Predictors of Relationship Self-Efficacy in Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT. Relationship self-efficacy (RSE) is confidence in one’s ability to support successful relationships. The present study investigated RSE’s relationship with attachment style (secure, anxious, and avoidant), jealousy, self-esteem, and gender. College undergraduates (N = 126) completed the Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale, Adult Attachment Scale, Self-Report Jealousy Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a demographic questionnaire. RSE was significantly correlated with self-esteem (r = .35), avoidant attachment style (r = -.23), and anxious attachment style (r = -.20). Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that self-esteem and jealousy were the only significant predictors of RSE (R² = .16, adjusted R² = .14). Although jealousy and RSE did not have a significant bivariate relationship, a positive relationship emerged after controlling for the other variables. It is possible that jealous attitudes may spur individuals to be more attentive toward their relationship partner; increased focus on the relationship may be associated with increased RSE. The reverse direction of effect, in which RSE contributes to jealousy and self-esteem, remains an alternative plausible explanation of this association.

Relationship Self-Efficacy

RSE is a form of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals’ beliefs in their ability to achieve goals (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy beliefs can influence which activities a person pursues, which coping strategies a person uses while participating in the activity, and persistence in the activity when faced with obstacles (Bandura, 1977). The greater an individual’s self-efficacy for a domain, the greater the effort invested into activities within the domain. Additionally, self-efficacy is not fixed; it can vary from domain to domain. For example, an individual may have high academic self-efficacy, but have low athletic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982).

Self-efficacy is also dynamic and may change in response to experiences and feedback. For instance, an individual may develop higher self-efficacy in a particular domain after receiving positive feedback or experiencing success in that area. Conversely, a lack of success or negative experiences may lead to a decrease in confidence within that domain.

Initiation and maintenance of satisfying romantic relationships is an important developmental task of early adulthood (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2001; Lopez, Morua, & Rice, 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Moreover, involvement in romantic relationships has positive effects for psychological and physical health (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010; Cui, Finchman, & Pasley, 2008; Markey, Markey, & Gray, 2007). Although several variables are relevant to one’s ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships, a critical factor is confidence in one’s ability to nurture them, or relationship self-efficacy (RSE; Lopez et al., 2007). However, relatively little empirical attention has focused on RSE (Riggio et al., 2011). The current study explored RSE and its association with other important relationship factors, including attachment style, jealousy, self-esteem, and gender."
response to an individual’s experiences (Bandura, 1977). Following a perceived success, individuals engage in self-attributions for the positive outcome, thus enhancing expectations for future success. For example, individuals may report increased self-efficacy for relationships following successful negotiation of a conflict with a romantic partner. These enhanced expectations for future success increase the probability that the individual will pursue more challenging future goals related to the domain (Bandura, 1977).

Lopez et al. (2007) conceptualized RSE as three related components: mutuality, emotional control, and differentiation beliefs. Mutuality refers to confidence in one’s ability to provide or receive support from a relationship partner during times of need. Emotional control refers to confidence in one’s ability to monitor and manage unfavorable feelings such as annoyance or anger toward a relationship partner. Finally, differentiation encompasses confidence in one’s ability to preserve interpersonal boundaries with one’s partner (e.g., ask for time alone or to spend time with one’s friends).

Existing research suggests that RSE exerts an important influence on relationships. High RSE has been associated with increased marital satisfaction (Baker & McNulty, 2010; Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000), relationship satisfaction (Cui et al., 2008), and proactive responses to relationship conflicts (Baker & McNulty, 2010; Cui et al., 2008). With regard to gender, the extant literature has yielded inconsistent results. Lopez et al. (2007) found no gender differences in overall RSE; however, Riggio et al. (2011) found that overall RSE is higher in women. Limited empirical attention has focused on the factors that may contribute to the development or maintenance of RSE (Riggio et al., 2011).

**Attachment Style**

Attachment style refers to the bond that forms between child and parent (or caretaker) in childhood (Collins & Read, 1990). Childhood attachment style may be described using the dimensions of secure, anxious, and avoidant. Both anxious and avoidant are classified as insecure attachments (Ainsworth & Wall, 1979).

