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Relationship Sabotage:
An Attachment and Goal-Orientation Perspective on Seeking Love
yet Failing to Maintain Romantic Relationships

Raquel Peel

BPsych (Hons), BA (ArtHist)(Mus), AdvDipMus (Business)

Thesis submitted under the supervision of Dr Kerry McBain, Ass. Prof. Nerina Caltabiano
and Dr Beryl Buckby for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Health) in the Discipline of
Psychology, College of Health Care Sciences,
James Cook University

2020

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge those who have contributed to the completion of this PhD thesis. First and foremost, I thank my primary advisor, Dr Kerry McBain, who has from the very beginning believed in me and in my project.

I would also like to thank Ass. Prof. Nerina Caltabiano, my secondary advisor and mentor, for her prompt replies, constructive and informative feedback, and words of encouragement. I greatly appreciate your expert advice, guidance and counsel through each aspect of this project, with selfless dedication. Having you as my advisor was an honour and a privilege.

My sincere thanks also go to Dr Beryl Buckby, my secondary advisor. I fell in love with research when undertaking my honours project under her supervision. Beryl has been a second mother to me, supporting me through some very difficult times. Thank you for your encouragement.

Besides my advisors, I would like to thank my husband, Matthew, for his limitless support, both during the completion of this thesis and throughout our lives together. You are my greatest encourager, tirelessly believing in me and my endeavours. Thank you for your unconditional love and for not letting me sabotage our relationship. I love you!

I also want to thank my parents, Orlando and Theresa Cristina. They have chosen to have me in their lives through adoption and they have provided me with every opportunity to conquer my dreams. Additionally, thank you to my brother, Daniel, for helping me with honest conversations and words of encouragement. My gratitude to them is better expressed in my

native language, Portuguese: Meus queridos, muito obrigada pelo seu amor e suporte incondicional. Amo vocês!

Further acknowledgements must go to my parents-in-law (and Australian parents), Bill and Sandra, who supported Matthew and me through my time as a student. When they attended my honours defence, they said my passion for research was contagious. They knew I should pursue a PhD before I did. Thank you for believing in me (and sitting through another defence seminar for this doctorate)!

Special mention must also go to my dear friends, Claire and Jasleen, who have provided me with ‘girl talk’ and sanity to keep pursuing my dreams. Also, my friend Anna, who shares the love for stats with me and enjoys hours of conversations about SEM.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank everyone who has participated in this research project and/or helped with recruitment. Without you, I could not have completed this thesis.

Thank you very much!

Muito Obrigada!

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Declaration of Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999), the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997) and the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001). The proposed research methodologies received human research ethics approval from the James Cook University Human Ethics Committee (approval numbers H7162 and H7414—see Appendices C and F).

Statement of Contributions of Others

The contributions displayed in the table below were essential for the completion of this thesis.

Nature of Assistance	Contributions	Details of Contributions
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Guidance • Intellectual input • Editorial help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Kerry McBain • Ass. Prof. Nerina Caltabiano • Dr Beryl Buckby
University Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workstation • Stipend scholarship • Competitive pool funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Cook University
Published Works Used in the Thesis Chapters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peel, R., Caltabiano, N., Buckby, B., & McBain, K. A. (2018). Mental health diagnoses and relationship breakdown: Which is the chicken and which the egg? <i>International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change</i>, 4(3), 98–116. Retrieved from http://www.ijicc.net/images/Vol4_iss3_s pec_ed_nov_2018/RaquelPeel_et_al.pdf • Peel, R., Caltabiano, N., Buckby, B., & McBain, K. A. (2009). Defining romantic self-sabotage: A thematic analysis of interviews with practicing psychologists. <i>Journal of Relationship Research</i>, 10(e16), 1–9. doi:10.1017/jrr.2019.7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All authors co-developed the research questions. • Peel collected the data and performed the data analyses with assistance from McBain, Caltabiano and Buckby. • Peel wrote the first draft of the paper, which was revised with editorial input from McBain, Caltabiano and Buckby. • Peel developed all figures and tables.

List of Publications Relevant to Thesis

Refereed Contributions

Journal Articles

- Peel, R., Caltabiano, N., Buckby, B., & McBain, K. A. (2019). Defining romantic self-sabotage: A thematic analysis of interviews with practicing psychologists. *Journal of Relationship Research, 10*(e16), 1–9. doi:10.1017/jrr.2019.7
- Peel, R., Caltabiano, N., Buckby, B., & McBain, K. A. (2018). Mental health diagnoses and relationship breakdown: Which is the chicken and which the egg? *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change, 4*(3), 98–116. Retrieved from http://www.ijicc.net/images/Vol4_iss3_spec_ed_nov_2018/Raquel_Peel_et_al.pdf

Conference Posters

- Peel, R., McBain, K. A., Caltabiano, N., & Buckby, B. (2019, March). *The romantic self-saboteur: How do people sabotage love?* Poster presented at the International Convention of Psychological Science. Paris, France.

Conference Abstracts

- Peel, R., McBain, K. A., Caltabiano, N., & Buckby, B. (2018, November). *What do psychologists have to say about self-sabotage in romantic relationships?* Abstract presented at the 17th Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group (APS-PORIG) National Conference. Melbourne, Australia.
- Peel, R., Buckby, B., McBain, K. A., & Caltabiano, N. (2018, July). *It is not what it seems. Heart break leads to mental health difficulties in higher education.* Abstract presented at the Australasian Mental Health and Higher Education Conference (AMHHEC). Townsville, Australia.
- Peel, R., McBain, K. A., Caltabiano, N., & Buckby, B. (2017, November). *How is self-sabotage presented in romantic relationships?* Abstract presented at the 16th Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Relationships Interest Group (APS-PORIG) National Conference. Melbourne, Australia.

Non-Refereed Contributions

Invited Keynote Addresses

- Peel, R. (2019, May 8). *What do psychologists and clients have to say about self-sabotage in romantic relationships?* Presented at The Townsville Hospital and Health Services. Townsville, Australia.
- Peel, R. (2018, October 27). *Why do we sabotage love?* Presented at TEDxJCUCairns. Cairns, Australia. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/kpIbl34SPNc>

Please see www.raquelpeel.com for other outputs including invited talks and interviews.

Abstract

A quick glance at the literature suggests that, although many individuals are searching for love, failure can often be the expected outcome. Some people are stuck in a continuous cycle of successfully initiating a relationship, yet being unable to maintain long-term engagements, and embarking on a path that appears to be a destined break-up. The concept of self-sabotage or self-handicapping might explain why and how this phenomenon occurs; however, no empirical research exists using these terms in the context of romantic relationships.

The term ‘self-sabotage’ is not well defined in the current literature. Self-sabotage is generally explained as a synonym of self-handicapping. However, the practice of self-handicapping is limited to physical barriers employed to explicitly hinder performance-driven activities, usually found in the context of education and sports. In these contexts, self-handicapping is defined as a cognitive strategy employed with the overall aim of self-protection. More specifically, self-handicappers create obstacles that impede success or withdraw effort to protect their self-esteem and competent public and private self-images. This definition does not fully encompass intrinsic behaviours found in romantic relationships. Therefore, the term ‘self-sabotage’ is proposed as an alternative. Theoretically, in the context of romantic relationships, self-sabotage is enacted through goal-oriented defensive strategies informed by attachment styles to protect self-worth. However, empirical research in this area is needed.

The aim of the current project was to investigate relationship sabotage and to explore the effect of attachment and goal orientation on the repertoire of self-defeating behaviours that may be enacted in this context. The project adopted a mixed-methods design with three phases and five studies. The first phase (Study 1) involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 practising psychologists who specialised in relationship counselling to

attain an expert account of sabotage in romantic relationships. Subsequently, one survey was used for Phases 2 (Studies 2 to 4) and 3 (Study 5). The survey incorporated a mixed-method component—specifically, a multi-phase convergent parallel design with closed and open-ended questions. The second phase involved developing and testing a scale to measure relationship self-sabotage. Finally, the third phase involved a modelling study to establish the best path leading to sabotage in romantic relationships.

The findings from Study 1 demonstrated a repertoire of possible self-sabotaging behaviours. These behaviours are in accordance with the existing literature on marriage dissolution (e.g., John Gottman) and relationship counselling (e.g., emotionally focused couple therapy by Susan Johnson). In addition, self-protection was identified as the major motivator for self-sabotage. Further, factors such as negative self-concept and other resultant individual characteristics derived from insecure attachment (e.g., rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy) are possibly the reason that people sabotage relationships. However, determining which specific behaviours are sabotaging individuals' chances of maintaining long-term relationships was not possible until all studies were completed.

Study 2 collected qualitative evidence from individuals with relationship experience ($n = 696$). These findings complemented the psychologists' responses and aided in the scale and model development. The qualitative accounts of people in relationships confirmed that many individuals seem to be stuck in a cycle of self-sabotage and unable to maintain long-term healthy engagements. In accordance with the insight provided by the psychologists, it seems that people sabotage romantic relationships to protect themselves. However, self-sabotage is preventable. The participants' meaningful testimonials regarding their lived experiences suggest that insight into relationships, managing relationship expectations, and collaboration with partners towards commitment are essential steps towards breaking the cycle of self-sabotage.

Study 3 ($n = 321$) and Study 4 ($n = 608$) were scale development studies. The first draft of the scale was reduced from 60 to 30 items with exploratory factor analysis in Study 3. Using a different sample in Study 4, the scale was further reduced to 12 items with three distinct factors established through confirmatory factor analysis. The resultant scale—titled the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale—measured three self-sabotaging behaviours: (1) defensiveness, (2) trust difficulty and (3) lack of relationship skills.

Study 5 ($n = 436$) tested three different models and various mediation paths within the framework of structural equation modelling. All models included demographic factors (i.e., age, gender and sex orientation), relationship factors (i.e., relationship status, duration, quality and stress), insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious and avoidant) and relationship self-sabotage behaviours (i.e., defensiveness, trust difficulty and lack of relationship skills). The findings indicated that the best model for relationship sabotage is not linear. The way people arrive at relationship sabotage is best demonstrated in a circular manner. While insecure attachment leads to self-sabotage, sabotaging relationships reinforce existing attachment styles, and also modify them. Further, it is possible that self-sabotaging tendencies influence how people perceive quality and stress in the relationship.

Overall, the data collected from practising psychologists in Australia and individuals from all parts of the world, with diverse backgrounds, ages, genders, sexual orientations and experiences, informed the conclusions of this project. Future studies need to be conducted to continue to validate the developed scale within different age and sexual orientation groups, as well as exploring diverse coupled relationships longitudinally. In conclusion, this project found that the drive to self-protect through self-defeating behaviours is often a result of insecure attachment styles and past relationship experiences; however, the pattern of self-sabotage is breakable.

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List of Abbreviations

ADF	Asymptotic Distribution Free
APS	Australian Psychological Society
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BCT	Behavioural Couples Therapy
CBCT	Cognitive Behavioural Couple Therapy
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CR	Composite Reliability
ECR-SF	Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Short Form
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EFCT	Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy
GCT	Gottman Couple Therapy
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
JCU	James Cook University
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
ML	Maximum Likelihood
MTMM	Multi-trait–multi-method
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
PCA	Principal Components Analysis
PRQCI	Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory
PRQCI-SF	Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory Short Form
PRSS	Perceived Relationship Stress Scale
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
PsyBA	Psychology Board of Australia
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
RSSS	Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SHS-SF	Self-Handicapping Scale Short Form
SRMR	Standardised Root Mean Square Residual
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index

Introduction

Why Study Self-Sabotage in Romantic Relationships?

'Today, we turn to one person to provide what an entire village once did: a sense of grounding, meaning, and continuity. At the same time, we expect our committed relationships to be romantic as well as emotionally and sexually fulfilling. Is it any wonder that so many relationships crumble under the weight of it all? It is hard to generate excitement, anticipation, and lust with the same person you look to for comfort and stability, but it is not impossible.'

(Perel, 2007, p. viii)

Love is grand and humans are hardwired to search for loving connections. Humans experience love throughout the lifespan, from the beginning to the end of life, in many different forms. Regarding romantic adult engagements, there is a wealth of pop culture literature and empirical research to suggest what love is, how humans find love, and how individuals can attain a successful and intimate relationship long term. Sternberg (1986) theorised that love is composed of three elements: intimacy, passion and commitment. Love also involves partner compatibility (Hall, Carter, Cody, & Albright, 2010), emotional connection (Johnson & Lebow, 2000), accessibility, responsiveness, engagement (Sandberg, Busby, Johnson, & Yoshida, 2012), acceptance (Beck, 1988), self-disclosure (Descutner & Thelen, 1991), independence (Waring, McElrath, Lefcoe, & Weisz, 1981) and conflict resolution (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1993b; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). Overall, research in this area is vast and encompasses the initiation, maintenance and dissolution of intimate relationships. Yet this is an area of study that continues to grow and interest researchers—after all, love remains largely misunderstood and many relationships continue to fail (Apostolou & Wang, 2019).

Compelling research has been conducted to explain the initial stages of romantic communication and engagement. For instance, the work of Hall et al. (2010) focused on individual flirting styles and partner compatibility, with five flirting styles proposed: (1) physical, (2) traditional, (3) sincere, (4) polite and (5) playful. Each flirting style has strengths

and weaknesses contributing to successfully engaging the interest of a potential partner. In addition, individual flirting styles are influenced by context (McBain et al., 2013). For example, flirting at a bar is better suited to a physical flirt who is confident and sees opportunities everywhere. Traditional flirts prefer to be introduced to someone in whom they are already interested, and prefer to flirt in clubs as opposed to bars. In contrast, sincere flirts are typically good at impressing dates with their planning skills and will adapt to different contexts. Polite flirts are cautious when flirting in all contexts and generally prefer conversation with a signal romantic interest, as opposed to body language. Playful flirts are extroverted and flirt for fun, which means they will be comfortable flirting anywhere—except if they are expected to show sincere interest (Hall et al., 2010; Hall & Xing, 2015; McBain et al., 2013; Xing & Hall, 2015). Altogether, the evidence on communicating romantic interest indicates that individuals' personality and flirting styles are amalgamated as a trait characteristic and are highly influenced by context and social norms.

Individual and social expectations of romantic engagements also influence the choice of a romantic partner. For instance, Fletcher and colleagues (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen, & Overall, 2004) argued that mate selection involves a trade-off of different desirable characteristics, such as kindness, physical attractiveness and wealth. Overall, Fletcher and Simpson (2006) explained that it is highly improbable that one individual will be able meet all these standards; therefore, expectations are often modified to justify partner selection (Karantzas, Simpson, Overall, & Campbell, 2019). Alternatively, some individuals will continually change partners to fit expectations (Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009). The work of Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000); Locke (2008); and Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, and Mutso (2010) also suggests that relationship factors (e.g., commitment, trust, intimacy, love, passion, inclusion of other in the self, dependence, satisfaction, flexibility, investment and social network) mediate the relationship between

insecure attachment styles and relationship success. Thus, regulating relationship goals and managing attachment behaviours are important considerations to maintaining successful long-term engagements. In turn, ‘falling short’ or ‘not living up’ to individuals’ or partners’ expectations is a recipe for relationship failure.

The work of Gottman and colleagues (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1993b; Heavey et al., 1993) details maladaptive behaviours and relationship dynamics that can predict relationship dissolution. For instance, behaviours that have been described as the ‘four horsemen of the apocalypse’ (i.e., criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) are proposed to lead to divorce in an average of six years after marriage (Gottman, 1993b). In addition, research resulting from observations of couples in counselling describes three communication styles or couple dynamics that contribute to the dissolution of romantic engagements: attack–attack, attack–withdraw and withdraw–withdraw (Christensen, 1987; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). This topic will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5; however, in short, it can be said that these behaviours and couple dynamics are broadly divided into attack and defence strategies to deal with conflict in the relationship and protect the individual from being hurt.

Despite strong evidence to suggest the destructive power of the ‘four horsemen’ and maladaptive couple interactions, there are antidotes. For instance, the Gottman Institute suggests a gentle start-up to deal with criticism, which involves using ‘I’ statements when expressing feelings to a partner. In addition, contempt can be combated by discussing the other person’s positive qualities. Defensiveness is better dealt with by taking responsibility for one’s wrongdoing and accepting the other’s perspective. Finally, stonewalling can be replaced with healthy self-soothing techniques (Lisitsa, 2013f). In accordance, prevalent practice models for relationship counselling address alternative ways of dealing with conflict and working towards healthy relationships. Specifically, two practice models for clients

experiencing relationship difficulty are most commonly adopted by psychologists working in Australia: emotionally focused couple therapy (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998) and Gottman couple therapy (Gottman & Silver, 2015). These will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Online articles and magazines can also provide love seekers a detailed picture of how to attain a successful relationship. For example, a blog post by Wong (2019), written in consultation with marriage therapists, summarises a successful romantic relationship in contemporary times as a partnership that involves being able to share the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ with a partner, with the expectation of receiving support, feeling ‘authentic’ in a coupled engagement and not having to pretend to be someone different, communicating well and being flexible to deal with conflict, having insight into one’s shortcomings and accepting one’s partner’s differences, and having a partner who is liked by friends and peers. Unsurprisingly, detailed guides of successful relationships, such as the one aforementioned, are not uncommon in the popular literature. However, they do fill love seekers with high expectations of romantic engagements and their partners. The issue is that these expectations are not always achievable.

Although the literature discussed thus far is abundant, a major gap in understanding relationships still exists. Lack of theory development, insufficient testing and lack of empirical evidence have resulted in an ambiguous conceptual definition to explain why some people are trapped in a continuous cycle of successfully initiating a romantic relationship, yet being unable to maintain long-term engagements, and embarking on a path to a destined break-up. The concept of self-sabotage and self-handicapping can both anecdotally explain why and how this phenomenon occurs; however, no empirical research exists using either term in the context of romantic relationships.

Self-handicapping has been extensively studied in the context of education and sports, and is a cognitive strategy employed with the overall aim of self-protection (Jones & Berglas,

1978; Rhodewalt, 1990). However, the concept of self-handicapping is limited mainly to physical barriers employed to explicitly hinder performance-driven activities, and does not fully encompass complex intrinsic behaviours commonly observed in the dissolution of romantic engagements. As an example, the Self-Handicapping Scale (Strube, 1986) measures high levels of the trait as a function of excessive drinking or eating, constantly feeling sick, or feeling easily distracted while reading. Thus, measuring self-defeating behaviours in romantic relationships using the Self-Handicapping Scale would be inadequate (this topic will be further explored in Chapter 1).

The self-defeating patterns of behaviours in romantic relationships remain largely misunderstood. Therefore, a new approach using different terminology and a different conceptual definition to self-handicapping is needed. The term ‘self-sabotage’ is widely used in popular culture (e.g., online articles, magazines and blogs); however, it is documented scarcely in empirical literature. As originally suggested by Post (1988), the term ‘self-sabotage’ can be used to explain behavioural expressions of individuals dealing with intrapersonal struggles. In accordance, Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) merged attachment and goal-orientation frameworks to theoretically explain how patterns of insecure attachment and insecure relationship views can trigger defensive functioning in individuals. Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) explained that stressful moments in the relationship will activate the individual’s attachment system, which in turn will determine how they respond to situations and set goals for their relationship. For instance, if the individual has a secure attachment system, they might resort to an adaptive response and set learning goals informed by constructive strategies. However, if the attachment system is not secure, the individual might resort to a maladaptive response and set self-validation goals informed by defensive strategies. Overall, the Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) theoretical model proposed a possible path to explain self-sabotage in romantic relationships. Nevertheless, research is yet to

explain how self-defeating behaviours in romantic relationships lead to self-sabotage (this model will be further explored in Chapter 2, as it forms the basis for the current project).

Altogether, there is a wealth of empirical evidence to suggest that patterns of behaviours that are characteristic of insecure attachment (i.e., anxious and avoidant) lead to the dissolution of romantic engagements (Chapter 2 also explains insecure attachment in greater detail). In short, anxious individuals fall in love frequently, yet experience extreme self-doubt, excessive need for approval and distress when others are unavailable or unresponsive (Harper, Dickson, & Welsh, 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In contrast, avoidant individuals mostly do not believe in love, repress feelings of insecurity, are reluctant to engage in self-disclosure, and express an excessive need for self-reliance. Accordingly, investigations have linked self-defeating traits, such as rejection sensitivity (i.e., anxious expectation of rejection in situations involving significant others; Downey & Feldman, 1996), to anxiously attached individuals, and fear of intimacy (i.e., the lack of ability to exchange feelings or thoughts with significant others; Descutner & Thelen, 1991) to avoidant attached individuals. However, previous research has failed to consider whether the stressors that are often inherent in the maintenance of an intimate relationship may trigger defensive functioning among people who are insecurely attached, leading to the use of self-defeating behaviours, and subsequently resulting in self-sabotage. It is this gap in the literature that the current project sought to investigate.

The current project involved defining self-sabotage in romantic relationships, developing a scale to measure the construct and proposing a relationship sabotage model. With a mixed-methods design divided into three phases and five studies, this project contributes to a greater understanding of how self-sabotage is enacted in the context of romantic relationships (see Chapter 3 for further details regarding the project design and methodological approach). Study 1 explored the theme of self-sabotage as viewed by

practising psychologists specialising in romantic relationships, with knowledge gathered from semi-structured interviews. The psychologists identified the main issues contributing to self-sabotage in romantic relationships and the reasons that it might occur. The findings from this initial study informed the creation of items for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale. Study 2 was another qualitative study to complement the findings from Study 1 by adding accounts of the general public regarding their lived experiences with relationship self-sabotage. The findings from Study 2 were compared with the first study to further the investigation regarding relationship self-sabotage and the scale development. Study 3 was the first empirical study to test a measure for self-sabotage using exploratory factor analysis. Subsequently, Study 4 re-tested the scale using confirmatory factor analysis in a different sample. The final study, Study 5, tested three alternative models of sabotage in romantic relationships using the newly developed scale and measures of attachment and other relationship factors. A best model was proposed, with implications for future research and practice.

Overall, this thesis consists of 10 chapters, with Chapters 1 and 2 presenting a review of the literature on the cognitive practice of self-handicapping and using attachment and goal-orientation theory to understand self-defeating behaviours. The literature review led to the development of this project, which is explained in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the findings from Study 1, with a detailed discussion referring back to the literature. Chapter 5 is a commentary based on an unexpected finding from Study 1. Chapters 6 to 9 present the findings from the remaining four studies. The final chapter, Chapter 10, presents a general discussion of the findings from this research project, with links to previous research and the theoretical background. The final chapter also includes a detailed discussion of how this thesis contributes to the existing literature, with special attention devoted to its implications and limitations.

Chapter 1

The Cognitive Strategy of Self-Handicapping

'Does it make sense to boycott ourselves?

...

Many seem to be aware of their problem. Many have decided to stop from tomorrow on. But when tomorrow and after tomorrow come many tend to let slip their vow and their self-sabotage goes on to rule their life. Their dissonant behavior transforms them into social losers or hopeless patsies and depresses them into the class of forlorn pariahs. They realize, as such, that self-handicapping makes no sense, but are not able to protect themselves from themselves since they have not got the muscle to live down the spell of addiction.'

(Pevernagie, 2019)

Self-handicapping is a cognitive strategy employed with the overall aim of self-protection (Jones & Berglas, 1978; Rhodewalt, 1990). This approach primarily serves the function of self-esteem and self-image safeguard. Jones and Berglas (1978) first explained that, when an individual faces a situation that presents a threat to their self-concept, they might act to manipulate the outcome of events to guarantee self-protection. After the event, different attributions are made in the face of success and failure to guarantee a win-win outcome for the self-handicapper. For instance, if faced with failure, the individual can justify the outcome as resulting from the handicap itself (i.e., an external cause), whereas, if faced with success, the individual can emphasise their ability to withstand the barriers of the handicap (i.e., an internal cause). Overall, it is proposed that the self-handicapper creates obstacles that impede success (Berglas & Jones, 1978) or withdraws effort (Rhodewalt, 1990; Smith, Snyder, & Handelsman, 1982) to protect their self-esteem and competent public and private self-images.

The current self-handicapping theory contradicts the concept initially proposed by Festinger (1954) and Heider (1958) to explain social interactions. Both theorists developed their understanding of interpersonal dynamics based on the premise that humans are driven to evaluate their ability to control the environment in which they exist. However, Jones and Berglas (1978) proposed that the self-handicapper is motivated to avoid accurate evidence of

their abilities as another strategic way to control the environment. Nevertheless, it is proposed that self-protection, as opposed to control over the environment, is the stronger motive (Berglas & Jones, 1978). Overall, the practice of self-handicapping is highly effective because it offers the individual a feeling of protection by moderating the effects of failure and success with an equally beneficial outcome. Additionally, this practice can momentarily bolster the individual's sense of self-esteem, thereby reinforcing its use and dependability (Rhodewalt, 1990).

The Practice of Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping is arguably the most commonly used strategy for self-protection in the educational context (Martin & Marsh, 2003; Török, Szabó, & Tóth, 2018). Berglas and Jones's (1978) original study investigated the link between self-handicapping and a recent history of non-contingent academic success in relation to gender differences (with varying test conditions). The authors proposed that, if previous evaluations of the individual's abilities left the individual uncertain about their current skills, they will choose a strategy that gives them the opportunity to justify failure (because of the handicap) or embrace success (despite the handicap). The results indicated that, following accidental success, only males chose to self-handicap by using a performance drug to undertake the retest. In addition, different private and public test conditions had no effect on males' choice to self-handicap. These results suggest that, for males, the choice to self-handicap served as a strategy to externalise probable failure at retest. Further, it can be suggested that males were motivated to self-protect regardless of the presence of others. However, the findings differed for females. While males understood accidental success as resulting from their existing abilities, females understood accidental success as resulting from luck (Berglas & Jones, 1978). Overall, these findings suggest that males' sense of self-concept is derived from previous performance and achievement (i.e., extrinsically and socially validated), while females' sense

of self-concept is a product of an intrinsic representation of what is true about themselves and destined to occur in their lives.

Sport is another context in which self-handicapping has been studied (Elliot, Cury, Fryer, & Huguet, 2006; Rhodewalt, Saltzman, & Wittmer, 1984). In this context, self-handicapping has been shown to mediate the relationship between goal setting and performance, meaning that individuals will set a goal to avoid performing as a way to protect against possible failure, which aligns with what was originally proposed by Berglas and Jones (1978). Thus, the practice of self-handicapping in this context is also primarily attributed to a prior experience of failure and subsequent accidental success. However, more recent evidence (Arndt, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002; Ferradás, Freire, Rodríguez-Martínez, & Piñeiro-Aguín, 2018; Schwinger, Wirthwein, Lemmer, & Steinmayr, 2014) suggests that individuals who are prone to self-protect using self-handicapping also display specific traits, such as low-self-esteem and high feelings of defensiveness and helplessness.

Although the initial premise of self-handicapping is still irrefutable (Jones & Berglas, 1978), it is now maintained that specific personality traits are important influences on why and how people use this strategy (Rhodewalt, 1990; Strube, 1986). Consequently, the theory has evolved to the understanding that some individuals might resort to self-handicapping prior to experiencing accidental success (Török et al., 2018). For instance, it is possible that individuals who have a negative self-concept hold the belief that they are not capable of performing in the first place. Other traits linked to the practice of self-handicapping are self-efficacy, locus of control and perfectionism. Therefore, a conclusion about how and why self-handicapping occurs would be stronger with a better understanding of how different individual traits and gender differences might influence intrinsic motivations to self-protect. Only then can inferences be made about self-handicapping in various contexts.

Investigating the practice of self-handicapping in other contexts will require a re-definition of the phenomenon and a re-evaluation of the instrument used to measure the construct. For instance, the Self-Handicapping Scale (Strube, 1986) measures high levels of the trait as a function of excessive drinking or eating, constantly feeling sick, or feeling easily distracted while reading, which suggests that this terminology is better used to describe physical barriers employed to explicitly hinder performance-driven activities. Thus, this instrument would not be appropriate in the context of romantic relationships. As it stands, other individual characteristics and motivators need to be examined to further investigations in various contexts, develop theory and empirical evidence.

The Influence of Negative Self-Concept

Self-concepts that are socially validated have a greater chance of influencing the practice of self-handicapping, based on two relational schemas (Rhodewalt, 2008). Individuals may attribute their self-conceptions to a history of non-contingent successes, or may hold the belief that their abilities are fixed and cannot be improved (Rhodewalt, 2008). Overall, working models based on self-reflection and social interactions are challenging to modify because people tend to assimilate new information to protect their existing schemas (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Consequently, as explained by Hewitt et al. (2003), individuals who are motivated intrapersonally (i.e., based on themselves) and interpersonally (i.e., based on interactions with others) to maintain and enhance self-esteem and self-presentation often choose to self-handicap.

Self-Esteem. This self-concept is highly dependent on social validation, which is especially true when associated with self-handicapping practices. In general terms, individuals with either low or high self-esteem can experience the need to self-handicap. While low self-esteem individuals self-handicap to protect against failure, high self-esteem individuals self-handicap to enhance implications of success. Further, Feick and Rhodewalt

(1997) proposed that self-handicappers experience less decline in self-esteem when exposed to failure compared with non-self-handicappers, and experience an increase in self-esteem when exposed to success. Overall, this evidence presents support for individuals' search for a win-win outcome and the overall goal of self-protection.

Different types of self-esteem might also influence self-handicapping practices. Spalding and Hardin (1999) found a significant difference between implicit (or private) self-esteem (i.e., derived from an intrinsic representation of the self) and explicit (or public) self-esteem (i.e., derived from previous performance and achievement). This finding is supported by Arndt et al.'s (2002) study, which concluded that individuals high in implicit self-esteem experience less self-threat and consequently resort to self-handicapping practices less often. However, this conclusion is possibly a misinterpretation. A more appropriate conclusion is that intrinsically attributed self-esteem might result in a different form of self-defeating behaviour not explained by the self-handicapping literature. This possible explanation was raised in early investigations of self-handicapping (Strube, 1986) and sequential studies investigating self-handicapping comorbidity with stress, anxiety and depression (Sahraç, 2011). Overall, it was found that the correlation between self-handicapping and high levels of stress, anxiety and depression might in fact suggest that intrinsic self-esteem is a by-product of low self-regard. More specifically, distinguishing between implicit self-esteem and explicit self-esteem is an issue, since self-handicapping does not fully address intrinsic behaviours. Investigations in other contexts should offer additional answers regarding how self-esteem difficulties can lead to self-protective behaviours.

In the context of romantic relationships, self-esteem forms part of a risk regulation model to explain how individuals balance divergent goals in relationships. Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) explained that people in romantic relationships will have dissonant goals to foster intimacy and self-protect. This explanation aligns with what was originally proposed

by Bowlby (1969) and this topic will be further reviewed in Chapter 2. In short, self-esteem is one trait that influences how individuals assess which goal to prioritise. Those who see themselves as worthy of relationships and perceive their partner as responsive will tend to choose proximity, while those who see themselves as undeserving of relationships and perceive their partner as non-responsive will tend to choose self-protection (Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006; Luerssen, Jhita, & Ayduk, 2017; Murray et al., 2006; Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Additionally, Luerssen et al. (2017) explained that individuals with low self-esteem choose self-protection in relationships because of fear of rejection and humiliation. Also noteworthy is the fact that individuals with low self-esteem will tend to make the wrong assessment about their partners and underestimate their partner's commitment to the relationship (Cameron, Stinson, Gaetz, & Balchen, 2010; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). This outcome is possibly a result of the individual's insecure view of themselves and others. Other concepts that could explain the practice of self-handicapping, and have been linked with self-esteem, are self-efficacy and locus of control. These concepts will be discussed later in this chapter.

Self-Presentation. This is another self-concept that is highly influenced by perception guided by social interactions. Strube (1986) found that increased awareness of private self-presentation is not always correlated with increased awareness of public self-presentation, which suggests that self-handicapping is more influenced by others' evaluation of the self. To elaborate, Strube (1986) originally explained that concern for self-image can lead the individual to form inaccurate representations of the self and others. This finding was later expanded in Hewitt et al.'s (2003) study, which found that individuals who displayed a perfectionist approach to self-presentation were more likely to be socially anxious and self-handicap. In accordance with Strube's (1986) prediction, self-handicapping tendencies appear to occur primarily because of concern for the evaluation of others, highly attenuated by low

self-esteem and self-regard. Thus, perfectionistic self-promotion and non-display of imperfection are defensive strategies that possibly lead to self-defeating behaviours (Hewitt et al., 2003). The concept of perfectionism, which is also referred to as high preoccupation with self-presentation, will be discussed later in this chapter. Conclusively, whether individuals strive to maintain self-presentation or avoid negative representations, their goal of self-protection is the same.

In romantic relationships, the quest to control self-presentation poses additional complications. The Ideal Standards Model proposed by Fletcher and Simpson (2000) details important selection criteria for romantic partners (i.e., kindness, physical attractiveness and wealth). Further, it is understood that individuals will use these standards as a starting point to rate themselves and note discrepancies (Overall et al., 2006). Moreover, a quick glance at the flirting literature (Hall et al., 2010; Hall & Xing, 2015; McBain et al., 2013; Xing & Hall, 2015) indicates that physical attraction is a strong feature influencing how individuals communicate romantic interest and initiate romantic relationships. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that individuals hold ‘ideal’ standards for themselves and others.

Modern online dating dynamics do offer some solutions to image presentation. Searching for a date online can offer an element of control over how the self is presented to others (Whitty, 2008) and how the romantic engagement unfolds (Corriero & Tong, 2015; Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017). For instance, in a study of internet dating, Whitty (2008) found that many participants admitted to controlling their online presentation by including misrepresentations on their profile (e.g., out-dated photographs and incorrect details regarding children, living arrangements, occupation and weight). The participants explained that this strategy was effective in attracting interest from suitors, and justified their misrepresentations as simple ‘exaggerations’, rather than lies. Overall, the evidence shows

that individuals are increasingly choosing to initiate dating online because of convenience and for self-protection (Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Ligtenberg, 2017).

Although the online space offers a 'solution' to image safeguarding, it also reinforces self-defeating behaviours. Overall, this poses a barrier to maintaining long-term relationships. Online dating can be particularly troubling when discrepancies between the 'real' and 'ideal' self are exposed. Specifically, online daters might feel unprepared and fear being rejected for who they really are when progressing to meet face to face. In turn, this feeling can trigger a cycle of self-protection, anxious expectation of rejection, and avoidance of intimacy and commitment. In accordance, Blackhart, Fitzpatrick, and Williamson (2014) found that rejection sensitivity is a predictive factor leading individuals to choose online dating. Similarly, Odacı and Kalkan (2010) found that young adults with reported high levels of internet use are increasingly lonely and anxious about dating. Further, Yao and Zhong (2014) found that online relationships, as opposed to offline relationships, are not an effective alternative to combat feelings of loneliness. Altogether, the evidence shows that individuals with negative self-concepts are more motivated to establish control and reduce anxiety by resorting to virtual relationships. Nevertheless, failure to establish real connections leaves them feeling lonely and rejected, which in turn reinforces the need for self-protection.

Self-Efficacy, Locus of Control and Perfectionism

Other traits linked to negative self-concept and self-handicapping are self-efficacy, locus of control and perfectionism (Arazzini Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014). These will be discussed next.

Self-Efficacy. This trait is defined as the belief that one can perform certain actions and these actions will in turn achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1997). A noteworthy distinction in this definition is that beliefs are not the same as expected outcomes. Therefore, self-efficacy requires the belief that one can both perform and achieve. This construct is often

linked with motivation, effort and persistence (Byl & Naydenova, 2016). Further, Maddux and Gosselin (2012) proposed that people build self-efficacy by using knowledge gathered from previous experiences of success and failure. This premise is similar to how self-handicapping is theorised. Consequently, self-efficacy is also commonly studied in the educational and sports contexts. Overall, it is proposed that self-efficacy is a predictor of self-handicapping (Arazzini Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014; Martin & Brawley, 2002). However, a recent study did not support this finding. A possible explanation for this result is that self-confidence, as opposed to self-efficacy, is a more stable predictor of self-handicapping (Coudevylle, Gernigon, & Martin Ginis, 2011). Self-efficacy is often also linked to self-esteem; however, Coudevylle et al. (2011) proposed that lack of self-confidence, as opposed to low self-esteem, offers a better explanation for self-handicapping. Investigations have also been conducted in romantic relationships (e.g., Byl & Naydenova, 2016; Futris, Sutton, & Duncan, 2017; Riggio et al., 2013); however, in this context, self-efficacy has not yet been linked to self-defeating behaviours.

In the context of romantic engagements, self-efficacy is understood as the ability to persist with the relationship in the face of difficulties and deal with stress in the relationship (Riggio et al., 2013). An important prediction made by Riggio et al. (2013) suggests that the ability to be a partner in a romantic engagement is predictive of romantic relationship satisfaction. In line with this prediction, Byl and Naydenova (2016) compared females' relationship and sport self-efficacy, and found that females with high sport self-efficacy also showed high relationship efficacy, thereby suggesting that self-efficacy is a transcendent trait. In accordance with Riggio et al.'s (2013) prediction, a positive correlation was found between self-efficacy and relationship satisfaction in males, yet not females. Nevertheless, females did report higher relationship satisfaction overall. Therefore, the difference in gender may be a result of the fact that males generally report higher self-efficacy than do females

(Byl & Naydenova, 2016). Similarly, a recent study conducted by Futris et al. (2017) to examine romantic self-efficacy in young people found that participants enrolled in a youth-focused relationship education program had better relationship skills than did those who were not enrolled. Specifically, individuals who attended the educational program reported increased confidence and intention to engage the skills learnt in romantic relationships. Further, this result suggests that educational programs designed to teach relationship skills have the potential to increase overall satisfaction and maintenance. Nevertheless, no studies to date have linked self-efficacy and self-handicapping in romantic relationships. Another trait that has received limited research attention is locus of control.

Locus of Control. This trait is defined as a personal belief that the outcomes of an action can be attributed to the actions of the self or others. Individuals with an internal locus of control will tend to take responsibility for events in their lives. In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control will tend to assign others responsibility for events in their lives (Akin, 2011; Kovaleva, 2012; Rotter & Mulry, 1965). In the context of education, locus of control is a relevant way for individuals to assess their own abilities. In accordance, Akin (2011) found that academic locus of control is a significant contributor to self-handicapping. An earlier study conducted by Prager (1986) also showed that locus of control could be linked with an individual's ability to be in an intimate relationship. In this study and other studies (e.g., Luerssen et al., 2017), intimacy was measured as the ability to self-disclose and express affection. Prager (1986) found that females in intimate relationships have a higher internal locus of control than do females not in an intimate relationship. Overall, the evidence suggests that the willingness to accept responsibility for events in one's life also makes it possible for intimacy with others to be formed. However, one trait alone cannot provide a comprehensive explanation.

Perfectionism. This trait is defined as setting high standards that cannot be met (Karner-Huțuleac, 2014; Pacht, 1984). Hewitt et al. (2003) proposed that perfectionistic self-promotion and non-display of imperfection are motivated intrapersonally by the desire for self-esteem maintenance and enhancement, and interpersonally by the desire to please an audience or avoid negative social outcomes. Similarly, Karner-Huțuleac (2014) found that perfectionism among students with high academic expectations is driven from anticipatory anxiety and fear of failure. Self-handicapping behaviours in this context include procrastination and compulsive behaviours. In accordance with previous research, these maladaptive behaviours were first adopted by students as coping mechanisms; however, over time, the same behaviours become self-defensive and led to low self-esteem and depression.

In the context of romantic relationships, maladaptive perfectionism has been linked with fear of intimacy (Martin & Ashby, 2004). Shea, Slaney, and Rice (2006) explained that this link is expressed differently in males and females. Within the dimension of adult insecure attachment, females will often express fear of closeness when avoidant, and a high concern for the possibility of rejection when anxious. For males, fear of intimacy is often expressed as a discomfort with close relationships. Further, Haring, Hewitt, and Flett (2003) found that maladaptive coping strategies—such as conflict, self-blame, avoidance and self-interest—mediate the relationship between perfectionism and poor marital functioning. Again, a gender difference exists, with females seen to adopt all listed coping mechanisms, while males often resort to conflict. This finding suggests that the expectation of perfection in the relationship leads both partners to experience maladjustment—while one partner feels constantly disappointed at unmet expectations, the other resorts to maladaptive coping mechanisms to avoid feeling inadequate against unrealistic standards. In accordance, Fletcher and colleagues (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Fletcher et al., 2004) explained that unmet relationship standards in a dyad engagement is a significant contributor to relationship dissolution.

Overall, previous research suggests that important individual differences—such as self-efficacy, locus of control and perfectionism—influence self-handicapping tendencies. In accordance, Arazzini Stewart and De George-Walker (2014) examined the path to self-handicapping as predicted by perfectionism and locus of control, and mediated by self-efficacy. They found that perfectionism and external locus of control predicted self-handicapping, and external locus of control also predicted low self-efficacy; however, self-efficacy did not mediate the relationship between the constructs. This result suggests that self-handicapping is triggered by a combination of maladaptive traits, yet more investigation is needed regarding the most appropriate prediction path. One possibility worthy of further investigation is the concept of belongingness, which is likely a mediator of self-handicapping (Bowles & Scull, 2019); however, this has not been examined to date.

Is Self-Handicapping a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?

The literature reviewed thus far has indicated that the practice of self-handicapping is difficult to escape because of its effectiveness and rewarding nature (Jones & Berglas, 1978). However, the self-handicapper's journey is often met with a twist. Rhodewalt (1990) suggested that high self-handicappers will inevitably fulfil their beliefs, meaning that, when they maintain their inability to complete a task, their performance can translate their claims into real outcomes. Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, and Khouri (1998) called this phenomenon a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. A self-fulfilling prophecy means that those motivated to maintain predictability will act to ensure that the outcome of performance matches expectations (Downey et al., 1998). However, the predictive utility of self-handicapping is dependent on the individual motive (Rhodewalt, 1990). As seen in the different arguments proposed by Festinger (1954), Heider (1958), and Jones and Berglas (1978), individuals have a different approach to their 'end goal' of control over the environment and self-protection. Therefore, it is possible that the way self-handicapping occurs is unique to the context.

In addition, different types of handicap barriers exist. Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) and Rhodewalt (2008) detailed varying short-term and long-term outcomes depending on the handicap used (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption, high level of stress and lack of sleep). Although short-term self-handicapping can provide the illusion of control over the environment and consequently bolster the individual's sense of self, long-term self-handicapping can undermine those same attributes that it once validated (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). This premise supports the argument that an operative sense of self-concept that is socially validated should be less stable than an intrinsic representation of the self. Studies evaluating chronic self-handicappers have also shown that the practice of avoidance of self-evaluation and maladjustment reinforce each other (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). Overall, three main consequences of long-term self-handicapping were identified: a direct effect of prolonged use of handicaps (e.g., alcohol addiction), repeated impediment of performance and self-deception. Given that self-handicapping appears to first validate, yet eventually hinders the individual's sense of self, it also highlights the lack of stability within one's self-concept. Consequently, despite the self-handicapper's best efforts, this instability can inevitably expose their true shortfalls, influence their self-concept and inevitably fulfil a self-defeating prophecy.

Chapter Summary

Self-handicapping is a cognitive strategy employed with the overall aim of self-protection. This phenomenon has been extensively studied in the context of education and sports, yet the same is not true in other contexts. The literature on self-handicapping suggests that this terminology is better used to describe physical barriers employed to explicitly hinder performance-driven activities. Thus, investigating self-defeating behaviours in romantic relationships using self-handicapping would not expose the unique behaviours responsible for dissolving romantic engagements. A more appropriate term to describe self-defeating

behaviours in the context of romantic relationships is 'self-sabotage'. Self-sabotage has been generally explained as a synonym of self-handicapping; however, no empirical definition exists for this terminology. Theoretically, it is proposed that self-sabotage can be used to explain maladaptive behavioural expressions of individuals dealing with intrapersonal struggles (Post, 1988). Further, there is an abundance of empirical evidence to suggest that patterns of behaviours characteristic of insecure attachment lead to the dissolution of romantic engagements (Harper et al., 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In accordance, Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) merged attachment and goal-orientation frameworks to theoretically explain how patterns of insecure attachment and insecure relationship views can trigger defensive functioning in individuals. Therefore, the next chapter will investigate how defensive functioning in romantic relationships leads to self-sabotage within the framework of attachment and goal-orientation theory.

Chapter 2

Merging Attachment and Goal-Orientation Theory:

A New Approach to Self-Sabotage in Romantic Relationships

'Romantic love is an attachment process (a process of becoming attached), experienced somewhat differently by different people because of variations in their attachment histories. Healthy and unhealthy forms of love originate as reasonable adaptations to specific social circumstances.'

(Hazan & Shaver, 1987)

Self-sabotage in romantic relationships is possibly enacted through goal-oriented defensive strategies informed by attachment styles to protect self-worth (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). In other words, defensive strategies can become self-defeating and consequently hinder the individual's chances of a successful relationship. This premise is supported by previous research. For instance, Elliot and Reis (2003) suggested that self-sabotage can be demonstrated in insecurely attached individuals who hold avoidance goals for their relationship. Further, Kammrath and Dweck (2006) found that insecure individuals who expected the relationship to fail were less likely to express their concerns and engage in strategies to resolve problems with their partners. Similarly, Murray et al. (2006) and Cavallo, Fitzsimons, and Holmes (2010) found that individuals will set self-protective goals, as opposed to connectedness goals, in the face of threat within the romantic relationship to manage potentially hurtful outcomes. Research conducted by Locke (2008) also indicated that insecure attachment predicted weaker goals to approach closeness with a romantic partner. Additionally, a meta-analysis conducted by Le et al. (2010) identified that insecure attachment styles and relationship factors—such as relationship dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, conflict and trust issues—contribute to the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Thus, it is possible that patterns of relationship behaviours resulting from individual differences might be contributing to a cycle of romantic self-sabotage, where some individuals are likely to continually destroy every relationship they have. Altogether, the

literature has long addressed the influence of individuals' adult attachment styles on the maintenance of intimate engagements, and some compelling research has been conducted using both attachment and goal-orientation theories, which will now be reviewed.

Attachment Theory

First proposed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), attachment theory was developed to conceptualise the universal human need to form close affectional bonds. Close bonds are first attained by attracting proximity and avoiding separation between the infant and caregiver. It is now understood that intimate bonds serve as a protective mechanism through human development and in the face of threat or danger. The central idea of this theory is that development involves the continual construction, revision, integration and abstraction of mental models of attachment that provide individuals with guidelines for coping with different forms of stress.

