Lanxiao Bai

Dr. Kyle Garton-Gundling

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This article's targeting audience is supposed to be the public, especially people who are struggling in the marsh of sadness after the failure and termination of a romantic relationship. This essay explored science evidences in this area to encourage those people to move on and to tell those people, no matter how much hard they are feeling, scientifically speaking, they still have very solid potential to live a new life.

Consider From Another Side

It is known that from ancient to modern eras, various artistic work in all genres salutes love and romance and, vice versa, express their misery and sorrow of separation and end of a relationship in any way. Similarly, people tend to estimate their own involvement in such experiment to be heartbreaking or even lethal. And indeed, some of their imaginations and estimations are definitely true, but it is an issue that needed to be clarified that people tend to subliminally overestimate the pain of an end of a romantic relationship -- namely, break ups or rejections.

When I was still with my latest girlfriend, just like many other people with similar experience, I felt like myself surrounded by paradise. Every second of my life worth living and full of events that make me have the most optimistic faith in our future. At that time, I really have no idea how pathetic I may react to the failure of our relationship. I thought I may crush or even suffer from very serious depression once that happens. At that time, I even feel it is possible that I can't continue living my life without her. But sometimes, human beings have to face the worst possible outcomes even with ceaseless expectations that it would never happen, and on that day, I was dumped, without any accessible way to fix it.

I felt lost immediately at the very first second of the finale of the drama of the relationship. Because it seemed to be so true that at that moment I thought it would be very hard for me to drive away all the delusions and obsessions. However, I found myself very "fortunate" that, though I cried a little bit during those two or three days, after I had talked with my family and friends, I healed pretty quickly from the sorrow. Life just has to move on, and no one cannot live without anyone, especially it comes to problems like trust and betrayal, which is a topic I'm familiar dealing with. I have to admit that I have overestimated the reality by lot, albeit the agony is indeed substantial. Thus, question should be asked that, is the phenomenon true generally, or this very event is a pretty specially case that rarely happens?

As a matter of fact, there're already considerable amount of research conducted in this area of topics and generated results that provided the answer to my question. Through academic research, researchers proved the negative effect brought by unsuccessful romantic relationship. For example, both the termination of marital (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987) and non-marital relationship (Sbarra, 2006) is powerful enough to generate considerable sadness, anger and insecurities (Davis, Shaver, &Vernon, 2003). The results are pretty much reasonable and easy to understand since they're completely within people's common sense. A termination of a long-term relationship not only means the break of a devoted mutual emotion, but also the crush of stability and expectation in one's life. Those losses could definitely be desperate, but it rarely reaches the extent that people always imagine it to be before all happens and "because the alternative life without a particular close other seems dark and miserable". (Eastwick, Eli, et al., 2007)

However, more researches has shown the fact that though people would experience all the negative effects listed above and in the previous works, "individuals tend to predict that such events will cause greater levels of distress and negative affect than is actually the case" (Wilson et al., 2000). In fact, large amount of articles has empirically explored the characteristics and processes underlying this pervasive bias (Eastwick, Eli, et al., 2007). Various reasons have been brought up to explain the error in forecasting, and several bias are used to argue why the overestimation would happen.

First hypothesis is that like human's natural immune systems, people may have their own psychological immune systems -- the ability to effortlessly make sense of and subsequently reduce the emotional impact of unexpected negative events (Gilbert, Lieberman, Morewedge, & Wilson, 2004) -- as well, which is counted to give a valid explanation. Since the crush of one's psychological states could also have great influence on their physical well being as well, during the process of evolution people, if with such distress for a long time may face higher potential of death. And through natural selection, such self-defence system was gradually established within human's brain to protect us from receiving considerable damage when such separation really happens even though people would stay alert when considering the risk of potential termination of an original stable relationship.

Another explanation is called bias caused by focalism, which means people's tendency to focus only on the emotional event in the survey they participated in while making forecast and ignore those events in daily life that increase or decrease their psychological distress (Wilson, 2000). It is very likely for people to become flurried when considering the worst outcome, especially when facing all these possibilities alone. The potential event could occupy most of one's focus and create unexpected overeaction and distress, which can be suppressed by the company and comfort by closed ones and distracted by substantial events in daily life. While gradually forgetting the experience in the past, the importance of it could be decreased and victims could finally be healed by the time.

In addition, this overestimation is also partially caused by errors due to an "empathy gap (Loewenstein, 1996, 2005) whereby participants insufficiently correct their forecasts to counteract the biases introduced by their status quo (Gilbert, Gill, & Wilson, 2002). Just like Loewenstein wrote in his article, " when one is angry, it is difficult to understand what it is like for one to be happy, and vice versa; when one is blindly in love with someone, it is difficult to understand what it is like for one not to be, (or to imagine the possibility of not being blindly in love in the future)." (Loewenstein, 2005) Because of the influence by the media and performances around us, people will unintentionally dramatize the potential termination of their cherished relationship, empathy gap appears as a result and subsequently makes mistake prophecy.

Some people challenged this conclusion by saying that this result may be not as valid as claimed to be because of two kinds of biases. The first possibility is called initial intensity bias, which refers to erroneous predictions about the initial emotional impact of an event. And another is called decay bias, which refers to erroneous predictions about the rate that an emotional reaction diminishes overtime (Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). In order to disprove the validity of the statement that the involvement of decay bias caused the erroneous forecast, Eastwick et al. conducted an research that surveyed sixty-nine freshman student during a 9-month longtitudinal study (Eastwick, Eli, et al., 2007).

The researchers used regression analysis and found out that coefficients implies a clear irrelevance between time and extent of distress. Specifically, according to the author, "participants' predicted Distress ratings decreased at a rate that did not differ significantly from their Actual Distress Ratings", namely, those data revealed no evidence of a decay bias (Eastwick, Eli, et al., 2007). In addition, there is another sub-research showing that "participants who were in love with their partners greatly overestimated the amount of distress they would feel immediately after breakup". And vice versa, those participants who were not in love with their romantic partners closely preceding the breakup were quite accurate when asked to forecast their distress(Eastwick, Eli, et al., 2007).

Actually, we can even explore deeper with these results, since one more question is pretty much worthy asking -- Why are those participants who are not in love or those who believe they are able to more accurately predict their level of distress than the rest of them? I have one empirical hypothesis that since those people described above devoted less during an previously established romantic relationship. In comparison, on the perspective of economics, it can be explained as the determination to discard a try of investment is somewhat determined by the amount of sunk cost. Then how about those who dedicated to, compromised and even sacrificed much for a relationship? Sometimes they are just too much moved by their own contributions, and just I just said, "dramatized" the finale of it before they actually find out what and how they have such failure in their minds. However, after everything comes to the end, and those people can restore their sanity, they will finally find out that there's nothing they can not just let go and move on, all the concerns beforehand exist for sure, but are just not that serious as they used to be worried about being.

In conclusion, although the pain and distress one can feel at the moment of termination of a romantic relationship is considerable and understandable, people always overestimate the extent of the influence they may face at that time. People have the instinct and potential to heal and move on at a speed much faster than they have ever imagined being.

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