There is not going to be someone for me as good as her.... the top key thing is there is not going to be anyone like her again for me" SP
	"at first when we broke up I was convinced I was going to die alone and I was

going to become that crazy cat lady. I don't like cats either so very irrational thinking. I was absolutely convinced I was going to die alone, nobody is going to be interested in me, I'm done, done for life. And then I think it gradually turned into I might find someone but they're not going to be like he was, and that then turned into I don't want another him, but I'm still going to die alone" HA

These findings remain consistent with previous research showing that pessimistic beliefs about future relationships prospects are a significant contributory factor to anxiously attached individuals remaining vulnerable to being emotionally attached to former partners and experiencing ongoing distress (Speilmann *et al.,* 2010).

Theme	Supporting Data
Pessimism appraisals	*"It's easier to go back than to go forward. It's easier to fix what relationship you have". SG*
	"I feel trapped because I can't move on. I can't go into another relationship because I've still got hold of this one" PR

Furthermore, participants rated their chances of meeting anyone else as slim on the basis of perceived 'evidence'. For example, viewing themselves as particularly undesirable or the ex- partner as especially unique or accepting of them for their flaws, inadequacies and character drawbacks was a commonly cited reason. Moreover, some participants appraised their chances of meeting future partners as slim on the basis of their lifestyle, thinking it was not conducive to meeting others, such as working late hours, having friends who were all in relationships, socialising less.

Theme	Supporting Data
Pessimistic appraisals	*"... because of my cerebal palsy. I do think he kind of just didn't even notice. It was like "I don't know if other people (i.e. future partners) are going to accept me for that. When I did start to go out with people, having dates, when they found out they would just leave me. I think (former partner) did accept me for who I was. I think he liked the fact I was different sort of thing" HR*
	"when I do the probability, when I met (former partner) I had a group of friends

that were mid twenties and would go out every Friday and Saturday night and I would be dragged along with them. This breakup, all my friends are married, they've all got kids, we're older, cynical, worn out. . I wont lie, how am I going to meet anyone. I work in IT, in a company that makes flour. The average age is probably 50. I'm like the fourth youngest person there but I'm the manager. Any generally you meet people through work. That doesn't seem to be an open avenue for me. I know that I'm stuck. I felt like I was stuck" GS

Partner idealisation

Participants commonly reported viewing their former partner in an idealised way following the breakup. The term viewing them through "rose tinted glasses" was often collaboratively used during interview to describe the process of idealisation and tendency to place the former partner on a pedestal. From an attachment perspective, such pessimistic future appraisals and idealisation may again be thought of as misplaced *activating strategies,* motivating the individual to continue to pursue the former partner as an attachment figure (see Critical Appraisal 6.12).

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Partner idealisation	*"I can't even explain, he was this lovable person, super romantic. Everything he did, he was really attentive and stuff. He taught me a lot of things, we went to loads of museums. It was just those things. I'll never have that (again). I don't think I'll ever meet a partner like that...definitely a perfect person. He got away. I said to my mum and sister, I don't think I can ever get that again. He's the perfect person who got away" CR*
	"..because she was very beautiful and very ambitious and very clever, I didn't see how I would ever be able to repeat that with somebody else. She had, in that element the perfect mix and at the time when we split up, I wasn't focusing on the stuff that she didn't have which I wished she had...I was focusing, it was focused on the fact of she's really pretty, she's really beautiful, she's really successful, she's really independent in terms of, erm, she's focused on where she wants to be going in her life and i'll never find that with somebody else" NH

Furthermore, individuals tended to perceive the partner as even more desirable and coveted following the breakup, with the partner's positive attributes becoming more elevated in the participant's mind. This often coincided with participants feeling somewhat diminished in relation to their perception of themselves. Indeed several participants gesticulated this during interview, physically mimicking tipping scales, with the former partner going up and themselves going down.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Partner idealisation	*Researcher: do you think after the relationship ended you were viewing her through rose tinted glasses?*
	Participant: "Completely. Utterly. One hundred percent...I put her on a pedestal.
	Researcher: "where were you?"
	Participant: "below ground level (laughs). I just wasn't worth, wasn't worthy of her. I was wasn't worth it. I wasn't worth her.
	Researcher: "so she's elevated in your mind..?"
	Participant: "yeah, because I was focusing on all of her plus points and all of my negative points, and that creates that distance between of, in between the two realities, or in reality. Yeah, and because I was focusing on that, focusing on her good things and because I wasn't up to that level...that's where the blame element comes in because she's here, and for it to work the only reason I'm so low down is through everything I've done wrong, and so she was the golden girl and I was the guy who was screwing everything up" HN

Distressing/unwanted thoughts and images

Participants regularly reported experiencing a number of unwanted, distressing thoughts and images following their breakups and analysis revealed some significant cognitive themes. All such thoughts may be seen as *activating* or *protest strategies,* evoking a significant amount of anxiety and distress in the individual motivating them to seek out the former partner again.

Partner in a new relationship

Firstly, participants commonly reported 'tormenting' thoughts and images of the former partner having met someone new or of them in situations whereby they had the potential to meet new partners. This extended in some cases to catastrophic notions of the partner finding a lasting, long-term loving relationship, which was particularly distressing for some participants.

Theme	Supporting Data
Partner in a new relationship	*"..he went out one time with his mates and he also went to Magaluf for a week and (it) absolutely devastated me 'coz everything everyone says about Magaluf is so upsetting...when he was out in Magaluf, I was just in bits every single night. I hated it". BK*
	"I wasn't too bothered about him having flings with people, it was more like if he got into a relationship with someone, (that) was a bit hard. I was more like scared of him developing something with someone" CG
	"..it's really hard because when you're with someone like that, it feels like yours. You feel like, you can't let anyone go near them, they are yours. The thought that she's going to kiss another guy is really traumatic to me" PS

Partner moved on/self as stuck

Participants further reported distressing thoughts of the partner having seemingly 'moved on' relatively quickly with their lives or having met someone new relatively quickly, in comparison to themselves as feeling emotionally 'stuck'. Indeed, the contrast between both participant and ex-partner's emotional states and perceived sense of having moved on seemed significant in underpinning distress reactions.

Theme	Supporting Data
Partner moved on while self as stuck	*"..my biggest fear, my biggest problem was that I was left mourning the relationship and she was dancing off in the sunset with a new guy, and in my head life was rosy for her.." SG*

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"that's the biggest thing actually really. I'm worried that he's fine, and I'm not fine. That kind of worries me a bit...I almost want him to not be ok. I want him to suffer a little bit. And part of me hopes he is. The part of me that knows him, I bet he is not (suffering). I bet he's fine. He's so spiritual. He's probably meditated his way out of it by now" JH

Partner getting away "scot free"

Similarly, several participants reported experiencing a sense of anger or injustice at the notion that the former partner had contributed to their distress, leaving them in a state of emotional upheaval, whilst they had moved on quickly showing little insight, awareness or remorse into how their behaviours had impacted on them. Indeed, the notion that they had got away "scot free" or had become advantaged in some way such as through an improved sense of confidence or happiness (at the price of the participants own sense of feeling diminished), seemed particularly distressing. Participants relayed that such thoughts, and an accompanying sense of anger was significant in them finding it difficult to move on and feeling "stuck" with their anger.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Partner getting away 'Scott free'	*Participant: "I wasn't sure what to do with myself at that point and obviously I had heard from my friends that he'd been going out and having a whale of a time....I was just more angry than anything because I thought what right did he have to go off and have fun when he'd just been a complete arsehole basically......the first few times I saw him he seemed happy and carefree, I thought actually you should be upset about this as well, or at least he should be thinking about it, but I didn't get that impression...I just wanted him to think about what had happened and just process it and actually think"*
	Researcher: Did the thought about him never having insight into what he'd done and never really seeing the injustice and unfairness of what he'd done....
	Participant: "Yeah, oh God that made me really angry. Coz I obviously didn't think he'd ever get to that point because he never really did unless I explicitly spelled it out for him saying "this is not ok". That was one of the big things, that was one of the reasons I felt so stuck" SM

Catastrophic thoughts about recovery

Consistent with previous research demonstrating that catastrophic interpretations of grief reactions were associated with prolonged relationship dissolution distress (Boelen & Reijntes, 2009), participants commonly reported upsetting thoughts of their own recovery process, worrying that they may be perpetually stuck in a distressing emotional state following the breakup with little notion of recovery. Moreover participants reported having set expectations or beliefs around how much time should pass before negative feelings dissipate.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Catastrophic thoughts about recovery process	*"Yeah, I think I wanted to be just over it straight away, but even now I'm just like "I shouldn't be feeling like this". I just feel like I should be happy now, coz he is. I've heard that it takes about six to eight months to get over someone" BK*
	"(I was) definitely feeling distressed about the way I was feeling. I just felt like, like I said, I wanted everything to end but also wanted to be normal. I wanted to feel normal again..this was the first thing that happened that made me think I couldn't come out of it. And it took quite a while for me to feel like I was ok" HA
	"I was very frustrated with how short the relationship was. I didn't understand why I was so upset about something that lasted a few months. It just didn't seem right. And people were kind of like "oh you should be getting over it now" and I was "yeah, I should. Why am I not getting over it?"....as it came to summer I felt as though realistically I would get over it but I didn't know how quickly it was going to happen, because it was taking longer than I thought it should have done" GC

5.7 Behavioural/maintenance factors

Participants made reference to a number of post-breakup behaviours or events during interview. It is hypothesised that these factors may be significant in maintaining distress symptoms and preoccupation towards the former partner following the

relationship breakup and an important component in a cognitive-behavioural maintenance model.

Internet surveillance

A majority of participants spoke of engaging in internet checking and ongoing surveillance of the former partner following the breakup. In particular, facebook was frequently cited as a tool by which participants would continue to monitor the former partner in terms of checking photos, updates and activity monitoring. These findings are consistent with recent research suggesting that continued online exposure to a former partner may inhibit recovery and prolong emotional distress (Marshall, 2012).