Mental models (or working models) are cognitive-affective relational schemas that, once activated, can shape and guide individuals' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Collins et al., 2006). Overall, it is proposed that development is the result of the interaction between the individual's genotype and phenotype, with the direct influence of the caregiver's social, psychological and biological make-up (Bowlby, 1969; Schore, 1999). From Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) early writings, it is understood that attachment is a phenomenon built from the inside out, starting at the infant's nervous system. Schore (1999) elaborated on Bowlby's teaching to explain that the process of attachment starts at the prefrontal system, where the infant's sensory processing of information can contribute towards a homeostatic (i.e., equilibrated) regulation between internal working models and external stimuli. Further, the prefrontal system is also responsible for the formulation of goal-oriented behaviour towards survival. More specifically, Bowlby also focused on the role of the limbic system to describe how development is shaped. The limbic system is responsible for instinctual behaviours, such

as adaptation and learning (as suggested by the early Charles Darwin). Therefore, it can be concluded that development is a result of the interaction between ‘an active and changing organism and an active and changing environment’ (Hinde, 1990; as cited in Schore, 2000, p.162). Further, Pipp and Harmon (1987) explained that the internal working models, which represent the dynamic relationship between infant and caregiver, are inherently stored in the memory systems. Overall, the important feature of this framework is that attachment behaviours are goal oriented to form close affectional bonds between the individual and the attachment figure towards ensuring survival (Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

The relationship between the infant and caregiver determines the attachment pattern. Infants are classified as either securely or insecurely attached, depending on their expectation concerning their caregiver’s accessibility and responsiveness. Secure attachment is characterised as a healthy bond between the infant and caregiver in which the child displays a normal pattern of behaviours when experiencing ensuing separation (e.g., child feels upset) and proximity (e.g., child can be comforted). If insecure, the child is classified as either insecure-ambivalent/resistant or insecure-avoidant. If the child is ambivalent/resistant, they tend to display signs of extreme apprehension in the face of separation and continued distress in the face of proximity, where comfort is difficult to achieve. If the child is avoidant, they tend to rarely display anxiety when facing separation and consequently tend to avoid proximity with the caregiver (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1972; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). A fourth attachment style (i.e., insecure-disorganised/disoriented) was later proposed by Main and Solomon (1986). The fourth style describes infants who are extremely insecure and exhibit unpredictable patterns of behaviours. Overall, it is broadly agreed that, once formed, attachment styles tend to endure; however, that does not mean these are forever fixed (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The idea that attachment is a continuous and persistent process was first encouraged by Bowlby's (1979) statement 'from the cradle to the grave' (p.129). This premise is heavily influenced by Freudian teachings and the search for answers to human behaviour rooted in childhood. Nevertheless, Bowlby was a great critic of Freud's work, especially concerning the sexualised remarks regarding the relationship dynamics between children and their caregivers (Bowlby, 1980). Following Bowlby's (1979) logic, Hazan and Shaver (1987) explored the continuity of attachment styles into adulthood and conducted ground-breaking research pioneering the investigation of romantic love as part of the attachment process. Hazan and Shaver's (1987) research investigated individuals' relationship experiences and working models. The authors concluded that schemas derived from working models of the self and others in relationships can place insecure individuals in a 'vicious cycle' (p. 321), where previous experiences affect beliefs, leading to predicted outcomes. In accordance, Rowe and Fitness (2018) explained that individuals begin to understand emotions from childhood, which means that the development of emotions involves making causal attributions of how experiences affect one's understanding of oneself and others.

However, the learning process is complex. To illustrate, Peterson (2018) offered an eloquent explanation by proposing that the extent to which something results from biology or the social environment depends on social interactions. This conclusion highlights a divide that has dominated the literature for many years, whereby some theorists view attachment as a trait-like characteristic of an individual's personality, and some understand attachment as context specific. Simply stated, attachment is dependent on both biology and upbringing (thus person specific) and on developmental changes, social interactions and relationship history, which means that it can change from one relationship to the next. The former better describes infant attachment styles, while the latter describes a more complex process characteristic of adult relationships.

In adulthood, the four attachment styles are also based on two dimensions: (1) attachment-related anxiety and (2) attachment-related avoidance. Individuals in the first dimension are typically focused on their sense of self-worth as characteristic of their relationship with others (i.e., acceptance vs. rejection), while individuals in the second dimension typically define their level of comfort in a relationship with others as a function of intimacy and interdependence with others (Collins et al., 2006). Insecure attachment in adulthood is also broadly classified as anxious and avoidant (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). These styles are demonstrated in the two-dimensional model of individual differences in adult attachment (see Figure 1), which was originally developed by Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) and later adapted by Shaver and Fraley (2004).

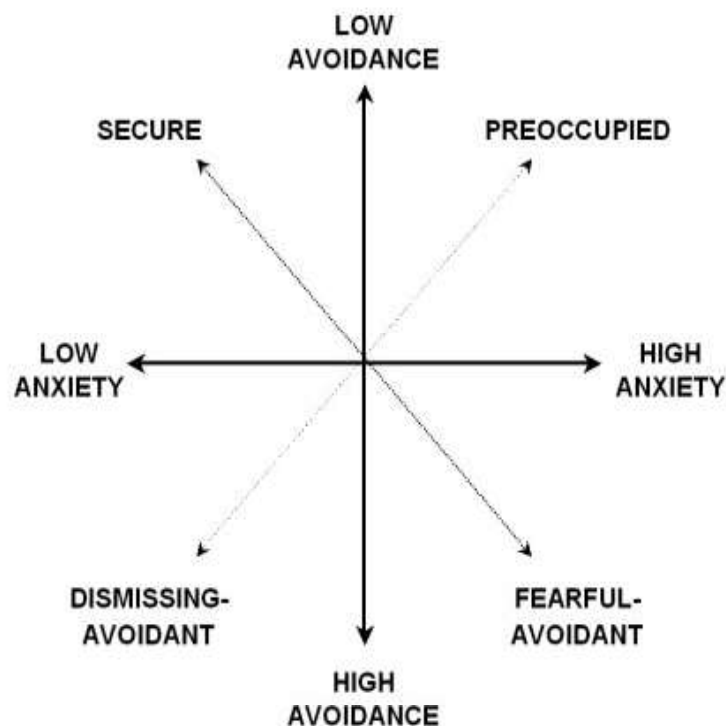


Figure 1. Two-Dimensional Model of Individual Differences in Adult Attachment.

From 'Self-Report Measures of Adult Attachment' by P. R. Shaver and R. C. Fraley (2004) (<http://labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/measures/newmeasures.html>). In the public domain.

Research that followed the seminal work of Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that the working models underpinning attachment may in fact affect future adult relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990). In a broad sense, working models (or mental models) are cognitive-affective relational schemas (or patterns of thought) that, once activated, can shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Collins et al., 2006). There is a consensus that working models in adults result from positive and negative views of the self and others (Collins et al., 2006; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000) and it is proposed that this cognitive-affective processing disposition undermining intimate relationships can inevitably influence the expectations and outcomes of romantic relationships. Specifically, Fonagy, Gergely, and Jurist (2004) adopted the concept of mentalisation to explain one's capability to understand one's own and others' state of mind. This concept is defined as a reflective function that aids the individual in interpreting behaviour, attitudes and feelings expressed by the self and others. For instance, in the context of self-handicapping, it was found that secure schemas can lead to less critical self-appraisal, which in turn might translate into healthier associations between the consequences of failure or rejection and the possibility of success or acceptance (Arndt et al., 2002). Conclusively, individuals will have multiple mental models of their attachment patterns throughout the lifespan, which will vary depending on their experience (Caron, 2012). In turn, these mental models will promote specific behaviours resultant from the individual's beliefs.

In romantic engagements, there are two beliefs that possibly have a significant effect on relationship maintenance and longevity: destiny and growth beliefs. Knee (1998) explained that individuals who believe in a destined relationship tend to assess their romantic engagements early and rapidly, and subsequently tend to give up easily. In contrast, individuals who believe that relationships are developed through growth tend to invest time and effort in trying to make the relationship work. The belief in romantic destiny is

categorised as a point of view that will most likely not change (i.e., a fixed view), while the belief in romantic growth is categorised as a point of view that can be changed (i.e., a flexible view). In accordance, relationship survival has been found to be highly correlated to initial impressions and initial satisfaction (Knee, 1998; Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001; Knee, Patrick, Vietor, & Neighbors, 2004). Further, individuals who believe that their relationship is destined also tend to believe that the outcome of their romantic life is beyond their control. Conclusively, it is proposed that this type of thinking might be implicitly responsible for how individuals set goals for their current and subsequent romantic engagements. However, this claim remains to be empirically tested.

Research on adult attachment details typologies for how anxious and avoidant individuals behave in intimate engagements. Those who are anxiously attached expect, readily perceive and overreact to the possibility of being rejected, while those who are avoidant tend to deny and suppress a desire for romantic engagement (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Wei & Ku, 2007). Further, Collins et al. (2006) proposed that secure individuals hold a positive relational schema with optimistic expectations of others, while insecure individuals hold a vulnerable relational schema that predisposes them to perceive relationships as mostly negative. More specifically, Collins et al. (2006) found that, when anxious individuals were faced with hypothetical partner transgressions, they became emotionally distressed, adopted relationship-threatening attributes and held maladaptive behavioural intentions. The feeling of dread experienced by anxiously attached individuals has been compared with the fear of death (Johnson, 2004). The same was not found for individuals high in avoidance (Collins et al., 2006). Therefore, it is concluded that different forms of insecure styles are linked with distinct patterns of behaviour. Overall, the main difference between anxious and avoidant individuals is the way they understand intimacy, the

way they deal with conflict, their attitude towards sex, their communication skills and their relationship expectations (Levine & Heller, 2012). Taken together, the evidence shows that, compared with secure individuals, insecure individuals are more likely to understand their partner's behaviour as negative.

Adult romantic interactions between insecure individuals can instil or strengthen insecure views, which in turn can trigger defensive strategies and self-defeating behaviours (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This is an important consideration because relationships as short as two years can reinforce or change attachment styles (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). Further, Wei and Ku (2007) found that self-defeating behaviours mediate the relationship between adult attachment and psychological distress. They also observed that people with low levels of self-esteem and social efficacy displayed higher levels of interpersonal distress and self-defeating patterns. Undeniably, context-specific distress will trigger defensive functioning (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010); however, it is important to note that behaviours do not become self-defeating until a pattern is established. Overall, the literature on attachment theory highlights several affective, cognitive and behavioural factors that contribute to the eventual dissolution of romantic partnerships if they are presented as patterns (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Wei & Ku, 2007). However, determining the fate of a relationship requires a more complex evaluation (Migerode & Hooghe, 2012). In accordance, it is proposed that attachment styles should be considered in combination with goal orientation to explain self-sabotage in romantic relationships.

Attachment and Goal-Orientation Theories

The intersection between attachment and goal-orientation theories presents an interesting line of research. While attachment theorists are concerned with how the relationship between infant and caregiver influences socioemotional functioning, most goal-orientation theorists examine how individuals' views and goals might lead them to a

constructive or defensive response to stressful situations (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Similarly, both theories outline that adaptive and maladaptive behaviours can lead to learning or self-validating experiences, respectively.

Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) developed a model encompassing attachment and goal-orientation theories to understand how individuals' responses to stressful situations in romantic relationships can be shaped by their attachment styles, and consequently trigger goals for the maintenance or dissolution of the relationship. Similarly to what is observed in infancy, in adulthood, the attachment figure can aid the individual to cope with stressful situations. Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) proposed two learning pathways developed in synchrony with adult attachment styles: (1) an adaptive pathway leading to constructive strategies and (2) a contrasting pathway leading to defensive strategies. Learning and self-validation goals can be formed based on whether the individual's view is changeable (incremental views) or fixed (entity views). Learning goals are adaptive goals motivated by the desire to succeed, while self-validation goals are maladaptive goals motivated by the desire to validate self-worth. In the company of a responsive significant other, the individual can expect support and care when dealing with stressful situations, which in turn results in secure views, potentially leading to learning goals filled with constructive strategies (e.g., 'to improve communication to deal with relationship stressors'). However, if the attachment figure is not responsive, the individual resorts to insecure views, leading to self-validation goals and defensive strategies (e.g., 'to avoid new relationships to prevent from getting hurt'). See Figure 2 for a breakdown of the Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) model.

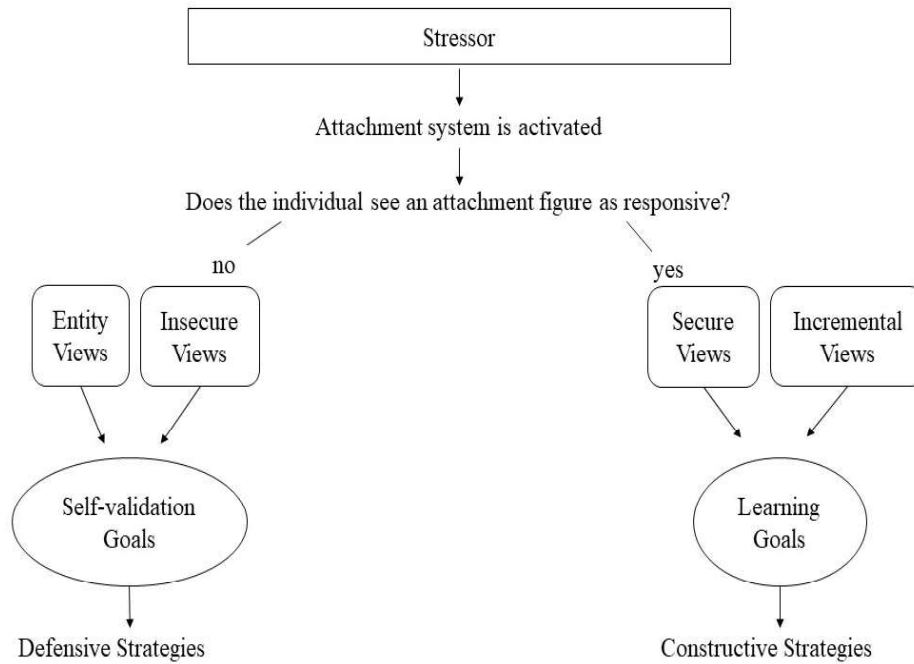


Figure 2. Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) Model.

From N. Rusk & F. Rothbaum. (2010). From stress to learning: Attachment theory meets goal orientation theory. *Review of General Psychology*, 14(1), 34. Copyright 2010 by the American Psychological Association.

The Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) model is based on the work of Murray et al. (2006), which explains that individuals choose self-validation goals to regulate risk. Similarly, Cavallo et al. (2010) proposed that individuals set self-validation goals, as opposed to learning goals, in the face of threat within the romantic relationship to manage potentially hurtful outcomes. Cavallo et al. (2010) concluded that goals adopted to regulate risk in romantic contexts seem to share properties with the goals originally proposed by Bowlby (i.e., approach intimacy and avoid separation). This conclusion agrees with a study conducted by Locke (2008) in which attachment styles were found to predict interpersonal goals of approach and avoidance. Specifically, studies have shown that anxious attachment predicts stronger goals of approval, acceptance, love and avoidance of submission and distance, and weaker goals to approach closeness (Locke, 2008; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). In contrast, avoidant attachment predicts stronger goals to avoid intimacy, achieve self-reliance,

maintain control, maintain distance from others, and avoid closeness and submission, and weaker goals to approach closeness and submission (Locke, 2008; Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). Similarly, Meyer, Olivier, and Roth (2005) found that anxiously attached females displayed great emotional distress and impulses to express both approaching behaviours (e.g., to engage with the partner) and avoidance behaviours (e.g., to seek distance from the partner). Altogether, the evidence shows that insecure individuals are more concerned with avoidance than approaching goals.

A similar model to Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) was proposed by Levine and Heller (2012). In Figure 3, the authors detail a case study with examples of how an insecurely attached individual would behave when facing stress in the relationship. The example given is of Emily. In this example, the sign of threat is the fact that Emily's boyfriend did not call her. The lack of communication poses a threat to Emily's relationship, and her attachment system was activated. Not receiving a phone call from her boyfriend makes Emily think that perhaps he is angry with her. Her response to feeling distressed is to seek her partner's emotional presence by inviting him to a romantic dinner. However, when her boyfriend does not answer or call back, Emily escalates to thinking that perhaps he is breaking up with her. These negative feelings continue to grow and she concludes that she will never hear from him again and will never find someone else like him. The case study of Emily illustrates an example of how an anxious insecure individual behaves when facing uncertainty in the relationship. Overall, the main obstacle in maintaining relationships is the balance between relationship stressors (Le et al., 2010) and goals (Cavallo et al., 2010; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). This dilemma is especially true for anxious individuals, who report more intense emotions (positive and negative) and emotional instability (Locke, 2008; Meyer et al., 2005; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). The diagram also details how this scenario could have progressed differently if the partner was available and responsive.

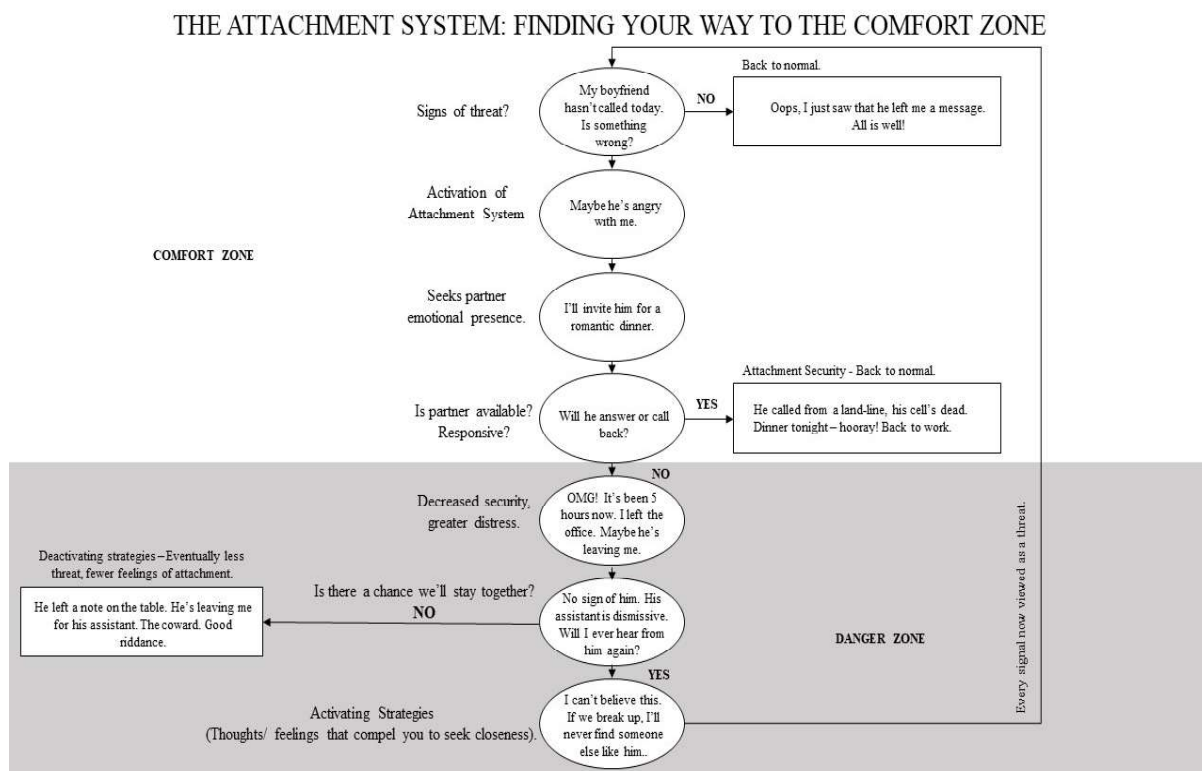


Figure 3. Attachment System Activation Example.

From A. Levine & R. S. F. Heller. (2012). *Attached: The new science of adult attachment and how it can help you find—and keep—love*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC, p. 83. Copyright 2012 by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller.

The current literature supports the premise that thought patterns and behaviours resultant from adult insecure attachment may be sabotaging an individual’s chances at a successful relationship. It is largely agreed that individuals use defensive strategies to protect self-concept (Levine & Heller, 2012; Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). These strategies become self-defeating if guided by self-validation goals (Spalding & Hardin, 1999; Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). As a result, the individual becomes stuck in a continuous cycle of relationship failure and validation of their insecure beliefs. However, no concrete evidence exists to explain which behaviours can be characterised as self-sabotaging. Thus, the final section of this chapter reviews the self-defeating behaviours identified in the literature, which can aid in understanding how self-sabotage is enacted in romantic relationships and inform the development of a scale to measure the construct.

Self-Defeating Cognitions, Emotional Responses and Behaviours in Romantic Relationships

Common cognitions associated with being insecurely attached are rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy. Self-silencing is also a behaviour observed in anxious individuals. Further, Gottman (1993b) proposed four behaviours that contribute to long-term relationship dissolution, which are titled the 'four horseman of the apocalypse': criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling. Self-defeating cognitions, emotional responses and behaviours in romantic relationships will be discussed next.

Rejection Sensitivity. The desire to protect against rejection is a central human motive (Downey & Feldman, 1996). An extreme version of this desire is found in individuals who are sensitive to rejection. Rejection sensitivity has been operationalised as an anxious expectation of rejection in situations involving significant others. Downey and Feldman (1996) found that people with this trait respond in four ways: (1) expect and readily perceive intentional rejection in their partners' ambiguous behaviours; (2) feel unsatisfied with their relationship; (3) retaliate to perceived rejection or threats of rejection with maladaptive emotions, such as resentment and anger; and (4) exaggerate their partners' feelings and attribute their actions to dissatisfaction and a desire to leave the relationship. More conclusive findings were presented by Downey et al. (1998), who found that rejection sensitivity predicted relationship break-up for males and females, even when controlling for relationship satisfaction, commitment and initial level of rejection sensitivity in the partner. This result was particularly significant if relationship satisfaction was reported daily. Female partners who displayed significantly greater levels of rejection sensitivity experienced dissatisfaction and thoughts of ending their relationship immediately after each conflict with their partners. It was concluded that feelings stored from past conflicts added to the perception of their partners' behaviours, justifying the desire to end the relationship. Additionally, Ayduk, Downey, and Kim (2001) found that rejection-sensitive women who experienced a romantic

break-up initiated by their partner were more depressed than women who self-initiated or participated in a mutual break-up. Further, Downey, Mougios, Ayduk, London, and Shoda (2004) found that exposing rejection-sensitive individuals to subtle rejection cues provokes stress responses and automatically activates defensive strategies. Overall, rejection sensitiveness was found to hinder romantic relationships, as it led individuals to behave in ways that undermined their chances of maintaining a supportive and satisfying close relationship. In turn, the act of rejecting (measured as hostile, detached and cold behaviours) is also identified as a negative partner interaction, leading to relationship dissolution (Ducat & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010).

Self-Silencing. This is a commonly used strategy to maintain romantic relationships (Jack & Dill, 1992). This trait is defined as the action of self-regulating (or suppressing) one's thoughts and feelings to protect one's relationships with others. Harper et al. (2006) found that self-silencing is a partial mediator for the relationship between rejection sensitivity and depression, which suggests that individuals who sacrifice their sense of self to maintain relationships are particularly vulnerable to depression. Additionally, a significant gender difference was found, with males reporting more self-silencing strategies than females. Males reported avoiding self-disclosure to maintain control, while females reported practising self-silencing to prevent being hurt. Altogether, it is proposed that individuals who are sensitive to rejection are especially prone to using this strategy and will behave to hide cognitions and protect emotions (Harper et al., 2006).

Fear of Intimacy. Intimacy is a vital human need (Hazan & Shaver, 1987); however, some individuals have been found to fear and consequently avoid intimacy because of their desire to protect their self-concept. Bartholomew (1990) proposed that individuals who avoid intimacy may experience an imbalance between their feeling of independence and dependence. Therefore, Bartholomew made a major distinction regarding the motivation

behind fearing and consequently avoiding intimacy, and hypothesised that there are two types of individuals: those who desire intimacy, yet fear and avoid it (i.e., the fearful type), and those who claim to have no fear of or desire for intimacy (i.e., the dismissive type). Nevertheless, in both cases, intimacy is avoided. Fear of intimacy is defined as the lack of ability to exchange feelings and thoughts with significant others. Three areas of importance have been considered in relation to this trait: (1) the content of feelings and thoughts shared, (2) the strength of feelings and thoughts shared and (3) the vulnerability felt by the individual regarding others. Individuals who present with fear of intimacy also tend to report loneliness (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Altogether, this trait describes the cognitions and emotional responses of individuals who long for intimacy, yet are paralysed by the fear of being hurt.

The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse. Gottman (1993a) proposed four behaviours that can contribute to the dissolution of long-term relationships: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. These behaviours have been described as the ‘four horsemen of the apocalypse’ because they are proposed to lead to divorce on an average of 5.6 years after marriage. Further, it is estimated that these behaviours are 90% accurate in predicting relationship dissolution if not addressed (Lisitsa, 2013c). Gottman’s (1993a) original research detailed the process leading to relationship dissolution as a structural model cascading to show a sequence of interactions, with criticism the first horseman, successively leading to contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling (Gottman, 2013). See Figure 4 for a representation of the cascade of behaviours leading to marriage dissolution, based on Gottman’s (1993a) original research.

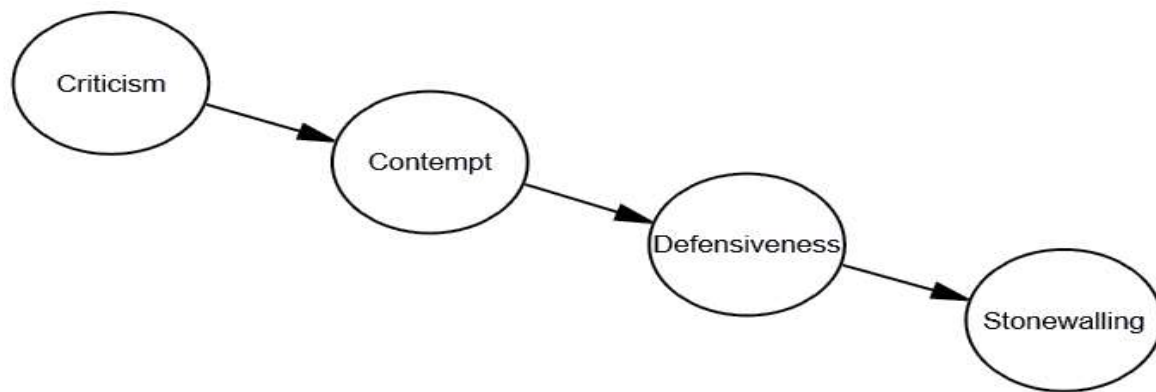


Figure 4. Cascade of Behaviours Leading to Marriage Dissolution.

Adapted from J. M. Gottman. (1993). A theory of marital dissolution and stability. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7(1), 63. Copyright 1993 by the American Psychological Association.

The First Horseman: Criticism. This behaviour is defined as an attack on a person's character to suggest that they are flawed (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009). Criticism is commonly enacted as a reaction to negative affect and a search for explanation of these feelings (such as anger and resentment). It can also become a habit to justify internal manifestations (or cognitions) of how the environment and other people's behaviours affect the individual (Lisitsa, 2013b). In Gottman's (1993a) original research, criticism was observed alongside complaint; however, a distinction was later made between the two constructs—a complaint is not always an attack, while criticism is.

The Second Horseman: Contempt. This behaviour is broadly defined as showing disrespect or insulting the partner (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009). Individuals might do this verbally with sarcasm, or simply by rolling their eyes at their partner. Other examples of contempt include name calling, cynicism, sneering, mockery, hostile humour and disgust. Among the four horsemen, this is the greatest predictor of relationship failure (Lisitsa, 2013a). The same emotional instability that leads to criticism can also lead to contempt; however, the latter is a more destructive attack with little room for understanding and compromise. Both strategies are considered a form of attack. In Gottman's (1993a) original research, criticism was found to be a great predictor of contempt, and both constructs led to

defensiveness. Contempt has also been linked to poorer physical health outcomes in couples, whereby individuals living with contemptuous conflict are more likely to experience chronic health issues, physical disability and poorer perceived health (Hysi, 2015), with males found to be significantly more affected (Tatangelo, McCabe, Campbell, & Szoeki, 2017).

The Third Horseman: Defensiveness. This behaviour is defined as ‘righteous indignation’ (para 1; Lisitsa, 2013d) as a result of a perceived attack (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Gottman, 1993b). It also involves the defensive party denying responsibility for the couple’s issues (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009). This construct was originally proposed to be the second horseman; however, it was observed that defensiveness is highly triggered by cognitions resultant from criticism and contempt (i.e., feeling criticised and victimised), which leads to stonewalling (Lisitsa, 2013d). Examples of defensive behaviours include externalising and shifting blame (i.e., assigning the partner responsible for emotional responses). Defensiveness is a strategy that people commonly use to protect themselves, and is understood to be a form of counterattack, most often in response to a complaint that has been misunderstood as criticism (Lisitsa, 2013d).

The Fourth Horseman: Stonewalling. This behaviour involves evasive manoeuvres, such as ‘shutting down’ or ‘closing off’ to avoid interacting with a partner (para 1; Lisitsa, 2013e). Individuals who stonewall will often cease communication with their partner, with the exception of showing negative non-verbal gestures (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009). This strategy is also often referred to as withdrawing (Lisitsa, 2013e). Individuals often withdraw when they are overwhelmed by their own feelings (Gottman, 1993b). Gottman (1993a) also identified that stonewallers will demonstrate a physiological reaction when feeling flooded (e.g., increased heartbeat). Physiological arousal reduces the individual’s ability to process information and leads to over-reliance on learnt maladaptive behaviours (Gottman, 1990). Thus, individuals seeking to shut down from emotional cues might also engage in obsessive

and self-destructive behaviours to distract themselves and self-soothe. This process is broadly described as a form of escape conditioning (Lisitsa, 2013e).

The metaphor depicting the 'end of times' in the New Testament (as caused by the four horsemen of conquest, war, hunger and death) is similar to what is proposed to occur in relationships. The process leading to marriage dissolution (or divorce) follows the cascade, which was originally proposed by Gottman in 1993, and later elaborated in 2014, as seen in Figure 5. The process begins with a harsh start-up (Gottman, 2014), which occurs when one person in the relationship starts a conversation with criticism or contempt, which leads the other to feel physiological flooding (or hyper-vigilance). Flooding is an unexpected set of negative emotions triggered by the interaction with the other partner (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). In accordance with attachment research (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), the perception of negative emotion is characterised by righteous indignation (or protest) and a hurtful reaction to a perceived attack (Johnson, 2004). This definition fits well with how criticism (or a misunderstood complaint) and contempt trigger defensiveness. Therefore, flooding leads the individual to defensiveness and stonewalling. Moreover, the behavioural manifestation of stonewalling (or, as originally described, 'a distancing and isolation cascade') leads to negative examination of the relationship through the lenses of an exacerbated experience of negative emotions (Gottman, 1993a; p. 69). Following conflict, individuals become stuck in a stage where they do not attempt to restore the relationship, which Gottman described as failed repair attempts. Gottman (2014) explained that the stage before divorce is characterised by bad memories of the relationship, where the couple recasts the entire history of the marriage. This ruminative stage blinds individuals to healthy solutions to repairing or maintaining the relationship. Altogether, negative emotions tend to trigger a ruminative process of maladaptive thoughts that validate feelings of distancing, thereby keeping the individual in a destructive cycle that leads to divorce.

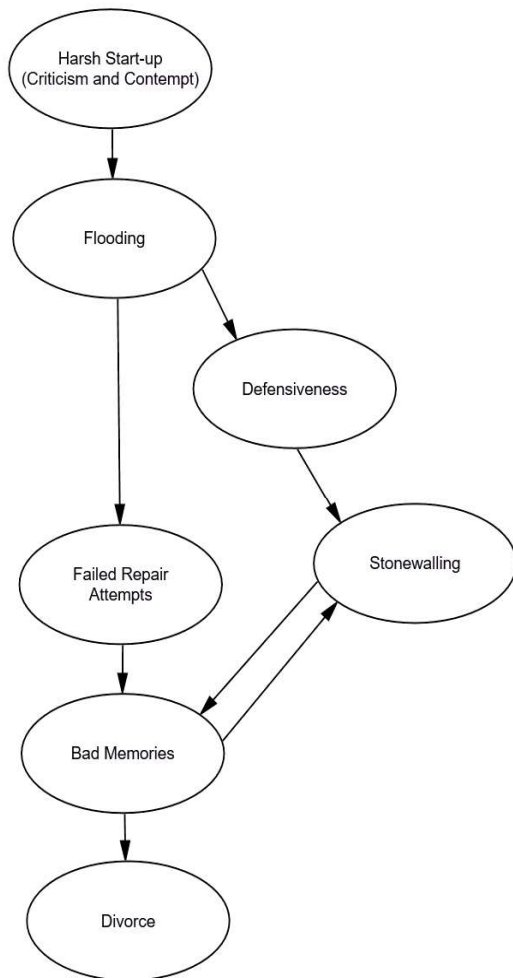


Figure 5. The Process of Marital Iteration.

Adapted from J. M. Gottman. (1993). A theory of marital dissolution and stability. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7(1), 69. Copyright 1993 by the American Psychological Association.

Gottman's research has evolved over the years to include other elements that also contribute to marriage dissolution. An added element resulting from Gottman and Levenson's research (Gottman, 1993b; Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2002) is emotional disengagement. It is estimated that couples with emotional disengagement will divorce after an average of 16.2 years, which is considerably more time when compared with the predictions involving the four horsemen. This is because individuals who are disengaged are no longer investing effort in the relationship either way—to maintain it or end it. Research has also revealed that the majority of relationship issues (69%) are everlasting and

cannot be fully resolved because of individual and personality differences, which suggests that some relationships are doomed from the start (The Gottman Institute, 2019). Other researchers (e.g., Hahlweg & Jacobson, 1984) have also identified issues that contribute to marriage dissolution, with lack of communication skills being the most widely highlighted. Altogether, researchers have found that self-defeating strategies are initially adopted to help maintain relationships; however, these tactics will often ultimately sabotage an already unstable romantic connection (Harper et al., 2006).

Chapter Summary

Self-sabotage in the context of romantic relationships may be enacted through goal-oriented defensive strategies informed by attachment styles to protect self-worth. While some compelling research has been conducted to explore the connection between insecure attachment and self-defeating behaviours, limited evidence exists to explain the prediction paths leading to approach and avoidance goals. The Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) model provides a possible path to explain sabotage in relationships; however, this model remains theoretical. Further, although the research conducted by Gottman (1991-2015) details the behavioural characteristics of individuals in relationships leading to marriage dissolution, more research is needed regarding which behaviours are characteristic of self-sabotage across multiple relationships, especially considering gender differences and relationship differences. It is also possible that the proposed cascade of behaviours leading to divorce (as shown in Figure 5) is enacted differently in the context of self-sabotage. Further examination is also needed to differentiate between failed relationships (i.e., those which might have dissolved naturally) and sabotaged relationships (i.e., those which dissolved as a direct result of the individuals' actions). The next chapter details the aim of the current project, the research design and the methodological approach, with particular attention devoted to the requirements for a mixed-methods design for scale and model development.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodological Approach to Scale Development and Modelling

Identified Research Gap and Aim

A major gap in the literature exists regarding self-defeating behaviours in insecurely attached individuals. It is well documented that defensive strategies can become self-defeating; however, the concept of self-sabotage (and how individuals engage in a pattern of destroying every relationship they have) is not well understood. Therefore, the aim of the current project was to investigate relationship sabotage and to explore the effect of attachment and goal orientation on the repertoire of self-defeating behaviours that may be enacted in this context.

Mixed-Methods Sequential Exploratory Design

A mixed-methods design was adopted to develop and test a scale to empirically measure relationship self-sabotage, and devise and test a model for predicting sabotage in romantic relationships. A mixed-methods design involves collecting and interpreting qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). However, there are many different ways to structure a mixed-methods project. The current project followed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, which is recommended for scale development (Carpenter, 2018; Creswell, 2014; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008), and involves first collecting qualitative data, followed by collection of quantitative data. Additionally, exploratory designs are content driven with a focus on what emerges from the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

The current project design involved three phases and five studies. The first phase (see Study 1, Chapter 4) involved conducting semi-structured interviews with practising psychologists to gather an expert account of sabotage in romantic relationships. Subsequently, one survey was used for Phases 2 and 3. The survey incorporated a mixed-methods component—specifically, a multi-phase convergent parallel design with closed and

open-ended questions. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used so that both sets of data could be collected simultaneously and then analysed separately, which allowed the results to be compared. This type of triangulated design is particularly important when there is potential for both sets of results to explain each other. The second phase encompassed Studies 2 to 4 and involved developing and testing a scale to measure relationship self-sabotage. Study 2 (see Chapter 6) was a qualitative evaluation of the participants' experience in relationships. The findings from this study were compared with the psychologists' responses and aided in the scale and model development. Study 3 (see Chapter 7) and Study 4 (see Chapter 8) were scale development studies. The proposed scale was first reduced with exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Then, using a different sample, the scale was further reduced, and distinct factors were established in a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The third phase (see Study 5, Chapter 9) encompassed one study in which a model for relationship sabotage was established. Figure 6 details the project design, which was drawn in accordance with Morse's (1991) and Creswell's (2014) recommendations.

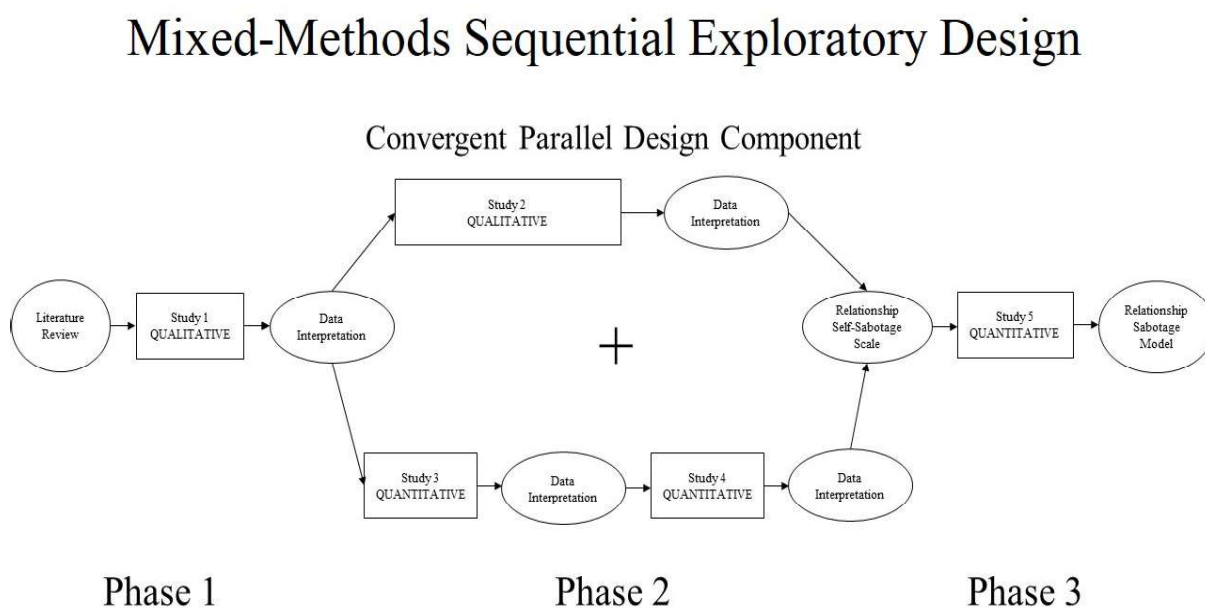


Figure 6. Project Design.

Considerations for Scale Development and Modelling

The process of scale development and modelling is complex and requires empirical rigour. Thus, an abundance of recommendations exist to inform this process (e.g., Carpenter, 2018; Gregory, 2014; Kline, 2005; Shum, O'Gorman, Creed, & Myors, 2017; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The current project followed a concise yet robust set of steps for scale development and modelling, which involved eight steps: (1) literature review, (2) semi-structured interview, (3) construct definition, (4) item and survey construction, (5) sampling procedure, (6) data quality, (7) data analysis and (8) presentation of results. Overall, the current project adopted an empirical and logical approach, based on expert recommendations, which encompassed making decisions primarily based on statistical analysis informed by the researchers' judgement (Brown, 1983; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006).

Literature Review (and Identified Gaps). This step was conducted to highlight the gap in knowledge regarding why individuals who have been successful at initiating romantic relationships are unable to maintain long-term engagements, and embark on the path to what appears to be a destined break-up. In accordance, the literature on self-handicapping, attachment and goal orientation was reviewed (see Chapters 1 to 2). It was concluded that, although the concept of self-handicapping begins to explain the cycle of failed romantic relationships, research is limited to contexts that are not representative of intimate engagements. A new term, 'self-sabotage', was proposed for the context of romantic relationships. Self-sabotage is possibly enacted through goal-oriented defensive strategies informed by attachment styles to protect self-worth. However, empirical research is inconclusive. Therefore, the aim of the current project was to investigate relationship sabotage and explore the effect of attachment and goal orientation on the repertoire of self-defeating behaviours that may be enacted in this context by developing and testing a scale and model for relationship sabotage.

Semi-Structured Interview (and Recruitment Process). A semi-structured interview was developed to collect qualitative data (the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A). Interviewing involves a verbal exchange between two people using a list of predetermined questions. The term ‘semi’ suggests flexibility to explore ideas as they surface in the conversation (Padgett, 2016; Patton, 1990). This method of data collection is well suited to explore concepts and generate dimensions and items. An added advantage of the semi-structured approach is the use of probes to gather more information and clarify answers (Barriball & While, 1994). Probing is useful to control the interview (Willis, Royston, & Bercini, 1991) and can also be used to reduce the risk for socially desirable answers (Patton, 1990), as it maximises the potential to establish rapport and place respondents at ease (Leech, 2002). However, probing can also facilitate biased responses if questions are leading. Willis, DeMaio, and Harris-Kojetin (1999) recommended using probes only to comprehend or interpret a question (e.g., what does this mean to you?) or a general probe (e.g., how did you arrive at this answer?). During the interview, attending and listening skills, such as using verbal and non-verbal encouragements, are also important to keep the respondent talking (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2018; Leech, 2002). Overall, several recommendations exist for developing open-ended questions, such as avoiding loaded, double-barrelled and leading questions. These considerations are important to ensure that respondents understand the questions and answer them appropriately. In this study, the interview questions also underwent expert review. Regarding recruitment, a sample of practising psychologists who specialised in relationship counselling was purposely selected, and members of the Australian Psychological Society (APS)’s Psychology of Relationships Interest Group were targeted via email invitations. The participants were also asked to share the study information sheet (see Appendix B) with other potential participants (referred to as snowball recruitment).

Construct Definition. The relationship self-sabotage construct was initially operationalised on the basis of the literature review presented in Chapters 1 and 2. The construct was further defined from themes extracted from the interviews with practising psychologists specialising in relationship counselling (see Study 1) and the responses of individuals with relationship experience (see Study 2).

Item and Survey Construction. Items were constructed based on the qualitative findings and the expert review of three researchers in the field of relationships, who were also practising psychologists (KM, NC, BB). Items were also based on established scales measuring various self-defeating behaviours (see complete list described in the methods section for Study 3). This procedure followed Worthington and Whittaker's (2006) recommendation. In addition, feedback from reviewers resulted in additional items being added (i.e., three items added to the initial pool of 57 items) and the wording of some of the items was changed for better comprehension. Reverse questions were also included to combat response automatism. As a result, a list of 60 items was devised (see Table 12 in Chapter 7 for the complete list of relationship self-sabotage items). The process of item and survey construction involved four additional considerations: (1) scaling method, (2) construct dimension, (3) survey measures and (4) survey distribution and recruitment.

Scaling Method. The scaling method used for the newly developed items was a seven-point Likert scale. It is recommended that items should be scaled with at least five response categories (Revilla, Saris, & Krosnick, 2014; Weijters, Cabooter, & Schillewaert, 2010). This approach offers a better way for ordinal items to be treated as continuous items when conducting data analyses. The more categories in an ordinal scale, the closer items are to continuous variables. One complication when using categorical data in parametric analysis is that values can be underestimated. However, Lubke and Muthen (2004) noted that data that meet basic assumptions, such as normality and minimum number of response categories, can

estimate true parameter values. Nevertheless, a better alternative is to use continuous data. This topic will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Construct Dimension. Based on the review of the literature, it was hypothesised that the relationship self-sabotage construct would be multidimensional and represent cognitions (i.e., thoughts), emotional responses (i.e., affect) and behaviours, as is true for most psychological constructs (Clark & Watson, 1995). Given that no clear indication exists regarding how many sub-factors such a scale would have, the scale was overestimated to contain 12 factors based on the 12 themes delivered from the two qualitative studies. Overestimation of both items and factors is preferred. A recommendation is to have at least three to five times the amount of expected items and factors. It is also recommended that initial scale items be piloted, and this was undertaken in Study 3 (Cattell, 1978; Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Henson & Roberts, 2006).

Survey Measures. In addition to items devised to measure relationship self-sabotage, the survey also included a number of valid and reliable tools, such as the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory Short Form (Fletcher et al., 2000), the Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form (Wei et al., 2007), the Self-Handicapping Scale Short Form (Strube, 1986) and an adaptation of the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) for relationships, which was titled the Perceived Relationship Stress Scale. Overall, a quantitative survey provides a numeric description of respondents' attitudes. Thus, results can be used to draw inferences and generalise conclusions in the sample used. Additionally, the survey included six open-ended questions (e.g., how do you protect yourself from being hurt in romantic relationships?) to further explore the themes derived from the interviews and explain the responses gathered from the survey items.

Survey Distribution and Recruitment. The survey designed for this project was distributed online (via a web link to the Qualtrics platform) to facilitate the data collection timeframe and expand the catchment area. Moreover, an online survey allows for anonymity, which in turn provides respondents with the opportunity to express their attitudes freely (Creswell, 2014). The same recruitment procedure was followed for Studies 2 to 5 (see respective studies for a full description of the recruitment procedure). The survey protocol can be found in Appendix D and the information sheet can be found in Appendix E. The measures were presented in the survey in the same order as shown in the protocol, and the relationship self-sabotage questions were randomised. See Table 1 for a description of each quantitative measure included in the survey, with construct examples.

Table 1

Survey Quantitative Measures.

