

DO ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP BREAKUPS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH?

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Introduction

Relationships are central to human existence. It provides camaraderie, courtship and love. Although the romantic relationships are primary source of happiness and satisfaction the loss or breakup of a romantic relationship can be a significantly distressing event. The pain of lost love is so intense and it can shake a person's beliefs about human interaction and relationships.

The idea that significant positive changes can occur in persons who are confronted with challenges, suffering and loss was suggested by Calhoun, Tedeschi, Cann & Hanks (2010). For example, negative outcomes of a romantic relationship break up represent only half of the picture and it leaves the positive outcomes under explored. Although the loss can produce a negative impact on a person, a person also has the capability of confronting the loss and surviving it. It may also result in positive changes in a person's life.

The theoretical framework of the personal growth following romantic relationship breakup was discussed by Schaefer and Moo's model of crisis and personal growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), Janoff – Bulman's model and Horowitz's model (Herbert, 2006) .

Most research in this area studies distress following a breakup. This study formulates a new approach to understanding relationship breakups, by focusing on possible positive changes, which reveal personal growth. The research findings can be used to help people rethink their reactions to breakups by identifying the personal strength within them. The research will also inform interventions in such cases. The primary objective of this study was to find whether romantic relationship breakups provide opportunities for personal growth.

- In line with this main objective, following questions were developed.

- What are factors that contribute to personal growth after a relationship break up?
- How does gender interact with post break up growth?
- What factors result in romantic relationship breakups?

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews including a list of open-ended questions based on the research topic. Using the purposive sampling technique a sample of 6 participants including 3 males and 3 females were drawn from the Faculty of Art, University of Peradeniya. The sample was selected from participants who had breakup of romantic relationship within last 18 months. Thematic analysis was used to examine data gathered from interviews.

Results and Discussion

The analysis extricated five themes, which were characteristics of the break up, personal strength, improved relationship with others, characteristics of the person's environment and factors affecting the break up. The study revealed that romantic relationship break ups provide opportunities for personal growth. Findings showed that although persons experienced negative changes as a result of relationship breakups, as time passed it provided an opportunity to view life more, positively. According to the findings, factors that affected the process of breakup and the reaction to the breakup were personal distress, duration of the relationship and the initiator status. The distress following a breakup can vary from person to person and gender played a significant role. The causes affecting romantic relationship breakups were betrayal, family disapproval and mismatching ideas and desires of the two individuals. Findings indicated personal strength as a major component of personal growth following a romantic relationship breakup and it includes self-perception and coping strategies. Finally it was revealed that person's environment had an strong impact on a person's growth following a breakup and that a breakup allowed individuals to build better relationships with others.

Conclusion

The study suggests that romantic relationship breakups do provide opportunities for personal growth. It is important to identify the characteristics of the breakup in order to develop an insight about romantic relationship. Personal distress, duration of the relationship and the initiator status were found as the major characteristics that are significant to understand the breakup process and the reactions to breakup. Factors impacting breakups are betrayal, family disapproval and mismatching of desires and wishes. As per this study, the way people experience romantic relationship breakup differs from one another and gender difference is identified as prominent. Females tended to express more sadness and feeling of being betrayed by the partner and males developed anger rather than sadness. The growth following romantic relationship breakup is attainable with the acquisition of personal strength, social support and the possibility of forming a new relationship. While a number of research related to this area were conducted in other countries this study was an attempt to explore personal growth following romantic relationship breakup in Sri Lankan society.

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