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Internet checking surveillance	"I have a secret profile that my sister done ages ago, which is amazing. I can't stop looking at it even though I don't care. If he's liked something (on facebook) I need to know then all about the person that he's liked, especially if it's a girl" ML

Continued contact with former partner

Previous research suggests that continued contact with a former partner may be a potential risk factor in prolonging distressing symptoms (Mason *et al.,* 2012). Related to this, participants commonly cited continued contact or the threat of contact with their former partner as being significant in inhibiting their recovery. One participant spoke of the distress of continuing to see his former partner as they lived in close geographical proximity and his feelings of relief when discovering she had left the country.

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Continued contact	**Participant**: "..I think what kept my focus on her, I don't know if this is the case or not, I started seeing her a lot, like everywhere. For a long time I was paranoid about running into her in the street. I was terrified....I'd cross over the street to get a better look down the street to avoid running into her. I didn't want to see her at all. I mean, I partly did, I'm not like a stalker or anything like that. I think she moved in one street over. So I think that was one thing that didn't help me at all. Like, I saw her going down a drive there once and that didn't help, the paranoia,

worrying about bumping into her in the street"

Researcher *"I guess geographical proximity, psychological proximity, they are all important. If you knew (hypothetically) she's emigrated to Australia I guess at some point that light switch has to go off in your mind?*

Participant *"Well, it's funny that you say that. I believe she went to (country). That's part of the reason I've been feeling better". CP*

"...because I was still seeing him all the time, it was very hard to just not think about it. Because I saw him and then that would bring on the thoughts again, whereas over the summer when I didn't see him it was a lot easier. And like it is a bit easier now because we're not in halls anymore and I don't see him all the time" GC

Ongoing pursuit/contact behaviours

Some participants reported engaging in ongoing pursuit behaviours towards the former partner, including persistent attempts at contacting through text, calling, emailing and other means such as letter writing. Several participants reported other strategies such as enquiring after the former partner through friends or engineering social situations so that they may see the former partner. These findings are consistent with research demonstrating that individuals high in attachment anxiety demonstrate greater preoccupation with the lost partner, including exaggerated pursuit attempts (Davis *et al.,* 2003).

Theme	*Supporting Data*
Ongoing pursuit/contact behaviours	*"When I was in (country name) I would go to places that we would go to. Once I past his house to see if he was home. Maybe asking his friends something, just to find out something" VS*
	"when I was in halls I used to do this thing, they would go into dinner at a certain time, I used to go up near the same time. I know it sounds weird. I used to go on nights out on the same nights as him. I don't do that anymore, but I did do that" CG

Self-change

Participants commonly reported engaging in self-change behaviours following the relationship dissolution. For example, individuals commonly reported going to the gym, dieting, spending more time on physical appearance whilst getting one's hair cut or re-styled emerged as an extremely common response. Through exploration, it emerged that engaging in such behaviours were causally related to the desire for the former partner to see them as desirable again or to engender a sense of regret in them for having ended the relationship. Such responses may be thought of as *activating strategies,* again with the desire to pursue closeness to the former partner.

Theme	Supporting Data
Self change	*"I tried to reinvent myself....I said to him when we were going out, "if you ever dump me I'm gonna become really hot". That's what I said to him. So I did try. I kind of still am a bit. Yeah, because he's deleted me from facebook he's not gonna see pictures that are uploaded of me by friends or whatever, so when he sees me, he's bound to see me coz we live close and we're in the same friendship group, maybe he'll think "Oh right, she looks totally different". Even though I don't wanna go back out with him, I suppose there's a kind of part of me that wants him to think "why did I end everything". KB*
	"..I wanted to better myself for her. I wanted to pick up a language and that, and maybe read a higher quality book, that sort of thing". PC
	"I wanted him to want me back. I didn't want to get back with him, but I wanted him to want me back. If I put a photo on facebook I was very conscious "I want him to think I look nice".

Comparisons

Several participants reported constantly comparing the former partner to any future romantic prospects and suggested that that this was not helpful to them in their recovery and potentially facilitating ongoing attachment.

Theme	Supporting Data

Comparisons	"I just felt like there wasn't anyone better (than former partner). When I was seeing this other guy, I was still of thinking about him (former partner), which wasn't great. I was comparing him to him which is bad" GC
	"...there has been other people. I went out for somebody else, but the entire time I was comparing, "you are not like this", "this is not how it was with (former partner)"..I was definitely consciously comparing him "oh, (former partner) didn't do that. "it's not the same" "it wasn't like this with (former partner)". PN

Rumination

Consistent with previous research (e.g. Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007) participants spoke of ruminating around the lost relationship, both mentally and behaviourally. For example, participants reported mentally churning over the lost relationship in addition to looking over old reminders such as mementoes photos and text messages. Several participants referred to deliberately re-visiting locations shared with the former partner with one participant relaying she had returned to a holiday destination previously visiting with a former partner.

Theme	Supporting Data
Rumination	"constantly, like just constantly. I laugh because looking back at it I realise how ridiculous it is....at night I couldn't stop thinking. My mind was constantly ticking. I was just thinking "oh he's with someone else now. I just couldn't stop myself thinking just everything really. It is difficult to explain, but it's like I was having loads and loads of thoughts at once and weren't all being properly processed so they were all like fighting with each other to get attention" HA

External trigger/Reminders

Reminders of the previous partner, whether welcomed or not, where frequently cited as significant in contributing to ongoing distress.

Theme	Supporting Data
External trigger/Reminders	"everything about me, she helped me pick out these jeans. She pulled out this top for me and said "I think you look really nice in this". Everything I look around (is

a) constant reminder. RP

"...it felt like little things would just trigger me being upset, just sort of seeing things that would remind me of things that we did, or particularly it would be things that we said we would do. So if saw something that reminded me of that would be upsetting" JF

Social support

Several participants alluded to limited social support in the wake of their relationship dissolution. Moreover, some suggested that their friends had a 'threshold' whereby their support would reach capacity and would desire them to 'move on' and not mention the relationship any further. Research within the bereavement literature shows that well meaning friends and family attempt to set a time limit on a bereaved person's right to grieve (LaGrand, 1988). Furthermore, a lack of social support is often associated with an increase in psychological distress following negative life events (Kessler, Price & Wortman, 1985). Indeed the literature has shown that positive support experiences (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007) and perceived group cohesion (Rom & Mikulincer, 2003) have all been shown to reduce attachment system activation in individuals who have high attachment anxiety.

Theme	Supporting Data
Social support	*"I had a month where people seemed to let me speak and then after then people didn't seem to want to hear about it anymore" JH*
	"I think my friends sort of said "we've given you a month, you've been with a different guy, move on already and stop obsessing over him". I couldn't in a way. I felt I'd jumped in so far and he just ended it. I still wanted my answers. He still hadn't answered all my questions" RL

Avoidance

Consistent with Boelen *et al's* (2006) cognitive model of prolonged grief citing avoidance as a key mechanism involved in the maintenance of grief-related distress, participants reported attempting to avoid contact with the former partner, or situations

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that may expose them to the partner following the breakup. Boelen *et al's* (2006) model of grief proposes that avoidance behaviour, including the avoidance of stimuli that remind of the loss maintains grief symptoms by preventing elaboration and integration of the loss.

However, results within the context of relationship dissolution allude to a paradox. On the one hand, participants reported attempting to avoid the ex-partner, yet on the other hand they also reported desires to reconnect and often engaged in ongoing contact attempts. It is hypothesised that avoidance may partly be understood in the context of the person not wanting to be exposed to a situation liable to distress them further, such as seeing the ex-partner with someone new, looking attractive, adjusting well or seeing them in a way that destroys any sense of hope for a reconciliation. As such avoidance may be viewed as a form of emotional self preservation.

Theme	Supporting Data
Avoidance	*"..he kind of scares me in a way. Because I feel like I don't want to see him and I dont' want to hear from him and I just don't want anything to do with him in a way. It's sort of a fear; what if he's moved on, what if he's got a girlfriend, what if, what if, what if. That concerns me quite a lot. What if he's suddenly normal, that's a massive worry. What if he suddenly wakes up, meets somebody and decides that they're good enough and then he marries them and has babies with them and gets a job and is normal. My friends tell me that won't happen but that does scare me. That I wasn't good enough, but the next one, maybe they will be" HJ*
	"the only reason I don't want to see him is because I'm worried he's moved on" HJ

However, despite engaging in avoidance the individual may still attempt to see the former partner in certain contexts. These may relate to socially engineered or controlled situations whereby the individual can present themselves to the ex-partner in the way they wish to be seen. For example, situations where they have made a particular effort with their appearance or some other situation where they can engender a sense of regret in the former partner. However, thoughts of seeing the ex-partner in a spontaneous or impromptu manner seemed to evoke significant anxiety.

Hypothetically, this may be because the individual has been caught 'off guard' and may not be able to control the situation and what the former partner sees. Within this context, both avoidance and ongoing pursuit may often co-exist in the individual's post-relationship experiences.

Reduced activity/ Social withdrawal

Consistent with Boelen *et al's* (2006) model of grief which cites avoidance of activities that could facilitate adjustment as a key factor causal to the maintenance of distress, participants reported reduced activity levels and social withdrawal following their breakup. Boelen *et al* suggest that such avoidance contributes to ongoing distress by blocking the correction of negative views of the self, life, and future that may develop following loss.