Measures	Construct	Subscale	Likert Scale	Example Item
Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory Short Form	Perceived Relationship Quality	(S) Satisfaction (C) Commitment (I) Intimacy (T) Trust (P) Passion (L) Love	Five-point: 'not at all' to 'extremely'	(Item 1) How satisfied are you with your current relationship? (Item 2) How committed are you to your current relationship? (Item 3) How intimate is your current relationship? (Item 4) How much do you trust your current partner? (Item 5) How passionate is your current relationship? (Item 6) How much do you love your current partner?
Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale	Relationship Sabotage	Proposed Themes: (PA) Partner Attack (PP) Partner Pursuit (PW) Partner Withdrawal (D) Defensiveness (C) Contempt (SE) Self-Esteem (CT) Controlling Tendency (RS) Relationship Skills (TD) Trusting Difficulty (DT) Destructive Tendency (AA) Attitude to Affairs (RB) Relationship Belief	Seven-point: 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'	(Item 1) I often criticise my partner. (Item 9) I get anxious when I think about my partner breaking up with me. (Item 16) Sometimes I feel that distancing myself from the relationship is the best approach. (Item 23) I constantly feel criticised by my partner. (Item 27) I feel respected by my partner (reverse question). (Item 33) I feel that I am not worthy of my partner. (Item 37) I believe that to keep my partner safe, I need to know where my partner is at all times. (Item 40) I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship (reverse question). (Item 44) I often get jealous of my partner. (Item 47) I like to spoil myself more than I should. (Item 52) I believe having affairs is part of being in a romantic relationship. (Item 59) I am happy when I feel like my relationship is just meant to be.
Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form	Adult Attachment	(ANX) Anxious Attachment (AVO) Avoidant Attachment	Seven-point: 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'	(Item 2) I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner. (Item 3) I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
Self-Handicapping Scale Short Form	Self-Handicapping	None	Seven-point: 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'	(Item 7) I would do a lot better if I tried harder.
Perceived Relationship Stress Scale	Perceived Relationship Stress	None	Five-point: 'never' to 'very often'	(Item 6) How often have you found that you could not cope with all the stressors in your relationship?

Sampling Procedure. The sampling procedure process involved three considerations: (1) sampling method, (2) sample demographics and (2) sample size.

Sampling Method. Three non-probability sampling methods were selected: purposive, convenience and snowball. A purposive sampling method was selected for Phase 1 (the qualitative semi-structured interview used for Study 1) and involved recruiting practising psychologists who specialised in relationship counselling. A purposive sample is used when the research requires participants to be deliberately chosen. This study chose to recruit psychologists to gather an expert account of self-sabotage in the context of relationships. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were selected for Phases 2 and 3 (the online survey for Studies 2 to 5) and involved recruiting members of the general public, who were easily accessible online, and encouraging respondents to identify other potential participants to share the survey. The final sample included single and committed individuals from all over the world. These three approaches to sampling were adopted to gather large samples in a small space of time. Large samples were needed to conduct scale and model development analysis. In addition, it is important to note that a purposive sampling method targeting only those who sabotage relationships was not possible, as the characteristics of a romantic self-saboteur and a test to measure the construct were not developed prior to this project. Overall, the sampling choices for this project ensured gathering an all-encompassing perspective of the concept of relationship self-sabotage (gathered from experts and lay individuals), which increased the potential for the results to be generalisable (Gregory, 2014; Kline, 2005; Shum et al., 2017). Further, the sampling choice ensured no replication of participants between phases, which is a recommendation when using a mixed-methods approach to develop a scale (Creswell, 2014).

Sample Demographics. Demographic information was collected in the interviews and surveys. Demographic questions collected in the interviews encompassed gender, age, cultural background, years of practice, practice type, work location, experience with relationship counselling, therapeutic approaches used and client mix. Demographic questions collected in the surveys encompassed age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of longest relationship, country of origin, history of affairs and seeking help from a psychologist. See the results section of each study for a full description of the sample demographics.

Sample Size. Considerations for sample size differ between qualitative and quantitative studies. In qualitative studies, sample size is considered adequate once data saturation is achieved (i.e., additional data do not provide new information; Creswell, 2014). In quantitative studies, statistical power is needed. Various recommendations exist for factor analysis and modelling. To establish power when conducting both EFA and CFA, the number of items, estimated parameters, item communalities and distribution of the covariance matrix are considered. For modelling, the number of observable variables and estimated parameters are also considered (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Browne, 1984; Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2013; Kline, 2016; Satorra & Bentler, 1994; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel–Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Each study chapter provides a detailed description of the criteria selected to determine the adequacy of sample sizes.

Data Quality. The quality of the data was initially assessed based on sample size. Further, data characteristics, such as normality and missing data, were evaluated (as detailed in each study chapter). Finally, a set of criteria was followed for each approach to data analysis to establish data quality and adequate parameters (as briefly discussed in the next section).

Data Analysis. Qualitative data were analysed with applied thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed with factor and modelling analyses. Additionally, reliability and construct validity (i.e., convergent and discriminant) analyses were conducted for the newly developed scale.

Applied Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying, describing and analysing implicit and explicit ideas from data. Another key feature of thematic analysis is the breadth of the scope, which means that this analytical process is conducive for large datasets (an important consideration for Study 2, which recruited 696 participants). Further, ‘applied’ thematic analysis focuses on solving a practical problem in an inductive manner (Guest et al., 2012). Specifically, for the current project, the data were analysed to develop an instrument to measure relationship self-sabotage and advance theoretical knowledge.

Applied thematic analysis adopts both positivist and interpretative epistemological approaches. The positivist approach is based on using empirical evidence to interpret observed data in a systematic manner. When working with qualitative data, a systematic approach involves reducing the data to codes that are later translated into themes. Further, codes can be quantified to demonstrate trends in the data (Bernard & Ryan, 1998). Overall, positivism is considered the dominant paradigm for a project involving instrument development. In contrast, the interpretative approach focuses on the meaning behind the story a participant is telling. This approach is focused on ‘individual reality’, which is not necessarily generalisable to ‘multiple realities’ (Guest et al., 2012, p. 14). Geertz (1973) explained that this approach is less focused on the ‘perfection of the consensus’ (p. 29). However, a solely interpretive approach would be deficient, as it may lack construct unanimity. Thus, multiple approaches needed to be considered for the analytical model for this project (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008).

Typically, exploratory designs use grounded theory or phenomenology. These approaches are ideal for small datasets and to gather an exhaustive coverage of the data. However, these approaches are lengthy, might provide over-interpretations of the data, are not necessarily systematic and are not ideal for research teams. Thus, the current project used applied thematic analysis, as it suits both small and large datasets (where a research team is involved) and combines two epistemological approaches. Moreover, having two sets of qualitative data (as designed in the current project) adds rigour to the analytical process, as it allows for results to be compared, thereby reducing the potential for bias (Guest et al., 2012). Conclusively, applied thematic analysis is a robust method. Chapters 4 and 6 provide more details regarding data analysis for the qualitative studies conducted in this project.

Factor Analysis. It is widely recommended to use both EFA and CFA when testing a scale in development (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). EFA is best employed to test construct validity in the initial stages of scale development; however, it is not designed to test hypotheses or theory. CFA is best employed to test an *a priori* hypothesis and evaluate if the scale structure can be replicated via inferential techniques (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The CFA conducted in the current project followed a structural equation modelling (SEM) framework. Primarily, SEM combines factor analysis with path analysis (including simple, multiple or multivariate regression). Further, it involves analysis of variance and covariance. Specifically, when using SEM, researchers are able to create latent variables from observed variables and establish paths to investigate predictive relationships among factors (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog, 1970a; Jöreskog, 1970b; Jöreskog, 1973; Kline, 2016).

It is essential that EFA and CFA are performed in separate samples (Bollen & Long, 1993; Costello & Osborne, 2005; Kline, 2016). Therefore, two separate datasets of quantitative data were collected for Studies 3 and 4 over a specific period. This is the

recommended approach when testing and cross-validating a scale (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In addition, this approach is used to confirm the structure of the proposed scale and check for measurement invariance. Further, Worthington and Whittaker (2006) recommended making no content changes to the scale (e.g., adding new items or changing item wording) between conducting both analyses. Changes to the instrument should be proposed only after CFA is conducted. Overall, both analytical methods are necessary—EFA explores factor structure based on theoretical investigation and thematic interpretation to formulate an *a priori* hypothesis, while CFA tests the proposed hypothesis and scale dependability. Further, these two factor analyses enable conclusions to be reached towards building a model to test self-sabotage in relationships.

Important considerations to establish data quality and adequate parameters for data analysis were noted for both analyses. For EFA, the criteria for establishing the factorability of the data, extraction method, rotation method, item reduction and factor selection criteria were noted in Study 3. For CFA, model conceptualisation, path diagram, path construction, model specification, model identification, parameter estimation, assessment of model fit and model re-specification were noted in Study 4.

Modelling Analysis. Three alternative models for relationship sabotage were tested, with the best model proposed. The modelling analysis followed the SEM framework with the same guidelines as the CFA, and added considerations for interpreting multivariate path analysis, non-recursive models and mediation. More details regarding the modelling analysis are provided in Chapter 9.

Presentation of Results. The results presented in this thesis follow the guidelines suggested by experts in the field, as detailed in the current chapter and each specific study chapter. Further, the evidence presented underwent peer-review prior to publication (see list of publications relevant to this thesis on page viii).

Additional Considerations for Qualitative Data

A methodological concern when using mixed-methods designs is that the qualitative sample might be reused when collecting quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). To remedy this concern, the current project was separated into three phases. To reiterate, the first phase involved interviewing practising psychologists specialising in relationship counselling to gather an expert description of self-sabotage in romantic relationships. The second and third phases involved surveying members of the general public. Therefore, it was expected that participants would not be sampled twice, thereby avoiding replication of results.

Another methodological concern refers to qualitative data not being adequately analysed, and quantitative data (specifically scale items) being constructed based on superficial findings (Creswell, 2014; Guest et al., 2012). This concern was addressed by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic and interpretative approach to applied thematic analysis, and Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig's (2007) method for reporting qualitative data (as detailed in Chapters 4 and 6). These approaches follow an in-depth analysis of themes. Further, the survey included closed and open-ended questions. According to Creswell (2014), using a convergent parallel design for a survey adds content and construct validity, as both qualitative and quantitative findings can be compared. This was considered an essential step, since the qualitative accounts of self-sabotage from Study 1 were restricted to practising psychologists, whereas accounts from Study 2 were taken from members of the general public. Further, data from Study 2 provided further information to build scale items.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the reliability and validity of qualitative data (Guest et al., 2012). Thus, Fossey, Harvey, Mcdermott, and Davidson's (2002) recommendations were followed to establish reliability. These recommendations were followed to strengthen themes to be internally coherent, consistent and distinctive through using a three-level approach (as detailed in Chapter 4). For content validity, the recommendations include verbatim transcription of interviews and illustrative quotations when presenting results. For construct validity, the recommendations include triangulation of data, using a method such as collecting convergent parallel data. These are all accepted measures to address reliability and validity concerns (Creswell, 2014; Guest et al., 2012). Further, the evidence presented underwent external peer-review prior to publication.

Chapter Summary

Previous research has failed to explore the notion of self-sabotage in romantic relationships and no instrument exists to measure this construct. This research sought to investigate this gap in the literature. To this end, the current project adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design conducted over three phases and five studies. Recommendations for scale development and model testing were followed to create an instrument and inform theory and practice in the context of romantic relationships. In addition, methodological concerns were addressed. The next chapter will present the findings from the first study.

Chapter 4

Study 1: What Do Psychologists Say about Self-Sabotage in Romantic Relationships?

Study Rationale

Identified Research Gaps. To reiterate, the term ‘self-sabotage’ is not well defined in the current literature. Self-sabotage is generally explained as a synonym of self-handicapping, which does not fully encompass the intrinsic behaviours found in romantic relationships. Some compelling research has been conducted to explain individual differences that may contribute to self-sabotaging tendencies. Overall, the existing evidence explains intrinsic motivations to sabotage love; however, a major gap in the literature still exists, as no studies to date have provided conclusive evidence to: (1) define relationship self-sabotage or (2) identify which behaviours are symptomatic of self-sabotage in romantic relationships.

Aim. The overall aim of the current study was to investigate how self-sabotage is presented in the counselling context and understood by practising psychologists towards defining the phenomenon, with possible accounts for individual motivation and representative self-sabotaging behaviours. To achieve the proposed aims, a semi-structured qualitative interview was devised for psychologists specialising in relationship counselling.

Research Questions. Two main research questions were addressed in accordance with the current study aims:

1. How is self-sabotage defined in romantic relationships?; and
2. Which behaviours are characteristic of self-sabotage in romantic relationships?

Methods

Participants

A sample limited to practising psychologists was deliberately chosen to ensure all participants had an equivalent level of education and training. Further, to be considered an expert in relationship counselling, participants had to be exposed to relevant training and clientele, either at work (e.g., through training at Relationships Australia¹) or through postgraduate qualifications (e.g., Master of Couple and Relationship Counselling).

A total of 15 psychologists (six males and nine females) from four Australian states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria) were interviewed. Participants were recruited until data were saturated and no further meaningful contributions were gathered. Therefore, a sample of 15 participants was deemed acceptable, as per the guidelines of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The participants' workplaces included private practices (12), Relationships Australia (two) and a university clinic (one). Private practices and the university clinic are not identified in this study to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The participants' ages ranged between 32 and 76 years ($M = 53.87$, $SD = 14.44$) and the mean average for practice experience was 21.47 years ($SD = 12.43$). The culturally diverse sample of participants included people with Australian, English, Polish, Welsh, Chinese, American, Canadian and Lithuanian backgrounds. See Table 2 for a complete description of the participants' characteristics.

¹ Relationships Australia is a community-based and not-for-profit Australian organisation providing relationship support services for individuals, families and communities. Relationships Australia is only partially funded by the government, so fees are normally charged (Relationships Australia, 2015).

Table 2

Study 1: Participants' Characteristics.

	<i>M</i>				<i>SD</i>		
Age (Years)	53.87				14.44		
Practice Experience (Years)	21.47				12.43		
Gender	Female			Male			
	9			6			
Cultural Background	Australian/English	Australian/Polish	Welsh	English/Chinese	American	Canadian	Lithuanian
	7	2	1	1	2	1	1
Practice Type	Private Practice		Relationships Australia		University Clinic		
	12		2		1		
	New South Wales		Queensland	South Australia		Victoria	
Practice Location	Sydney	Townsville	Brisbane	Adelaide	Melbourne		
	Newcastle	Toowoomba	Gold Coast				
	4		6	1	4		

Notes: N = 15.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed by four researchers (RP, KM, NC, BB). The questions sought to explore the practising psychologists' perceptions of what self-sabotage is and how it is presented in relationships. Specifically, the interview guide included questions regarding the reason that clients might be self-sabotaging (e.g., 'Why do you think some people regularly start and end relationships?' and 'What are the behaviours that drive these [self-destructive] patterns?'). The questions also explored how clients might be sabotaging their relationships (e.g., 'What are some common behaviours presented by clients who feel they are in a romantic relationship that is not working?', 'How do clients protect themselves from being hurt in romantic relationships?' and 'What are some of the protective behaviours people use?'). Some specific questions regarding the pattern of self-sabotage were also asked (e.g., 'Would you say that clients' romantic relationship patterns become self-fulfilling?').

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at James Cook University (JCU; Number H7162, see Appendix C). Recruitment for this study was initially undertaken by email invitation sent by the APS's Psychology of Relationships Interest Group to its members. Moreover, participants were asked to share the study information sheet (see Appendix B) with other potential participants (referred to as snowball recruitment). Data were collected between November and December 2017. The interviews lasted between 15 minutes and one hour. The interviews were taped, transcribed verbatim and analysed using applied thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012) with NVivo (QSR International), version 12 plus.

Data Analysis

The current study adopted applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012). This analytical approach is systematic and interpretative (Guest et al., 2012). Six phases were followed, as per Braun and Clark's (2006) and Nowell, White, and Moules's (2017) recommendations. These phases involved: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) seeking and organising common themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) generating theme definitions and names and (6) producing an analysis report. See Table 3 for a detailed explanation of each phase involved in conducting applied thematic analysis.

Table 3

Phases to Conduct Thematic Analysis.

Phases	Description
Data Familiarisation	Transcribing interviews, reading transcriptions, drafting a code book and documenting theoretical and reflective thoughts.
Generating Initial Codes	Systematically organising the information from the data into categories and debriefing with members of the research team.
Seeking and Organising Common Themes	Identifying similarities and discrepancies in participants' comments, where commonalities are classified under an umbrella term, and diagramming themes to explore connections.
Reviewing Themes	Testing the themes against the original data to ensure each theme is unique and accurately classifies similar ideas together for single cases and across multiple cases. This process involves vetting themes and subthemes and testing for referential adequacy by returning to the raw data.
Generating Theme Definitions and Names	Interpreting the overall meaning of each theme and ensuring the name given summarises the comments categorised together to represent one main idea. The overall idea should also be in alignment with existing research and evidence relevant to the context investigated.
Producing an Analysis Report	Describing the process of coding, theme generation and analysis in sufficient detail with illustrative text descriptions to create context and reporting reasons for theoretical, methodological and analytical choices throughout the entire study.

The researchers also adopted a three-level approach to strengthen the analytical process (see Fossey et al., 2002). First, initial coding was revised using shared coding sessions and theme generation by two researchers (RP, NC), with consensus used to resolve discrepancies. Second, all authors were consulted to establish the integrity of coding and themes. Third, the final main themes and subthemes were systematically determined and verified by all researchers. Additionally, all findings from the study were reported in accordance with Tong et al.'s (2007) checklist for reporting qualitative interviews (see Appendix G for the checklist).

Verbatim illustrative quotations were selected from transcriptions and included in the text (enclosed in quotation marks) to illustrate extracted themes and subthemes. Further, unclear words (e.g., 'this' and 'that') were replaced with a word that approximated what the participant intended to say, based on the context of the quotation (e.g., the question asked or a word commonly used in the participant's speech). Replaced words are indicated in square brackets. Additionally, grammar errors were corrected in some quotations. The decision to replace and correct grammar words was made to ensure that the comprehension of the representative quotation was not affected, which is in accordance with McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig's (2003) recommendations. See Table 3 for a breakdown of the phases involved in conducting thematic analysis.

Findings

Five main themes were identified from the interviews with psychologists, and these will be discussed below: (1) therapeutic approaches used in relationship counselling, (2) reasons to seek therapy, (3) surface and core issues, (4) self-sabotaging behaviours and (5) reasons that people self-sabotage.

Therapeutic Approaches Used in Relationship Counselling

The interviews indicated that, while all 15 psychologists used at least one evidence-based approach for helping clients with romantic relationship difficulties, they often used these in combination with approaches that are not yet endorsed by the APS. The most commonly used therapeutic approach reported by psychologists was Gottman couple therapy (GCT; 73%). For example, one psychologist who worked for Relationships Australia explained: 'Relationships Australia subscribe to the Gottman model'. Another psychologist working in a private practice reported:

I was originally trained as a narrative therapist, but it did not cover all the bases and it was not effective enough. Then, I tried emotion-focused therapy, but I was still not happy with it either. Then I trained in Gottman relationship therapy. I basically just use Gottman now. I do not use the other two models.

Davoodvandi, Nejad, and Farzad's (2018) recent study confirmed that GCT is well endorsed among practising psychologists, especially those whose primary focus is relationship counselling, with enduring effects on couples' intimacy and marital adjustment.

The evidence-based approach reported most often by psychologists was emotionally focused couple therapy (EFCT; 53%). Other endorsed approaches reported were cognitive behavioural therapy (40%), family therapy (systemic, strategic and structural; 40%), acceptance and commitment therapy (20%), psychodynamic psychotherapy (20%), narrative therapy (13%) and dialectical behavioural therapy (6.7%). Only one psychologist specifically

reported using behavioural couples therapy (BCT; 6.7%). Additionally, three psychologists (20%), who did not explicitly report working with EFCT, reported working within the attachment theory framework, which might suggest knowledge and practice of EFCT. Other guiding theories were client-centred theory (6.7%) and learning theory (6.7%). Author Esther Perel was also nominated as a reference to inform practice (13%). Overall, this finding suggests that evidence-based practice is not always best or preferred practice. Table 4 describes the therapeutic approaches used in relationship counselling.

Table 4

Therapeutic Approaches Used in Relationship Counselling.

APS Endorsement *	Therapeutic Approaches Used by Psychologists	Participants (N = 15)	Weight (%)
	Emotionally focused couple therapy	8	53
	Cognitive behavioural therapy	6	40
	Family therapy and family-based interventions (including systemic, structural and strategic family therapies)	6	40
Evidence-Based Approaches	Acceptance and commitment therapy	3	20
	Psychodynamic psychotherapy	3	20
	Narrative therapy	2	13
	Behavioural couples therapy	1	6.7
	Dialectical behavioural therapy	1	6.7
Non-Evidence-Based Approaches	Gottman couple therapy	11	73
	Strength-focused therapies	1	6.7
	Attachment theory	3	20
Other (Theories and Authors)	Client-centred theory	1	6.7
	Learning theory	1	6.7
	Esther Perel	2	13

Notes: *APS (2010); Murphy and Mathews (2010).

Reasons to Seek Therapy

The issue that a client reports during their initial session with a psychologist is not always the reason that they sought therapy. One psychologist explained: ‘The problem a client brings through the door is not the problem you end up working on. There is what they say and what they really want. Those are two different things’. Clients initially come to therapy with concerns relating to mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and depression. However, once trust is established, the issue for which they seek treatment most often is relationship difficulties. Another psychologist explained: ‘Generally, the presenting problem was not relationship issues. It was generally depression and anxiety. Then relationship issues emerged, and they probably really were the precipitating factors’. In accordance, one psychologist stated: ‘In the course of [therapy], relationship issues emerged, and sometimes they probably really were the precipitating factors’. In effect, this means that, in some cases, clients can be assessed and treated for mental health difficulties and psychopathologies without a clear understanding of the causal issue, and before revealing precipitating issues.

Surface and Core Issues

Romantic relationship difficulties are complex and multi-layered. One psychologist described that relationship difficulties present as ‘dissatisfaction’ at the surface, while another psychologist termed surface issues as ‘feelings of having unmet needs’. A variety of issues were identified as possible causes for feeling dissatisfied in a romantic relationship, such as parenting, housing, money, work, communication, intimacy, infidelity, family violence, legal difficulties and anger management. However, dissatisfaction is also not clearly expressed, and is often masked by what one psychologist described as ‘hurt feelings’. Overall, clients express pain with behaviours such as sulking, complaining, feeling upset, sadness, distress, guilt, shame, despair, anger, irritability, frustration and detachment. See Figure 7 for a representation of this theme.

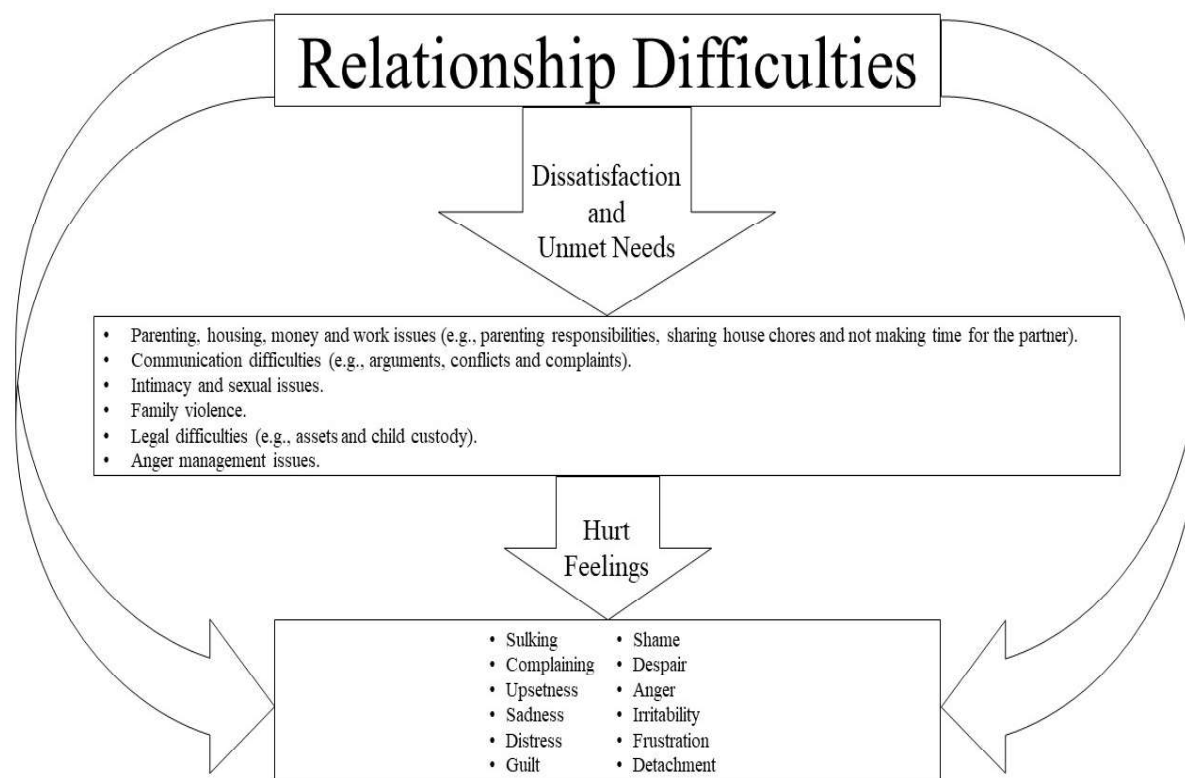


Figure 7. Relationship Difficulties Presentation in Counselling.

The psychologists interviewed agreed that multi-layered issues increase the difficulty in assessing and differentiating surface and core issues. A psychologist explained: ‘The behaviours tend to be related to the root-end of the problem’. This complexity can lead to confusion for practitioners assessing relationship difficulties as endogenous depression or anxiety. Moreover, mental health difficulties are treated very differently from relationship issues. For instance, improving couple communication and relationship skills is an effective course of treatment with a beneficial flow-on effect for anxiety and mood. Therefore, careful identification of issues is critical to effectively and appropriately target a psychological intervention to match the client presentation.

Self-Sabotaging Cognitions and Behaviours

The psychologists described cognitions and behaviours that contribute to the dissolution of romantic engagements, including partner attack (e.g., criticism), partner pursuit (e.g., partner checking), partner withdrawal (e.g., stonewalling), defensiveness (e.g., externalising), contempt (e.g., disrespecting the partner), difficulties trusting and jealousy (e.g., lack of trust or jealous behaviour), destructive behaviours (e.g., excessive shopping), affairs (e.g., attitude to affairs or history of affairs) and partner harassment and abuse (e.g., controlling finances).

Clients find themselves in the same destructive patterns as they move from one relationship to the next. One psychologist explained: '[They] find they have replicated the very pattern they were escaping from'. However, these behaviours are not clearly expressed. Another psychologist described self-sabotaging behaviours as 'nicely complicated and multi-layered and not easily spotted'. One more psychologist provided an example: '[For] some clients, their defence is a form of attack'. Overall, self-destructive behaviours can be understood as manifestations of the 'different ways, [people] try to protect themselves'. See Table 5 for examples of self-sabotage behaviours with representative quotations.

Table 5

Self-Sabotaging Cognitions and Behaviours.

Self-Sabotaging Cognitions and Behaviours	Examples	Illustrative Quotation
Partner Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism • Accusations and blaming • Creating conflict • Arguing • Fighting • Yelling • Complaining • Judging • Name calling • Acting on revenge and payback 	<p>‘[There is] a lot of name calling, harassment and blaming.’</p> <p>‘The communication gets affected, as well as the way they are thinking about their situation.’</p>
Partner Pursuit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinging • Demanding • Partner checking • Protesting 	‘[Partner] checking brings on the end of the relationship.’
Partner Withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stonewalling • Avoiding conflict • Distancing • Hiding emotions • Focusing on others (e.g., children or elderly parents) • Ignoring the partner • Ignoring the relationship 	‘They do not anticipate someone is actually going to meet [their] needs.’
Defensiveness*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Externalising • Victimising • Shifting blame 	<p>‘There are a lot of “I am right, she is wrong” and “win or lose”.’</p> <p>‘They will tend to externalise a lot of the blame.’</p> <p>‘They get really fixed on cycles of blame, justifying their own behaviour and attacking their partner.’</p> <p>‘Externalising is often with their partner, but it turns into everybody else’s fault.’</p>
Contempt*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing disrespect to the partner • Sarcasm • Cynicism • Sneering • Mockery • Hostile humour • Disgust • Eye rolling 	<p>‘He just rolls his eyes like “here we go again”.’</p> <p>‘She does not really respect him.’</p>
Difficulties Trusting and Jealousy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust • Jealous behaviour 	‘[They] do not trust and deep down [they] even wondered why [their partner] even committed.’
Destructive Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive shopping • Gambling • Excessive drinking • Self-medicating • Overeating 	‘People use all sorts of coping behaviours, like overeating, turning to alcohol and other substance abuse types.’
Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude to affairs • History of affairs 	‘If you are not committed to [the relationship], you will always find a better option.’
Partner Harassment and Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling finances • Blackmailing • Keeping partner from leaving • Verbal threats • Physical attacks • Emotional manipulations • Stalking 	<p>‘They range from communication style to DV [domestic violence], controlling behaviours and avoidant behaviours.’</p> <p>‘They do not want or let their partner be independent.’</p> <p>‘Violence is a way of killing the relationships.’</p>

Notes: *These cognitions and behaviours are also understood as a form of attack.

Reasons that People Self-Sabotage

Several reasons that clients may be self-sabotaging were identified. These were coded into six subthemes: (1) motivation to self-protect and fear of being hurt; (2) insecure attachment styles; (3) difficulties with self-esteem and negative self-concept; (4) relationship beliefs, views and expectations; (5) difficulty coping with relationship issues and (6) avoiding relationship commitment.

Motivation to Self-Protect and Fear of Being Hurt. All psychologists agreed that ‘consciously or unconsciously, [people] self-sabotage the relationship or withdraw from it’ because they are afraid of being hurt and ‘scared and too uncomfortable to make [themselves] vulnerable’. Another psychologist explained that fear is ‘a deep anxiety about being abandoned by our intimate partner’. The same psychologist explained that fear can ‘overshadow everything’. For instance, one psychologist explained that, although clients might be self-sabotaging with anger outbursts, fear is a driving motivator—‘often what they are feeling right down deep beneath the surface is fear’. Generally, clients are protecting themselves from the hurt that their current relationship or previous relationships have caused them.

Insecure Attachment Styles. The theme of attachment was well documented in all interviews. One psychologist explained that these behaviours are ‘expressions of how the relationship is not working in terms of manifest, but underneath that is attachment’. Another psychologist added: ‘It is all about connection, but the way we respond when we are disconnected is either we get angry or withdrawn’. Further, a psychologist explained: ‘People engage in self-sabotage behaviours because of a historical pattern’. Another psychologist elaborated on the idea that attachment is ‘how [clients] learn about expressed emotions’. All psychologists agreed that learning about attachment occurs during childhood or previous relationships. Further, one psychologist explained: ‘It is a preoccupation with the relationship

and a preoccupation with the history of relationships'. However, it might also be that the attachment is 'context dependent', as attachment is not necessarily 'one trait' and can be 'malleable'. As a result, it is agreed that clients might 'internalise experiences' and behave in unique ways, which are tailored by prior experiences.

Difficulties with Self-Esteem and Negative Self-Concept. Another explanation for clients' behaviour may relate to difficulties with self-esteem. A psychologist explained: '[Clients] do not think they are worthy and they are critical of themselves'. This negative view of themselves can be translated into how clients deal with others in their life. One psychologist provided an example from a client who stated: 'She makes me feel like whatever I do is not good enough'. Consequently, the same psychologist explained that, for some clients, it is easier to be defensive and conclude that they are not worthy: 'I am going to flail around, but I know it is not going to make any difference to anyone'. Another psychologist explained that clients 'see themselves as hopeless and helpless more often than not'. Further, a negative self-view can be translated into poor expectations of partners and the relationship: 'People self-protect by displacing uncomfortable feelings on their partner'.

Relationship Beliefs, Views and Expectations. Some clients hold negative views of relationships and assume failure. Two examples were provided by psychologists who reported that clients expect that '[situations are] never going to get any better' and 'this is as good as [it] will get'. Alternatively, clients have unrealistic views and expectations of their partners and relationships. One psychologist reported: 'The most common [expectation] is that my partner should know what I am thinking'. Another psychologist explained: 'A lot of people are very uneducated about relationships—what is normal and what is not normal and what works and what does not work'. Fairy tales were also mentioned as influencing clients' relationship views: 'In general, people know that the fairy tale is just a fairy tale, but they influence us in subtle ways'. Moreover, the psychologists stated that some people simply 'do

not know how to do it [maintain a relationship]', 'have not had good role models' or 'do not know what a good relationship looks like'. Further, another psychologist explained that these unrealistic behaviours are a consequence of attachment and learning: '[These are] well-worn patterns of behaviours or patterns of expectations of what people should do or how people will respond'. The same psychologist explained that people will act on these expectations without 'reality testing it'. Alternatively, clients might be projecting their own insecurities and discomfort on their partner and relationship. Some psychologists explained that clients are also inflexible with change. They clarified that these individuals 'stick to their own interpretation' or 'their worldview is governed by their individual perspective and they forget they are in a coupled relationship'.

Difficulty Coping with Relationship Issues. Self-sabotaging behaviours also leave clients unprepared to deal with relationship issues. One psychologist explained: 'They might find it more difficult to cope with some of the challenges that might come up'. The psychologists described this as a lack of 'resilience' or 'self-efficacy'. Another psychologist gave the following example: 'When there is conflict, it is very difficult for them to regulate and think clearly'. Further, clients do not understand that challenges are normal in relationships. Another psychologist explained: '[There is] a lack of acceptance of conflict as being a normal part of the relationship'. Moreover, social norms, traditions and culture can influence how clients understand relationships. For instance, one psychologist explained that some clients believe '[they] are not supposed to fight' in relationships.

Avoiding Relationship Commitment. People also begin and end relationships regularly as a way to protect themselves. One psychologist quoted their client who said: 'If I never get too close to anyone, and never let anybody in, then I am never going to get hurt and it could just be fun all the time'. Another psychologist explained that sometimes clients will fall into a pattern of 'ending relationships even when they still want to be in them'. It is also

possible that difficulties with relationship commitment are reinforced by social search mobile apps. A psychologist explained that the introduction of apps such as Tinder makes it easier for people to jump from one relationship to the next. A client was described to 'go on Tinder dates and, while she was with that person at the bar, [she] would be swiping and looking at who else she could be with'. Further, another psychologist explained that dating sites have made it possible for people to 'try many different options and meet many different people'.

Discussion

Psychologists in the current study tended to polarise between practising either GCT or EFCT. It is evident that other treatment models also need to be considered and this issue will be discussed in greater length in the next chapter. Overall, the lack of consensus between practising psychologists and researchers can interfere with application of treatments and achieving the best outcomes for clients. However, noteworthy is the fact that EFCT is heavily based in Gottman's (1993b) findings. Therefore, a more flexible approach is required to counselling relationships combined with mental health difficulties that reduce the stigma associated with engaging in counselling services (Dixon-Gordon, Whalen, Layden, & Chapman, 2015; Link & Phelan, 2006; Mansell, Harvey, Watkins, & Shafran, 2009), unnecessary labelling and misdiagnosis (Aragonès, Piñol, & Labad, 2006). McAdams et al. (2018) and Wampold (2015) advocated, supported by evidence, that better outcomes in relationship therapy are achievable when practitioners establish a sound therapeutic alliance and rapport with the client and demonstrate an adequate level of knowledge and expertise. Adequate knowledge and expertise include identifying and having a thorough understanding of a client's presenting issue, preparing for the session, and formulating treatment plans that are aligned with the client's goals. In addition, an effective therapist should strive to convey a genuine desire to help and establish a trusting alliance with the client towards developing the best treatment (McAdams et al., 2018).

Individuals often present to therapy with complex and comorbid symptoms. Therefore, diagnostic clarity will not be possible (or wise) at first in many cases. Nevertheless, it is possible to choose a therapeutic approach that focuses on the client's holistic presentation with appropriate contextual and cultural considerations. The choice of approach also supports the development of a stable alliance between practitioner and client. Wampold (2015) noted that therapeutic alliance contributes to approximately 30% of positive change. Additionally, Gurman (2008) offered an extensive discussion of therapeutic methods matched to presentations, such as comorbidity with depression (Beach, Dreifuss, Franklin, Kamen, & Gabriel, 2008), personality disorders (Fruzzetti & Fantozzi, 2008) and substance abuse (Birchler, Fals-Stewart, & O'Farrell, 2008). The suggested practices outlined by Gurman (2008) and Gurman, Lebow, and Snyder (2015) are specific clinical approaches for couple therapy and go beyond those endorsed by the APS, which points to the difference between evidence-based research guided by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and evidence-informed research. Woodbury and Kuhnke (2014) described evidence-informed research as individual-focused practice, more inclusive of the practitioners' expertise and intuition. Nevertheless, the longstanding argument is that practising psychologists and researchers do not generally agree on what is best practice (Gurman, 2015; Truax & Carkhuff, 1976; VanDerHeyden, 2018).

The findings from the current study are consistent with the established literature. The practising psychologists who participated in the interviews described self-sabotaging behaviours that are well known as maladaptive relationship behaviours. For instance, John Gottman's (Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Shapiro & Gottman, 2005) predictors of marriage dissolution and the 'four horseman of the apocalypse' (i.e., criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) were mentioned. Additionally, the practitioners identified couple dynamics (i.e., attack–attack, attack–withdraw, withdraw–

withdraw) that are often discussed within the EFCT framework (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998) and behavioural models (Christensen, 1987; Sullaway & Christensen, 1983). These dynamics will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Further, Heyman, Weiss, and Eddy (1995) identified that behaviours such as blame, invalidation, inattention and independence are significant contributors to marital dissolution. In short, the self-sabotaging cognitions and behaviours identified by the psychologists align with the three negative core relationship dimensions (rejection, coercion and chaos) identified by Ducat and Zimmer-Gembeck (2010). Specifically, these authors highlighted the destructive nature of coercion (measured as controlling and demanding behaviours) and chaos (measured as inconsistent, unreliable and unpredictable behaviours), which would explain what the psychologists noted in their practice. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that clients do not always clearly express their cognitions, emotions and motivations as behaviours, which means that some of the discussed findings in this study require further clarification. Overall, the current study highlighted that professionals and clients alike find it difficult to differentiate between core and surface issues in the counselling context (Peel, Caltabiano, Buckby, & McBain, 2018). Consequently, understanding the different motives or reasons that people seek self-protection (sometimes at the cost of breaking or not forming attachment bonds), and in turn self-sabotage, is an important step to help identify self-defeating behaviours empirically and in practice.

The interviews also confirmed self-protection as the main motivator for self-sabotage. This was an expected outcome based on evidence from the self-handicapping and attachment theories. It seems that insecure individuals are more motivated to self-protect than to form close affectional bonds. This is further complicated by the fact that self-protection can lead individuals to form patterns of maladaptive behaviours in relationships with others (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Further, these patterns are difficult to escape, which in turn means that

individuals might be stuck in a cycle of self-sabotage. Overall, self-protection is a highly enticing exercise because it offers the individual a feeling of control over their environment by moderating the effects of painful experiences (Jones & Berglas, 1978; Rhodewalt, 1990).

The psychologists in the current study also unanimously agreed that patterns of behaviours characteristic of insecurely attached adults inevitably lead to the dissolution of romantic engagements. This premise is in accordance with the previous literature (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1972; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Individuals' internalised experiences resultant from their relationship history with parents, peers and other romantic partners inform how they understand present interactions. To reiterate, insecure individuals in romantic relationships will typically behave in two different ways: (1) they might fall in love frequently and experience extreme self-doubt, excessive need for approval and distress when others are unavailable or unresponsive, or (2) they might not believe in love, repress feelings of insecurity, be reluctant to engage in self-disclosure, express an excessive need for self-reliance and avoid commitment (Harper et al., 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Therefore, it is suggested that self-sabotaging can be demonstrated in insecurely attached individuals who hold avoidance goals for their relationship (Elliot & Reis, 2003; Locke, 2008). Specifically, insecure attachment can predict self-defeating goals to avoid intimacy and achieve self-reliance, control and distance from others (Mikulincer et al., 1998; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003).

The attachment theory literature alone has contributed to a strong explanation of how several affective, cognitive and behavioural expressions might predict the eventual dissolution of romantic partnerships. However, determining the fate of a relationship requires a complex evaluation of the different attachment styles, as well as the factors unique to the individual and the dyad engagement. More specifically, and similarly to what was found in the current study, Wei and Ku (2007) observed that people with a negative self-concept

displayed higher levels of self-defeating patterns and interpersonal distress. Further, Weisskirch (2017) found that a high sense of self-efficacy in maintaining romantic relationships had a direct effect on an individual's wellbeing. Thus, it is possible to suggest that maladaptive thought patterns and resultant behaviours may in fact be sabotaging an individual's chances of engaging in or maintaining a long-term relationship (Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Wei & Ku, 2007). Taken together, the evidence indicates that, compared with secure individuals, insecure individuals are more likely to understand their partner's behaviour as negative because of their own negative self-view.

Negative self and relationship views are often a product of working models of behaviours learnt through development (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Originally, Hazan and Shaver (1987) explained that schemas derived from working models of the self and others can in turn place insecure individuals in a 'vicious cycle' (p. 321), where previous experiences affect beliefs, leading to predicted outcomes (Collins et al., 2006). Alternatively, Knee (1998) explained that individuals who believe in a destined relationship (also understood as a belief in fairy tales; Knee et al., 2004) tend to assess their romantic engagements early and rapidly, and subsequently tend to give up easily on the relationship. Further, individuals who believe their relationship is destined also tend to believe that the outcome of their romantic life is beyond their control (Knee et al., 2004). Together, the working model and destiny belief theories provide a strong explanation of how individuals set goals for their current and subsequent romantic engagements and why maintenance and longevity are so difficult to achieve. Additionally, the psychologists interviewed identified an added complication, which has been previously addressed in the flirting literature (Hall et al., 2010)—it seems that individuals do not hold realistic expectations of relationships and do not understand what a healthy relationship looks like.

Unrealistic expectations and lack of relationship skills can lead to conflicting goals. The current study revealed similar findings to previous studies. Some examples are seeking intimacy and independence (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000) or seeking intimacy and avoiding rejection (Cavallo et al., 2010). To reiterate, the meta-analysis conducted by Le et al. (2010) confirmed that individual factors, such as insecure attachment styles, and relationship factors, such as commitment issues, dissatisfaction, conflict and lack of trust, can contribute to the dissolution of a romantic relationship. Further, one of the main obstacles in maintaining relationships is risk regulation and balance between relationship stressors (Le et al., 2010) and conflicting goals (Cavallo et al., 2010; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Together, insecure beliefs and conflicting goals lead individuals to a defensive response to stressful situations (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Additionally, contemporary online dating dynamics allow for an element of control over how the self is presented (Whitty, 2008) and how the romantic engagement unfolds (Corriero & Tong, 2015; Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017). This is particularly enticing to individuals wishing to self-protect by avoiding intimacy and commitment.

Defining Self-Sabotage in Romantic Relationships

Overall, the evidence from the current study aids in differentiating between motivations to self-sabotage and the way self-sabotage is enacted in romantic relationships. Self-saboteurs hold insecure views of romantic relationships and, although they are doing all they can to maintain the relationship (Ayduk et al., 2001), failure is an expected outcome (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Using a similar logic to self-handicapping, a romantic self-saboteur can be defined as someone who shows patterns of self-destructive behaviours in relationships to impede success or withdraw effort and justify failure. A self-saboteur who seeks a romantic relationship is also equally committed to portraying a win-win outcome (Peel, Caltabiano, Buckby, & McBain, 2019). The individual guarantees a win if the

engagement survives despite the employed defensive strategies, or if the engagement fails, in which case their insecure beliefs are validated.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

The scope of the present study was restricted to practice in Australia and to a small group of psychologists; therefore, generalisability cannot be implied. Although the number of participants was not a limitation when interpreting the qualitative data (because of having reached data saturation), the number of participants was a limitation when assessing preferred therapeutic approaches among psychologists working in Australia. Nevertheless, the purpose of the present study was not to assess therapeutic approaches used in therapy. This was an unexpected finding and future studies will benefit from using a larger sample to report the percentage of psychologists practising within or outside the evidence-based framework. Future studies should also ask professionals to differentiate between therapy efficacy when using the same method with individuals and couples. This discussion might provide answers that the current study could not. Additionally, the current study was limited to counselling practised by psychologists. Different interpretations might be offered if interviews were conducted with other mental health professionals who practice talk therapy, such as counsellors, social workers and psychiatrists. Further, differences across gender and age have not yet been explored.

It is also possible that the way psychologists understand relationship self-sabotage is different to clients' understandings and research evidence (Gurman, 2015; Truax & Carkhuff, 1976). This is possibly because professional psychologists have a better understanding of human behaviour and because their practical knowledge is limited to clients they see or learn about. In essence, their clients are individuals or couples with relationship difficulties, rather than functioning relationships. A further consideration is that clients' accounts of their experiences in relationships might differ from actual events, which would affect practitioners'

conclusions. It is also possible that some described experiences, and consequently proposed themes, derived from these interviews will not be generalisable to the population outside of the counselling context, as not everyone in relationships attends counselling. Conclusively, more in-depth discussion of the phenomenon of self-sabotage will be made possible once data collected from members of the general public are also taken into account.

Study Implications

A direct implication of this study is the understanding of how self-sabotage is presented in romantic relationships to aid in the development of a model from which psychologists can identify and treat clients. Further, understanding clients' issues represents a substantial component of the therapeutic interaction between mental health professionals and their clients. This essential step should occur before the best therapeutic approach is selected. Therefore, investigating how psychologists understand the diversity of presenting issues commonly seen in daily practice (and developing evidence) can also provide a foundation towards updating best practice in psychology.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the notion of self-sabotage within the confines of romantic relationships and to explore how psychologists in practice understand this phenomenon. A repertoire of self-sabotaging behaviours was identified by practitioners, with possible reasons as to why this occurs. Overall, it seems that motivations for self-sabotage and self-handicapping are the same across different contexts—people use self-defeating behaviours to control the environment and self-protect. However, these self-defeating behaviours are context dependent. In the context of intimate relationships, the literature on attachment and goal orientation is better equipped to explain the intrinsic self-defeating behaviours contributing to the dissolution of romantic engagements. For instance, factors such as a negative self-concept and other resultant individual characteristics derived

from insecure attachment (e.g., rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy) are possibly the reason that people self-sabotage relationships. However, the existing literature does not empirically address which behaviours are sabotaging individuals' chances of maintaining long-term relationships. Behaviours such as those described by Gottman and Levenson (2002) as contributors of relationship dissolution are possibly the way relationships are sabotaged. Nevertheless, this premise is yet to be confirmed. The present study was the first step to empirically define and explore self-sabotage in romantic relationships by gathering evidence from practising psychologists. Future studies needed to be conducted to further develop theory towards creating and testing a scale and model for relationship sabotage. The next chapter will complement the discussion on relationship counselling to clarify some of the unexpected findings highlighted within the current study.

