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### **Gender Differences In Reasons For Romantic Dissolution (Breakup), Breakup Distress And Coping Strategies Among Heterosexual Couples**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Current study aims to find out whether there are gender differences in breakup reasons, breakup distress and coping strategies used to cope with the breakup. There are total of 199 participants which include 98 males and 101 females. Three surveys were used in this study which include Youth Attribution Romantic Dissolution (YARD), Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) and Revised Coping Operations Preference Enquiry (R-COPE). Participants were required to read the participant information sheet, fill in the demographic form and the three scales mentioned accordingly if they fulfill every inclusion criterion and agree to participate. Results showed that there are significant gender differences in breakup reasons which include intimacy, autonomy and infidelity. Females reported that they breakup in romantic relationship due to inadequate intimacy whereas males reported that they breakup due to problems in autonomy and own infidelity. No significant gender differences were found for romantic affiliation and status. Besides, there are no significant gender differences found in breakup distress and coping strategies used, but the main effect for coping strategies is significant whereby analysis showed that accommodation was most often used by participants to cope with breakup and avoidance was the least used. Explanations were highlighted in the current study. These findings allow societies to have a better understanding on gender differences with issues in breaking up in romantic relationship.

**KEYWORDS:** gender difference, breakup reasons, breakup distress, coping strategies.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Romantic relationship occurs in many stages of life but most of them occur during adolescents and young adult stage<sup>1</sup>. A satisfying romantic relationship can be long lasting and might bring benefits such as promote ones' health<sup>2</sup>. However, an unsatisfying romantic relationship could end up with breakup in romantic relationship or romantic dissolution (whereby both terms were used interchangeably by other researchers), which is defined as termination of romantic relationship<sup>3</sup>. Breaking up in romantic relationship might bring positive outcomes such as promoting growth<sup>4</sup> but also negative outcomes such as decreasing life satisfaction<sup>5</sup> as according to research, breaking up is one of the most traumatic experience an individual faced in their life<sup>6</sup>. Thus, when they are distressed, they would find ways to cope with the breakup distress, whereby coping is defined as cognitive and behavioural efforts made to respond to a threat<sup>7</sup> and breakup distress is defined as feeling of pain and suffering which affect the body or mind after breakup<sup>8</sup>. Coping strategies used could be beneficial or detrimental<sup>9</sup> and if they did not cope well with the breakup, it might affect them by increasing their distress<sup>5</sup> or having unstable emotions over time<sup>10</sup>.

In the current generation, breaking up in romantic relationship might be seen as normal experience for most of the individuals, especially adolescents and emerging adults<sup>11</sup>, however, it could bring huge effect to an individual's life if they do not manage well with the breakup, for instance, they might end up with substance abuse such as taking excessive drugs and alcohols to calm themselves or avoid from recalling the bitter experiences<sup>12</sup>. In some extreme cases, some of them might have suicidal thoughts or commit suicide as they are extremely depressed with the breakup<sup>13</sup>. They refused to seek help from the counselors or people around them as they might be afraid of being stigmatized by the society, or they think that they could manage themselves<sup>14</sup>. If couples who breakup in a romantic relationship and are facing difficulties refused to seek help, they might engage in dangerous coping methods and harm the mselves. There fore, to help those who had breakup in romantic relationship to overcome their difficulties, current study aimed to find out more about the reason why people breakup in the romantic relationship, how distress were they when they breakup and how did they cope with the breakup, especially the differences between genders so that counselors or societies could have a better understanding on how males and females differ in the aspects mentioned, and pay more attention as well as provide appropriate support and strategies to those who had undergone breakup to prevent them from engaging in dangerous act.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

People would start to engage in or decided to terminate their romantic relationship due to several reasons based on the opinion of different individuals, however, according to Equity Theory

and Social Exchange Theory, equality and weight age of cost and reward are important factors in a relationship, and people could terminate their relationship due to the problems arise in both factors.

### ***Equity theory and romantic dissolution***

According to Equity Theory, termination of relationship could be due to the problems in equality in a romantic relationship. Equity Theory states that in a romantic relationship, people would achieve their highest satisfaction when the relationship is equal, whereby the input and output is equal for both partners<sup>15</sup>. However, dissatisfaction would occur if there is inequity in the relationship. Inequity in relationship occurs when either one of the partner felt over benefitted, which is defined as individual who received more rewards compared to the partner, or under benefitted, which is defined as individual who received fewer rewards compared to the partner<sup>16</sup>. Partner who felt over benefitted would feel guilty and angry, whereas partner who felt under benefitted would feel frustrated and depressed, and the higher the inequity in the relationship, the lesser the probability of maintaining the relationship, and if both partner failed to restore the equity in relationship, termination might occur<sup>16,17</sup>.

