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REBOUNDED

A 2004 NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY STUDY OF COLLEGE FRESHMEN SHOWED THAT THOSE WHO WERE DUMPED BOUNCED BACK IN LESS TIME THAN THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD.

love
hurts

Brokenhearted over a breakup? Getting dumped may have more benefits than you'd think. Sharon Steel reports.

Hannah,* sixteen, from Baltimore, met her most recent boyfriend through mutual friends. "We went out, held hands, and acted like any other couple," she says. But after a while, he started behaving differently: "He got cocky and just wasn't as nice. On one date, we saw some of his buddies and he introduced me as just his friend."

Three weeks after the "friend" incident, Hannah's boyfriend dumped her. "I always told myself I was the kind of girl who wouldn't let a breakup upset me," she says. "But you can't help feeling sad, even if you knew it was inevitable."

Melissa, eighteen, of Montreal, Canada, experienced the other side of things. She recently ended a relationship with her long-term boyfriend. "I was with the guy for a year and a half, and everything was good. But he's a really jealous person," she says. "At my last birthday party, he got mad that I wasn't giving him all my attention."

After the party, Melissa asked him not to contact her for a while, but he didn't listen. Instead, he called, texted, and showed up at her house, crying and screaming. So she ended things with him, which she says wasn't easy: "I still care about him a lot. It's been hard for me, too."

The details of every split differ, but heartache is universal. Perhaps that's why Tokyo-based market-research firm Hime & Company recently unveiled a new benefit policy: Heartbreak leave, or *shitsuren kyuka*, a paid day off for employees who are too devastated to come into the office right after a breakup.

Truly, the first cracks of a shattered heart can easily destroy a person's focus and performance—and they don't spare anyone. Some of Hollywood's biggest stars have had very public relationship issues during the past year. Last August, Pink commemorated her separation from Carey Hart in her kiss-off anthem "So What." Taylor Swift has regularly talked about being dumped (via a 27-second phone call) by Joe Jonas. Even the fictional Dan and Serena haven't been able to avoid a series of crash-and-burn endings on *Gossip Girl*, which have had many viewers biting their lips in empathy. ➤



SPLIT DECISION
HOLLYWOOD STARS AREN'T IMMUNE TO HEARTBREAK. ANNE HATHAWAY AND RAFFAELLO FOLLIERI (ABOVE) AND KATY PERRY AND TRAVIS McCOY (LEFT) CALLED IT QUITS.

but one of the most surprising things about breakups is how resilient and capable we often prove to be, particularly after some time has passed. In 2004,

social psychology Ph.D. candidate Paul Eastwick and associate professor of social psychology Eli J. Finkel, Ph.D., both of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, conducted a nine-month study to predict the level of distress a group of college freshmen would feel after parting with a long-term boyfriend or girlfriend. A total of 26 participants terminated relationships with their significant other during the study and found that the mourning period was over much faster than they had expected. The students assumed they would still be grieving their losses three months later. In reality? "The participants were back to their pre-breakup levels of happiness after about six weeks on average," Eastwick says. "When people think about how awful the breakup is going to be, they aren't thinking about all the other aspects of their life that will go on—classes, friends ... things that may very well provide them with rewards."

Melissa says that in the month since she cut off communication with her now ex-boyfriend, she has been concentrating on school and seeing her friends much more than she used to. "It's been really fun because I had stopped talking to quite a few of my friends," she says. "Not because any of us did anything, but because my relationship was taking up too much space."

Melissa Kantor, from Brooklyn, was inspired to write her novel *The Breakup Bible* (Hyperion) as a result of the lingering memory of her first breakup, as a sophomore in high school. Since her book was published, in 2007, Kantor has received a number of letters from girls who have had experiences similar to the main character's. "The letters express a sense of having triumphed over this terrible thing," she says. "Even the girls who are still sad come from such a strong place. Almost every letter talks about how their friends have been so amazing."

Rosie, eighteen, from Providence, Rhode Island, agrees. "Your friends appreciate the right things about you. If you were in a relationship that turned unpleasant, it can be great to immerse yourself in people



DIS-CHORD

NATALIE PORTMAN DATED INDIE MUSICIAN DEVENDRA BANHART AFTER MEETING HIM AT HIS "CARMENSITA" VIDEO SHOOT, IN MARCH 2008. ACCORDING TO REPORTS, THE PAIR SPLIT LAST SEPTEMBER.



END GAMES

COSTARS ON THE SET OF 2004'S *THE NOTEBOOK*, RYAN GOSLING AND RACHEL McADAMS HAVE HAD AN ON-AND-OFF RELATIONSHIP. (MOST RECENTLY: OFF.)

on and off with Justin Bobby.”

Psychoanalyst Deborah Lamberti notes that the difficult slog through the end of a relationship mirrors the stages of grief cited in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D.’s seminal book, *On Death and Dying*, first published four decades ago. Our pain needs to be taken seriously, Lamberti says.

“You could absolutely know something is the best for you intellectually, but it doesn’t necessarily mean you feel a sense of liberation,” she says. “There has to be mourning for the wonderful parts. You have to accept that the relationship won’t become what you thought it was going to be.”

After you move on from the breakup and life hits you with an actual death, a divorce, or the loss of a job, having experienced a tough split might just be your emotional keystone—the building block to survive something even tougher. “If you’ve had a perfectly charmed life, there’s nothing there to give you the courage and the hope that you’ve been through [something difficult before] and survived,” Lamberti says.

Getting through a breakup also requires rewiring your brain to think more confidently. Lori Evans, Ph.D., director of psychology training at the New York University Child Study

who really know and like you,” she says.

Pop-culture touchstones can also validate breakups when we run out of words of our own. “Music is crucial. For moments of pure despair I suggest Damien Rice or Jeff Buckley,” says Rosie, who also reads as an escape. “To be honest, *The Hills* was pretty comforting,” Hannah adds. “Lauren’s relationships never seem to last long, and Audrina has been

Center, points out that recovery from heartbreak can be as simple as faking it until you make it.

“Even if you don’t believe it, you tell yourself: I can handle this, I will get through this,” she says. “If you use positive self-talk, you start to convince yourself that it’s true.”

Often the turning point comes when people begin to tire of their sadness. “A friend tells a joke and you laugh and realize, This is what I used to do,” Evans says. “Sometimes it’s when another boy shows interest. It’s like, ‘Oh, there *is* life after this.’” Accepting that heartbreak is part of the experience of love is crucial, experts agree. “We all think we won’t get past something, but we do,” Evans says. “Adverse circumstances can bring out the best in people.”

“If you’re always so protected that you can’t be hurt, then you’ll limit the experiences you’re going to have,” Kantor warns. “That’s what’s sad to me—a life that’s pain-free.” □

**Name has been changed.*

MOVING ON

IF YOU’RE GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT BREAKUP, EXPERTS EVANS, KANTOR, AND LAMBERTI SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING.

Let it out “For a while you may be angry, irritable, or sad,” Evans says. “It’s natural unless it lasts a long time or the intensity of emotion is so huge that you’re not functioning.”

Lean on family and friends “Express the loss, talk about it, and get support,” Evans advises. “Friends can help by saying, ‘I’ve been there, and you’ll be okay.’”

Focus on you “For a lot of girls, a breakup is the chance to remember who they are,” Kantor says. “There’s often cool stuff in their lives—school, play rehearsals, team practice—that can be compelling and time-consuming and often helps” the recovery process.

Remember: Time heals “You come out of the darkness in stages,” Kantor says. “Once you process the whole range of feelings,” Lamberti adds, “you can reclaim your life.” —S.S.