Although attachment style is established in early childhood, it generally extends across the lifespan and remains stable (Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended attachment theory to characterize adult romantic relationships and found that adult attachment relationships closely resemble the attachment styles observed in children. Adults who have a romantic partner that they feel is available and supportive tend to feel secure and free to “explore their environment confidently” (Fraley & Shaver, 1998, p.1200). However, adults who feel threatened or doubt about their partner’s support experience anxiety. Anxious adults worry that their partner does not love them as much as they love their partner and thus fear abandonment. Much like infants, they try to regain this support by obtaining the attention of their partner. Avoidant adults report uneasiness toward intimacy with their partner and an unwillingness to rely on their partner for support (Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Although there are no published studies on attachment style and RSE, several studies suggest a robust relationship between attachment and relationship outcomes. For example, Collins and Read (1990) investigated the association between attachment style and quality of romantic relationships. They found that among women, those who had greater attachment anxiety also reported more negative relationship experiences and less satisfaction with their partners. Men who reported more secure attachment had partners that reported more positive experiences in their relationships. Furthermore, Collins, Cooper, Albino, and Allard (2002) found that adolescent attachment style predicted the type and quality of adulthood relationships. Collins et al. (2002) found that secure adolescents reported more shared disclosure and favorable relationship outcomes than avoidant or anxious adolescents. In a longitudinal study, Simpson (1990) found that securely attached individuals were more likely to be in secure relationships, whereas those with avoidant or anxious attachment styles were more likely in relationships with less trust or intimacy.

For the current study it was hypothesized that attachment style would be associated with RSE. Specifically, secure attachment style would be positively correlated with RSE and anxious and avoidant attachment style would be negatively correlated with RSE. Securely attached individuals feel assured and stable in their relationships and experience relationship success (Collins et al., 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Given that self-efficacy is strengthened by feelings of success (Bandura, 1977), secure individuals’ relationship successes may facilitate the development of greater RSE.
Insecurely attached individuals, however, report less satisfaction within their relationships (Collins et al., 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990). These negative experiences or perceptions of relationship failures may decrease RSE.

**Jealousy**

Romantic jealousy includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that arise from perceived threats to one’s romantic relationship (White, 1981). Jealousy is triggered by the threat of separation from one’s partner, especially when it is feared that the partner will be lost to a romantic rival (Mathes, Adams, & Davies, 1985). Jealousy produces an intimidating and often hostile situation that may activate the system of attachment. It can also pose a threat to an individual’s self-esteem (Guerrero, 1998).

Prior research shows a relationship between jealousy and attachment style (Collins & Read, 1990; Guerrero, 1998). For example, people with anxiety about their relationships (e.g., feelings of abandonment) are more likely to distrust their partners, experience more jealousy, and display poor confidence in themselves as well as their relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). Similarly, Guerrero (1998) found that individuals with insecure attachment styles were more likely to experience jealousy within their relationships. In addition, jealousy was positively correlated with lack of confidence in relationships.

In the current study it was hypothesized that jealousy would be negatively correlated with RSE. In the face of a perceived relationship threat, jealous individuals believe that their relationship is at risk (Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997). The belief that one’s relationship is threatened is inconsistent with confidence in one’s ability to support and maintain a romantic relationship. The thought pattern that one may not be able to support and maintain the relationship may be related to lower RSE.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a feeling that individuals have toward themselves that can relate to their worth or value (Rosenberg, 1989). Self-esteem is associated with various dimensions of interpersonal and romantic relationships (Cramer, 2009). Those with high self-esteem are more likely to have better relationships and higher relationship satisfaction (Sciangula & Morry, 2009). However, individuals with lower self-esteem tend to report lower relationship satisfaction, greater doubts about their romantic relationships, and greater concerns about rejection by their partners (Cramer, 2009; Zeigler-Hill, Fulton, & McLemore, 2011).

Self-esteem and general self-efficacy are closely related. According to Bandura (1997), individuals with high self-esteem possess and pursue more challenging goals and therefore tend to have higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, individuals with high self-efficacy are likely to evaluate themselves and their accomplishments more positively; these positive self-evaluations in turn reinforce perceptions of worth and confidence (Bandura, 1997). Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona, and Schwarzer (2005) found a direct relationship between general self-efficacy and self-esteem.

For the current study it was hypothesized that self-esteem would be positively correlated with RSE. Individuals with high self-esteem will most likely report high RSE because they are more likely to pursue romantic relationships and experience relationship successes compared to their counterparts with low self-esteem. As RSE is a specific type of general self-efficacy, it was expected that participants that have high self-esteem would report high RSE.