Thus, based on the Equity Theory, satisfaction in romantic relationship could be achieve if both partners treat each other equally, for instance, if one of the partner is working full time to pay for the house rental, the other partner would be expected to do so to achieve equality in a relationship so that none of them is required to put in more effort in the relationship, however, if only one partner is working to pay for the house rental and the other did not contribute, there will be inequity and dissatisfaction occurring in this relationship. This theory is different from the concept of Social Exchange Theory which mentioned about how does weight age of cost and rewards affect the decision of people starting and terminating the romantic relationship.

### ***Social exchange theory and romantic dissolution***

Social Exchange Theory assumed that in a romantic relationship, people are motivated to obtain maximum rewards, whereby rewards are resources that are claimed as pleasurable, desirable and gratifying, and obtain minimum cost, whereby cost are resources that are undesirable or punishment. The outcome or profit gained in a relationship is obtained by the subtraction of rewards towards the cost, thus, the larger the rewards and the lower the cost, the higher the positive outcome or profit gained in a relationship<sup>18</sup>. People would start a relationship when they could achieve maximum reward and minimum cost to get a higher positive outcome and terminate the relationship when they could not achieve it<sup>17</sup>.

Besides maximizing rewards and minimizing cost, the other important aspect is trust, which is the essence of Social Exchange Theory<sup>19</sup>. When trust is lost in the relationship, the commitment to

the relationship will also decrease as both partner no longer trust each other for bringing good to the relationship, which would then lead to couples breaking up in the romantic relationship<sup>20</sup>. This could be supported by the study of Bravo, Connolly and McIsaac<sup>21</sup> whereby the study found that losing trust is one of the reason why romantic couples breakup in the relationship.

Therefore, in a romantic relationship, according to Equity Theory, individuals would hope to achieve equality in giving and receiving whereas according to Social Exchange Theory, individuals would hope to obtain maximum rewards and minimum costs, or at least not to obtain cost higher than rewards. If one of the partner felt inequality in a relationship, they would feel distress as they are gaining unequal treatment from the other half, and when an individual is required to always engage in activities that is costly, such as keep working overtime to earn money, this relationship would not last long as the individual might felt tired and unfair. Although the theories proposed are the possible reasons that could lead to breakup in a romantic relationship, according to researchers, there are several different reasons that could possibly lead to breakup in romantic relationships as well.

### ***Gender and reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship***

According to Bravo et al.<sup>21</sup>, the three most important reasons that lead to breaking up in romantic relationship are problems in affiliation (such as losing interest in the partner and bored with the relationship), intimacy (such as losing trust in partner and uncaring behavior of the partner) and autonomy (such as lack of freedom), and the results were supported by the study of Norona et al.<sup>11</sup> which also found that most frequently reported reasons for romantic dissolution were unmet intimacy, identity and autonomy needs. The results were possible because companionship, trust, closeness and intimate communication were the main characteristics of a successful romantic relationship<sup>21</sup>, and if these characteristics were not being fulfill, there are no reason for them to continue as it does not coincide with their goal of starting a romantic relationship<sup>11</sup>. According to other researches, reasons such as different interest and communication problems between couples were also being identified as the important reasons for breakups<sup>22</sup> and this result were similar to the study of Morris, Reiber and Roman<sup>23</sup> which states that lack of communication is the top reason for romantic dissolution. The result could be because people could not stand the differences in interest after long period, and without proper communication, couples would end up quarrelling which hurts the relationship<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, based on the research of Connolly and McIsaac<sup>24</sup>, for adolescents, inadequate intimacy and affiliation were the most frequently reported reasons that causes the romantic dissolution, which is consistent with the study of Bravo et al.<sup>21</sup> and Norona et al.<sup>11</sup>. Besides the reasons stated above, there were some other reasons that could lead to breaking up in romantic relationship as well. For example, according to Buss's sexual strategy theory, reasons such as

infertility, loss of resource availability and psychological abuse imposed by partner were some of the reasons of romantic dissolution<sup>25</sup>.

Based on the studies stated above, most of them focused on the general reasons for romantic dissolution instead of the gender differences. There were only few studies which focuses on the gender differences for reasons in breaking up in romantic relationship. For instance, in the research of Bravo et al.<sup>21</sup>, more males stated that infidelity was the reason for breaking up compared to females, whereas in the study of Wade<sup>26</sup>, males were more likely to initiate breakup with their partner due to sexual conflict such as unable to meet their sexual expectations and lack of communication in sexual behaviors.

From the researches above, the top reasons that lead to breakup in romantic relationship are problems in affiliation, intimacy and autonomy, and some other reasons such as infidelity and communication problem also contributes to the breaking up in romantic relationship. Whereas for gender differences, infidelity and sexual conflict were the reason why male breakup with their partner in a romantic relationship. Most of the researches done focuses mainly on the general reasons on why couple breakup in the romantic relationship, but only limited researches focus on the gender differences, and the reason for female to breakup in a romantic relationship is unclear. Thus, current study wishes to figure out the gender differences in breaking up in romantic relationship. When couple breakup in romantic relationship, they might experience different emotions, which would be explore further in the following paragraph.