Theme	Supporting Data
Reduced activity/ Social withdrawal	*"...I was in my room locked away. I didn't want to talk, didn't want to eat, do anything. I couldn't do anything, I didn't want to do anything" RC*
	"I stopped going out, I wanted to be home all the time, I wanted to eat all the time. I want to don't talk to anyone, just be with myself" VS

5.8 Emotions and physical sensations.

Participants reported a range of emotional experiences following the breakup of their relationship. The findings suggest that relationship dissolution does not pertain to one particular emotion but instead a myriad of emotional experiences are encountered which are hypothesised to be reflective of the varying cognitions the individual may be pre-occupied with at any particular time.

Negative Emotions

Participants cited general depressive symptoms as the most prevalent emotion they had experienced following the breakup, although anger and feelings of being 'lost' emerged as other salient experiences. Some participants described their experiences akin to

traditional grief following the death of a loved one while several participants reported feeling suicidal or having suicidal thoughts in the aftermath of their breakup

Theme	Supporting Data
Emotional reactions	*"Depression. I felt completely hopeless at the time. I thought I'd never be happy again. I've felt angry, I've felt anxious, scared. Just sadness, really sad" HJ*
	"..I was just lost, that's the only way to describe it... I was a bit of a shell of a person I think. I got very upset very easily...I was just absolutely distraught. I didn't understand. I couldn't comprehend why it was happening and I felt very much like the world was against me" HA
	"I felt very low. I didn't want to be alive. I didn't want to be here. It's the fact that it was so close to home I couldn't take it and every day I would just be, I would never be happy I would never be joyful" EM
Death	*"I think for me, the reason why it's been so intense and harrowing is because it's felt like someone's died. I haven't experienced death a lot in my life I'm lucky to say, but this is probably the closest thing I can associate with what it feels like to lose someone in that way. But in my head it's almost worse, because I've made it happen". PV*
Suicidal thoughts	*"...it did get me very down, very down. And I did get to the point where I could of easily pulled a car in front of a lorry, you know, driving to work some days. That's how I felt. I didn't feel I could escape. I couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel of escaping the way I felt" RN.*
	"..Is started self harming a bit, that was one way of me dealing with the pain. I have gone to counselling about that, it's over now. There was an outlet for that pain in a way, it was just one of those things" RL

Physical sensations

Participants cited a range of accompanying physical sensations. These included impaired concentration and anxiety symptoms including feelings of sickness and nausea. Participants commonly cited appetite changes following the relationship

breakup, particularly reduced appetite and subsequent weight loss while sleep disturbances were also frequently cited.

Theme	Supporting Data
Physical sensations	*"....I kept just going faint and feeling like I was falling to the floor. Kept losing all sense of like standing up and being there I kind of felt like I was just falling" BK*
	"I felt like someone was standing on my chest a lot, but I think that goes with the sadness I think. And I couldn't breathe sometimes, when I felt really sad. It was like someone was standing on my chest all the time. It was like a real heavy feeling here (points)" JH
	"..I felt like zombie-fied. I felt so weird. It's weird to think your body can do that. It is weird to think that your body can react that way to something so emotional" RC
Appetite	*"I start a film over about four times. I just watch or read things but don't actually take anything in. I just can't concentrate" KB*
	"I had no appetite. My mum literally had to come into my room and give me food and watch me eat it. I didn't feel hungry. I don't know, I kept saying to my mum "I feel like I'm gonna die" or something like that. That's how intense it was. I just had no energy. I'd go out and then walk straight back in. I couldn't even go out onto the road and the road was literally just in front on my house" CR
	"I felt physically sick all the time. I couldn't eat because I felt so sick. I just felt like a bit nauseous. I think it's because I felt so upset that I just, I don't know how to describe it. It's where your emotions impact on your physical being. I was so upset I felt like I'd lost my appetite. I lost like a stone in about a week which is ridiculous. I wasn't eating, probably quite dehydrated as well because I wasn't drinking anything. I was completely unable to take care of myself" HA
	"In the first four weeks after the split up I lost one and a half stone. I just lost all of my appetite. I was struggling to eat and people were worried about me. I lost most of the weight from my face first so everyone could tell" SG
Sleep	*"It did impact on my sleep. I couldn't sleep at night. I would wake up and (be)*

sweating and (I) had nightmares, or no sleep and be worry worry, worry. I was thinking of him all the time, obsession" AB

"I couldn't sleep for about four weeks. I almost considered going to the doctors to help me sleep. I couldn't fall asleep and when I did I'd wake up at about five o clock and then I'd just lye awake thinking about it until about seven" HJ

5.9 Summary of findings

The consistency of themes across participants and the empirical association between the highlighted processes and distress reactions leads to the development of a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress and maladjustment. The model shares similarities with that proposed by Boelen *et al.,* (2006) in conceptualising prolonged grief, but is clinically derived and provides more information as to precise cognitive and behavioural processes.

5.10 Conceptualisation of recovery

Several participants having experienced their relationship dissolution some time prior to interview were able to chart how their experiences, including their feelings thoughts and appraisals, had significantly changed over time. These findings had relevance in leading to a proposed model of recovery, presented in Appendix J. This conceptualisation alludes to how individuals may be assisted in moving forward and the findings therefore point to promising areas of intervention

6. Discussion

Twenty-seven individuals reporting difficulties adjusting following the dissolution of a romantic relationship were interviewed about their experiences and completed self-report measures pertaining to attachment style and personality characteristics. The aims of the study were to examine for commonality in themes across individual's narrative accounts and to investigate whether some of the known correlates of distress, borne out of quantitative studies, were collectively present in the individuals' reported experiences. Moreover, to consider how these factors, along with new emergent themes, were systematically related in order to contribute to the development of a theoretical model of relationship dissolution distress, based on integrated cognitive-behavioural and attachment principles.

Research aims were achieved. The consistency of themes across participants led to the proposal of a model of relationship dissolution distress. The model is both theoretically and empirically derived and may have useful clinical implications.

6.1 Summary of findings

Vulnerability factors

Results suggest there are a number of pre-existing factors that may make the individual more vulnerable to adjustment difficulties following the breakup of a significant relationship. These factors pertain to attachment, intra-personal and relationship-specific variables. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Davis *et al*., 2003; Sbarra & Emery, 2005), analysis of questionnaire data revealed that the majority of participants within the sample endorsed an anxious style of attachment, notably either a '*pre-occupied'* or '*fearful'* attachment style respectively. This remains consistent with previous findings suggesting that an anxious attachment orientation remains a significant vulnerability factor contributing to emotional distress reactions following relationship loss.

Furthermore, results of the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ) suggested that negative schemas may also be an important vulnerability factor in contributing to distress reactions following a relationship breakup. In particular, negative schemas around abandonment, self sacrifice, unrelenting standards and insufficient self-control emerged as commonly endorsed schema profiles across the sample and may be associated with subsequent maladjustment. Moreover, consistent with previous research (e.g. Boelin & van den Hout 2010; Chung *et al*., 2002) findings further revealed that pre-existing low self-esteem and the extent to which the individual continues to perceive their identity as "intertwined" with their former partner may be a potential risk factor in contributing to relationship dissolution distress.

Analysis also alluded to a number of relationship-specific variables that may be significant vulnerability factors in contributing to emotional distress post-breakup. Consistent with Rusbult's (1980) investment model of commitment and with prior research suggesting that factors that increase relationship investment are associated with greater difficulty adjusting to a dissolution (e.g. Field *et al*., 2009; Stanley, Rhoades & Markham, 2006), findings suggested that the degree of commitment and how serious the relationship was perceived to be prior to breakup was a significant contributory factor to the distress later experienced.

Characteristics of the breakup

Characteristics of the breakup event may also have bearing on the distress experienced post breakup. Indeed, relational factors between the ex-partner and the individual and the manner in which the breakup is communicated may be just as important as inter-personal factors in contributing to distress. Consistent with previous research (i.e. Davis *et al.,* 2003; Sprecher *et al.,* 1998), most participants indicated that they had not initiated the breakup but were instead the ones who had been 'rejected' by their partner. These findings suggest that initiator status is an important variable involved in the distress one experiences following a relationship breakup.

Moreover, the majority of participants had felt the breakup had been sudden or "out of the blue" and relayed that they were given no clear or definitive reasons for why the

partner wished to terminate the relationship, being left with a number of "unanswered questions". Furthermore, participants commonly reported that the former partner would become avoidant following the breakup and unavailable for further dialogue. It is hypothesised that such characteristics may contribute to the individual experiencing a 'lack of closure' around the relationship and being unable to fully integrate and process the loss, acting as another significant factor in maintaining distress.

Cognitive processes

In the context of having few clear reasons for why the relationship ended, participants commonly reported embarking on a prolonged period of post-relationship analysis ('post-relationship autopsy'). Consistent with previous research (e.g. Saffrey & Ehrenberg 2007), this process seemed marked by excessive rumination around the lost relationship, with the individual attempting to come up with definitive reasons for why the relationship had broken down and draw some conclusions as to what may have happened. This component of the model theoretically links the individuals need for answers with the cognitive appraisals that are subsequently formed in an attempt to form conclusions and process the loss.

Indeed, in seeking to understand the factors that may have accounted for the dissolution, findings suggested that the individual may engage in a number of distorted cognitive processes hypothesised to be related to the maintenance of their distress. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Boelen & Reijintes, 2009), findings revealed that individuals consistently engaged in thoughts of self-blame following the breakup, often scrutinising every aspect of their behaviour in looking for reasons as to how they had contributed to the relationship failing. This was often verbalised as "if I hadn't have done, x, y or z this would not have happened". Additionally, individuals commonly reported negative thoughts of self following the dissolution, particularly appraising they had not been "good enough" for their previous partner and attributing this to either physical or personality characteristics.

Furthermore, individuals reported forming pessimistic appraisals around future romantic prospects following the breakups. This was commonly expressed as "I will

never meet anyone like him/her again" or "the chances of meeting someone like that again are slim". These findings remain consistent with previous research demonstrating that pessimistic beliefs about future relationships were a significant contributory factor for anxiously attached individuals remaining emotionally attached to former partners and experiencing ongoing distress (Speilmann *et al.,* 2010).

