

Article

## Coping with Break-Ups: Rebound Relationships and Gender Socialization

Cassie Shimek <sup>1</sup> and Richard Bello <sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Communication Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA; E-Mail: cassieshimek@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Department of Communication Studies, Sam Houston State University, Box 2299, Huntsville, TX 77341, USA

\* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: bello@shsu.edu; Tel.: +1-936-294-1516; Fax: +1-936-294-1336.

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**Abstract:** When serious romantic relationships are terminated, partners are faced with convoluted and complex challenges of detachment from their previous partner, negative feelings about the overall situation, and the need to move forward in life. When faced with this relational upheaval, some individuals employ and find relief in superficial or noncommittal rebound relationships, which act as a means for coping with the loss of the previous relationship and the severed emotional attachment to an ex-partner, but which are under studied by empirical researchers. In a study of 201 participants, men were predicted and found to be more likely to enter rebound relationships in the aftermath of a relational termination based on lower levels of social support, more emotional attachment to an ex-partner, and displaying the ludus (or game playing) love style. In addition to the measures of these variables, gender socialization and parental investment theory provide further support for the study's claims. In sum, rebound relationships were employed by men as a distraction from their feelings of emotional attachment for their ex-partner, but also as a source of support and due to inherent ludic characteristics.

**Keywords:** rebound relationship; emotional attachment; Lee's love styles; emotional distress; gender; social support; gender socialization; parental investment theory

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## 1. Introduction

Romantic relationships are a challenging endeavor that individuals seek as a primary goal to achieve in life, and when these relationships end, the termination can be detrimental and emotionally distressing. When taking a look at traditional romantic relationships, who, males or females, would handle this life-changing event worse? The stereotypical inclination would lead one to believe that women, who are more emotionally sensitive according to conventional wisdom, would handle this type of life event far worse than men because they are more relationally involved with others. Research has actually found that because men have more emotional and practical needs met in romantic relationships, they will suffer more from the ending of the relationship than do women [1]. Against conventional wisdom, men fall in love more quickly than women do, as well as actually taking relationship dissolution harder [1,2].

Ample evidence shows that gender differences heavily prevail within the dissolution of romantic relationships [1,3,4]. Men and women are socialized differently, therefore establishing a foundation in which gender differences become prevalent theoretically and socially. Specifically related to this study's argument, different approaches to love, diverse perspectives on parental investments, and distinctive usages for social support networks are approached through the lens of gender socialization. Key polarizations within these variables allow for men and women to employ coping mechanisms that are suited to their pivotal characteristics. The premise established from research is that men do not fare well when trying to cope with the termination of a romantic relationship, which therefore creates distraction mechanisms in order to relocate or bypass the negative emotions. This distraction could possibly lead men, more so than women, into rebound relationships, which acts as an instrumental switch in focus from the recent relational termination to the new found love interest.

Rebound relationships have little empirical research support, therefore allowing a developmental need to be addressed. An operational definition of rebound relationships includes the following characteristics: occurring after termination of a romantic relationship, superficial in nature, a means for coping with the previous termination, and occurring around six weeks after the termination [5]. The following review of gender differences within several different variables establishes the necessary foundation for analysis of the employment of such relationships. Based on support provided by previous research, key variables influence the likelihood that males, rather than females, will utilize rebound relationships to cope with a previous relational termination.

## 2. Review of Literature

The intention of this study is to focus on whether gender influences one's likelihood to begin a rebound relationship. To support the reasoning for why the socialization of gender would influence the initiation of a rebound relationship after a relational termination, three specific variables are included as evidence: Lee's love styles [6], parental investment theory [7], and social support networks. Each reinforces the idea that gender socialization will affect which coping mechanism will be employed when one is experiencing high levels of distress, and more specifically, whether males or females are more likely to enter rebound relationships.

### *2.1. Relational Termination from a Gendered Perspective*

Although relational termination can be at the mutual consent of both partners, it is usually chosen by one partner, the breakup initiator, leaving the other partner as a breakup recipient. Due to differences in gender characteristics, most would think that females would handle this termination far worse if and when they are the recipients. According to research, women are often perceived as more emotional than men, especially in personal relationships, and therefore are stereotyped as experiencing more anxiety, guilt, sadness, and anger following relational dissolution than men [1,4]. Surprisingly, there is evidence that this gender assumption is incorrect and that women are actually the more responsible party when deciding to end the relationship. According to Hill and colleagues [3], women tend to play the role of breakup initiator more often than do men. Due to this role association, it could be assumed that women would experience fewer emotional upheavals, surprises, and disturbances. Women become conscious of relational problems sooner than men do, which allows them time to prepare for the inevitable and consequently leave men surprised by the revelation [1]. Men tend to be more vulnerable, shocked, or upset when relational terminations occur. They have been found to handle the ending of a romantic relationship worse than women, as well as been found to have stronger feelings of sadness, depression, and loneliness [8].

The idea that men are generally more emotionally distraught from a break-up could be connected to the notion that men tend to fall in love quicker and harder than do women. Males have been found to recognize their love for their partner much sooner than females and will be more apt to call new emotional feelings love [2]. Kanin, Davidson, and Scheck [9] reported that a female within a relationship will act more rationally, which will slow the pace of mate selection and commitment. These differences in approaches and ideas about love are supported by another study stating that “males may fall in love more easily than females...and may display greater romanticism in their relationship beliefs” ([10], p. 416). This combination of occurrences leads to men’s lives being changed dramatically after a relationship ends [1,11].