Chapter 5

A Commentary on Relationship Counselling in Australia: Is Evidence-Based Practice Best Practice?

Study 1 revealed an unexpected finding outside the proposed aims and research questions for this project. The interviews indicated that, although all 15 psychologists used at least one evidence-based approach to help clients with romantic relationship difficulties (e.g., EFCT), they often used these in combination with approaches that are not yet endorsed by the APS, such as GCT. Further, the majority of psychologists reported preferring and achieving better results when using GCT. This chapter is a commentary on the state of relationship counselling in Australia to further inform the development of a scale and model for sabotage in relationships.

Practising as a Psychologist in Australia

Practising psychologists, in particular, are required to adhere to a set of procedures. Ethically, there are three principles that psychologists must follow when engaging with clients: (1) respect for the rights and dignity of people, (2) propriety and (3) integrity (APS, 2007). In accordance, obtaining a licence to practise psychology in Australia is a rigorous process that involves completing an accredited qualification and supervised practice recognised by the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA; 2018a) and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (2018). The process of registration for a general psychologist includes a minimum six years of qualification (four years of undergraduate training and two years of practice, or five years of undergraduate training and one year of practice; PsyBA, 2018b). Alternatively, individuals might choose to specialise, which involves four years of undergraduate training and two years of professional training (e.g., clinical psychology or counselling psychology; PsyBA, 2018a). Finally, an important requirement of holding a licence to practise psychology is treating clients with evidence-based approaches (Antony & Barlow, 2014; Hunsley & Lee, 2007) and a range of approaches are recommended for

specific mental health diagnoses (APS, 2010; Murphy & Mathews, 2010). Overall, understanding how psychologists practise within a diversity of presenting issues commonly seen in daily practice (and developing evidence) can provide a foundation towards updating best practice in psychology.

Evidence-Based Practice in Australia

Establishing evidence-based approaches is dependent upon meeting a set of criteria (i.e., strength of evidence, size of effect and relevance of evidence) used to systematically evaluate the quality of research and potential effectiveness of treatment in practice (NHMRC, 2009). Accordingly, five levels for evaluating evidence are outlined: (1) quality of study, (2) consistency of results, (3) clinical impact, (4) generalisability of results and (5) application to practice (NHMRC, 2009). These guidelines are endorsed by the APS to ensure that mental health professionals can rigorously assess evidence and provide clients with the best available care.

Mental health services funded by the Australian government are also assessed based on best evidence (Hickie & McGorry, 2007). Mental health plans through Medicare (2019)—the government agency under the Australian Department of Health—are written only by medical practitioners, usually general practitioners, who refer patients to a mental health service provider. In turn, mental health professionals are expected to provide evidence-based treatments to qualify for Medicare rebates or other government schemes (Hickie & McGorry, 2007). However, government incentives are generally also dependent on formal mental health diagnoses (Epstein et al., 2010), which means that those seeking treatment for a diagnosed condition are the most benefited. This is a problematic procedure, especially if the life events that triggered the psychopathology remain unresolved.

The two most common mental health diagnoses reported across different contexts are anxiety and depression (World Health Organization, 2017). However, the current emphasis

on diagnoses does not always equate to resolving the reason for presentation to counselling, which Yalom (2002) argued could be ‘counterproductive’ (p. 5) in the client’s search for an explanation of their symptoms (Becker, 2008). Accordingly, mental health professionals treat clients with a variety of evidence-based treatments to target common psychopathologies, rather than the specific source of the client’s concern. For instance, a report from the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Heads of Counselling Services (2010) examining service delivery in university counselling centres in Australia and New Zealand found that depression and anxiety were diagnosed in clients 100% of the time. The same report also indicated that romantic relationship difficulties were the third most common issue (83%) reported as the reason for seeking counselling in the first place. Further, relationship counselling is the most commonly reported reason that individuals seek help from professional counsellors (Halford & Pepping, 2019; Kulka, Veroff, & Douvan, 1979) and one of the top three reasons that individuals use employment assistant programs (Halford & Pepping, 2019; Stewart, Bradford, Higginbotham, & Skogrand, 2016). Nevertheless, romantic relationship difficulties are not a diagnosable psychopathology.

Diagnostic systems provide a common language for mental health professionals to implement therapeutic interventions (Carey & Pilgrim, 2010). This common language also leads to improved access to medical treatment and services, and provides clients with knowledge to explain their distress (Epstein et al., 2010). However, most mental health conditions cannot be assessed based on the presence or absence of physical markers, which makes mental health diagnoses more complex. Some issues, such as relationship difficulties, are not discrete, objective or clearly identifiable—they are relative to culture and based on consensus, which is prone to be socially constructed (Gornall, 2013). For instance, diagnostic systems, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder—Fifth Edition* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), cluster cognitive, emotional and behavioural

markers in an organised principle to convey clear and efficient assessments. However, these markers are difficult to measure accurately and require clinical judgement. As highlighted in previous chapters, understanding the client's issues is an essential first step to inform clinical judgement. Another important step is forming a therapeutic alliance with the client. Together, these steps will influence the therapist's approach to treatment (Corey, 2017).

Understanding Romantic Relationship Difficulties in Counselling

Mental health and relationship difficulties are frequently comorbid, as evidence demonstrates (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Mead, 2002; Rogers, Ha, Updegraff, & Iida, 2018; Whisman, 2001). The bi-directionality of cause and effect complicates the counselling process, which in turn creates problems in research and practice. Nevertheless, some research cites relationship difficulties as a predictor of depression (Gibb, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2011; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Mirsu-Paun & Oliver, 2017; Rick, Falconier, & Wittenborn, 2017; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). The opposite is also true—mental health difficulties can be a barrier to beginning and maintaining relationships (Hewitt et al., 2003; Meyer et al., 2005). This complexity has a consequence in the real world of lived experience, as there is no clearly effective model of practice for individuals and couples experiencing relationship difficulties.

Despite romantic relationship difficulties being in the top five most prominent reasons for counselling, there are limited evidence-based interventions specifically designed for the purpose of treating individuals or couples (First et al., 2002). The APS currently lists only EFCT and BCT as recommended treatments for romantic relationship difficulties (APS, 2019). Several reviews (Byrne, Carr, & Clark, 2004; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012; Mead, 2002; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003) cited EFCT and BCT as preferred therapeutic approaches. However, there is less empirical evidence for BCT's effectiveness, even though this approach has been substantially tested

across diverse individual and relational presentations. Further, these two approaches are criticised for primarily focusing on individual counselling, rather than couple therapy. Another approach recommended by Gurman (2015) is cognitive behavioural couple therapy (CBCT), which focuses on couples' functioning within a diverse range of difficulties (e.g., emotional intimacy, parenting style, career conflict, sexual issues and infidelity) and offers a greater focus on how the individual's cognition can affect their behaviour. Overall, this approach merges practices from EFT and BCT (Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

Relationship therapy is difficult to acquire. For instance, statistics show that couple counselling has high drop-out rates, with up to half of clients not returning after their first session (McAdams et al., 2018). In addition, many therapists report disliking working with couples (Halford & Pepping, 2019). Further, the limited evidence of efficacy for couple counselling leaves a gap in knowledge regarding the contribution of relationship dynamics to the mental health of individuals (First et al., 2002). Much of the evidence relates to the efficacy of therapy for individuals experiencing relationship difficulties. In accordance, Gibb et al. (2011) concluded that relationship breakdowns are associated with increased rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour and overall risk of mental health difficulties. Similarly, Peel, Buckby, and McBain (2017) identified intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship difficulties as significant factors contributing to perceived suicide risk. Further, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Mirsu-Paun and Oliver (2017) provided evidence that both negative relationship quality and relationship stressors are strongly associated with poor mental health outcomes. A specific example was given by Halford and Pepping (2019), who explained how the association between relationship and alcohol issues is bi-directional. The authors noted that, in about 40% of the couples who present to therapy, one person is drinking heavily. Moreover, it is well known that relationship issues can predict alcohol misuse (Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006). Thus, relationship stressors are considered

strong contributors to mental health conditions, either as a predisposing or maintaining factor (Byrne et al., 2004). In accordance, Norcross, Pfund, and Prochaska (2013) proposed that relationship therapy is a practice that needs further attention moving forward. This suggestion is particularly relevant considering the evidence that couple therapy can often be more effective than individual therapy (Baucom, Whisman, & Paprocki, 2012).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Relationship Therapy

Broadly, most therapeutic approaches focus on cognitive, behavioural and affective presentations with varying emphasis. For instance, EFCT primarily focuses on the expression of emotions (Johnson, 2004), while CBCT interventions view emotions as a cause and a response to behaviours and cognitions (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). Thus, understanding emotions is central to differentiating between approaches.

In the context of EFCT, individuals are seen to express layers of emotions, in which vulnerable core (or primary) emotions, such as sadness and fear, are hidden beneath defensive surface (or secondary) emotions, such as anger. Secondary emotions are considered more 'acceptable'. Further, it is understood that emotions are layered to protect the individual in their pursuit to meet attachment needs (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). The goal of therapy is to uncover vulnerable primary emotions to help individuals empathise with one another and have their needs met. According to Johnson (2004), understanding key emotions triggered during conflict and using them to develop new responses is an essential step towards change. Further, Goldman, Greenberg, and Angus (2006) proposed that beyond dealing with attachment, emotion regulation is needed to help clients with either limited or excessive emotional expressions.

Emotional expressions also help individuals understand and communicate their needs and goals. In a healthy interaction, these expressions will serve as a basis for collaboration to be formed. However, in relationships dominated by conflict, these interactions can also serve

to drive partners further apart (Johnson, 2004). Gottman's research (1991–2015) details evidence of typologies for couple interactions, which are broadly used in couple's therapy (e.g., GCT, EFCT and CBCT). Initial prepositions and results from researchers who tested the Gottman method (e.g., Bischoff, 2002) suggest that lack of emotional connection, especially in the face of conflict, is a strong predictor of marriage dissolution. In addition, couple interactions and the way individuals respond to conflict in marriage can predict divorce even during early stages of the relationship. For instance, a higher ratio of negative to positive interaction emphasises maladaptive behaviours in relationships (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009). Together, this evidence highlights the importance of defining couple typologies in romantic relationships to inform practice. Originally, three types of couples were proposed in relation to levels of emotional expressivity: (1) the volatile couple, who are characterised by high levels of the construct; (2) the validating couple, who are characterised by intermediate levels of the construct; and (3) the conflict-avoiding couple, who are characterised by low levels of the construct. These three styles were later developed into what is used in today's practice.

Typology of Individuals and Couples in Romantic Relationships. Research following Gottman's (1993a, 1993b) initial prepositions has contributed to well-known individual and couple typologies. Christensen (1987) identified three typologies of individuals in relationships: (1) the pursuer, (2) the withdrawer and (3) the attacker. In addition, three main patterns of communication in couple relationships were identified: (1) attack–attack, (2) attack–withdraw and (3) withdraw–withdraw. These were further developed by Greenberg and Johnson (1998) and Johnson (2004). Overall, it is important to note these typologies have limitations and are situation specific, meaning that individuals can change their behaviours depending on their cognition and emotional responses (this will be further discussed in Chapter 6).

Typology of Individuals: The Pursuer, the Withdrawer and the Attacker.

The Pursuer. A pursuer is someone who will go to extreme lengths to elicit a reaction in their partner. They seek a strategy that they believe will work and, when that does not happen, they become increasingly desperate and their strategies become more extreme. Examples of pursuing behaviours are clinging, partner checking, demanding and protesting (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004). For the pursuer, the worst response that their partner can offer is to withdraw.

The Withdrawer. A withdrawer often feels criticised or judged, and, as a result, they seek distance. Withdrawers are described in a similar manner to the way Gottman described stonewallers (refer to Chapter 2). Distancing or withdrawing are also often used as a physiological reaction to feeling frightened or overwhelmed. Examples of withdrawing behaviours include stonewalling, avoiding conflict, distancing, hiding emotions, focusing on others (as opposed to the partner) and ignoring the partner and the relationship (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004). For withdrawers, the more someone pursues, the more they retract.

The Attacker. Attackers can be either pursuers or withdrawers who begin to attack in response to feeling attacked themselves. They feel that their strategy is not succeeding and they need to defend themselves from a current or an imminent attack. Examples of attacking behaviours include criticism, accusations and blaming, creating conflict, arguing, fighting, yelling, complaining, judging, name calling and acting for revenge and payback (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004).

Typology of Couples: Three Main Relationship Dynamics.

The Attack–Attack Dynamic. This partner dynamic is characterised by the interaction between a pursuer and a withdrawer where both are using attack as a strategy. Attacking roles are interchangeable—the pursuer attacks if they feel their needs are not being met, and the

withdrawer attacks if they feel pressured or provoked. These behaviours are not necessarily hostile (e.g., clinginess), nevertheless they often encourage (or pressure) the other person to withdraw. Overall, individuals are predominantly either pursuers or withdrawers and they attack as a defence mechanism for dealing with conflict in the relationship (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004).

The Attack–Withdraw Dynamic. This partner dynamic is the most common interaction observed in relationships. It is characterised by the pursuer acting at high levels to elicit a response from their withdrawer counterpart, which in turn results in pushing the partner further away (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004). The dynamic involved in this pattern is aligned with attachment theory, which suggests that perceived insecurity elicits protest to find proximity (Bowlby, 1969; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998).

The Withdraw–Withdraw Dynamic. This partner dynamic is the most destructive interaction observed in relationships and is characterised by both parties seeking distance to avoid conflict. If individuals in this dynamic were previously pursuers, they stop trying to elicit a response in their partner. Consequently, the withdrawer partner is left in deeper isolation. Alternatively, individuals might start their interactions both as withdrawers. This interaction resembles adaptive behaviours to self-protect, loss of hope and, if the couple does not seek changes, this dynamic can lead to the end of the relationship (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2004).

Evidence from Relationship Therapy

The evidence from relationship therapy highlights several important findings. Gottman and colleagues (Gottman, 1993b; Heavey et al., 1993) found that the pursue–withdraw interaction in long-term relationships tends to shift to attack–attack, which is expressed as defensiveness. This conclusion is not shared amongst all researchers (e.g.,

Christensen, 1987). Nevertheless, it does support the argument that typologies are situational. Additionally, long-term pursuers and withdrawers resort to blame to defend and avoid being hurt. This finding was also discussed by psychologists in Study 1. Nevertheless, Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 2014) proposed that, although individuals might have very emotionally expressive relationships involving ‘attack’ behaviours, these relationships can still function well. This arises from a key essential characteristic needed in couple interactions: acceptance. If partners accept the value of intense expressiveness and all the vital information it can provide, the relationship can develop to show deep emotional connection. Other essential elements to combat negative interactions in relationships are accessibility, responsiveness and engagement (Sandberg et al., 2012). Overall, the importance of understanding practical evidence in romantic relationships is highlighted to shed some light on how the different intimate interactions might be destroying romantic engagements or, alternatively, paving the path for healing.

Recommendations to Inform Practice

A few recommendations for practitioners working with individuals experiencing relationship issues are worth noting. These are empirically grounded recommendations, but, most importantly, they are from practice-based evidence. Gottman (1993a, 1993b, 2014) emphasised the importance of ‘repair attempts’ to heal the communication between individuals and reframe negative experiences with positives. Repair attempts involve actions such as taking responsibility for a problem, agreeing with one’s partner, expressing affection or expressing gratitude for the other person’s efforts. An example is one partner being active in attempting to repair issues in the relationship, while the other acknowledges and values the attempt. This is an important consideration, as failed repair attempts (as explained in Chapter 2) are hypothesised to lead to a ruminative state in which the individual will be flooded with

negative emotions, avoid interactions with their partner and move towards the option of divorce (Gottman, 1993b).

The distress caused by interactive dynamics, such as pursue–withdraw, can greatly affect the physical and mental health of individuals and lead to presentation of anxiety and depression (Falconier & Epstein, 2011; Goldman et al., 2006; Whisman & Baucom, 2012). In accordance, Johnson (2004) recommended three steps for treating clients within the context of EFCT: (1) a safe therapeutic alliance, (2) unfolding emotional responses to form new ones in the context of attachment theory and (3) learning new responses to restructure key interactions. This approach also involves reframing how the individual understands conflict. Further, in EFCT, the therapist and client can engage in exploring how the partner interaction (e.g., pursue–withdraw) is affecting the couple. Part of this exploration involves asking individuals to role-play a scenario in which they act as their partner would. For instance, a pursuer will act as the withdrawer, while the withdrawer plays the pursuer. This technique is used to highlight existing relationship dynamics, provoke insight and instigate change.

Epstein and Baucom's (2002) approach to relationship therapy emphasises combining cognitive behavioural interventions (e.g., cognitive behavioural therapy) with person-centred interventions (e.g., GCT and EFCT) to deescalate negative interactions and reinforce positive interactions. This is a well-rounded approach used for a variety of individual and couple issues. Broadly, behavioural interventions have evolved from changing behaviour to focusing on enhancing relationship satisfaction and promoting change and acceptance (Halford & Pepping, 2019). For instance, techniques in this approach involve psycho-education, skills training focusing on understanding emotions and relationship interactions, and sharing positive emotional experiences to positively reinforce good interactions (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Rowe & Fitness, 2018).

Practitioners need to seek appropriate training and achieve competence to understand and interpret individuals' and couples' emotional experiences and interactions. Further, cues and triggers that explain these interactions need to be identified for the therapist to engage in the therapeutic process with the client. In accordance, Halford and Pepping (2019) proposed that understanding the reciprocal association between individual and couple issues is fundamental to treatment, even if the relationship is not the presenting problem. This process will involve helping the client move towards change through enhancing insight, skills for self-monitoring, self-soothing, expressing emotions constructively, accepting their partner's emotional expressions, valuing their partner's attempts, responding empathically to the partner's messages and collaborating (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman, 2014; Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Johnson, 2004). In addition, more specific skills for working with relationship issues are needed, and these include couple (as opposed to individual only) case formulation; couple-based therapeutic alliance (where applicable); skills in managing couple conflict during therapy sessions; and assisting partners to improve intimacy, communication and security (Halford & Pepping, 2019). Above all, practitioners also need to move beyond models of intervention to empathetically respond to clients' issues in a holistic manner, targeted at understanding individual characteristics, societal influences and modes of couple communication (Fitzgerald, 2017). All these recommendations are particularly important, as there is a common consensus that clients generally perceive helping professionals as lacking expertise in relationship issues (Stewart et al., 2016), which means that practitioners need to address challenges to conduct relationship therapy effectively (Halford & Pepping, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Romantic relationship difficulties present in counselling as frequently as mental health difficulties; however, symptoms are not easily defined or clearly identified by practitioners. Therefore, relationship breakdown is often treated as the consequence of

anxiety and depression, without any clear research-supported evidence of causal directionality. Yet, it is largely known that relationship difficulties are important precipitators and maintainers of mental health diagnoses. Further, evidence-based treatments for relationship issues are of variable efficacy for both individuals and couples. Specifically, the preferred approach identified among psychologists in Study 1 (GCT), although informed by research evidence, is not yet endorsed by the APS as best practice. Therefore, it is proposed that less time should be spent on precise diagnostic assessments, and more emphasis placed on the therapeutic alliance in service provision and adherence to methods that demonstrate contextual and cultural efficacy. The next chapter will present the findings from Study 2, which addressed the limitations and complemented the findings from Study 1, towards developing a scale to measure relationship self-sabotage.

Chapter 6

Study 2: 'Why Do We Sabotage Love?'

*I'm never gonna let you close to me
Even though you mean the most to me
'Cause every time I open up, it hurts
So I'm never gonna get too close to you
Even when I mean the most to you
In case you go and leave me in the dirt*

...
*I know you're thinking I'm heartless
I know you're thinking I'm cold
I'm just protecting my innocence
I'm just protecting my soul.'*

(Napier, Eriksen, Smith, & Hermansen, 2017)

Study Rationale

Identified Research Gaps. A repertoire of self-sabotaging behaviours was identified by practising psychologists who specialised in relationship counselling. Further, the psychologists discussed possible motivations for sabotaging relationships. However, it was also necessary to gather data from participants in the general community, who had or were experiencing relationship difficulties.

Aim. The aim of this study was to gather further evidence towards the development of a self-sabotage scale by exploring how the participants understood self-sabotage in their own relationships in comparison with what was suggested by experts in romantic relationships.

Research Question. One main research question was addressed in accordance with the current study aim: (1) Are the accounts provided by individuals with relationship experience different to the accounts provided by practising psychologists regarding self-sabotage in romantic relationships?

Methods

Participants

A sample of 696 participants was recruited for the current study. The participants' ages ranged between 15 and 80 years ($M = 30.58$, $SD = 13.56$) and four participants did not disclose their age. The distribution included 172 males (25%) and 524 females (75%). Regarding sexual orientation, the majority of participants reported being heterosexual (559, 80%), while 86 (12.5%) were bisexual, 30 (4.5%) were homosexual, 14 (2%) reported as 'other' and seven (1%) elected not to answer. For those who reported as 'other', 11 provided descriptions for their sexuality, which included androphilic (one), asexual (three), homoromantic (one), pansexual (four), queer (one) and romantic (one). The majority of participants (428, 61.5%) reported being in a relationship, which they rated as high quality overall (range 8 to 30, $M = 24.77$, $SD = 4.64$). The instrument used to measure perceived relationship quality was the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory Short Form (Fletcher et al., 2000). The psychometrics of this instrument will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. Further, the participants reported a mean of 7.5 years ($SD = 10.28$, range 0 to 61) as their longest relationship duration, while a total of 195 (28%) participants reported having had an affair. In addition, a total of 213 (31%) participants reported previously seeing a psychologist for issues regarding a romantic relationship. The culturally diverse sample included participants from all over the globe (at least 50 different countries), with the majority coming from Australia (327, 47%), the United States (110, 16%) and Southeast Asia (116, 17%). The majority of participants reported an association with JCU (364 [52%] students, 28 [4%] staff, and 26 [4%] both). However, most participants (402, 58%) reported never having studied or worked in mental health. See Table 6 for a complete description of the participants' characteristics.

Table 6

Study 2: Participants' Characteristics.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	30.58	13.56
Range (15–80 years)		
Longest Relationship Duration	7.50	10.28
Range (0–61 years)		
Perceived Relationship Quality	24.77	4.64
Range (8–30)		
	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	172	25
Female	524	75
Other	0	0
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	559	80
Homosexual	30	4.5
Bisexual	86	12.5
Other (androphilic, asexual, homoromantic, pansexual, queer, romantic)	14	2
Prefer not to answer	7	1
Relationship Status		
In a relationship (committed, de facto, married)	428	61.5
Not in a relationship	268	38.5
Affair		
Yes	195	28
No	501	72
Seen a Psychologist for Relationship Issues		
Yes	213	31
No	483	69
Country of Origin		
Australia	327	47
New Zealand	8	1
United States	110	16
Canada	9	1.5
United Kingdom (England, Scotland)	25	3.5
Western Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands)	13	2
Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine)	7	1
Northern Europe (Denmark, Norway, Sweden)	9	1
Southeast Asia (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam)	116	17
East Asia (China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan)	16	2.5
South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives)	12	2
Pacific Islands (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands)	4	.5
Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe)	18	2.5
Middle East (Iraq, Turkey)	2	.5
South America (Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico)	13	2
Did not report	0	0
Affiliation with JCU		
Student	364	52
Staff	28	4
Both	26	4
No association	278	40
Mental Health Literacy		
Yes	294	42
No	402	58

Notes: Overall *N* = 696; Age *N* = 694; Perceived Relationship Quality *N* = 428.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at JCU (Number H7414, see Appendix F). The study was conducted online as an anonymous low-risk survey and was distributed via a web link to the Qualtrics platform (see Appendix D for the survey protocol). The survey link was placed on a paper version of the information sheet (see Appendix E) and on online sites, such as the primary researcher's website; social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter; the APS research page; and fellow researchers' online pages. The survey link was also placed on the JCU Psychology SONA research participation system. Additionally, a press release calling for television, radio, newspaper and media sites was issued, which resulted in the link being shared on various platforms. Snowball recruitment (i.e., participants sharing the information sheet or web link with other potential participants) was also encouraged. It is estimated that the participants took around 15 to 30 minutes to complete the survey. Data for the current study were collected between June 2018 and January 2019. Data were analysed using applied thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012) with NVivo (QSR International), version 12 plus.

Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended questions in the current study were similar to those asked in Study 1 (Chapter 4). Seven questions were asked, as follows:

1. What do you expect of your romantic relationships?;
2. How do you protect yourself from being hurt in romantic relationships?;
3. What patterns of behaviour do you see in yourself in your romantic relationships?;
4. What do you do to hold onto a relationship that is no longer working?;
5. How do you usually break-up a relationship?;
6. What are some of the things you do or would like to do to maintain a successful relationship?; and
7. What holds you back from maintaining a successful relationship?

Data Analysis

The current study adopted the same analytical approach as Study 1—applied thematic analysis. One main difference is noted. To handle such a large data set, the researchers first coded themes within the seven questions. Once this first step was completed, themes were reviewed, compared and classified as either main themes or subthemes. To reiterate, the Study 1 process involved: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) seeking and organising common themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) generating theme definition and names and (6) producing an analysis report. Further, the researchers adopted a three-level approach to strengthen the analytical process (see Fossey et al., 2002), which consisted of reviewing initial coding using shared coding sessions and theme generation by two researchers (RP, NC), with consensus used to resolve discrepancies. In addition, all researchers were consulted to establish the integrity of coding and themes. Lastly, the final main themes and subthemes were systematically determined and verified by all researchers. Additionally, all findings from the current study were reported in accordance with Tong et al.'s (2007) checklist for reporting qualitative interviews (see Appendix G for the checklist). Verbatim illustrative quotations were selected from transcriptions and included in the text (in quotation marks) to illustrate extracted themes and subthemes. Further, unclear words (e.g., 'this' and 'that') were replaced in this report with a word that approximated what the participant intended to say based on the context of the quotation (e.g., question asked or a word commonly used in the participant's speech). Replaced words are indicated in square brackets. Additionally, grammar errors were corrected in some quotations. The decision to replace and correct grammar words was made to ensure that the comprehension of the representative quotations was not affected, which is in accordance with McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig's (2003) recommendation. Refer back to Table 3 for a detailed summary of the phases involved in conducting an applied thematic analysis.

Findings

The findings from the current study are divided into four main themes: (1) reasons to self-sabotage romantic relationships, (2) strategies to avoid being hurt, (3) insight into relationship self-sabotage and (4) managing relationship expectations and strategies for relationship maintenance.

Reasons to Self-Sabotage Romantic Relationships

The participants mentioned seven main reasons that they cannot maintain romantic relationships. These motives were organised as subthemes to the theme ‘reasons to self-sabotage romantic relationships’, as follows: (1) fear, (2) difficulty with self-esteem and negative self-concept, (3) broken trust, (4) past relationship history, (5) high expectations, (6) lack of relationship skills and (7) dissonance between behaviours and expectations.

Fear. Fear was the most widely mentioned motive regarding why people sabotage their relationships. The participants expressed five main fears: (1) fear of being hurt, (2) fear of rejection, (3) fear of abandonment, (4) fear of loneliness and (5) fear of commitment.

Fear of Being Hurt. Many participants shared their ‘heartbreak’ stories and explained how the fear of being hurt again prevented them from trying new relationships. A female participant (age 28, bisexual) explained: ‘I have a fear of having my heart broken again’. The same participant stated that she wanted to marry one day and have a relationship that would last longer than a year, but fear stopped her from trying. Another female participant (age 25, pansexual) elaborated:

I often find I try not to get as close to the other person as I would like. I am always afraid it is not going to work out or I am going to get hurt, but I know that me trying to maintain a distance like that is one of the reasons my relationships always fail.

The same participant added: ‘I screw it up, usually on purpose—I break-up with them before I can get too attached’. Similarly, a male participant (age 41, homosexual) described his

reason as a 'fear of getting hurt by being the one broken up with'. Fear of being hurt might also prevent someone from leaving their current relationship and pursuing a better one. A female participant (age 56, heterosexual) explained that she protected herself by 'filtering' what she said to avoid 'getting hurt and falling into the same pattern again'. The same participant explained: 'I would rather not have an intimate/romantic relationship again for fear of repercussions from the first one. I am "maintaining" a relationship with my partner, but not the one I had signed up for'. Fear of being hurt encompassed many other fears and unknown factors that come with being in a relationship. In the case of the latter participant, her fear could be a product of trauma from previous relationships. To summarise, another female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained that the 'what if' factor of relationships can be scary and prevent individuals from risking being hurt.

Fear of Rejection. Many participants described fear of being rejected or not accepted by their romantic partner. A female participant (age 19, heterosexual) explained: 'I have a fear of rejection which usually stops me from trying to enter relationships'. In the case of this participant, relationship history also drove her to self-protect. The same participant elaborated: 'My first relationship was emotionally abusive, so I am scared to try for a [new] relationship'. Low self-esteem might also affect the individual's perception of acceptance and sense of belonging. For instance, another female participant (age 30, heterosexual) explained: 'I fear not being good enough'. A male participant (age 22, homosexual) elaborated on the reason he cannot maintain relationships: '[It is] a fear of not being accepted for who I am'. The same participant added: 'I tend to play a different person when I am in a relationship. I have to maintain a lot of control in my job, so I really let loose when I am in a relationship'. Another male participant (age 24, heterosexual) agreed that fear of not being accepted could lead him to keep secrets and not resolve issues in the relationship: 'Fear of not being accepted leads me to keep secrets from my partner. I fear the relationship will end because of conflict

and that keeps me from addressing underlying issues'. The same participant elaborated to explain how this pattern of behaviour was unhealthy for him: 'I stay in relationships even when they become unhealthy for me. I do not break-up with the partner, or I go back to a relationship over and over despite unfixed problems'. Behaviours driven by fear are complicated. Although the individual does not actively end the engagement, they can withdraw effort to cause the relationship to 'end naturally'. In accordance, the same participant admitted that staying in unhealthy relationships did not last and, after a time, he would 'ghost them' or 'cut off all communication completely'. Fear of rejection can also lead individuals to conceal their feelings. A female participant (age 22, asexual) explained that she often developed feelings for her close friends and then convinced herself they were just platonic. The same participant explained that she was asexual, yet not aromantic; therefore, she expected 'comfort, safety and a strong emotional connection in relationships'. Nevertheless, despite the pain it caused her, she did not vocalise her romantic feelings to 'avoid rejection altogether'. The same participant concluded: 'I would like to tell her I have feelings, but I fear that she will think I am creepy and reject me'.

Fear of Abandonment. Fear of abandonment was also mentioned as a reason to avoid romantic relationships. A female participant (age 18, bisexual) explained: 'I do not allow myself to become too overly attached to someone I genuinely care about, in case of abandonment'. For some participants, fear of abandonment could be crippling. Another female participant (age 17, homoromantic) explained why she could not have a relationship with men:

I have a very irrational fear of abandonment. It is possible those reasons are why I do not like dating or having relationships with males. Because of this I never feel like I can completely open up to my partner or fully trust them with everything about me.

For others, being left by their romantic partner was scarier than being in a relationship with which they were not happy. Another female participant (age 17, heterosexual) explained: 'I am always more worried about the relationship ending. I stay with my partner even if he does something to hurt me badly. Even if I cannot trust him anymore'.

Fear of Loneliness. Similar to fear of being abandoned, one female participant (age 18, homosexual) explained that her fear of loneliness prevented her from pursuing a relationship that could make her happier:

Despite my sexual orientation being homosexual, I did not come out even to myself until I was already in my current relationship with a self-identified man. Though I feel no attraction to him, he would never leave me, so I stay to avoid loneliness.

Fear of Commitment. Fear of commitment was also mentioned by several participants. For a male participant (age 20, heterosexual), fear of commitment stemmed from a fear of being rejected: 'I am scared of commitment. I feel like if I give myself to someone, they will just get tired of me and toss me to the side when they are done with me'. Fear of commitment is also often a product of past experiences. Another male participant (age 18, queer) explained that he did not have good examples of commitment in his life: 'I do not like commitment. I have not had the best examples of a healthy commitment in my life, but I try to work around it and work to keep things flowing as best as possible'.

Other fears were also mentioned, such as fear of betrayal, fear of failure and fear of intimacy. All these fears were described as reasons for not entering or not investing in relationships.

Difficulty with Self-Esteem and Negative Self-Concept. Many participants explained poor self-esteem or self-concept as the reason that they could not maintain long-term relationships. For instance, one female participant (age 20, heterosexual) simply answered: 'myself and my flaws'. Another female participant (age 23, heterosexual)

elaborated by saying: ‘I am not good enough for my partner and one day he will realise that and leave. I tend to think I am lesser than my partner and do not deserve him’. Similarly, another female participant (age 26, bisexual) explained by saying: ‘I am not enough or good enough and they will realise and resent me for tricking them’. Another female participant (age 21, heterosexual) added: ‘My own beliefs that I am maybe not good enough, or worthy of such affection make it difficult [to maintain relationships]’.

Low self-esteem can affect relationship maintenance. Further, seeking validation in relationships can cause individuals much distress. One female participant (age 62, heterosexual) explained that she ‘lacks the confidence’ to maintain relationships. The same answer was provided by many other participants. Another female participant (age 24, heterosexual) explained: ‘When I was fitter, I was more confident, but now I have put on weight and do not feel as confident anymore’. Similarly, a male participant (age 27, homosexual) stated that ‘self-worth problems’ can interfere with everything, especially maintaining a relationship. He further explained that low self-esteem interferes with the ‘perception of what is happening [in the relationship]’. Self-worth problems were also described by participants as an ‘inferiority complex’. For instance, a female participant (age 51, heterosexual) explained: ‘I have held false beliefs from my childhood that I have never been good enough and everyone is over the top of me’.

Difficulty with self-esteem and negative self-concept can also mean that individuals blame themselves for what happens in the relationship. For instance, a female participant (age 20, heterosexual) explained:

When something goes wrong in my romantic relationship, I often find reasons that it is my fault and blame myself, because I rather think that I am the one causing the pain than my boyfriend—I believe I do this as a way to protect myself from potentially being hurt.

Negative attributions of the self and others can also lead individuals to misinterpret others' emotions and avoid relationships altogether. For instance, a female participant (age 34, heterosexual) explained: 'I avoid people who like me—I think there is something wrong with them'. The same participant elaborated to explain that 'fear of being hurt or rejected' stopped her from maintaining relationships: 'I don't want to go through that pain again'.

Broken Trust. Many participants described broken trust as the main reason they could not maintain relationships. A female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained: 'If I cannot trust my partner, I will not be honest and then we will not have good discussions or communication, which ends in break-ups'. Another female participant (age 29, heterosexual) explained: 'I no longer trust my romantic partners 100%. I will always be thinking about what I would do if they left or cheated, so I never get fully invested'. Difficulties trusting are often related to past experiences of betrayal. For instance, one female participant (age 27, bisexual) explained that she had 'difficulty trusting after infidelity and lies'. Another female participant (age 18, heterosexual) also described her experience as follows: 'I cannot trust people very easily after being cheated on. Commitment seems very unattainable in this day and age. I am just having a hard time finding someone, or giving someone a chance to prove me wrong'. Overall, the participants described having trust difficulty and feeling jealous. Thus, choosing not to trust, or being unable to trust, were also described as strategies to avoid being hurt.

Past Relationship History. A history of heartbreak can also leave people feeling helpless and without options. A female participant (age 23, heterosexual) explained that she could not maintain relationships because of 'previous relationship baggage'. A male participant (age 33, bisexual) elaborated:

No matter how hard I try to be the best possible partner I can be, they always leave me in the end. I just feel like I have had a long run of bad luck with finding the right girl. The more times my heart gets broken, the harder it becomes to trust.

For some, a traumatic past led to a sense of helplessness. For instance, a female participant (age 27, bisexual) explained that she was ‘finding hard to let go of traumas of past relationships’ and that was the reason she could not maintain new relationships. Another female participant (age 21, heterosexual) recalled her previous relationships:

The main reason I withdrew or became distant is that I was sexually abused as a child. So, that can have a really huge impact on the relationship, especially since I have reached a point to finally recognise my past.

High Expectations. High expectations of romantic relationships and partners were mentioned as another reason that these individuals could not maintain relationships. Relationship expectations can sometimes be misleading and harm relationship maintenance, rather than aiding it. For instance, a female participant (age 26, androphilic) explained: ‘I am held back by high expectations and the fantasy of what successful relationships look like. I have been fed a romanticised and perfect picture of relationship[s] that diverges greatly from the reality of what dating is like’. This testimonial agrees with Knee’s (1998) theory, which proposes that some individuals hold a destined belief that romantic relationships should align with fairy tale romances. For these individuals, relationships can be assessed early and rapidly, as they know what they want. The same participant elaborated: ‘I also want to avoid prioritising my relationship over other aspects of my life and avoid self-sabotaging as a protective mechanism from getting hurt’. Similarly, another female participant (age 17, homoromantic) explained: ‘I think I can make our relationship like a fairy tale, only to realise that I cannot and I give up or not even try to begin with’. Another female participant (age 19, heterosexual) explained how high expectations affected her romantic engagements: ‘I do not

last long in relationships if my expectations are not met. I will stay for a while and I will let go of my partner—sometimes “ghosting” emotional detachment’. Another female participant (age 18, heterosexual) elaborated to explain that all relationships will eventually end because of individuals’ flaws: ‘All relationships inevitably come to an end, no matter how great the other person is. Once you spend too much time with a person, there is a tendency to nit-pick at their flaws, rather than celebrating their strengths’. In contrast, a male participant (age 35, heterosexual) reported how managing expectations might be the first step towards a healthy relationship: ‘I have been married for six years. I am a happy man. I have learned never to expect anything in a relationship. That is the first step for a healthy relationship’.

Lack of Relationship Skills. Lack of relationship skills was largely expressed by participants as a function of age and immaturity. For instance, a female participant (age 17, heterosexual) explained: ‘I am so young. I have no idea what I am doing with anything’. Similarly, another female participant (age 50, heterosexual) explained: ‘I worry about kids having no backbone to deal with real relationships. [They have] no skills to deal with loss of love’. In accordance, several participants described their fate with relationships as a result of their own immaturity. For instance, a female participant (age 32, bisexual), who reported being in a relationship, explained that, in her past, she had poor relationship examples and her own immaturity held her back: ‘What used to hold me back was lack of experience, poor relationship examples (from my parents) and my own immaturity’. Further, another female participant (age 17, homoromantic) explained:

I have social issues that contribute to my lack of understanding of norms, communication problems and standoffishness. I want a relationship to work and happen, but at the same time I cannot find the motivation or resources to maintain it, so I do not bother.

Lack of relationship skills might also be expressed as an inability to communicate and share tasks in the relationship. For instance, a female participant (age 23, heterosexual) explained: ‘[There is a] lack of communication, and lack of willingness to do something I may not get “paid back” for. For example, if I am the only one doing the cleaning, why would I want to continue?’. Additionally, some participants were not experienced in relationships and had trouble understanding the dynamics involved in romantic engagements. For instance, a male participant (age 19, heterosexual) explained: ‘I have trouble seeing things from my partner’s perspective, especially if I do not believe I have done anything wrong’.

Dissonance between Behaviours and Expectations. Relationship expectations and patterns of relationship behaviours are often not in harmony. Although many participants expressed a desire for commitment, the way they acted towards their partners did not signal commitment. For instance, a male participant (age 33, heterosexual) explained: ‘When I see that something is wrong, I just walk away to avoid unnecessary drama’. This aligns with research conducted by Christensen and Heavey (1990), Gottman (1993b), and Heavey et al. (1993), which showed that men are most often the stonewallers in the relationship. However, the same participant showed dissonance when he reported: ‘I see myself as a person who put in too much time and effort into my relationship’. Another male participant (age 21, heterosexual) stated that although he was not able to commit to the relationship, he expected commitment and attentiveness from his partner. He explained:

By not fully investing 100% of your whole self on your partner, you have to be your own individual and not one half of a ‘shared person’, so when the worse comes to worse, you do not lose all of yourself in the process.

This exemplified imbalance could inevitably lead to relationship breakdown. Refer to Table 7 for an explanation of each subtheme included under ‘reasons to self-sabotage romantic relationships’, with illustrative quotations.

Table 7

Reasons to Self-Sabotage Romantic Relationships.

Subthemes	Reasons to Self-sabotage Romantic Relationships
<p>FEAR</p>	<p>Subthemes' Definition</p> <p>Fear is an umbrella term for fear of being hurt, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of loneliness and fear of commitment. Other fears were also mentioned, such as fear of betrayal, fear of failure and fear of intimacy. Fears can also encompass many other unknown factors that come with being in a relationship.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<p>Fear of Being Hurt</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I often find I try not to get as close to the other person as I would like. I am always afraid it is not going to work out or I am going to get hurt, but I know that me trying to maintain a distance like that is one of the reasons my relationships always fail' (female, age 25, pansexual). • 'Fear of getting hurt by being the one broken up with' (male, age 41, homosexual). 	
<p>Fear of Rejection</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I have a fear of rejection which usually stops me from trying to enter relationships' (female, age 19, heterosexual). • '[It is] a fear [of] not being accepted for who I am' (male, age 22, homosexual). • 'I would like to tell her I have feelings, but I fear that she will think I am creepy and reject me' (female, age 22, asexual). 	
<p>Fear of Abandonment</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I do not allow myself to become too overly attached to someone I genuinely care about, in case of abandonment' (female, age 18, bisexual). • 'I have a very irrational fear of abandonment. It is possible those reasons are why I do not like dating or having relationships with males. Because of this I never feel like I can completely open up to my partner or fully trust them with everything about me' (female, age 17, homoromantic). 	
<p>Fear of Loneliness</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Despite my sexual orientation being homosexual, I did not come out even to myself until I was already in my current relationship with a self-identified man. Though I feel no attraction to him, he would never leave me, so I stay to avoid loneliness' (female, age 18, homosexual). 	
<p>Fear of Commitment</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I am scared of commitment. I feel like if I give myself to someone, they will just get tired of me and toss me to the side when they are done with me' (male, age 20, heterosexual). • 'I do not like commitment. I have not had the best examples of a healthy commitment in my life, but I try to work around it and work to keep things flowing as best as possible' (male, age 18, queer). 	
<p>DIFFICULTY WITH SELF-ESTEEM AND NEGATIVE SELF-CONCEPT</p>	<p>Low self-esteem and negative attributions about the self and others can affect interpersonal relationships. The participants explained that this was often the reason that they could not maintain romantic relationships. This subtheme also encompassed participants' self-described 'inferiority complex'.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I am not enough or good enough and they will realise and resent me for tricking them' (female, age 26, bisexual). • 'My own beliefs that I am maybe not good enough, or worthy of such affection make it difficult [to maintain relationships]' (female, age 21, heterosexual). • 'I have held false beliefs from my childhood that I have never been good enough and everyone is over the top of me' (female, age 51, heterosexual). • 'I avoid people who like me—I think there is something wrong with them' (female, age 34, heterosexual). 	
<p>BROKEN TRUST</p>	<p>Broken trust is often a result of past experiences of betrayal. This subtheme included being unable to trust romantic partners and feeling overly jealous.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'If I cannot trust my partner, I will not be honest and then we will not have good discussions or communication, which ends in break-ups' (female, age 22, heterosexual). • 'I no longer trust my romantic partners 100%. I will always be thinking about what I would do if they left or cheated, so therefore never get fully invested' (female, age 29, heterosexual). • 'Difficulty trusting after infidelity and lies' (female, age 27, bisexual). • 'I cannot trust people very easily after being cheated on. Commitment seems very unattainable in this day and age. I am just having a hard time finding someone or giving someone a chance to prove me wrong' (female, age 18, heterosexual). 	
<p>PAST RELATIONSHIP HISTORY</p>	<p>Past relationship history may include a history of heartbreak, betrayal and trauma.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Previous relationship baggage' (female, age 23, heterosexual). • 'Finding hard to let go of traumas of past relationships' (female, age 27, bisexual). 	
<p>HIGH EXPECTATIONS</p>	<p>High expectations of romantic relationships may be a product of unrealistic standards derived from perfectionistic traits, feeling as though one's needs are unmet or misunderstood, or holding 'destined beliefs' about romantic relationships.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I am held back by high expectations and the fantasy of what successful relationships look like. I have been fed a romanticised and perfect picture of relationship[s] that diverges greatly from the reality of what dating is like' (female, age 26, androphilic). • 'I do not last long in relationships if my expectations are not met. I will stay for a while and I will let go of my partner—sometimes "ghosting" emotional detachment' (female, age 19, heterosexual). 	
<p>LACK OF RELATIONSHIP SKILLS</p>	<p>Lack of relationship skills refers to participants' inability to understand or have insight into the dynamics involved in a coupled relationship. For instance, lack of experience, inflexibility, immaturity and learned helplessness were categorised under this subtheme as contributors.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotations:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I am so young. I have no idea what I am doing with anything' (female, age 17, heterosexual). • 'I worry about kids having no backbone to deal with real relationships. [They have] no skills to deal with loss of love' (female, age 50, heterosexual). • 'What used to hold me back was lack of experience, poor relationship examples (from my parents) and my own immaturity' (female, age 32, bisexual). 	
<p>DISSONANCE BETWEEN BEHAVIOURS AND EXPECTATIONS</p>	<p>Relationship expectations and patterns of relationship behaviours are often not in harmony. Although many participants expressed a desire for commitment, this was not reflected in the way they behaved in relationships and acted towards their partners.</p>
<p><u>Illustrative Quotation:</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'When I see that something is wrong, I just walk away to avoid unnecessary drama' and 'I see myself as a person who put in too much time and effort into my relationship' (male, age 33, heterosexual). 	

Strategies to Avoid Being Hurt

When asked how they protected themselves from being hurt, the participants identified six main destructive relationship patterns that could contribute to dissolution of romantic engagements: (1) relationship withdrawal, (2) defensiveness, (3) pretending, (4) relationship pursuit, (5) partner attack and (6) the pursue–withdraw dynamic.