### ***Gender and breakup distress***

After terminating a romantic relationship, according to researches, males and females would have different emotions towards breakups. Based on the study of Choo, Levine and Hatfield<sup>27</sup>, men experience less happiness and relieve after breaking up compared to women, and this could be because men tend to rely on their partner more for emotional support, so once they break up, men would have more difficulties in adjusting as they had lost support from the partner. Besides, they are less aware of the problem arise as compared to women, thus, they would be more surprise and hard to accept the fact<sup>27</sup>. This result is similar to the study of Rueger, Malecki and Demaray<sup>28</sup> as they also found that men tend to be more surprised and upset after breaking up, and this might be due to the reason that men tend to fall in love easier and harder compared to women, so when they end the relationship, they tend to be more upset and have a difficult time to adapt.

However, there were different results found in the study of other researchers, whereby they found that women tend to be more distress after breaking up compared to men<sup>23,29,30,31,32</sup>. There were different explanations towards the result found. Based on Buss and Schmidt<sup>33</sup> explanation, the result found may be because males feel that they can be able to meet other potential females which might

be more suitable for them, so they would prefer to engage in a short-term relationship. Thus, when they experience break up, they would be less likely to experience emotional distress compared to females. Based on the explanation on Hendricks and Hendrick<sup>34</sup> and Collins, Cramer and Singleton-Jackson<sup>35</sup>, men tend to absorb ludic love style, which is defined as carefree dating, more likely to content with many partners and less committed in relationship. Thus, there will be less emotionally involved in the relationship which leads to less distress after breaking up in a romantic relationship, which is quite consistent with the explanation of Buss et al.<sup>33</sup>.

It can be seen that there were contradicting results found by researchers whereby some of them found that males tend to experience more distress after breaking up and some found that females were the one who experience more distress, but there were also researchers who found different results compared to the researchers stated above, which is no gender differences in distress after romantic dissolution occurred<sup>36,37</sup>. Since there were different results on whether males or females, or neither of them feel more distress after breaking up, current study wish to explore into this area to find out the results. After experiencing breaking up in romantic relationship, individuals might experience different emotions as well as adapting to different coping strategies to aid them in overcoming the emotions that they had.

### ***Gender and coping strategies for breaking up in romantic relationship***

According to researchers, there are many different coping strategies that individuals used to cope with the breakup. Based on the study of Choo et al.<sup>27</sup>, men and women were more likely to blame themselves for the dissolution, but men were less likely to blame and criticize their partner compared to women. This could be because women think that they had contributed more in the relationship compared to men, so when breakup occurs, women were more likely to blame men as they think that men did not contribute as much as they do<sup>38</sup>. Besides, men were more likely to engage in work and activities such as playing sports to distract themselves from thinking about the relationship compared to women<sup>27</sup> and this is similar to the study of Rueger et al.<sup>28</sup> which also states that men tend to cope with romantic dissolution through avoidance, which is to avoid any thoughts and emotions related to the romantic dissolution, and also physical recreation which is involved in activities that would aid them in avoiding unnecessary thoughts, such as engaging more to their work or drink excessively<sup>39</sup>. Not only that, Wood<sup>40</sup> had found that men might also enter into rebound relationship to cope with the romantic dissolution as they do not know how to express their emotions. Unlike women, men are not supposed to cry and get assistance from others when they face problems based on the social norm, thus, they are unsure of how to cope with such situation<sup>40</sup>. Thus, men are more independent and refrain from showing their expressions to others<sup>41</sup>.

However, for women, they would most likely to seek emotional support, ruminate about the problems as well as using positive self-talk<sup>7</sup> to cope with the romantic dissolution. This result is supported by the study of Shimeket al.<sup>36</sup> and Sorenson et al.<sup>39</sup>, whereby they also found that women tend to seek emotional support from others. The results obtained might be due to the stereotype that females were more emotionally sensitive and are weak in handling relationship dissolution, thus, it is acceptable for females to express themselves more freely, seek for help and cry if they face any problems, but not males<sup>40</sup>.

Therefore, based on the past researches, men would most likely to cope with the breakup by trying to engage in different activities to avoid themselves from thinking about the breakup that they experienced, whereas women would most likely to cope with the breakup by seeking emotional support from others, and some other coping strategies such as self-blaming and blaming partner were also used by both gender. It can be seen that both gender do engage in different coping strategies when they experience breakup in romantic relationship. Thus, current study wishes to explore again whether there are gender differences in coping strategies used after breaking up in romantic relationship.