### *2.2. Gender Socialization*

From early childhood, the American culture encourages and socializes boys and girls to think, act, and portray themselves in certain ways based on and evaluated through one’s cultural norms. There are many differences that are attributable to femininity and masculinity to which children, adolescents, and adults are subjected.

Research has shown that the message sent to boys in Western culture is that they are to be aggressive, self-reliant, and therefore practically emotionless through the internalization of anything from depression to physical pain in order to be considered tough and assertive [12]. To be self-reliant is to depend on no one for anything, especially women. As observed by Wood, manliness and the view of a “real man” incorporates extreme autonomy, emotional control, and dependency only on himself [12]. On the contrary, girls are taught to be cooperative and responsive towards others, share information within close relationships, and to be responsible for taking care of family [12,13]. The polarizations of these gendered characteristics provide evidence that women are raised under the preconceived notion that they are responsible for relational orientations and experienced in dealing

with all the emotions that are associated with them, whereas men are taught that emotions are not acceptable and so they can be lost in how to handle or control them properly when an emotional revelation occurs. As observed by Canary, Emmers-Sommer, and Faulkner [14], the stereotypical typology of females being relationship specialists, as well as emotionally sensitive, will only contribute to the prevalence of the mistaken belief that they handle relational dissolution worse.

The expectations of these gendered attributes hold boys and men in tight roles they are rigidly socialized to portray, whereas girls and women are given more freedom to express themselves. Boys and men are especially held within the restraints of what is determined as acceptable by cultural norms. For instance, girls are allowed to be strong and independent, but it is unacceptable for boys to cry or to need assistance from others, therefore confining boys within the restrictions of masculinity [12]. Due to this strict restriction on gender representation, it is unacceptable for men to display feelings of sadness or being distraught, which can leave men unsure about how to properly deal with these emotions. Additionally, when faced with negative emotional situations of relational termination, men are stuck within the confines of masculinity, and therefore not socially allowed to express emotions judged as feminine, in particular, expressing negative feelings. When placed in an emotionally trying situation, men typically have fewer means, particularly through socialization, to express or deal with the resulting emotions, which allows for the potential of distraction through a rebound relationship.

Several key variables that are representative of these differences in gender socialization will next be explored, particularly as they might manifest a connection to rebound relationships.

### 2.3. Lee's Love Styles

The way individuals approach love and relationships is yet another aspect in which men and women differ. Lee [6] argues that there are certain tendencies that both sexes unconsciously use to approach romantic connections. The three primary styles of love are eros (romantic, passionate love), storge (friendship love), and ludus (game playing love); with three secondary love styles consisting of combinations created from the primary styles: mania (possessive love), agape (selfless love), and pragma (practical love) [6,15].

The typologies developed by Lee are centered on the types of relationships people form instead of based on the individuals themselves. Lee [6] also found individuals to portray different love styles simultaneously within different relationships. However, there are noted patterns of certain classifications men and women tend to portray. Although individuals can utilize different love styles simultaneously based on their interpersonal needs, there are consistencies in the usage of particular styles based on sex type. Men tend to be more ludic or game-playing lovers, whereas women are mostly pragma lovers [15,16]. Ludic individuals tend to view love as a game, in which it is ideal to be carefree in the dating scene, be content with more than one partner at a time, and keep relationships at a relatively superficial and noncommittal level. Pragma, or practical, love style consists of individuals who seek certain desirable qualities in a partner before beginning a relationship in order to find an optimal match, but who also want to be confident that the relationship will work well to satisfy their basic needs [16–18].

Since women and men have notably different approaches to relationships and love styles, there might be a correlation between this difference and how each handles relationship dissolution. One

noteworthy explanation of how males' and females' traditional socialization tendencies affect approaches to relationships comes from Dion and Dion [19]. They propose that women have a more pragmatic approach to relationships and marriage rather than being guided by idealistic reasons, which is also supported by Hendrick and Hendrick [15]. Women typically have contributed less to the family system economically, which influences the standard of living based on their choice of husband [19,20]. Men differ from this approach significantly because they have been socialized to be self-sufficient, and, therefore, they create their own standard of living rather than depending on their spouses [19,20]. Women's more practical approach to finding a partner, which involves a more specific set of characteristics they desire in that partner [15,16], should in turn make them more aware of different dimensions within the dyad. This awareness and "checklist" type of approach to relationships could help them be more conscious and evaluative of problems, differences, and the overall future of the romantic connection. The pragma love style is known for creating rational calculations based on attributes portrayed by the current or potential lover, also referred to as "love planning". Men, on the other hand, absorb the ludic love style, which avoids emotional intensity within themselves and from their partners [15]. Now, this avoidance of emotional intensity might intuitively suggest that men would be less distressed by breakups than women, rather than more. Furthermore, this might indeed be the case for superficial relationships without commitment and/or a declaration of love. However, we believe that quite the opposite is likely for relationships that have progressed to a level of depth, long-term commitment, and perhaps love [10,11]. In other words, because of their generally nonchalant approach to involvements, men might be blindsided by how to handle strong emotional connections once those feelings are finally noticed and perceived, that is, once men shift from a game-playing approach as they fall in love with a particular significant other.