Moreover, participants consistently referred to idealising the former partner following the relationship breakup, perceiving them even more desirable and coveted after the relationship had ended. This sense of placing the former partner on a pedestal often coincided with the individual reporting a diminished perception of self comparative to the ex-partner. For example, while the partner had become elevated in the participant's mind, their perception of themselves equally seemed to diminish. Finally, analysis indicated that participants commonly reported experiencing a number of distressing and unwanted thoughts and images relating to the former partner and self which also seemed important in contributing to distress reactions. Indeed, several participants spoke of such thoughts as "tormenting", contributing to significant anxiety and distress.

All cognitive processes described may be conceptualised as '*activating strategies*' (e.g. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2002) or *protest reactions*, in essence thoughts or images that compel the individual to continue to pursue closeness, physically or emotionally, to the partner as an attachment figure (see critical appraisal 16.4). The model diagrammatically depicts these cognitive processes moving in a circular fashion, symbolising how the individual oscillates around such cognitive experiences, subsequently experiencing a myriad of emotional states.
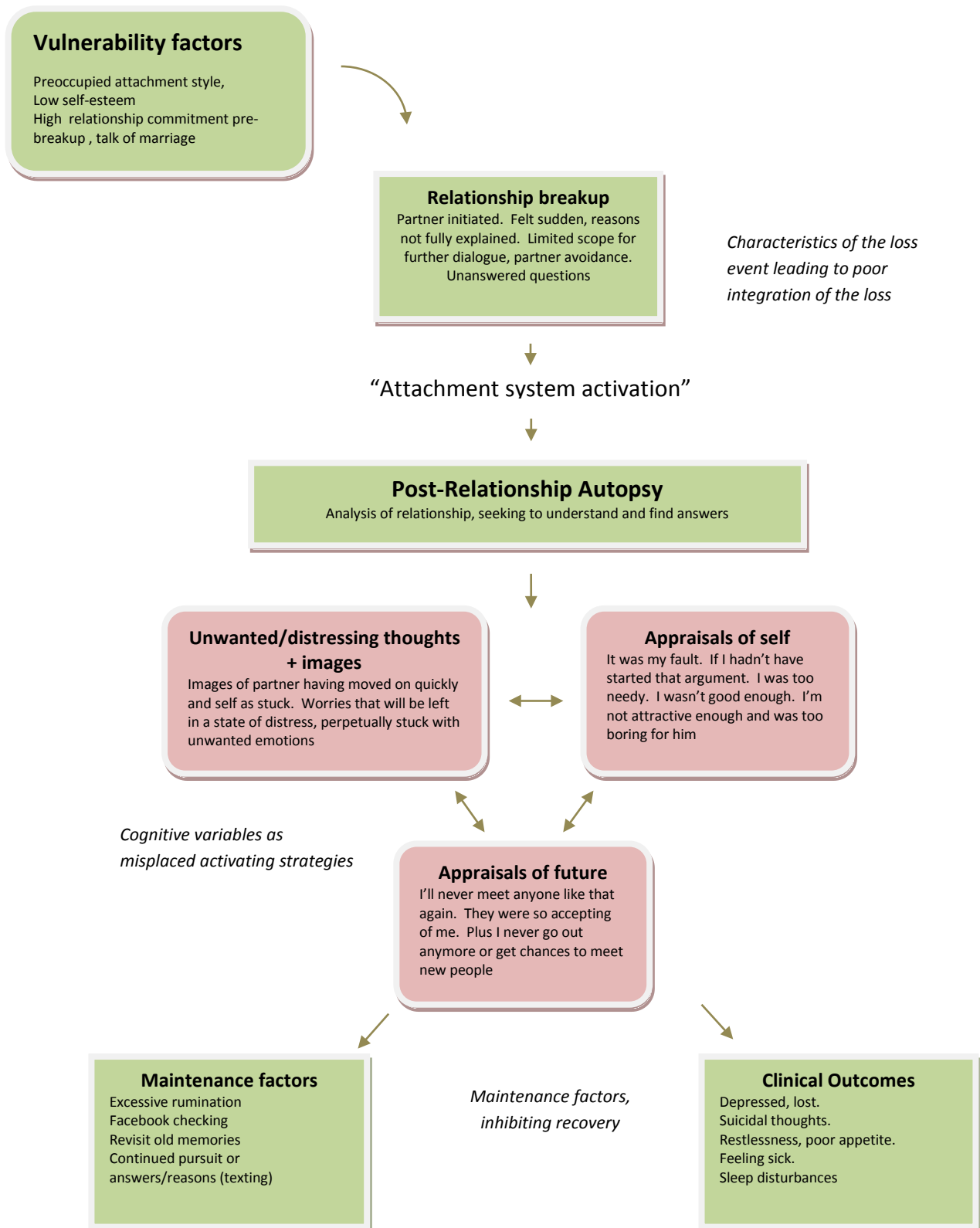
Maintenance processes

Analysis revealed that individuals tend to engage in a number of behaviours, or are involuntarily exposed to a number of factors, that may serve to maintain focus of attention on the former partner thereby contributing to ongoing maladjustment. For example, consistent with previous research (e.g. Marshall, 2012; Mason *et al.,* 2012; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007) internet surveillance, continued contact or the threat of continued contact, exposure to reminders or triggers associated with the former partner

and rumination around the lost relationship all emerged as potential maintenance factors hypothesised to keep focus of attention on the lost relationship and thus inhibit the recovery process.

Furthermore, consistent with Boelen *et al's* (2006) cognitive model of prolonged grief which cites avoidance as a key mechanism involved in the maintenance of distress, individuals commonly reported attempting to avoid situations relating to the former partner. Boelen *et al.* suggest that avoidance may maintain grief symptoms by preventing elaboration and integration of the loss. It is further hypothesised that avoidance within the context of relationship dissolution may be partially understood in the context of the person not wanting to be exposed to a situation that would be liable to distress them further, such or seeing the former partner with someone else, coping well, looking attractive, or equally being seen by the partner in a personally undesirable state. Finally, participants reported social withdrawal and reduced activity levels following the relationship breakup. Consistent with Boelen *et al's* (2006) model of grief, avoidance of activities that could facilitate adjustment may maintain symptoms by blocking the correction of negative beliefs that may develop following loss.

Figure 12: Cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress (example)

Vulnerability factors

Preoccupied attachment style,
Low self-esteem
High relationship commitment pre-breakup , talk of marriage

Relationship breakup
Partner initiated. Felt sudden, reasons not fully explained. Limited scope for further dialogue, partner avoidance. Unanswered questions

Characteristics of the loss event leading to poor integration of the loss

"Attachment system activation"

Post-Relationship Autopsy
Analysis of relationship, seeking to understand and find answers

Unwanted/distressing thoughts + images
Images of partner having moved on quickly and self as stuck. Worries that will be left in a state of distress, perpetually stuck with unwanted emotions

Appraisals of self
It was my fault. If I hadn't have started that argument. I was too needy. I wasn't good enough. I'm not attractive enough and was too boring for him

Cognitive variables as misplaced activating strategies

Appraisals of future
I'll never meet anyone like that again. They were so accepting of me. Plus I never go out anymore or get chances to meet new people

Maintenance factors
Excessive rumination
Facebook checking
Revisit old memories
Continued pursuit or answers/reasons (texting)

Maintenance factors, inhibiting recovery

Clinical Outcomes
Depressed, lost.
Suicidal thoughts.
Restlessness, poor appetite.
Feeling sick.
Sleep disturbances

6.2 Clinical Implications

If supported in future research, the findings presented here may have useful implications for clinicians working with individuals reporting adjustment difficulties following the dissolution of a relationship. For example, the model may assist clinicians in understanding further those variables most salient in contributing to unique distress reactions and formulating the link between attachment dynamics, ruminative strategies and cognitive behavioural processes with subsequent maladjustment.

Furthermore, the findings may lead to the development of effective treatment strategies and point to promising targets of cognitive and behavioural intervention. In particular, interventions that assist the individual in re-examining distorted appraisals around self blame, pessimistic appraisals around future romantic prospects and negative thoughts of self may prove fruitful areas of intervention. Moreover, interventions that encourage individuals to step back from negative ruminative processes such as mindfulness based cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002) may be particularly useful in helping with adjustment following a breakup and initiating individuals along health adjustment trajectories.

Moreover, the model not only highlights those factors that maintain distress over time, it also seeks to conceptualise why particular individuals may have a predisposition or vulnerability to becoming distressed following the breakup of a relationship. For example, findings suggests that individuals with anxious attachment styles are particularly susceptible to relationship dissolution difficulties. This may have further treatment implications and therapeutic efforts may be aimed at exploring the potential role of the individual's attachment history in influencing their reactions post breakup and laying foundations for secure attachment experiences. Moreover, the model may have utility as an early intervention model, helping to preventatively identify those individuals, under certain conditions, most vulnerable to encounter difficulties coping following relationship loss. Early intervention may be vital in achieving better outcomes before negative ruminative, cognitive and behavioural strategies become entrenched.

6.3 Research strengths and limitations

This research is the first to employ qualitative methodology to gain a richer insight into the individual's experiences of relationship dissolution with a view to developing a theoretical account of distress, previously not yet proposed within the clinical literature. The study builds on some of limitations of previous research within the area by using a varied and diverse sample in an attempt to improve the external validity of the findings. Indeed, the total sample comprised of individuals of varying ages, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation and relationship length. Moreover, unlike previous research which has mainly used samples of undergraduate students, the research also incorporated a 'clinical sample' adding toward the applicability of the findings to clinical populations.

