

# Cape Breton Post

## Researchers' work challenges assumption rebound relationships never a good thing

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Illustrations: Anne Wilson, a researcher at Wilfrid Laurier University, says rebound relationships are not necessarily a bad thing. The Canadian Press

You're dating another man soon after Mr. Not-So-Right took a hike - despite friends' warnings that rebound relationships don't work.

It's the new year, they say.

Don't be in such a rush. Take some time before jumping into the fish pond again.

Who's right? Is it you, the one stepping out with tall, dark and handsome? Or is it your all-wise and ever-helpful friends?

Social psychologist Anne Wilson loves questions like this.

An associate psychology professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, she delves into questions about self-identity, about memory and about people's perceptions and relationships.

"Fascinated by life," she looks at the kind of issues we face daily and tries to understand them better. "I look at popular wisdom and see if it's true," she says.

Wilson, along with her former honours student Stephanie Spielmann and relationships researcher Geoff MacDonald of University of Toronto, has looked at rebound relationships. Spielmann, now a University of Toronto graduate, is the primary investigator on their research paper - which appeared late last year in a social psychology publication.

To rebound or not is a real-life question that preoccupies most of us at one time or another, she says.

If you don't think so, consider the excitement in the blogosphere after the research was published.

Bloggers and podcasters had a field day discussing the findings.

"I was surprised," says Wilson, a 37-year-old researcher at WLU who received a Premier's Research Excellence Award in 2002 and now holds a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in social psychology.

"It's interesting to see all the interpretations. ... Some are quite funny."

The researchers' work challenges the assumption that rebound relationships are never a good thing.

They found that for some people, rebounding might

actually give "the necessary nudge to let go of their ex," Wilson says.

That's not usually mom's advice.

"Your best friend, your mother and most relationship self-help gurus seem to share a common opinion: if you jump into a new relationship 'on the rebound' - not long after a previous romance has ended - it will never work," Wilson wrote in a research synopsis.

"The prevailing wisdom is that you need time to get over the ex before even considering someone new."

While exploring how people coped with romantic breakups, Spielmann, Wilson and MacDonald discovered examples of what they call the "anxiously attached" person among the 162 undergraduates they questioned for their study - individuals who were hung up on a past relationship.

"They describe old flames as burning bright," Wilson said. "There's this type of person who's always going back to the same ex who you know is bad for them."

Anxiously attached people take breakups particularly hard, Wilson said.

They worry about the likelihood of finding love and acceptance again. They're often clingy or needy in their relationships and they constantly seek reassurance from their partners.

When the romance is over, and it's time to throw out the ex-partner's toothbrush, anxiously attached people have more trouble letting go. They pine and obsess.

"They're left floundering," Wilson said.

And in extreme cases, they may even stalk their ex.

In the study, the researchers found both anxiously attached people who were single and anxiously attached people who had started new "rebound" relationships.

Those in rebound relationships, they discovered, were less preoccupied with their ex-partners. Rebound relationships had helped to reassure them that they were worthwhile partners.

"So we suggest that getting into a new relationship allows you to get over the ex," she said.

"We thought the rebound relationship might be an

antidote. ... You tell yourself, 'I found someone, so it tells me I'm still worthwhile.'"

Wilson says she and her fellow researchers have shown that rebound relationships aren't always bad. They can help anxiously attached people get over an ex. The popular wisdom that they're always bad isn't true.

But Wilson - she is married with two small children to a biochemist, by the way, making rebounding a totally academic subject - isn't about to hand out prescriptions for rebounding.

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