#### 2.4. Parental Investment Theory

Parental investment is the contributions and responsibilities parents will have to endure in order to provide and ensure their offspring's best reproductive success [7]. Essentially, this is the cost that parents will have to take responsibility for when having offspring. Bjorklund and Shackelford support this theoretical perspective through their observation that conflict arises between males and females in relationships over how much should be invested in mating *versus* how much in parenting [21]. Parental investment also implies that males and females carry different duties and responsibilities within mating and to their offspring. Females are inherently burdened with carrying and providing for the fetus from the time of conception to birth, and thereafter they assume the role of primary caregiver because the offspring feeds from its mother until weaned. Males have relatively low investment for the reproduction of their offspring, which is basically their "replenishable" sperm [21–23].

The weight of responsibility on males and females influences the approaches taken when considering mate selection. According to Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, and Trost [24], typically women would be investing the most into a relationship, therefore leading to the notion that they will be picky when selecting a mate. Men, who typically invest the least, would be more competitive towards potential threats or imposers. Bjorklund and Kipp [22] state that when women are trying to choose their partners, there are numerous qualities that are observed to determine whether or not the man is a good mate. Women not only take into account whether their partners will be able to provide the

necessary resources to take care of her and their potential children, but also whether or not good genes will be passed along. This approach assumed by women is seen as a more cautious and selective strategy [22]. Women have more potential investments than do men, which leads them to be more selective with their sexual partners. Men naturally have little involvement in the reproduction process, simply providing their sperm, and they are less likely to assume the primary care position, therefore allowing them to be less selective in partners than women because of their potential lack of investment in any offspring that results [23]. Women, therefore, are more selective than men when considering romantic relations due to differing amounts of potential investment made, which further supports the idea that women are more relationally aware than men. Although it takes a more distinctly evolutionary approach, some of the findings in research based on sexual strategies theory also support this analysis. For example, Buss and Schmitt [25] found that men preferred larger numbers of sexual relationships within a given time frame and were less selective about sexual mates.

This relates to and shares similarities with the types of love styles that are adopted by males and females. As previously stated, women are more future-oriented, cautious, and trait-oriented in approaching serious relationships due to their pragma love style and inherent investment in offspring. The result of this circumspective method is that women are more consciously attuned to the relationship and whether or not it has a future. They are better able to adjust, prepare, know, and act upon their feelings of discontentment when a relationship is not meeting their needs or “checklist”. Therefore, women become more aware of issues present within a relationship, which creates a sense of preparedness regarding the relational termination [1]. Men, on the other hand, are more competitive, less invested, and detached from this conscious awareness of relational direction. They are less likely to look for the characteristics or traits in support of parent investment, and are less concerned about the nature of the relationship. Men’s naivety can cause them to be unaware that a current relationship has already been cancelled by their partner, due to her concerns about whether investment and other criteria are being met. Therefore, men can be more taken aback by relational termination and, once again, not sure how to properly sort through their emotions.

### *2.5. Social Support Networks*

When examining the social support networks for males and females, there are clear, noticeable differences in the size and usage of the networks. Several researchers conclude that a social support network is comprised of individuals who have a relationship with the individual supported, and provide an assortment of resources to that individual [26,27]. Social support is an exchanging of positive affective states between individuals that can help to decrease certain reactions linked to negative mental states [28]. These support systems that individuals build help to provide relief from negative events. An increase in positive benefits, such as feelings of belonging, intimacy, sense of self-worth and control, can be given and received from support networks [29,30]. Having a strong social support system offers many positive advantages for individuals who are at times struggling. We have a tendency to search for companionship or social contact, which is most likely caused by our need for affiliation, social comparison, and intimacy [31]. In general, having a good support system is strongly desired and extremely helpful during times of distress.

Men and women often have different types of support systems, from their size to the purpose they serve. Rueger, Malecki, and Demaray [8,32] suggest that girls and women are more likely to use their social networks for support than are boys and men. Women report that their networks supplied many different functions, that they received more emotional support from their networks than did men, and that men have less affective or emotional social participation than do women. Men isolate the number of confidants they acquire and most tend to only have one, their spouse, which leaves them quite vulnerable [28]. When a dyad is no longer together, women will be able to turn to their support systems for the psychological protection and collaboration to manage their upsets. Men have fewer individuals they can rely on and turn to for the same support, especially considering that their primary confidant was their now absent partner. Day and Livingstone [33] found that women are more likely to confide in others and men are more independent and refrain from expressing their emotions, which is created from the socialization to which both sexes are subjected. This scenario, once again, leaves men lost about how to cope with their upset feelings and negative emotions.

Overall, the provided explanations display how women are taught to encircle themselves with many different relationships, are pragma lovers who are hesitant and picky when choosing partners, and are high in parental investment, all of which supports their selective nature; also, they have a vast support system to help them manage relational dissolutions. On the contrary, men are socialized to be less experienced within romantic relationships, are ludic lovers who are often taken aback by relational dissolution, are less invested and selective in relationships, and have fewer support networks to help them navigate through a break-up. Therefore, men are less adaptive to, equipped for, and prepared for relational terminations.

Subsequently, the above summarization leads to predictions regarding previously discussed variables, such as gender socialization, love styles, parental investment, and social support, and the effects of relational termination on an individual.

H1: Because of differences in gender socialization, love styles, parental investment, and social support, males experience greater emotional distress in the aftermath of a breakup than do females.