**Gender**

The relationship between gender and RSE is equivocal. Lopez et al. (2007) studied RSE and its association with several factors, including gender. In their investigation, there were no gender differences in overall RSE. Women scored higher on mutuality beliefs, while men scored higher on emotional control beliefs. This pattern suggests that gender is correlated with specific components of RSE, rather than overall RSE (Lopez et al., 2007). However, Riggio et al. (2011) found that women reported overall greater RSE than men in their study.

Although the evidence on gender differences in RSE is limited and inconsistent, there is clear evidence of gender differences in tasks related to RSE outside of the context of romantic relationships. For example, MacGeorge, Clark, and Gillihan (2002) found that women reported stronger self-efficacy beliefs for their ability to provide emotional support to a friend in need. Additionally, Clark (1993) found that women anticipated higher rates of effectiveness before they provided emotional support to a friend and reported higher rates of success following the interaction. Participating women also indicated that they believed they were...
more successful at this task than a man would have been.

For the current study it was hypothesized that women would have higher RSE. Women report stronger self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to provide emotional support (Clark, 1993; MacGeorge et al., 2002). Furthermore, increased experience with a task, such as one related to relationship maintenance, led to familiarity and higher rates of success. As women experience emotional support provision at a higher rate than men, they may experience greater self-efficacy within this particular domain (MacGeorge et al., 2002). Each of the above mentioned variables contributes to RSE and suggests that women may demonstrate higher RSE than men.

**The Current Study**

Although research addresses other factors of interpersonal relationships, little empirical attention has focused on RSE itself (Riggio et al., 2011). The purpose of the current study was to further explore RSE and its correlates in undergraduate students. We hypothesized that secure attachment style and self-esteem would be positively correlated with RSE. Additionally, we hypothesized that anxious and avoidant attachment styles and jealousy would be negatively correlated with RSE. We also hypothesized that women would report greater RSE than men and that RSE would be significantly predicted by attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant), jealousy, self-esteem, and gender.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

Power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3 (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). A power of .90 and an alpha level of .05 were used to calculate the minimum number of participants needed to detect a small effect size. The analysis indicated that data from a minimum of 88 participants would be necessary. Participants were 126 (31.7%, n = 40, men; 68.3%, n = 86, women) undergraduates recruited from a medium-sized university in the southwestern United States. Five individuals declined the invitation to participate in the study. Participants’ age ranged from 17 to 39 (M = 20.89, SD = 4.25). The sample was ethnically diverse; 49.2% of participants identified as Hispanic (n = 62) and 31% identified as White (n = 39). The remaining participants identified as Asian (7.1%; n = 9), Black (6.3%; n = 8), and multietnic (5.6%; n = 7). Less than 1% of participants (n = 1) chose not to respond to the question about ethnicity. With regard to relationship status, 46.8% (n = 59) were in a committed relationship, 46% (n = 58) were single, and 7.1% (n = 9) were married. Finally, the sample was comprised of 49.2% (n = 62) freshmen, 7.9% (n = 10) sophomores, 14.3% (n = 18) juniors, and 28.6% (n = 36) seniors.

Participants were recruited in social science and general education courses during the summer and fall 2011 semesters. These courses were chosen because they fulfill general core or graduation requirements across several majors; therefore, students from diverse academic majors were included in the sample. Potential participants received a verbal and written description of the study; this description was general and did not provide information about specific study hypotheses. Participants completed all measures during class time and were not offered monetary incentive or course credit for participation. Measures were completed anonymously. The Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved this study (protocol #11-03-012).

**Materials**

**Demographic questionnaire.** Participants provided their age, gender, ethnicity, year in school, and relationship status.

**Attachment style.** Participants completed the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990). The AAS was chosen for this study because it was designed to measure three specific styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. The AAS does not classify an individual as having a particular type of attachment; rather, it provides a profile for each individual by yielding a score for each of the three attachment dimensions. The AAS contains 18 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 5 (very characteristic). Examples of questions from this scale are, “I am comfortable having others depend on me,” and “I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me” (Collins & Read, 1990, p. 647).