Despite some of the aforementioned strengths, there are several limitations that are worth of consideration. Despite efforts to recruit a diverse sample, the majority of participants nevertheless fell within the 19-24year age range. While helpful in providing insight into the experiences of young adults following early romantic relationships breakups, the findings do not necessarily generalise to other populations, particularly individuals in different developmental phases. Furthermore, several participants from the 'clinical' sample were either undergoing or finishing a course of therapy at the point of interview. Consequently, their reported cognitions and appraisals may have shifted significantly over the course of treatment making it difficult to distinguish between current processes and those at the time of acute distress.

Moreover, current methodology did not permit inferences as to which of the proposed mechanisms within the model were most salient in contributing to distress. In particular, it is difficult to know to what extent the cited vulnerability factors, relationship breakup characteristics, cognitions and maintenance factors individually or in combination contribute to the severity or duration of distress. In addition, the study provided no formal definition of distress or preoccupation and no validated measures were administered. As such, it remains difficult to say with certainty which variables are causally associated with distress given that distress as a construct had not formally been defined. It may be that some variables correlate with a particular form or distress,

and some with others. In hindsight, measures of distress or preoccupation may have been utilised within the current methodology.

6.4 Comparison with established models of emotional disorders

One of the aims of the current study was to develop a cognitive-behavioural model of relationship dissolution distress similar to those found in the literature for other emotional disorders. Several authors have recently proposed that the emotional distress experienced following the loss of a romantic relationship remains akin to the grief experienced following the death of a loved one (e.g Emery, 1994, 2004; Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Furthermore, particular models of grief seem to share similar theoretical features to the model proposed within the context of this research. For example, similar to the findings reported within this study, negative beliefs about the self, life and the future in addition to catastrophic misinterpretations of grief reactions contribute to our theoretical understanding of the variance in emotional reactions experienced following bereavement and loss as highlighted in Bolen *et al's.* (2006) recent cognitive behavioural model of prolonged grief disorder.

However, a critical difference between models of grief and a model of relationship dissolution distress is that unlike death, the loss and breakup of a relationship is theoretically revocable, thus making the grieving process much more cyclical than linear (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 2005).   Indeed, individuals may oscillate a great deal in their emotional reactions following a relationship breakup, rather than demonstrating linear adjustment over time (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Consistent with contemporary perspectives on bereavement and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980; Stroebe & Schut, 2001), the model of relationship dissolution presented here predicts that changes in emotions may fluctuate over time, partly as a function of the individual's propensity to engage in particular behavioural and cognitive activities which may prolong distress and facilitate ongoing preoccupation towards the former partner. For instance, ongoing contact with one's former partner following a relationship breakup may stall the emotional adjustment process and reactivate painful emotions, thus prolonging emotional distress.

Moreover, a further difference between the model of relationship dissolution distress and other grief models may be the element of time. While it may take weeks, months or even years to mourn the loss of a relationship, accidentally bumping into the former partner in the street or receiving a surprise message, for instance, may reactivate or amplify the distress that may have slowly dissipated since the separation. Sbarra and Emery (2005) suggest that these types of experience may also disturb the balance of positive emotions, thwarting feelings of freedom or relief. Clearly the experience of grieving the passing of a loved one, aside from exposure to potential reminders of the lost individual, would not involve such exposure and the process of grief can be thought of as more linear or even.

6.4.1 Models of trauma

Several authors have postulated that the emotional distress experienced in the wake of a romantic relationship may be similar to the distress reactions encountered following other distressing life events, particularly traumatic events. Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that the dissolution of a relationship can be a highly stressful and traumatic process (Bloom, Asher & White, 1978; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1986). As such, some researchers have drawn comparisons between relationship dissolution reactions and models of PTSD. Chung *et al*. (2002) first suggested that people could manifest post-traumatic stress symptoms as a result of the dissolution of a dating relationship and that consequently post-traumatic stress reactions can be extended to arenas beyond accidents, assaults or natural disasters.

In particular, Chung *et al.* (2002) investigated the extent to which individuals, following the dissolution of a dating relationship, experienced formal post-traumatic stress symptoms. In their study, the authors found that individuals experiencing a relationship breakup experienced significant post-traumatic stress symptoms as measured on the Impact of event scale (IES). Indeed 72 per cent of individuals in their sample scored at the high IES symptom level and 43 per cent were thought to be psychiatric cases. Furthermore, individuals experienced chronic symptoms as consistent with DSM-IV which lasted more than 3 months (America Psychiatric Association, 1994). Also, there

was a clear relationship between intrusive thoughts, avoidance behaviour and general health.

6.4.2 Limitations of trauma model

The findings presented by Chung *et al.* (2002) demonstrate the extent to which the breakup of a dating relationship can affect individuals in a way similar to that experienced following a traumatic event. On the basis of such findings, the authors argue that we can possibly extend post-traumatic stress symptoms to the arena of relationship dissolution. However, the extension of a trauma model is not without its limitations. For example, in order for people to be diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, they need to meet several criteria as outlined in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Firstly, they must have experienced an event said to be outside the range of usual human experience and which would be markedly distressing and traumatic to the average person. Moreover, such experiences are often said to be sudden and unexpected and threaten the physical integrity of the individual, while responses to such experiences involve intense helplessness, fear or horror.

Although many individuals reported having experienced their relationship dissolution as sudden and unexpected within the current research, one can argue that the dissolution of a dating relationship is not an event which falls outside the range of usual human experience, neither can it be said to 'threaten the physical integrity of the individual'. Furthermore, responses to a dissolution may not usually involve intense fear and horror, although people might feel helpless about the dissolution and experience a number of anxiety symptoms. In sum, making a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder may not be applicable when thinking about the dissolution of a dating relationship. However, it may be of interest to consider whether or not some of the psychological distress reactions following a relationship dissolution can be measured in terms of individual post-traumatic stress symptoms, characterised for example by intrusion and avoidance, both two key features of the current findings.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

An important recommendation for future research would be to empirically validate the current findings and assess the applicability of the model across diverse samples and groups of individuals. In particular, given that the sample mainly drew on younger individuals in early dating relationships, future research may look to examine the applicability of the findings to longer term relationships and to people experiencing breakups in other developmental phases. Relationship dissolution may be a categorically different experience across the age span and future research should investigate whether the findings reported here are exclusive to one developmental phase or not.

Furthermore, future research should also examine the extent to which the findings generalise to individuals of other cultures. Although the study included participants of varied ethnic backgrounds, the extent to which the findings may be applicable across cultures is yet to be established. Most research on relationship dissolution has been based on data from western-oriented, individualistic societies and research around other cultures is needed to broaden a cross-cultural perspective.

Cognitive and behavioural themes were consistent across attachment style, with individuals with both anxious and secure orientations alluding to similar cognitive and behavioural processes. However, attachment orientation may nevertheless influence the intensity and duration of such processes and future research may consider whether the thoughts and behaviours as highlighted vary in intensity as a function of attachment style.

Given that participants reported on their experiences retrospectively, future studies may benefit from examining relationship dissolution distress using prospective design studies. Indeed, romantic relationships are naturally occurring events and methodology should look to capture the processes more fully. It could be that the cognitions and behaviours reported here reflect a particular point in time longitudinal designs may be useful to examine changes in cognitions and behaviours as they evolve. Related to this, future research may also examine the applicability of the findings with other theoretical

models, in particular the cycle of grief (e.g. Kubler-Ross, 2005). Indeed, it may be interesting to explore whether the experiences reported here, particularly the cognitions and behaviours, are exclusive to a certain stages of grief or not. For example, whether anger reactions are reflective of *activating* or *protest strategies* with the intention of continuing to pursue the lost partner, or instead reflective of detachment strategies and a move into the 'anger phase' as part of the recovery process.

6.6 Conclusions

Although the empirical association between relationship dissolution and emotional distress is well established within the research literature, there have been no attempts to draw together some of the variables known to account for distress reactions and examine how they may be systematically related. The consistency of themes emerging across analysis in this current study, in addition to findings from self-report measures, lend support for the development of a cognitive-behavioural conceptualisation of relationship dissolution distress that may assist clinicians in the future. Strengths of the research relate to deriving the findings from a large and diverse qualitative sample and integrating findings from previous research and theoretical assumptions around attachment dynamics. The next challenge is to test the applicability of the model through further empirical investigation.

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Part 3: Critical Appraisal

Submitted April 2014

6. Critical appraisal

6.1 Selecting the research topic: "Do we need another cognitive-behavioural model?"

Background and context

The motivation to pursue this research area began several years ago whilst working as a cognitive-behavioural therapist within a primary mental health service in London. I noticed with regularity that clients would be referred to the service for difficulties adjusting following a relationship dissolution, reporting significant symptoms of anxiety and depression. However, this was not a presenting problem that was assumed to be under the remit of CBT and clients of this nature would typically be referred to relationship counselling services to access specialist support.

I had completed my training in CBT at Royal Holloway University in 2009 and was fortunate enough to receive good quality training which I hope has 'stood me in good stead' ever since. However the paradox later struck me that despite all the excellent training around specific emotional disorders (for example, leading figures in particular cognitive models would provide training around conditions such as social anxiety, PTSD etc), relationship adjustment difficulties received no absolutely no coverage whatsoever, despite emerging as one of the more common presenting problems in primary care. Indeed, I encountered relationship dissolution problems far more frequently than conditions such as health anxiety, body dysmorphic disorder or even OCD.

I later discovered there was relatively little research around relationship dissolution within the formal clinical literature (most studies feature in the domain of social psychology). As stated throughout this thesis, no model had been proposed or any research from a cognitive-behavioural perspective as to how to approach this type of presentation. In light of a clear gap within the literature and given the clear clinical need, I became interested in researching and developing a model that may help clinicians encountering this type of presentation in future.

Clinical case examples

Working with one client particular client aroused my interest and prompted my decision to start informally researching this area. The client was a woman in her early thirties who was referred to the service initially for issues with low mood and longstanding low self-esteem. However it later emerged that difficulties adjusting following a relationship dissolution was most significant in understanding her current depressive episode.

