

Relationship Breakups: Are They All Bad?

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research focused on the link between attributions people make about relationship termination, coping strategies employed post-breakup and possible posttraumatic growth experienced as a result of a breakup. The research also studied the relations between past relationship breakups and current relationship satisfaction, level of respect for partner, and satisfaction with life.

The measures used for this study included: a background inventory, the Relationship Breakup Attribution Measure (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), the Problem Focused Style of Coping Scale (Heppner, Cook, Wright, & Johnson, 1995), the Emotional Approach Coping Scale (Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, & Danoff-Burg, 2000), the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), the Relationship Assessment Scale (S. Hendrick, 1988), the Respect Toward Partner Scale (S. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

Correlations, regression analyses, and analysis of variance examined associations among the variables. Significant correlations were found among the variables for the total sample, for men and women separately, and for current dating status. Attributions and some coping strategies were predictive of posttraumatic growth for both men and women. For women, coping by emotional processing was related to life satisfaction, and growth from a prior relationship was related to current partner respect and relationship satisfaction. Respect and relationship satisfaction were positively correlated for both genders. Individuals in a romantic relationship had greater life satisfaction than individuals not in a relationship. Men's satisfaction with life was significantly impacted

by dating status, whereas women's satisfaction with life was not. In general, women had higher levels of life satisfaction than men. Clinical implications of the results and future research possibilities are noted.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Relationship breakups are such a common occurrence that very few people avoid one, along with the ensuing stress and heartache. Those who have been through this experience can attest to the immense pain that comes from the loss of a partner and the failure of a relationship. Simpson (1987) stated that “few experiences in life are capable of producing more emotional distress, anguish, and suffering than is the dissolution of an important relationship” (p. 683).

Relationship breakups can impact nearly all areas of one’s life: social, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, physical, and spiritual. Some of the frequently studied negative effects of a breakup are related to emotional distress (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Simpson, 1987), anger (Weiss, 1976), resentment and loneliness (Sprecher, 1994), and adjustment problems, including stress, and hopelessness (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003). Despite the prevalence of breakups and the associated well-known negative outcomes, there is much about the dissolution of important relationships that is still not understood. For example, little is known about how attributions that people make regarding relationship breakup are related to coping strategies people use to get through the breakup (Buck, 2006), or the potential benefits that can come from a relationship breakup once the process of healing begins. This research spotlights these issues which have been largely ignored in the literature.

More specifically, the current research focused on the link between attributions people make regarding relationship termination, coping strategies employed post-breakup and posttraumatic growth experienced as a result. In addition, the current study examined

the relation between past experiences with relationship breakup (i.e., attributions made, coping strategies employed, posttraumatic growth experienced) and current relationship satisfaction, level of respect, and satisfaction with life.

### *Attributions and Relationship Breakup*

Attributions help answer common questions that follow a breakup such as, “What happened?” and “Who was at fault?” Weiss (1975) called the answers to these questions accounts, which serve the purpose of organizing the happenings of a relationship dissolution. Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti and Garnick (1986) explained that accounts can also serve the purposes of regaining a sense of control over the breakup, gaining a new sense of self, and developing predictability about one’s future. Accounts also can serve as a catharsis. Finally, attributions can also help serve the purpose of maintaining social identity and integrity, which La Gaipa (1982) described as an important part of relationship disengagement. In other words, an individual can use attributions to help “save face” with friends and family.

Gender strongly influences relationships (Bell, 1981), and by extension, the attributions made regarding conflict and dissolution. In Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976), women who were presented with a list of attributions about their breakup (e.g., “my desire to be independent,” “my interest in someone else,” “living too far apart”) rated a larger number of attributions as important sources of conflict more than did men. The authors concluded that their finding suggested that women are more sensitive to problems within a relationship than are men. Baxter (1986) found the same trend, with women citing not only more reasons for their breakups than men, but also different reasons (i.e.,

Autonomy, Openness, and Equity cited by women significantly more and only Romance cited by men significantly more).

### *Coping*

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is used by individuals during times of stress as a means of adaptation and stress reduction. The literature is vast yet lacking a consensus about the most concise way to categorize coping strategies. Some authors, such as Lazarus and Folkman, view coping as situation-specific, meaning that individuals alter their coping strategies to fit their present situation. In contrast, considerable research has focused on individual differences in coping (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001).

Another categorization of coping is that of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Billings and Moos (1981) summarized the difference between these two forms of coping: “Problem-focused coping includes attempts to modify or eliminate the sources of stress through one’s own behavior. Emotion-focused coping includes behavioral or cognitive responses whose primary function is to manage the emotional consequences of stressors and to help maintain one’s emotional equilibrium” (p. 141).

Coping is an important aspect of relationship breakup due to the stress and emotional distress brought about by such a life change. Coping-related variables found to be related to how an individual copes after a breakup include initiator status (Sprecher, 1994), social support, and controllability over the breakup (Frazier & Cook, 1993). Gender also plays an undeniable role in coping, including coping with a relationship termination. It appears as though men and women may focus on different aspects of the

same situation. In *Divorce Talk*, a book describing a qualitative study of divorce, Riessman (1990) found that men tend to define divorce as a personal failure, but women do not. Rather, women focus on their achievements after marriage. Riessman highlighted the positive consequences of divorce that many women reported experiencing: learning to be alone, becoming more self-reliant and less dependent, and achieving independence, autonomy, and a greater sense of control. It is possible that these findings generalize to non-marital romantic relationship breakups as well.

Buck (2006) used a three-factor measure of coping, the Problem-Focused Styles of Coping (Heppner, Cook, Wright & Johnson, 1995), in a study of attributions, coping strategies, and posttraumatic growth following relationship breakup. After failing to find many meaningful correlations between attributions and coping strategies, Buck concluded that a measure specifically focused on situational, affective coping may have been more appropriate due to the heightened level of emotions most people experience during a relationship breakup. When emotions run high, they are likely to influence not only how one copes, but the types of attributions made as well. The current research used more than one measure of coping.

#### *Posttraumatic Growth*

Although the research focusing on the negative impact of crisis is vast, very little has been done that examines the relationship between adversity and positive outcomes. However, this trend is shifting toward a focus on positive health, encompassing physical, mental and social domains (Seeman, 1989). For example, the idea that a period of crisis in one's life offers opportunity for change, a concept labeled stress-related growth (Park, Cohen & Murch, 1996; Park & Fenster, 2004) is now being explored. There is little

difference between stress-related growth and a similar concept called posttraumatic growth (PTG), which also explores the idea of finding a “silver-lining” in what would otherwise be periods of only crisis (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Posttraumatic growth is also similar to the construct of resilience, or responding positively to hardship. However, unlike resilience, posttraumatic growth “refers to reports of positive changes in individuals that occur as the result of attempts to cope in the aftermath of traumatic life events” (Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005, p. 233). Resilience does not encompass the change that is a defining characteristic of posttraumatic growth.

In a study of attributions, coping strategies, and posttraumatic growth after a relationship breakup, Buck (2006) found that a significant amount of posttraumatic growth was experienced by some individuals. Similarly, Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) conducted a qualitative study to examine what type of changes college students experience after a romantic relationship breakup and the process through which these changes, if any, occur. After noting that the terms “stress-related growth” and “posttraumatic growth” are used interchangeably within the literature, the authors concluded that “change and personal growth can arise through the experience of a breakup” (p. 5).

Tashiro and Frazier (2003) argued that both the prevalence of distressing relationship breakups and the frequency of such breakups throughout one’s life (most people experience more than one breakup) are important reasons to conduct research in this area. Based on the research of Berscheid, Lopes, Ammazalorso, and Langenfeld (2001), it has been argued that making attributions regarding the cause for failure of a past relationship is the only way individuals can correct these problems in their next

relationship (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Learning from one's past mistakes and not repeating them in a new relationship is one potential benefit from a relationship breakup.

### *Relationship Satisfaction*

Relationship satisfaction has been referred to as a relationship well-being "barometer" (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and refers to an individual's subjective experience of how satisfied they are in their relationship. Relationship satisfaction has been found to play a role in relationship stability and quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Because satisfaction plays a role in relationship stability, it is not surprising that Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler (1988) found couples who were more likely to break up were those lower in satisfaction.

A number of factors have been linked to satisfaction in relationships, such as the attachment styles of the partners (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000), the presence and absence of certain love styles (Hendrick et al, 1988), sexual satisfaction, commitment, spousal support, increased intimacy, and self-disclosure (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). Although some factors contribute differently to men and women's satisfaction in relationships, research has shown that both genders report experiencing comparable levels of satisfaction (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997). In addition, satisfaction levels in same-sex relationships parallel levels reported in opposite-sex relationships (Peplau & Spaulding, 2000).

### *Respect*

Relationship satisfaction is also strongly correlated with respect for partner within a romantic relationship (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). The concept of respect is infrequently studied and unclearly defined, despite its seemingly obvious importance to

relationships. Although respect is essential in all relationships, Frei and Shaver (2002) argued that there may be something unique about respect in close relationships specifically. Respect has been labeled as one of the four core relationship values by Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg (1994), alongside forgiveness, intimacy and commitment. Presently it is unclear whether respect is a completely separate entity from other aspects of close relationships. For example, in their development of the Respect For Partner Scale, Frei and Shaver found such a strong positive correlation between respect and relationship satisfaction ( $r = .73$ ), they argued that these two may really represent the same construct.

### *Life Satisfaction*

Along with positive and negative affect, life satisfaction is an element of subjective well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Subjective well-being is a construct regarding an individual's opinion about his or her quality of life. Where positive and negative affect account for the emotional component of well-being, life satisfaction accounts for the cognitive component (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Just as every individual appraises situations differently, each individual will also determine her/his own level of satisfaction based on things that are personally important and valued (e.g., relationships, money, health). Along with emotional well-being and physical health, life satisfaction has been linked to positive psychological health in college-aged students (Levy, 2003).

As might be expected, an individual's level of subjective well-being may change while the individual experiences life's "ups and downs." Headey and Wearing (1989) proposed an equilibrium model to explain this somewhat transient characteristic.



Although circumstances encountered by an individual will temporarily influence his or her level of subjective well-being, it more often than not returns to a baseline level (Headey & Wearing, 1989).

For many people, life's "ups and downs" include being in and out of romantic relationships. For example, married individuals testify to greater happiness and satisfaction with life than unmarried, divorced or separated individuals (Myers, 2000). However, Myers explained that being in an unhappy marriage reverses this finding, making divorced and separated individuals happier than married people. In this way, relationship satisfaction appears to be highly correlated with life satisfaction.

### *The Current Study*

The current study investigated how the attribution(s) and coping strategies associated with romantic relationship termination are associated with each other and the level of posttraumatic growth experienced following the breakup. The present study also involved the relationships among relationship satisfaction, respect, and life satisfaction, and explored how some of these variables relate to those variables previously mentioned. The current research attempted to study the relationships among attributions, coping strategies, posttraumatic growth, relationship satisfaction, respect and life satisfaction in a unique way. Although each variable has been linked individually to others (e.g., attributions to coping, respect to relationship satisfaction), there is no known research to date attempting to understand the relationships among all of these constructs.

*Research Questions and Hypotheses*

Research Question 1: How are attributions, coping strategies (both problem-focused and emotion-focused) and posttraumatic growth related to each other and to other variables including relationship satisfaction, respect for partner, and life satisfaction?

This question will assess the interrelations among all variables. Specific relationships of interest are addressed in the following research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 2: How do attributions and problem-focused coping strategies predict growth?

Research Question 3: How do attributions and emotional approach coping strategies predict growth?

Stanton, et al. (2000) found that for women, the emotional approach coping scales were positively correlated with hope (Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder et al. defined hope as having a sense of “goal-directed determination” and “planning ways to meet goals.” This definition shares a similarity with posttraumatic growth: the idea that individuals will retain a sense of fortitude and resolve. Some of the items on Snyder et al.’s Hope Scale are extremely similar to items on the posttraumatic growth inventory. For example, the Hope Scale item, “Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem” is very similar to the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) item, “I know better that I can handle difficulties.” Other items on the Hope Scale encompass the idea of growth from potentially adverse life events (e.g., “My past experiences have prepared me well for my future”). **H1** Therefore, it is hypothesized that emotional approach coping, including the subscales of Emotional Processing and Emotional Expression, will be significant positive predictors of posttraumatic growth for women. However, this

relationship is not being hypothesized for men. In general, women are known to be more comfortable verbally expressing their emotions than men (Brody & Hall, 1993). Stanton, Parsa, and Austenfeld (2001) argued that comfort, as well as skill level, in dealing with the specific emotion being expressed may impact the efficacy of emotional approach coping. Indeed, Stanton and her colleagues specifically name gender as an individual difference characteristic that could impact the usefulness of this kind of coping. Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Cameron, and Ellis (1994) found that under certain conditions, women using emotional approach coping were less depressed and more satisfied with their lives, whereas men using emotional approach coping were more depressed and less satisfied. Theoretically, it could be difficult to recognize growth if an individual is depressed or unsatisfied with life.

Research Question 4: Are emotional approach coping strategies related to life satisfaction?

Stanton et al. (2000) found that for female breast cancer patients, emotional expression was associated with less distress and more energy. In addition, Stanton et al. (1994) found that women using emotional approach coping were less depressed and more satisfied with their lives, whereas men using emotional approach coping were more depressed and less satisfied. **H2** Thus, it is hypothesized that emotional approach coping will be positively correlated with life satisfaction for women, but will not be correlated for men.

Research Question 5: How does growth from a prior relationship breakup relate to respect and satisfaction in a current relationship and to current satisfaction with life?

**H3** It is hypothesized that growth from a prior relationship breakup will be related

positively to respect for a current partner and also satisfaction with life. Many of the items on the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory involve changes that would likely have a positive impact on relationships. For example, endorsement of the items “I have a greater sense of closeness with others,” “I put more effort into my relationships,” and “I am more likely to try to change things which need changing,” would seemingly be related to greater respect in a close romantic relationship and an increase in relationship satisfaction.

Research Question 6: How do people in a current romantic relationship compare to people not in a current romantic relationship in terms of their satisfaction with life?

As Myers (2000) succinctly put it, “a mountain of data reveal that most people are happier when attached than when unattached” (p. 62). Myers also argued that the greater happiness level of romantically attached people compared to unattached people is true for men and women alike. Although Myers was referring to married versus unmarried individuals, the idea that people are happier when romantically linked to another individual, even when dating or engaged, likely remains true. **H4** It is anticipated that people currently in a relationship will report higher life satisfaction than people not currently in a relationship, consistent with Chambliss (2008).

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### *Participants*

A power analysis (Cohen, 1992) was conducted and it was determined that 204 participants (102 men and 102 women) were needed to achieve a medium effect size ( $\alpha = .05$ ). Some 557 undergraduate psychology students ( $n = 373$  women and  $n = 177$  men) from a large south central university participated. Seven participants were excluded from analyses for failing to indicate their gender. Fifty-eight participants were excluded due to missing demographics information and invalid responses (e.g., indicating “E” on the scantron for a scale ranging from “A-D”) bringing the total to 492 participants. Three more participants were deleted for failure to answer the last item. Another 24 were deleted for indicating two or more invalid responses. Finally, two more participants were excluded for failing to answer an entire scale. All of the remaining scantrons were reviewed to be sure that none of the participants had answered uniformly throughout the entire questionnaire. No participants were excluded for this reason. Thus, 463 participants remained ( $n = 310$  women and  $n = 153$  men).

The majority (66%) of the total sample was between 19-21 years of age, 5% were 18 or younger, 27% were between 22-30 years of age, 2% were between 31-40, and less than one percent (.6%) were 41 or older. The majority of the total sample was Caucasian (74%), 1% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% were African-American, 16% were Latino(a)/Hispanic, and 3% identified themselves as Other. Most of the total sample (93% of men and 96% of women) answered the questionnaire items based on the breakup of a heterosexual relationship. Between seven and ten individuals (approximately 2%)

denied ever having been through a romantic relationship breakup, and three people (.6%) denied ever having been in a romantic relationship. Fifteen participants were currently married and one was divorced. Nearly half (48%) of the total sample reported having been through a breakup within the last twelve months, and 41% of the total sample reported being the initiator of the breakup. Most (71%) of the total sample were either casually dating or seriously dating/engaged to someone at the time of participation. However, over half of the total sample (52%) of participants denied currently being in love. Of the participants involved in a romantic relationship at the time of participation, 48% described the relationship as sexual in nature.

A large proportion (58%) of participants who had experienced a breakup reported that their relationship breakup was moderately to extremely important to them. The majority (65%) of breakup participants reported that their relationship breakup was at least moderately stressful, and 30% reported having a small amount or no control over their breakup. The majority of breakup participants denied viewing their relationship breakup as a threat (53%). However, many viewed it as a loss (85%), and even more viewed it as at least a slight challenge (91%). Finally, three-fourths of the breakup participants (75%) denied considering the breakup a problem at the time of responding.

### *Instruments*

The measures used for this study included: a background inventory, the Attribution Scale, the Problem Focused Style of Coping Scale, the Emotional Approach Coping Scale, the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, the Relationship Assessment Scale, the Respect Toward Partner Scale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. For purposes of clarity in the analysis and presentation of results, for all measures, the higher the score

the more of the attribute. Alphas for all subscales for the total sample and for women and men separately for the current study are shown in Appendix J.

*Background Inventory (Appendix B).* A 31-item background inventory gathered demographic information such as gender, age, ethnicity, whether participants had experienced a breakup, and if so, how recently, current relationship status, and other relevant relationship questions (see Footnote<sup>1</sup> at the end of this chapter).