Overall, the measure has sound psychometric properties. Sperling, Foelsch, and Grace (1996) demonstrated validity between the AAS and other measures of the adult attachment. Moreover, AAS scores have been found to remain stable over time (Collins & Read, 1990). Cronbach’s alphas for the three subscales were .75, .72, and .69 in Collins and Read’s (1990) validation study. The internal reliability coefficients for the secure, avoidant, and...
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anxious subscales in the present study were .64, .71, and .64, respectively.

Jealousy. Jealousy was measured with the Self-Report Jealousy Scale (SRJS; Bringle, Roach, Andle, & Evenbeck, 1979). The SRJS contains 25 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (pleased) to 4 (extremely upset). The scale was designed to measure jealousy with an emphasis on romantic jealousy. Examples of the questions from this scale are, “At a party, your partner kisses someone you do not know,” and “At a party your partner dances with someone you do not know,” (Bringle, 1991, p. 122). This measure has sound psychometric properties; it has demonstrated an internal consistency alpha of .88 and a test-rest correlation coefficient of .77 (Bringle, 1991; Bringle et al., 1979). The overall reliability coefficient for the SRJS in the present study was .86.

Self-Esteem. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, (SES; Rosenberg, 1979). The SES is the most widely utilized measure of this construct and contains 10 items that are scored using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) (Rosenberg, 1979). The scale is designed to measure individual self-esteem with items such as: “I feel that I have a number of good qualities,” and “I certainly feel useless at times” (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 291). Rosenberg and several colleagues have validated the measure (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979). The overall reliability coefficient for the SES in the present study was .90.

Relationship self-efficacy. Participants completed the Relationship Self-Efficacy Scale, (RSES; Lopez et al., 2007). The RSES contains 35 items that are scored on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (I am not sure at all) to 9 (I am completely sure). This scale was designed to measure a person’s confidence in his or her abilities to engage in relationship maintenance behaviors within intimate relationships (Lopez et al., 2007). Examples of questions from this scale are, “Within your present relationship how confident are you in your ability to tell your partner when you would prefer to be alone?” and “Within your present relationship how confident are you in your ability to let your partner take care of you when you are ill?” (Lopez et al., 2007, p. 85). Overall, the measure has sound psychometric properties. Although Lopez et al., (2007) did not report an overall internal reliability coefficient for the RSES, Cronbach alphas for the three subscales were .93 (mutuality), .85 (emotional control), and .79 (differentiation). Additionally, RSES results were found to be valid predictors of relationship outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Lopez et al., 2007). The overall reliability coefficient for the RSES in the present study was .90.

Results

Bivariate correlations between RSE and attachment style, jealousy, and self-esteem are displayed in Table 1. As predicted, self-esteem, avoidant attachment style, and anxious attachment style were significantly correlated with RSE. Self-esteem’s relationship with RSE had a moderate effect size; anxious and avoidant attachment styles’ relationships with RSE had small-to-moderate effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). These results supported the study’s hypotheses. However, jealousy and secure attachment style were not significantly correlated with RSE. These results did not support the study’s hypotheses that these variables would be significantly related to RSE. A one-way ANOVA, $F(1, 124) = .85$, $p = .36$, was conducted to investigate gender differences in RSE. Contrary to the study’s hypothesis, RSE did not significantly differ between men ($M = 179.38$) and women ($M = 183.31$).

A $z$-transformation was performed to standardize all variables prior to the analysis. Assumptions of linearity, normality, and homogeneity of variance were tested and met for all variables prior to the regression analysis. Stepwise multiple regression analysis investigated the significance of attachment style (secure, avoidant, anxious), jealousy, self-esteem, and gender as predictors of RSE (see Table 2). The analysis yielded a significant model for RSE after two steps, $R^2 = .16$, adjusted $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 116) = 10.72, p < .001$. The model included self-esteem ($ß = .39, p < .001$) and jealousy ($ß = .19, p = .03$). Although jealousy was not significantly related to RSE at the bivariate level, a relationship did emerge

<table>
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<th>TABLE 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Correlation Between Study Variables</td>
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<td>Variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. RSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Self-Esteem</td>
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<td>3. Jealousy</td>
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<td>4. Anxious Attachment Style</td>
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<td>5. Avoidant Attachment Style</td>
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<td>6. Secure Attachment Style</td>
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$p = .05$, $*p < .01$
after controlling for the other variables’ effects on RSE. Despite their significant bivariate relationships with RSE, avoidant and anxious attachment styles did not explain a significant proportion of RSE variance after controlling for the other study variables. Moreover, secure attachment style and gender were not significant predictors of RSE. The significant prediction model for RSE supported the study’s final hypothesis; however, contrary to this hypothesis, self-esteem and jealousy were the only significant predictors in the model.