### ***Present study***

From the researches mentioned above, there were many reasons why romantic couples choose to terminate their relationship, and there were also gender differences in experiencing breakup distress, as well as how they cope with the breakup. However, there were only few researches who focus on the gender differences in the reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship, and there were contradicting results found between gender differences in breakup distress. Not only that, according to previous researches, men and women do adapt different coping strategies after breaking up in romantic relationship, current study would also research on this aspect to find out the differences. Therefore, current research aimed to find out more in detail about gender differences in opinions on reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship, experience of breakup distress and coping strategies.

The hypotheses made were 1) males and females do have different opinions on breakup reasons, 2) there are gender differences in experiencing breakup distress, and 3) there are differences in how males and females cope with breakup.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

A total of 199 participants were recruited through convenience sampling and snowball sampling method by approaching people in university and approaching people through internet. The inclusion criteria in the study include Malaysians, those who aged between 18 to 25, had breakup

before within the past three years (the relationship was heterosexual), with heterosexual as their preferred sexual orientation. The reason why participants who aged between 18 to 25 were recruited is because these are the time where most of the people experience romantic relationships in their life<sup>5</sup>, so there is a likelihood of having multiple breakups during this age<sup>23</sup>. Besides, current study only recruited people who had breakup within the past three years to ensure that participants could provide information as accurate as possible. Not only that, homosexuals and bisexuals are excluded because the reasons for them to breakup might be different from heterosexual couples. For instance, problems such as obtaining fewer protections from societies and legal rights may be more common for homosexuals and bisexuals to breakup compared to heterosexual couples<sup>42</sup>. Thus, the above explanations explain the inclusion criteria set for the current study. Participants consisted of 98 males and 101 females who aged between 18 to 25 ( $M = 21.08$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ). The details were shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 199)**

Characteristics	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%
Age	21.08	1.79		
18			18	9.0
19			28	14.1
20			27	13.6
21			37	18.6
22			46	23.1
23			29	14.6
24			7	3.5
25			7	3.5
Breakup duration				
less than 1 year			77	38.7
1 year to 2 years			73	36.7
2 years to 3 years			49	24.6
Gender				
Male			98	49.2
Female			101	50.8

## Materials

**Participant information sheet.** Participant information sheet consists of purpose of this study being carried out, inclusion criteria, rights of the participants to withdraw from the study, counseling center’s contact number and address, ethics approval and details of the researcher and supervisor. Participants were required to read the participant information sheet before proceeding to the next session of the survey if they agree to continue.

**Demographics.** Participants were required to provide details regarding their age, gender, nationality, whether did they breakup before and the duration of the breakup, whether the relationship was heterosexual or homosexual and their preferred sexual orientation.

**Youth Attribution for Romantic Dissolution (YARD)**<sup>21</sup>. This questionnaire consists of 21 questions which aimed to find out the reasons why romantic couples breakup in romantic



relationship. Participants were required to rate on the 4-points Likert scale, with 1 indicating “not at all” and 4 indicating “very much”. There were 5 subscales in the YARD scale which include romantic affiliation, intimacy, autonomy, infidelity and status. Items 3, 4, 5, 11, 17 and 18 measures romantic affiliation, items 1, 6, 10, 16 and 19 measures intimacy, items 9, 12, 14 and 20 measures autonomy, items 2, 7 and 13 measures infidelity and items 8, 15 and 21 measures status. The means of each of the five subscales were computed to get the mean score, with highest score on specific subscale indicate the reason for breaking up in the romantic relationship. The internal consistency reliability of YARD scale ranged from .62 to .84 and was validated through cross-validation analysis<sup>21</sup>.

**Breakup Distress Scale (BDS)**<sup>43</sup>. This questionnaire consists of 16 questions which aimed to find out how distress participants feel after breaking up in romantic relationship. Participants were required to rate on the 4-points Likert scale, with 1 indicating “not at all” and 4 indicating “very much so”. Higher scores indicate higher distress whereas lower scores indicate lower distress. The internal consistency reliability was .91<sup>43</sup>.

**Revised Coping Operations Preference Enquiry (R-COPE)**<sup>44</sup>. This questionnaire consists of 40 questions which aimed to ask participants about how they coped with stressful events, and stressful event in the current study refer to breaking up in romantic relationship. Participants were required to rate on the 4-points Likert scale with 1 indicating “I usually don’t do this at all” to 4 indicating “I usually do this a lot”. There were 5 subscales with 5 different coping strategies which include self-help, approach, accommodation, avoidance and self-punishment coping strategies. Items 1 to 8 measures self-help, items 9 to 16 measures approach, items 17 to 24 measures accommodation, items 25 to 32 measures avoidance and items 33 to 40 measures self-punishment. The scores of each subscale were computed to predict the coping strategies, with higher scores on a particular coping strategy indicate the use of that coping strategy. The reliability of R-COPE scale ranged from .81 to .92, and convergent and discriminate validity were performed in this scale.