More specifically, this study poses hypotheses aimed at predicting the love styles predominately established by men and women, and apparent social support. The addition and contribution of gender socialization and parental investment reinforce the established argument, but will not be precisely accounted for within the study's survey. The following hypotheses are to re-establish (through replication of previous findings—see the cited references above) the importance of love styles and social support.

H2: Women are more likely to display the pragma love style, whereas men will be more ludic lovers.

H3: Female participants have more social support than do men.

Now, how do men cope with the distress from break-ups? The following section explores and provides insight into the types of coping mechanisms that men employ to assist in handling negative emotional arousal, which then suggests a possible connection with rebound relationships.

## 2.6. Coping Mechanisms and Rebound Relationships

There are a variety of ways or approaches for coping with taxing occurrences, and of course there is a noticeable difference in strategies men and women will employ. Coping mechanisms are employed by individuals in attempts to resolve difficulties or manage their internal or external demands that are challenging to their psychological resources [34,35]. Choo *et al.* ([9], p. 261) state that “men tend to use emotional distraction or dampening techniques following breakups, involving such things as burying themselves in work or sports to forget or ignore the pain resulting from the recent breakup”. There are other means of coping that men will utilize, such as avoidance or physical recreation [8]. Therefore, men will try to avoid the negative thoughts or emotions that are correlated with the relational dissolution by focusing their attention elsewhere, which suggests the possibility that men could also very easily distract themselves by means of another relationship. This then introduces the idea that men could be more likely than women to enter into rebound-type relationships after relational termination as a way to redirect themselves away from the negative emotions associated with the recent break-up.

Rebound relationships, for the purpose of this study, are considered romantic relationships subsequent to the breakup of a serious relationship for the purpose of alleviating distress associated with the breakup. These relationships are initiated within a short period of time after the relational termination—an average of 6.23 weeks—and are relatively superficial in nature [5]. This definition was empirically determined in a previous study by examining and coding participants’ responses to a question about how rebound relationships should be defined [5]. Rebound relationships are relatively under researched, possibly because the work that has been done is inconclusive about whether these types of relationships even exist. This is seen in the work of Nicholas Wolfinger, who wanted to test for a rebound effect after marriage, which resulted in “a single straightforward finding: there is no rebound effect” ([36], p. 18). On the other hand, the research of Spielmann, Macdonald, and Wilson [37] suggests that the rebound effect is real, a way of detaching emotionally from ex-partners by focusing on new partners. There are fundamental aspects that are to be surveyed, which should create clarity for this relational form. There appears to be an underlying gender effect, which posits that one sex is more likely to enter into these relationships than the other. This notion is based on the previously offered explanations for why men do not manage relational dissolutions well, and the idea that men tend to use distraction as an emotional coping mechanism, causing them to be more prone to jump into rebound relationships than women. In research thus far, there is no apparent correlation between men’s coping mechanisms and the tendency or likelihood for men to become involved in rebound-type relationships. However, upon looking closely at the social and relational characteristics of men, such a correlation could potentially be established.

More specifically, this likely difference between distress levels of males and females, and the likelihood of seeking out rebound relationships as a means of coping with the overbearing negative emotions associated with relational terminations, suggest the following:

H4: Males are more likely than females to enter into subsequent rebound relationships as a coping mechanism for dealing with higher distress levels.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

Participants ( $N = 201$ ) were enlisted from varying communication studies courses at a medium-sized southern university. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before data collection began. The sample consisted of 107 females (53.23%) and 91 males (45.27%), with a mean age of 21.76 ( $SD = 4.04$ ) and an age range from 18–62. Approximately 58.7% were Caucasian, 17.9% were African-American, 12.9% were Hispanic, 4% were Asian, 11% were of mixed ethnicity, and 3% were other ethnicity. The approximate educational classification of the participants was 8% freshmen, 22.9% sophomores, 30.3% juniors, and 36.3% seniors. Also, the marital status or relational classification of the participants consisted of 44.3% single, 8.5% casually dating, 31.8% seriously dating, 8.5% engaged, 4.5% married, and 1% divorced. Additionally, 26.4% of the participants considered themselves to be the breakup recipient (in their most recent breakup), 52.7% of participants were the breakup initiator, 16.4% of participants were involved in a mutual breakup, and 4.5% had never experienced a breakup before. The communication studies courses utilized ranged from basic to upper level classes, which offered a variation in student demographics, such as classification.

#### 3.2. Survey Basics

The purpose of this survey was to gain a more in-depth look at rebound relationships and the developed variables. The survey was a combination of scales focusing on love styles, social support, emotional distress after the most recent breakup, rebound relationships, emotional attachment to the most recent ex-partner, the perception of the break-up message used, and demographic information.

#### 3.3. Survey Makeup

Lee's love styles were measured through 42 love items provided in the Love Attitudes Scales [15]. The respondents were to answer using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *moderately disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *moderately agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. These scales were used to classify which love style each respondent fell into, such as eros (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.75$ ), ludus (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.65$ ), storge (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.70$ ), pragma (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.77$ ), mania (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.75$ ), and agape (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

Social support was measured through the use of 12 items from a revised edition of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [38], which used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Participants were asked to respond to statements concerning social support, such as "There is a special person who is around when I am in need" and "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family." The internal reliability of the scale was found to be strong at 0.86 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ).