*Relationship Breakup Attribution Measure (Appendix C).* Attributions regarding relationship termination were assessed with a 36-item scale (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) on which participants were asked to consider and rate possible causes that led to the decline and breakup of their most recent past romantic relationship. This measure includes four 9-item subscales in which each of four causal factors is represented: Person (e.g., “My mood,” “My insensitivity”), Other (e.g., “Partner’s mood,” “Partners insensitivity”), Relational (e.g., “Value conflicts,” “Communication Problems”), and Environmental (e.g., “Work stress,” “Our friends were disruptive to our relationship”). Scores are on a five-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all a cause) to 4 (very much a cause), and items for each of the four subscales were averaged, with higher scores on the subscales indicating that the participant recognizes the factor(s) to be a larger cause of the relationship breakup. Tashiro and Frazier (2003) developed the 40-item version of this scale based on a previous qualitative study by Berscheid et al. (2001) that assessed the attributions of participants based on their responses to open-ended questions and then coded these responses into the four categories of causal factors. The alpha coefficients for the four 10-item scale scores ranged from  $\alpha = .71$  (Environmental) to  $\alpha = .79$  (Relational), and subscale intercorrelations ranged from .24 to .60, suggesting some measurement overlap

between the subscales (see Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Buck (2006) found alpha coefficients for the four 9-item scale scores ranging from  $\alpha = .65$  (Environmental) to  $\alpha = .73$  (Other). In the current study, alpha coefficients ranged from  $\alpha = .70$  (Environmental) to  $\alpha = .77$  (Relational). More specifically, alpha coefficients for scale scores for men ranged from  $\alpha = .72$  (Person and Environment) to  $\alpha = .77$  (Relational), and from  $\alpha = .68$  (Environment) to  $\alpha = .77$  (Other and Relational) for women. The authors reduced the scale to its current 36-item version and claim that in this form the scale is preferable to the 40-item scale (Tashiro, personal communication, April, 20, 2005). However, there appears to be no published evidence to support this claim. No validity evidence appears to be available for this measure.

*Problem-Focused Style of Coping (Appendix D).* Coping was assessed using two measures, the first of which was an 18-item scale called the Problem-Focused Style of Coping (PF-SOC; Heppner et al., 1995). The 5-response scale ranges from 0 (almost never) to 4 (a great deal), and there are three subscales: Reflective (e.g., planning, reflective), Suppressive (e.g., escapism, denial), and Reactive (e.g., distortion, impulsivity). Higher summed scores on each of the three factors are indicative of more frequent endorsements of Reflective, Suppressive, and Reactive coping styles. Heppner et al. provided evidence supporting the reliability and validity of PF-SOC scale scores. Estimates of internal consistency ranged from  $\alpha = .80$  (Reflective Style) to  $\alpha = .67$  (Reactive Style). The intercorrelations among the PF-SOC and two other coping/problem-solving measures provided evidence for concurrent validity for the three PF-SOC factor scores. Estimates of test-retest reliability for PF-SOC scale scores over a 3-week time interval were: .65 for the Suppressive factor, .67 for the Reflective factor,



and .71 for the Reactive factor. Evidence for the construct validity of PF-SOC scores was indicated by the correlations between the PF-SOC and a checklist assessing the frequency of problems, an anxiety inventory, an assessment of depression, an assessment of cognitive, physical and emotional symptoms of distress, and a measure of locus of control. Finally, regarding discriminant validity, the PF-SOC scores were not related to social desirability (Heppner et al., 1995). In the current study, alpha coefficients for the scale scores ranged from  $\alpha = .77$  (Reflective Style) to  $\alpha = .70$  (Reactive Style). More specifically, alpha coefficients for scale scores for men ranged from  $\alpha = .72$  (Suppressive Style) to  $\alpha = .78$  (Reflective Style), and from  $\alpha = .67$  (Reactive Style) to  $\alpha = .77$  (Reflective Style) for women.

*The Emotional Approach Coping Scale (Appendix E).* Coping was also assessed using a 16-item measure, the Emotional Approach Coping Scale (Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, & Danoff-Burg, 2000). The four-response scale ranges from A (I usually didn't do this at all) to D (I usually did this a lot), and the measure is comprised of two 8-item subscales: Emotional Processing (describing attempts by a respondent to understand his/her emotions, such as, "I work on understanding my feelings"), and Emotional Expression (e.g., "I let my feelings come out freely"). Higher summed scores on each of the two subscales are indicative of more frequent endorsements of Emotional Processing and Emotional Expression coping styles. Correlations between the two subscales range from .55-.62. Stanton et al. (2000) provided evidence of reliability and validity for the Emotional Approach Coping Scale. Items are highly internally consistent ( $\alpha = .92$  to  $\alpha = .97$ ), and test-retest reliability over four weeks was  $r = .79$  for expression and  $r = .81$  for processing. In the current study, alpha coefficients for the scale scores ranged from  $\alpha =$

.91 (Emotional Processing) to  $\alpha = .94$  (Emotional Expression). More specifically, alpha coefficients for scale scores for men ranged from  $\alpha = .90$  (Emotional Processing) to  $\alpha = .93$  (Emotional Expression), and from  $\alpha = .92$  (Emotional Processing) to  $\alpha = .95$  (Emotional Expression) for women.

*Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Appendix F)*. Posttraumatic Growth was assessed with the 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). The PTGI “measures the extent to which survivors of traumatic events perceive personal benefits, including changes in perceptions of self, relationships with others, and philosophy of life, accruing from their attempts to cope with trauma and its aftermath” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 458). The response scale for the PTGI ranges from A (I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.) to F (I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.), and the PTGI includes both a total score and 5 subscale scores. The total score is calculated by summing the scores on all the items. In the present study, the PTGI was reduced to A through E (6 responses to 5 responses, by removing the response option, “I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.”) for practical data collection reasons, and only the total score was used in data analyses. Tedeschi and Calhoun provided evidence of reliability and validity. The estimate of internal consistency for the PTGI total score was  $\alpha = .90$ . Test-retest reliability over two months for the PTGI total score was  $r = .71$ . Regarding concurrent and discriminant validity, as expected, the PTGI did not seem to be related to social desirability or neuroticism, but was positively correlated with optimism and religious participation (Tedeschi & Calhoun). In the current study the alpha coefficient for the total

score was  $\alpha = .94$  for the total sample, and for both men and women. Scale response reduction did not compromise its reliability.

The *Relationship Assessment Scale (Appendix G)*. Relationship satisfaction was measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; S. Hendrick, 1988), a single factor measure consisting of seven items rated on a 5-point Likert basis. The total score is calculated by averaging the sum of the scores on the items after reverse scoring two of the items. Hendrick provided evidence of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and found the RAS to be highly correlated with a longer standard measure of satisfaction, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spainer, 1976), as well as with other measures of love, commitment and self-disclosure. In the current study, the alpha coefficient for the RAS was  $\alpha = .89$  for the total sample,  $\alpha = .88$  for men, and  $\alpha = .89$  for women. The RAS poses questions concerning general relationship satisfaction, problems in the relationship, and how well the relationship meets needs and expectations.

*The Respect Toward Partner Scale (Appendix H)*. Respect for one's partner was measured using the 5-point Likert Respect Toward Partner Scale designed by Hendrick and Hendrick (2006). The measure's six items are averaged to produce a single scale score. The authors found this measure to be unidimensional and, in regard to construct validity, highly correlated with the Respect For Partner Scale (Frei & Shaver, 2002). Confirmatory factor analyses produced acceptable fit indices. The alpha reliability coefficient was .81, and test-retest reliability over a one-month interval was  $r = .82$ . In the current study, the alpha coefficient for the Respect Toward Partner Scale was  $\alpha = .88$ . More specifically, alpha coefficients for scale scores ranged from  $\alpha = .90$  for men to  $\alpha = .86$  for women.

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale (Appendix I)*. Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), measuring the cognitive component of subjective well-being. The measure is a 5-item Likert scale ranging from A (strongly disagree) to E (strongly agree). Pavot, Diener, Colvin, and Sandvik (1991) found that items on this scale loaded on one general factor, accounting for 75% of the variance. Psychometric properties, including test-retest reliability over both a two-week ( $r = .84$ ) and a one-month time period ( $r = .84$ ; Pavot et al., 1991), and internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$ ; Pavot & Diener, 1993) for this measure were adequate. In the current study, the alpha coefficient for the total sample was  $\alpha = .86$ . More specifically, alpha coefficients were  $\alpha = .88$  for men and  $\alpha = .84$  for women. Regarding convergent and discriminant validity, the Satisfaction with Life Scale did not seem to be related to measures of emotional well-being, but was found to be positively related to other subjective well-being assessments (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

### *Procedure*

Participants signed up for participation in the study through a participant pool management website, or were recruited from relevant upper-level psychology classes (e.g., PSY 3341 Close Relationships), with instructor permission. For data collection through the participant pool management website, surveys were distributed in groups no larger than 30 people. For data collection in psychology classes, surveys were distributed to all individuals in the class who volunteered to participate. A brief lecture on the topic being studied, lasting approximately twenty minutes, was given in each upper-level class after data were collected and debriefing forms were distributed. This lecture included a

power point presentation, a brief review of the literature and a description of the current study.

Participants were instructed to base their responses on their most recent romantic relationship breakup. Participants who had never been through a breakup were asked to so indicate by selecting “I have not been through a breakup” on items #17-31. The number of participants who indicated they had never been through a breakup ranged from 7 to 10 (e.g., some indicated “I have not been through a breakup” on one item but indicated that they had been through a breakup on another item), making it difficult to determine if they had never been through a romantic relationship breakup or if they had made an error in responding. These individuals were instructed to base their responses to the rest of the questionnaire on how they would imagine reacting to a breakup. All of these individuals were retained due to their small number. Item 30 asked “Including this one, how many breakups have you had since graduating high school,” and 29 individuals indicated “I have not been through a breakup.” As described above, it is unclear how many individuals had never been through a romantic relationship breakup at any point in their lives ( $n = 7-10$ ). Therefore, the exact number of people who had not been through a breakup since high school cannot be stated, but ranged from 19 to 22.

The survey packets were distributed and instructions provided. A demographics page was presented first, which asked the participants for such information as their age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and current relationship status. The remaining measures were presented in the following order: the Attribution Measure, Problem-Focused Style of Coping, Emotional Approach Coping Scale, Posttraumatic Growth

Inventory, the Relationship Assessment Scale, the Respect Toward Partner Scale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

Completion of the survey took less than one hour. The participants in this study were asked questions concerning their most recent romantic relationship and their current relationship, if applicable. Participants who were not currently in a romantic relationship were asked to respond to all questionnaire items in order to compare them with participants who were in a relationship. Where necessary, participants not currently in a relationship were instructed either to indicate this, to base their responses on their most recent breakup, or to imagine they were currently in a romantic relationship. Upon completing and turning in the questionnaire, each participant was given a debriefing form that explained the study. Students in the introductory psychology classes were awarded course credit for their participation. Students in upper-level psychology courses were often awarded extra credit for their participation, at the instructor's discretion.

Footnote

<sup>1</sup>The instructions on page 2 of the demographics questionnaire read, “If you have EVER been through a romantic relationship breakup, please complete the following questions (#17-31) based on your most recent breakup. If you have never been through a romantic relationship breakup, please select the answer that indicates that this is the case (i.e., “I have not been through a breakup”).” The instructions should have asked participants to complete items #14-31 based on their most recent breakup. The researcher became aware of this numbering error after data collection was nearly complete. Fortunately, none of the participants whose data were used in analyses failed to answer questions #14-16. In addition, the responses to these items were not inconsistent with other demographics items.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### *Gender Differences and Descriptive Information*

Descriptive information including means and standard deviations on major variables for the total sample and for men and women are included in Table 1. Histograms and scatterplots were examined to determine the existence of significant outliers, and none were found. A brief review of comparisons between the measures used in this sample to previous samples can be found in Appendix K. Using t-tests and an alpha level of .05 to indicate statistical significance, results of the current study indicated that men reported making significantly less ‘Other,’ ‘Relational,’ and ‘Environmental’ attributions, less reactive and emotionally expressive styles of coping, less posttraumatic growth, and less satisfaction with life than did women, in response to their most recent relationship breakup.

Mean item scores indicate that both men and women in this sample generally described Person, Other, Relational, and Environmental attributions as being “not at all a cause” to “somewhat of a cause” of their relationship breakup. In this sample, on average, men and women described themselves between “occasionally” or “sometimes” using the three problem-focused coping strategies, and “occasionally” or “often” using emotional expression and emotional processing coping strategies. Men and women generally described themselves as experiencing a “small” to “moderate” degree of change due to their relationship breakup. Based on the Relationship Assessment Scale, both men and women indicated that satisfaction with their current relationship (or their most recent romantic relationship for those individuals not currently involved in a romantic



relationship) was above average. Men and women on average indicated moderate to strong agreement with the items on the Respect Toward Partner Scale (e.g., “I respect my partner,” “I honor my partner”). On average, men and women indicated that they were neutral (i.e., neither agreed nor disagreed) or they agreed with the items on the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

*Questions and Hypotheses Addressed by Correlations and Regression Analyses*

*Research Question #1: Relationships Between Variables*

**How are attributions, coping strategies (both problem-focused and emotion-focused) and posttraumatic growth related to each other and to other variables including relationship satisfaction, respect for partner, and life satisfaction?**

Pearson correlations for the total sample between the variables in this study are included in Table 2. Regarding the associations among attributions, coping strategies and posttraumatic growth, there were significant positive associations among all attribution variables (i.e., Person, Other, Relational, Environmental), and between all attribution variables and problem-focused coping strategies (i.e., Reflective, Reactive, Suppressive) with two exceptions: between Person attributions and Reflective coping, and between Other attributions and Suppressive coping.

There were significant positive associations between Other attributions and both Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing, as well as between Relational attributions and Emotional Processing. There were also significant positive associations between Reflective coping and Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing and between Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing. The associations between Suppressive coping and both Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing were

negative. Posttraumatic growth was positively associated with every other variable except Suppressive coping and relationship satisfaction. The Relationship Assessment Scale was negatively associated with all attribution variables, as well as Reactive and Suppressive coping styles. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was negatively associated with Person, Other and Relational attribution variables, and Reactive and Suppressive styles of coping. However, the Respect Toward Partner Scale was positively associated with posttraumatic growth and the Relationship Assessment Scale. Finally, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was positively associated with Emotional Processing, posttraumatic growth, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Respect Toward Partner Scale. In contrast, this scale was negatively associated with Suppressive coping.

Pearson correlations for men between the variables in this study are included in Table 3. Regarding the associations among attributions, coping strategies and posttraumatic growth, there were significant associations among all attribution variables for men (i.e., Person, Other, Relational, Environmental), as well as between all attribution variables and reactive coping. There were also significantly positive correlations between Other, Relational and Environmental attribution variables and Reflective coping. There were positive associations between Person and Relational attribution variables and Suppressive coping. Suppressive coping was also positively associated with Reactive coping, but negatively associated with Reflective coping. Emotional Expression was found to be positively associated with Other attributions and Reflective coping, while Emotional Processing was found to be positively associated with Other and Relational attributions, Reflective coping and Emotional Expression. However, Emotional Processing was found to be negatively associated with Suppressive coping, relationship

satisfaction, and respect toward partner. Posttraumatic growth was found to be positively associated to all other variables except Suppressive coping. The Relationship Assessment Scale was negatively associated with Other and Relational attribution variables, as well as Reflective and Reactive coping styles. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was negatively associated with Other and Relational variables, and Reactive and Suppressive coping. The same scale was positively correlated with the Relationship Assessment Scale. Finally, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was positively associated with posttraumatic growth, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Respect Toward Partner Scale.

Pearson correlations for women between the variables in this study are included in Table 4. Regarding the associations among attributions, coping strategies and posttraumatic growth, there were significant associations among all attribution variables for women (i.e., Person, Other, Relational, Environmental), as well as between all attribution variables and reactive coping. There were also significantly positive correlations between Other, Relational and Environmental attribution variables and reflective coping. There were positive associations between Person, Relational and Environmental attribution variables and Suppressive coping. Suppressive coping was also positively associated with Reactive coping, but negatively associated with Reflective coping. Emotional expression was found to be negatively associated with Person attributions and Suppressive coping, but positively associated with Reflective coping. Emotional processing was found to be negatively associated with Person attributions and Suppressive coping, but positively related to Reflective coping and Emotional Expression. Posttraumatic growth was found to be positively associated to all other

variables except Environmental attributions and Suppressive coping. The Relationship Assessment Scale was negatively correlated with Person and Relational attribution variables, as well as Suppressive coping styles. However, the Relationship Assessment Scale was positively associated with Emotional Expression. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was negatively associated with Person and Relational variables, as well as Reactive and Suppressive coping. The same scale was positively correlated with Emotional Expression and the Relationship Assessment Scale. Finally, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was found to be positively associated with Emotional Processing, posttraumatic growth, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Respect Toward Partner Scale. The same scale was found to be negatively associated with Reactive and Suppressive coping styles.

Participants were asked “Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?” and three participants indicated that they had never been in a romantic relationship; those three individuals were excluded from the following data analyses. Pearson correlations for men who were not involved in a romantic relationship at the time of participation in this study are included in Table 5, and those correlations for men who were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of participation are included in Table 6. Z tests (Bruning & Kintz, 1977) for differences between these independent correlations (i.e., those for men not in a romantic relationship at the time of participation versus men in a romantic relationship) suggested that men in these two groups differed significantly on a number of correlations. Men not in a relationship had a significantly higher correlation between Other attributions and Reflective coping style (.44 vs. .11,  $z = 2.18, p < .05$ ), between Person attributions and Suppressive coping style (.66 vs. .41,  $z = 2.15, p < .05$ ), and

between Other attributions and Emotional Processing (.46 vs. .14,  $z = 2.14, p < .05$ ). Men not in a relationship compared to men in a relationship had significantly more negative correlations between the Relationship Assessment Scale and both Other (-.46 vs. -.08,  $z = 2.51, p < .05$ ) and Relational attributions (-.55 vs. -.03,  $z = 3.54, p < .05$ ). Men not in a relationship, compared to men in a relationship, also had a significantly more negative correlation between the Respect Toward Partner Scale and both Other attributions (-.43 vs. -.03,  $z = 2.59, p < .05$ ), and a significantly different correlation between the Respect Toward Partner Scale and Relational attributions (-.44 vs. .01,  $z = 2.78, p < .05$ ).