### ***Procedure***

The initial proposal of this study was submitted to the ethics committee of Sunway University and was being approved by the ethics committee, with the ethic approval code 20171077. Once the proposal was approved, the survey was prepared in two different forms which include hard copy (participants were required to complete the survey on paper) and soft copy (participants were required to complete the survey through Google form). Participants who completed the survey using hard copy were being recruited in Sunway University which is located in Klang Valley using face to face approach, whereas participants who completed the survey using soft copy were recruited through social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, whereby the Google form link was sent to

the participants to be click and complete through social media, and the participants would send the link to their friends and their friends would send to others, using snowball technique. Participants recruited through social media were either studying in local or overseas or had started working. Once participants obtained the survey (either hard or soft copy), they were required to read the participant information sheet and continue the survey if they fulfilled all of the inclusion criteria and agree to continue, and return the survey (for participants who were answering in the form of hard copy) or straight away click “submit” on the Google form without answering any questions in the survey (for participants who were answering in the form of soft copy) if they did not fulfill any one of the inclusion criteria or refused to continue the survey. For participants who agreed and fulfilled all inclusion criteria, they were required to fill in the demographic form, followed by YARD, BDS and R-COPE scale, and given a debriefing form as well as thanked for their participation. The whole survey took around 15 minutes and no compensation was provided.

**Study design**

A descriptive research survey design was used in the current study. The independent variable was gender and dependent variables were reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship, breakup distress and coping strategies used after breaking up in romantic relationship.

**RESULTS**

**Normality test**

A non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to compare the differences between males and females in experiencing breakup distress. Non-parametric test was used as the dependent variable, which is breakup distress had violated the normality assumptions, with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov significant value as .017.

**Table 2: Kolmogorov-smirnov normality test for breakup distress scale**

Variable	Statistic	df	P
Breakup Distress Scale	.071	199	.017

**Analysis**

**Hypothesis 1.** A two-way mixed between-within ANOVA was carried out to find out whether there are differences between males and females in reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship. The interaction effect between gender and breakup reason was significant, Wilks’ Lambda = .93,  $F(4, 194) = 3.89, p = .005$ , partial eta square = .074. Pair wise comparison showed that there are significant gender differences for intimacy whereby females scored higher compared to males (*mean differences* = .23,  $p = .034$ ), autonomy whereby males scored higher than females

(mean differences = .26,  $p = .031$ ) and infidelity whereby males scored higher than females (mean differences = .15,  $p = .030$ ). There are no significant gender differences for romantic affiliation (mean differences = .073,  $p = .52$ ) and status (mean differences = .017,  $p = .84$ ). Thus, there are differences in breakup reasons which include intimacy, autonomy and infidelity and no differences in romantic affiliation and status reported by both males and females, hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

**Table 3: Mixed between-within analysis of variance of types of interaction between breakup reason and gender, main effect for breakup reason and gender**

Variabes	Wilks'Lambda	Hypothesis df	Error df	F	Partialeta square	p
Breakup reason*gender	.93	4	194	3.89	.074	.005
Breakup reason	.24	4	194	155.03	.76	<.001
Gender		1	197	.061	.000	.81

**Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of breakup reasons**

Variables	M		SD	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Romantic affiliation	1.98	2.06	.77	.83
Intimacy	2.26	2.50	.80	.74
Autonomy	2.31	2.05	.88	.80
Infidelity	1.38	1.23	.51	.44
Status	1.44	1.45	.58	.57

**Hypothesis 2.** A Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to find out the gender differences in experiencing breakup distress. There were no significant differences in the breakup distress for males ( $Md = 33$ ,  $n = 98$ ) and females ( $Md = 35$ ,  $n = 101$ ),  $U = 4710.000$ ,  $z = -.59$ ,  $p = .57$ ,  $r = .042$ . Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

**Table 5: Mann-whitney u test of gender differences in breakup distress**

Variables	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	z	p	r
Breakup Distress	4710.000	9561.000	-.59	.57	.042

**Table 6: Mean rank and sum of ranks for gender differences in breakup distress**

Gender	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Males	97.56	9561.000
Females	102.37	10339.00

**Hypothesis 3.** A two-way mixed between-within ANOVA was carried out to find out whether there are differences in how males and females cope with breakup in romantic relationship. The interaction

effect between gender and coping strategies used was not significant, Wilks' Lambda = .98,  $F(4, 194) = .87$ ,  $p = .48$ , partial eta square = .018. There was no difference between how males and females cope with breakup in romantic relationship. Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

The main effect for coping strategies was significant, Wilk's Lambda = .29,  $F(4, 194) = 117.122$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta square = .71, with accommodation as the most often used coping strategy ( $mean = 24.73$ ,  $SD = 4.95$ ), followed by self-help ( $mean = 19.67$ ,  $SD = 6.22$ ), self-punishment ( $mean = 18.29$ ,  $SD = 6.88$ ), approach ( $mean = 17.15$ ,  $SD = 5.96$ ) and avoidance ( $mean = 14.08$ ,  $SD = 5.29$ ).

