

The influence of a romantic breakup on self-concept

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When a romantic relationship ends, an individual's self-concept is vulnerable to change, according to research in the February issue of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Self-concept is defined as a person's sense of "me." Romantic partners develop shared friends, activities and even overlapping self-concepts.

Using three studies, the researchers examined self-concept changes that can occur after a breakup. They found that individuals have reduced self-concept clarity after a breakup. This reduced clarity can contribute to emotional distress. The loss of the relationship has multiple psychological consequences, including the tendency for individuals to change the content of their selves and the feeling that their selves are subjectively less clear and even smaller.

Finding that there is a prevalence of self-change experienced when a romantic relationship ends provides a testament to the power of loss that impacts one's sense of self.

"Not only may couples come to complete each others' sentences, they may actually come to complete each others' selves," write authors Erica B. Slotter, Wendi L. Gardner, and Eli J. Finkel. "When the [relationship](#) ends, individuals experience not only pain over the loss of the partner, but also changes in their selves. This research is the first to demonstrate the unique contribution of reduced self-concept clarity to the emotional distress that individuals experience post-breakup."

More information: The article "Who Am I Without You? The Influence of Romantic Breakup on the Self-Concept" in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* is available free for a limited time at psp.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/36/2/147

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