Pearson correlations for women who were not involved in a romantic relationship at the time of participation are included in Table 7, and those correlations for women who were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of participation are included in Table 8. Z Tests (Bruning & Kintz, 1977) for differences between these independent correlations (i.e., those for women not in a romantic relationship at the time of participation versus women in a romantic relationship) suggested that women in these two groups differed significantly on a number of correlations. Women not in a relationship, compared to women in a relationship, had a significantly lower correlation between Environmental attributions and Reflective coping style (.08 vs. .30,  $z = 1.98, p < .05$ ), and a significantly higher correlation between the Satisfaction with Life Scale and Emotional Processing (.39 vs. .08,  $z = 2.86, p < .05$ ). Women not in a relationship compared to women in a relationship differed significantly in the correlation between the Relationship Assessment Scale and both Other (-.33 vs. .05,  $z = 2.52, p < .05$ ) and Relational (-.46 vs. .02,  $z = 4.11, p < .05$ ) attribution variables. Women not in a relationship also had a significantly more negative correlation between the Respect for

Partner Scale and Relational attributions (-.32 vs. -.01,  $z = 2.77$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than women in a relationship.

*Research Question #2: Attributions and Problem-Focused Coping Strategies*

**How do selected attributions and problem-focused coping strategies predict growth?**

Attributions were found to be predictive of growth for men ( $R^2 = .17$ ,  $F = 7.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Other attributions were a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .01$ ) when controlling for Person, Relational and Environmental attribution variables (Table 9). Problem-focused coping strategies were also found to be predictive of growth for men ( $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F = 5.94$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Reactive ( $p < .01$ ) and Reflective ( $p < .05$ ) coping strategies were significant predictors of growth when controlling for other coping strategies (Table 10). The order of steps in the multiple regression analyses was determined based on theoretical argument that one would first make initial attributions and then employ coping strategies after a romantic relationship breakup. For this reason, attribution variables were added to the model initially, followed by coping strategies. When problem-focused coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in growth. Other attributions remained a significant predictor of growth (Table 11).

Attributions were found to be predictive of growth for women as well ( $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F = 9.01$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Other attributions were a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .01$ , Table 12). Problem-focused coping strategies were also found to be predictive of growth for women ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F = 7.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Reflective ( $p < .01$ ) coping strategies were significant predictors of growth when controlling for other coping strategies (Table 13).

When problem-focused coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies still accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in growth ( $R^2 = .14, F = 7.16, p < .01$ ). Other attributions and Reflective coping remained significant predictors of growth ( $p < .01$ , Table 14).

For both men and women, making attributions based on one's partner (Other attributions) was found to be predictive of growth. When problem-focused coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, Reflective coping (e.g., planning, reflecting) remained a significant predictor of growth for women, but not for men.

*Research Question #3: Attributions and Emotional Approach Coping Strategies*

**How do selected attributions and emotional approach coping strategies predict growth? H1 It is hypothesized that emotional approach coping, including both Emotional Processing and Emotional Expression, will be significant positive predictors of posttraumatic growth for women, but not for men.**

As described above, attributions were found to be predictive of growth for men ( $R^2 = .17, F = 7.59, p < .01$ ), and Other attributions were a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .01$ ) when controlling for Person, Relational, and Environmental attribution variables. Unlike what was hypothesized, the two emotional approach coping strategies, Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing were found to be predictive of growth for men ( $R^2 = .08, F = 6.47, p < .01$ , Table 15). However, neither Emotional Expression nor Emotional Processing was found to be a significant predictor of growth when controlling for the other emotional approach coping strategy. As a result, none of the information found in Table 15 is in bold. When emotional approach coping strategies

were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies still accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in growth ( $R^2 = .21, F = 6.38, p < .01$ ). Other attributions remained a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .05$ ) but Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing did not (Table 16).

As described above, attributions were found to be predictive of growth for women ( $R^2 = .11, F = 9.01, p < .01$ ), and Other attributions were a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .01$ ). As hypothesized, emotional approach coping strategies were also found to be predictive of growth for women ( $R^2 = .04, F = 7.06, p < .01$ ), and Emotional Processing ( $p < .05$ ) was a significant predictor of growth when controlling for Emotional Expression (Table 17). When emotional approach coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies still accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in growth ( $R^2 = .15, F = 8.59, p < .01$ ). Other attributions remained a significant predictor of growth ( $p < .01$ ), as well as Emotional Processing ( $p < .05$ , Table 18).

When emotional approach coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies still accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in growth for both men and women. Attempting to understand one's emotions (Emotional Processing) was found to be predictive of growth for women, but not for men.

#### *Research Question #4: Emotional Approach Coping Strategies and Life Satisfaction*

**Are emotional approach coping strategies related to life satisfaction? H2 It is hypothesized that emotional approach coping strategies will be positively correlated with life satisfaction for women, but not for men.**



A significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and Emotional Processing was found for the total sample. It was hypothesized that emotional approach coping would be positively correlated with life satisfaction for women, but not for men. When analyzed separately by gender, this significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and Emotional Processing was found for women but not for men. However, a test for difference between independent correlations concluded men and women's correlations between life satisfaction and Emotional Processing were not significantly different. Unlike what was predicted, there were no associations found between Emotional Expression and life satisfaction for either gender. When considered a single emotional approach coping variable, Emotional Processing and Emotional Expression combined were significantly positively correlated with life satisfaction for women but not for men. However, the author of the scale warns, "even though we find that they correlate highly in some samples, they may relate differentially to outcomes, so I suggest you analyze them separately" (A. Stanton, personal communication, May 4, 2005).

Expressing emotion (Emotional Expression) was not found to be related to life satisfaction in the current study for either gender. As hypothesized, attempting to understand one's emotions (Emotional Processing) was found to be positively correlated to life satisfaction for women, but not for men.

*Research Question #5: Growth, Respect, Relationship Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction*

**How does growth from a prior relationship breakup relate to respect and satisfaction in a current relationship and to current satisfaction with life? H3 It is hypothesized that growth from a prior relationship breakup will be related positively to respect for a current partner and also satisfaction with life.**

Only individuals who were currently in a romantic relationship at the time of participation were examined to determine whether growth from a prior relationship breakup relates to respect and satisfaction in current relationships and satisfaction with life. When correlations were conducted on the total sample of individuals in a romantic relationship ( $n = 256$ ), including both men and women, there was a significant positive association found between posttraumatic growth and respect, as was hypothesized. There were also positive correlations between posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction, respect and relationship satisfaction, and between respect and satisfaction with life. For men ( $n = 76$ ) there was a significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and respect. For women ( $n = 180$ ) there were significant positive correlations between posttraumatic growth and respect ( $r = .16, p < .05$ , see Table 8), posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction, and between relationship satisfaction and respect. Unlike what was predicted, no significant relationships between growth and life satisfaction were found. A test for difference between independent correlations concluded men and women's correlations between variables were not significantly different. Total sample correlations were separately compared to those for men and then those for women. Total sample correlations were not significantly different from those of either gender.

For women, growth from a prior relationship breakup was related to respect and current relationship satisfaction. Growth from a breakup was not found to be related to these variables for men. However, for both men and women, respect and relationship satisfaction were positively correlated. There were no significant relationships between growth from a relationship breakup and life satisfaction found for either gender.

*Question and Hypothesis Addressed by Analysis of Variance*

*Research Question #6: Dating Status and Life Satisfaction*

**How do people in a current romantic relationship compare to people not in a current romantic relationship in terms of their satisfaction with life? H4 It is anticipated that people currently in a relationship will report higher life satisfaction than people not currently in a relationship, consistent with Chambliss (2008).**

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine how people currently in a romantic relationship compared to people not currently in a romantic relationship in terms of their satisfaction with life. Means and standard deviations for gender and current dating status for life satisfaction are found in Table 19. The two-way ANOVA table for gender and dating status differences for life satisfaction are found in Table 20.

Individuals who indicated that they had never been in a romantic relationship ( $n = 3$ ) were removed from data analyses. A significant difference was found for gender for life satisfaction,  $F(1, 456) = 6.90, p < .05$ , with women having more life satisfaction than men. As hypothesized, a significant difference was also found for dating status for life satisfaction,  $F(1, 456) = 8.37, p < .05$ , with individuals currently involved in a romantic relationship having more life satisfaction than those not in a relationship. No significant difference was found for the dating by gender interaction,  $F(1, 456) = 2.56, p > .05$ .

When dating status was analyzed separately for each gender by conducting separate one-way ANOVAs, it was found that dating status produced a significant effect for men  $F(1, 149) = 5.76, p < .05$  but not for women  $F(1, 307) = 1.48, p > .05$ . The one-way ANOVA tables for men and women are found in Tables 21 and 22. In independent samples t-tests conducted separately by gender, men who were currently dating were significantly more

satisfied with their lives than men who were not currently dating ( $p < .05$ ). There was no significant difference between women currently dating, compared to women not dating, in terms of their satisfaction with life.

Individuals in a romantic relationship were found to have greater life satisfaction than individuals not in a relationship. Men's satisfaction with life was found to be significantly impacted by dating status, whereas women's satisfaction with life was not. In general, women had higher levels of life satisfaction than men.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for the Total Sample and for Men and Women*

	Total Sample		Men		Women		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Attributions							
Person	.87	.64	.87	.65	.87	.64	.10
Other	1.34	.80	1.23	.76	1.39	.81	-1.99*
Relational	1.58	.78	1.47	.78	1.64	.78	-2.32*
Environmental	1.05	.71	.95	.70	1.10	.71	-2.18*
Problem-Focused Coping	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Reflective	1.54	.79	1.57	.80	1.53	.78	.58
Reactive	1.80	.86	1.64	.89	1.87	.84	-2.68*
Suppressive	1.34	.79	1.36	.79	1.33	.79	.34
Emotional Approach Coping	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Emotional Expression	1.49	.88	1.31	.84	1.58	.89	-3.08*
Emotional Processing	1.51	.78	1.43	.78	1.55	.78	-1.63

Table 1 - Continued

Other	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
PTGI	1.90	.86	1.66	.87	2.01	.84	-4.22*
RAS	2.93	.93	2.85	.94	2.97	.93	-1.35
Respect	3.16	.87	3.12	.94	3.18	.83	-.58
SWLS	2.56	.90	2.40	1.03	2.64	.82	-2.53*

*Note.* PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale.

\* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. Men  $n = 153$ , Women  $n = 310$ .

Table 2

*Correlations Among All Variables*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.16**	.44**	.31**	.05	.29**	.52**	-.07	-.09	.14**	-.17**	-.11*	-.09
Other		.59**	.21**	.22**	.24**	.03	.13**	.13**	.34**	-.13**	-.12**	-.02
Relation			.32**	.22**	.28**	.26**	.09	.15**	.28**	-.15**	-.14**	.00
Envrmt				.19**	.19**	.25**	-.03	.05	.18**	-.10*	-.08	-.03
Reflect					.14**	-.14**	.31**	.53**	.23**	-.04	.03	.06
React						.38**	.08	.04	.19**	-.15**	-.16**	-.07
Suppress							-.24**	-.28**	.01	-.15**	-.24**	-.13**
Express								.69**	.23**	.06	.09	.04
Process									.23**	-.03	.02	.11*
PTGI										.09	.10*	.20*
RAS											.64**	.27**
Respect												.20**

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Men  $n = 153$ , Women  $n = 310$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 3

*Correlations Among Variables for Men*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.18*	.48**	.36**	.06	.42**	.53**	.02	-.00	.21**	-.11	-.09	-.06
Other		.55**	.35**	.28**	.29**	.02	.24**	.29**	.36**	-.23**	-.20*	-.14
Relation			.38**	.28**	.35**	.27**	.15	.26**	.32**	-.20*	-.17*	-.01
Envrmt				.16*	.25**	.14	.04	.05	.27**	-.15	-.08	-.06
Reflect					.15	-.19*	.28**	.48**	.22**	-.20*	-.12	-.01
React						.44**	.10	.10	.27**	-.25**	-.24**	.01
Suppress							-.13	-.21*	.03	-.09	-.19*	-.04
Express								.67**	.26**	-.09	-.06	-.07
Process									.25**	-.16	-.14	-.09
PTGI										.03	.11	.20*
RAS											.61**	.35**
Respect												.24**

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Men  $n = 153$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.



Table 4

*Correlations Among Variables for Women*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.16**	.42**	.29**	.04	.23**	.51**	-.12*	-.13*	.11*	-.20**	-.12*	-.10
Other		.60**	.14*	.19**	.21**	.04	.07	.05	.31**	-.09	-.09	.04
Relation			.28**	.19**	.22**	.26**	.03	.08	.24**	-.14*	-.13*	-.02
Envrmt				.20**	.15**	.31**	-.09	.04	.11	-.08	-.08	-.04
Reflect					.14*	-.12*	.34**	.56**	.25**	.05	.11	.11
React						.36**	.04	-.01	.12*	-.11	-.12*	-.14*
Suppress							-.29**	-.32**	.01	-.18**	-.27**	-.18**
Express								.70**	.18**	.13*	.17**	.07
Process									.20**	.03	.11	.21**
PTGI										.10	.09	.17**
RAS											.66**	.22**
Respect												.17**

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Women  $n = 310$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 5

*Correlations Among Variables for Men Not In a Relationship*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.19	.53**	.31**	.15	.43**	.66**	-.08	-.02	.32**	-.04	.07	-.02
Other		.58**	.28*	.44**	.24*	-.02	.35*	.46**	.25*	-.46**	-.43**	-.22
Relation			.40**	.39**	.36**	.41**	.13	.26*	.25*	-.55**	-.44**	-.14
Envrmt				.27*	.21	.22	-.05	.05	.19	-.20	-.09	-.05
Reflect					.21	-.09	.37**	.54**	.37**	-.30**	-.17	-.04
React						.41**	-.04	.07	.40**	-.22	-.26*	.07
Suppress							-.24*	-.27*	.14	-.07	-.14	.07
Express								.67**	.26*	-.08	.02	-.04
Process									.29*	-.30**	-.08	-.12
PTGI										-.13	.01	.31**
RAS											.59**	.20
Respect												.20

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Men  $n = 75$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 6

*Correlations Among Variables for Men In a Relationship*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.18	.44**	.42**	-.03	.44**	.41**	.07	-.03	.16	-.18	-.20	-.08
Other		.54**	.41**	.11	.35**	.07	.16	.14	.48**	-.08	-.03	-.07
Relation			.37**	.20	.38**	.16	.17	.25*	.39**	-.03	.01	.09
Envrmt				.04	.30**	.08	.15	.06	.37**	-.17	-.09	-.08
Reflect					.06	-.26*	.22	.44**	.09	-.10	-.06	.04
React						.51**	.30**	.17	.15	-.23*	-.21	-.02
Suppress							-.07	-.18	-.04	-.15	-.22	-.13
Express								.65**	.32**	-.15	-.10	-.08
Process									.26*	-.10	-.18	-.06
PTGI										.10	.16	.04
RAS											.62**	.40**
Respect												.20

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Men  $n = 76$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 7

*Correlations Among Variables for Women Not In a Relationship*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.19*	.46**	.24**	-.02	.17	.52**	-.08	-.17*	.09	-.17*	-.10	-.11
Other		.63**	.05	.18*	.20*	.05	.15	.11	.34**	-.33**	-.20*	.10
Relation			.25**	.19*	.26**	.29**	.11	.08	.20*	-.46**	-.32**	.01
Envrmt				.08	.04	.30**	-.02	.01	.11	.02	-.01	-.03
Reflect					.13	-.15	.35**	.52**	.18*	-.05	.07	.12
React						.24**	.12	.08	.21*	-.16	-.15	-.07
Suppress							-.30**	-.39**	-.03	-.15	-.30**	-.26**
Express								.71**	.29**	-.02	.12	.22*
Process									.25**	-.02	.08	.39**
PTGI										-.03	.02	.21*
RAS											.58**	.13
Respect												.17

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Women  $n = 129$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 8

*Correlations Among Variables for Women In a Relationship*

	Other	Relation	Envrmt	Reflect	React	Suppress	Express	Process	PTGI	RAS	Respect	SWLS
Person	.13	.39**	.31**	.08	.29**	.50**	-.13	-.10	.13	-.24**	-.15*	-.10
Other		.58**	.20**	.20**	.21**	.03	.02	.01	.29**	.05	-.00	-.02
Relation			.31**	.19**	.20**	.24**	-.03	.08	.26**	.02	-.01	-.05
Envrmt				.30**	.23**	.31**	-.11	.06	.11	-.08	-.09	-.05
Reflect					.14	-.09	.32**	.59**	.30**	.07	.10	.09
React						.44**	-.01	-.06	.06	-.16*	-.14	-.20**
Suppress							-.28**	-.26**	.03	-.24**	-.29**	-.12
Express								.69**	.11	.12	.13	-.05
Process									.18*	.07	.15*	.08
PTGI										.22**	.16*	.14
RAS											.56**	.28**
Respect												.13

*Note.* Relation = Relational, Envrmt = Environmental, Reflect = Reflective, React = Reactive, Suppress = Suppressive, Express = Emotional Expression, Process = Emotional Processing, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Women  $n = 180$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, \* $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Table 9

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables Predicting Growth for Men*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.24	0.28	0.08
Other	<b>0.68</b>	0.25	<b>0.25</b>
Relational	0.24	0.27	0.09
Environmental	0.35	0.25	0.12

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 153$ .

Table 10

*Summary of Regression for Problem-Focused Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Men*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Reactive	<b>1.11</b>	0.37	<b>0.27</b>
Reflective	<b>0.54</b>	0.27	<b>0.17</b>
Suppressive	-0.21	0.35	-0.06

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 153$ .

Table 11

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables and Problem-Focused Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Men*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.27	0.31	0.09
Other	<b>0.54</b>	0.25	<b>0.20</b>
Relational	0.20	0.27	0.08
Environmental	0.31	0.25	0.11
Reactive	0.65	0.37	0.16
Reflective	0.24	0.27	0.07
Suppressive	-0.42	0.38	-0.11

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 153$ .



Table 12

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables Predicting Growth for Women*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.12	0.19	0.04
Other	<b>0.66</b>	0.17	<b>0.28</b>
Relational	0.10	0.19	0.04
Environmental	0.14	0.16	0.05

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 310$ .

Table 13

*Summary of Regression for Problem-Focused Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Women*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Reactive	0.37	0.25	0.09
Reflective	<b>0.78</b>	0.18	<b>0.24</b>
Suppressive	0.01	0.22	0.00

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 310$ .