The next section of the survey focused on involvement in rebound relationships. A combination of questions was used to assess the respondents' past and future involvement in rebound relationships. The first question addressed whether or not the respondents had been involved in a rebound relationship, which was followed by a question about how frequently they had been in such a

relationship based on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *infrequently*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often*. The next two questions about rebounds were hypothetical in nature. The respondents were asked how likely they were to be involved in rebound relationships in the future, which was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*. The final question addressed how likely it is that rebound relationships occur in general, which was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*. Overall rebound tendency was computed by combining scores for two items, personal rebound frequency and likelihood of personal future rebounds. Because both the individual items represented some aspect of rebound tendency, we believe this combination of items was justified and produced a more valid overall measure. The internal reliability of this combined scale was 0.64 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). Because of concern that possible negative connotations of the word "rebound" might bias respondents against admitting to being involved in rebounds, the word was not used in any of these questions, nor anywhere else in the survey. Instead, the definition of rebounds arrived at in other empirical research, and referred to above [5], was used. That definition given to participants was "a romantic relationship that was initiated soon after a previous relationship breakup, used to help cope with emotional distress being experienced, and which was likely at least somewhat superficial in nature".

Following the rebound section, emotional distress due to the most recent break-up was measured using the Intensity and Duration of Emotional Distress Index [39]. The respondents answered three items concerning intensity: "Immediately after the breakup, how difficult was it for you to make an emotional adjustment?" "Immediately after the breakup occurred, to what extent did it disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine?" "How upset were you immediately after the break-up?" These questions were answered based on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *a great deal/extremely*. The respondents then answered three items focused on duration: "How long did it take you to make an emotional adjustment after the breakup?" "How long were you upset after the breakup?" "How long did the breakup disrupt your typical, everyday functioning and routine?" An 8-point Likert scale was utilized when responding, where 1 = *1 week or less* and 8 = *about 2 months or more*. As suggested by Simpson [39], all 6 items were combined to create a more reliable index. In the current study, for the first section of scales focusing on distress intensity, internal reliability was 0.88 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). The second section of the scales determined the duration of distress, and was found to have internal reliability of 0.89 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). The combination of these scales had a very strong internal reliability as well (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

To further our knowledge of emotional distress and rebound relationships, a measure of emotional attachment to the most recent ex-partner from a romantic relationship was included due to its relationship to emotional distress. Emotional attachment was measured through Spielmann, MacDonald, and Wilson's [37] adapted version of Wegner and Gold's hot- *versus* cold-flame questionnaire. The respondents used a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, when replying to four items: "Sometimes I still get sort of an aching feeling in my heart when I think about my ex-partner"; "I am still in love with my ex-partner"; "If my ex-partner could come back into my life, I would immediately leave any current relationship I was in"; and "Losing my ex was the worst thing that ever happened to me." Internal reliability of this measure was found to be strong (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

Respondents were then asked to provide, from their most recent breakup, the message that was communicated to indicate that the relationship was over. This was an open-ended question, which allowed for freedom in response, and it was designed in part to prompt recall of the situation so that an evaluation of that message could be assessed in a follow-up question. Two researchers separately developed a set of identifiable categories that they felt represented the respondents' perceived reasons delivered within the breakup message. The researchers then revealed to one another the categories they had developed and worked to establish one set of agreed upon reasons that best represented the breakup messages given by the respondents. The researchers, separately, coded each message using the established reasons. The breakup messages frequently contained multiple reasons, therefore allowing the researchers to apply more than a singular reason to the messages. Scott's pi, a standard statistic for assessing intercoder reliability, was employed.

The reasons found within the breakup messages were: no reason given (99% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.97), dislike from family and/or friends (99% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.66), infidelity (98.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.86), physical distance (100% agreement), difference in interests, values, and goals (97% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.85), desire for independence (96.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.52), interest in another (100% agreement), difference in commitment level (90% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.36), boredom (99% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.50), lack of attraction (98.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.66), trust and/or jealousy issues (98% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.79), altercations (98.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.85), other's personal issues (96% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.71), communication problems (95.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.5), unmet emotional needs (96% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.73), unresponsiveness (97.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.69), issues with alcohol and/or drugs (100% agreement), better as friends (99% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.9), feelings faded (96.5% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.79), relationship timing (97% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.83), and breakup was mutual (99% agreement, Scott's pi was 0.95).

The follow-up item (referred to above) was that respondents were next asked to assess how positively or negatively the message was perceived using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *very negatively* to 7 = *very positively*. Demographic characteristics of the respondents were collected at the end of the survey.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

All of the data analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Specifically, two versions of a General Linear Model (GLM) with a variation to the initial GLM, were used to test all hypotheses. Two GLMs were used primarily in order to examine emotional distress as both an outcome and predictor variable. Recall that emotional distress has been conceptualized as something that would depend upon a number of social and psychological factors, but which should also predict rebound tendencies.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Hypothesis 1

The logic of the literature review and rationale suggested that males would experience greater emotional distress in the aftermath of a breakup than would females. A GLM (GLM I) was constructed

that included relationship history (breakup initiator or recipient), gender, and the evaluation of the breakup message as independent variables, with overall emotional distress, intensity of distress, and duration of distress as dependent variables. However, the results of GLM I showed no significant relationship of gender to any of the measures of emotional distress.