Relationship Withdrawal. Withdrawing from romantic partners or relationships is a strategy that individuals use to avoid being hurt. Relationship withdrawal was the most widely mentioned subtheme under the theme of ‘strategies to avoid being hurt’. This subtheme encompassed many strategies, such as: (1) partner withdrawal, (2) distancing, (3) emotional detachment and (4) withdrawing effort. All these strategies could be used to either drive the relationship away or avoid conflict and maintain the relationship.

Partner Withdrawal. To reiterate, partner withdrawal involves evasive manoeuvres, such as ‘shutting down’ or ‘closing off’ to avoid interacting with a partner (para 1; Lisitsa, 2013e). This strategy is also often referred to as stonewalling. Individuals often withdraw when they are feeling overwhelmed by their own feelings (Gottman, 1993b; Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Lisitsa, 2013e). In some cases, individuals might withdraw in anticipation of their partners doing the same. A female participant (age 20, asexual) explained: ‘I withdraw from partners before they do’. The same participant explained that her low self-esteem held her back from maintaining relationships. For some participants, the decision to withdraw was more definite. Another female participant (age 53, heterosexual) explained that the way she protected herself from being hurt was by simply ‘avoiding relationships’ altogether. In the latter participant’s case, her previous relationship history had taught her that the best way to seek protection was by avoiding relationships. Similarly, another female participant (age 54, heterosexual) recommended: ‘Always leave an escape route’. The same participant added: ‘I always keep in my mind some options’.

Distancing. Relationship withdrawal is also expressed as distancing. This behaviour involves keeping a physical and emotional distance from partners as a way to avoid feeling vulnerable. Distancing behaviours are similar to stonewalling and involve unavailability, withholding and shutting down (Horsmon, 2017). A male participant (age 18, queer) explained: ‘I distance myself or simply do not get in relationships’. Similarly, a female participant (age 53, heterosexual) explained: ‘I withdraw or put distance between my partner and me’. Other individuals distanced themselves to force their partners to act. Another female participant (age 21, homosexual) explained: ‘I distance myself and hope they dump me eventually’. Although one female participant (age 38, bisexual) reported currently being in a ‘successful relationship’, in the past, she would distance herself and ‘find another person with whom [she] can have either an emotional or sexual affair’. The same participant elaborated to say that ‘lying’ and ‘cheating’ were her approaches to create distance between herself and her previous partners.

Emotional Detachment. Individuals who withdraw in relationships will often also remain emotionally detached. Emotional detachment involves being emotionally ‘checked-out’, not expressing emotions or concealing emotions to avoid emotional connections (Gottman, 1993b; Levenson & Gottman, 1985; Lisitsa, 2013e). A female participant (age 54, heterosexual) explained: ‘I tend to physically and emotionally distance myself. I find it very difficult to trust men, so I do not open up quickly or easily’. Further, a male participant (age 19, heterosexual) explained that withdrawal is a learnt behaviour: ‘I tend to shut down my emotions and become neutral—something I learnt from not just romantic relationships’. Another female participant (age 20, heterosexual) explained that she responded to cues in the relationship: ‘I tend to detach myself from the romantic side of the relationship if I feel I am getting too attached quickly. Or if there has been an issue (even if it is tiny)’. Individuals who seek to shut down from emotional cues may also engage in obsessive and self-destructive

behaviours as a way to distract themselves and self-soothe (Lisitsa, 2013e). For instance, a female participant (age 21, homosexual) explained: 'I escape my feelings however I can, by daydreaming, drinking too much, video games, self-harming or anything else that can kind of numb it out'. For other participants, cheating could be a way to lessen feelings or push the relationship to an end. Another female participant (age 30, heterosexual) explained: 'I shut down, do not speak my mind and cheat'. Similarly, a different female participant (age 27, bisexual) explained why she was not open with her feelings: 'I move a lot. I do not like being dependent on people. Vulnerability terrifies me'.

Withdrawal of Effort. As an attempt to avoid conflict and self-protect (Smith et al., 1982), some participants noted that they withdrew effort. For instance, some participants described relationship withdrawal as not investing effort in the relationship. A female participant (age 24, heterosexual) explained: 'I think I stop trying to make an effort. I stop voicing my concerns and try to deal with them on my own. I usually try to just "suck it up"'. In some cases, withdrawing or no longer investing effort in the relationship occurs as a result of a lifetime of hurt. A male participant (age 64, heterosexual) explained: 'I stay as detached as necessary based on how things are between us'. This participant used this strategy because he expected 'constant criticism and negative observations about how I do not measure up'. The same participant explained that he would not leave his current relationship because he had 'family connections' that he did not want to lose. The same participant elaborated: 'I have lived a life of deferred gratification and I do not have many years left'. Distinctively, the next two participants described not investing effort in their relationships in a very typical Australian manner. One male participant (age 23, heterosexual) stated: 'I always have a "she will be right, mate" attitude'. The same participant explained what he meant by that statement: 'I tend to be very lazy and only do things for my partner when I am basically pressured or forced'. Another male participant (age 33, heterosexual) similarly stated: 'Ever

heard the phrase “she will be right, mate”? That is my approach. [The relationship] will run its course regardless of my behaviour’. Withdrawing effort can be broadly understood as the way a stonewaller deals with seeking to avoid conflict in the relationship (Lisitsa, 2013e).

Partner withdrawal, distancing, emotional detachment and withdrawal of effort can ultimately destroy the individual’s chance of a successful romantic engagement. This is especially prominent if participants are making rapid assessments about romantic engagements and ending the relationship prematurely. It is also problematic if it is a behavioural pattern. A female participant (age 29, heterosexual) explained:

I end relationships prematurely, or start to end them when I see cracks appear—I do not work hard enough to resolve issues. I start to act more and more disinterested to hide how upset I am. I think I do this as I am afraid they will eventually become disinterested in me.

In contrast, some participants had insight into how destructive these patterns can be. Another female participant (age 23, heterosexual) explained: ‘By distancing myself, I know I am being destructive and not really giving the romantic relationship a chance’.

Defensiveness. This is another strategy that people use to protect themselves (Gottman, 1993b). To reiterate, defensiveness is defined as a ‘righteous indignation’ (para. 1) or victimisation as a result of a perceived attack (Lisitsa, 2013d). Defensiveness is often seen in relationship withdrawers (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002) and includes behaviours such as distancing, withdrawing and stonewalling (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995; Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). A female participant (age 27, bisexual) provided an example: ‘I get defensive or shut down’. The same participant elaborated to say: ‘I do not really put myself out there too often because I expect relationships to hurt’. She concluded to explain that in the past she would ‘lose [herself] in the relationship and try to change [herself] to fit the person they want’. Similarly, another female participant (age 22,

heterosexual) said: 'I protect myself from getting hurt in a romantic relationship by putting up all of my walls and not letting go of my guard'. For some participants, defensiveness was a way to avoid being hurt and to test whether their partner could be trusted. As explained by one female participant (age 18, heterosexual): 'I act defensive until the person is proven to be trustworthy'. For others, defensiveness was a strategy employed after years of being hurt. Another female participant (age 50, heterosexual) explained that, after 21 years in a relationship, she would 'put up a wall and not communicate about anything'. She elaborated that she was tired of being criticised and having her feelings misunderstood. Further, she reported that, when she tried to communicate, it resulted in her being blamed for the 'relationship breakdown'. This participant's testimonial is in accordance with Gottman's (1993b) research. Individuals often become defensive in response to criticism, especially if the partner interaction involves a complaint (Lisitsa, 2013d). Similarly, another female participant (age 58, heterosexual) stated that she avoided being hurt by becoming 'increasingly silent'. She elaborated to say that the only pattern she saw in her relationships was that of 'always being used', and she concluded by saying that the reason she could not maintain successful relationships was because of 'bad luck when selecting partners'.

Pretending. In the context of intimate relationships, this strategy broadly involves deceiving oneself or partners about feelings (Cole, 2001). Male and female participants (of various ages and sexual orientations) described pretending as an approach to either avoid being hurt or hold onto a relationship that was no longer working. For instance, participants said: 'I pretend that it is working' (male, age 23, heterosexual), 'I pretend it is still working and ignore the problems' (male, age 19, heterosexual), 'I pretend everything is okay when it is not' (female, age 24, heterosexual), 'I pretend it is not happening' (male, age 43, homosexual) and 'I pretend that things are better than they truly are' (male, age 58, heterosexual). One female participant (age 31, heterosexual) explained that her pretending

started with small lies: 'I used to tell small lies about how I am feeling'. The same participant added that she had stopped this pattern and was currently in a 'successful relationship' in which she felt 'confident'. A different example came from a male participant (age 72, heterosexual), who explained that pretending for him occurred when he noticed his relationship was not going well: 'I just put on a happy face, tell myself it could be worse and get on with my days. I tried for 40 years to repair the relationship, but she is too damaged from her childhood to ever be happy'. Similarly, a female participant (age 29, heterosexual) explained: 'I go into "auto-pilot" and act as if everything is fine'.

Within the subtheme of pretending, the participants also described 'being what the other person wants', 'justifying', 'making excuses' and 'rationalising'. For instance, a male participant (age 41, homosexual) explained how he pretended: 'I try to act more like what they want or desire'. A female participant (age 23, heterosexual) explained how she justified what was happening in her relationship: 'I may pretend that I do not care or I would justify I am not good enough for my partner and one day he will realise that and leave'. Similarly, another female participant (age 20, heterosexual) explained how she rationalised her feelings: 'If I feel like the relationship is starting to break-up and I think my partner wants to break-up, I sometimes try to convince myself that I feel the same way and that it is mutual'.

Overall, individuals pretend for many reasons, such as children, financial situations or fear of how their partner might respond. One female participant (age 50, heterosexual) explained:

I put on a front and pretend I am happy, even though I am not. I have tried counselling, but my husband refused to participate. I have tried talking one-on-one to my husband about our problems, but he does not listen and instead blames me and shows no remorse for his behaviour. Sadly, I am playing the game until I am financially ready for my children and I to leave.

According to one male participant (age 18, heterosexual), this subtheme could be summarised by stating that, above all, pretending involves ‘closing up the heart’. Overall, the cognitive dissonance that comes with pretending is dangerous because it inevitably motivates individuals to act in ways to alleviate the psychological pain associated with the act of lying or deceiving oneself or others (Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011). In turn, pretending can be a fast route to sabotaging.

Relationship Pursuit. For many individuals, retaining the relationship or ‘holding onto the relationship’ is the best way to avoid being hurt. These individuals will implement many strategies in an attempt to prevent the relationship from ending and for fear of being abandoned. Three main strategies were mentioned by participants: (1) partner pursuit, (2) pleasing the partner and (3) bargaining.

Partner Pursuit. Partner pursuit involves chasing an emotional connection with one’s partner. This strategy is often perceived as a demand from one partner for the other to respond (Christensen, 1987; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). A male participant (age 38, homosexual) recalled that, in the past, he would do anything to keep his partner and prevent the relationship from ending: ‘In my first relationships, I would try everything I could. I would stalk, fight, cry—anything and everything’. Similarly, a female participant (age 20, heterosexual) explained:

I constantly seek approval from my boyfriend. I find myself doing almost anything (and everything) to keep him happy. For example, I will go over to his apartment and clean it up and leave a sweet note to make sure he knows that he is loved. I believe I give too much in my relationships, both romantic and interpersonal.

Pleasing the Partner. To reiterate, pleasing the partner is a major aspect of relationship pursuit (Christensen, 1987; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). However, in an attempt to please their partner, some individuals inevitably push them away. For instance, one female

participant (age 35, heterosexual) explained: 'I become 100% focused on that person and want to give the relationship my all. Sometimes this is overbearing and can turn off my partner'. For some individuals, this exercise is self-destructive. For instance, another female participant (age 21, homosexual) explained: 'I become a "pleaser" and do everything I can to ensure my partner is happy, while drowning my own feelings out in escapism, drinking and self-harming'. Similarly, another female participant (age 30, heterosexual) explained: 'I self-sacrifice because I feel like my partner's happiness is more important than my own. I give more time to making them happy than I do for myself'. Another female participant (age 29, heterosexual) recalled how she would let her partners treat her: 'I have let people treat me pretty badly in past relationships. I have lowered my own self values and respect to hold onto the relationship'. Partner pursuit also includes apologising frequently. One female participant (age 29, heterosexual) explained: 'I apologise, I tell my partner what they want to hear and tell myself it is the best thing to do instead of walking away because then I would be alone'. Overall, the participants explained that pleasing their partners involved seeking approval and validation from them and placing their partner above themselves at the cost of their own needs and emotions.

Bargaining. This strategy is similar to trying to please one's partner and involves promising to do anything for the partner and the relationship (Christensen, 1987; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). For instance, one female participant (age 21, heterosexual) explained: 'I beg for them to come back'. Another female participant (age 21, heterosexual) described what she had done in previous relationships: 'I would do anything they said or try to become the person that they wanted me to be. I also ignored the fact that I felt constantly threatened by other women (even my friends)'. Similarly, another female participant (age 24, heterosexual) explained: 'I make promises that I will do better/more. Cop abuse/name calling on the chin and ignore the hurtful things that are being said'.

Partner Attack. Some individuals attack their partner as an attempt to protect themselves. To reiterate, attacking behaviours include criticism, complaint and judging (Heavey et al., 1995; Johnson et al., 1999). One female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained how she became critical of her partner: ‘I do notice when I am upset I can be far too critical of my partner and point out everything they are doing wrong’. For other individuals, this behaviour involved blaming. Another female participant (age 21, heterosexual) explained: ‘I have a bad tendency of throwing the blame to my partner so that I do not get hurt, even if it could have been my fault or both of ours’. Blaming can be viewed as both an attack and defence; however, blame is better understood as a perceived effect of defensiveness, where the individual feels criticised or judged (Lisitsa, 2013d). Another female participant (age 30, heterosexual) explained that, after she felt as though she had done everything she could to maintain the relationship, she turned the blame onto her partner: ‘I lose myself in the relationship and then blame the partner’. Partner attack can also involve trying to hold onto ‘power’ in the relationship by being dominant. Another female participant (age 29, homosexual) explained how she sought to hold onto power in the relationship when she felt unhappy: ‘I become more dominant when I am unhappy in the relationship’.

The Pursue–Withdraw Dynamic. To reiterate, the pursue–withdraw dynamic is often seen in relationships where one partner will attack while the other defends. However, individuals may not adhere to only one pattern of behaviour (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). It is natural that some individuals will both pursue and withdraw, depending on the relationship dynamic. For instance, Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, and Christensen (2007) explained that individuals switch from pursuers to withdrawers when they experience a sense of helplessness in the relationship and feel that their efforts are useless. In contrast, withdrawers will pursue if they desire change to occur in their partner or relationship. One female participant (age 47, heterosexual) provided an example: ‘When my partner is overly needy, I

pull away. When my partner is avoidant, I cling'. Another female participant (age 21, homosexual) elaborated by explaining why she changed her pattern:

I am either obsessively close with someone or not close at all. The moment I feel like my partner might not like me, no matter how irrational that feeling is, I shut myself out and move on to form an obsessive relationship with someone else. I tend to compare current partners to an abusive relationship I had when I was a child and it results in me acting very dramatically and getting hurt over small things.

Similarly, another female participant (age 53, heterosexual) explained: 'I oscillate between expressing my needs/dissatisfaction and concealing them out of fear that my partner will leave'. The exemplified pattern is also enacted with dissonant behaviours and expectations. One female participant (age 29, homosexual) explained: 'For example, I pull away when hurt, but expect more closeness from the partner'. Conclusively, the long-term consequence of the pursue-withdraw dynamic is a build-up of frustration and disappointment, which leads to a cycle of attacking and defending (Wile, 2013). Refer to Table 8 for an explanation of each subtheme included under 'strategies to avoid being hurt', with illustrative quotations.

Table 8

Strategies to Avoid Being Hurt.

STRATEGIES TO AVOID BEING HURT	
Subthemes	Subthemes' Definition
RELATIONSHIP WITHDRAWAL	Withdrawing from romantic partners or relationships is a strategy that individuals use to avoid being hurt. This strategy includes partner withdrawal, emotional detachment and withdrawing effort. Partner withdrawal involves 'shutting down' or 'closing off' to avoid interacting with one's partner. Emotional detachment involves not expressing or concealing emotions to avoid emotional connections. Withdrawing effort involves actively investing less work in the relationship or contributing less towards making the relationship work in an attempt to avoid conflict or push the relationship away. All these strategies can be used to either drive the relationship away or maintain the relationship.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
Partner Withdrawal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I withdraw from partners before they do' (female, age 20, asexual). 	
Distancing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I distance myself and hope they dump me eventually' (female, age 21, homosexual). 	
Emotional Detachment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I escape my feelings however I can, by daydreaming, drinking too much, video games, self-harming or anything else that can kind of numb it out' (female, age 21, homosexual). 	
Withdrawing Effort	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I think I stop trying to make an effort. I stop voicing my concerns and try to deal with them on my own. I usually try to just "suck it up"' (female, age 24, heterosexual). 	
DEFENSIVENESS	Defensiveness is another strategy people that use to protect themselves. Defensiveness is defined as a 'righteous indignation' or victimisation as a result of a perceived attack.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I get defensive or shut down' (female, age 27, bisexual). 'I act defensive until the person is proven to be trustworthy' (female, age 18, heterosexual). 	
PRETENDING	Pretending broadly involves lying to oneself or one's partner about how one feels about the relationship. Pretending also includes 'being what the other person wants', 'justifying', 'making excuses' and 'rationalising'.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I pretend it is still working and ignore the problems' (male, age 19, heterosexual). 'I may pretend that I do not care, or I would justify I am not good enough for my partner and one day he will realise that and leave' (female, age 23, heterosexual). 	
RELATIONSHIP PURSUIT	For many individuals, maintaining the relationship or <i>holding onto the relationship</i> is the best way to avoid being hurt. These individuals are often perceived as 'needy' and will implement many strategies in an attempt to prevent the relationship from ending and for fear of being abandoned. Relationship pursuit may include partner pursuit, pleasing the partner and bargaining. Partner pursuit involves chasing an emotional connection with one's partner. This strategy is often perceived as a <i>demand</i> to respond. Pleasing the partner involves seeking approval and validation from one's partner and putting one's partner above oneself by hiding one's own needs and emotions. Bargaining involves promising to do anything for the partner and the relationship.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
Partner Pursuit	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'In my first relationships, I would try everything I could. I would stalk, fight, cry—anything and everything' (male, age 38, homosexual). 	
Pleasing the Partner	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I become a "pleaser" and do everything I can to ensure my partner is happy, while drowning my own feelings out in escapism, drinking and self-harming' (female, age 21, homosexual). 	
Bargaining	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I make promises that I will do better/more. Cop abuse/name calling on the chin and ignore the hurtful things that are being said' (female, age 24, heterosexual). 	
PARTNER ATTACK	Some individuals will attack their partner in an attempt to protect themselves. This strategy includes being critical, blaming the partner and holding power over the relationship.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I do notice when I am upset, I can be far too critical of my partner and point out everything they are doing wrong' (female, age 22, heterosexual). 'I have a bad tendency of throwing the blame to my partner so that I do not get hurt, even if it could have been my fault or both of ours' (female, age 21, heterosexual). 	
THE PURSUE-WITHDRAW DYNAMIC	This dynamic includes adopting both pursuit and withdrawal methods.
<u>Illustrative Quotations:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'When my partner is overly needy, I pull away. When my partner is avoidant, I cling' (female, age 47, heterosexual). 'I oscillate between expressing my needs/dissatisfaction and concealing them out of fear that my partner will leave' (female, age 53, heterosexual). 	

Insight into Relationship Self-Sabotage

Romantic self-sabotage was defined in this project as employing patterns of self-destructive behaviours in relationships to impede success or withdraw effort and justify failure. Participants with insight into their own self-sabotage patterns provided examples to explain how their behaviours could be destructive in romantic relationships. For instance, one female participant (age 29, heterosexual) explained: ‘I self-sabotage potential good relationships which can lead to marriage and put myself in relationships which are doomed to fail from the start, as I have a fear of being abandoned’. The same participant explained the reason that she self-sabotaged: ‘[The relationship] ends on my accord, as opposed to the other person’s’. Similarly, another female participant (age 26, pansexual) explained: ‘If the other person gets close too quickly, I get overwhelmed and usually do something to sabotage it. I tend to feel trapped. Generally, any kind of trapped feeling leads to me doing something to sabotage the relationship’. The same participant admitted she was not good at ending relationships and resorted to self-sabotage: ‘I am not good at breaking up with people. I generally just sabotage the relationship in some way so it deteriorates and then it can just end “naturally”’. Another female participant (age 49, heterosexual) explained that she self-sabotaged because she always expected rejection. She described testing her partners and, when they did not respond the way she wanted, she closed herself off: ‘I self-sabotage. I expect them to say [something]. When they do not say anything, it proves my point and I close a bit of myself off’. Another female participant (age 26, androphilic) explained that she self-sabotaged to protect herself: ‘I protect myself by sometimes underplaying my romantic feelings or self-sabotaging before the other person can hurt me’. Another female participant (age 30, heterosexual) explained how self-sabotaging involved ‘sacrificing’ her passions: ‘I sabotage myself for the “good” of the relationship, not realising until it is too late that the relationship will be better if I continue to do what I love’. Another female participant (age 44,

heterosexual) explained her relationship pattern: ‘I spend time on people that are bad for me and sabotage the ones that would be good for me’. Although it can be difficult to break the pattern of self-sabotage, it is not impossible. One female participant (age 47, heterosexual) reported having sabotaged many relationships in her teenage years, yet rated her current relationship of 23 years as ‘committed and happy’. She recalled: ‘[I would] be exactly what they do not want and get them to end it. I would sabotage things on purpose’. Conclusively, she explained that the most important aspect that enabled her to be ‘all in’ in a relationship was feeling safe. Refer to Table 9 to review representative quotations from the theme ‘insight into relationship self-sabotage’.

Table 9

Insight into Relationship Self-Sabotage.

INSIGHT INTO RELATIONSHIP SELF-SABOTAGE

Romantic self-sabotage was defined in this project as employing a pattern of self-destructive behaviours in relationships to impede success or withdraw effort and justify failure.

Illustrative Quotations:

- ‘I self-sabotage potential good relationships which can lead to marriage and put myself in relationships which are doomed to fail from the start, as I have a fear of being abandoned’ (female, age 29, heterosexual).
 - ‘If the other person gets close too quickly, I get overwhelmed and usually do something to sabotage it. I tend to feel trapped. Generally, any kind of trapped feeling leads to me doing something to sabotage the relationship’ (female, age 26, pansexual).
 - ‘I self-sabotage. I expect them to say [something]. When they do not say anything, it proves my point and I close a bit of myself off’ (female, age 49, heterosexual).
 - ‘I protect myself by sometimes underplaying my romantic feelings or self-sabotaging before the other person can hurt me’ (female, age 26, androphilic).
 - ‘I spend time on people that are bad for me and sabotage the ones that would be good for me’ (female, age 44, heterosexual).
 - ‘I sabotage myself for the “good” of the relationship, not realising until it is too late that the relationship will be better if I continue to do what I love’ (female, age 30, heterosexual).
-

Managing Relationship Expectations and Strategies for Relationship Maintenance

Having insight that one might be self-sabotaging one's relationship is an important step towards implementing change (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2010; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). This insight will also inform the relationship expectations and health strategies needed to maintain long-term health engagements. The participants reported similar themes when discussing relationship expectations and what they considered key aspects to maintaining a successful relationship. Thus, six major relationship expectations that could aid in the maintenance of long-term healthy engagements were identified: (1) trust, (2) communication, (3) time together, (4) commitment, (5) safety and (6) acceptance.

Trust. Trust was a very prominent expectation in the participants' answers and was often used in combination with 'honesty', 'loyalty' and 'reliability'. Further, for those with a history of infidelity, lack of trust was considered the main reason that previous relationships ended and new ones failed to flourish. One male participant (age 31, bisexual) explained: 'More than anything, I expect loyalty and commitment'. Similarly, one female participant (age 22, heterosexual), explained: 'I expect my partner to always be open and honest with me'. Trust and respect were often used as complementary expectations. For instance, another male participant (age 21, heterosexual) explained that 'mutual trust and respect' were important expectations for a relationship. This was particularly important if there was a history of infidelity in the relationship or if one partner (or both partners) had an 'inferiority complex', as the same participant described. Another female participant (age 24, heterosexual) elaborated: 'I expect trust and honesty, not being constantly questioned and not feeling like I need to constantly question, open communication without fear of judgement, and loyalty. I expect my partner to be there for me when I need support'.

Communication. Communication was mentioned as another main strategy to avoid being hurt in a relationship, as well as an expectation towards maintaining a successful relationship. Synonyms to communication were also used by participants, such as ‘open communication’ and ‘openness’. For instance, a female participant (age 27, heterosexual) stated: ‘I expect to be able to communicate with each other and to be open to feedback to grow and better our relationship’. Another female participant (age 28, heterosexual) elaborated: ‘Mature conversations about where people are at regarding the relationship is the smoothest way to realise it needs to end, or that there are ways to work on it’. Another female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained: ‘Openness is important for me because it allows me to know how my partner is feeling and vice-versa. It makes it so much easier to understand and empathise’. Similarly, another female participant (age 27, heterosexual) explained how she protected herself from being hurt and clarified her expectations: ‘By being upfront about an issue, so it does not turn into something bigger than it actually is’. One female participant (age 37, heterosexual) reported being in an ‘extremely healthy’ relationship, and explained how, through communication, she had implemented ‘relationship health checks’ to ensure the relationship was progressing well. Another female participant (age 50, bisexual) elaborated to explain that ‘open communication’ involves ‘each person seeking to understand the other and not jumping to conclusions about a situation, behaviour or belief’. Further, another female participant (age 24, heterosexual) explained that communication also involves ‘discussing [a topic] before it becomes an issue and try to put myself in the other person’s shoes’. Communication was also mentioned as a way to manage expectations in romantic relationships. A female participant (age 34, heterosexual) explained that communication allows the couple to ‘set expectations’ and ‘make expectations clear’. Similarly, a female participant (age 34, heterosexual) recommended: ‘If you are upset about something, talk to each other about it. Most disagreements or injured feelings are due to

miscommunication or assumptions'. Similarly, a female participant (age 26, heterosexual) explained that open communication can avoid pain: 'I find openly communicating can prevent a lot of pain'. Another female participant (age 29, heterosexual) summarised: 'Talking openly is the key for me'. Overall, the participants' answers were in accordance with Vernon's (2012) recommendations for avoiding sabotage in romantic relationships. The author proposed that communication is an important step to debunk unrealistic expectations regarding romantic engagements.

Commitment. Commitment was also expressed as a prominent expectation; however, many participants had different understandings of commitment. One female participant (age 71, heterosexual) provided an all-encompassing description of what is needed to maintain a relationship long term: 'Commitment, a deep sense of love and to see past what many people may call faults'. Being committed also included being emotionally available and not taking the relationship for granted. Further, the same participant shared her strategy to staying committed: '[We] always go to bed at night knowing we have worked together to resolve disagreements'. Another female participant (age 35, heterosexual) explained that commitment is the 'willingness to be together and work through relationship difficulties'.

Commitment was also discussed in combination with 'putting in effort', 'collaboration' and 'mutual respect'. Although commitment was a prominent single-word expectation, participants' descriptions of what they sought in relationships better aligned with collaboration towards consolidating commitment from both parties. One female participant (age 20, heterosexual) explained: 'Putting in effort, being proactive in doing little things for my partner like cooking, doing the things he wants to do, supporting him in difficult times, and cheering him on with whatever he is working on'. Similarly, another female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained that being proactive is 'working on things as soon as they come up'. This participant added that this strategy is especially important if the individual

wishes to protect themselves from being hurt in the relationship. Another female participant (age 22, heterosexual) explained: 'I expect us to always work together as a team in all aspects of life. I expect this because good relationships are about working together, talking things out, and having faith and loyalty in each other'. Similarly, another female participant (age 27, heterosexual) explained that she expected 'a partnership, where both parties respect each other, and help each other grow'.

Time Together. Being able to spend 'quality time together' was a prominent expectation of relationships and a way to maintain healthy commitments. One female participant (age 29 heterosexual) explained that it is important to 'prioritise good quality time together'. Another female participant (age 22, heterosexual) stated: 'I expect to spend quality time together, and to be continuously putting effort in the relationship so that it remains healthy and strong'. However, it is not always possible to spend 'quality time' with a partner as life together becomes busy. A female participant (age 48, heterosexual) was in a 'committed and faithful' relationship of 29 years and explained that she wished she had more time with her partner: 'I would like to do more with him and [spend] more time together, but we have a busy life with full-time jobs, three kids and no family around us'. The same participant added that 'open communication' and 'date nights' helped them stay connected during busy times. Accordingly, a male participant (age 43, heterosexual) offered his recommendation for a healthy relationship dynamic: 'Have a set date once a week or fortnight depending on time schedules and finance, and allow a casual date, such as going to a movie together or going out for dinner or even exercising'.

Safety. Safety was considered an important expectation in relationships and a contributor to relationship maintenance. For instance, one female participant (age 23, heterosexual) stated that she needed 'someone I can be vulnerable with, knowing that I am safe'. Safety is a basic human need (Bowlby, 1969; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Maslow,

1943); however, some participants had not experienced safety in previous relationships and expressed a desire for a relationship without fear. A female participant (age 23, heterosexual) discussed: 'A romantic relationship which does not cause me any harm or fear. Even if there are fights, it should be resolved from both sides so we can take in lessons and have a healthier relationship'. Overall, seeking safety and avoiding pain were at the core of most participants' motives.

Acceptance. Acceptance was an insightful step mentioned by participants towards pursuing a healthy relationship. Acceptance involves understanding that being hurt is a natural part of being in a romantic relationship. For instance, one female participant (age 49, heterosexual) recommended: 'Accept that getting hurt is the risk that you take'. Similarly, another female participant (age 26, heterosexual) explained that it is important to realise that 'getting hurt is a part of life and [we] need good coping strategies for when it happens'. Another female participant (age 29, heterosexual) also explained: 'I do not plan on protecting myself from getting hurt because I believe that sometimes being hurt is unavoidable despite how much both partners want to avoid hurting each other'. Acceptance is also about respecting one another in the relationship. One female participant (age 35, heterosexual) explained how feeling accepted by her current partner had made a difference for her: 'I had a lot of rejection and abandonment issues from a previous marriage breakdown. [Currently], I have someone who has walked through my brokenness with me to see me restored as if it never happened'. She concluded: 'Amazing what real love can do!'. Refer to Table 10 to review representative quotations from the theme of 'managing relationship expectations and strategies for relationship maintenance'.

Table 10

Managing Relationship Expectations and Strategies for Relationship Maintenance.

MANAGING RELATIONSHIP EXPECTATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE	
Subthemes	Subthemes' Definition
TRUST	Trust was a very prominent expectation in participants' answers and often used in combination with 'honesty', 'loyalty' and 'reliability'. For those with a history of infidelity, lack of trust was often considered the main reason that previous relationships had ended and new ones failed to flourish.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'More than anything, I expect loyalty and commitment' (male, age 31, bisexual). • 'I expect my partner to always be open and honest with me' (female, age 22, heterosexual).
COMMUNICATION	Communication was mentioned as another main strategy to avoid being hurt in a relationship, as a well as an expectation towards maintaining a successful relationship. Synonyms of communication were also used by participants, such as 'open communication' and 'openness'. Communication was also mentioned as a way to manage expectations in romantic relationships.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I expect to be able to communicate with each other and to be open to feedback to grow and better our relationship' (female, age 27, heterosexual). • 'Mature conversations about where people are at regarding the relationship is the smoothest way to realise it needs to end, or that there are ways to work on it' (female, age 28, heterosexual).
COMMITMENT	Commitment was expressed as a prominent expectation. Commitment was discussed in combination with 'putting in effort' and 'collaboration'. Being committed also included being emotionally available and not taking the relationship for granted.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '[Commitment is the] willingness to be together and work through relationship difficulties' (female, age 35, heterosexual). • 'I expect us to always work together as a team in all aspects of life. I expect this because good relationships are about working together, talking things out, and having faith and loyalty in each other' (female, age 22, heterosexual).
TIME TOGETHER	Being able to spend 'quality time together' was a prominent expectation of relationships and a way to maintain healthy commitments.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I expect to spend quality time together, and to be continuously putting effort in the relationship so that it remains healthy and strong' (female, age 22, heterosexual).
SAFETY	Safety is a basic human need and was considered an important expectation in relationships and a contributor to relationship maintenance.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '[I want] someone I can be vulnerable with, knowing that I am safe' (female, age 23, heterosexual). • 'A romantic relationship which does not cause me any harm or fear. Even if there are fights, it should be resolved from both sides so we can take in lessons and have a healthier relationship' (female, age 23, heterosexual).
ACCEPTANCE	Acceptance was an insightful step mentioned by participants towards pursuing a healthy relationship. Acceptance involves understanding that being hurt is a natural part of being in a romantic relationship. Acceptance might also be about accepting one another in the relationship.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Accept that getting hurt is the risk that you take' (female, age 49, heterosexual). • 'I do not plan on protecting myself from getting hurt because I believe that sometimes being hurt is unavoidable despite how much both partners want to avoid hurting each other' (female, age 29, heterosexual).

Discussion

Highlights from the Current Study

The results from the current study were similar to the findings identified after interviewing the practising psychologists in Study 1. Individuals will sabotage relationships for one main reason—to protect themselves. Accordingly, fear was the most prominent answer regarding why the participants could not maintain successful relationships. This aligns with previous research (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990; Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1998) that linked rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy to insecurely attached individuals. Further, the current study shows that individuals will often become defensive and withdraw from relationships to avoid being hurt. However, the answer to self-sabotage in relationships is not simple. Reviewing the reasons for self-sabotage and the strategies that the participants employed to protect themselves would not necessarily clearly indicate which are the self-sabotaging behaviours. Nevertheless, the current study does suggest that self-defeating behaviours are contributing to self-sabotage. The most prominent contributors of relationship sabotage will become clear in the next studies.

Also noteworthy is the fact that, although individuals might have the reasons and the means to self-sabotage, behaviour only becomes self-defeating to a point of self-sabotage if a pattern emerges from one relationship to the next. In fact, most participants in the current study reported being in a relationship (61.5%). Of those, the vast majority (75%, as shown in Table 6) rated their engagement as of high quality. Therefore, two broad conclusions can be made: (1) self-defeating behaviours can lead to self-sabotage and (2) self-sabotage is a pattern that can be broken. As a result, the current study offers insight into what self-sabotage is and how to avoid it.

The findings from the current study highlight the importance of looking at the self in the couple relationship. Previous studies (e.g., Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002) highlighted the

importance of an internal locus of control to attribute responsibility for the fate of the relationship to the individual. It is also well known that self-reflection leads to greater understanding of emotions, cognitions and behaviours (Gerace, Day, Casey, & Mohr, 2017). Further, scholars in this space (e.g., Riggio et al., 2013; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002) are recognising that individuals need to learn how to be in a romantic relationship, as those skills are not necessarily innate. Relationship skills aid individuals in learning how to be in a relationship, as well as achieving personal growth by strengthening core beliefs about the self and others. This inference is in accordance with early teachings by Bandura (1997), which highlighted the importance of experiences in the process of forming schemas of expectations of a romantic partner. Additionally, Shaver and Mikulincer (2002) and Riggio et al. (2013) also proposed that relationship skills aid in facing stressors, which are unavoidable in a coupled relationship, with resilience and persistence to stay together.

Many participants explained how they were able to stop self-defeating behaviours and maintain successful relationships. Additionally, some participants were able to offer healthy strategies that they were currently employing towards relationship maintenance. These are in accordance with previous research (e.g., Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Silver, 2015). Further, Ducat and Zimmer-Gembeck (2010) highlighted three behavioural dimensions leading to positive partner interactions: warmth (measured as affectionate and loving behaviour), autonomy support (measured as partner encouragement regarding decision making, life choices and personal goals) and structure (measured as consistent and reliable behaviours). Overall, these positive behaviours were identified by the study participants, which suggests that changes can begin to occur with insight. Many of those who provided insightful strategies spoke of lived experiences of heartbreak and hurt. The acceptance that being hurt is a natural part of being in a romantic relationship seems to be a major part of the process of breaking the cycle of self-sabotage.

The participants' answers also suggested that managing relationship expectations is a key aspect towards maintaining a healthy relationship. To quote Lamott (2011), '[e]xpectations are resentment waiting to happen' (p. 233). In accordance, Merves-okin, Amidon, and Bernt (1991) found that marriage satisfaction for women was more affected by their own expectations than their partner's attitude. Similarly, the results from the current study and Study 1 indicated that high expectations of relationships and general lack of knowledge about what a coupled relationship entails can be very destructive in romantic engagements and cause significant distress. One expectation that causes individuals much stress is commitment. According to Erikson (1995), full commitment in an intimate relationship cannot be achieved with 'fear of ego loss' (p.263)—commitment requires the self to abandon fear in 'solidarity of close affiliations' (p.264). This argument reaffirms that fear can stand in the way of commitment and relationship expectations. Insight is also especially important considering that the majority of relationship issues (69%) are everlasting and cannot be fully resolved because of individual and personality differences (The Gottman Institute, 2019). A well-known anecdote to destructive behaviours in relationships is taking responsibility for one's own actions and expectations (Lisitsa, 2013d). Thus, it appears that the remedy is collaboration between partners with room for vulnerability towards consolidating commitment. In turn, a committed partnership can better balance expectations and reality.

Emerging Individual Differences

Although gender, age and sexual orientation differences were not within the scope of the current study, some trends are worth noting. For instance, the current study, in accordance with Gottman's (1993b) original research, found that many males were stonewallers. However, age was also a factor to explain individuals' motives to stonewall. While younger males tended to stonewall for fear of being hurt and lack of trust, older males seemed to have

experienced many criticisms in their relationship and learnt that the best approach to a happy relationship was to avoid conflict. It could also be that trends that do not fit the norm are more indicative of how self-sabotage develops. For instance, females are normally the pursuers in the relationship and rarely the stonewallers. However, when females stonewall, it is very predictive of divorce (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1993b; Heavey et al., 1993). Therefore, it could be said that stonewalling and similar behaviours, such as withdrawing and distancing, among females are a strong indication of self-sabotage. Further, female participants with a past of hurtful relationships seemed to have developed cynicism towards obtaining a successful relationship. After reportedly trying all they could to maintain a relationship, many females voiced opting to give up on love or attributed their fate to bad luck. This reasoning is in accordance with the self-handicapping literature, which proposes that females will often understand success as resulting from luck (Berglas & Jones, 1978). A further complication seems to be that females are often the ones either expressing or holding onto high expectations for the relationship. Therefore, they might resort to blaming their partner for their frustrations with the engagement. Nevertheless, the results from the current study also show that individual differences regarding self-esteem might be contributing to younger females blaming themselves (as opposed to their partners) and deeming themselves unworthy of relationships. Regarding relationship skills, the results from this study suggest that age, immaturity and lack of experience in relationships are possibly major reasons why individuals do not have the ability to maintain healthy coupled engagements. Further, participants of non-heterosexual orientation tended to fear not being accepted for who they were and became defensive by either blaming themselves or others, which suggests that sexuality is an added element to individual differences that is worth investigating. Nevertheless, although interesting to discuss, all these differences need to be further explored.

Limitations

A limitation in the current study was that the majority of participants who chose to answer the qualitative questions were in a relationship and rated their engagement as high quality. A purposeful selected sample solely composed of identified self-saboteurs might have offered different accounts. Nevertheless, such a sample was not possible to assemble until this project, as the construct had not previously received much research attention.

Future Studies

The next two studies in the current project tested a scale that was developed to empirically measure self-sabotaging behaviours in romantic relationships. Items were created from knowledge gathered from interviews with practising psychologists and qualitative accounts of individuals who experienced relationship difficulties or dissolution.

Conclusion

Many individuals seem to be stuck in a cycle of self-sabotage and unable to maintain long-term healthy engagements. In accordance with the insights provided by practising psychologists and individuals in relationships, it seems that people will sabotage romantic relationships to protect themselves. Essentially, behaviours that are initially protective become self-sabotaging. The drive to self-protection is often a result of insecure attachment styles and past relationship experiences. Further, the results from the current study suggest the behaviours that may be the contributors to self-sabotage. A noteworthy finding is that, regardless of how people sabotage their relationships, the pattern to self-sabotage is breakable. The participants' meaningful testimonials regarding their lived experiences suggest that insight into relationships, managing relationship expectations and collaboration with partners towards commitment are essential steps towards breaking the cycle of self-sabotage.

Chapter 7

Study 3: Developing the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

Study Rationale

Identified Research Gaps. Although the terms ‘self-handicapping’ and ‘self-sabotage’ are often used interchangeably, the practice of self-handicapping is limited to physical barriers and does not fully encompass the intrinsic behaviours found in romantic relationships. The term ‘self-sabotage’ better fits the description of self-defeating behaviours leading to relationship sabotage. However, no measurement exists for self-sabotage in the context of romantic relationships. Studies 1 and 2 provided insight into why and how self-sabotage is enacted, which contributed to the development of items for a scale to be developed to measure the construct.

Aim. The current study aimed to test a scale in development—the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale (RSSS), using an EFA. This study was the ‘pilot’ analysis for the scale.

Participants

A sample of 321 participants was recruited for the current study. The participants’ ages ranged between 15 and 80 years ($M = 29.60$, $SD = 13.42$), where five participants did not disclose their age. The distribution included 98 males (30.5%), 222 females (69%) and one reported as ‘other’ (0.5%). Regarding sexual orientation, the majority of participants reported being heterosexual (243, 76%), while 53 (17%) were bisexual, 11 (3%) were homosexual, 11 (3%) reported as ‘other’ and three (1%) elected not to answer. For those who reported as ‘other’, 11 provided descriptions for their sexuality, which included androphilic (one), asexual (three), asexual and homoromantic (one), asexual and romantic (one), bisexual (one), heteroflexible (one), pansexual (one), polysexual (one) and queer (one). The majority of participants (193, 60%) reported being in a relationship, with a reported mean of 7.1 years ($SD = 10.39$, range 0 to 59) for their longest relationship duration, and a total of 99 (31%)

participants reported having had an affair. In addition, a total of 78 (24%) participants reported previously seeing a psychologist for issues regarding a romantic relationship. The culturally diverse sample included participants from all over the globe (at least 41 different countries), with the majority coming from the United States (96, 30%), Southeast Asia (82, 26%) and Australia (53, 16.5%). The majority of participants (174, 54%) reported no association with JCU. Further, most participants (196, 61%) reported never having studied or worked in mental health. See Table 11 for a complete description of the participants' characteristics.

Table 11

Study 3: Participants' Characteristics.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	29.60	13.52
Range (15–80 years)		
Longest Relationship Duration	7.10	10.39
Range (0–59 years)		
	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	98	30.5
Female	222	69
Other (no description provided)	1	0.5
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	243	76
Homosexual	11	3
Bisexual	53	17
Other (androphilic, asexual, heteroflexible, homoromantic, pansexual, polysexual, romantic, queer)	11	3
Prefer not to answer	3	1
Relationship Status		
In a relationship (committed, de facto, married)	193	60
Not in a relationship	128	40
History of Affairs		
Yes	99	31
No	222	69
Seen a Psychologist for Relationship Issues		
Yes	78	24
No	243	76
Country of Origin		
United States	96	30
Canada	11	3
Australia	53	16.5
New Zealand	3	1
England	17	5
Western Europe (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands)	11	3.5
Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Russia, Ukraine)	7	2
Northern Europe (Denmark, Norway)	3	1
Southeast Asia (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam)	82	26
East Asia (China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan)	13	4
South Asia (India)	7	2
South Pacific Islands (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands)	3	1
Africa (Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe)	6	2
Middle East (Iran)	1	.5
South America (Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico)	6	2
Did not report	2	.5
Affiliation with JCU		
Student	142	44
Staff	2	1
Both student and staff	3	1
No association	174	54
Mental Health Literacy		
Yes	125	39
No	196	61

Notes: Overall $N = 321$.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at JCU (Number H7414, see Appendix F). The current study followed the same procedure as Study 2 for data collection (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion). Data for the current study were collected between June and September 2018. Data were analysed using SPSS (IBM Statistics), version 25.

Measures

The measures of interest for the current study included 10 demographic questions and 60 relationship sabotage questions.

Demographic Characteristics. Demographic questions encompassed age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of longest relationship, country of origin, history of affairs, seeking help from a psychologist, mental health literacy and affiliation with JCU (student, staff or both).

Relationship Sabotage. The relationship sabotage items were created based on the literature review, the main themes extracted from the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with psychologists specialising in relationship counselling (reported in Study 1, Chapter 4) and the accounts of members of the general community regarding their relationship experience (reported in Study 2, Chapter 6). Additionally, other scales were reviewed in preparation for the development of the RSSS. The scales reviewed included the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Rejection Sensitive Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1996), the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991), the Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale (Knee, 1998), the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Wei et al., 2007) and the Goal Orientation Inventory (Dykman, 1998). As a result, the pilot measure represented 12 main themes: (1) partner attack (e.g., criticism and lack of communication skills), (2) partner pursuit (e.g., clinginess), (3) partner withdrawal (e.g.,

stonewalling), (4) defensiveness, (5) contempt, (6) self-esteem, (7) controlling tendency (e.g., controlling partner's finances), (8) relationship skills, (9) trust difficulty, (10) destructive tendency (e.g., excessive drinking), (11) attitude to affairs and (12) relationship belief.

As per Worthington and Whittaker's (2006) recommendation, the newly formulated items were submitted to expert reviewers (KM, NC, BB) in the field of relationships research. Additionally, all reviewers were practising psychologists with experience in relationship counselling. Feedback from the reviewers resulted in additional items being added (three items were added to the initial pool of 57 items, resulting in a total of 60 items) and changing the wording of some items for better comprehension. Finally, reverse questions were included to combat response automatism.

Conclusively, the initial version of the RSSS contained 60 items, with a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'), where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. The relationship sabotage items were randomly presented in the survey to prevent question order from affecting scores. See Table 12 for a complete list of the items included in the RSSS.