Table 14

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables and Problem-Focused Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Women*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.20	0.20	0.07
Other	<b>0.59</b>	0.17	<b>0.24</b>
Relational	0.06	0.19	0.02
Environmental	0.06	0.16	0.02
Reactive	0.16	0.25	0.04
Reflective	<b>0.59</b>	0.19	<b>0.18</b>
Suppressive	-0.16	0.26	-0.04

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 310$ .

Table 15

*Summary of Regression for Emotional Approach Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Men*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Emotional Expression	0.47	0.29	0.17
Emotional Processing	0.40	0.31	0.14

*Note.*  $N = 153$ .

Table 16

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables and Emotional Approach Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Men*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.29	0.28	0.09
Other	<b>0.55</b>	0.25	<b>0.21</b>
Relational	0.18	0.27	0.07
Environmental	0.39	0.24	0.13
Emotional Expression	0.42	0.27	0.15
Emotional Processing	0.19	0.30	0.06

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 153$ .

Table 17

*Summary of Regression for Emotional Approach Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Women*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Emotional Expression	0.17	0.19	0.07
Emotional Processing	<b>0.44</b>	0.22	<b>0.16</b>

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 310$ .

Table 18

*Summary of Regression for Attribution Variables and Emotional Approach Coping Strategies Predicting Growth for Women*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Person	0.25	0.19	0.08
Other	<b>0.66</b>	0.16	<b>0.28</b>
Relational	0.02	0.19	0.01
Environmental	0.13	0.16	0.05
Emotional Expression	0.15	0.19	0.06
Emotional Processing	<b>0.44</b>	0.22	<b>0.16</b>

*Note.* Values in bold are significant at  $p < .05$ .  $N = 310$ .

Table 19

*Descriptive Statistics for Gender and Dating Status for Life Satisfaction*

Gender	Dating Status	Mean	SD	N
Male	Not in a Relationship	2.20	1.02	75
Male	In a Relationship	2.60	1.03	76
Female	Not in a Relationship	2.57	.84	129
Female	In a Relationship	2.69	.81	180

*Note.* Men  $n = 151$ , Women  $n = 309$ .



Table 20

*Analysis of Variance for Life Satisfaction*

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Gender	137.48	1	137.48	6.90	<b>.009</b>
Dating Status	166.79	1	166.79	8.37	<b>.004</b>
Gender X Dating Status	50.95	1	50.95	2.56	.111
Error	9091.18	456	19.94		
Total	84859.00	460			

*Note.*  $p < .05$ .  $N = 460$ . The Satisfaction with Life Scale was the outcome variable.

Table 21

*Analysis of Variance for Life Satisfaction for Men*

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	151.02	1	151.02	5.76	<b>.018</b>
Within Groups	3903.97	149	26.20		
Total	4054.99	150			

*Note.*  $p < .05$ .  $N = 151$ . The Satisfaction with Life Scale was the outcome variable.

Table 22

*Analysis of Variance for Life Satisfaction for Women*

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	24.95	1	24.95	1.48	.225
Within Groups	5187.20	307	16.90		
Total	5212.16	308			

*Note.*  $p < .05$ .  $N = 309$ . The Satisfaction with Life Scale was the outcome variable.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The current study explored the link between attributions people make regarding relationship termination, coping strategies employed post-breakup and posttraumatic growth experienced as a result. The current study was also interested in connecting past experiences with relationship breakup and current relationship satisfaction, level of respect, and satisfaction with life. Many of the associations among the variables remained the same across both genders. For both men and women, there were significant positive associations among all attribution variables (i.e., Person, Other, Relational, Environmental), as well as between all attribution variables and Reactive coping. It is possible that making attributions regarding a breakup requires an individual to engage in some of the behaviors that Reactive coping is based upon, such as distortion (Heppner et al., 1995). Examples of the items on the Reactive coping subscale of the Problem Focused Style of Coping (PF-SOC) measure are: “I got preoccupied thinking about the relationship problem(s) and overemphasized some parts of it,” and “I misread another person’s motives and feelings without checking with the person to see if my conclusions were correct.” If an individual is distorting and overemphasizing different aspects of their breakup, as well as attributing blame impulsively, it is unsurprising that all of the attributions (i.e., Person, Other, Relational, Environmental) were positively correlated to Reactive coping.

There were also significant positive correlations between Other, Relational and Environmental attribution variables and Reflective coping for both genders. Examples of the items on the Reflective coping subscale of the PF-SOC are, “I identified the causes of

my emotions which helped me identify and solve the relationship problems,” and “I got in touch with my feelings to identify and work on the relationship problems.” The findings seem reasonable because an individual who has engaged in reflective behaviors, such as thoughtfully identifying and working on the relationship problems, likely would not attribute blame to self.

There were positive associations between Person and Relational attributions and Suppressive coping for both genders. As was concluded by Buck (2006), this finding provides further evidence that placing blame on oneself, either completely as in the case of Person attributions (e.g., “My dishonesty”) or partially as in the case of Relational attributions (e.g., “We had trouble communicating”), may cause an increase in such behaviors as denial and escapism in order to cope.

Both Suppressive and Reactive coping move a person away from resolving his or her problems through escapism, denial, distortion and impulsivity while Reflective coping moves a person toward resolving his or her problems through planning and reflecting (Heppner et al., 1995). Therefore, the finding that suppressive coping was positively associated with Reactive coping, but negatively associated with Reflective coping for both genders is sensible.

Reflective coping includes an affective component (e.g., “I got in touch with my feelings to identify and work on the relationship problem(s)”), so understandably Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing were found to be positively associated with Reflective coping and with each other for both men and women. Emotional Processing was found to be negatively associated with Suppressive coping because this

form of coping includes such behaviors as escapism and denial. Denying or avoiding one's emotions is in stark contrast to trying to better understand them.

Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) stated that escapist coping strategies generally result in negative psychological outcomes. The current study found evidence in support of this claim: posttraumatic growth was positively associated with all other variables except Suppressive coping for men. In addition, growth was positively associated with all variables except Suppressive coping and Environmental attributions for women.

The Relationship Assessment Scale and the Respect Toward Partner Scale were negatively associated with Relational attribution variables. As one's satisfaction and level of respect in a relationship increases, making attributions based on relational variables (e.g., "Problems surrounding sexual activities," "Lack of affection") should theoretically decrease, and it did. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was also negatively associated with Reactive and Suppressive coping. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was positively correlated with the Relationship Assessment Scale.

Life satisfaction has been linked to positive psychological health in college-aged students (Levy, 2003). Satisfaction with life also appears to be related, both directly and indirectly, to a number of other types of satisfaction. For example, relationship satisfaction is a prerequisite of sorts in order for women to obtain sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2001; Byers, 2005), and sexual satisfaction, along with marital satisfaction, is vital to the maintenance of life satisfaction for women (Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996). As one might expect, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was positively associated with the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Respect Toward Partner Scale in the current study.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale was positively associated with posttraumatic growth as well. Growth in the aftermath of adversity would ideally lead an individual to become more satisfied with her/his life. Each individual has a baseline level of subjective well-being, and thus life satisfaction. After experiencing a serious life challenge, that level falls below average and posttraumatic growth may be responsible for its rebound to the baseline level.

There are several important points to highlight regarding the correlations found among the variables for men who were currently in a relationship as compared to men not in a relationship. Men not in a relationship had a significantly higher correlation between Other attributions and Reflective coping style, between Person attributions and Suppressive coping style, and between Other attributions and Emotional Processing. It is feasible that men who were not in a relationship at the time of participation were currently still very actively coping with their last relationship breakup. This could help explain why the relationships between these variables were so much stronger for this group of men.

Men and women who were not currently in a romantic relationship were instructed to answer the Relationship Assessment Scale and the Respect Toward Partner Scale based on the same relationship they had been considering in answering previous questions. In other words, these individuals were instructed to answer these two scales based on their most recent romantic relationship which was now over. With this in mind, men not in a relationship had significantly stronger negative correlations between the Relationship Assessment Scale and both Other and Relational attributions than men in relationships. This group also had a significantly stronger negative correlation between

the Respect Toward Partner Scale and Other attributions, and a significantly different correlation between the Respect Toward Partner Scale and Relational attributions. As their relationship satisfaction and respect toward their partner decreased, this group of men made more attributions based on their partner and relational variables (e.g., “Lack of companionship,” “Lack of affection”).

Similarly, there were significant differences on a number of correlations between variables for women. Women not in a relationship had a significantly higher correlation between the Satisfaction with Life Scale and Emotional Processing. After finding self-respect to be positively correlated to life satisfaction, Chambliss (2008) explained that adults who are not in relationships may have more time to take care of themselves than adults in relationships. When Emotional Processing is viewed as a self-care practice, its relationship to life satisfaction may be better understood. Women who are currently single may have more time and energy to dedicate to better understanding their emotions. This increased awareness and understanding of self could in turn increase how satisfied these women are with their lives.

Along with men, women not in a relationship differed significantly in the correlations between the Relationship Assessment Scale and both Other and Relational attribution variables from women in a relationship. For women in a relationship, these correlations were both positive and neither was significant. For women not in a relationship, these correlations were both negative and were significant ( $p < .01$ ). As their relationship satisfaction decreased, this group of women made more attributions based on their partner and relational variables. Women not in a relationship also had a significantly stronger negative correlation between the Respect for Partner Scale and Relational



attributions. As respect toward their partner decreased, this group of women made more attributions based on relational variables. Similar to men, it is feasible that women who were not in a relationship at the time of participation were currently still very actively coping with their last relationship breakup. This could help explain the correlations between these variables for women not in a relationship.

Women in a relationship had a significantly stronger positive correlation between Environmental attributions and Reflective coping style than women not in a relationship. It is possible that prior to entering their current relationship, and through the process of coping with their last breakup, these women's attributions became less related to their partner or the interaction between the partners, and more about the external environment in which the relationship took place (e.g., finances, friends, geography). This shift in attributions may have occurred through reflection and causal analysis, both components of Reflective coping (Heppner et al., 1995).

For both men and women, making attributions was predictive of growth, and Other attributions were a significant predictor of growth when controlling for Person, Relational and Environmental attribution variables. Other attributions place blame for a relationship breakup on one's partner, meaning that the breakup was beyond one's control. Many of the life events to which growth has been attributed in the literature are things beyond an individual's control. For example, growth has been reported in the aftermath of rape (Burt & Katz, 1987), bereavement (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1989-1990; Schwartzberg & Janoff-Bulman, 1991), HIV (Schwartzberg, 1994), cancer (Collins, Taylor, & Skokan, 1990; Taylor, 1983), heart attack (Affleck, Tennen, & Croog, 1987), and disasters (Thompson, 1985). Posttraumatic growth does not follow every adverse

experience that people encounter, but rather only those experiences which are significant enough to threaten one's core beliefs (Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2007). Stressors are perceived as less threatening when they are under one's own control (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001), and therefore more threatening when they are not. A lack of control in an adverse circumstance such a rape or a breakup, could serve a key role in adding to its perceived stressfulness, and prompting growth to be realized after the event has occurred.

When problem-focused coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, Other attributions remained a significant predictor of growth for both genders and Reflective coping (e.g., planning, reflecting) remained a significant predictor of growth for women, but not for men. Reflective coping was the only coping strategy that Buck (2006) found to be associated with posttraumatic growth for women as well. Buck explained the possibility that Reflective coping (e.g., planning for the future) can be very empowering, leading to growth. In Riessman's (1990) book, *Divorce Talk*, he explicated that men tend to define divorce as a personal failure, whereas women focus on their achievements after a divorce. Some positive consequences of a divorce for women include increased independence and autonomy, increased self-reliance (and therefore less dependence), and learning to be alone (Riessman, 1990). These findings potentially generalize to a dating relationship breakup, and help explain why Reflective coping was the only problem focused coping strategy we found to be predictive of posttraumatic growth for women.

Partial support was found for the hypothesis that emotional approach coping, including both Emotional Processing and Emotional Expression, would be significant

positive predictors of posttraumatic growth for women, but not for men. Emotional approach coping strategies were found to be predictive of growth for women and men. When emotional approach coping strategies were added to the model after attribution variables, coping strategies still accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in growth, and Other attributions remained a significant predictor of growth. Attempting to understand one's emotions (Emotional Processing) remained a significant predictor of growth as well, but only for women.

In their study examining coping and emotional reactions after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Park, Aldwin, Fenster and Snyder (2008), concluded that for their participants, engaging with a stressor and being emotionally aroused (in this case by anger) increases the likelihood of recognizing growth. Anger and behaviors that the authors labeled positive coping (e.g., getting emotional support from others, praying/meditating, concentrating one's efforts on doing something about the situation, learning to live with it, looking for the good in what is happening) were better predictors of posttraumatic growth than posttraumatic stress, whereas feelings of depression and behaviors that the authors labeled negative coping (e.g., trying to take your mind off things, expressing negative feelings, distracting oneself, using alcohol/drugs) were better predictors of posttraumatic stress than growth.

One possibility for the finding that Emotional Processing, but not Emotional Expression, remained a predictor of growth for women is that Emotional Expression is merely expressing one's feelings (e.g., "I let my feelings out," "I allowed myself to express my emotions"), which are often negative when it comes to romantic relationship breakup. This venting, rather than actively engaging oneself in trying to understand

emotions, as in Emotional Processing, does not seem to help achieve growth. This explanation would be consistent with the findings of Park et al. (2008).

Partial support was found for the hypothesis that emotional approach coping strategies would be positively correlated with life satisfaction for women, but not for men. A significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and Emotional Processing was found for the total sample. However, when analyzed separately by gender, this significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and Emotional Processing was found for women but not for men. Unlike what was predicted, there were no associations found between Emotional Expression and life satisfaction for either gender.

The gender difference in our finding could be related to the emotional gender differences described by Brody and Hall (1993). The authors stated that “females are superior to males both at recognizing feelings in others and at verbally and facially expressing a wide variety of feelings themselves” (p. 457). Since women in this study did not show associations between life satisfaction and emotional expression, only partial support was found for Brody and Hall’s point of view.

Another possibility could explain the link between Emotional Processing and life satisfaction for women. Brody and Hall (1993) explained that women display certain types of emotions frequently, such as happiness and warmth. These emotions are related to women’s traditional gender roles of social bonding and interacting with others (Brody & Hall). Displaying these types of emotions, as well as being able to recognize what others are feeling, likely increases the quantity of intimate relationships (friendships, romantic relationships) women have, and the quality of those relationships (e.g.,

increased level of relationship satisfaction). Consistent with this idea, greater social support has been linked to relationship satisfaction (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999), and life satisfaction (Chambliss, 2008).

The failure to find a significant positive relationship between Emotional Expression and life satisfaction may be related to the debate regarding the value of catharsis. The literal meaning of catharsis is “to release or to purge” (Bushman, Baumeister, & Phillips, 2001, p. 18). As Bushman, Baumeister and Phillips described, the idea behind the theory of catharsis is that releasing negative emotions will have a positive effect on an individual’s emotional state. However, for decades many researchers have argued that catharsis may not be beneficial in terms of decreasing negative emotions (e.g., Goldman, Keck, & O’Leary, 1969; Hornberger, 1959). Many emotions experienced after a breakup are negative, such as sadness or anger. If expressing these emotions (Emotional Expression) is not helpful, an individual’s emotional state may not improve. If an individual’s emotional state remains negative, his or her satisfaction with life would be unlikely to improve as well.

The current study hypothesized that for individuals who have experienced growth from a relationship breakup prior to entering their current relationship, correlations between growth and respect for their current partner, as well as between growth and satisfaction with life will be significant. When correlations were conducted on the total sample of individuals in a romantic relationship ( $n = 256$ ), including both men and women, there was a significant positive association found between posttraumatic growth and respect. There were also positive correlations between posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction, as well as between respect and relationship satisfaction.

Consistent with Chambliss (2008), a significant positive correlation was also found for partnered adults between respect toward partner and satisfaction with life. Like many things in life, an individual often gets out of a relationship what he or she puts into the relationship. Individuals with high levels of respect for their partners are likely to be highly respected (and honored, approved of and communicated with) in return. An individual in a reciprocal, good quality relationship such as this would likely have a high level of life satisfaction because relationships, especially romantic relationships, are important to many people.

When the data were analyzed separately by gender, growth from a prior relationship was found to be related to respect and current relationship satisfaction for women. For reasons that are unclear, growth was not found to be related to these variables for men. Even though the total score of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was used in this study, the measure does include five subscales measuring various aspects of growth. It is possible that men experienced a different kind of growth than did women; a kind of growth that would not necessarily have an impact on future relationships. For example, rather than experiencing growth on the PTGI subscale *Relating to Others*, which may benefit future relationships (e.g., “I put more effort into my relationships”), men may have experienced growth on the PTGI subscale *Spiritual Change* (e.g., “I have a better understanding of spiritual matters”), which may have no impact on future relationships.

For both men and women, respect and relationship satisfaction were positively correlated. This is consistent with the findings of Hendrick and Hendrick (2006) linking respect to relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, there were no significant relationships

between growth and life satisfaction found for either gender. The instructions for the Satisfaction with Life Scale did not indicate whether a participant was supposed to answer the items based on their life at the present moment or their entire life. If participants answered items based on their lives in general, it is possible that they were considering many things that may have occurred prior to the growth they experienced. For example, even a participant who had experienced growth from a breakup may strongly disagree with the Satisfaction with Life Scale item, “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.” If the participants had been instructed to answer the Satisfaction with Life Scale based on their lives since experiencing growth, the relationship between posttraumatic growth and satisfaction with life may have been significant.

In general, women were found to have higher levels of life satisfaction than men. There is evidence in the literature that women rate themselves significantly higher than men on happiness (Matlin & Gawron, 1979), a construct likely strongly correlated to life satisfaction. As hypothesized, a significant difference was also found for dating status for life satisfaction, with individuals currently involved in a romantic relationship having more life satisfaction than those not in a relationship. Married individuals testify to greater happiness and satisfaction with life than unmarried, divorced or separated individuals (Myers, 2000), and this finding may generalize to dating relationships. In other words, unmarried, partnered individuals likely testify to greater happiness and satisfaction with life than un-partnered individuals. When analyzed separately by gender, this relationship remained true for men, but not for women. Men who were currently dating were found to be significantly more satisfied with their lives than men who were

not currently dating. In other words, men's satisfaction with life was found to be significantly impacted by their dating status. Surprisingly, there were no significant differences found between women currently involved in a romantic relationship and those who were not in terms of their satisfaction with life. It could be that the female college student population in the current study focused on aspects of their lives other than romantic relationships from which to obtain their life satisfaction, such as friendships, familial relationships or advancing their education. No significant difference was found for the dating by gender interaction.