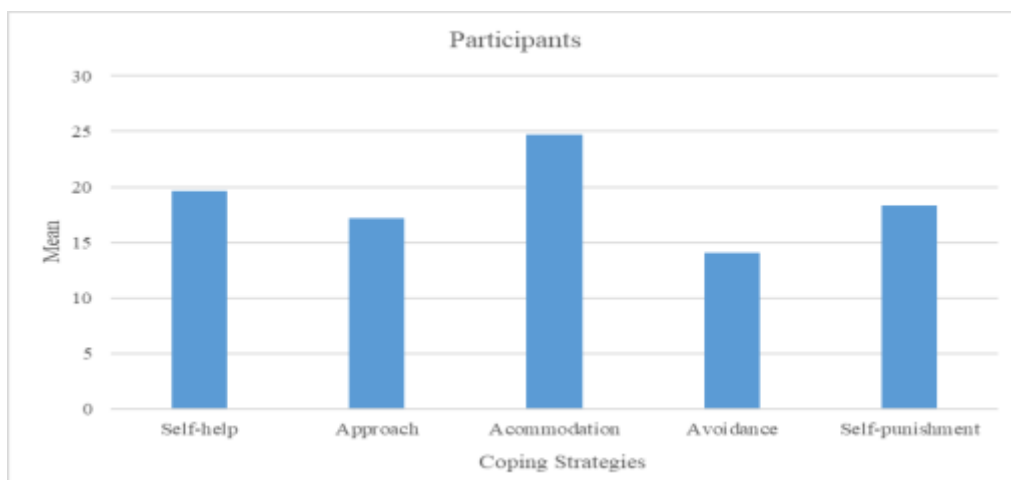
The main effect for gender was not significant,  $F(1, 197) = .33$ ,  $p = .57$ , partial eta square = .002. There is no difference between males and females in scoring each coping strategy.

**Table 7: Mixed between-within analysis of variance of types of interaction between coping strategies used and gender, main effect for coping strategies used and gender**

Variabes	Wilks' Lambda	Hypothesis df	Error df	F	Partial eta square	p
Coping strategies used*gender	.98	4	194	.87	.018	.48
Coping strategies used	.29	4	194	117.12	.71	<.001
Gender		1	197	.33	.002	.57

**Table 8: Mean and standard deviation of main effect for coping strategies**

Variables	M	SD
Self-help	19.67	6.22
Approach	17.15	5.96
Accommodation	24.73	4.95
Avoidance	14.08	5.29
Self-punishment	18.29	6.88



**Figure 1: Graph for coping strategies used**

## **DISCUSSION**

The result of the study showed that there are only gender differences in certain reasons for breaking up in romantic relationship which include intimacy whereby inadequate intimacy was more salient for females as breakup reasons compared to males, and autonomy and infidelity whereby problems in autonomy and participants' own infidelity was more salient for males as breakup reasons compared to females. There are no gender differences found between problems in romantic affiliation and status. Besides, there are also no gender differences in breakup distress and coping strategies used to cope with the breakup in romantic relationship. However, in overall, accommodation was highly rated as coping strategies used, followed by self-help, self-punishment, approach and avoidance.

The results on gender differences in breakup reasons was somehow supported by the study of Bravo et al.<sup>21</sup> as they also found that own infidelity was rated by males as the reason for them to break up in romantic relationship compared to females. The findings that inadequate intimacy was rated as breakup reasons by females, problems in autonomy was rated as breakup reasons by males and no gender differences found for romantic affiliation and status were rather new. In the YARD scale, questions that measure intimacy include components such as trust, honesty and commitment. Trust is important for females as it is difficult for females to build trust on others because they had been discriminated historically<sup>45</sup>, thus when they lost trust towards the partner, they would have high tendency to breakup with the partner as they might feel humiliated by trusting their partner foolishly<sup>46</sup>. Whereas for males, autonomy might be important for them as they would prefer to have more freedom for themselves instead of fully committed to the relationship. This might be because according to Robinson, White and Anderson<sup>47</sup>, males need to find time for themselves to hang out with friends because romance help them to obtain emotional stability as they could express their emotions and resolve their conflicts better compared to when they are with their girlfriend. So, when they lost the autonomy, they might breakup in the romantic relationship as they feel pressured. Furthermore, romantic affiliation such as having interest with the partner is the main characteristics in a relationship<sup>21</sup> as most couples would not continue the romantic relationship if they had problem in it. Thus, this could lead to no gender differences in rating as both of them have equal thoughts on this. Whereas for status, it might be that individuals at this age may not see status as important factor in a relationship, they value more on intimacy and autonomy since they would be more likely to breakup when these two criteria are not fulfilled<sup>11,21</sup>, which might explain why there are no gender differences as both gender may equally perceive it as less likely to breakup due to this reason.