Table 12

Complete List of Items for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

THEMES	QUESTIONS
PARTNER ATTACK	1. I often criticise my partner.
	2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.
	3. When I think about my partner, I focus on the things that attracted me in the first place.
	4. I communicate well with my partner.
	5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.
PARTNER PURSUIT	6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.
	7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.
	8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
	9. I get anxious when I think about my partner breaking up with me.
	10. I check in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.
	11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.
PARTNER WITHDRAWAL	12. I sometimes hide my emotions from my partner.
	13. I prefer to avoid fighting with my partner, as I do not like conflict.
	14. I try not to get too intensely involved in romantic relationships.
	15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
	16. Sometimes I feel that distancing myself from the relationship is the best approach.
	17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.
	DEFENSIVENESS
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	
20. I have valid reasons for when things go wrong in the relationship.	
21. I feel like I am unlucky in romantic relationships.	
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	
CONTEMPT	
	25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.
	26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.
	27. I feel respected by my partner.
	28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
SELF-ESTEEM	29. I feel like I always fail at relationships.
	30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.
	31. The success of my romantic relationships reflects how I feel about myself.
	32. I would do a lot better in my relationships if I just tried harder.
	33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.
CONTROLLING TENDENCY	34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.
	35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.
	36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.
	37. I believe that to keep my partner safe, I need to know where my partner is at all times.
	38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner, I know best.
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	39. I believe that I do not have to change how I am in relationships.
	40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.
	41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
	42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
TRUST DIFFICULTY	43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.
	44. I often get jealous of my partner.
	45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
	46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
DESTRUCTIVE TENDENCY	47. I like to spoil myself more than I should.
	48. I enjoy partying and I am always looking to have a good time.
	49. My partner often complains about how much money I spend.
	50. My partner often complains I drink too much.
ATTITUDE TO AFFAIRS	51. I would forgive my partner if I found out they had an affair.
	52. I believe having affairs is part of being in a romantic relationship.
	53. My partner should forgive me if I have affairs.
	54. If I have an affair, it will be because my partner neglects me.
RELATIONSHIP BELIEF	55. If my relationship is not working, I will end it and look for another one.
	56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.
	57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.
	58. I believe that some relationships are doomed from the start.
	59. I am happy when I feel like my relationship is just meant to be.
	60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.

Notes: Reverse questions—3, 4, 7, 15, 26, 27, 35, 40, 41, 42, 57, 60.

Data Characteristics

Normality. The current data skewedness (values ranging from -1.09 to -1.69) and kurtosis (values ranging from -1.37 to 2.62) showed mild deviations from normality. However, this complies with the parameters recommended by Fabrigar et al. (1999) to treat the data as normally distributed (i.e., skewness < 2, kurtosis < 7). Further, this recommendation is specific to conducting factor analysis using the maximum likelihood (ML) extraction method.

Sample Size. A sample size above 300 is considered good for EFA (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006), especially given that the sample item communality values in this study were within the recommended range (.40 to .90), with few exceptions. Further, Worthington and Whittaker (2006) and Field (2013) explained that, for initial EFA, the sample size can be as low as 100 participants. Therefore, the current sample of 321 participants was deemed acceptable.

Missing Data. The current sample did not include missing data for the study variables in the RSSS ($N = 321$).

Data Analysis

A two-part analysis involved first conducting EFA on the full 60-item scale to assess the underlying factor structure and refine the item pool. Second, a reduced version of the scale was re-analysed with the same sample, also using EFA. This practice was recommended by Henson and Roberts (2006) and Worthington and Whittaker (2006) when conducting scale-length optimisation to ensure that item elimination does not result in significant changes to factor structure, and the originally established criteria for the scale are still met.

As per Costello and Osborne's (2005) and Carpenter's (2018) recommendation, a ML extraction method was applied when conducting EFA. This extraction method is arguably the

most robust choice for normally distributed data, as it provides more generalisable results and allows for the computation of goodness-of-fit measures and the testing of the significance of loadings and correlations between factors (Carpenter, 2018; Fabrigar et al., 1999; Haig, 2005). These are important considerations for future analysis of the scale using SEM (Kline, 2016). Data were analysed using SPSS (IBM Statistics), version 25.

Results

Complete Scale

Internal Reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the complete scale (60 items) was .88, indicating good internal consistency. The standard cut-off indicators recommended by the most stringent researchers (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cronbach, 1951; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) were followed (i.e., $\alpha \geq .9$ = excellent; $.9 > \alpha \geq .8$ = good; $.8 > \alpha \geq .7$ = acceptable; $.7 > \alpha \geq .6$ = questionable; $.6 > \alpha \geq .5$ = poor; $.5 > \alpha$ = not acceptable). Further, item-total statistics suggested very little improvement if any item was to be removed.

Internal Validity. The data factorability was examined with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO; Kaiser, 1974) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954). The KMO statistic measures whether the correlations between pairs of variables can be explained by other variables (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test measures whether the correlation matrix differs significantly from an identity matrix (Bartlett, 1954). These are necessary conditions to support the existence of underlying factor structures. Factorability was established with a KMO above the recommended (i.e., .6) at .84 and Bartlett's test was significant ($\chi^2_{(1,770)} = 8,004.04$, $p < .001$). To aid in the interpretation of results, a direct oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalisation was performed, which allowed for factors to correlate. It was assumed that factors within the construct of relationship sabotage should all correlate, as this is often the case when measuring psychological constructs (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar et al., 1999).

Eigenvalues above 1, as per Kaiser's (1960) recommendation, indicated 15 factors, accounting for 49.79% of the total variance in the test. Factor 1, the strongest factor, accounted for 16.71% of the variance. Further, the factor correlation matrix showed that factors were not highly correlated (i.e., $< .3$), which indicated the existence of unique factors.

The pattern and structure matrices were reviewed (see Appendices H and I, respectively); however, to access quality and a parsimonious structure, the pattern matrix was considered for final decisions (Carpenter, 2018). Factor reduction was applied following two criteria: (1) number of items on each factor ≥ 4 and (2) item coefficient values $\geq .32$. Regarding the number of items, Costello and Osborne (2005) and Carpenter (2018) recommended factors to have at least three items. However, a minimum of four items per factor is suggested for one-factor congeneric model analysis (Kline, 2016), which is a recommended step when conducting CFA (Holmes-Smith & Rowe, 1994). Additionally, items with coefficient loadings below $.32$ were eliminated, as their total item variance did not equal the minimum recommended (10%; Costello & Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Reductions resulted in a remaining 39 items with seven factors retained (Factors 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 13). Following this, a subsequent EFA was conducted on the same sample to retest the remaining items and factors, as recommended by Henson and Roberts (2006).

Reduced Scale

Internal Reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the total reduced scale (39 items) was $.88$, indicating good internal consistency. Analysis showed no change in total reliability for the reduced scale. Further, item-total statistics suggested very little improvement if any item was to be removed. Sub-factors showed mostly acceptable to good reliability (Cohen, 1988; Cronbach, 1951; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) for Factor 1 ($\alpha = .89$), Factor 2 ($\alpha = .72$), Factor 3 ($\alpha = .76$), Factor 4 ($\alpha = .72$), Factor 5 ($\alpha = .73$), Factor 6 ($\alpha = .45$) and Factor 7 ($\alpha = .59$). Factor 8 only showed one item with a coefficient above $.32$; therefore, subscale reliability

analysis was not performed. Reliability coefficients were also considered when reducing items and subscales (Field, 2013).

Internal Validity. A subsequent EFA with the same specifications as the previous analysis was conducted on the 39-item scale. Factorability was indicated with the KMO at .87. Further, the Bartlett's test was significant ($\chi^2_{(741)} = 4,912.540$, $p < .001$). Finally, eigenvalues above 1 indicated eight factors, accounting for 46.93% of the total variance in the test. See Appendices J and K, respectively, for pattern and structure matrices. Further reductions with the same specifications as the previous analysis were applied, resulting in five final factors (Factors 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7), with 30 items, accounting for 39.55% of the variance. Factor 1, the strongest factor, accounted for 20.88% of the variance and predominantly comprised items corresponding to the theme of defensiveness. Additionally, Factor 2 (27.37%) predominantly comprised relationship skill items, Factor 3 (6.18%) mainly comprised trust difficulty items, Factor 5 (1.59%) mostly comprised self-esteem items and Factor 7 (1.26%) primarily comprised controlling tendency items.

This result concluded the internal validity analyses for the current study. However, further analyses were needed because three items (Items 6, 22 and 25) were cross-loading between factors, which indicated that the factors might not be representing distinct constructs. See Table 13 for the final extracted factors.

Table 13

Extracted Factors for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

Items (N = 30)	Factors					h ²
	1	2	3	5	7	
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.	.840					.780
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	.843					.744
27. I feel respected by my partner.	.721					.655
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.	.707					.618
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	.534			-.385		.525
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.	.511			-.365		.536
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.	.450					.464
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	.547					.667
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.		.746				.533
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.	.607					.444
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.	.652					.500
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.	.639					.462
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.	.644					.579
4. I communicate well with my partner.	.482					.562
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.	.487					.498
10. I check in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.	-.446					.306
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.	.463					.386
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe, I need to know where my partner is at all times.					.599	.575
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner, I know best.					.418	.222
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.			.416		.373	.451
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.					.323	.303
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.			.398			.291
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.				-.719		.567
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.				-.603		.515
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.		.385				.263
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.			.651			.560
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.			.604			.535
44. I often get jealous of my partner.			.525			.398
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.			.499			.463
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.			.466			.380
Eigenvalues	8.714	3.473	2.850	1.593	1.262	
% Variance	20.876	7.368	6.179	3.333	1.798	46.924
Trace	6.051	4.684	4.480	2.309	1.807	

Discussion

The scale in development underwent a two-part EFA. The final reduced scale showed 30 items and five factors (defensiveness, relationship skills, trust difficulty, self-esteem and destructive tendency). Overall, these factors assess three domains leading to relationship sabotage (cognitions, emotional responses and behaviours), which will now be discussed.

Defensiveness

Defensiveness was the strongest factor with eight items. Considering the results from Studies 1 and 2, this finding was unsurprising. The interviews with practising psychologists revealed that the main reason that people sabotage their relationships is to protect themselves. The same was found when reviewing the accounts of members of the general public. Further, extensive research (e.g., Cavallo et al., 2010; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003; Murray et al., 2006; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010) shows that motivation to self-protect is a powerful reinforcer of maladaptive behaviours in relationships with others. Also, De Castella, Byrne, and Covington (2013) showed that motivation to self-protect goes beyond cultural difference. In a study comparing Australian and Japanese students regarding academic motivation, the results indicated that self-protectors are typically high in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping and low in helplessness. This is possibly the same in the context of romantic relationships. Overall, it is well established that adult relationship interactions are strongly guided by a specific set of goals linked to attachment (Johnson et al., 1999), meaning that secure attachment would possibly encourage goals of connection and insecure attachment would encourage goals of self-protection.

Some items loading on the defensiveness factor belonged to the originally proposed partner attack (Item 5) and contempt (Items 25, 27 and 28) themes. Defensiveness, partner attack and contempt items included in the RSSS were primarily based on research conducted by Greenberg and Johnson (1998) and Gottman and Silver (2015). Greenberg and Johnson

(1998) described three patterns of communication in the relationship (attack–attack, attack–withdraw and withdraw–withdraw). To reiterate, attacking is understood as a desperate attempt to gain the partner’s attention at any cost. Further, Gottman and Levenson (2002) found conflict (expressed as anger, dysfunctional communication and negativity) to be a strong predictor of marital dissolution. Finally, defensiveness and contempt are two of the ‘four horsemen of the apocalypse’ described by Gottman and Silver (2015) as a clear sign of ‘marriage meltdown’ (p. 31). Together, these are well-known predictors of relationship dissolution; therefore, it is understandable that they would amalgamate into one factor. However, it is expected that not everyone would resort to the same techniques when self-sabotaging. Therefore, it was expected that not all themes would make a significant contribution to define self-sabotage. Nevertheless, defensiveness seems to be the one common approach used by people when sabotaging. Additionally, people will likely be defensive and engage in their ‘preferred’ destructive technique (e.g., attack or withdraw). In accordance, Gottman and Silver (2015) found that individuals who are feeling defensive will often become hyper-vigilant (Gottman & Silver, 2015), and typically either attack or withdraw (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). Additionally, Gottman (1993b) found that 85% of males will resort to stonewalling, which is a known withdrawal approach. In contrast, females are typically known for raising issues in the relationship (Gottman, 1993b). Overall, defensiveness can take many forms.

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills were represented with nine items. The practising psychologists interviewed in Study 1 proposed that lack of relationship skills is one of the main reasons that people maintain the cycle of self-sabotage. The results from Study 2 also supported this claim. Thus, it is proposed that clients know little about how relationships work (i.e., what to expect and how to maintain them), which may be a result of poor relationship role models

based on negative interactions and outcomes (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). Other items loading on the relationship skills factor described poor communication skills (Item 4, under ‘partner attack’), partner withdrawal (Item 15), clinginess (Items 7 and 10, under ‘partner pursuit’), contempt (Item 26) and relationship belief (Item 60). Overall, relationship skill is a broad concept; therefore, it is likely that it would encompass an amalgamation of items from different themes. Specifically, partner withdrawal and pursuit (or attack) are well-documented patterns of relationship interaction seen in couples having difficulties communicating (Greenberg & Johnson, 1998). This is further complicated by disrespect, which is a strong characteristic of contempt (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Also, individuals with a poor understanding of romantic engagements, often based on unrealistic representations (e.g., fairy tale beliefs), tend to withdraw effort to repair the relationship and give up easily (Knee et al., 2004).

Trust Difficulty

Trust difficulty was represented by seven items. Five items were derived from the originally proposed theme and two were derived from the ‘partner pursuit’ theme (Items 6 and 8). There is strong evidence that people who resort to partner pursuit, specifically clinginess, will often push their partner away and consequently destroy relationships (Ayduk et al., 2001). Further, there is a strong link between trust difficulty and insecure attachment (Harper et al., 2006; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Overall, lack of trust is commonly associated with a previous experience of betrayal or the expectation of betrayal (Downey et al., 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Specifically, Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) defined trust as a multidimensional trait consisting of three sub-factors (predictability, dependability and faith), all of which are affected by insecure attachment (Simpson, 1990). Altogether, this construct represents a maladaptive cognition (e.g., mistrust), an emotion reaction (e.g., anxiety) and the resultant behaviour (e.g., partner pursuit).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was represented by four items, two of which were cross-loading with defensiveness items (Items 22 and 25). This could mean that the two constructs were not uniquely different. Overall, it is well understood that individuals with low self-esteem display higher levels of self-defeating patterns (Wei & Ku, 2007). Further, low self-esteem is a strong motivator for self-protection (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Jones & Berglas, 1978). Therefore, it is possible that the construct of self-esteem simultaneously stands alone and among other constructs, as both a precursor and a maintainer of self-sabotage. Consequently, future research should consider self-esteem as a moderator construct in the model for relationship self-sabotage. Also noteworthy is Coudeville, Gernigon, and Martin Ginis's (2011) proposition that lack of self-confidence, as opposed to low self-esteem, is a better way to understand self-defeating tendencies.

Controlling Tendency

Controlling tendency was represented by five items. Four items were from the originally proposed theme and one item (Item 6) was from the 'partner pursuit' theme. This was unsurprising, since research has long linked partner abuse or harassment with insecure attachment developed in childhood (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). Early-life relationships with parents and peers are important role models for adult romantic relationships. In addition, this is when individuals learn to love and depend on love (Wolfe et al., 1998). Another example is Item 6 ('I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together'), which cross-loaded between controlling tendency and trust difficulty. This finding was also reasonable, since the item could easily be interpreted as either construct. Additionally, it was expected that both constructs would be highly correlated.

Study Limitations

Although items were written with specific constructs in mind, derived from broad themes (as shown on Table 12), the final scale showed a combination that slightly differed from the originally proposed structure. For instance, while partner pursuit was not represented as a unique factor, items from this proposed theme cross-loaded with the relationship skills and trust difficulty factors. Other examples were partner attack and self-esteem themes, which cross-loaded with the defensiveness factor. This was an expected result and not uncommon when developing scales. The process of scale development, although based on a strong literary background, needs to undergo exploratory tests to strengthen the original predictions (Carpenter, 2018). Further, it is acknowledged that research in the area of psychological sciences, especially research examining individuals' characteristics, should account for high correlations between variables. These potential limitations were considered when choosing the oblique rotation method for the conducted factor analysis (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar et al., 1999). Additionally, as an investigative measure, an alternative EFA was conducted using the varimax orthogonal rotation method, which did not show a clearer factor structure, thereby confirming the original suspicions.

It is also possible that some items, such as Item 10 ('I check in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay'), were ambiguous and did not accurately describe the proposed themes, and thus were misunderstood by participants. For instance, while Item 10 was written to represent clinginess, it was possibly understood as a sign of a good relationship dynamic. This could be partially because of a poorly devised item or participants' lack of understanding of relationships. Alternatively, given the interactive nature of relationships, it is possible that some participants rated the scale items based on their partner's behaviour, as oppose to their own. Further, some themes were difficult to distinguish and were highly correlated with other factors (e.g., partner attack and pursuit,

which are both maladaptive ways to elicit a partner to respond). Another limitation is that within the same construct there are items which represent cognitions and behaviours, and this is not clearly differentiated when interpreting quantitative ratings. Lastly, the total variance explained, which was initially low for the complete 60-item scale (49.79%) and lowered further for the reduced 30-item scale (39.55%). Although this was an issue when assessing the strength of the overall construct representing relationship sabotage, it is worth noting that the ML extraction method naturally shows lower variance explained, as it is a more stringent method compared with principal components analysis (PCA). Unlike ML, PCA provides elevated variance explained, which in turn can show a misleading conclusion with too many factors (Carpenter, 2018; Costello & Osborne, 2005). ML provides a more restrained yet generalisable result (Carpenter, 2018). Conclusively, future analyses are needed to improve the scale total variance explained, item and construct structure, and overall applications.

Future Studies

CFA will be conducted in the next study with a different sample to confirm the structure of the proposed scale and check for measurement invariance, as recommended by Costello and Osborne (2005). Additionally, Bollen and Long (1993) and Kline (2016) recommended that scales in development undergo cross-validation with a new sample of data. Further, construct validity analysis will be conducted in the next study to assess convergent and discriminant validity.

Conclusion

The current study was the first study to empirically test the RSSS. However, the process of scale development requires a multi-study approach (Carpenter, 2018; Costello & Osborne, 2005; Henson & Roberts, 2006). Therefore, further investigations were warranted to determine the reliability and validity of the proposed constructs. The next study in this project re-tested the reduced version of the RSSS using a CFA in a different sample.

Chapter 8

Study 4: The Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

Study Rationale

Aim. The current study aimed to retest and cross-validate the RSSS.

Methods

Participants

A sample of 608 participants was recruited for the current study. Participants' ages ranged between 17 and 80 years ($M = 32.30$, $SD = 13.76$) and five participants did not disclose their age. The distribution included 156 males (26%) and 452 females (74%). Regarding sexual orientation, the majority of participants reported being heterosexual (486, 80%), while 77 (12.5%) were bisexual, 28 (4.5%) were homosexual, 12 (2%) reported as 'other' and five (1%) elected not to answer. Most participants (394, 65%) reported being in a relationship, which they rated as high quality overall ($M = 24.84$, $SD = 4.67$, range 8 to 30). The participants also reported a mean of 8.6 years ($SD = 10.36$, range 0 to 61) for their longest relationship duration, and a total of 183 (30%) participants reported having had an affair. In addition, a total of 210 (34.5%) participants reported previously seeing a psychologist for issues regarding a romantic relationship. The participants reported a mean of 22.50 ($SD = 7.44$, range 6 to 42) for anxious attachment, which was considered moderate, and a mean of 15.50 ($SD = 6.58$, range 6 to 40) for avoidant attachment, which was considered low. Further, a mean of 40.54 ($SD = 9.29$, range 16 to 68) was reported for self-handicapping tendencies, which was considered moderate. The culturally diverse sample included participants from all over the globe (at least 49 different countries), with the majority coming from Australia (346, 57%). Most participants reported an association with JCU (274, 45%). However, the majority (345, 57%) reported never having studied or worked in mental health. See Table 14 for a complete description of the participants' characteristics.

Table 14

Study 4: Participants' Characteristics.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	32.30	13.76
Range (17–80 years)		
Longest Relationship Duration	8.63	10.56
Range (0–61 years)		
Perceived Relationship Quality	24.84	4.67
Range (8–30)		
Insecure Attachment		
Anxious attachment	22.50	7.44
Avoidant attachment	15.50	6.58
Range (6–42)		
Self-Handicapping	40.54	9.29
Range (10–70)		
	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	156	26
Female	452	74
Other	0	0
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	486	80
Homosexual	28	4.5
Bisexual	77	12.5
Other (no descriptions provided)	12	2
Prefer not to answer	5	1
Relationship Status		
In a relationship (committed, de facto, married)	394	65
Not in a relationship	214	35
History of Affairs		
Yes	183	30
No	425	70
Seen a Psychologist for Relationship Issues		
Yes	210	34.5
No	398	65.5
Country of Origin		
United States	86	14
Canada	9	1.5
Australia	346	57
New Zealand	9	1.5
United Kingdom (England, Ireland, Scotland)	25	4.5
Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands)	14	2
Eastern Europe (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Ukraine)	6	1
Northern Europe (Denmark, Norway, Sweden)	7	1
Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam)	50	8
East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan)	10	1.5
South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Sri Lanka)	10	1.5
South Pacific Islands (Fiji, Palau, Papua New Guinea)	4	1
Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe)	13	2
Middle East (Iraq, Turkey)	2	.5
South America (Brazil, Puerto Rico)	17	3
Did not report	0	0
Affiliation with JCU		
Student	274	45
Staff	38	6
Both student and staff	29	5
No association	267	44
Mental Health Literacy		
Yes	263	43
No	345	57

Notes: Overall $N = 608$; perceived relationship quality $N = 394$; insecure attachment $N = 596$; self-handicapping $N = 582$.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at JCU (Number H7414, see Appendix F). The current study followed the same procedure as Studies 2 and 3 for data collection (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion). Data for the current study were collected between September 2018 and January 2019. Data were analysed using AMOS and SPSS (IBM Statistics), version 25.

Measures

The measures of interest for the current study included 10 demographic questions, 30 relationship sabotage questions, six perceived relationship quality questions, 12 attachment style questions and 10 self-handicapping questions.

Demographic Characteristics. Demographic questions encompassed age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of longest relationship, country of origin, history of affairs, seeking help from a psychologist, mental health literacy and affiliation with JCU (i.e., student, staff or both).

Relationship Sabotage. Relationship sabotage was tested using the scale in development. The RSSS was first tested in Study 3. The full set of items (60 items) indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$). The reduced set of items (30 items) showed the same internal consistency. Using the reduced scale, sub-factors showed mostly acceptable to good reliability for defensiveness ($\alpha = .89$), relationship skills ($\alpha = .72$), trust difficulty ($\alpha = .76$), self-esteem ($\alpha = .73$) and controlling tendency ($\alpha = .59$). The final analysis conducted in Study 3 informed the existence of five factors across 30 items. A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. Table 15 details a complete list of the factors and items.

Table 15

Reduced List of Items for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

FACTORS	QUESTIONS
DEFENSIVENESS	28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
	23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.
	27. I feel respected by my partner.
	18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
	5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
	42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
	26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.
	15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
	41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
	40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.
	4. I communicate well with my partner.
TRUST DIFFICULTY	7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.
	10. I check in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.
	60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.
	57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.
	8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
SELF-ESTEEM	46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
	44. I often get jealous of my partner.
	43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.
	11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.
CONTROLLING TENDENCY	45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
	33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.
	30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.
CROSS-LOADING ITEMS	37. I believe that to keep my partner safe, I need to know where my partner is at all times.
	38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner, I know best.
	34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.
	22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.*
	25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.*
	6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.**

Notes: Reverse questions—4, 7, 15, 26, 27, 40, 41, 42, 57, 60. * This item was cross-loading between defensiveness and self-esteem factors.

** This item was cross-loading between trust difficulty and controlling tendency factors.

Perceived Relationship Quality. The perceived relationship quality questions were extracted from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQCI; Fletcher et al., 2000), which contains 18 items to assess six components of relationship quality: (1) satisfaction, (2) commitment, (3) intimacy, (4) trust, (5) passion and (6) love. The instrument showed good to excellent internal consistency for satisfaction ($\alpha = .93$), commitment ($\alpha = .94$), intimacy ($\alpha = .88$), trust ($\alpha = .74$), passion ($\alpha = .89$) and love ($\alpha = .90$). The current study adopted a short form of the scale (PRQCI-SF; six items) with one item from each of the six original constructs, showing good overall internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$). In addition, Fletcher et al. (2000) conducted CFA to compare alternative models for relationship quality to establish whether relationship quality is a mono-trait or multi-trait construct. The best-fitting model showed that all six perceived relationship quality factors represented a consistent indication of the individual's general attitude towards their partner and the relationship, meaning that, although all factors were covariant, they also operated independently towards a single second-order factor. The current study only collected perceived relationship quality information from individuals in a relationship, which would be naturally higher than single individuals. This choice was deliberate to comply with the scale developer's instruction. An example of a satisfaction item is 'How satisfied are you with your relationship?'. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('extremely'), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. The overall score for perceived relationship quality was calculated by summing all six items. Therefore, scores ranging between 6 and 13 were considered low, 14 and 22 were moderate, and 23 and 30 were high (Fletcher et al., 2000). Participants in the current study scored a mean of 24.84 ($SD = 4.67$) for perceived relationship quality, which was considered high.

Adult Attachment Styles. Adult attachment styles were measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Short Form (ECR-SF; Wei et al., 2007). The ECR-SF is an adapted version of the original and widely used self-report scale proposed by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) to assess two attachment dimensions: (1) anxiety and (2) avoidance. The short form contains 12 items (six items for each construct) and is proposed to facilitate a more focused and easily adaptable construct. An example of an anxiety dimension item is ‘I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner’, while an example of an avoidant dimension item is ‘I try to avoid getting too close to my partner’. The ECR-SF (Wei et al., 2007) showed acceptable internal consistency for the anxiety subscale ($\alpha = .77$) and the avoidance subscale ($\alpha = .78$), and good test retest reliability for both subscales ($\alpha = .82$ and $\alpha = .89$, respectively). Additionally, Lafontaine et al. (2016) conducted a study comparing all existing versions of the ECR and found the 12-item short version to have the best psychometric properties, with the anxiety subscale showing alpha values between .78 and .87 and the avoidance scale showing alpha values between .74 and .83. The current study showed comparable internal consistency for the anxiety subscale ($\alpha = .77$) and avoidance subscale ($\alpha = .83$). Further, the ECR-SF showed good construct validity when compared with scales measuring constructs such as depression, anxiety, interpersonal distress, psychological distress, fear of intimacy, loneliness, excessive reassurance seeking, emotional reactivity, emotional cut-off, comfort with self-disclosure and social desirability (Lafontaine et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2007). A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. Scores for anxious and avoidant attachment were calculated by summing the six items that represented each of the two constructs. Therefore, insecure attachment scores ranging between 6 and 17 were considered low, 18 and 30 were moderate, and 31 and 42 were high (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Participants in the current study scored a mean

of 22.50 ($SD = 7.44$) for anxious attachment, which was considered moderate, and a mean of 15.50 ($SD = 6.58$) for avoidant attachment, which was considered low. These results were comparable to what was found by Wei et al. (2007) when using the same scale (anxious attachment: [$M = 22.41$, $SD = 7.24$] to [$M = 22.45$, $SD = 7.14$]; avoidant attachment: [$M = 14.97$, $SD = 6.40$] to [$M = 15.66$, $SD = 6.25$]) with a group of 65 psychology undergraduate students (16% male and 74% female) aged between 19 and 29 years, of whom the majority reported being in a committed relationship (52%).

Self-Handicapping. The self-handicapping questions were extracted from the Self-Handicapping Scale Short Form (SHS-SF; Strube, 1986). The original study that evaluated the long and short forms of the scale showed more acceptable internal consistency for the short form ($\alpha = .70$) than the long form ($\alpha = .62$). The current study showed comparable internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$) for the reduced scale. Further, the SHS-SF showed good construct validity when compared with scales measuring constructs such as self-esteem, depression, private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, social anxiety and extraversion (Rhodewalt et al., 1984; Sahranç, 2011; Schwinger et al., 2014; Strube, 1986; Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimension. Scores for self-handicapping tendencies were calculated by summing all 10 items that represented the construct. Therefore, scores between 10 and 29 were low, 30 and 50 were moderate, and 51 and 70 were high. Participants in the current study scored a mean of 40.54 ($SD = 9.29$) for self-handicapping tendencies, which was considered moderate.

Data Characteristics

Normality. The current data skewedness (values ranging from -0.42 to 1.71) and kurtosis (values ranging from -1.41 to 4.22) showed mild deviations from normality;

however, this complied with the parameters recommended by Fabrigar et al. (1999) to treat the data as normally distributed (i.e., skewness < 2, kurtosis < 7).

Sample Size. Specific recommendations apply for SEM analysis when determining sample size. Bentler and Chou (1987), Worthington and Whittaker (2006), and Kline (2016) recommended a sample of a minimum of 200 participants and a minimum of 5:1 participants per parameter. In the current study of 608 participants, the least complex model (a one-congeneric model) estimated eight parameters (a ratio of 76:1) and the most complex model (Modified Model 1) estimated 93 parameters (a ratio of 6.5:1). Therefore, the current sample was adequately powered to detect significant misspecifications in the models examined. Further, Browne (1984) developed the Asymptotic Distribution Free (ADF) estimator for sample sizes based on a weight matrix in the function for fitting covariance structures. This method is considered too stringent (Satorra & Bentler, 1994) and other methods, such as the aforementioned, are most often used. Nevertheless, it is noted that the current study met the sample size suggested by the ADF estimator, with 630 participants for 20 observable variables, and 31 latent variables in the most complex model (Modified Model 1).

Missing Data. The current sample did not include missing data for the study variables in the RSSS ($N = 608$) or PRQC-SF ($N = 394$). The numbers for the PRQC-SF corresponded only to participants who reported being in a relationship. Missing data on the other two variables (ECR-SF and SHS-SF) were considered 'minimum', since they accounted for less than 5% of the responses (Rubin, 1976). The missing data for the ECR-SF corresponded to 12 responses (1.97%), and for the SHS-SF corresponded to 26 responses (4.28%); therefore, as recommended by Browne (1984), analysis proceeded without imputation.

Data Analysis

CFA was conducted to evaluate the EFA-informed factor structure and psychometric properties found in Study 3 (Chapter 7). Additionally, construct validity analyses were

conducted. The following six steps proposed by Bollen and Long (1993) and Kline (2016) were applied to conduct CFA within the SEM framework: (1) model conceptualisation, (2) path diagram construction and model specification, (3) model identification, (4) parameter estimation, (5) assessment of model fit and (6) model re-specification.

Model Conceptualisation. This step involved detailing the set of variables to be tested. These should be determined from a strong theoretical background to formulate an *a priori* hypothesis. A proposed model derived from the EFA conducted in Study 3 is shown in Figure 8 and includes five factors: (1) defensiveness, (2) relationship skills, (3) trust difficulty, (4) self-esteem and (5) controlling tendency.

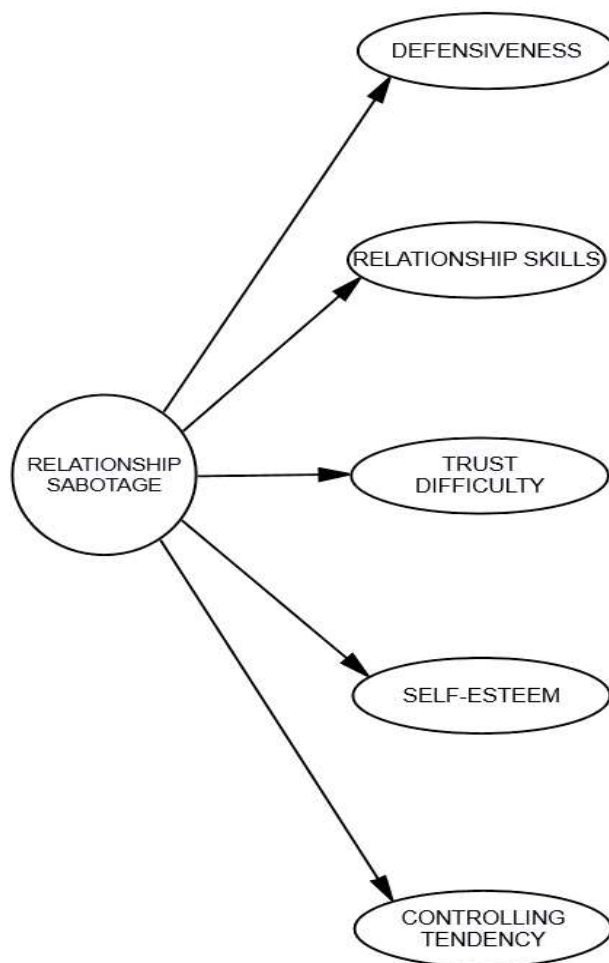


Figure 8. Proposed Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

Path Diagram Construction and Model Specification. In the AMOS (IBM Statistics) program, the path diagram construction and model specification occur in the same step in which the model is being drawn. All latent variables were scaled from 1 to 7 (from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’) by fixing the factor loading from one of the observable variables (also called the reference variable) from each set of constructs to the value of 1. The error terms (associated with observable and latent variables) were also set to the value of 1. This process was used to identify and scale the model (Byrne, 2010).

Model Identification. This step assessed whether the model had enough information to estimate free parameters. The *t*-rule method (Bollen, 1989) was used to assess model identification. This method was calculated with the formula below, where *t* is the number of free parameters to be estimated and *k* is the number of observed variables:

$$t \leq \frac{1}{2} k (k + 1)$$

Model identification is assumed if the number of parameters to be estimated in a model does not exceed the number of unique variances and covariances in the sample variance–covariance matrix (calculated using *k*). The most complex model analysed in the current study (Modified Model 1) had 93 free parameters and 20 observable variables; therefore, it met the *t*-rule requirement (i.e., $93 \leq 210$).

Parameter Estimation. Free parameters in the model were estimated using the ML procedure, as was done in Study 3. In SEM, this practice is recommended by several researchers (e.g., Kline, 2016) following the original seminal work of Jöreskog (1967). ML is a robust approach for normal or near normal data, as it provides close estimates of measurement error and a chi-square distribution closely related to the population of estimation.

Assessment of Model Fit. Six measures were used to assess model fit. Two fit statistics were used:

1. chi-square (χ^2), which should be non-significant, indicating no significant difference between the observed and expected underlying variance–covariance matrix (Gulliksen & Tukey, 1958); and
2. root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which should be less than .05, with a *p*-value greater than .05 to accept the test of close fit and the lower bound of the 90% confidence interval equal to 0 to test if exact fit is supported.

The RMSEA takes into account the error of approximation in the population and reduces the stringent requirement on the chi-square that the model should hold exactly in the population (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Byrne, 2010). Further, three incremental or comparative fit indices were used:

3. goodness-of-fit index (GFI);
4. comparative fit index (CFI); and
5. Tucker-Lewis index (TLI).

The GFI and CFI provide an indication of how well the hypothesised model accounts for variance in the data in comparison with the null model, and the TLI estimates the model parsimony (Bentler, 1990; Jöreskog, 1984). These three indices should be greater than .95 and TLI should not be greater than 1. Finally, a residual statistic was used:

6. standardised root mean square residual (SRMR).

The SRMR should be less than .06 and assesses the residual variance unexplained by the model (Bentler & Weeks, 1980). Refer to Table 16 for a list of model fit measures selected for the current study, with detailed description and comments.

Table 16

Summary of Selected Fit Measures for Structural Equation Modelling.

Fit Measures	Abbreviation	Type	Acceptable Level	Description	Comments
1 Chi-square (with its associate degree of freedom and probability difference)	$\chi^2 (df \text{ and } p)$	Fit statistic	$p > .05$	The chi-square value indicates no significant difference between the observed and expected underlying variance-covariance matrix.	This fit measure is greatly affected by sample size and data distribution. The acceptable level applies to normal multivariate data. An adjusted p -value should be used for non-normal data.
2 Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA	Fit statistic	RMSEA < .05 $p > .05$ LO 90 = 0	The RMSEA takes into account the error of approximation in the population and reduces the stringent requirement on the chi-square that the model should hold exactly in the population.	The lower bound of the 90% confidence interval equal to 0 suggests that even the test of exact fit is supported.
3 Goodness-of-fit index	GFI	Incremental or comparative fit indices	GFI > .95	The GFI and CFI provide an indication of how well the hypothesised model accounts for variance in the data in comparison with the null model.	—
4 Comparative fit index	CFI	Incremental or comparative fit indices	CFI > .95		
5 Tucker-Lewis index	TLI	Incremental or comparative fit indices	.95 < TFI < 1	The TLI estimates the model parsimony.	Values greater than 1 may indicate that the model is over-fit.
6 Standardised root mean square residual	SRMR	Residual statistic	SRMR < .06	The SRMR assesses the residual variance unexplained by the model.	Large values for SRMR, when all other fit indices suggest good fit, may indicate outliers in the raw data.

Model Re-Specification. When the initial model analysis showed poor fit, modifications were applied to improve the model. The AMOS (IBM Statistics) program provides a set of recommendations informed by indices, such as factor regression weights, error measurement and variance explained, to highlight the best alterations. However, final alterations were informed by the existing literature, previous research findings and the results from the current project's set of studies.

Added Set of Steps to Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The CFA conducted also followed Holmes-Smith and Rowe's (1994) recommendations, which entailed three additional steps. First, one-congeneric models were fitted for each individual factor to clean each construct and ensure model fit. In this step, factor score regression weights, variance explained and measurement error were used to select which items to discard or keep. In addition, for the purpose of testing one-congeneric models, Items 6, 22 and 25 were used in

the two factors for which they were cross-loading. This procedure was also followed because one-congeneric models need a minimum of four items to represent the construct and ensure good model identification (Bollen, 1989). Overall, the one-congeneric model approach allows for factors of different weights within the same construct to contribute uniquely, and does not assume that items are parallel (i.e., all variables carry the same weight). Second, a full multi-factor confirmatory analysis with the final set of items reflecting each construct was conducted. Third, composite variables were created for each construct and the model was fitted again.

Results

The internal validity analyses and results will be discussed first. Internal reliability will be discussed subsequently in relation to the final scale.

Internal Validity

One-Congeneric Model Analyses.

Defensiveness Factor. The initial analysis for this factor partially fit ($\chi^2_{(20)} = 80.539$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .071 [.055, .087], $p = .017$; GFI = .996; CFI = .978; TLI = .969; SRMR = .025). Model specifications analysis showed high covariance between Items 27 and 28 and Items 5 and 18. The items with the smallest regression weights were removed. A further two items (Items 22 and 25) were removed to achieve a final model of four items. The final one-congeneric model fit ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 4.632$, $p = .099$; RMSEA = .047 [.000, .104], $p = .455$; GFI = .996; CFI = .998; TLI = .994; SRMR = .010). See Figure 9.

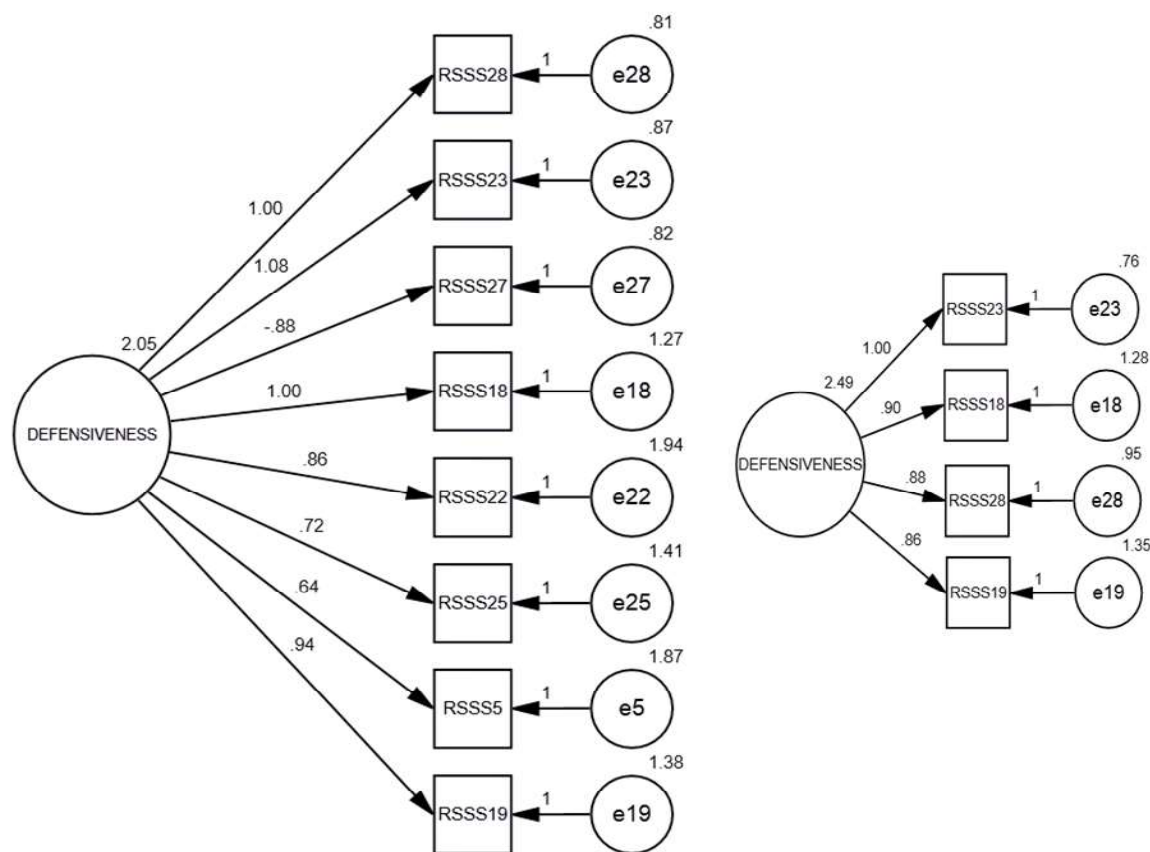


Figure 9. Initial and Modified One-Congeneric Model for Defensiveness.

Relationship Skills Factor. The initial analysis for this factor partially fit ($\chi^2_{(35)} = 98.118, p < .001$; RMSEA = .055 [.042, .067], $p = .264$; GFI = .969; CFI = .932; TLI = .912; SRMR = .041). Model specifications analysis showed high covariance between Items 41 and 57, Items 7 and 26, and Items 4 and 15. First, items with the smallest regression weights out of the pair of covariance were removed. Second, items with the smallest regression weights (Items 4, 7, 26, 57, 60) were removed to achieve a final model of four items. Although Item 10 had a larger regression weight than Item 41, it was removed because it did not fit with the other items in the final model, which were all reverse coded to indicate lack of relationship skills. The final one-congeneric model fit ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 1.331, p = .514$; RMSEA < .001 [.000, .071], $p = .837$; GFI = .999; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .009). See Figure 10.

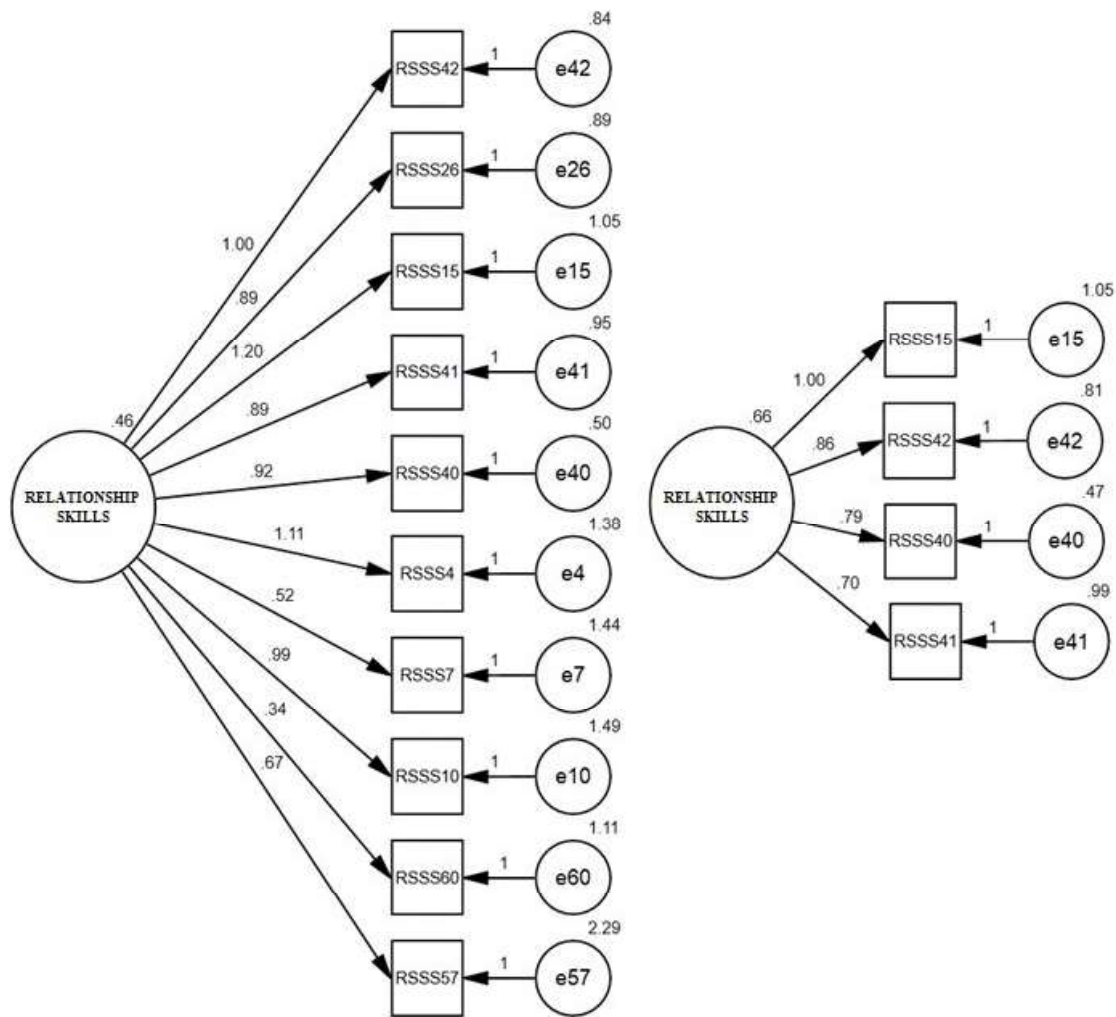


Figure 10. Initial and Modified One-Congeneric Model for Relationship Skills.