#### *Limitations of the Current Study*

One major limitation of the current study was the use of a college student sample. The generalizability of the results is limited because the majority of the sample was within an age range of 19-21. It is possible that quantitative or qualitative differences in coping strategies may exist for adults of varying ages, so the same study conducted on an older population may yield different results. Another major limitation of the current study was that the majority of the sample was Caucasian. This particular limitation poses difficulty in regard to generalizing the findings to other ethnic populations. As with all research of this nature, the findings can only be treated as associations between constructs rather than as proof of causal relationships.

All retrospective data is potentially flawed in regard to accuracy because memories can change or be distorted over time. Romantic relationship breakups from the past, especially the distant past, can be recalled by participants differently than those breakups which have happened recently. The current study did not account for recall error, and therefore the results may be limited.



Similar to Buck (2006), the current study did not make a distinction between same-sex relationship breakup and heterosexual relationship breakup. It may be important to make this distinction because research has shown that despite many similarities between gay and lesbian relationships and heterosexual relationships (Kurdek, 1998), there are still noticeable differences. One study cited more frequent relationship dissolution and more autonomy in gay and lesbian partners (Gottman et al., 2003). As an example, this finding could have potential implications for the current study; more frequent relationship breakups could impact the amount of growth an individual experiences.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Future researchers might consider the role that sexual orientation plays in the relationships between the variables in the current study. As discussed above, a gay or lesbian relationship breakup could result in different levels of growth than a same-sex relationship breakup.

It would be interesting to examine the connection between these constructs in a population comprised of married and divorced individuals. Gerstel (1988) and Reissman (1990) have found that especially for women, one of the potential benefits of divorce is the strengthening of relationships with others. It has also been found that the use of coping mechanisms can be influenced by one's social support (Holahan, Moos, Holahan, & Brennan, 1995; Holahan, Moos, Holahan, & Brennan, 1997; Terry, Rawle, & Callan, 1995). It is possible then that for some people a divorce strengthens social support which in turn influences the coping mechanisms those individuals employ to get through their divorce.

As stated in Buck (2006), marriage may provide increased potential to develop coping strategies. There is increased conflict and stress in many marriages due to sharing one's life with another individual. This conflict and stress may provide the impetus for improved coping mechanisms. For this reason, examining a population of married and divorced individuals in a study similar to this one may yield different results.

### *Conclusions*

Despite its limitations, this study offers several important implications for psychologists and their clients. Due to the frequency of relationship breakups and the pain that is caused by them, it is imperative that psychologists try to understand the path to healing in an attempt to help clients navigate through the process. More research is necessary to better understand the relationship between the variables in this study. As described, similar research using different populations would be advantageous. As suggested by Buck (2006), a longitudinal study may also be helpful since a breakup is a process and coping strategies in response to an event often change over time.

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APPENDIX A  
EXTENDED LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship breakups are such a common occurrence that very few people avoid one, along with the ensuing stress and heartache. Those who have been through this experience can attest to the immense pain that comes from the loss of a partner and the failure of a relationship. Simpson (1987) stated, “few experiences in life are capable of producing more emotional distress, anguish, and suffering than is the dissolution of an important relationship” (p. 683).

Relationship breakups can impact nearly all areas of one’s life: social, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, physical, and spiritual. Some of the frequently studied negative effects of a breakup are related to emotional distress (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Simpson, 1987), anger (Weiss, 1976), resentment and loneliness (Sprecher, 1994), and adjustment problems including stress, and hopelessness (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003). Despite the prevalence of breakups and the associated well-known negative outcomes, there is much about the dissolution of important relationships that is still not understood. For example, little is known about how attributions that people make regarding relationship breakup are related to coping strategies people use to get through the breakup (Buck, 2006), or the potential benefits that can come from a relationship breakup once the process of healing begins. This research spotlights these issues which have been largely ignored within the literature.

More specifically, the current research will focus on the link between attributions people make regarding relationship termination, coping strategies employed post-breakup and posttraumatic growth experienced as a result. In addition, the current study is interested in finding a link between past experiences with relationship breakup (i.e., attributions made, coping strategies employed, posttraumatic growth experienced) and

current relationship satisfaction, level of respect, and satisfaction with life. The following literature review is divided into sections addressing each of these constructs and their interrelatedness. The review concludes with the rationale for the current research as well as research questions and specific hypotheses.

### Attributions and Relationship Breakup

Attributions help answer common questions that follow a breakup such as, “What happened?” and “Who was at fault?” Weiss (1975) called the answers to these questions accounts, which serve the purpose of organizing the happenings of a relationship dissolution.

Once understood in this way, the events can be dealt with. They can be seen as outcomes of identifiable causes and, eventually, can be seen as past, over, and external to the individual’s present self. Those who cannot construct accounts sometimes feel that their perplexity keeps them from detaching themselves from the distressing experiences. They may say, “If I only knew what happened, if only I could understand why” (pp. 14-15).

Although Weiss was specifically referring to marital separation, account-making certainly occurs for unmarried individuals going through a breakup as well. Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti and Garnick (1986) explained that accounts can also serve the purposes of regaining a sense of control over the breakup, gaining a new sense of self, and developing predictability about one’s future. Accounts also can serve as a catharsis. Interestingly, the participants in a study by Harvey and Alvarez (as described in Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978) described this account-making as having occurred mostly at night when they could not sleep, or during idle periods during the day.

Account-making, “serves the human’s drive for homeostasis in all physical and psychological systems” (Harvey et al., 1986, p. 193), so it is important for each individual member of the dissolved couple but also for the social network within which the couple resided. La Gaipa (1982) explained relationship disengagement from the systems approach, which assumes interrelatedness between the individual and the social aspects of a relationship breakup. As a result of this interrelatedness, a breakup will have implications for the larger social network. For example, a heterosexual man who separates from his partner may explain to his parents that his ex-partner is no longer their potential daughter-in-law. The ripple effect of this breakup may then cause a disturbance in the equilibrium of the family, which account-making may help reduce. Finally, attributions can also help serve the purpose of maintaining social identity and integrity, which La Gaipa described as an important part of relationship disengagement. In other words, an individual can use attributions to help “save face” with friends and family.

The social component of account-making is also evident when considering the role that third parties can play. Levinger (1983) used the example of a woman who discusses her feelings with family and friends, which in turn leads her to dwell on her partner’s negative characteristics even more. In addition, the friends and family involved in this self-disclosure process may then begin to treat her partner differently (e.g., more negatively). In more directly related ways, third parties such as family members (e.g., in-laws) or extra-marital lovers may also be the cause of the problem.

Just as there are two sides to every story as the old cliché would have it, there are two sides to every breakup. Hill, Rubin and Peplau (1976) stated, “it is difficult to speak confidently about the breakup, as if it refers to a single, objective set of events. Instead it

seems necessary to attend separately to ‘his breakup’ and ‘her breakup,’ in each instance looking at the matter from the respective partner’s point of view” (p. 159). The contrast between two partners’ stories is best understood in context. Orvis, Kelley and Butler (1976) mentioned that attributions are often made in situations of conflict in which each partner is likely attempting to justify his or her actions while criticizing the other partner.

Gender strongly influences relationships (Bell, 1981), and by extension, the attributions made regarding conflict and dissolution. In the Hill et al. (1976) study, women who were presented with a list of attributions about their breakup (e.g., “my desire to be independent,” “my interest in someone else,” “living too far apart”) rated a larger number of attributions as important sources of conflict than did men. The authors concluded that their finding suggests women are more sensitive to problems within a relationship than are men. Baxter (1986) found the same trend, with women citing not only more reasons for their breakups than men, but also different reasons (i.e., Autonomy, Openness, and Equity cited by women significantly more and only Romance cited by men significantly more). In another study conducted by Harvey and Wells (as described by Harvey et al., 1978), couples were asked about the sources of conflict in their relationships, and gender differences were also found. Specifically, out of seventy-two participants (36 unmarried couples), eleven of the men (one-third) participating mentioned differing interest in sexual matters, while only three women mentioned it at all. However, the presence of a significant other in their spouse’s life was mentioned more by women than men as a cause of conflict, in addition to financial concerns and work stress.

The perception or awareness of more problems within a relationship may help explain why women are more likely to report that they initiated relationship breakups than men (Sprecher, 1994). Another possibility, suggested by Weiss (1975), would account for this gender difference among divorced individuals specifically: women file for divorce more than men do, and in an effort to develop a socially and legally appropriate explanation, they provide a more extensive list of attributions.

An interesting finding by Harvey and Wells is that men and women tend to do a poor job of estimating, in either direction, how much importance their partner places on certain issues in the relationship (Harvey et al., 1978). Examples include men overestimating how much importance females place on differing interest in sexual matters and females overestimating how much importance men place on financial problems and work stress.

There is conflicting evidence within the literature about the stability of attributions once they are made. Harvey and Alvarez conducted a study in which they interviewed ten recently separated individuals (separated within the last year) about the causes of their relationship dissolution and then conducted at least two follow up interviews (at least two per person) within 1-2 months of initial contact (Harvey et al., 1978). Some common attributions mentioned among interviewees were infidelity on their partner's part, insensitivity (in this case meaning a lack of affection or intimacy), desire for freedom from marital constraints, differing values and habits, differing religious orientation, and alcoholism (sometimes leading to physical abuse). Interestingly, the researchers found that very few of the respondents' attributions changed over the course of time from the initial interview (about a six-month period). However, Lloyd and Cate

(1985) found that the amount of four different types of attributions (i.e., dyadic, individual, social network and circumstantial) changed throughout the course of a relationship. For example, among their participants, social network and circumstantial attributions remained constant across the relationship, but the amount of dyadic and individual attributions ebbed and flowed depending on what stage the relationship was in (e.g., dating, breaking up). Weiss (1975) also offered support for the argument that attributions are changeable; he stated that accounts given prior to divorce differ significantly from those given afterwards because events get re-interpreted. It may be the case that while going through the process of dissolution, accounts change, but once a final decision is made (such as separation or divorce), accounts become more stable and solidified. More research is necessary to better understand this aspect of attributions.

## Coping

### *General Review*

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), defined coping as “a stabilizing factor that can help individuals maintain psychosocial adaptation during stressful periods; it encompasses cognitive and behavioral efforts to reduce or eliminate stressful conditions and associated emotional distress” (p. 25). According to Lazarus and Folkman, coping is used by individuals during times of stress as a means of adaptation and stress reduction. These authors also viewed coping as situation-specific, meaning that individuals alter their coping strategies to fit their present situation. In support of this situation-specific view of coping, Billings and Moos (1981) found modest differences in coping among their participants, depending on the type of event eliciting the coping (e.g., death, illness).



Considerable research has focused on individual differences in coping (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001). As explained by Carver and Scheier (1999), optimists expect good things to happen to them, even in difficult circumstances. After an extended review of the literature, the authors concluded that optimism has a positive association with psychological well-being and a negative association with distress. This conclusion was based on research with individuals facing serious medical conditions (e.g., coronary artery bypass surgery, breast cancer, failed in vitro fertilization), and less severe life events (e.g., entering college). Carver and Scheier delineated many studies in which optimists used more beneficial types of both problem-focused coping (handling the problem) and emotion-focused coping (handling the emotions), while pessimists tended to avoid and deny the stressor, especially when they perceived it as uncontrollable.

Costa, Somerfield and McCrae (1996) examined the relationship between coping and the “big five” personality characteristics. These authors argued that because personality traits affect psychological functioning, it then follows that those same traits would also affect coping. It appears they were right. They found that individuals who ranked highly in neuroticism blamed themselves and externalized that blame by taking it out on others. Individuals who were open to new experiences gathered information, tried to see the problem from various points of view, and then tried fresh solutions. Individuals who scored low in agreeableness directly expressed their anger and frustration. Individuals who scored high on conscientiousness persevered and used less passive coping responses. Finally, the authors found that extraverts reacted to stress by talking and joking about it with people around them.

In addition to the “big five” personality characteristics, socioeconomic variables have also been related to coping. Billings and Moos (1981) found a positive association between more active types of coping (as opposed to avoidance coping) and education and income. For participants in their study with higher levels of education and larger incomes, these positive associations proved to be beneficial, as greater use of active coping strategies was associated with reduced stress. For purposes of the current study, what is important to note is that individual differences appear to exist.

In *Anger, Hostility, and the Heart*, Siegman and Smith (1994) pointed out that although there are interpretive problems in the way anger is usually measured, there do seem to be individual differences in coping with anger. The authors specified that the experience of anger includes subjective and cognitive processes, whereas the expression of anger refers to behavior. They further argued that withholding the expression of anger can be construed as suppression or repression, both forms of coping. However, the expression of anger can also be construed as coping in that the individual is airing the subjective feelings he/she is experiencing. Yet, expressing anger through aggressive behaviors can also be interpreted as a failure to cope, or a lack of inhibition (Siegman & Smith, 1994). Difficulty arises in knowing which of these interpretations is the actual state of affairs. Throughout the book, there are many examples of research linking heart health to coping with anger. For example, one study found that the outward expression of anger reduced anger-induced blood pressure elevations (Berkowitz, 1970). Other studies have found that this type of behavior raised systolic and diastolic blood pressure. These cardiovascular changes have been associated with coronary heart disease (Williams, 1989).

Beck (1983) described two dimensions of personality relevant to depression: social dependency and autonomy. According to Beck, an individual can have both of these characteristics and alternate back and forth between them, but most individuals have a dominant dimension. Taken from Beck's description, an individual who is socially dependent needs frequent reassurance in relationships and depends on his or her relationships in order to avoid social isolation, which is very painful. An individual who is autonomous has his or her own set of goals and standards, is action-oriented, and is often unaware of his or her impact on others. According to which "mode" an individual is in, certain stressors may lead to depression, whereas others may not, because the mode influences how the individual interprets the stressor (Beck). As will soon be described, how an individual interprets a stressor can have a large impact on how he/she copes with the stressor. As Beck described, an individual with a personality characterized largely by social dependency would be more likely to experience depression if she/he experienced the death of a loved one or the termination of an important relationship than would someone in the autonomy mode.

The literature is vast yet lacking a consensus about the most concise way to categorize coping strategies. As noted earlier, both situation-specific coping and individual differences in coping have been studied. Another common categorization of coping is that of approach coping, in which the individual makes purposeful attempts to resolve his/her problem, versus avoidance coping, in which the individual avoids the problem (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Yet another categorization is that of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Billings and Moos (1981) summarized the difference between these two forms of coping: "Problem-focused

coping includes attempts to modify or eliminate the sources of stress through one's own behavior. Emotion-focused coping includes behavioral or cognitive responses whose primary function is to manage the emotional consequences of stressors and to help maintain one's emotional equilibrium" (p. 141).

Emotion-focused coping has often been linked to poor outcomes, such as negative adaptation (Moos & Schaefer, 1993). Stanton, et al. (2000) argued that this is due to a number of very different coping strategies, such as avoidance and approach coping, being lumped together under the "emotion-focused coping" umbrella. The results of research conducted by Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Cameron, and Ellis (1994) provided evidence that "emotional approach coping scales are confounded with distress and psychopathological content" (p. 359). Stanton and her colleagues argue that another oversight on the part of emotion-oriented coping researchers is the lack of attention, in specific items or entire measures, given to coping that seeks to recognize, comprehend and convey emotions.

By carefully selecting or constructing items, Stanton and her colleagues were able to find more positive outcomes of emotional approach coping. For example, Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, and Danoff-Burg (2000) found that for female breast cancer patients, emotional expression was associated with less distress and more energy. In addition, Stanton et al. (1994) found that under certain conditions, women using emotional approach coping were less depressed and more satisfied with their lives, although men were more depressed and less satisfied. Thus, gender seems to play a moderating role in whether emotional approach coping is beneficial.

As a result of these findings, Stanton et al. (2000) developed a scale which restores faith in focusing on emotions as a legitimate coping strategy and solves the

above mentioned problems. Their Emotional Approach Coping Scale consists of two subscales: Emotional Expression and Emotional Processing, which the authors described as “active attempts to acknowledge and understand emotions” (p. 1150). This scale can measure dispositional coping or situational coping, depending on the researcher’s purpose and the instructions provided to participants.

In a study analyzing common coping measures (e.g., the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, and the Coping Strategies Inventory), Cook and Heppner (1997) explained that some common models of coping oversimplify a more complex phenomenon involving activities from three realms: behavior, cognition and affect. More recently a three-factor coping model has been supported: problem engagement (including “problem-focused, talk-oriented coping”), avoidance (“emotion-focused” avoidant coping), and social/emotional (a factor including social support and emotion management; Cook & Heppner, 1997). Cook and Heppner (1997) concluded that there is interrelatedness between coping strategies and that, “people do not exercise precise, phenomenological distinctions between the different coping strategies” (p. 919).

Heppner, Cook, Wright and Johnson (1995) developed a measure, the Problem-Focused Styles of Coping (PF-SOC), which includes a Reflective factor (e.g., planning, reflecting), a Suppressive factor (e.g., escapism, denial), and a Reactive factor (e.g., distortion, impulsivity). A goal of Heppner et al. was to avoid what they perceived as a potential pitfall of previous measures, ambiguous items. The authors also approached coping as dispositional rather than situation-specific. Finally, Heppner et al. chose to conceptualize problem-focused coping slightly differently than many other researchers by including cognitive, behavioral and affective components. The result was a coping

measure, the PF-SOC, which includes both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

### *Coping and Relationship Breakup*

As previously mentioned, coping is an important aspect of relationship breakup due to the stress and emotional distress brought about by such a life change. For example, in the case of a divorce, Bohannan (1970) described all the interrelated aspects of life that an individual going through a divorce must learn to cope with:

- (1) the emotional divorce, which centers around the problem of the deteriorating marriage;
- (2) the legal divorce, based on grounds;
- (3) the economic divorce, which deals with money and property;
- (4) the coparental divorce, which deals with custody, single-parent homes, and visitation;
- (5) the community divorce, surrounding the changes of friends and community that every divorcee experiences;
- and (6) the psychic divorce, with the problem of regaining individual autonomy (pp. 29-30).