#### 4.2. Hypothesis 2

A modified version of GLM I was constructed to examine the hypothesis that females would exhibit the pragma love style more, whereas males would exhibit more of the ludus love style. The modified GLM I only changed with the addition of game playing love or ludus love style, pragmatic love or pragma love style, and social support as dependent variables. This hypothesis was partially supported. Gender was found to be a significant predictor of the ludus love style or game playing love,  $F(1, 158) = 13.75, p < 0.0001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ . Males ( $M = 2.53, SD = 0.79$ ) did indeed score higher on ludus than females ( $M = 2.10, SD = 0.60$ ). However, there was no significant difference between the sexes regarding the pragma love style (for females,  $M = 3.48, SD = 0.71$ ; for males,  $M = 3.47, SD = 0.79$ ).

#### 4.3. Hypothesis 3

The modified GLM I was also used to evaluate the expectation that women rely more on social support than do men. This hypothesis was confirmed. Gender was found to be a significant predictor of social support,  $F(1, 158) = 8.30, p = 0.0025$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ . Females ( $M = 6.15, SD = 0.74$ ) reported perceived social support more than males ( $M = 5.82, SD = 0.81$ ).

#### 4.4. Hypothesis 4

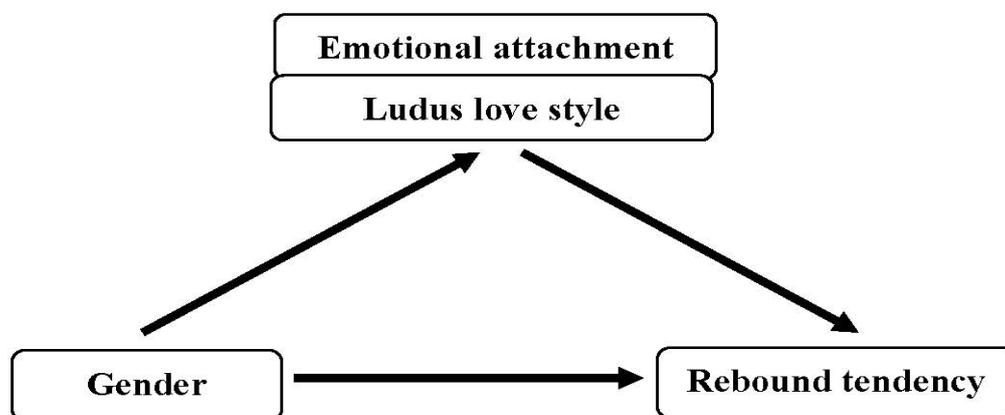
Because it was expected that males would have higher distress levels in reaction to relational breakups, this hypothesis predicted that males would be more likely to enter into subsequent rebound relationships. Although it has already been shown that males did not suffer from higher distress levels than females, an unexpected finding was that males ( $M = 2.30, SD = 1.18$ ) experienced greater levels of emotional attachment to ex-partners than did females ( $M = 1.85, SD = 0.97$ ),  $t(155.50) = -2.77, p = 0.006$ . Emotional attachment was measured for its possible relation to emotional distress, and, therefore, it was not expected to produce such a finding so distinct and apart from emotional distress. In addition, it has already been shown that males exhibited more ludic love style tendencies than females (see H3 results above). A second GLM (GLM II) was constructed that included gender, relationship history, and the two love styles most likely to be influential (ludus and pragma) as the factorial predictors, with emotional attachment, social support, and emotional distress as covariates and rebound frequency, likelihood of future rebounds, and overall rebound tendency as dependent variables. As a complement to the H3 results, GLM II results demonstrated an influence of the ludus love style on rebound tendencies, Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.92, F(2, 96) = 4.33, p = 0.008$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.083$ . In the case of ludus love style and rebound tendency overall,  $F(1, 97) = 8.14, p = 0.005$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ . When looking at ludus love style and rebound frequency,  $F(1, 97) = 7.47, p = 0.007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.07$ .

Additionally, ludus love style was related to entering future rebounds,  $F(1, 97) = 5.17$ ,  $p = 0.025$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ .

Therefore, because gender was so strongly related to the variables of emotional attachment and the ludus love style, a final version of GLM II was constructed that excluded those two variables as predictors. The results of the testing of this model demonstrated support for H4. The overall model results demonstrated a significant impact of gender on the rebound tendency variables, Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.91$ ,  $F(2, 99) = 4.83$ ,  $p = .005$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ . The specific results showed that gender had a significant impact on each of the three measures of rebound tendency. In the case of rebound tendency overall, males ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ) scored higher than females ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ),  $F(1, 100) = 8.24$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ . For rebound frequency, males ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) also scored higher than females ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $F(1, 100) = 2.74$ ,  $p = 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ . Finally, males ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) indicated a greater tendency toward future rebounds than females ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $F(1, 100) = 9.75$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.09$ .

Finally, because emotional attachment and ludus love style were associated with rebound tendency overall and were higher for males than females, and because males exhibited more rebound tendency overall than females, it was suspected that emotional attachment and ludus might mediate the connection between gender and rebound tendency overall. Using the four steps proposed by Baron and Kenny [40] for testing for mediation effects, it was found that emotional attachment and the ludus love style did in fact mediate between gender and rebound tendency overall (see Figure 1). First, linear regression demonstrated that gender was correlated with rebound tendency overall,  $B = 1.31$ ,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . Second, the regression also showed that gender significantly predicted the potential mediator of emotional attachment,  $B = 0.46$ ,  $t = 3.25$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Third, in a regression that included gender and emotional attachment as predictors, emotional attachment significantly predicted rebound tendency overall,  $B = 0.71$ ,  $t = 3.63$ ,  $p = 0.0004$ . Fourth, the results of step three show a partial mediation effect because sex was still related to rebound tendency, though not with statistical significance,  $B = 0.84$ ,  $t = 1.86$ ,  $p = 0.07$ .