The result whereby no differences were found between males and females in experiencing breakup distress contradict to the researches done preciously as most of the study found gender

differences in experiencing breakup distress<sup>23,27,29</sup>. However, it coincides with the study of Shimek et al.<sup>36</sup> and Tashiro et al.<sup>37</sup> as they found no gender differences in experiencing breakup distress. Possible explanation that could explain the findings is that the stereotype between males and females might have changed years ago by<sup>22</sup>. All the while women were stereotyped as more emotional than men<sup>27</sup> and based on social norm, women are given more freedom to express their emotions and allowed to cry if they are facing difficulties, but men were restricted to do so as they are expected to be stronger and more independent than women<sup>40</sup>. Thus, when it comes to breakup, women can show their distress by expressing their emotions, but men were less likely to do so, and women will be more likely to perceive as more distressed due to this reason. However, in the current era, it is socially acceptable for men to be emotionally open and express their emotions by crying<sup>48</sup> as men are human beings with emotions too. Furthermore, in this era, younger generations are facing tougher social and economic conditions compared to the generation of their parents<sup>49</sup> which lead to heavier burdens on younger generations as they need to strive and compete with each other<sup>50</sup>, thus, this might train the younger generations, which include women as well, to become emotionally tougher, and this might lead women to be less likely to feel distressed or breakdown easily as they are trained to survive in the tough situation. Thus, the changes of social norm and stereotype could explain why there are no gender differences in breakup distress as both might have equal chance to get distressed or not. Besides, another possible reason could be that breakup distress might also be affected by other factors such as initiator status<sup>51</sup> and personality<sup>52</sup>. Based on Frazier et al.<sup>51</sup>, noninitiator of the breakup will be more distressed and had a hard time to recover from breakup as compared to initiator of the breakup as noninitiators are not prepared, and they feel that they are unable to control the situation compared to initiator who are more prepared. On the other hand, according to Snyder et al.<sup>52</sup>, personality traits could affect the response of individual towards stressful events. For instance, individual with high neuroticism may experience more distress after breaking up in romantic relationship as they tend to interpret events negatively, overreact or get anxiety, worry or jealous easily which may bring more problems to themselves<sup>53</sup>. Thus, it might be that initiator status and personality play a bigger role in affecting the breakup distress experience by individual instead of gender differences.

The result obtained in the current study were surprising as most of the past researchers found that there were gender differences in how they cope with the breakup in romantic relationship. This might be because the gap differences between gender might be minimized due to the changes in current generation<sup>54</sup>. For instance, men are often perceived as independent, able to control emotion and are extreme autonomy<sup>40</sup>. Thus, they are expected to solve problems independently without expressing their emotions to others<sup>40</sup>, and one of the coping strategies that suits this is to avoid thinking about it<sup>28</sup>. Whereas for females, they are perceived as more emotional<sup>27</sup> and are taught to

share information with their close friends<sup>40</sup>, which they might most likely to seek emotional support from others<sup>36</sup>. However, in the current generation there are no issues for males to share their problems with friends, in fact according to Robinson et al.<sup>47</sup>, males find their male best friend to resolve their conflicts and disclose their emotions, and females might be trained to be independent too given that they are living in a tougher condition<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, social media is widely used and had become daily activities for both males and females<sup>55</sup> given the easy accessibility of social media. Therefore, this might close the gap between gender differences in their thoughts as they obtain similar information through the social media since social media is used for social interaction, expressing thoughts and sharing information<sup>56</sup>. With this, they might have similar thought on coping strategies way than before.

Although there are no gender differences in coping strategies used, the additional analysis indicates that the main effect for coping strategies is significant whereby accommodation, which is define as adapting and coping with reframing, replacing goal and accepting problems optimistically<sup>44</sup> is rated as the most used coping strategy. This might be due to change in perception towards breakup. Instead of perceiving it negatively, they might perceive it as a lesson learnt so that they could prevent themselves from making the same mistakes in the future relationship<sup>57</sup>, and they might see it as a chance to promote growth which according to Crisis Theory, negative events can help to promote growth<sup>58</sup>. This reason could also explain why avoidance are rated as least used coping strategies, they wish to face the problem and hope that they would make positive changes that would help them to improve in future relationship instead of avoiding it as avoiding will lead to self-sabotage<sup>59</sup>, which would not benefit the individual.