Trust Difficulty Factor. The initial analysis for this factor did not fit ($\chi^2_{(14)} = 125.755$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .115 [.097, .133], $p < .001$; GFI = .940; CFI = .863; TLI = .794; SRMR = .065). Model specifications analysis showed high covariance between Items 43 and 46, Items 11 and 45, and Items 6 and 11. First, Item 11 was removed because of covariance with two other items, and then Item 43 was removed based on a weaker regression coefficient compared with Item 46. The analysis still showed high covariance between Items 6 and 45. Item 6 was removed based on weaker regression coefficient. The final one-congeneric model fit ($\chi^2_{(2)} = .304$, $p = .859$; RMSEA < .001 [.000, .043], $p = .965$; GFI = 1; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .005). See Figure 11.

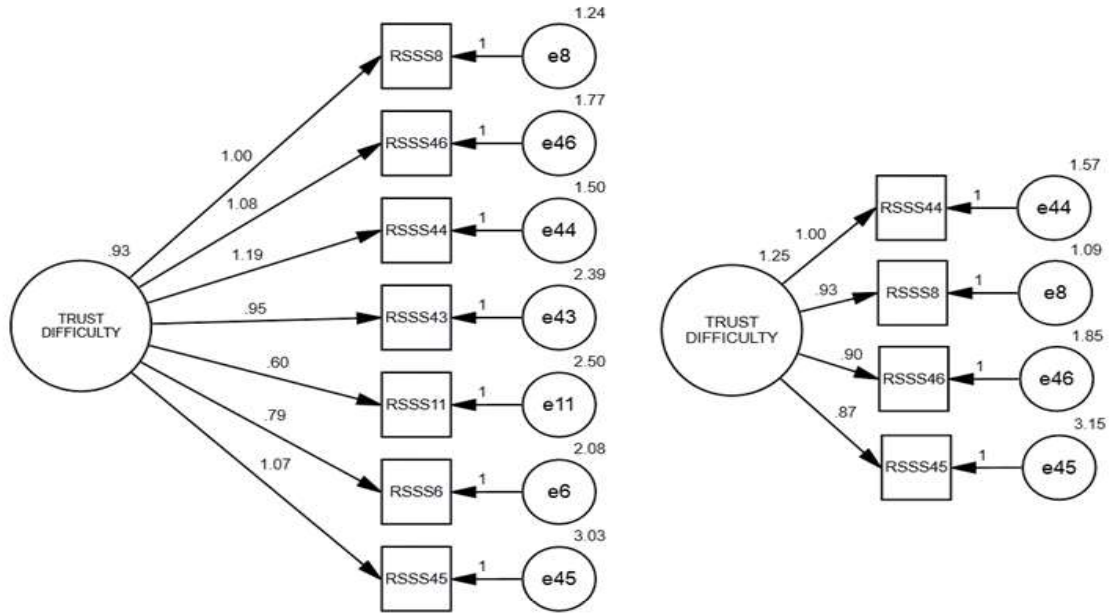


Figure 11. Initial and Modified One-Congeneric Model for Trust Difficulty.

Self-Esteem Factor. The initial analysis for this factor partially fit ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 34.465$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .164 [.118, .214], $p < .001$; GFI = .971; CFI = .909; TLI = .726; SRMR = .055). Model specifications analysis showed high covariance between Items 30 and 33. The final one-congeneric model fit with the added covariance ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .174$, $p = .676$; RMSEA < .001 [.000, .081], $p = .842$; GFI = 1; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .003). See Figure 12.

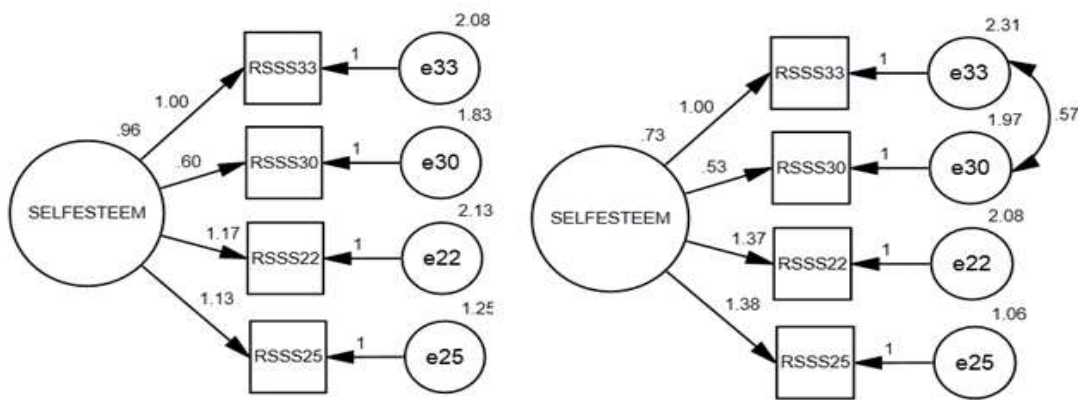


Figure 12. Initial and Modified One-Congeneric Model for Self-Esteem.

Controlling Tendencies Factor. The initial analysis for this factor fit ($\chi^2_{(2)} = .576$, $p = .750$; RMSEA < .001 [.000, .055], $p = .933$; GFI = 1; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .007).

See Figure 13.

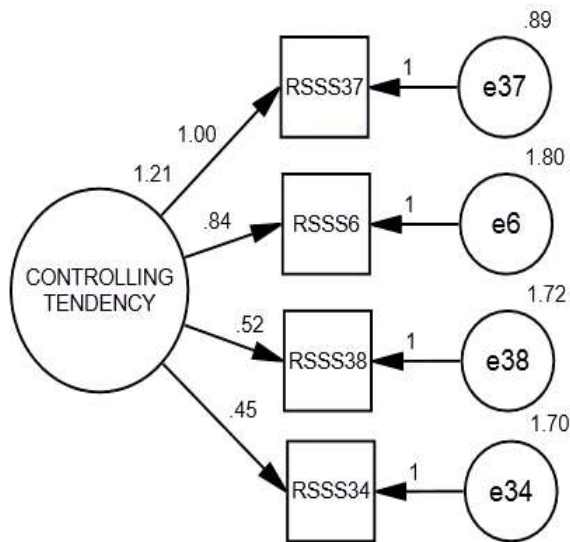


Figure 13. Initial One-Congeneric Model for Controlling Tendency.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

The Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale. The initial model analysis for the full scale did not fit ($\chi^2_{(165)} = 645.311$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .068 [.062, .073], $p < .001$; GFI = .903; CFI = .880; TLI = .862; SRMR = .071). See Figure 14.

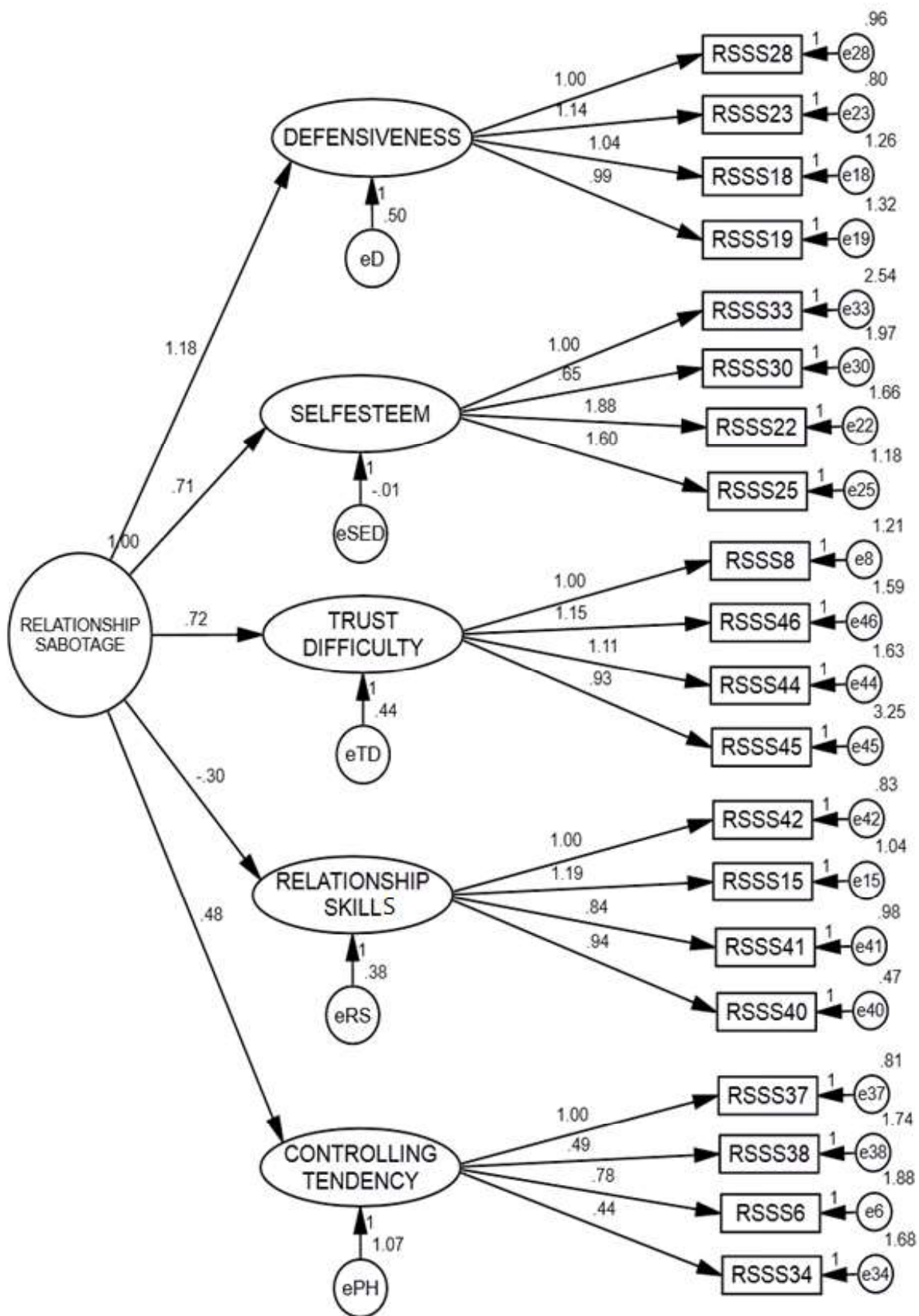


Figure 14. Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale Five-Factor Initial Model.

Model specifications analysis showed covariance between items. Once covariances were drawn, the model fit ($\chi^2_{(117)} = 131.288, p = .173$; RMSEA = .014 [.000, .026], $p = 1$; GFI = .979; CFI = .996; TLI = .994; SRMR = .036). See Figure 15.

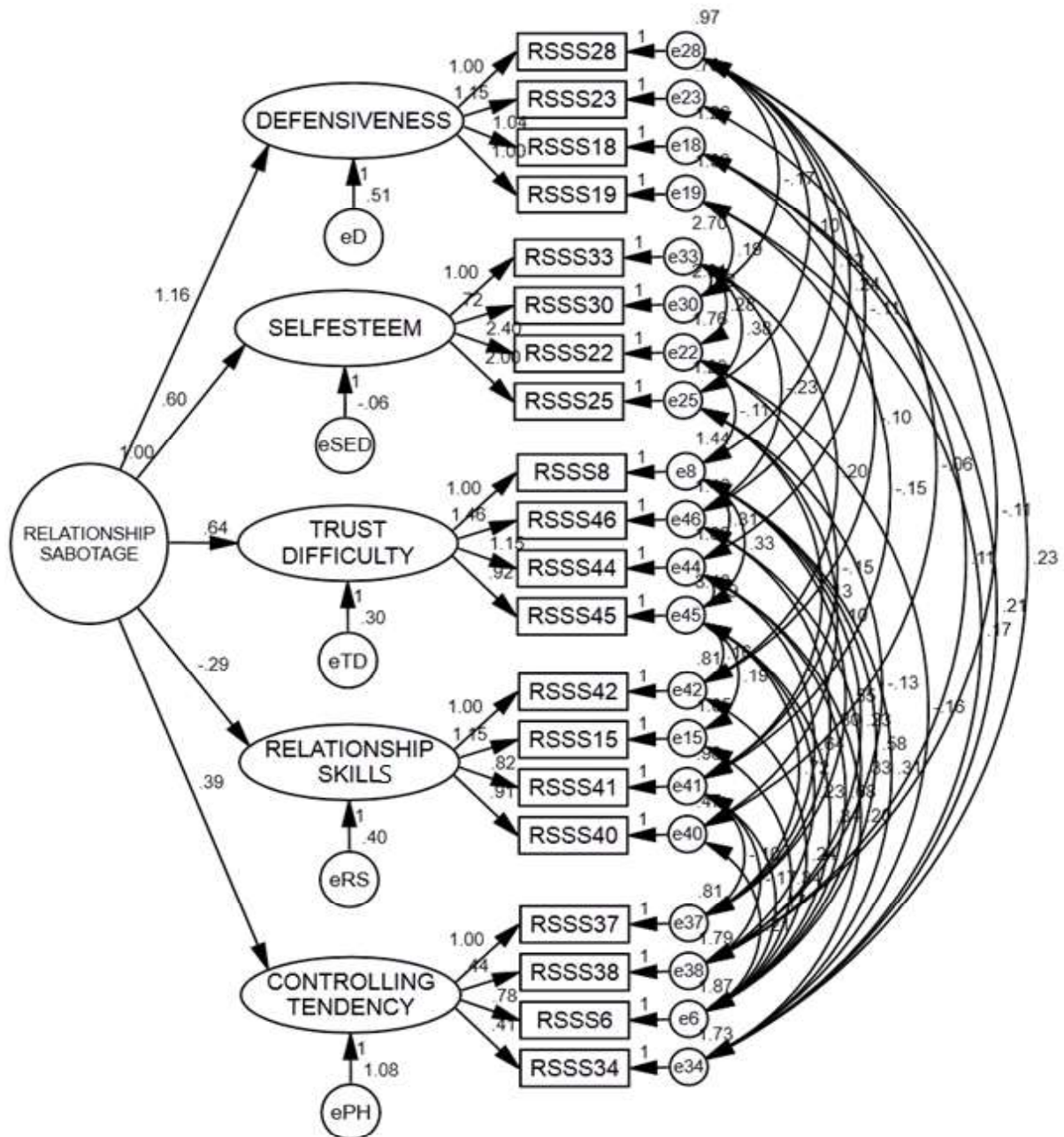


Figure 15. Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale Five-Factor Model Modification 1.

Scale items with standardised regression weights equal or under .32 were removed, which resulted in two items from the self-esteem factor being removed (Items 30 [.267] and 33 [.316]). Additionally, this factor showed high covariance with the defensiveness factor, which indicated that the two factors could not be differentiated. Consequently, the factor of self-esteem was completely removed. The decision to remove this factor was made because only having two items for one factor is insufficient information to define a subscale construct, which in turn can provide an inadmissible solution (Kline, 2016). Further, the factor of controlling tendency was removed because of having more than two items with regression weights under .5 (Items 34 [.329] and 38 [.342]), as recommended by Kline (2016). Additionally, this factor showed high covariance with the trust difficulty factor, which indicated that the two factors could not be differentiated. The retained scale contained three factors with four items each ($\chi^2_{(39)} = 34.962$, $p = .655$; RMSEA < .001 [.000, .024], $p = 1$; GFI = .990; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .020). See Figure 16.

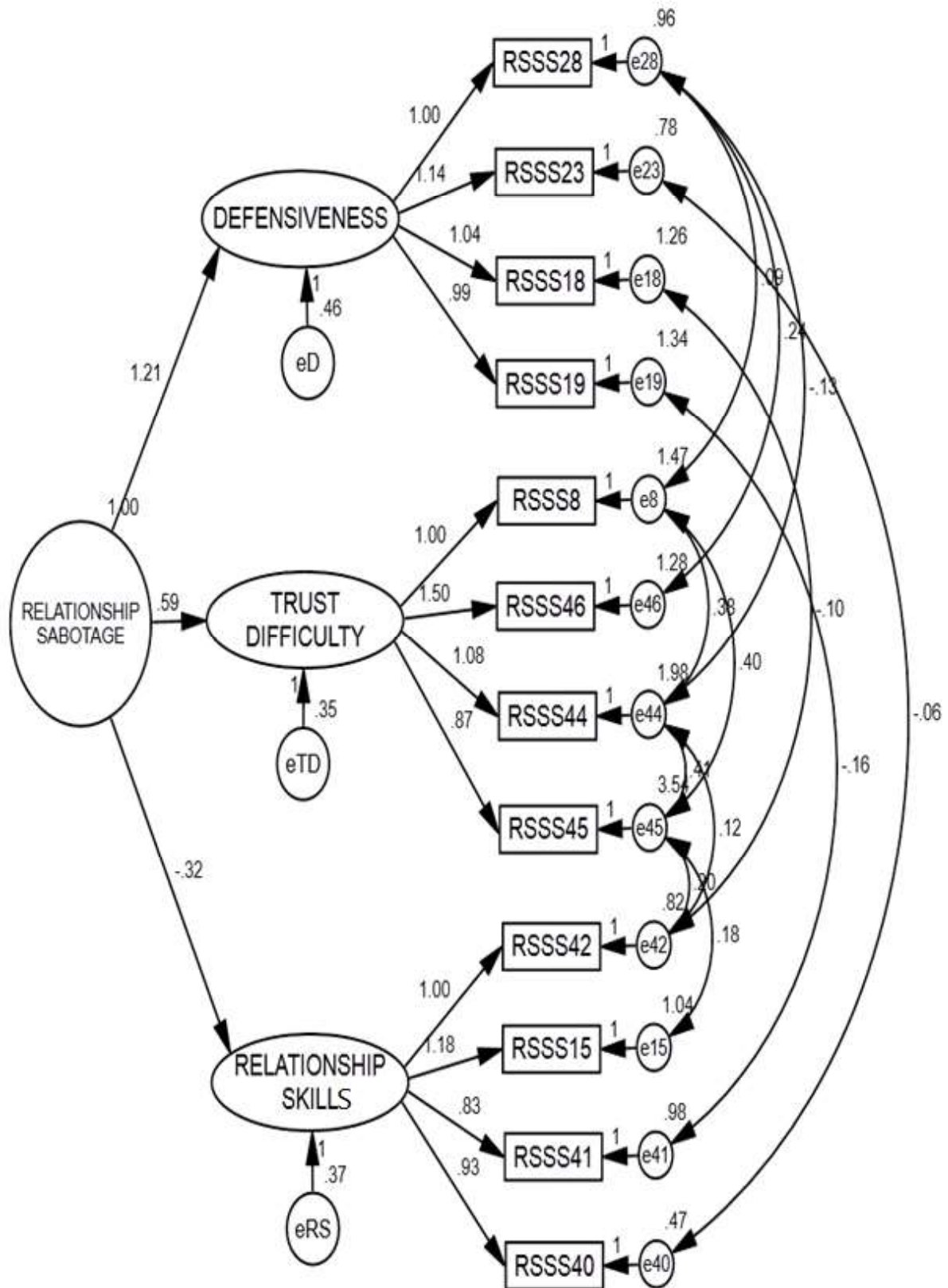


Figure 16. Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale Three-Factor Model Modification 2.

The final analysis involved fitting the scale composite variables. First, the composite variables were created using the factor score regression weights obtained from the one-factor congeneric measurement models, as recommended by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1989). This approach is unlike adding raw scores to represent subscales, which assumes that the items are parallel. Weighted composite variables best represent each variable's unique contribution. Further, weighted composite variables are continuous, as opposed to Likert scale scores, which are ordinal. Therefore, for the purpose of creating weighted composite variables, factor score regression weights were rescaled to add up to a total of 1. The composite model fit with covariances drawn ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 2.530, p = .112$; RMSEA = .05 [.000, .131], $p = 3.62$; GFI = .997; CFI = .993; TLI = .978; SRMR = .020). See Figure 17.

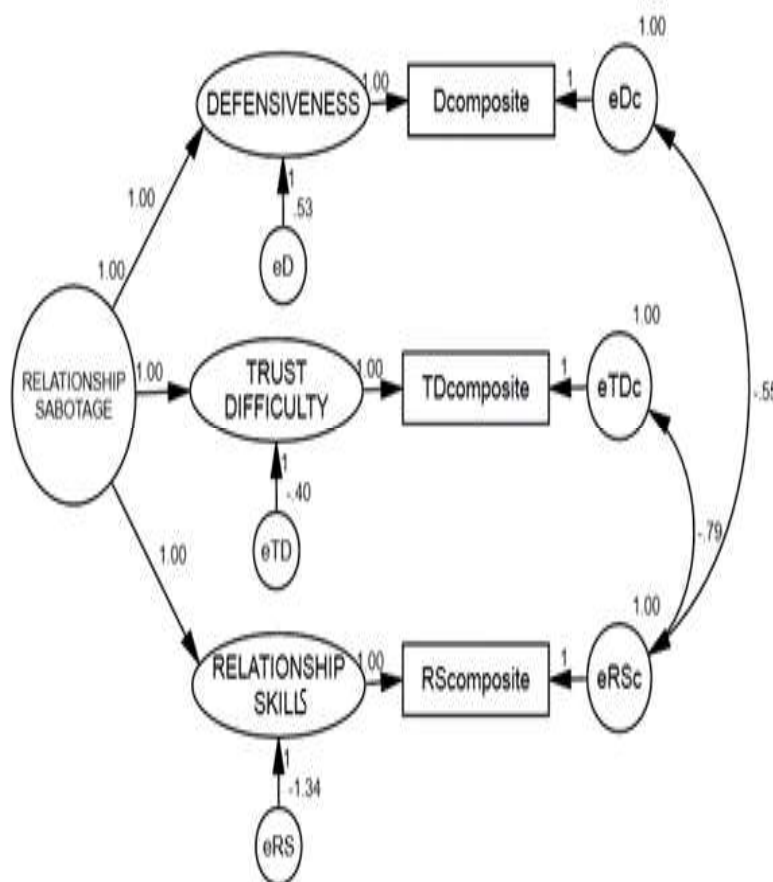


Figure 17. Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale Composite Model.

A correlations matrix of all 30 items can be found in Appendix L and a table with full model estimates (which includes standard deviations of the variables) can be found in Appendix M. McDonald and Ringo Ho (2002) recommended providing readers with this information to assess the models derived from the CFA. Further, a list of the final retained items and constructs for the RSSS can be found in Table 17.

Table 17

Final Items in the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

FACTORS	QUESTIONS
DEFENSIVENESS	28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
	23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.
	18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
	19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
	15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
	41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
	40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.
TRUST DIFFICULTY	8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
	46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
	44. I often get jealous of my partner.
	45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.

Notes: Reverse questions—15, 40, 41, 42.

Internal Reliability

Internal reliability was calculated with the gold-standard measure of Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and the SEM-recommended practice of coefficient H (Hancock & Mueller, 2011). According to Hancock and Mueller (2001), coefficient H provides a more robust way to assess latent measures created from observable construct indicators, such as regression coefficients, especially if items are not parallel. The Cronbach's alpha calculation assumes that all items are parallel, which is not often the case, and is affected by the sign of the indicators' loading. Alternatively, coefficient H is not limited by the strength and sign of items and draws information from all indicators (even from weaker variables) to reflect the construct. Further, Lord and Novick (1968) proposed that if measures associated with a latent trait are congeneric, Cronbach's alpha will be a lower-bound estimate of the true reliability. Overall, the standard cut-off indicators are the same in both methods, as detailed in Chapter

7. The results showed excellent/good reliability for the RSSS total scale ($\alpha = .82$; $H = .93$), good reliability for the defensiveness factor ($\alpha = .88$; $H = .89$), and acceptable/questionable reliability for the trust difficulty factor ($\alpha = .69$; $H = .69$) and relationship skills factor ($\alpha = .69$; $H = .71$).

Construct Validity

Traditional approaches to assess construct validity (i.e., the multi-trait–multi-method [MTMM] matrix approach) rely on the assumption that the construct’s variables are parallel. Therefore, assessing validity with a correlation matrix alone is limited and does not account for the effect of variables with different regression weights and measurement errors. To remedy this limitation, SEM-based approaches to construct validity were also performed. SEM-based approaches highlight how constructs are affected differently and allows them to correlate freely among themselves. Further, these approaches assess how well each construct fits within the model with regard to variance explained and measurement error (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). All analyses were performed on the final retained model (Modified Model 2).

Convergent and Discriminant Validity (MTMM Matrix Approach). Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed using the MTMM matrix, which assesses construct validity by comparing the correlation matrix between the proposed constructs and constructs measured by different scales, which are either conceptually similar or dissimilar (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The final RSSS was compared with three measures—the ECR-SF, SHS-SF and PRQCI-SF. The RSSS total scale showed significant positive correlations ($p < .01$) with the ECR-SF total ($r = .653$) and the SHS-SF total ($r = .348$), and significant negative correlation with the PRQCI-SF total ($r = -.550$), which represent convergent validity. Divergent validity was not found using this method. See Table 18 for a complete overview of the analysis.

Table 18

Correlation Matrix to Measure Construct Validity for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

	Defensiveness	Trust Difficulties	Lack of Relationship Skills	Relationship Sabotage	Attachment Anxiety	Attachment Avoidance	Experience in Close Relationships	Self-Handicapping	Lack of Relationship Quality
Defensiveness	1	.453**	.339**	.868**	.400**	.477**	.547**	.255**	-.613**
Trust Difficulties		1	.189**	.760**	.566**	.334**	.573**	.360**	-.177**
Lack of Relationship Skills			1	.571**	.040	.464**	.300**	.150**	-.421**
Relationship Sabotage				1	.491**	.554**	.653**	.348**	-.550**
Attachment Anxiety					1	.268**	.824**	.447**	-.151**
Attachment Avoidance						1	.767**	.265**	-.607**
Experience in Close Relationships							1	.454**	-.449**
Self-Handicapping								1	-.009
Relationship Quality									1

Notes: ** = .01 (two-tailed). RSSS and subscales (N) = 608, ECR-SF and subscales (N) = 596, SHS (N) = 582, PRQCI (N) = 394.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity (SEM-based Approaches).

Convergent Validity. According to Bagozzi et al. (1991), if all factor loadings are statistically significant, meaning that the relationship between an observed variable and latent construct is different to zero, convergent validity can be assumed. Further, Holmes-Smith and Rowe (1994) recommended a threshold value of .5 for the standardised loading (with a significant t -statistic) to achieve convergent validity. All the proposed constructs in Modified Model 2 met these criteria (defensiveness = .87; trust difficulty = .70; lack of relationship skills = .47), and all standardised factor loadings (except for Item 45) were equal to or higher than .5. Hair (2010) proposed an all-encompassing and more stringent set of criteria for convergent validity, which requires an average variance extracted (AVE) between constructs greater than .5, standardised factor loading of all items not less than .5, and composite reliability (CR) greater than .7. This set of criteria is in agreement with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) original work. The results in the current study partially supported construct validity, with the AVE between defensiveness and lack of relationship skills at .51, between defensiveness and trust difficulty at .49, and between trust difficulty and lack of relationship skills at .35. CR for defensiveness was .88, for trust difficulty was .65, and for lack of relationship skills was .70. See Appendix M for the standardised factor loading retained on Modified Model 2 and see Table 19 for AVE and CR estimates.

Table 19

AVE and CR Estimates for Factors in the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

Factors	Defensiveness	Trust Difficulties	Lack of Relationship Skills
CR	0.884	0.646	0.696
Pair of Factors	Defensiveness and Trust Difficulties	Defensiveness and Lack of Relationship Skills	Trust Difficulties and Lack of Relationship Skills
AVE	0.491	0.513	0.345
Square-rooted AVE	0.701	0.716	0.587
Factors Inter-correlation	0.62	0.409	0.332
Squared Factors Inter-correlation	0.384	0.167	0.11

Discriminant Validity. The criterion adopted by Kline (2016) was considered for discriminant validity analyses, which stipulates that validity can be assumed if the correlation between two factors is less than .85. This was further supported by Cheung and Wang (2017), who recommended the correlation not be significantly greater than .7. However, this approach is often criticised for its reliance on the correlations matrix approach, which does not consider variance explained and error measurement (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Therefore, two additional approaches were considered.

Discriminant validity was first assessed using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) approach in a multi-trait–mono-method context using the AVE and inter-correlation between factors. This method showed that all pairs of constructs were distinct, thereby supporting discriminant validity (i.e., $AVE > \text{squared factors inter-correlation}$ or $\text{square-rooted AVE} > \text{factors inter-correlation}$). Refer back to Table 19. Further, discriminant validity was assessed using the Bagozzi et al. (1991) nested model method. This procedure involves measuring the difference between the constrained and unconstrained (with correlation between constructs set to 1) models between each two pairs of variables. The conclusion is based on the difference between the models' chi-square test. The difference between models should show that constraining the correlation between the two constructs worsens the model fit (i.e., there is a significant difference between models), which in turn means that the

constructs are discriminant. The nested model approach was performed between factors showing divergent constructs. Additionally, this approach has gained favour as a technique to compare alternative models (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The results from this test supported discriminant validity—see Table 20.

Table 20

Nested Model Approach to Discriminant Validity in the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

Models	Defensiveness and Trust Difficulty			Defensiveness and Lack of Relationship Skills			Trust Difficulty and Lack of Relationship Skills		
	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Constrained	23.971	14	0.49	364.642	17	.000	283.391	14	.000
Unconstrained	16.127	13	.242	12.458	16	.712	11.594	13	.561
Difference	7.844	1	.005	358.184	1	.000	271.797	1	.000

Discussion

One-factor congeneric models drawn from the *a priori* hypothesis fit well once items were reduced. The CFA analysis of the full scale involved two modifications to address item covariance. Modified Model 1 showed self-esteem as the strongest factor; however, high covariations between this factor and defensiveness resulted in the self-esteem factor being removed. Further, the controlling tendency factor was removed because of weak item factor loadings and overall variance explained. Consequently, although Modified Model 1 fit, it contained weak (and possibly indistinctive) factors. In addition, it is possible that this model was the least parsimonious alternative (because of having many covariance parameters). Therefore, Modified Model 2 was preferred. The final retained model, Modified Model 2, showed defensiveness as the stronger factor (similarly to the EFA conducted in Study 3). Overall, these findings add support for the overarching themes of self-protection and low-self-esteem present in the self-handicapping literature. Further, the final composite model showed that defensiveness and trust difficulty factors were contributing uniquely to the

overall latent variable representing relationship sabotage. However, the same was not true for relationship skills. The relationship skills factor was the weakest and showed covariations with the two other constructs. This was theoretically expected, since it was assumed that people with both defensiveness and trust difficulty issues would lack relationship skills. Nevertheless, this factor requires attention in future studies. Research should continue to improve item strength and overall variability for this construct. Proposed changes are recommended in the limitations section and future chapters.

Construct validity assessed using correlation matrices showed convergent validity between relationship self-sabotage, insecure attachment, self-handicapping and perceived relationship quality, as expected. Discriminant validity was not found using this method. This result is unsurprising considering the limitations with the MTMM approach, which relies on the assumption that the construct's variables are parallel. Another issue with using this approach to assess discriminant validity is the fact that most psychological constructs are somewhat related by nature (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar et al., 1999). Further, SEM-based methods were applied to assess construct validity. All the SEM-based adopted methods are considered rigorous and widely accepted. However, there is great debate regarding which practice to use, as no method is without limitations. Cheung and Wang (2017) compared approaches using a correlation matrix (i.e., Campbell & Fiske, 1959) and SEM (i.e., Bagozzi et al., 1991; Fornell & Larcker, 1981) for convergent and discriminant validity, and criticised all methods for not having a criterion to effectively address overestimated measurement errors (often as a consequence of using the ML estimation approach) and its influence on translating sample data to population conclusions. Overall, Cheung and Wang (2017) recommended that the best approach is to draw conclusions based on a combination of criteria. Specifically, convergent validity can be assumed if the AVE is not significantly less than .5 and standardised factor loadings of all items are not significantly less than .5, and

discriminant validity can be assumed if the correlation between two constructs is not significantly greater than .7. Therefore, although the relationship skills factor did not meet the desired criteria in all tests, it would still be considered an acceptable construct as per Cheung and Wang's (2017) recommendation. Further, Holmes-Smith and Rowe (1994) proposed that one-factor congeneric models show that all the variables contributing to the overall measurement of the latent variable are similar in nature, meaning that they represent similar 'true scores'. As such, a good-fitting one-factor congeneric model implies validity.

Limitations

Although it was concluded that the final retained scale for the relationship sabotage could be used to represent the construct of interest, research needs to continue improving scale items, subscales and the overall construct. Specifically, items in the relationship skills construct might need to be more specific to represent overt behaviour and differentiate between thought and action (e.g., using positive remarks and shared humour to deescalate conflict, Gottman, 1993b). Further, current items are better suited to people in relationships (or those who can recall a past relationship). They do not adequately account for those who sabotage by not engaging in relationships at all (i.e., those who use disengagement as a self-protective strategy). This is further emphasised by the fact that most participants (65%) recruited in the current study reported being in a relationship (and rated their relationships highly), which would influence how they understood their experiences in relationships. Thus, the results might have differed if the sample was composed mainly of single people having difficulties engaging in romance. Altogether, these are considerations for future research.

Another limitation of this study was sample diversity (i.e., cultural background, gender and sexual identity). Although the study recruited a culturally varied sample, the survey was only scored in English. Also, the current study recruited mostly female participants and answers from gender and sexually diverse individuals were minimal, which

could hinder specific conclusions. Thus, it is a recommended step of scale development to test a newly developed scale with diverse samples and translated items (Carpenter, 2018), and it is expected that this step would provide further information towards making this scale more generalisable.

Using model modifications is also a limitation that needs to be addressed. Bollen and Long (1993) and Kline (2016) recommended that it is especially important to cross-validate models that have undergone modifications, as parameter estimates are unique to the sample tested. Also, construct validity analyses did not assess the measurement across the domains of cognitions, emotional responses and behaviours. Thus, future investigations will need to be conducted to guard against the possibility that the results found in the current sample would not be replicated in another sample and to continue to strengthen the scale.

Future Studies

In contrast to what the name suggests, CFA is actually an exploration for answers based on theory and an *a priori* hypothesis (Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996). Consequently, scale development is a continuing process with the aim of improving measures to adequately assess a psychological phenomenon. Therefore, the next study in the current project tested models of sabotage in romantic relationships using the developed scale, relationship factors (such as relationship quality and stress) and insecure attachment.

Conclusion

The RSSS was developed based on extensive theoretical investigations and stringent model re-specifications. The final result was a 12-item scale with three constructs (defensiveness, trust difficulty and relationship skills). However, investigations should continue improving the overall scale estimates. Nevertheless, the studies conducted thus far for this project provide valuable information to build a model for predicting relationship sabotage and inform future directions.

Chapter 9

Study 5: A Model for Relationship Sabotage

*'I think I run away sometimes
Whenever I get too vulnerable
...
Wish that I could let you love me
...
What's the matter with me?
...
And every time it gets too real
And every time I feel like sabotaging
I start running again.'*

(Keane et al., 2018)

Study Rationale

Identified Research Gaps. A theoretical model merging attachment and goal-orientation frameworks offers a possible explanation for how patterns of insecure attachment and insecure relationship views can trigger defensive functioning in individuals and lead to relationship dissolution. To reiterate the discussion from Chapter 2, Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) proposed that stressful moments in a relationship will activate the individual's existing attachment system, which in turn will determine how the individual responds to situations and set goals. Therefore, if the individual has an insecure attachment, stressful situations can lead them to resort to defensive strategies.

The vast majority of research conducted to explain behavioural representations of insecure attachment styles has focused on defensive strategies, such as rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996) and fear of intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). To reiterate, it is proposed that people who are insecurely attached might expect, readily perceive and overreact to the possibility of being rejected. In addition, they tend to deny and suppress a desire for romantic engagement (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Wei & Ku, 2007; Wei et al., 2007). However, self-defensive behaviours, such as those aforementioned, will not necessarily lead to self-sabotage in relationships. Instead, it is proposed that some characteristics of self-defensive strategies, such as rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy,

are found in self-sabotaging behaviours. Nevertheless, previous research has failed to consider whether the stressors that are often inherent in the maintenance of an intimate relationship may trigger defensive functioning among people who are insecurely attached, leading to the use of self-defeating behaviours, and in turn resulting in self-sabotage. It is this gap in the literature that the current study sought to investigate.

Study Aim. In accordance with the identified research gaps, the current study aimed to test models for self-sabotage in romantic relationships.

Research Questions. Two research questions were addressed in accordance with the current study aim: (1) What is the best model for relationship sabotage? (2) What are the variables mediating the relationship between relationship factors, insecure attachment and relationship sabotage?

Hypotheses. An important practice gaining favour in SEM involves testing competing models to inform the best paths between constructs (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Therefore, three hypothetical models were tested in the current study. All models were based on the literature review discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and the findings from the four previous studies conducted in this project. Further, all models encompassed four latent variables: (1) demographic factors (i.e., age, gender and sexual orientation), (2) insecure attachment (i.e., anxious and avoidant attachment styles), (3) relationship factors (i.e., relationship status, longest relationship duration, perceived relationship quality and perceived relationship stress) and (4) relationship sabotage (i.e., defensiveness, trust difficulty and lack of relationship skills).

Hypothetical Model 1 was drawn in accordance with Rusk and Rothbaum's (2010) premise, which proposes that stress in the relationship will activate the individual's attachment style, and then, if insecurely attached, the individual is predicted to resort to self-

defensive strategies to deal with the stressors in the relationship. See Figure 18 for a conceptual drawing of the model.

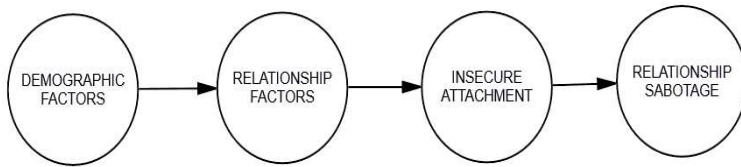


Figure 18. Hypothetical Model 1 for Relationship Sabotage.

The next two models challenged Rusk and Rothbaum's (2010) premise. Although it is agreed that relationship factors, such as stress, can activate insecure attachment, and in turn defensive responses, it is also possible that those responses are activated regardless of stress in the relationship. Relationship sabotage is proposed to be a trait characteristic (such as self-handicapping) learnt and developed through life experiences, which means that relationship sabotage is most likely not a situational response dependent on stress or other relationship factors. Therefore, the next two models investigated the direct and indirect paths between relationship factors, insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. Specifically, Hypothetical Model 2 tested how relationship factors influence the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. See Figure 19 for a conceptual drawing of the model.

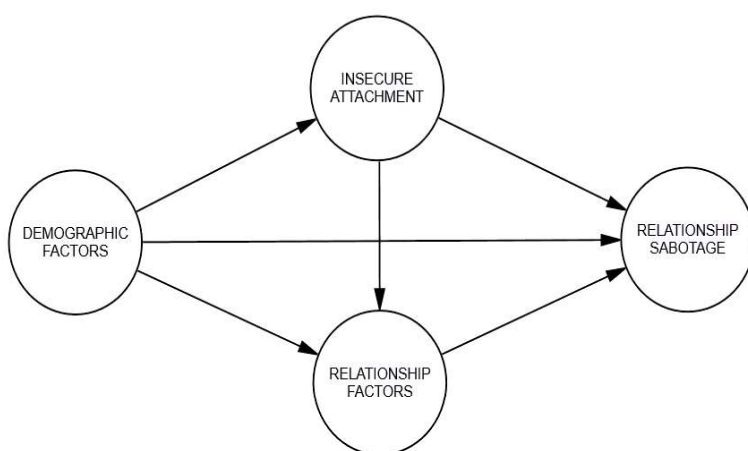


Figure 19. Hypothetical Model 2 for Relationship Sabotage.

It is also important to note that Rusk and Rothbaum's (2010) model assumed an existing attachment style that is activated in the presence of stress in the relationship. Hypothetical Model 3 suggested that relationship factors and relationship sabotage influence existing attachment styles or develop new ones. In accordance, the third model investigated how relationship sabotage influences the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship factors, and how insecure attachment influences the relationship between relationship factors and relationship sabotage. See Figure 20 for a conceptual drawing of the model.

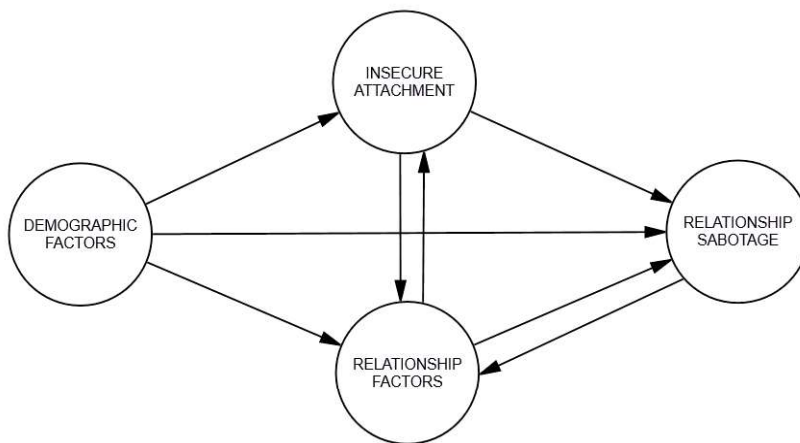


Figure 20. Hypothetical Model 3 for Relationship Sabotage.

Methods

Participants

A sample of 436 participants was recruited for the current study. Participants' ages ranged between 14 and 75 years ($M = 27.41$, $SD = 12.37$). The distribution included 128 males (29.5%) and 302 females (69.5%), and six reported as 'other' (1%). For those who reported as 'other', six provided descriptions for their gender, which included gender fluid (one), gender neutral (one), non-binary (one), queer (two) and transgender male (one). Regarding sexual orientation, most participants reported being heterosexual (336, 77%), while 74 (17%) were bisexual, 11 (2.5%) were homosexual, eight (2%) reported as 'other'

and seven (1.5%) elected not to answer. For those who reported as 'other', eight provided descriptions for their sexuality, which included asexual (two), bi-curious (one), confused (one), panromantic and demisexual (one), pansexual (one) and questioning (two). Most participants (250, 57%) reported being in a relationship, which they rated as high quality overall ($M = 22.99$, $SD = 5.69$, range 6 to 30). Also, participants reported moderate perceived relationship stress with a mean of 27.52 ($SD = 6.86$, range 11 to 45). Further, participants reported a mean of 5.68 years ($SD = 8.13$, range 0 to 50) for their longest relationship duration. A total of 93 (21%) participants reported having had an affair. A total of 101 (23%) participants reported previously seeing a psychologist for issues regarding a romantic relationship. Regarding insecure attachment, the participants reported a mean of 23.58 ($SD = 6.86$, range 6 to 41) for anxious attachment, which was considered moderate, and a mean of 16.11 ($SD = 6.43$, range 6 to 35) for avoidant attachment, which was considered low. Regarding relationship sabotage, the participants reported a mean of 2.88 ($SD = 1.43$, range 1 to 7) for defensiveness, 2.83 ($SD = 1.19$, range 1 to 6) for trust difficulty, and 2.06 ($SD = .81$, range 1 to 7) for relationship difficulty, which were all considered low. The culturally diverse sample included participants from all over the globe (at least 41 different countries), with the majority coming from Australia (215, 49%), the United States (70, 16%) and Southeast Asia (62, 14%). The majority of participants reported an association with JCU (298 [68%] students, two [.5%] staff and one [.5%] both student and staff). However, most (282, 65%) reported never having studied or worked in mental health. See Table 21 for a complete description of the participants' characteristics.

Table 21

Study 5: Participants' Characteristics.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	27.41	12.37
Range (14–75 years)		
Longest Relationship Duration	5.68	8.13
Range (0–50 years)		
Perceived Relationship Quality	22.99	5.69
Range (6–30)		
Perceived Relationship Stress	27.52	6.86
Range (11–45)		
Insecure Attachment		
Anxious attachment	23.58	6.86
Avoidant attachment	16.11	6.43
Range (6–42)		
Relationship Sabotage	2.88	1.43
Defensiveness	2.83	1.19
Trust difficulty		
Relationship skills	2.06	.81
Range (1–7)		
	N	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	128	29.5
Female	302	69.5
Other (gender fluid, gender neutral, non-binary, queer, transgender male)	6	1
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	336	77
Homosexual	11	2.5
Bisexual	74	17
Other (asexual, bi-curious, confused, panromantic and demisexual, pansexual, questioning)	8	2
Prefer not to answer	7	1.5
Relationship Status		
In a relationship (committed, de facto, married)	250	57
Not in a relationship	186	43
History of Affairs		
Yes	93	21
No	343	79
Seen a Psychologist for Relationship Issues		
Yes	101	23
No	335	77
Country of Origin		
United States	70	16
Canada	9	2
Australia	215	49
New Zealand	9	1.5
United Kingdom (England, Ireland, Scotland)	18	4
Western Europe (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain)	8	2
Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Poland)	3	1
Northern Europe (Finland, Norway, Sweden)	4	1
Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore)	62	14
East Asia (China, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan)	17	4
South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan)	7	2
South Pacific Islands (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands)	5	1
Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia)	6	1
Middle East (Iran, Iraq)	2	.5
South America (Brazil, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago)	6	1
Did not report	0	0
Affiliation with JCU		
Student	298	68
Staff	2	.5
Both student and staff	1	.5
No association	135	31
Mental Health Literacy		
Yes	154	35
No	282	65

Notes: Overall $N = 438$.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at JCU (Number H7414, see Appendix F). The current study followed the same procedure as Studies 2, 3 and 4 for data collection (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion). Data for the current study were collected between November 2018 and April 2019. Data were analysed using AMOS and SPSS (IBM Statistics), version 25.

Measures

The measures of interest for the current study included 10 demographic questions, six perceived relationship quality questions, 10 perceived relationship stress questions, 12 attachment style questions and 12 relationship sabotage questions.

Demographic Characteristics. Demographic questions encompassed age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of longest relationship, country of origin, history of affairs, seeking help from a psychologist, mental health literacy and affiliation with JCU (i.e., student, staff or both).

Perceived Relationship Quality. The perceived relationship quality questions were extracted from the PRQCI-SF by Fletcher et al. (2000). The PRQCI-SF contains six components of relationship quality: (1) satisfaction, (2) commitment, (3) intimacy, (4) trust, (5) passion and (6) love. The original items were modified to include the word ‘current’ for individuals in a relationship and the word ‘previous’ for single individuals with relationship experience. An example of a modified satisfaction item is: ‘How satisfied are you with your current relationship?’ or ‘How satisfied were you with your previous relationship?’. Items were modified to include responses from all individuals recruited. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (‘not at all’) to 5 (‘extremely’), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. To reiterate, the overall score for perceived relationship quality was calculated by summing all six items. Therefore, scores ranging

between six and 13 were considered low, 14 and 22 were moderate, and 23 and 30 were high (Fletcher et al., 2000). The current study found good internal consistency for items referring to a current relationship ($\alpha = .86$) and good internal consistency for items referring to a previous relationship ($\alpha = .89$). A more extensive discussion of the psychometric properties for this scale, including the findings from other studies, can be found in Chapter 6.