**Figure 1.** Emotional attachment to ex-partner and ludus love style mediates the connection between gender and rebound tendency.



With regard to ludus as a mediator, it was shown that, using linear regression, gender significantly predicted ludus, as men were found to be more ludic,  $B = 0.42$ ,  $t = 4.07$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ . Next, ludus

significantly predicted rebound tendency overall,  $B = 1.02$ ,  $t = 3.27$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Because sex was still related to rebound tendency, but without statistical significance ( $B = 0.78$ ,  $t = 1.73$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ), partial mediation was established for ludus as an intervening variable between gender and rebound tendency (see Figure 1).

A more current method of mediation analysis, one that is generally considered more accurate, also confirmed and clarified these results. This method, which uses a bootstrapping procedure through a computer program by Hayes [41] called Process used in conjunction with SPSS, produced the following results. First, it showed that, indeed, when ludus and emotional attachment were included along with gender as part of a model predictive of rebound tendency, gender was no longer a significant predictor of rebound tendency (coeff = 0.49,  $t = 1.09$ ,  $p = 0.28$ ) while both ludus (coeff = 0.93,  $t = 3.03$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and emotional attachment (coeff = 0.57,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) were significant predictors. In addition, this method provided a path analysis clearly demonstrating that there were significant indirect effects of gender on rebound tendency through both ludus (effect = 0.40,  $p = 0.03$ , 95% CI = 0.18–1.01) and emotional attachment (effect = 0.39,  $p = 0.03$ , 95% CI = 0.09–0.96).

A second overall model tested using Process was the same as the first, except that emotional distress and social support were included as covariates. The results were quite similar, though not identical. In the model predicting rebound tendency, gender was, again, not a significant predictor (coeff = 0.48,  $t = 1.06$ ,  $p = 0.29$ ), while ludus (coeff = 0.95,  $t = 2.95$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and emotional attachment (coeff = 0.52,  $t = 2.21$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) were significant predictors. Neither of the two covariates were significant predictors of rebound tendency. The only substantive difference was in the path analysis, which continued to show a significant indirect effect of gender on rebound tendency through ludus (effect = 0.43,  $p = 0.03$ , 95% CI = 0.10–1.02), while the indirect effect of gender on rebound tendency through emotional attachment approached significance (effect = 0.32,  $p = 0.07$ , 95% CI = 0.02–0.78). It appears likely that this change in the indirect effect through emotional attachment was due to the fact that two highly correlated predictors were both included in the model, that is, a bivariate correlation between emotional attachment and emotional distress was  $r = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Because our original rationale included examining emotional distress due to a break-up as both a predictor (of rebound tendencies) variable and an outcome (of gender) variable, we decided to construct a final Process model that would shed light on the path from gender to rebound tendency through emotional distress as the mediator. The model itself showed that sex was not significantly predictive of emotional distress, nor was emotional distress predictive of rebound tendency. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the path analysis showed nothing approaching a significant indirect effect of gender on rebound tendency through emotional distress (effect = 0.02,  $p = 0.82$ , 95% CI = -0.11–0.24).

Another note worth mentioning about the results is that, although social support did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of rebound tendencies within a GLM, a bivariate correlation did reveal that social support was negatively related to future rebound tendency ( $r = -0.12$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). There was also a negative relationship of social support to rebound frequency that approached significance ( $r = -0.13$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ) and a similar relationship of social support to overall rebound tendency ( $r = -0.14$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ).

Finally, an unexpected finding was that women ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) exhibited the eros love style more than men ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ),  $t = 2.25$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p = 0.03$ .

## 5. Discussion

There were several variables that focused on gender differences, which the literature and rationale developed as a key identifier as to who would enter rebound relationships. The results concerning whether males or females would experience higher levels of emotional distress after a breakup (H1) showed no significant difference between the two. Gender was also evaluated based on love styles. It was thought that women would display more of the pragma love style, whereas men would exhibit ludic tendencies (H2). Partial support was found for this hypothesis, that men were indeed more ludic, but there was no significant difference between the genders on pragma love style. There was an unexpected finding that women were found to display the eros love style more than men, which has no connection to the rationale provided for this study. Any interpretation of this finding as it would pertain to emotional distress and rebound relationships would be highly speculative at this point. In H3, the study sought to demonstrate that women rely more on social support than do men, which was indeed supported by the findings. In conjunction with the established rationale, women have networks that they can confide in and turn to for support during difficult times, whereas men are more independent and tend to rely on themselves [28,33]. Although social support did not turn up as a significant predictor of rebound tendencies in the GLM in which it was included, the direction of that relationship was as expected. This indicates that social support might contribute somewhat to rebound tendencies, especially in light of the most essential gender finding discussed below.