There are several strengths that can be obtain in the current study. According to the study of Bravo et al.<sup>21</sup>, they stated that their limitation was only including adolescents who age between 15 to 17 which narrows down the range and decreases generalization. Thus, current study increases the age range from 18 to 25 years old which include college and university students as well as emerging adults who are working to increase the generalization of the population. Besides, many of the researches focuses on Westerners and there are only limited studies who focus on Asians. Thus, current study could provide new information to the readers and researchers regarding gender differences in breakup reasons, breakup distress and coping strategies used so that they could compare the differences between Westerners and Asians. Researchers could also get insight and consider conducting research on Asians to obtain more information in this area.

Although several strengths can be obtained in the current study, certain limitations might need to be taken into consideration. One of the limitation was that participants might answer according to social desirability responding since this is a self-report study, whereby social

desirability is defined as tendency of participants to show a positive image of themselves<sup>60</sup> by deceiving themselves to believe in information that they provided or conform to values that are socially accepted<sup>61</sup>. Thus, in the current study, participants might not answer honestly on the breakup reason and coping strategies used as they wish to portray themselves in a positive image. For instance, if the breakup was due to infidelity of participants, participants might not answer honestly as infidelity is seen as socially unacceptable. Whereas for coping strategies, it is possible that participants may not admit that they use avoidance or self-punishment to cope with the breakup as both coping strategies are maladaptive coping strategies<sup>44</sup> and participants would not want to be perceived as maladaptive. The other limitation is that distraction might affect the participants when they are answering the questionnaires. According to Shih, Huang, and Chiang<sup>62</sup>, distraction will have a negative impact on the concentration and attention of a person. Since some of the participants were recruited through online survey, it is unknown that whether participants were distracted by other distracter while they were answering the questionnaire. Thus, it may affect their concentration and attention which might lead them to misread the items.

Thus, to further improve current study, future study could consider using the 33-item of Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale<sup>63</sup> to check whether participants were prone to social desirability bias to increase reliability of the response obtained. Besides, future study could also consider arranging a quiet room that allow participants to answer the questionnaire to minimize the environmental distractions such as loud music that could affect their performance in answering the questionnaire. In addition, future study may consider using survey with wider scope of breakup reason and coping strategies or use open-ended questions so that researcher could obtain and research on more possible breakup reasons and coping strategies used.

It is important to find out and make sense of the gender differences in breakup reasons among romantic couples, so that couples who are in relationship or individuals who are planning to engage in future relationship could take note of the things that males and females are looking for and avoiding in a romantic relationship. For instance, the results of the current study show that problems in autonomy was more salient for males as breakup reason compared to females, which indicate that males prefer to have more time for themselves to engage in other activities. Thus, females may want to consider to give more freedom to the boyfriend so that the boyfriend would have time for himself, and both parties would not be stressed up due to unmet expectations.

Furthermore, the result whereby no gender differences were found in breakup distress and coping strategies used could provide information to the societies that both males and females might have the equal chance of getting distress or not distress and using certain coping strategies to cope with the breakup which may be beneficial or harmful to them. Thus, attention and support should be



given to both gender so that either one of them will not be neglected. For instance, females are usually being perceived as experiencing more negative emotions such as distress compared to males<sup>27</sup>. Due to this reason, societies will tend to pay more attention and provide more support for females and neglect males. Thus, hopefully this study could act as a reminder to the societies to provide attention and support to both gender so that help would be available to them when they need. Besides, results obtained may also give insight to other researchers to find out and conduct research on other factors that would possibly lead to breakup distress and other possible coping strategies used to cope with breakups that friends, families and counselors have more perspective to look into when they encounter this situation.

At the end, just as what Social Exchange Theory proposed, individuals would always hope that they will achieve maximum rewards and minimum cost to get a high satisfaction in a romantic relationship. For instance, females would want to get closer to the partner so that they could obtain sense of security and attention from the partner (rewards) instead of feeling insecure and being ignored (cost) in a relationship so that they will be highly satisfied. However, in real life, Equity Theory may be more applicable as obtaining equality in a relationship might be the one which could lead couple to have a long-lasting relationship. For instance, when the females' expectation of getting to spend most of the time with the partner can be lower down, both their relationship would obtain equality as both of them would have the equality in obtaining time for themselves. With this, they would get higher satisfaction and long-lasting relationship as neither of them would feel over benefitted or under benefitted.

## **CONCLUSION**

This project research on whether there are gender differences between breakup reasons, breakup distress and coping strategies used to cope with the breakup. It is important to find out whether there are gender differences in the aspect mentioned so that it helps couple or individuals who are planning to engage in a romantic relationship to understand the important aspects that they need to pay attention to in a romantic relationship. This study is also useful for counselors as it will help to increase their knowledge and understanding on breaking up in romantic relationship, which would benefit them when they are dealing with such case. In conclusion, societies and future researchers should pay more attention in issues regarding breaking up in romantic relationship so that it would help couples to overcome their difficulties and help them to lead a better life.

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