Upon working with her, the woman would describe feeling perpetually 'stuck' following a relationship that had ended around two years previously. Indeed, she said that she was still frequently texting and calling the former partner and generally feeling preoccupied by him, unable to move on. What I found most intriguing were the thoughts she reported, particularly in the context of the relationship she described. For example, the salient thoughts pertained to "I'll never meet anyone like him again" and this was often verbalised as a sort of mental probability; "the chances of me meeting someone like him again are slim". She also reported further negative thoughts such as "I wasn't good enough for him" or "he was too good for me".

As stated, these thoughts and appraisals were particularly conspicuous in light of her relationship. For example, she had reported a somewhat transient relationship with a man she had known only briefly, who had lived in the same house as her as part of a house share in London. The relationship seemed to be primarily a sexual one and she later described how the individual would often bring other partners back to the home, something which she had tolerated despite causing her some distress. Indeed at one point she described purchasing earplugs to prevent her from hearing the man in the adjacent room with other partners.

She also described not actually knowing much about the individual such as his real name or age and it became clear from her descriptions that the ex-partner did not view their time together as particularly meaningful. Within this context it was intriguing as to how this woman, an otherwise intelligent and resourceful individual with a successful career as a secondary school teacher, had become so preoccupied with a

relationship of this nature. Indeed, her appraisal of "I will never meet anyone like him again" stuck out like a proverbial sore thumb within this context. I became fascinated as to what might have been the factors that had contributed to her feeling this way and experiencing the relationship in this way.

I worked with another client shortly after and there were some consistencies in cognitive themes that further propelled my interest.   Again, what remained interesting were his reported cognitions within the context of the relationship he described. A young man in his early twenties undertaking a PhD in physics at a London University, he was referred to the service suffering with depression following a relationship breakdown. He described feeling "not good enough" for the former partner after the breakup and in particular, that it was "all his fault" that things had ended. Indeed, he was scrutinizing every aspect of his behaviour seeking reasons as to why the relationship had failed and often verbalised sentiments to the effect of "if I hadn't have done x y and z we would still be together...". However, the young man described an extremely abusive relationship where it seems the partner had consistently treated him unfavourably. Again, it was intriguing how such an intelligent, rational individual was forming such distorted appraisals around the relationship ending.

"Do we need another cognitive-behavioural model?"

I have often asked myself the question "do we need another cognitive-behavioural model" throughout the process of this research, especially having worked primarily within psychodynamic approach as part of my clinical training. CBT is sometimes mistakenly regarded as a panacea and it is not uncommon to google any emotional disorder and find some evidence suggesting that CBT is an effective intervention. Moreover, the 'Overcoming' book series (self help books for emotional conditions based on CBT principles), is ever expanding.   I have therefore questioned the merits of proposing yet another CBT model for yet another type of presentation.

However, when reflecting on this question, I am often reminded of the aforementioned clients and how particularly skewed their cognitions seemed to be, especially within the context of the relationships they had described. Indeed, their thoughts, in both cases,

seemed clear examples of typical Beckian thought distortions. This suggested to me that under particular conditions, a relationship dissolution may significantly promote negative and distorted thinking patterns hypothesised to be related to distress reactions.

Social Networking

Furthermore, I had also reflected how modern social media, particularly social networking, may have the potential to exacerbate emotional difficulties following relationship loss in a way unlike any point in the past. Indeed, relationship breakups may very well be experienced differently now compared at any point previously. The advent of Facebook and other forms of social networking mean the partner is always available, or potentially available through such channels. Previous the internet or even texting, relationship breakups may have been more definitive and individuals may have found it easier to adjust as the former partner was not available to access as an ongoing attachment figure. This has clearly altered and social networking may have made relationship dissolutions harder to negotiate than they ever have previously.

This research therefore sought to investigate a phenomena within its current social and cultural context. Furthermore, given the cognitive distortions and processes alluded to, as well as the potential to engage in behaviours that may serve to keep focus of attention on the former partner, it was felt that another cognitive-behavioural model was not only relevant but perhaps long overdue.

6.2 Personal relationship to the topic

A part of me has felt slightly self-conscious by the research topic, perhaps reflecting feelings of mild embarrassment that others may think this is an experience I have had difficulty with personally. While a personal connection to the topic in this sense would be perfectly acceptable, my personal motivation was derived more through developing an idea in clinical practice and seeing its potential to grow and address an area of clinical need, rather than through personal difficulties per se. Nevertheless, I have often reflected on a personal level how my own previous relationship breakup experiences have been different from each other and have always been intrigued as to

why negotiating some breakups was more difficult than others. This personal connection has helped me to remain curious as to why, under particular circumstances, dissolutions may be difficult for some individuals compared to others and what might be some of the factors that account or this.

Furthermore, I had previously worked for two and a half years at a high security prison where I was mainly involved in the assessment of violent and psychopathic offenders. In particular, I was placed on a wing which housed a number of male offenders who were serving life sentences for murder and specifically worked with a number of men who had murdered their partners following a relationship breakup. I was often intrigued as to how some men could respond to interpersonal rejection by stalking, pursuing and ultimately murdering their partners and what might be the factors as to account for this, compared to other individuals who understandably grieve a breakup and potentially feel very angry, but do not resort to such measures. The extension of the current findings to forensic populations may be a fruitful area for future exploration.

6.3 Hopes for the research

It was hoped at the outset that this research may have the potential to address a gap within an area of clinical need. Furthermore, the motivation was to develop a model that had clinical utility. What remains hopeful is the scope for future research, not only in validating the current findings but particularly thinking about treatment ideas and approaches. Indeed, the findings may lend themselves well to interventions by highlighting those variables most amenable to modification. In previous clinical work, some interventions were already trialled such as encouraging clients to understand further about their attachment style and attachment dynamics, normalising some of their cognitive processes and restructuring negative appraisals.

Moreover, the maintenance factors highlighted within the model point to salient areas of behavioural intervention. Previously in clinical work I would use a modified version of a Salkovskis (1996) vicious flower maintenance formulation when working with clients with attachment difficulties. This was often was useful in helping individuals see the benefit of dropping attachment-directed behaviours with a view of reducing

preoccupation towards the former partner.   If validated, such techniques may prove fruitful in the treatment of individuals presenting with relationship dissolution distress.

Figure 13: Maintenance formulation (Salkovskis, 1996)
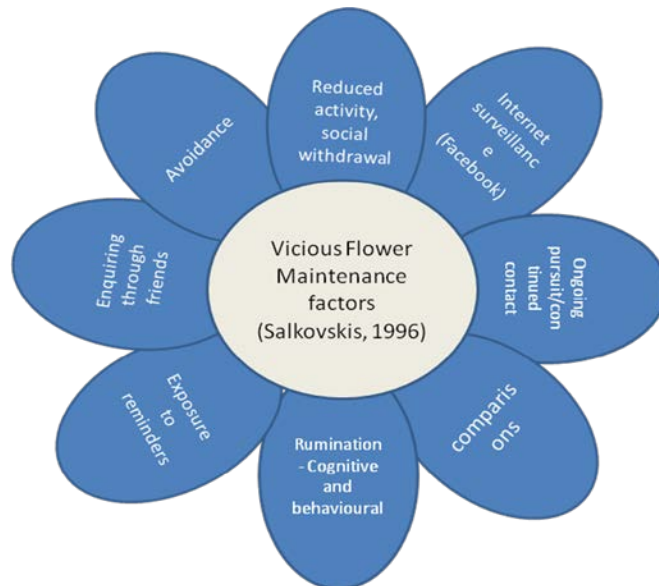
Analysis also led to the proposal of a second model, a conceptualisation of recovery. Indeed several participants, having experienced the relationship breakup some time prior to interview, were able to chart how their experiences including their feelings thoughts and appraisals had significantly changed over time. This model alludes to how individuals may be assisted in moving forward and to interventions that may help with this. The findings overall therefore point to some promising areas of intervention. The intention is to hopefully stay involved in clinical research and continue developing this area further, particularly in relation to structured interventions.

6.4 Writing up the research report

It was a challenge to write up the findings for the purpose of the research report. Twenty seven in-depth research interviews inevitably amounted to a lot of data and findings pointed to the development of two models as stated, one of distress and one of recovery. Attempting to summarise these findings within the context of the word count without compromising on detail was often challenging and key points that would serve

to contextualise some of the findings often had to be edited or removed. Indeed, it is felt that the results presented are a 'skeleton' of the actual findings and elaborating as to how each mechanism or variable may causally prolong distress or inhibit recovery in any theoretical depth was precluded. This particularly applied to thinking about how specific negative schemas emerging from results of the Young Schema Questionnaire may causally be related to distress reactions.

I note elsewhere that previous dclin psych researchers have commented that the conventions of report writing may not be conducive to qualitative types of analysis where there is a strong focus on structure and method and perhaps less room for elaboration around the findings. However, it is appreciated that structured report writing is essential for dissemination and the critical appraisal section, with its opportunity to reflect on the study and contextualise the motives for wanting to carry out the research, was appreciated and felt a welcomed luxury away from the rigours of academic structure.

6.5 Personal impact of the research

Conducting this research has been invaluable in furthering my understanding of adult attachment. I have come to regard attachment theory as one of the most relevant psychological theories in terms of its applicability to clinical practice and wider reading around attachment dynamics provided a valued level of insight which I feel will be helpful in the future, particularly in understanding therapeutic relationships and attachment dynamics in more depth. I also feel that conducting this research has helped me develop an area of specialism which has been valuable in terms of feeling motivated to continue with clinical research and perhaps devising training and teaching around adult attachment in future. I feel I have also benefited from conducting a research project of this scope and it has given me more confidence to embark on clinical research again in the future.