**Discussion**

The present study investigated RSE’s relationships with attachment style, jealousy, self-esteem, and gender. RSE was significantly related to anxious attachment style, avoidant attachment style, and self-esteem. It was initially hypothesized that attachment style, jealousy, self-esteem, and gender would significantly predict RSE. However, self-esteem and jealousy were the only variables that significantly predicted RSE.

Self-esteem’s significant bivariate and predictive relationships with RSE support the study’s hypotheses. In the present study, individuals with a greater sense of worth (self-esteem) tended to have greater confidence in their ability to initiate and support romantic relationships (RSE). According to Bandura (1997), individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to have high self-efficacy because they attempt more challenging goals; success in ambitious goals reinforces these positive self-appraisals and facilitates the development of positive expectations for future goals. With regard to the present study, individuals with high self-esteem may be more likely to view themselves as worthy of positive relationship outcomes, thus more likely to engage with their partners and work cooperatively and proactively to address relationship conflicts. Self-attributions for the resultant positive outcomes could not only reinforce the individual’s sense of worth and esteem, but also serve as mastery experience to bolster RSE (Bandura, 1977). This finding is consistent with previous research, finding self-esteem related to other forms of self-efficacy (Luszczynska et al., 2005).

The findings did not support the hypothesis that jealousy would be negatively correlated with RSE; however, once the effects of self-esteem, attachment style, and gender were controlled for in the regression analysis, jealousy explained a significant portion in RSE. Unexpectedly, jealousy had a significant positive relationship with RSE in the regression analysis; increases in jealousy predicted increases in RSE. This finding contradicts prior research that yielded a significant negative relationship between jealousy and confidence in relationships (Guerrero, 1998). This discrepancy could be related to the diverse impacts that jealousy may have on relationships. For example, whereas one individual might feel threatened by someone’s attraction to his or her spouse, another person may view the attraction as a source of public esteem (White, 1981). Moreover, some scholars have hypothesized that jealousy-related efforts to protect a valued relationship from perceived threat are adaptive for relationship maintenance. For example, increasing attention toward the romantic partner, making efforts to improve communication within the relationship, and insulating a potential romantic rival in response to a perceived threat may function as constructive behaviors to minimize the attractiveness of a competing partner and in turn protect the relationship (Bevan, 2008; Guerrero, Anderson, Jorgensen, Spitzberg, & Eloy, 1995).

Within long-term relationships, these jealous reactions may be perceived as appropriate and contribute to the relationship’s on-going success (Aune & Comstock, 1997; Mathes, 1986). The endurance of the relationship as a result of these jealous behaviors may in turn strengthen confidence in the ability to support the relationship (RSE).

Results supported the hypothesis that insecure

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<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Stepwise Regression Analysis Predicting RSE (N = 126)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step and Predictor Variable</strong></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
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<td><strong>Step 1:</strong></td>
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<td>Self-Esteem</td>
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<td>Avoidant Attachment Style</td>
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<td>Anxious Attachment Style</td>
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<td>Secure Attachment Style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2:</strong></td>
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<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.16***</td>
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<td>Avoidant Attachment Style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$
attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) would be correlated with RSE. Individuals whose worries about their partners’ emotional investment led them to seek out intimacy and approval from their partners (anxious attachment style) tended to report lower RSE. Moreover, RSE tended to be lower in individuals who avoid depending on others in relationships and find it difficult to trust relationship partners (avoidant attachment style). Anxious and avoidant attachment styles’ correlations with RSE are somewhat consistent with past research that says attachment style is a good predictor of other relationship characteristics such as relationship quality (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990).

However, results did not support the hypothesis that secure attachment style would be correlated with RSE. Multiple studies have found secure attachment style to be indicative of relationship satisfaction (Edeci & Gençoğ, 2006; Guerrero, Farinelli, & McEwan, 2009). The current findings suggest that secure attachment style may play more of a role in relationship satisfaction than in feelings of confidence in one’s ability to maintain romantic relationships. Although relationship satisfaction and RSE may be related in some relationships, they are not necessarily synonymous.