Among other things, an individual's appraisal of the severity of a stressor (for purposes of this research, a breakup) is based on the number of life arenas the stressor impacts, and whether or not those life arenas are perceived as important (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001). In conjunction with Bohannan's statement, the complexity of breakups helps explain why most people perceive relationship terminations as such enormous stressors. Some of the arenas of life mentioned by Bohannan may be affected to a lesser extent by unmarried individuals going through a breakup than married individuals divorcing (e.g., unmarried individuals may have less property to divide). However, Bohannan's idea that the sooner

an individual learns how to cope adequately with one problem, the better he/she will be at dealing with the others, is just as applicable.

A number of coping-related variables have also been found to have a large impact on how an individual copes after a breakup. For example, Frazier and Cook (1993) found that controllability of the breakup and coping resources such as social support were related to adjustment and recovery after a heterosexual breakup (and indeed, most of the extant literature has focused on heterosexual rather than same-sex relationships). Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) conducted a study in which eleven heterosexual participants who had been through a breakup within the last year were interviewed regarding their breakup experiences, and any changes they perceived as being a result of their breakup. For these participants, previous experience with breakups was helpful in knowing how to cope in the aftermath of another breakup. These participants also found the level of contact with the ex-partner to have an effect on their coping, with frequent contact impacting coping in a negative way.

Individual characteristics and personality traits can impact the selection of coping strategies, and certain coping strategies may be most helpful when dealing with a relationship breakup. For example, Headey and Wearing (1990) found instrumental coping strategies (i.e., logical analysis, information seeking and problem solving) were effective for dealing with a range of situations, including personal relationship events such as a broken engagement, separation, or divorce, but affective regulation and avoidance strategies were damaging. The authors found that instrumental strategies were selected most often by women, persons of high socioeconomic status, and individuals with greater openness to feelings and a specific component of extraversion (warmth).

As previously stated, gender plays an undeniable role in coping, including coping with a relationship termination. It is possible that men and women focus on different aspects of the same situation. In *Divorce Talk*, a book describing a qualitative study of divorce, Riessman (1990) explained that where men tend to define divorce as a personal failure, women do not. Rather, women focus on their achievements after marriage. Riessman highlighted the positive consequences of divorce that many women reported experiencing: learning to be alone, becoming more self-reliant and less dependent, and achieving independence, autonomy, and a greater sense of control. It is possible that these findings generalize to non-marital romantic relationship breakups as well.

#### *Coping and Initiator Status*

Initiator status (the individual instigating the breakup is the “initiator”) plays a large role in the perception of control over a breakup, and thus the ability to cope with the breakup. At times, only one partner (the initiator) decides to end a marriage. When this happens, “the second spouse has little choice but to accept that decision” (Levinger, 1983, p. 354), and the same could be said for dating relationships. Sprecher (1994) described the initiator in a case like this as having “desirable control” (p. 206).

In an effort to explore similarities and differences in the two sides of a relationship breakup, Sprecher (1994) found that non-initiators (those left by a partner) reported more distress than initiators. Frazier and Cook (1993) also found non-initiators to have recovered less well and to perceive the breakup as more stressful. As some authors have concluded, it is likely that a breakup is easier to cope with if it is desired by oneself rather than being imposed by another (Hill et al., 1976). This is not to say that a breakup is “easy” for initiators, by any means. In their qualitative study of college student



relationship breakups, Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) found that even participants who initiated breakups described a significant sense of loss.

However, the initiator may also be at an advantage in terms of preparing for and anticipating the change, thereby making the process easier. For example, Hagestad and Smyer (1982) found that spouses who began the process of disengagement earlier in the relationship felt more positively about their divorce than spouses who did not. In a college student sample, Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) also found that “initiators often began to grieve before they had ended their relationship, whereas noninitiators were rarely aware of their impending breakup and could, therefore, only begin to grieve afterwards” (p. 6). Overall, stressors are perceived as less threatening when they are under one’s own control (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001).

The other key aspect of perceived control over a breakup is responsibility (i.e., which partner was to blame for the problems in the relationship). In contrast to the desirable control described previously, Sprecher (1994) labeled this aspect as “undesirable control” (p. 206). Again, gender seems to play a role; Sprecher found that men blamed themselves as much as they blamed women. However, women were less likely to blame themselves than to blame their partner. There were no significant associations between this “undesirable control” and emotional reactions.

Based on the findings of Lloyd and Cate (1985) from their study of attributions for changes in relationships, initiator status is associated with the types of attributions made about a breakup. Their findings revealed that initiators made less dyadic and more individual attributions than non-initiators or ex-partners who perceived their relationship breakup as mutual.

### *Coping and Attributions*

Buck (2006) used a three-factor measure of coping, the Problem-Focused Styles of Coping (Heppner et al., 1995), in a study of attributions, coping strategies, and posttraumatic growth following relationship breakup. After failing to find many meaningful correlations between attributions and coping strategies, Buck concluded that a measure of a different type of coping, such as emotion-focused coping, may have been more appropriate due to the heightened level of emotions most people experience during a relationship breakup. When emotions run high, they are likely to influence not only how one copes, but the types of attributions made as well. The current research intends to use more than one measure of coping.

### Social Support

#### *General Considerations*

Caplan (1974) described social support as lasting interpersonal relationships among individuals who can be counted on to offer emotional support and assistance when needed. There is likely a positive relationship between social support and emotional support, described as support that strengthens self-esteem and self-confidence; as emotional support increases, so should self-esteem and self-confidence (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996). Each of these traits is often bruised by the termination of a close romantic relationship. However, there is some evidence suggesting that an individual's appraisal of support, not the actual contacts, is the key component of social support (Antonucci & Israel, 1986), and the perception of support does not always correspond with actual support (Frazier, Tix, Klein, Arikian, 2000). Sarason, Sarason, Shearin and Pierce (1987) stated that the perception of support is important because it is translated

into a view of being loved and valued. In turn, feeling loved and valued can make a significant difference when an individual is faced with adversity.

Sarason, Levine, Basham, and Sarason (1983) developed the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) to measure perceived social support. The measure included two subscales: the Number score, indicating how many people an individual has supporting them in 27 various situations (e.g., “Whom can you count on to console you when you are very upset?”), and the Satisfaction score, measuring how satisfied the individual is with that support, on a 6-point Likert scale. Generally speaking, an individual who attains a high total score on the SSQ perceives his/her environment to be supportive when necessary.

Perceived social support has been found to be positively correlated with measures of extraversion and negatively correlated with measures of trait anxiety and neuroticism (Sarason et al., 1987; Sarason et al., 1983). Congruent with these findings, some authors have argued that perceived social support may be a personality characteristic (Heller & Swindle, 1983). Other authors have believed that perceived social support is a learned experience which develops based on past experiences with supportive others, such as one’s parents (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1996). Whether perceived social support is a personality characteristic or a learned behavior, it is related to coping in that if an individual feels supported, he/she more accurately and positively appraises himself/herself and others, and may cope with problems more effectively (Pierce et al., 1996). Pierce et al. added that perceived social support may impact coping by reducing the stressful situations people put themselves in, leading people to develop individual coping skills, and leading people to ask for help when they need it. As might be expected,

perceived low social support is associated with poor coping behavior (Sarason & Sarason, 1986), psychosomatic complaints (Theorell, 1976), and psychological distress (Dean & Lin, 1977).

Although similar to each other in some ways, there is a significant distinction between relationship-specific social support and general perceived social support (Pierce et al., 1996). Relationship-specific support refers to an individual feeling supported within the context of an established relationship in which there are expectations of support (e.g., supportive behaviors within a romantic relationship). General perceived social support refers to the individual's perception of support from the larger environment. These two types of support are related (Pierce et al.). For example, an individual's experience with relationship-specific support can influence general perceptions of support, either positively or negatively. Conflicting evidence regarding the benefits of social support in the literature may be due to which type of social support is measured.

Sarason, Sarason, Shearin and Pierce (1987) developed a short measure of social support, the SSQ6, derived from the previously mentioned Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983). In their first of two studies, three of the twenty-seven items on the SSQ were given with and compared to the SSQ. The authors named this three-item measure the SSQ3 and items included: "Who accepts you totally, including both your worst and your best points?" "Whom can you really count on to tell you, in a thoughtful manner, when you need to improve in some way?" and "Whom do you feel truly loves you deeply?" Although the SSQ3 and SSQ were found to be very similar, after a second study, the authors decided the six-item version of the SSQ

(SSQ6) was more psychometrically desirable (i.e., had greater internal reliability, ranging from .90-.93). The items on the SSQ6 were open-ended and included one of the previously listed items that was used in the second measure, in addition to five similar items asking participants by whom they feel supported in a range of situations. It was concluded that, “because the SSQ6 is psychometrically sound and when time of administration is a consideration, the SSQ6 is an acceptable substitute for the SSQ” (Sarason et al., 1987, p. 506).

Sokolski and Hendrick (1999) modified the SSQ6 measure into a Likert format, and after each item asking how many people the respondent has in his/her life that provide support of various kinds, Sokolski and Hendrick added, “is one of them your partner?” This revised 12-item version of the SSQ6 will be used for the current research. As previously stated, inconsistent evidence in the literature may be due to a lack of clarity regarding whether general social support or relationship-specific social support is being measured. Sokolski and Hendrick’s measure is ideal due to its inclusion of six items measuring general social support (the original SSQ6 items) and another six measuring relationship-specific support. By measuring both forms of social support, this study is attempting to avoid the problem of conflicting findings faced by many other social support researchers.

### *Social Support and Coping*

Coping is also related to social support which, according to Holahan, Moos and Schaefer (1996), can strengthen coping efforts. Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1996) explained, “When defined in terms of a coping response, social support refers to the receipt of supportive behaviors from others in an individual’s social network” (p. 436).

Social support may have an impact on the kind of coping strategy used by individuals.

For example, Terry, Rawle and Callan (1995) found that for women who had given birth one month prior to participating in their study, social support during pregnancy was negatively related to avoidant strategies and positively related to approach strategies.

Stanton, Kirk, Cameron and Danoff-Burg's (2000) findings suggest that in an amenable, supportive environment, emotional expression is adaptive for both genders.

Alternatively, it is possible that coping strategies utilized by people impact the social support they receive (Frazier et al., 2000). Heller and Swindle (1983) construed the relationship to be bi-directional: social support not only affects the individual, but the individual affects the type of social support as well as the amount. Finally, although there is little evidence to support this hypothesis, the two constructs simply may not influence each other, as described by Frazier et al. (2000) in their longitudinal study of renal transplant recipients.

Heller and Swindle (1983) attempted to explain some of the vagueness in the social support literature. In addition to the previously mentioned bi-directional relationship between social support and coping, the authors urged researchers to remember that this relationship is also developmental, implying that changes occur over time. Furthermore, the authors explained that each individual's present level of support is directly related to his or her past support, and the amount of support an individual has at any given time can change due to life events (e.g., relationship breakup). It is when researchers fail to recognize these intricacies that the literature becomes clouded (Heller & Swindle, 1983).

Applying this idea to the current study, social support may play a different role for an individual before a breakup, during a breakup, and after a breakup. For example, a couple may have mutual friends before a breakup, providing each partner with a sense of support. However, during a breakup when an individual is losing his/her partner (a significant member of his/her social support network), he/she may rely more on friends for companionship and consolation than before the breakup. It is also possible that while going through a breakup an individual may become depressed, leading “fair-weather friends” to avoid him/her, reducing available social support. After a breakup, he or she may become withdrawn from the social group previously shared with the partner, electing not to put him/herself in social situations with mutual friends, and relying more on family members, newfound friends, or a new partner.

As mentioned previously, social support is only one of the many variables related to coping. Heller and Swindle (1983) emphasized the importance of not focusing solely on social support while studying coping. By including a social support measure in addition to more than one measure of coping, the current research hopes to avoid this problem.

### *Social Support and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction*

Literature attempting to understand relationship satisfaction often focuses on conflict within the relationship. However, Cramer (2004a, 2004b) suggested that satisfaction in relationships may be better studied if the focus is switched from conflict to support, which seems to have a stronger role. Cutrona (1996a) explained that spousal support decreases the risk of isolation of each partner from the other in times of stress, helps prevent depression, and helps establish connectedness between the two partners in a

relationship. Feeling supported in a relationship potentially increases emotional intimacy between the partners as well (Cutrona, 1996a). Thus, social support is related to higher levels of satisfaction in relationships.

Naturally, individuals in romantic relationships want to feel as though they are supported by their partner, both generally and in especially trying times. Baxter (1986) argued that this expectation is so strong it is deserving of the status of a “relationship rule,” meaning that the absence of support may be a relationship deal-breaker. Cutrona (1996b) explained that this feeling of support can be established by displaying concern for one’s partner, and acting in ways that reassure as well as convey understanding and a willingness to help. Cutrona argued that a survival of any intimate relationship is at least partly dependent on these types of supportive acts.

Sokolski and Hendrick (1999) found that men and women who perceived greater social support from their partners had greater relationship satisfaction. Brobst, Clopton, and Hendrick (2009) found that for married couples with a child who had the disability of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), support from the spouse was related to relationship satisfaction of both partners, whereas general social support was not related to satisfaction. So again, how social support is measured and the type of social support being measured can impact findings.

Cutrona (1996b) explained that social support, or responding to another’s needs, is linked heavily to other important aspects of close relationships, such as love and trust. Caring for someone else is usually included when one thinks about the components of love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Indeed, Kelley (1983) argued that caring is central to how love is currently conceptualized. Supportive behaviors, like those mentioned



previously by Cutrona, establish trust. With trust, each partner believes in the other's commitment to the relationship and to them. Cutrona stated that with this kind of trust, attributions regarding minor deviations are usually situational rather than personal faults of the partner. To expand on one of Cutrona's examples, within the context of a trusting relationship, if a husband is supposed to call after work and does not, his wife will likely attribute this to something situational, such as being kept late by the boss, rather than assuming he is out looking for alternative partners.

If the survival of any relationship is at least partially dependent on supportive behaviors (e.g., displaying concern for one's partner, acting in ways that reassure, convey understanding and a willingness to help), it follows that the lack of these behaviors is detrimental. In the absence of these supportive behaviors and the ensuing important components of a relationship (e.g., love, trust), the dyad is threatened. Indeed, in Baxter's (1986) study of breakup accounts, lack of support was often cited as a cause of relationship demise.

### *Social Support and Coping with Relationship Breakup*

Ideally, in a romantic relationship both individuals support one another in difficult times. Thus, coping with a relationship breakup may be particularly complicated because an individual is likely losing one of the major supportive relationships in his/her life. This loss forces the individual to find other supportive relationships (e.g., family, friends, another partner) to play the role that the ex-partner once did (Pierce et al., 1996). However, it is likely that some relationship breakups are caused by a lack of support between partners. In that case, ex-partners would not experience the added strain of losing a key part of their support network due to their breakup.

At the present time it is unclear what role social support plays in a relationship breakup. Some authors have found positive social support to be associated with better adjustment following the termination of a close relationship (Frazier & Cook, 1993). Yet, in a study examining the relationship between attachment and social support on college student adjustment to relationship breakup, social support failed to predict adjustment after a breakup (Moller, Fouladi, McCarthy, & Hatch, 2003).

Larger amounts of social support have also been linked to less everyday stress for individuals following a divorce (Sansom & Farnill, 1997). Sansom and Farnill's examples of everyday stressors included such things as adjusting to a different standard of living, arranging child care, and interacting with the ex-spouse. However, Frazier and Cook (1993) found that social support did not make the breakup itself any less stressful for their unmarried participants. The authors concluded that a breakup will likely be perceived as stressful regardless of the amount of social support an individual has, but social support may be key in recovering from the breakup faster.

Holahan, Moos, and Schaefer (1996) stated that coping efforts can be strengthened by social resources that provide emotional support. Emotional support, in turn, can increase self-esteem and self-confidence; attributes often negatively affected by a relationship breakup. As seen above, with or without social support, relationship breakups can still be very stressful for some individuals, but there is a potential "silver-lining," which will be discussed next.

## Posttraumatic Growth

### *General Considerations*

Although the research focusing on the negative impact of crisis is vast, very little has been done that examines the relationship between adversity and positive outcomes. This gap in research is likely because “psychologists understand vulnerabilities and illness better than adaptive strengths and health; they are better prepared to treat disorder than to promote well-being and personal growth” (Holahan et al., 1996, p. 24). However, this trend is shifting toward a focus on positive health, encompassing physical, mental and social domains (Seeman, 1989). For example, the idea that a period of crisis in one’s life offers opportunity for change, a concept labeled stress-related growth (Park, Cohen & Murch, 1996; Park & Fenster, 2004) is now being explored. There is little difference between stress-related growth and a similar concept called posttraumatic growth (PTG), which also explores the idea of finding a “silver-lining” in what would otherwise be periods of only crisis (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Posttraumatic growth is also similar to the construct of resilience, or responding positively to hardship. However, unlike resilience, posttraumatic growth “refers to reports of positive changes in individuals that occur as the result of attempts to cope in the aftermath of traumatic life events” (Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005, p. 233). Resilience does not encompass the change that is a defining characteristic of posttraumatic growth. The authors go on to emphasize that a person need not have worked through all his/her distress from the trauma before experiencing growth; it is not the trauma which is responsible for the growth, but rather the struggle to cope during the aftermath of the trauma. Tedeschi, Calhoun and Cann (2007) explained that a common misunderstanding of posttraumatic growth is that it offsets the negative impact that an individual experiences due to trauma, when in fact growth is often experienced simultaneous to pain

and grief. Another misunderstanding that these authors attempted to clarify is the difference between resource gain and posttraumatic growth. Increased meaning in one's spiritual life and greater compassion for others, both examples of growth used by the authors, "go well beyond comforting oneself and simply feeling better or having more free time" (p. 401). Resource gain refers to positive benefits such as these, but lacks the meaning and self-realization component that posttraumatic growth encompasses (Tedeschi, Calhoun & Cann, 2007).

