

All You Need is Love

by Bradley T. Wajda, D.O.

How do you define heartbreak? Is it the loss of a relationship? A possession? An ambition? The loss of something or someone that filled you with desire and yearning? Though there are many situations in which we experience emotional defeat, I want to focus on the most personal: the loss of a romantic relationship because of rejection. It may be surprising to learn that the emotion of love begins with psychology and transforms into chemistry.

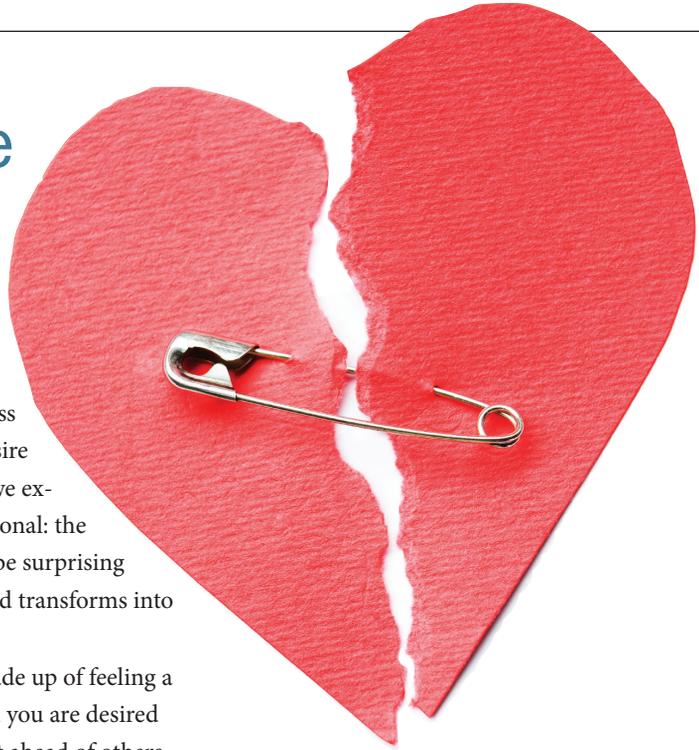
The psychology of seeking a loving relationship is made up of feeling a sense of value and a sense of purpose. You feel valued when you are desired and sought after — when your needs and well-being are put ahead of others. You feel a sense of purpose when you reciprocate love by seeking out, desiring, valuing and putting the well-being of another first.

The more you love and feel loved, the more you will experience a greater sense of purpose and value. If there isn't a reciprocal relationship of being loved equally, then it doesn't work. Is it any surprise that the "one" that you call your own and picture the rest of your life with could create severe loss of self-esteem and depression when they voluntarily choose to quit reciprocating? If they reject you in favor of finding another?

This is the most personal rejection, because it comes from the person who presumably knows you better than any other person. Symptoms of depression can easily arise from this personal rejection and devaluing of your purpose. A loss of interest in activities, isolation, appetite changes, sleep disturbances, a loss of energy, and feeling hopeless are just a few of the symptoms of depression. Now for the real surprise — not only does rejection result in depression, but it also results in symptoms of actual pain and addiction withdrawal.

Even though you have been rejected and left alone by your partner, you're still in love. You have a strong craving for that person and such a desire to reconcile that you will most likely behave in ways that cause you to embarrass yourself. That craving and compulsive need to reach out to the other person is what has led many researchers to examine the chemistry of heartbreak.

This begs the question: Since heartbreak looks like addiction, would the chemistry of heartbreak look like the chemistry of addiction? In fact, they are identical. When the jilted lover is exposed to pictures of their beloved, functional brain scans reveal patterns of neural activity (via dopamine which is the "feel good" neurotransmitter) that are identical to patterns seen in addicts. So, as the song says, "You might as well face it, you're addicted to love."



The neurochemical changes that have to occur during recovery from traditional addictions also have to occur during the recovery from heartbreak. This is what makes a "rebound relationship" so dangerous. It is like the cross-addiction that occurs when you substitute food for nicotine. You transfer these intense affections onto someone who hasn't earned them, and with that affection you give trust and familiarity that is likewise unearned. You are trying to undo the rejection by "proxy" — by using someone who is merely a substitute for your lost love — and you will find yourself in a disastrous relationship asking, "How did I get here?"

Most of the time, you find someone with many of the personality traits that your lost love has. This is why I hear so many people say, "I think my picker is broken." In a way, it is. It's important to try and recognize when you may be trying to symbolically go back in time and undo the hurt by succeeding in a relationship with a person who is a replica of the one you lost.

There is actual pain from heartbreak.



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The theory is based on the hormonal triggering of the sympathetic nervous system (the “fight or flight” response) conflicting with the parasympathetic nervous system (the “rest and digest” response). Functional brain scans show that the pain felt during extreme emotional distress and actual physical pain are in identical structures in the brain. The term “heartbreak” may well have originated from the actual cardiac distress that can arise from emotional distress. Takotsubo cardiomyopathy or “Broken Heart Syndrome” is a sudden temporary weakening of the heart brought about by the release of stress hormones. It can resemble a heart attack.

So, you're grieving and you want to know what to do to make this go away. It takes a healthy dose of time. Time to allow the grieving process to do its job. Don't jump into the rebound relationship, don't isolate, don't cling to the past, and don't enter into self-destructive behavior such as substance abuse or multiple sexual relationships.

“All's fair in love and war.” It may be a great-sounding platitude, but don't be vindictive — move on. Seek support from friends and family. Don't hesitate to seek support from a mental health professional. Get active and appreciate every little step you take as a step toward healing.

During his 25 years of practicing in the Central Valley, Dr. Bradley T. Wajda (aka “Dr. Brad”) has amassed extensive experience in adult and child psychiatry, as well as comprehensive substance abuse treatment. Catch “Dr. Brad” Sundays at 6 p.m. on Power Talk 96.7 with “Psyched” or at RadioPsyched.com. You can also read more from “Dr. Brad” at EsanoHealth.com.