6.6 Recruitment challenges

Recruitment difficulties were acknowledged as a challenge from the offset. The difficulties as they emerged pertained not to the identification of participants, but in the accessing of them. Indeed access was often precluded to suitable participants for a number of reasons. Some services did not wish to be part of the research process, despite holding many potential participants. For example, some services had formal policies in place regarding co-operating with external research and this position was fully respected. On other occasions it was suspected that services were somewhat research aversive, and did not wish to involve themselves for reasons not stipulated.

Moreover, some individuals initially seemed agreeable to help but later demonstrated some avoidance. It was fully appreciated that services were perhaps busy and supporting research of this nature was not a clinical priority. However, not being able to access a pool of suitable participants was often frustrating especially as in reality the research was not intrusive neither would it involve any direct work from a service perspective, other than to display a poster in waiting areas or perhaps handing a poster over to clients.

Recruitment of participants was also precluded due to ethical hurdles. For example, several participants were highlighted within other NHS trusts through existing connections. Contacts were made with respective heads of service for permission to access the participants and service managers said they would be happy to support the research. However, to access the participants, I was required to embark on a lengthy bureaucratic process which involved applying for an honorary contract within the respective trust. This then involved CRB checks, references and occupational health clearance before then making an additional local ethics application. This would have amounted to an eight month process in total, just so a clinician could hand over a research poster to a client for them to consider volunteering. Clearly an eight month process for permission for a poster to be passed over seemed like a long and unnecessarily arduous process and thus precluded recruitment from other NHS trusts.

6.7 Composing the sample

Attempts were initially made to recruit an exclusively 'clinical sample' to make the project more 'clinically relevant' and ensure the findings had clinical applicability. This proved difficult on account of some of the aforementioned challenges. As such, a decision was made to add a student sample. Indeed, it felt necessary to add a student sample to the study for several reasons. Firstly, most of the previous research within the area of relationship dissolution has made use of undergraduate students. It was therefore important to mirror this to a certain extent given that most *a priori* themes were derived from findings from undergraduate samples. Secondly, it was considered that individuals presenting in mental health services may have had a range of mental health difficulties or other co-morbid presentations that may potentially have 'contaminated' the area under investigation. I reflected with my supervisor that students may represent a 'purer' form of the phenomenon under investigation. For example, given their potential to be relatively high functioning in other domains of their life, any emergent difficulties around relationship adjustment may allude precisely to the attachment difficulties the study was primarily investigating. Moreover, romantic relationships are frequently occurring events amongst this social group and therefore represented a useful sample to access.

6.8 Impact of the research on participants

It was encouraging to note that the research seemed to have a positive impact upon those who volunteered. A concern prior to recruitment related to whether individuals would want to take part in this study given there was no obvious incentive or reward. Moreover, there was a concern that some students may only be motivated to take part in return for research credits. Both anxieties were unfounded. There proved to be an overwhelming interest to take part in the study with individuals welcoming the chance to talk about their experiences. I even found myself in a surprising position of having to turn volunteers away. Furthermore, it was clear that student volunteers were motivated to take part in the research irrespective of research credits and just saw this as a bonus.

Furthermore, there proved to be a cathartic element to the study. Participants often fed back that they had found the process helpful and even "enjoyable". Some relayed that the process of talking about their relationship so extensively had enabled them to finally 'move on' and put things behind them. Although measuring for a therapeutic effect was not an objective of the research, the feedback nevertheless pointed to a secondary finding, namely that a short term intervention and normalising experiences may have the potential to aid recovery.

The cathartic element was also quite reassuring as I had found the ethical review process quite rigorous with a big focus being placed on risk. Indeed members of the committee were concerned that the process may distress individuals to an extent whereby they may be at risk following the interview. No risk issues emerged and it was reassuring to see that the impact upon participants had largely been positive. However, the position of the ethics committee was fully appreciated.

6.9 Advantages of qualitative methodology

Qualitative methodology helped gain a richer insight into the individual's experiences of relationship dissolution than previous studies, primarily using cross sectional design features, have been able to offer. Indeed themes emerging from interviews matching *a priori* themes from previous research conveyed a level of depth and meaning far beyond the mere label they had been prescribed from cross-sectional research. For example, 'negative thoughts of self' was correlate of distress from a correlational questionnaire study by Bolen and Reijntes (2009). However, this particular study tells us little more than this label. For example, it doesn't tell us what negative thoughts people experience or why they experience them. The same applies to thought of self-blame or pessimistic appraisals of future romantic prospects. In the current study when participants made reference to negative evaluations of themselves following the relationship they were not relaying this as a mere descriptive label, but instead were providing a rich narrative of some of the thoughts they were experiencing at the time. As such, although participants would often relay experiences that broadly could be classified as matching the *a priori* labels, it is important to note that these *a priori* labels previously told us little about these experiences. The current study was therefore able

to offer layers of meaning beyond previous labels helpful to the development of a theoretical model.

6.10 'Bottom up' clinical research

It was a satisfying experience to see some of the themes I had previously observed in clinical practice emerge throughout the research process. It was also satisfying to note upon conducting the literature review that some of the findings from the empirical studies looking at the correlates of relationship dissolution distress were congruent with what I had been observing in clinical practice (i.e. pessimistic appraisals). This provided a sense of reassurance and confidence and made me feel that I was undertaking 'bottom up' clinical research; research originating from clinical practice and observation and then validated and developed through formal academic research.

6.11 Use of measures

The study did not formally measure distress or pre-occupation towards the former partner, as acknowledged in the discussion section. Whilst there are an abundance of measures that capture these constructs, an early decision was made not to make the study too heavy on measures. Indeed, administering additional measures was considered inappropriate given the amount of data already requested from clients and given the capacity for them to potentially shape subsequent narrative accounts. It was felt that the study was an intensive qualitative process without undue testing using further questionnaires. Levels of distress, preoccupation and attachment were gauged by virtue of participants being in services or through self-report.

6.12 Cognitive appraisals as activating strategies

The thoughts and appraisals highlighted throughout this research may be directly related to distress symptoms by virtue of their content, reflecting negative thinking patterns and typical Beckian thought distortions. However, they may also be considered forms of misplaced *activating strategies* which may serve to prolong

distress and preoccupation towards the former partner. To re-cap, *activating strategies* are any thoughts or appraisals that compel the individual to pursue closeness to the former partner again as an attachment figure within the context of an *activated attachment system*. However, these strategies may be counterproductive if the former partner is no longer available, leaving the individual vulnerable to becoming 'stuck' in their ongoing pursuit and vulnerable to an amplifying cycle of distress.

Many of the appraisals demonstrated in this research may be examples of *activating strategies* in this regard. For example, pessimistic appraisals of future romantic prospects and idealisation of the partner may be misplaced *activating strategies* as they may motivate the individual to continue to pursue the ex-partner who is no longer available. Indeed, with the perceived chances of finding someone else as slim and with the ex-partner now so idealised in the individual's mind, the individual remains motivated to continue to direct attachment related needs towards the former partner given the perception of these needs being unlikely to be met elsewhere.

Furthermore, thoughts of self-blame may also be considered misplaced *activating strategies*. For example, with the individual perceiving they were to blame for the demise of the relationship and it being all their fault, it is hypothesised that the former partner is protected from any sense of wrong doing in the individual's mind and remains idealised. Alternatively, if the ex-partner were to be blamed or held in mind negatively following the breakup they would not be as idealised thus reducing the compulsion or motivation to pursue them as an attachment figure. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that by attributing blame to oneself and not an external event, the individual may feel a sense of control over what they have perceived to have done wrong. This, in turn may lead to a sense that if they can correct what they have done, 'fix it' or show the partner they can change, they may be able to 'win' the partner back and reconcile the relationship. Within this context, thoughts of self-blame may serve as ongoing *activating strategies.*

Similar to self-blame, thoughts of "not being good enough" may also be considered in a similar fashion. For example, negative thoughts around not being good enough following the breakup was often another version of self-blaming (i.e. "it was because I

wasn't good enough/attractive enough that he/she left me"). Again, this appraisal attributes fault to factors intrinsic to the individual which again safeguards the ex-partner from being held negatively, thus facilitating ongoing idealisation and the sense that they were more attractive and thus worthy of pursuing.

Moreover, by attributing blame to something internal, it is hypothesised that the individual may again feel a sense of control, particularly over something could potentially be fixed or changed. Indeed, such appraisals often seemed related to some participants engaging in a number of self-change or improvement behaviours following the breakup. Through exploration, it emerged that such behaviours were often related to the wish for the former partner to see them as desirable again or to engender a sense of regret within the former partner for having ended the relationship. Indeed, a BBC documentary by Louis Theroux once depicted a woman who underwent extensive cosmetic surgery in an attempt to 'improve' herself and win back her partner's affection following a relationship breakup (to no avail). In sum therefore, negative thoughts of self, triggered after a breakup, may often lead to attempts to 'improve' oneself for the purpose of eliciting the attention of the former partner again. In this sense, such thoughts maybe considered *activating strategies,* compelling the individual to behave in particular ways designed to win back the partner or be seen as desirable again.

Finally, some of the distressing thoughts and images as highlighted within the research may also be examples of *activating strategies.* For example, thoughts or images of the ex-partner with someone new or in situations where they might meet someone new may evoke a significant degree of anxiety and distress motivating the person to purse them again as an attachment figure to deactivate the attachment system.

Furthermore, some cognitions may contribute to *protest reactions.* To recap, *protest reactions* are any action or response aimed at re-establishing contact or getting the former partner's attention in a way they respond. For example, thoughts around injustice, particularly thoughts of the ex-partner having behaved badly and having got away 'scot free' following the breakup, may evoke a significant degree of anger within compelling the individual to seek out the ex-partner again in order to make them see what they have done wrong in the hope they will perhaps acknowledge their

behaviours, make reparations and reconcile. As such, these thoughts and the anger they evoke may be an *activating strategies* given their potential to lead to *protest reactions* motivating the individual to continue to pursue the partner as an attachment figure.