As previously mentioned, stress-related growth and posttraumatic growth are very similar. However, two recently developed measures, the Stress-Related Growth Scale (SRGS) developed by Park, Cohen and Murch (1996), and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), have produced conflicting results concerning whether the construct of growth is unidimensional or multidimensional.

Park, Cohen and Murch's (1996) Stress-Related Growth Scale is based on the conceptualization of determinants of stress-related growth developed by Schaefer and Moos (1992). Specifically, Schaefer and Moos claimed characteristics of the person and the environment, characteristics of the negative event, and behavior used to cope with the event determined stress-related growth. Building on this categorization, Park, Cohen and Murch generated items within these domains (i.e., positive changes in personal resources, social resources and coping skills). Despite having predicted three factors, Park et al. (1996) found nearly all items on their original scale loaded on one general factor. After omitting items and changing the wording of some items from a positive to a negative direction, Armeli, Gunthert and Cohen (2001) found a revised version of the Stress-

Related Growth Scale to be multidimensional. The authors concluded that this multifactor solution represented stress-related growth more adequately than the previous scale had. However, minimal research using this scale has been conducted. As a result, a more widely used measure supporting a multidimensional structure of growth will be used in the current study: the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI).

The authors of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), identified three realms in which positive change occurs after a traumatic event: changes in philosophy of life, changes in oneself, and changes in interpersonal relationships. Similar to the development of the Stress-Related Growth Scale, development of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory began by generating items within these categories. The results of a principal components analysis yielded five factors: New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change and Appreciation of Life (details of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory will follow). Likely due to the similarity in theory between stress-related growth and posttraumatic growth, there is little difference in scale item content between the Stress-Related Growth Scale (e.g., “You learned to be open to communicate more honestly with others,” “You learned to be a more confident person”) and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (e.g., “I am more willing to express my emotions,” “I discovered that I’m stronger than I thought I was”).

#### *Posttraumatic Growth and Relationship Breakup*

Growth has been reported in the aftermath of events such as rape (Burt & Katz, 1987), bereavement (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1989-1990; Schwartzberg & Janoff-Bulman, 1991), HIV (Schwartzberg, 1994), cancer (Collins, Taylor, & Skokan, 1990; Taylor, 1983), heart attack (Affleck, Tennen, & Croog, 1987), and disasters (Thompson, 1985).

To some individuals, these types of traumas and tragedies may seem more severe than a relationship termination, making the term “posttraumatic growth” seemingly inappropriate when applied to a breakup. However, the types of growth being measured by the posttraumatic growth inventory certainly are not necessarily unusual for an individual having experienced a breakup (e.g., increased feelings of self-reliance, a sense of increased closeness with others, increased religious faith). Additionally, the reader is encouraged to keep in mind that posttraumatic growth does not follow every adverse experience that people encounter, but rather only those which threaten one’s core beliefs (Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2007). Because there is subjectivity involved in the appraisal of a stressor, no two individuals will interpret it in the same way, even two partners who are leaving the same relationship (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001). So growth should not be expected for those individuals who do not perceive their breakup as being especially threatening or stressful, but rather only those for whom the breakup initiates a reexamination of beliefs. Within the subgroup of individuals who experience growth after facing adversity, growth varies from person to person, ranging from private changes in one’s view of self, to very social and public changes (Bloom, 1998; Tedeschi, Calhoun & Cann, 2007).

Thus, if the above information is true, and what Simpson (1987) claims about the loss of a partner being one of the most “distressing and traumatic experiences that life has to offer” (p. 683) is valid, it should follow that posttraumatic growth is also feasible after the termination of a close romantic relationship. In a study of attributions, coping strategies, and posttraumatic growth after a relationship breakup, Buck (2006) tested this idea and found that indeed, posttraumatic growth was experienced by some individuals.

As hypothesized, a significant positive correlation was found between the use of reflective coping strategies and posttraumatic growth for both men and women. A significant positive relationship was found for men between suppressive coping and posttraumatic growth, as well as between reactive coping and posttraumatic growth. No significant associations were found for women between either suppressive or reactive coping and posttraumatic growth. Person, other and relational attributions were positively related to posttraumatic growth for men. For women, only relational attributions were positively associated with posttraumatic growth.

Using the terms “stress-related growth” and “posttraumatic growth” interchangeably, Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) conducted a qualitative study to examine what kind of changes college students experience after a romantic relationship breakup and the process through which these changes, if any, occur. Their 11 participants consisted of 6 women and 5 men, all of whom identified as heterosexual. Of the 69 changes reported by participants, 64 of those were positive, with each participant reporting at least one positive change. The authors specified that the most commonly cited positive changes mentioned (in order) were: learning something beneficial for relationships in the future, gaining personal strength and learning how to deal with stressful life events, feeling more independent, increased self-awareness and maturity, and reprioritizing. Needless to say, the authors concluded that “change and personal growth can arise through the experience of a breakup” (p. 5). However, these findings were not without a caveat; there was variation among Hebert and Popadiuk’s participants in terms of the amount of time it took individual participants to experience changes and growth.

Based on their interviews with participants, Hebert and Popadiuk (2008) formed a “model of change and personal growth following breakups” (p. 5). This model consisted of a core category, moving self forward, and three phases: experiencing a loss, pulling apart, and moving beyond. Moving self forward was defined by the authors as a movement away from the painful breakup towards closure, while focusing on growth and change, and continuing to set goals and be active. This core category was bi-directionally related to each of the three phases in the circular model that surrounded it. To use the authors’ language, during the first phase, experiencing a loss, participants “surveyed the damage,” meaning they were become aware of the implications of the breakup. During the second phase, pulling apart, participants went through “the process of separating from an ex-partner physically, emotionally, and symbolically,” usually causing significant anger or distress (p. 6). However, it was during this second phase that many participants in this study became aware of at least one positive change stemming from their relationships ending (e.g., having learned something, increased freedom). By the third phase, moving beyond, the distress that participants felt so strongly before began to dissipate. In addition, the authors noted that participants now had an improved ability to grow, a greater self-connection, and paid more attention to their own feelings, desires and needs. Because college is a time of maturation for most students, and maturation is similar to the types of growth mentioned here, Hebert and Popadiuk explicitly stated that these changes were distinguishable from normal maturation in that they were more pronounced, and participants believed the changes occurred rapidly. Similar lines of reasoning differentiating growth from maturation have been argued by other authors (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).



*Posttraumatic Growth and Coping*

Snyder and Pulvers (2001) proposed that the connection between stress, coping and growth may be due to an increased flexibility in thinking. The authors explained that individuals are forced to appraise a stressor, pair it with a sufficient coping strategy (potentially shifting back and forth between more than one), and then monitor how well that coping works. This process would necessitate flexible thinking, a possible prerequisite to growth.

In an attempt to better understand the relationship between coping and posttraumatic growth after a breakup, Buck (2006) found reflective (e.g., planning, reflecting), reactive (e.g., distortion, impulsivity) and suppressive (e.g., escapism, denial) coping strategies were all positively associated with posttraumatic growth for men. However, reflective coping was the only strategy found to be positively associated with growth for women. The author explained that the men who experienced growth after their breakup might have been willing to try multiple coping strategies, but for women, reflective coping, including such things as planning for the future, can be empowering, leading to growth.

In *Divorce Talk*, a book previously described, Riessman (1990) explained that where men tend to define divorce as a personal failure, women focus on their achievements after marriage such as learning to be alone, becoming more self-reliant and less dependent, and achieving independence and autonomy. It is possible that these findings generalize to a non-marital romantic relationship termination, and help explain why reflective coping was the only strategy found to be associated with posttraumatic growth for women.

The current study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of this vague link between coping and posttraumatic growth. Other authors are also in support of this quest, such as Holahan et al., (1996) who stated, “Research on stress and coping, in its progression from illness, to resilience, and finally to growth, mirrors a process of expansion and discovery necessary throughout the field of psychology” (p. 24). The field’s increasing interest in “positive” psychology can help people focus on their personal strengths as they cope with strife and find benefits in their life struggles.

*Posttraumatic Growth, Coping and Social Support*

Life crises can do many things, one of which is that they “often necessitate help-seeking that can foster deeper social bonds and enduring confidant relationships” (Holahan et al., 1996, p. 33). Ironically, when faced with many forms of crisis (e.g., AIDS, death, natural disaster, divorce), it is often losing a loved one which most challenges us, but which has the potential to lead us to better relationships. As captured by the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory subscale, ‘Relating to Others’ (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), an individual may grow in his/her relationships in the aftermath of a crisis. Although the intricacies of these interrelated constructs are fascinating and poorly understood, Armeli et al. (2001) offered support that in addition to the occurrence of an event perceived as stressful (and assumed to be severe enough to challenge us), support resources and adaptive coping strategies (Holahan et al.) are also prerequisites for growth. Additional research, such as the current study, is warranted in order to further understand these relationships.

*Attributions, Relationship Breakup and Posttraumatic Growth*

Based on the research of Berscheid, Lopes, Ammazalorso, and Langenfeld (2001), it has been argued that making attributions regarding the cause for failure of a past relationship is the only way individuals can correct these problems in their next relationship (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Learning from one's past mistakes and not repeating them in a new relationship is one potential benefit from a relationship breakup.

Tashiro and Frazier (2003) argued that both the prevalence of distressing relationship breakups and the frequency of such breakups throughout one's life (most people experience more than one breakup) are important reasons to conduct research in this area. These authors developed a measure based on a variation of Kelley et al.'s (1983) categories of causal attributions, but specifically regarding relationship breakup. The authors labeled four relevant types of attributions: *Person*, *Other*, *Relational*, and *Environmental* (brief descriptions taken from Buck, 2006, follow). The Tashiro and Frazier (2003) measure will be used in the current research.

*Person* attributions refer to attributions based on a person's own traits, physical characteristics, abilities and beliefs (e.g., my dishonesty). The literature is unclear regarding the outcome of this type of attribution. *Person* attributions have been found to be related to less negative emotion (Sprecher, 1994). However, Choo, Levine, and Hatfield (1996) found *Person* attributions to be related to less positive emotion and more negative emotion. In Buck's (2006) study, there were no significant associations between *Person* attributions and posttraumatic growth for women, but there was a significant association between these variables for men.

*Other* attributions refer to attributions based on the person's partner, such as the partner's personal traits, physical characteristics, abilities and beliefs (e.g., my partner's

dishonesty). These types of attributions have been related to distress and negative emotions (Choo et al., 1996). However, Buck (2006) found *Other* attributions to be significantly related to posttraumatic growth for men but not for women.

*Relational* attributions refer to attributions that reflect a combination or an interaction of the previous two attribution styles (*Person* and *Other*). These attributions focus on how the two partners relate to each other (e.g., lack of common interests). Divorced individuals who make these types of attributions regarding their previous marriage have been found to be happier, more confident and more socially active (Newman & Langer, 1981). Stephen (1987) found that individuals who make *Relational* attributions regarding a breakup are less distressed than other individuals. In support of this previous research, Buck (2006) found significant statistical relationships for both men and women between *Relational* attributions and posttraumatic growth.

*Environmental* attributions refer to those attributions that involve the social and physical environments surrounding the relationship (e.g., school stress, money difficulties). There has been very little attention paid to the relationship between this type of attribution and distress (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Tashiro and Frazier found that those individuals who made more *Environmental* attributions also experienced more growth, but Buck (2006) failed to find any significant relationships between *Environmental* attributions and posttraumatic growth for men or women.

As previously discussed, trust is established through supportive behaviors that display reassurance, concern, understanding and a willingness to help (Cutrona, 1996b). Trust is an important component of relationship satisfaction. Cutrona stated that with trust, attributions regarding minor deviations are usually situational rather than personal.

To use Tashiro and Frazier's (2003) language, partners with trust make more "environmental" rather than "other" attributions. Without trust, partners may make more negative attributions about their partner or the relationship, likely leading to less satisfaction and possible failure of the relationship.

### Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction has been referred to as a relationship well-being "barometer" (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and refers to an individual's subjective experience of how satisfied they are in their relationship. Relationship satisfaction has been found to play a role in relationship stability and quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Because satisfaction plays a role in relationship stability, it is not surprising that Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler (1988) found couples who were more likely to break up were those lower in satisfaction.

A number of factors have been linked to satisfaction in relationships. For example, satisfaction in a relationship is related to the attachment styles of the partners, optimally with each partner having a secure style (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000). Hendrick et al. (1988) found the presence of a certain love style, passionate love, and the absence of another, game-playing love, to be positively related to relationship satisfaction. Sokolski and Hendrick (1999) found sexual satisfaction, commitment, spousal support, increased intimacy and self-disclosure to be positively related to satisfaction for both men and women. However, the correlations for women between relationship satisfaction and both general social support and task equity were significantly higher than those for men.

Although some factors contribute differently to men and women's satisfaction in relationships, research has shown that both genders report experiencing comparable levels of satisfaction (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau, 1997). In addition, satisfaction levels in same-sex relationships parallel levels reported in opposite-sex relationships (Peplau & Spaulding, 2000).

Because relationship concerns are a common reason people present in therapy and because satisfaction is important in relationships, researchers have strived to create a measure of satisfaction that is user-friendly and useful. S. Hendrick (1988) enlarged the focus of her previous Marital Assessment Questionnaire (1981), originally designed to provide a short measure of marriage relationship satisfaction, to all romantic relationships. A single factor, seven-item, Likert scale with sound and consistent psychometric properties (S. Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998), the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), was the end result and will be used in the current study. In addition to its brevity, what is especially advantageous about the RAS is its ability to provide information regarding specific aspects of satisfaction, such as regrets about the relationship.

#### *Relationship Satisfaction and Respect*

As previously mentioned, romantic relationship breakup can be especially difficult in that the termination of a close relationship means losing one's partner. In theory, one's partner is a strong social support. Individuals in romantic relationships reveal many aspects of themselves and their lives to their partner, and this self-disclosure and spousal support (for marriages specifically) is linked to relationship satisfaction (Baxter, 1979; Hendrick, 1981; Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). Relationship satisfaction is

also strongly correlated with a person's level of perceived self-respect and respect for their partner within a romantic relationship (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006).

The concept of respect is infrequently studied and unclearly defined, despite its seemingly obvious importance to relationships. Although respect is essential in all relationships, Frei and Shaver (2002) argued that there may be something unique about respect in close relationships specifically. Respect has been labeled as one of the four core relationship values by Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg (1994), alongside forgiveness, intimacy and commitment. Presently it is unclear whether respect is a completely separate entity from other aspects of close relationships. For example, in their development of the Respect For Partner Scale, Frei and Shaver found such a strong positive correlation between respect and relationship satisfaction ( $r = .73$ ), they argued that these two may really represent the same construct.

In her writings on respect, sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) explained that respect for others will often be returned. She further described six themes of respect: empowerment (helping others believe in themselves), curiosity (genuine interest in the experience of others), dialogue (communicating in an authentic fashion), attention (engaging with others), healing (nurturing others), and self-respect (appreciating one's own qualities). Although Lawrence-Lightfoot's terminology was not used, terms representing similar constructs were identified by participants in Frei and Shaver's (2002) study as being important features of respect (e.g., honest, sensitive to feelings, listening). The authors were attempting to operationalize respect, which they found to be more of an attitude than an emotion.

Conceptually based on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2000) qualities that characterize respect, Hendrick and Hendrick (2006) developed the six-item Respect Toward Partner Scale. Similar to Frei and Shaver (2002), the authors found that respect was correlated with relationship satisfaction, commitment and self-disclosure. The Respect Toward Partner Scale was also correlated with the Respect For Partner Scale (Frei & Shaver).

In a study of marital satisfaction, couples were given the opportunity to answer an open-ended question regarding their opinion of the most important aspects of a successful marriage (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). In order, the top ten most common themes mentioned were communication, spiritual/religion, trust, commitment, love, respect, friendship, understanding, intimacy and sharing/caring. Thus, if the presence of these variables is associated with having a successful relationship, an absence of these variables may cause dissatisfaction in a relationship. In other words, low levels of these variables may be causes for a breakup. It then follows that if one can appropriately identify causes for past breakups and grow from the breakup experiences, one might then be more satisfied in future relationships. Because relationships play such a large role in most people's lives, if an individual values relationships and is satisfied in his/her relationships, he/she may be more likely to be satisfied with life overall.

#### Life Satisfaction

Along with positive and negative affect, life satisfaction is an element of subjective well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Subjective well-being is a construct regarding an individual's opinion about his or her quality of life. Where positive and negative affect account for the emotional component of well-being, life satisfaction accounts for the cognitive component (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Just as



every individual appraises situations differently, each individual will also determine her/his own level of satisfaction based on things that are personally important and valued (e.g., relationships, money, health). Along with emotional well-being and physical health, life satisfaction has been linked to positive psychological health in college-aged students (Levy, 2003).

As might be expected, an individual's level of subjective well-being may change while the individual experiences life's "ups and downs." Headey and Wearing (1989) proposed an equilibrium model to explain this somewhat transient characteristic. Although circumstances encountered by an individual will temporarily influence his or her level of subjective well-being, it more often than not returns to a baseline level (Headey & Wearing, 1989).

For many people, life's "ups and downs" include being in and out of romantic relationships. For example, married individuals testify to greater happiness and satisfaction with life than unmarried, divorced or separated individuals (Myers, 2000). However, Myers explained that being in an unhappy marriage reverses this finding, making divorced and separated individuals happier than married people. In this way, relationship satisfaction appears to be highly correlated with life satisfaction.

Satisfaction with life also appears to be related, both directly and indirectly, to a number of other types of satisfaction. For example, relationship satisfaction is a prerequisite of sorts in order for women to obtain sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2001; Byers, 2005), and sexual satisfaction, along with marital satisfaction, is vital to the maintenance of life satisfaction for women (Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996).