Contrary to the study’s hypothesis, secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles were not significant predictors of RSE. The dimensions of attachment style did not explain RSE beyond that explained by self-esteem. Securely attached individuals are characterized by high self-esteem; individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to engage others and utilize strategies to create success in their goals (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Huis in ’t Veld, Vingerhoets, & Denollet, 2012). However, anxious and avoidant individuals are characterized by low self-esteem; these individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors designed to avoid failure, rather than create success (Baumeister et al., 1989; Huis in ’t Veld et al., 2012). After these effects of self-esteem on relationship patterns were removed, attachment styles were not significantly related to RSE.

Contrary to the study’s hypotheses, gender was neither a significant predictor of RSE nor were women more likely to report higher RSE than men. This contradicts Riggio et al.’s (2011) findings that women report overall greater confidence in relationships; however, it supports Lopez et al.’s (2007) findings of gender differences in some components of RSE, but not overall RSE. This pattern of results suggests that men and women perceive themselves to have different strengths within relationships, but overall equal confidence in their ability to utilize their respective strengths to support relationships. However, there were significantly fewer men in the sample and this may limit the conclusions that may be drawn regarding gender differences in RSE.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research
The unequal distribution of gender is a limitation of this study; significantly more women participated than men. As the study included gender as a specific variable being tested, it is difficult to confidently generalize the results to a general population from a sample that is primarily comprised of women.

Due to the correlational nature of the study design, conclusions cannot be drawn about the causal relationship between the hypothesized predictors and RSE. Alternative directions of effect are plausible. For example, RSE’s direct relationship with self-esteem suggests that each may facilitate development of the other. RSE’s inverse relationships with insecure attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) suggest a similar process. Insecurely attached individuals may be more inhibited in relationships, which could contribute to poor relationship outcomes. Poor relationship outcomes could decrease RSE. In turn, decreased RSE may reinforce attitudes associated with insecure attachment styles.

Unexpectedly, the current study found that jealousy had a positive predictive relationship with RSE. Although often associated with poor relationship outcomes, some reactions to jealousy have been associated with positive relationship effects (Andersen, Eloy, Guerrero, & Spitzberg, 1995; Guerrero & Afifi, 1999). For example, jealousy can trigger communication responses that improve confidence in maintenance of a threatened romantic relationship (Guerrero et al., 1995; Guerrero, Trost, & Yoshimura, 2005). Given that jealousy is multifaceted (White, 1981), future research may investigate how its cognitive, behavioral, and affective facets independently relate to RSE. Additionally, responses that individuals utilize to cope with jealousy may mediate its relationship with RSE. Future research could investigate the possibility of jealousy triggering relationship-maintenance-oriented behaviors as well as the positive role jealousy may play in relationships.

Additionally, future research could investigate the effect of degree of relationship commitment
on RSE. Previous research has found a correlation between relationship commitment and RSE. For example, Lopez et al. (2007) found that participants within committed relationships reported greater confidence in caregiving and their ability to protect a relationship by regulating negative emotions. In addition, Le and Agnew (2003) found that relationship commitment differences were related to emotional investment and interdependence of partners within relationships. Results such as these indicate that commitment status is related to facets of RSE. Further research could explore how commitment status affects different relationship-maintenance behaviors.

Further research could address the role that age plays in RSE and related variables. Davila, Burge, and Hammen (1997) found that instability in attachment style ranged from 28% in a 6-month period to 34% in a 2-year period in first year college women. This could suggest that attachment patterns vary in stability early in young adulthood. Data on the influence of age in relationship maintenance could significantly aid in the process of providing counseling to young couples in relationships that might be struggling as a result of age. Past research has found that individuals who marry younger are more likely to divorce than those who wait until they are older (Moore & Waite, 1981). Investigation into the role that age plays in RSE and related variables such as attachment style would assist in this process.

Finally, further research could explore the correlation between relationship satisfaction and RSE. Lopez et al. found the scores on the RSES emotional control subscale to be predictive of relationship satisfaction; this suggests that relationship satisfaction and dimensions of RSE are closely related. If an association between these variables is established, interventions to improve RSE may be useful tools to improve relationship satisfaction. Given that marital happiness and satisfaction are proactive influences against divorce (White & Booth, 1991), knowledge of RSE and its association with relationship outcomes may be beneficial for individuals considering marriage.

References


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