6.13 'Maintenance' factors reconsidered

Upon reflection it was unclear how much particular factors highlighted as 'maintenance factors' such as ruminating on past memories or returning to places of interest were causal to ongoing distress or actually part of the process of recovery. For example, one particular participant described revisiting previous locations shared with the partner as like "visiting a grave" suggesting this may be part of her recovery. Another alluded to Facebook checking as a normal part of the adjustment process. Bowlby (1980) has proposed that successful resolution of bereavement does not necessarily involve detachment. Instead an altered attachment bond needs to be achieved, integrating thoughts, memories and feelings about the individual into one's self-concept whilst being able to move on. Indeed, part of the integration process involves reorganising and redefining one's conception of self without the other person. In this context, clearly some of the highlighted processes within this research may be a reflection of integration and an adjusting self-concept. Further research may be necessary to determine whether such processes are significant in maintaining distress and inhibiting recovery on, or actually central to recovery.

6.14 The model: Revisited

It may be important to stress that the presented model does not intend to provide a universal account of every individuals experience of relationship dissolution, neither does it endorse the idea that any one factor highlighted within the model causally accounts for distress reactions. Indeed, not all participants cited each of the highlighted processes in their narrative experiences. Clearly certain factors may be applicable to some people while other factors more applicable to others. This suggests that relationship dissolution should be considered individually and a tailored formulation should always ensue. However, the findings may still be useful in pointing to commonalities in themes and particular vulnerability factors potentially present in the

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individual's account, which may have value to clinicians when formulating and planning interventions.

6.15 Final reflections

Having an idea in clinical practice and seeing it develop to a point of completion through a structured academic process has been rewarding. I was aware that there was some expectation that DClin psy researchers align themselves somewhat with clinical and academic staff and established research projects. I was therefore grateful to the department in allowing me to pursue this area independently without restriction and I would say that undertaking this research has been one of the best experiences of my career.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule

PART 1 (General Questions)

A1). If you feel comfortable, in your own words could you describe your relationship breakup experience from your point of view?

B1). Obtain details of the relationship, including;

How did the relationship start?
How long did the relationship last?
Had it been considered a committed, loving relationship or more 'causal' in flavour?
Had plans for the future been discussed or considered?
How much time had been spent together?
Had the relationship been experiencing difficulties leading up to the breakup or had the breakup seemed sudden

C1). Obtain details of the breakup, including;

Who initiated the breakup?
How was the breakup of the relationship communicated?
What were the reasons given for the breakup of the relationship?
Was the breakup mutual or favoured by one partner?
How did they respond to the relationship ending?
How did they respond to the partner ending the relationship? (in the case of the partner being the initiator)

D1). Obtain details of previous relationships, including

Had the participant had many previous relationships (sensitively)?
Had these been serious relationships?
Had they experienced significant distress when these relationships ended?
(probing for thoughts, feelings, appraisals and behavioural reactions in response to these breakups may be explored)

PART 2 (Cognitive/Behavioural areas)

A2. Can you describe how you have felt and the emotions you have experienced since the relationship has ended? (if there has been mixed emotions, encourage them to describe emotional journey if possible)

B2. Have you experienced any physical symptoms or sensations associated with the breakup or the emotions you have felt? Could you describe them?

C2. Do you find yourself thinking and reflecting on the relationship and the breakup much, or have you been able to put it out of your mind?

D2. Do you feel you have felt a sense of closure regarding the breakup or do you still find yourself seeking questions as to why the relationship ended?

E2. What thoughts do you have about the breakup? Have you ever perceived the breakup to be your fault or have you attributed the ending of the relationship to your partner?

F2. What thoughts or feelings have you had about yourself since the relationship ended?

G2. How do you feel about the future? What do you think about future relationship opportunities? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about future relationship opportunities or neither?

H2. How do you feel about your ex-partner currently? Have you always felt this way or has this changed?

I2. Have you attempted to reconcile the relationship ever? What attempts have you made?

J2. People respond in all different types of ways when a breakup ends? Can you describe what behaviours you have engaged in? (probe for concepts of rumination, reduced activity and socialising and any personal strategies)

K2. Sensitively probe for unhelpful and maladaptive behaviours that keep focus of attention on the former partner, such as unwanted pursuit behaviours (ranging from stalking behaviours to facebook/internet checking), clinging to mementos or reminders of former partner etc.

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet for ECR-r Questionnaire

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in a study examining relationship breakup experiences. We would first like you to complete a brief questionnaire looking at the way you relate to others in the context of romantic relationships. The questionnaire is called the ECR-r (The Experience in Close Relationships-Revised) and takes about 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Why do I have to complete this questionnaire?
You have been asked to complete this questionnaire as it provides insights into the way you relate to others in the context of romantic relationships which is of interest to this research project. Your responses will be anonymous and kept confidentially. Should you wish to withdraw after completing the questionnaire, your results will be destroyed.

To complete the questionnaire
There is also a modified online version you can complete at http://www.web-research-design.net/cgi-bin/crq/crq.pl. This version provides a summary page of your results immediately after completing the questionnaire for your own interest. This page also includes information as to what these results mean and further links are available on that page should you be interested in finding out more about your results.

What happens next?
After you have completed the questionnaire the principal researcher will contact you within two weeks to let you know what will happen next and to arrange a suitable time for interview should you still wish to take part

Any further questions?
Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions.

Further information about the ECR-r can be found at
http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/measures/ecrr.htm

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to measure how you relate to others in the context of intimate relationships. It is estimated that it should take no longer than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous and will be kept confidentially.

I have read the information sheet provided and consent to completing the questionnaire
Do you agree to go on? **Yes No**

The statements below relate how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you *generally* experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current or most recent relationship. Respond to each statement by providing a circle to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement

Click to indicate whether you

I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
•	•	•	•	•	•	•

I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
•	•	•	•	•	•	•

I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
•	•	•	•	•	•	•

It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
•	•	•	•	•	•	•

My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
•	•	•	•	•	•	•

It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

30. I tell my partner just about everything.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I do not often worry about being abandoned.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

My partner really understands me and my needs.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I worry a lot about my relationships.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I worry that I won't measure up to other people.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I am nervous when partners get too close to me

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I talk things over with my partner.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

| • | • | • | • | • | • | • |

I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.

Strongly Disagree ● ● ● ● ● ● ● Strongly Agree

Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Strongly
Disagree

Strongly
Agree

	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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Date XX

Dear XX

My name is David and I am currently completing the clinical psychology doctorate at the University of Leicester. I thought I would briefly write to you to outline a future research study that I may require your help with at some point. I hope this is ok.

Prior to starting the clinical training I was working as a Hi Intensity CBT therapist within an IAPT service in West London. During that time I started to research a cognitive model of relationship attachment. This was a model that sought to account for individuals presenting in therapy reporting a prolonged degree of psychological distress and ongoing preoccupation with a former partner following the break-up of a romantic relationship. Currently there is no existing cognitive model to account for this type of presentation and I am researching it further with a view to helping clinicians who work in this area.

I wondered whether it would be possible to visit with you to briefly discuss the research further as it may involve pooling a few clients from local services at some point in the future. Although I have good contacts with two IAPT services in London, I would value building up contacts more locally and would appreciate the chance to briefly meet up with you.

If you have a free slot in your diary at any point, I would be grateful for the chance to discuss this research in a bit more detail. My university email is db287@le.ac.uk or my number is 078XXXXXXX.

Thank you for reading my letter and I hope to hear back from you soon

Yours sincerely
David Beecraft
db287@le.ac.uk

Information for Clinicians

This is a study looking to examine the experiences of individuals presenting in counselling and psychological services reporting a prolonged duration of psychological distress and ongoing pre-occupation with a former partner following the dissolution of a romantic relationship.

Gaining a richer understanding of the experiences individuals report may contribute to the first steps in the development of a cognitive-behavioural conceptualisation of relationship 'dissolution' distress that hopefully will aid clinicians in future.

Referral criteria

- Individuals who have experienced a relationship breakup and report a prolonged duration of distress and ongoing preoccupation with the lost relationship/former partner (2/3 or more months post breakup)
- Individuals between the ages of 18-35yrs (negotiable)
- No identified Axis II presentations

What the study involves

Suitable participants are invited to take part in an interview that seeks to explore their relationship breakup experiences. This may involve discussing aspects of the breakup, their thoughts, feelings, and how they may have responded since the relationship ended. There will be an opportunity to discuss anything else they feel may be relevant. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants will also be required to complete a short questionnaire which looks at how they relate to others in the context of intimate relationships. This may take approximately 5-10 minutes and can either be done at the same time as the interview or can be done separately via an email link.

How to refer

If you have a client that may wish to volunteer, please contact me on the details overleaf providing some basic information. Alternatively, please give the client a copy

of a flyer or participant information sheet so they can consider the study further and self-refer should they wish.

Who is the researcher?
My name is David Beecraft and I am undertaking a postgraduate doctorate programme in Clinical Psychology at the University of Leicester. I am an accredited Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist (BABCP accredited) with experience of working with individuals with this type of difficulty.

Contact details
David Beecraft
db287@leicester.ac.uk
University of Leicester, Clinical Psychology, 104 Regent Rd, Leicester, LE1 7LT
07952549109 or 0116 223 1639 (please leave a message with a member of the admin staff and I will respond as soon as possible.).

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT
PLEASE NOTE: THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR CLINICIANS ONLY AND NOT TO BE GIVEN TO PARTICIPA

Appendix E-N

Please note: Appendix E-N were not available to upload electronically as part of one whole document due to formatting difficulties,but can be made available upon request (davidbeecraft@yahoo.co.uk)