Satisfaction with one's social network is also likely related to overall life satisfaction. For most individuals, an ideal life would include having people around them who care: a partner or spouse, friends, family members, co-workers, a faith community, or whoever else might provide social support when necessary. Subsequently, having social support likely increases one's overall satisfaction with life. Interestingly, in a validation study of the Satisfaction with Life Scale, Pavot, Diener, Colvin and Sandvik (1991) gathered family and peer reports (at least three of each) about participants' positive and negative affect. Readers are reminded that positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction are the three components of subjective well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976). The authors found high convergence between self reports and social network reports, which they concluded is evidence that subjective well being, including life satisfaction, is stable and global.

Keeping in mind that social support can strengthen coping efforts (Holahan, Moos & Schaefer, 1996), one could speculate that those individuals higher in life satisfaction, previously shown to be linked to social support, would use more adaptive coping strategies. The current study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between these constructs.

Life satisfaction and posttraumatic growth are likely interrelated as well. Growth in the aftermath of adversity would ideally lead an individual to become more satisfied with her/his life overall. As mentioned previously, each individual has a baseline level of subjective well-being, and thus life satisfaction. After experiencing a serious life challenge, that level falls below average and posttraumatic growth may be responsible for its rebound to the baseline level. Not surprisingly, given this interrelatedness between life

satisfaction and posttraumatic growth, items within the two scales being used in this study also share similarities. For example, “I have changed my priorities about what is important in life” on the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory is similar to the item “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life” on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. And, the item “I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life” on the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory is similar to the item “I am satisfied with my life” on the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

### The Current Study

The first purpose of this study was to better understand how the attribution(s) and coping strategies associated with romantic relationship termination are associated with each other and the level of posttraumatic growth experienced following the breakup. Making attributions, otherwise known as account-making, can help individuals regain a sense of control over the breakup and give individuals a new sense of self as well as a greater sense of predictability about the future (Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti & Garnick, 1986). Due to the stress and emotional distress that usually follows a romantic relationship breakup, coping is also an essential component of post-relationship adjustment. Coping-related variables found to be related to how an individual copes after a breakup include initiator status (Sprecher, 1994), social support, and controllability over the breakup (Frazier & Cook, 1993). Although not every individual who goes through a romantic relationship breakup will experience posttraumatic growth, for those individuals who perceive a breakup as threatening to their core beliefs (Tedeschi, Calhoun & Cann, 2007), growth is a plausible result. Indeed, Buck (2006) found certain coping strategies, specifically reflective, reactive, and suppressive coping strategies to be positively

associated with posttraumatic growth for men and reflective coping to be related to growth for women.

The present study also involved the relationships among relationship satisfaction, respect, and life satisfaction, and will explore how some of these variables relate to those variables previously mentioned. Respect has been found to be predictive of relationship satisfaction (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006; Frei & Shaver, 2002). Life satisfaction has been found to be directly and indirectly related to other forms of satisfaction, such as sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction, commitment, spousal support, increased intimacy and self-disclosure have all been found to be positively related to relationship satisfaction for both men and women (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). Because romantic relationships generally play such a large role in people's lives, relationship satisfaction is likely related to life satisfaction.

Factors contributing to relationship satisfaction such as trust and commitment established through the display of supportive behaviors, can influence the types of attributions individuals make regarding the actions of their partners (Cutrona, 1996b). A lack of these qualities can be detrimental to a relationship. In Baxter's (1986) study of breakup accounts, lack of support was often cited as a cause of relationship demise.

Unfortunately, many crises involve losing a loved one (e.g., AIDS, death, natural disaster, divorce). However, this loss has the potential to lead us to better relationships with others such as family, friends and God. Armeli et al. (2001) claimed that in addition to the occurrence of an event perceived as challenging and stressful, support resources and adaptive coping strategies (Holahan et al., 1996) are also fundamentals for growth.

The current research attempted to study the relationships among attributions, coping strategies, posttraumatic growth, relationship satisfaction, respect and life satisfaction in a unique way. Although each variable has been linked individually to others (e.g., attributions to coping, respect to relationship satisfaction), there is no known research to date attempting to understand the relationships among all of these constructs. The current research attempted to do so.

APPENDIX B  
BACKGROUND INVENTORY

**\*PLEASE DO NOT WRITE ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE PACKET. RECORD ALL OF YOUR RESPONSES ON THE SCANTRON FORM PROVIDED.**

**PLEASE ANSWER ALL ITEMS CAREFULLY.**  
**READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS.**

**BACKGROUND INVENTORY**

**Fill in the response that answers the questions most accurately for you.**

1. I am a: (A) Male (B) Female
  
2. My ethnicity/heritage is:
  - (A) Asian/Pacific Islander
  - (B) African-American
  - (C) Latino(a)/Hispanic
  - (D) Anglo/Caucasian
  - (E) Other
  
3. My age is:
  - (A) 18 or less
  - (B) 19-21
  - (C) 22-30
  - (D) 31-40
  - (E) 41 or over
  
4. Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?
  - (A) No
  - (B) Yes
  - (C) I have never been in a romantic relationship
  
5. Is your romantic partner:
  - (A) Male
  - (B) Female
  - (C) Not in a relationship
  
6. What is your relationship status?
  - (A) Not dating
  - (B) Casual dating
  - (C) Serious dating or engaged
  - (D) Married
  - (E) Divorced
  
7. If you are currently involved in a romantic relationship, is your relationship a sexual relationship?
  - (A) No, it is not sexual
  - (B) Yes, it is a sexual relationship
  - (C) Not in a relationship

8. How many previous romantic relationships have you been involved in?  
(A) None  
(B) One  
(C) Two  
(D) Three  
(E) Four or more
9. How long have you been in this romantic relationship?  
(A) One month or less  
(B) 1-3 months  
(C) Three months to a year  
(D) Over one year  
(E) Not in a romantic relationship
10. Are you in love now? If “Yes,” how long?  
(A) No  
(B) Yes, one month or less  
(C) Yes, one to three months  
(D) Yes, three months to one year  
(E) Yes, over one year
11. How many times have you been in love?  
(A) None  
(B) One  
(C) Two  
(D) Three to five  
(E) More than five
12. Do you live with your relationship partner?  
(A) Yes  
(B) No  
(C) Not in a romantic relationship
13. Have you experienced a romantic relationship breakup in the last 12 months?  
(A) No  
(B) Yes

**If you have EVER been through a romantic relationship breakup**, please complete the following questions (#17-31) based on your *most recent* breakup. **If you have never been through a romantic relationship breakup**, please select the answer that indicates that this is the case (i.e., “I have not been through a breakup”).

14. Was your romantic partner:  
(A) Male  
(B) Female  
(C) I have not been through a breakup



15. How long has it been since your relationship breakup?
- (A) 0-6 months
  - (B) 6-12 months
  - (C) 12-24 months
  - (D) 24 or more months
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
16. Who initiated this breakup?
- (A) myself
  - (B) my partner
  - (C) both of us
  - (D) other people
17. How old were you at the time your relationship ended?
- (A) 18 or less
  - (B) 19-21
  - (C) 22-30
  - (D) 31 or over
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
18. How old was your partner at the time your relationship ended?
- (A) 18 or less
  - (B) 19-21
  - (C) 22-30
  - (D) 31 or over
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
19. What was your relationship status?
- (A) Casual dating
  - (B) Serious dating or engaged
  - (C) Married
  - (D) Divorced
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
20. How long were you involved in this relationship?
- (A) 0-6 months
  - (B) 6-12 months
  - (C) 12-24 months
  - (D) 24 or more months
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
21. How would you rate the intensity of the breakup?
- (A) not very intense
  - (B) intense
  - (C) very intense
  - (D) I have not been through a breakup

22. Did you live with your relationship partner before the breakup?

- (A) No
- (B) Yes
- (C) I have not been through a breakup

23. How much control did you have over this breakup?

- (A) none
- (B) a small amount
- (C) a moderate amount
- (D) a large amount or total control
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

24. Was the breakup a challenge to you?

- (A) very much
- (B) somewhat
- (C) slightly
- (D) not at all
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

25. Was the breakup a threat to you?

- (A) very much
- (B) somewhat
- (C) slightly
- (D) not at all
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

26. Was the breakup a loss to you?

- (A) very much
- (B) somewhat
- (C) slightly
- (D) not at all
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

27. As a life event, how important was this breakup to you?

- (A) not important
- (B) slightly important
- (C) moderately important
- (D) very or extremely important
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

28. How stressful was this breakup to you?

- (A) not stressful
- (B) slightly stressful
- (C) moderately stressful
- (D) very or extremely stressful
- (E) I have not been through a breakup

29. Do you consider the breakup a problem right now?
- (A) no
  - (B) somewhat
  - (C) yes
  - (D) I have not been through a breakup
30. INCLUDING THIS ONE, how many breakups have you had since graduating high school?
- (A) one
  - (B) two
  - (C) three
  - (D) four or more
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup
31. How much time passed between your most recent breakup and your new relationship?
- (A) 0-12 months
  - (B) 12-24 months
  - (C) more than two years
  - (D) I have not begun dating again
  - (E) I have not been through a breakup

APPENDIX C

RELATIONSHIP BREAKUP ATTRIBUTION MEASURE

### Relationship Breakup Attribution Measure

The following items refer to possible causes that led to the decline and eventual breakup of your most recent past relationship. *If you have never been through a breakup*, please imagine which of the following attributions would likely cause one. Please indicate on your scantron form how much of a cause each item was using the following scale:

A-----B-----C-----D-----E  
Not at all                      Somewhat                      Very much  
a cause                              of a cause                              a cause

- 32. My mood
- 33. We had trouble communicating
- 34. Living far away from each other
- 35. My insensitivity
- 36. Partner's insensitivity
- 37. Partner's mood
- 38. Partner's demanding style
- 39. My dishonesty
- 40. Partner's dishonesty
- 41. The separateness of our social networks (e.g., few shared friends...)
- 42. Problems surrounding sexual activities
- 43. The fact that I needed a lot of personal space
- 44. Lack of companionship
- 45. The fact that my partner needed a lot of personal space
- 46. My need for or enjoyment in sexual activities
- 47. Different goals
- 48. Our friends were disruptive to our relationship
- 49. Partner's need for or enjoyment in sexual activities

50. My substance use (drinking, smoking, drug use, etc.)
51. Work stress
52. Lack of affection
53. My not needing to be in a relationship
54. Lack of common interests
55. My past experiences and background
56. My partner not needing to be in a relationship
57. School stress
58. Different expectations of the relationship
59. Money difficulties
60. My partner's past experience and background
61. Different needs
62. Time constraints
63. My reluctance to talk about important problems
64. Our living conditions
65. Difficulty resolving conflict
66. Partner's reluctance to talk about important problems
67. We were rarely in the same place at the same time (work, school...)

APPENDIX D  
PROBLEM-FOCUSED STYLE OF COPING

### **Problem-Focused Style of Coping**

Think about your most recent relationship breakup and how you reacted to it. *If you have never been through a relationship breakup*, please imagine how you might react. Please read each statement below, and indicate how often you used, or would imagine using, each item when responding to the breakup. In doing so, use the following alternatives:

- A. ALMOST NEVER
- B. OCCASIONALLY
- C. SOMETIMES
- D. OFTEN
- E. A GREAT DEAL

Please respond to the items as honestly as possible so as to accurately portray how frequently you did what is described in each item. Do not respond to the items as you think you should (i.e., what you should have done); rather respond in a way that most accurately reflects how you actually thought, felt, and behaved in response to the problem.

Some people may find that a number of these items are typical of the way they responded all of the time, other items were occasionally used, while others were almost never used as a response. For example, consider this statement:

I thought about past failures to help me solve this problem.

If you did this often in response to this specific relationship breakup, you would indicate D on your scantron.

**Do not mark on this inventory**; instead make your responses on the scantron answer sheet.

- 68. I was not really sure what I thought or believed about the relationship problem(s).
- 69. I didn't sustain my actions long enough to really solve the relationship problem(s).
- 70. I thought about ways that I solved similar relationship problems in the past.
- 71. I identified the causes of my emotions which helped me identify and solve the relationship problem(s).
- 72. I felt so frustrated I just gave up doing any work on the relationship problem(s) at all.
- 73. I considered the short-term and long-term consequences of each possible solution to the relationship problem(s).



74. I got preoccupied thinking about the relationship problem(s) and overemphasized some parts of it.
75. I continued to feel uneasy about the relationship problem(s), which told me I needed to do some more work.
76. My old feelings got in the way of solving this relationship problem(s).
77. I spent my time doing unrelated chores and activities instead of acting on the relationship problem(s).
78. I thought ahead, which enabled me to anticipate and prepare for the relationship problem(s) before it arose.
79. I thought the relationship problem(s) through in a systematic way.
80. I misread another person's motives and feelings without checking with the person to see if my conclusions were correct.
81. I got in touch with my feelings to identify and work on the relationship problem(s).
82. I acted too quickly, which made the relationship problem(s) worse.
83. I had a difficult time concentrating on the relationship problem(s) (i.e., my mind wandered).
84. I had alternate plans for solving the relationship problem(s) in case my first attempt did not work.
85. I avoided even thinking about the relationship problem(s).

APPENDIX E  
THE EMOTIONAL APPROACH COPING SCALE

### **The Emotional Approach Coping Scale**

Please read each statement below, and indicate how often you performed each item when responding to the relationship breakup. *If you have never been through a relationship breakup*, please imagine how you might react. In doing so, use the following alternatives:

A = I usually didn't do this at all

B = I did this occasionally

C = I did this often

D = I usually did this a lot

86. I let my feelings out.

87. I found a way to express my emotions.

88. I realized that my feelings are valid and important.

89. I took the time to figure out what I was really feeling.

90. I delved into my feelings to get a thorough understanding of them.

91. I allowed myself to express my emotions.

92. I acknowledged my emotions.

93. I found a way to understand my emotions better.

94. I explored my emotions.

95. I expressed the feelings I was having.

96. I looked closely at the reasons for my feelings.

97. I let my feelings come out freely.

98. I got my feelings out in the open.

99. I took time to express my emotions.

100. I worked on understanding my feelings.

101. I felt free to express my emotions.

APPENDIX F  
POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH INVENTORY

### Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of your most recent romantic relationship breakup. *If you have never been through a relationship breakup*, please imagine which changes might occur for you. In doing so, please use the following scale.

A = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.

B = I experienced this change **to a small degree** as a result of my crisis.

C = I experienced this change **to a moderate degree** as a result of my crisis.

D = I experienced this change **to a great degree** as a result of my crisis.

E = I experienced this change **to a very great degree** as a result of my crisis.

102. I changed my priorities about what is important in life.
103. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.
104. I developed new interests.
105. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.
106. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.
107. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.
108. I established a new path for my life.
109. I have a greater sense of closeness with others.
110. I am more willing to express my emotions.
111. I know better that I can handle difficulties.
112. I am able to do better things with my life.
113. I am better able to accept the way things work out.
114. I can better appreciate each day.
115. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.
116. I have more compassion for others.
117. I put more effort into my relationships.
118. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.
119. I have a stronger religious faith.
120. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.
121. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.
122. I better accept needing others.

APPENDIX G  
THE RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

**The Relationship Assessment Scale**

Please mark on the answer sheet the letter for each item which best answers that item for you. *If you are not currently in a romantic relationship*, please answer in terms of the same relationship you have considered in answering previous questions.

123. How well does your partner meet your needs?  
A B C D E  
Poorly Average Extremely well
124. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?  
A B C D E  
Unsatisfied Average Extremely satisfied
125. How good is your relationship compared to most?  
A B C D E  
Poor Average Excellent
126. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?  
A B C D E  
Never Average Very often
127. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?  
A B C D E  
Hardly at all Average Completely
128. How much do you love your partner?  
A B C D E  
Not much Average Very much
129. How many problems are there in your relationship?  
A B C D E  
Very few Average Very many

APPENDIX H  
THE RESPECT TOWARD PARTNER SCALE



### **The Respect Toward Partner Scale**

We are interested in how respect may be related to romantic relationships. Please answer the questions below with your current romantic partner in mind. *If you are not currently in a romantic relationship*, please answer in terms of the same relationship you have considered in answering previous questions.

For each statement:

- A** = Strongly agree with the statement
- B** = Moderately agree with the statement
- C** = Neutral—neither agree nor disagree
- D** = Moderately disagree with the statement
- E** = Strongly disagree with the statement

- 130. I respect my partner.
- 131. I am interested in my partner as a person.
- 132. I am a source of “healing” for my partner.
- 133. I honor my partner.
- 134. I approve of the person my partner is.
- 135. I communicate well with my partner.

APPENDIX I

THE SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE

### **The Satisfaction with Life Scale**

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-5 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate letter on the scantron form. Please be open and honest in your responding.

**A** = Strongly Disagree

**B** = Disagree

**C** = Neither

**D** = Agree

**E** = Strongly Agree

136. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

137. The conditions of my life are excellent.

138. I am satisfied with my life.

139. So far I have gotten the most important things I want in life.

140. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!**

APPENDIX J

ALPHA LEVELS FOR THE STUDY

*Alpha Levels*

Variables	Men	Women	Total
Person	.72	.73	.72
Other	.75	.77	.76
Relational	.77	.77	.77
Environmental	.72	.68	.70
Reflective	.78	.77	.77
Reactive	.74	.67	.70
Suppressive	.72	.72	.72
Emotional Expression	.93	.95	.94
Emotional Processing	.90	.92	.91
PTGI	.94	.94	.94
RAS	.88	.89	.89
Respect	.90	.86	.88
Satisfaction	.88	.84	.86

*Note.* PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale, Respect = Respect Toward Partner Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale. Men  $n = 153$ , Women  $n = 310$ .

APPENDIX K  
SAMPLE COMPARISONS

### **Sample Comparisons**

Scores on many of the measures in this sample were compared to available scores in other samples using independent t-tests and an alpha level of .05. Of the measures used in this sample that were compared to previous samples (i.e., Relationship Breakup Attribution Measure, The Emotional Approach Coping Scale, the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, Relationship Assessment Scale), the only differences found were for the Problem-Focused Style of Coping (Heppner et al., 1995). Both men and women scored significantly lower on Reflective coping in this sample compared to a college student sample that included both genders from Heppner et al. (1995). Also, men scored significantly lower on Reactive coping and women scored significantly lower on Suppressive coping in this sample compared to Heppner et al.'s sample.