This finding was that males were more likely to enter into a rebound relationship than women, as suggested by H4, but not apparently as a means of coping with emotional distress, which H4 also presumed. Although emotional distress was eliminated due to insignificant findings, males were found to have higher emotional attachment for their ex-partners than women. As previously reported, males were also found to display more ludus love style. Initially, GLM II did not portray significant findings for gender as a predictor of rebound tendencies. However, because both emotional attachment and the ludus love style were strongly correlated with gender, the GLM II was revised leaving those two variables out. This revision resulted in gender emerging as a significant influence on rebound tendencies, with males more likely to enter rebound relationships than women. Finding that emotional attachment and ludus were associated with rebound tendencies and gender, and that males displayed more rebound tendencies, it was suspected that mediation effects might be occurring. The Baron and Kenny [40] four-step process demonstrated the occurrence of mediation in both cases: emotional attachment and ludus mediated the relationship between gender and rebound tendencies. These results were largely supported as well by the method of mediation analysis described by Hayes [41]. They not only provide a solid empirical foundation for the existence of rebound relationships, but also the additive of significant relationships between variables. The essential interpretation of these findings is that while males do exhibit greater rebound tendencies, they do so largely because of the stronger emotional attachment they have to ex-partners as well as their own ludic tendencies. An initial response to this is that because the ludus love style involves avoiding emotional intensity in relationships, how can it be that men also scored higher in emotional attachment to ex-partners, and what does this combination of findings have to do with increased rebound tendencies for men? Upon closer inspection, we believe the answers become clearer. While men appear to be more likely to treat relationships in *general* with less emotional intensity (as in the ludus love style), this does not imply

that once they “fall” for someone else and begin a committed romantic relationship that includes feelings of love that they will continue to approach that *particular* relationship with the same lower level of emotional intensity. Furthermore, if that is indeed the case, they might be prime candidates for experiencing high levels of emotional attachment to the ex-partner once that special, committed, loving relationship does dissolve. Indeed, this higher level of emotional attachment that men experience to ex-partners from intense relationships might very well be, in part, because they have not been involved in as many of them as women have (due to ludic tendencies) and, hence, are unfamiliar with how to cope with such dissolutions. This situation implies an immediate need for a coping strategy, a strategy that appears for many men to take the form of a distracting rebound relationship, especially considering the relative lack of social support systems that men also appear to have.

A broader theoretical implication is that it appears that males do not enter rebounds more often because of some biologically based need to get on with another relationship, but instead because of more socially learned experiences and characteristics that compel them in that direction. Although these mediated effects were unexpected, they do strengthen and add understanding to the overall argument and finding that men are more likely to enter rebound relationships than women.

### *Limitations*

One specific limitation of this study involves the recall and evaluation of breakup messages. Participants were asked to recount that message through answering an open-ended question and to rate how negatively or positively they perceived the breakup message to be. Because there were no significant findings concerning the evaluation of these messages, the decision was made not to pursue whether the specific type of message might have some influence. Perhaps future research should revisit these types of messages, as well as other communicative issues surrounding the initiation and development of rebound relationships.

Another limitation was that the sample was limited to college students. It appears plausible that the motivations and experiences prompting involvement in rebounds could be different for this age group as compared to an older sample, and research is needed to assess this possibility.

Finally, the study’s basic methodology represents another limitation. Asking participants to recall memories about past relationships has and will continue to be used in relationships research, but it does have the potential for inaccuracy due to faulty memory. Additional research that uses other methodologies (e.g., diary keeping about current relationships, as in Ragsdale [42]) is, therefore, needed.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study sheds light on the development of rebound relationships, which have been overlooked and understudied by researchers. Men were predicted and found to be more likely to enter rebound relationships, but due to strong emotional attachments to ex-partners and their ludic nature rather than to experiencing high levels of emotional distress. Preliminary research found that these relationships occur after a relational termination, help cope emotionally with the previous relational termination, are rather superficial in nature, and occur shortly after the previous relational termination. Rebound relationships are largely uncharted territory, therefore opening many avenues for future research essential to the understanding of these kinds of relationships. Specifically, the application of

attachment theory to the partner who assumes the role of rebounder might shed light on the strength of the rebound relationship, as well as its duration. In the current study, the primary focus was on the role of gender in the initiation of rebound relationships. Therefore, we felt that the inclusion of attachment theory was beyond the scope of this study, especially considering that there appears to be little to no evidence connecting gender to particular attachment styles. Another source for potential research is the development of rebound relationships through the analysis of stage theory and comparison to the development of regular romantic relationships. Additionally, it might be helpful to develop a rationale in the future to examine the eros love style and its connection to rebound relationships since it turned up an unexpected finding in this study related to gender. Also, research on self-construal, especially regarding any gender differences in interdependent *versus* independent self-construals [43], might shed additional light on both the precursors of rebound relationships and the ways in which rebound relationships are negotiated and conducted. Lastly, it might be productive to shift the focus on the partners involved in the rebound relationship through the lens of equity theory, which determines relational satisfaction based on partner's perceptions of how equitable the relationship is [44]. Determining whether those involved in rebound relationships feel under- or over-benefitted [44] might provide insight into the differences in perception the partners have of the relationship, as well as differences between rebound and non-rebound relationships regarding levels of equity.

In conclusion, we believe the findings from this study not only provide evidence for some of the precursors of rebound relationships, but also create a foundation for future research by opening the door further to an under-studied dimension of romantic relationships.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Author Contributions

Cassie Shimek was responsible for the idea conceptualization and most of the research and writing concerning the literature review and rationale. She also was largely responsible for the design of the survey. Richard Bello contributed most of the statistical analysis and much of the writing of the results, discussion, and conclusion. However, it is important to note that the authors collaborated to some degree on virtually all sections of this study.

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