Perceived Relationship Stress. Perceived relationship stress was measured using an adapted version of Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein's (1983) 14-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The PSS was originally designed to measure the degree to which everyday situations in individuals' lives are perceived as stressful. Items from the original scale were reworded to focus on stress in participants' current or most recent relationship. The adapted measure was titled the Perceived Relationship Stress Scale (PRSS). For example, the item 'In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?' was reworded as 'How often have you found that you could not cope with all the stressors in your relationship?'. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('never') to 5 ('very often'), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. The overall score for perceived relationship stress was calculated by summing all 10 items. Therefore, scores ranging between 10 and 22 were considered low, 23 and 37 were moderate, and 38 and 50 were high. Cohen et al. (1983) surveyed three samples (two samples of college students and one sample of a community smoking-cessation program). In these samples, means of 23.18 ($SD = 7.31$, range 6 to 50), 23.67 ($SD = 7.79$, range 5 to 44) and 25 ($SD = 8.0$, 7 to 47) were found, respectively. In addition, the 14-item scale showed good internal consistency, with alpha rates of .84, .85 and .86, respectively. Good test-retest reliability was found for the samples of college students who were re-tested after two days (.85). In contrast, a poor test-retest score (.55) was found for the community smoking-cessation program sample who were re-tested after six weeks. Regarding validity, the PSS was positively

correlated to life-event impact scores in all three samples (.35, .24 and .49, respectively; $p < .05$), showing convergent validity. The PSS was also used to measure stressful life events and showed good predictability of social anxiety in the two study samples (.37 and .48, $p < .001$). Likewise, participants in the current study reported a mean of 27.52 ($SD = 6.86$), which was considered moderate. Moreover, the 10-item adapted scale for perceived relationship stress showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$).

Adult Attachment Styles. Adult attachment styles were measured using the ECR-SF (Wei et al., 2007). The ECR-SF assesses two insecure attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) with 12 items (six items for each construct). An example of an anxiety dimension item is ‘I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner’, while an example of an avoidant dimension item is ‘I try to avoid getting too close to my partner’. A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’), was employed, where high scores indicated high levels of the measured dimensions. Scores for anxious and avoidant attachment were calculated by summing even scores to compose anxious attachment and odd scores to compose avoidant attachment. Therefore, insecure attachment scores ranging between six and 17 were considered low, 18 and 30 were moderate, and 31 and 42 were high. In the current study, the ECR-SF showed acceptable internal consistency for the anxiety subscale ($\alpha = .73$), good internal consistency for the avoidance subscale ($\alpha = .80$) and acceptable internal consistency for the total scale ($\alpha = .78$). Participants in the current study scored a mean of 23.58 ($SD = 6.86$) for anxious attachment, which was considered moderate, and a mean of 16.11 ($SD = 6.43$) for avoidant attachment, which was considered low. These results were comparable with those found in Study 4 (Chapter 8) and past studies. A more extensive discussion of the psychometric properties for this scale, including findings from other studies, can be found in Chapter 8.

Relationship Sabotage. The RSSS was previously tested in Study 3 (Chapter 7) using EFA and Study 4 using CFA. The scale manual, which details information on scoring, interpretation and norms, can be found in Appendix N. In short, the scale contains three subscales: defensiveness, trust difficulty and relationship skills. A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'), is employed, where high scores indicate high levels of the measured dimensions. Once items are reverse coded, high scores in the relationship skills factor indicate lack of relationship skills. See Table 22 for the final set of items.

Table 22

Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale.

FACTORS	QUESTIONS
DEFENSIVENESS	1. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
	2. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.
	3. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
	4. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
TRUST DIFFICULTY	5. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
	6. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
	7. I often get jealous of my partner.
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	8. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
	9. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
	10. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
	11. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
	12. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.

Notes: Reverse questions = 9, 10, 11, 12. Defensiveness subscale = 1, 2, 3, 4. Trust difficulty subscale = 5, 6, 7, 8. Relationship skills subscale = 9, 10, 11, 12.

Internal reliability for the RSSS was assessed with Cronbach's alpha and coefficient *H*. To reiterate the discussion from Chapter 8, Hancock and Mueller (2001) proposed that scales developed using CFA are better assessed with coefficient *H*, as this measure provides a more robust way to evaluate latent measures created from observable construct indicators, such as regression coefficients, especially if items are not parallel. The Cronbach's alpha calculation assumes that all items are parallel, which is often not the case, and is affected by the sign of the indicators' loading. Alternatively, coefficient *H* is not limited by the strength

and sign of items, and draws information from all indicators (even from weaker variables) to reflect the construct. Further, Lord and Novick (1968) proposed that, if measures associated with a latent trait are congeneric, Cronbach's alpha will be a lower-bound estimate of the true reliability. Therefore, both estimates are reported.

Using Cronbach's alpha, the full set of items in the RSSS (12 items) indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). The sub-factors showed mostly acceptable to good reliability for defensiveness ($\alpha = .85$), trust difficulty ($\alpha = .63$) and relationship skills ($\alpha = .76$). Using coefficient H , the full set of items indicated excellent internal consistency ($H = .92$). The sub-factors showed mostly acceptable to good reliability for defensiveness ($H = .86$), trust difficulty ($H = .65$) and relationship skills ($H = .77$).

The scores for each relationship sabotage sub-factor were created using the factor score regression weights obtained from the one-factor congeneric measurement models, as recommended by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1989). This approach was also used in Study 4. To reiterate, this approach is unlike adding raw scores to represent subscales, which assumes that the items are parallel. Weighted composite variables best represent each variable's unique contribution. Further, weighted composite variables are continuous, as opposed to Likert scale scores, which are ordinal. Therefore, for the purpose of creating weighted composite variables, factor score regression weights were rescaled to add up to a total of 1. Conclusively, relationship sabotage scores ranging between 1 and 3 were low, 4 were moderate, and 5 and 7 were high.

Data Characteristics

Normality. Data normality was assessed for the current study's main variables. The perceived relationship quality data showed skewedness values ranging from -0.96 to -1.67 and kurtosis values ranging from -.09 to 2.80. The perceived relationship stress data showed skewedness values ranging from .03 to .59 and kurtosis values ranging from -.79 to .26. The

attachment style data showed skewedness values ranging from $-.59$ to 1.81 and kurtosis values ranging from -1.35 to 4.32 . The relationship sabotage data showed skewedness values ranging from $-.05$ to 1.74 and kurtosis values ranging from -1.43 to 5 . Conclusively, the current study data showed mild deviations from normality, and complied with the parameters recommended by Fabrigar et al. (1999) to treat the data as normally distributed (i.e., skewness < 2 , kurtosis < 7).

Sample Size. Specific recommendations for sample size when using SEM were previously discussed in Chapter 8. In the current study of 436 participants, the least complex full model (Initial Model 1) estimated 26 parameters (a ratio of 17:1) and the most complex model (Final Model 3) estimated 42 parameters (a ratio of 10:1). These numbers are in accordance with the recommendations by Bentler and Chou (1987), Worthington and Whittaker (2006), and Kline (2016), which include a sample of a minimum of 200 participants and a minimum of 5:1 participants per parameter.

Missing Data. The current sample did not include missing data for the study variables.

Data Analysis

The current study followed the same six steps conducted in Study 4 to analyse data using the SEM framework: (1) model conceptualisation, (2) path diagram construction and model specification, (3) model identification, (4) parameter estimation, (5) assessment of model fit and (6) model re-specification (Bollen & Long, 1993; Kline, 2016), with the additional set of steps as per Holmes-Smith and Rowe's (1994) recommendations. Altogether, three sets of analysis will be discussed. First, a series of CFAs were conducted to test how the predicted latent variables fit in one-congeneric models, prior to testing the full models. As explained in Chapter 8, the one-congeneric model approach allows for factors of different weights within the same latent construct to contribute uniquely, and does not assume

that items are parallel (Holmes-Smith & Rowe, 1994). Second, three full models were compared to answer Research Question 1. Finally, a series of mediations were conducted to answer Research Question 2.

Model Conceptualisation. Three full models were drawn and tested in the current study, in accordance with the discussed *a priori* hypotheses. Refer back to Figures 18, 19 and 20 for a conceptual drawing of the Hypothetical Models 1, 2 and 3.

Path Diagram Construction and Model Specification. Paths between variables were drawn in accordance with the proposed hypotheses. In addition, all latent variables were set by fixing the factor loading from one of the observable variables (also called the reference variable) from each set of constructs to the value of 1. The error terms (associated with observable and latent variables) were also set to the value of 1. Further, original paths between latent variables, as shown in the initial models, were fixed to the value of 1 in the modified models once the paths between the observable variables were established. This process was used to identify and scale the model (Byrne, 2010). A more detailed discussion of this step can be found in Chapter 8.

Model Identification. Model identification is assumed if the number of parameters to be estimated in a model does not exceed the number of unique variances and covariances in the sample variance–covariance matrix (i.e., $t \leq k$). The most complex model analysed in the current study (Final Model 3) had 42 free parameters and 42 observable variables; therefore, it met the *t*-rule requirement (i.e., $42 \leq 42$). A more detailed discussion of this step can be found in Chapter 8.

Parameter Estimation. Free parameters in the model were estimated using the ML procedure, as was done in Studies 3 and 4. In SEM, this practice is recommended by several researchers (e.g., Kline, 2016), following the original seminal work of Jöreskog (1967). ML is a robust approach for normal or near normal data, as it provides close estimates of

measurement error and a chi-square distribution closely related to the population of estimation.

Assessment of Model Fit. Six measures were used to assess model fit. A full discussion of each measure can be found in the previous chapter. Also refer back to Table 16 for a list of model fit measures selected for the current study, with detailed descriptions and comments.

Model Re-Specification. When the initial model analysis showed poor fit, modifications were applied to improve the model. The AMOS (IBM Statistics) program provides a set of recommendations informed by indices, such as factor regression weights, error measurement and variance explained, to highlight the best alterations. However, final alterations were informed by the existing literature, previous research findings and the results from the current project's set of studies.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Latent Variables

CFA was conducted for each of the four latent variables used in the full models (i.e., demographic factors, relationship factors, insecure attachment and relationship sabotage).

Demographic Factors. The latent variable for demographic factors was composed of age, gender and sex orientation. Model fit analysis indicated a good fit for this latent variable ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .705$, $p = .401$; RMSEA = .000 [.000, .119], $p = .610$; GFI = .999; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .017), as shown in Figure 21.

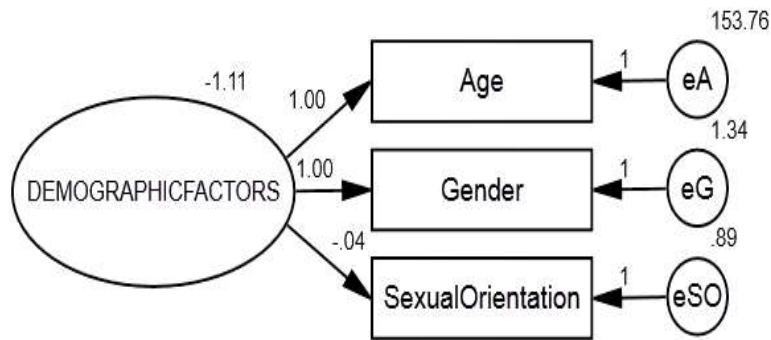


Figure 21. One-Congeneric Model for Demographic Factors.

Relationship Factors. The latent variable for relationship factors was composed of relationship status, longest relationship duration, perceived relationship quality and perceived relationship stress. Model fit analysis indicated a good fit for this latent variable ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .885$, $p = .347$; RMSEA = .000 [.000, .124], $p = .564$; GFI = .999; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .011), as shown in Figure 22.

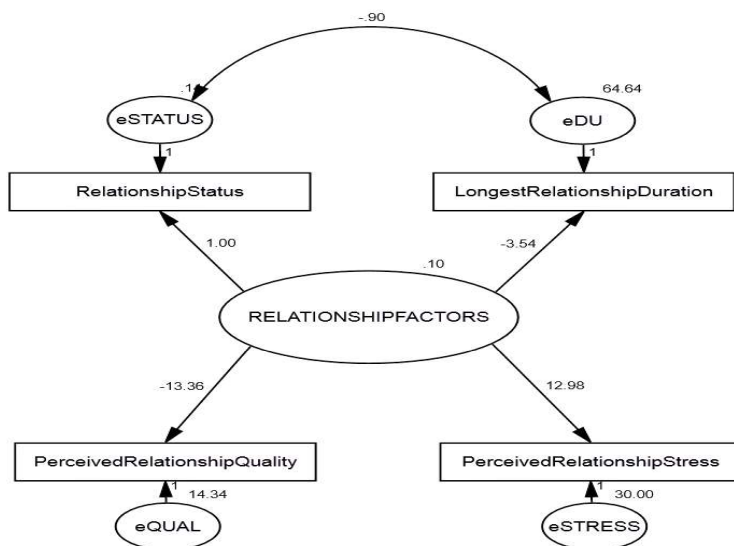


Figure 22. One-Congeneric Model for Relationship Factors.

Insecure Attachment. The latent variable for insecure attachment was composed of anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. Each sub-factor one-congeneric model fit separately for anxious and avoidant attachment (anxious attachment: $\chi^2_{(5)} = 3.996, p = .550$; RMSEA = .000 [.000, .059], $p = .901$; GFI = .997; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; SRMR = .015; avoidant attachment: $\chi^2_{(6)} = 7.843, p = .250$; RMSEA = .027 [.000, .071], $p = .759$; GFI = .994; CFI = .998; TLI = .995; SRMR = .013), as shown in Figure 23. However, it was not possible to fit a one-congeneric model of insecure attachment with the two composite constructs, as a minimum of three constructs is needed to ensure good model identification (Bollen, 1989).

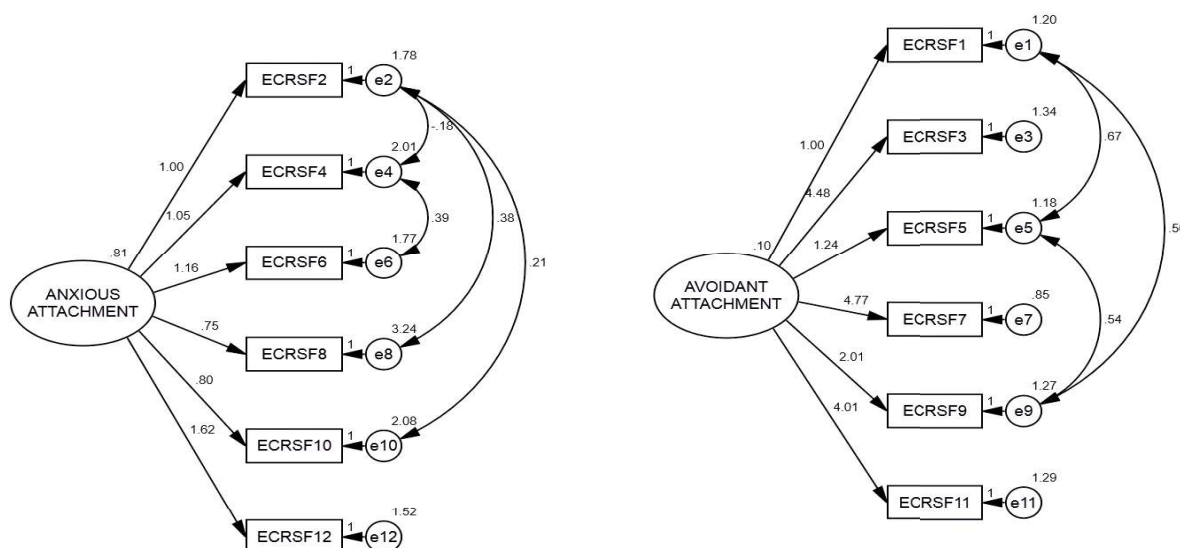


Figure 23. One-Congeneric Models for Insecure Attachment.

Relationship Sabotage. The latent variable for relationship sabotage was composed of defensiveness, trust difficulty and relationship skills. Model fit analysis indicated a good fit for this latent variable ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 3.039, p = .081$; RMSEA = .068 [.000, .162], $p = .244$; GFI = .995; CFI = .986; TLI = .959; SRMR = .024), with the RMSEA fit statistic showing a partial good fit. See Figure 24.

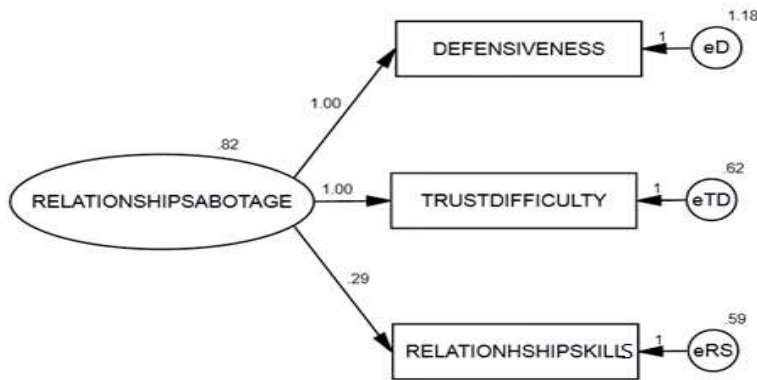
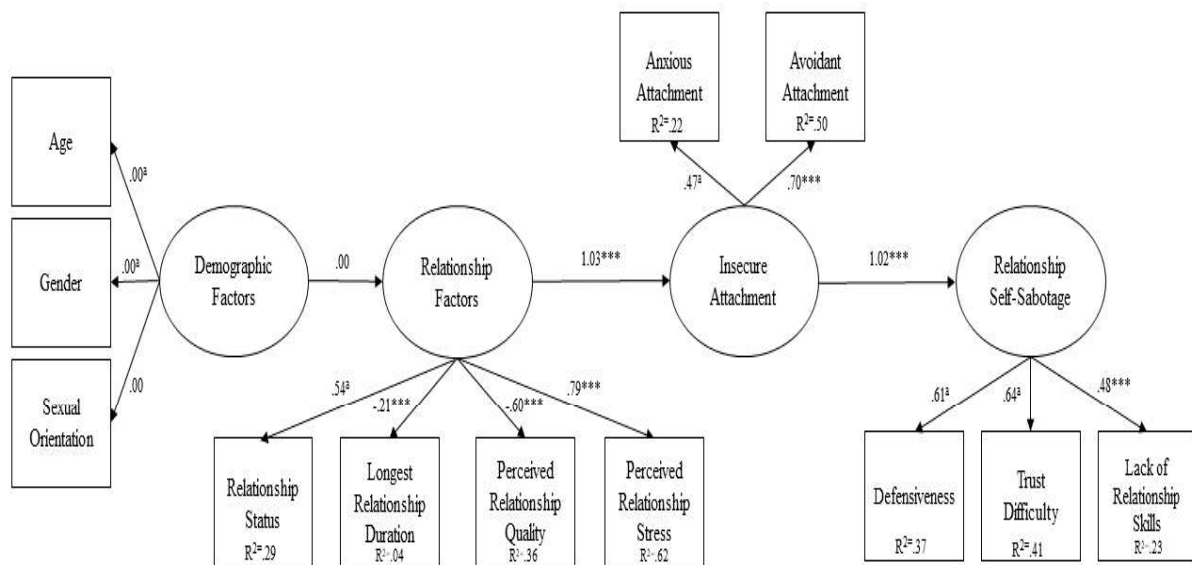


Figure 24. One-Congeneric Model for Relationship Sabotage.

Full Structural Equation Models

Three full models were tested in accordance with Hypothetical Models 1, 2 and 3.

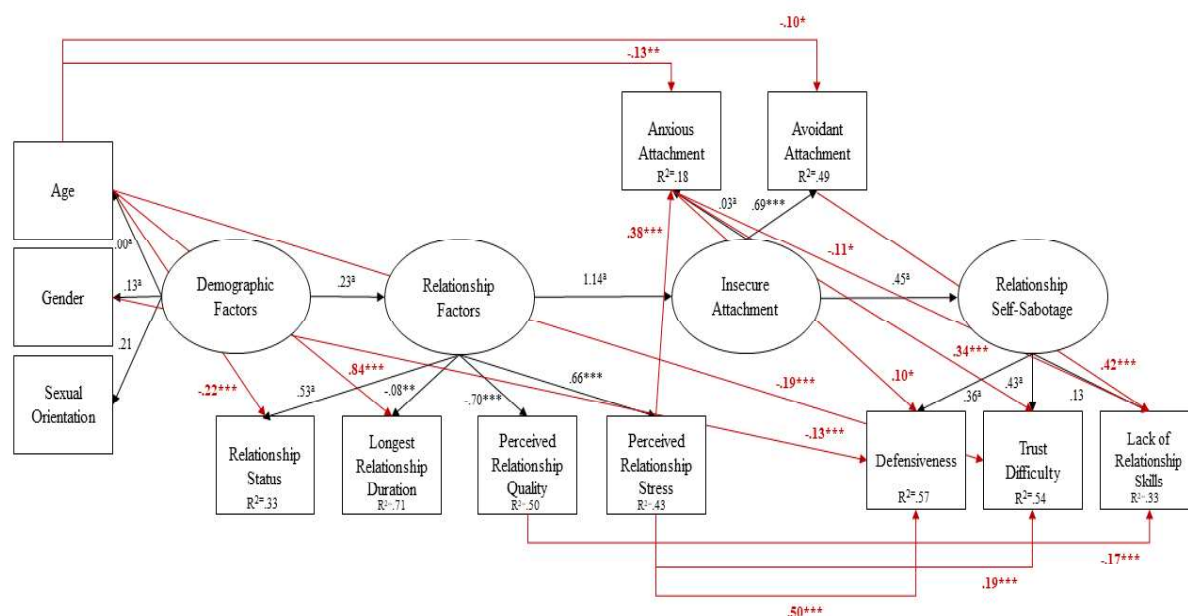
Model 1. The initial Model 1 indicated a poor fit ($\chi^2_{(52)} = 900.948, p < .000$; RMSEA = .194 [.183, .205], $p < .001$; GFI = .783; CFI = .540; TLI = .416; SRMR = .132), as shown in Figure 25.



Notes: a = constrained parameter. *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths.

Figure 25. Standardised Effects for Initial Model 1.

Model specifications analysis suggested added regression paths and covariances. The final Model 1 indicated a good fit ($\chi^2_{(37)} = 46.963, p = .126$; RMSEA = .025 [.000, .044], $p = .986$; GFI = .983; CFI = .995; TLI = .990; SRMR = .032). See Figure 26.



Notes: *a* = constrained parameter. *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths, while red arrows represent added paths.

Figure 26. Standardised Effects for Final Model 1.

Inspection of Figure 26 and Table 23 showed that demographic factors, such as age, were a significant predictor of relationship status ($-.22, p \leq .001$), longest relationship duration ($.84, p \leq .001$), anxious attachment ($-.13, p \leq .005$), avoidant attachment ($-.10, p \leq .05$) and trust difficulty ($-.23, p \leq .001$). Further, gender was a significant predictor of defensiveness ($-.13, p \leq .001$). Regarding relationship factors, perceived relationship quality was a significant predictor of trust difficulty ($-.17, p \leq .001$), and perceived relationship stress was a significant predictor of anxious attachment ($.38, p \leq .001$), defensiveness ($.54, p \leq .001$) and trust difficulty ($.32, p \leq .001$). Regarding insecure attachment, anxious attachment was a significant predictor of defensiveness ($.10, p \leq .05$), trust difficulty ($.34, p \leq .001$) and relationship skills ($-.11, p \leq .05$). Avoidant attachment was a significant

predictor of lack of relationship skills (.42, $p \leq .001$). Inspection of Table 25 also indicates an indirect effect from age to defensiveness (-.01) and lack of relationship skills (-.03), and from perceived relationship stress to lack of relationship skills (-.04).

Altogether, the longest relationship duration explained the most variance in Model 1, with 71% ($R^2 = .71$). Further, the following variables also explained model variance: relationship status (33%; $R^2 = .33$), perceived relationship quality (50%; $R^2 = .50$), perceived relationship stress (43%; $R^2 = .43$), anxious attachment (18%; $R^2 = .18$), avoidant attachment (49%; $R^2 = .49$), defensiveness (57%; $R^2 = .57$), trust difficulty (54%; $R^2 = .54$) and lack of relationship skills (33%; $R^2 = .33$).

Close inspection of the results from the initial Model 1 (see Figure 25) indicated that the relationship between relationship factors and insecure attachment was not linear (1.14). Although regression weights above 1 are valid (Joreskog, 1999), they indicate a non-linear relationship between constructs, which is possibly a result of mediation effects (Spiess & Neumeyer, 2010). This will need to be further investigated.

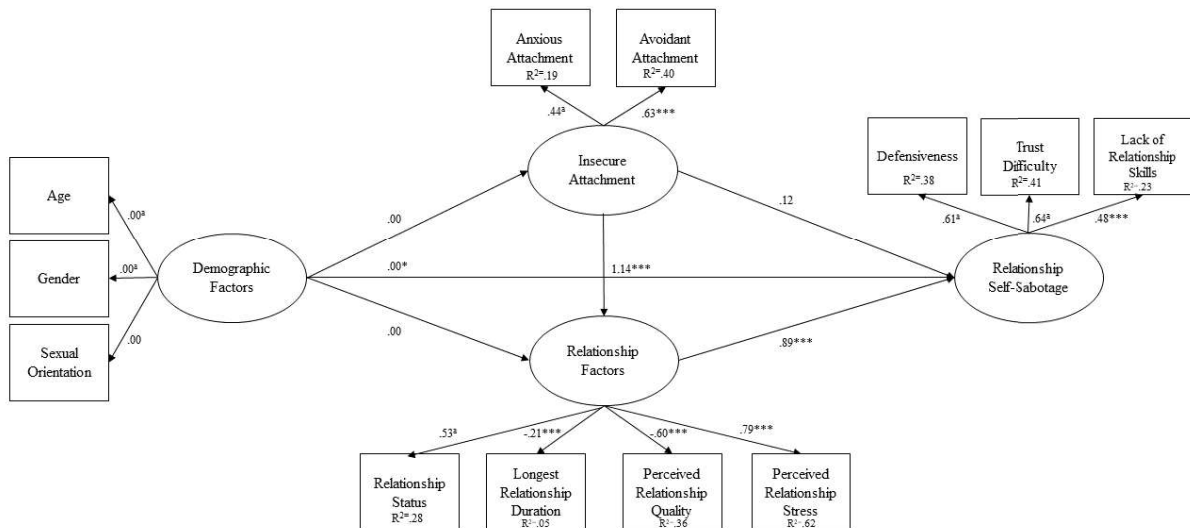
Table 23

Model 1: Standardised Effects of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables.

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables																											
	Relationship Status			Longest Relationship Duration			Perceived Relationship Quality			Perceived Relationship Stress			Anxious Attachment			Avoidant Attachment			Defensiveness			Trust Difficulty			Lack of Relationship Skills			
	Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)						
	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T				
Age	.22***	.00	.22	.84***	.00	.84	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.13**	.00	.13	.10*	.00	.10	.00	.01	.01	.19***	.04	.23	.00	.03	.03	
Gender	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.13***	.00	.13	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Sexual Orientation	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Relationship Status		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Longest Relationship Duration	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Perceived Relationship Quality	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.17***	.00	.17
Perceived Relationship Stress	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.38***	.00	.38	.00	.00	.00	.50***	.04	.54	.19***	.13	.32	.00	.04	.04	.04
Anxious Attachment	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.10*	.00	.10	.34***	.00	.34	.11*	.00	.11	
Avoidant Attachment	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.42***	.00	.42	

Notes: *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05.

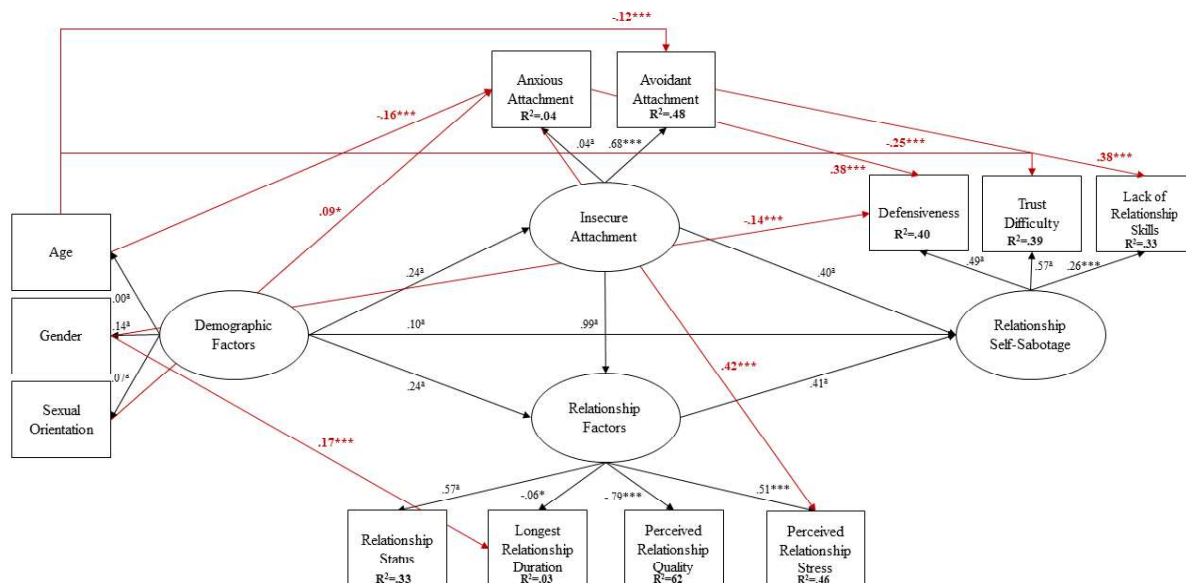
Model 2. The initial Model 2 indicated a poor fit ($\chi^2_{(49)} = 891.219, p < .001$; RMSEA = .199 [.187, .210], $p < .001$; GFI = .788; CFI = .544; TLI = .385; SRMR = .131), as shown in Figure 27.



Notes: *a* = constrained parameter. *** $\leq .001$; ** $\leq .005$; * $\leq .05$. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths.

Figure 27. Standardised Effects for Initial Model 2.

Model specifications analysis suggested added regression paths and covariances. The final Model 2 indicated a good fit ($\chi^2_{(37)} = 48.144, p = .104$; RMSEA = .026 [.000, .045], $p = .982$; GFI = .983; CFI = .994; TLI = .989; SRMR = .031). See Figure 28.



Notes: a = constrained parameter. *** $\leq .001$; ** $\leq .005$; * $\leq .05$. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths, while red arrows represent added paths.

Figure 28. Standardised Effects for Final Model 2.

Inspection of Figure 28 and Table 24 showed that demographic factors, such as age (-.16, $p \leq .001$) and sexual orientation (.09, $p \leq .05$), were significant predictors of anxious attachment, and age was a significant predictor of avoidant attachment (-.12, $p \leq .001$) and trust difficulty (-.25, $p \leq .001$). Additionally, gender was a significant predictor of longest relationship duration (.17, $p \leq .001$) and defensiveness (-.14, $p \leq .001$). Regarding insecure attachment, anxious attachment was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress (.42, $p \leq .001$) and defensiveness (.38, $p \leq .001$), and avoidant attachment was a significant predictor of lack of relationship skills (.38, $p \leq .001$). No significant paths were found between relationship factors and relationship sabotage in Model 2, which may be a result of mediation effects. Inspection of Table 26 also showed an indirect effect from age (-.07) and gender (.04) to perceived relationship stress, age (-.06) and sexual orientation (.03) to defensiveness, and age (-.05) to lack of relationship skills.

Altogether, perceived relationship quality explained the most variance in Model 2, with 62% ($R^2 = .62$). Further, the following variables also explained model variance: relationship status (33%; $R^2 = .33$), longest relationship duration (3%; $R^2 = .03$), perceived relationship stress (46%; $R^2 = .46$), anxious attachment (4%; $R^2 = .04$), avoidant attachment (48%; $R^2 = .48$), defensiveness (40%; $R^2 = .40$), trust difficulty (39%; $R^2 = .39$) and lack of relationship skills (33%; $R^2 = .33$).

Close inspection of the results from the initial Model 2 (see Figure 27) showed a similar finding to the initial Model 1—the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship factors also showed a regression weight of 1.14. This finding suggests a non-linear relationship and bi-directionality between the constructs to be further explored in mediation analyses.

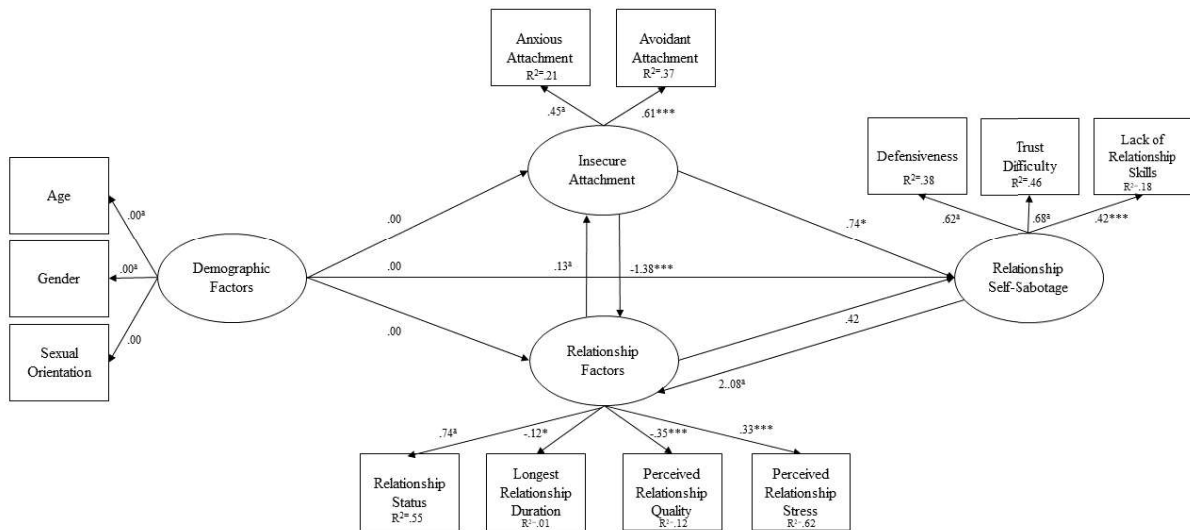
Table 24

Model 2: Standardised Effects of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables.

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables																										
	Anxious Attachment			Avoidant Attachment			Relationship Status			Longest Relationship Duration			Perceived Relationship Quality			Perceived Relationship Stress			Defensiveness			Trust Difficulty			Lack of Relationship Skills		
	Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)					
	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T
Age	-.16***	.00	-.16	-.12**	.00	-.12	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.07	-.07	.00	-.06	-.06	-.25***	.00	-.25	.00	-.05	-.05
Gender	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.17***	.00	-.17	.00	.00	.00	.00	.04	.04	-.14***	.00	-.14	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Sexual Orientation	.09*	.00	.09	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.03	.03	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Anxious Attachment		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.42***	.00	.42	.38***	.00	.38	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Avoidant Attachment	.00		.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.38***	.00	.38
Relationship Status	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00				.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Longest Relationship Duration	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Perceived Relationship Quality	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Perceived Relationship Stress	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Notes: *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05.

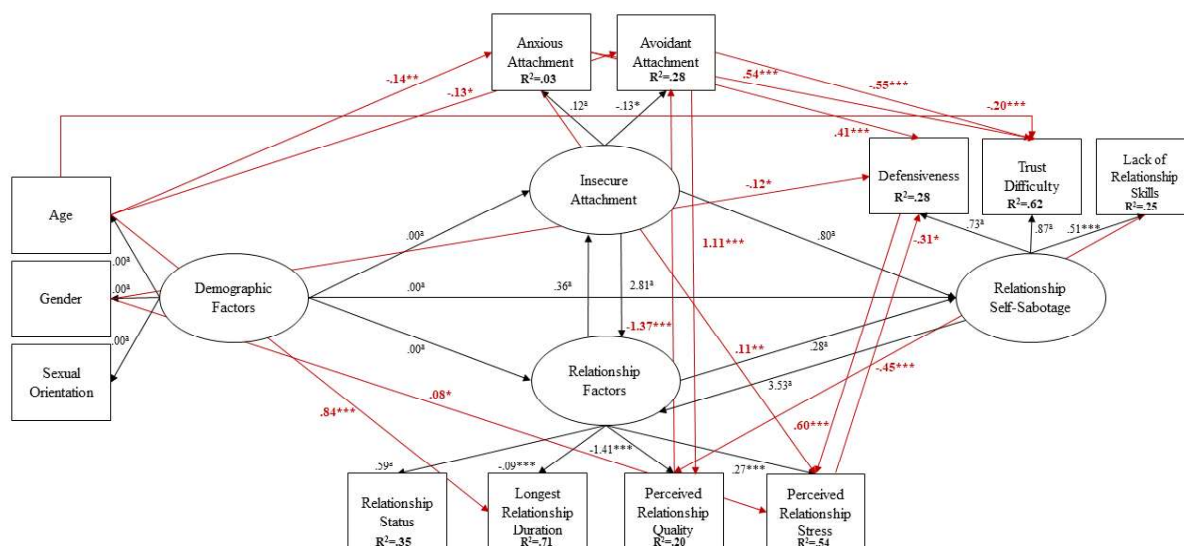
Model 3. The initial Model 3 indicated a poor fit ($\chi^2_{(49)} = 1149.362, p < .001$; RMSEA = .227 [.216, .239], $p < .001$; GFI = .735; CFI = .404; TLI = .197). The residual statistic for SRMR could not be calculated in this model, as means and intercepts were estimated. See Figure 29.



Notes: a = constrained parameter. *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths.

Figure 29. Standardised Effects for Initial Model 3.

Model specifications analysis suggested added regression paths and covariances. The final Model 3 indicated a good fit ($\chi^2_{(36)} = 39.206, p = .328$; RMSEA = .014 [.000, .038], $p = .997$; GFI = .985; CFI = .998; TLI = .997; SRMR = .036). See Figure 30.



Notes: a = constrained parameter. *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05. Squares represent observable variables and ellipses represent latent variables. Black arrows represent hypothesised paths, while red arrows represent added paths.

Figure 30. Standardised Effects for Final Model 3.

Inspection of Figure 30 and Table 25 showed that demographic factors, such as age, were a significant predictor of anxious attachment (-.14, $p \leq .005$), avoidant attachment (-.13, $p \leq .05$), longest relationship duration (.84, $p \leq .001$) and trust difficulty (-.25, $p \leq .001$), and gender was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress (.01, $p \leq .05$) and defensiveness (-.12, $p \leq .05$). Regarding relationship factors, perceived relationship quality was a significant predictor of avoidant attachment (.54, $p \leq .001$) and perceived relationship stress was a significant predictor of defensiveness (-.26, $p \leq .05$). Regarding insecure attachment, anxious attachment was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress

(.30, $p \leq .005$), defensiveness (.32, $p \leq .001$) and trust difficulty (.54, $p \leq .001$), and avoidant attachment was a significant predictor of perceived relationship quality (.44, $p \leq .001$) and trust difficulty (-.22, $p \leq .001$). Finally, regarding relationship sabotage, defensiveness was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress (.51, $p \leq .001$) and lack of relationship skills was a significant predictor of perceived relationship quality (-.18, $p \leq .001$).

Inspection of Table 27 also indicates an indirect effect from age to perceived relationship quality (-.06), perceived relationship stress (-.04) and defensiveness (-.04); from perceived relationship quality to trust difficulty (.30); and from lack of relationship skills to avoidant attachment (.24) and trust difficulty (-.13).

Altogether, longest relationship duration explained the most variance in Model 3, with 71% ($R^2 = .71$). Further, the following variables also explained model variance: relationship status (35%; $R^2 = .35$), perceived relationship quality (20%; $R^2 = .20$), perceived relationship stress (54%; $R^2 = .54$), anxious attachment (3%; $R^2 = .03$), avoidant attachment (28%; $R^2 = .28$), defensiveness (28%; $R^2 = .28$), trust difficulty (62%; $R^2 = .62$) and lack of relationship skills (25%; $R^2 = .25$).

Close inspection of the results from both the initial and final Model 3 showed a high regression weight between insecure attachment and relationship factors (-1.38 and 2.81, respectively). The same was found between relationship sabotage and relationship factors (2.08 and 3.53, respectively). As aforementioned, these results may be because of the existence of mediation effects, which will be examined in the next section.

Table 25

Model 3: Standardised Effects of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables.

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables																										
	Anxious Attachment			Avoidant Attachment			Relationship Status			Longest Relationship Duration			Perceived Relationship Quality			Perceived Relationship Stress			Defensiveness			Trust Difficulty			Lack of Relationship Skills		
	Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)			Effects (R ²)					
	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T	D	I	T
Age	-.14**	.00	-.14	-.13*	.08	-.05	.00	.00	.00	.84***	.00	.84	.00	-.06	-.06	.00	-.04	-.04	.00	-.04	-.04	-.20***	-.05	-.25	.00	.00	.00
Gender	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.08*	-.07	.01	-.12*	.00	-.12	.00	.00	.00
Sexual Orientation	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Anxious Attachment		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.11**	.19	.30	.41***	-.09	.32	.54***	.00	.54	.00	.00	.00
Avoidant Attachment	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	1.11***	-.67	.44	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.55***	.33	-.22	.00	.00	.00
Perceived Relationship Quality	.00	.00	.00	-.137***	.83	-.54	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.30	.30	.00	.00	.00
Perceived Relationship Stress	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		-.31*	.05	-.26	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Defensiveness	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.60***	-.09	.51		-		.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Trust Difficulty	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00		-		.00	.00	.00
Lack of Relationship Skills	.00	.00	.00	.00	.24	.24	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.45***	.27	-.18	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.13	-.13		-	

Notes: *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005; * ≤ .05.

Mediation Models

The results from the full model analyses showed many significant paths between variables, with bi-directional significance. Therefore, it was also important to consider the relationships between sets of variables. The following mediation analyses were conducted in accordance with the paths proposed in the two hypothetical models, which challenged the Rusk and Rothbaum premise. Hypothetical Model 2 (refer back to Figure 19) posited that relationship factors mediated the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. Further, Hypothetical Model 3 (refer back to Figure 20) posited that relationship sabotage mediated the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship factors, and insecure attachment mediated the relationship between relationship factors and relationship sabotage. Consequently, three mediation models were tested (see Figure 31). Overall mediation analyses were conducted to highlight which variables were the major contributors to relationship sabotage.

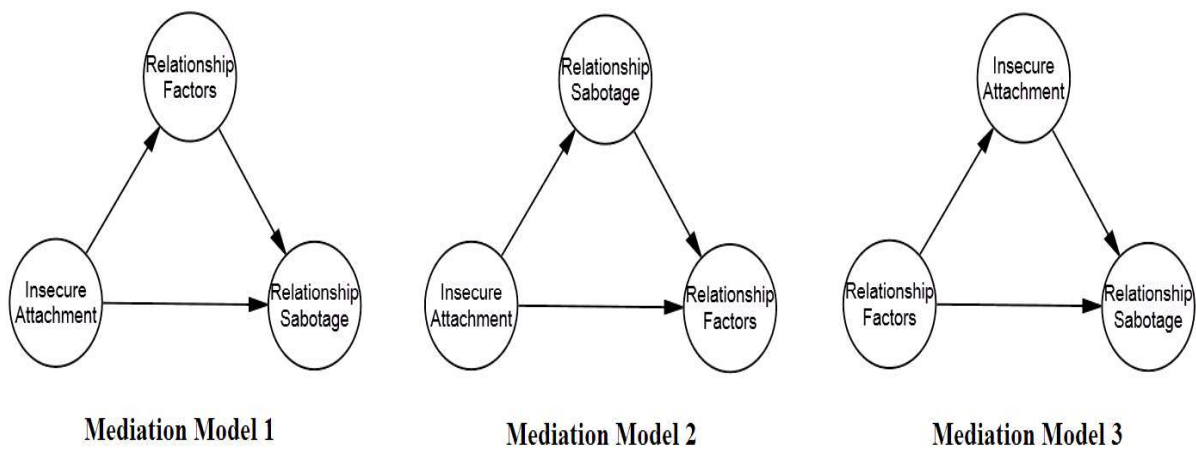
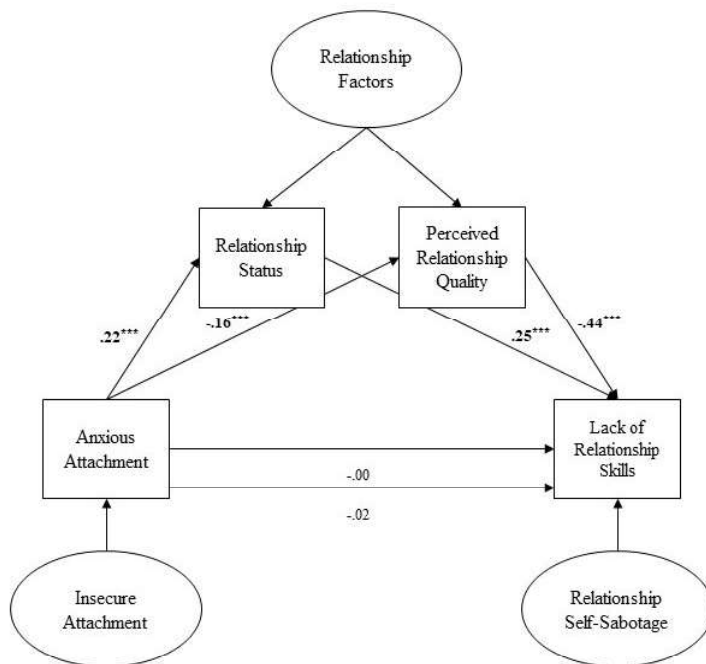


Figure 31. Mediation Models.

A test of chi-squared differences between mediation models and non-mediation models was used to assess mediation effects. The conclusion was based on the difference between the models' chi-square test. The difference between models should show that a mediation model does not worsen the model fit (i.e., there is no significant difference between models), which in turn means that the mediation model is a better representation of the relationship between the variables. All possible three variable full mediation interactions were tested for each model. Full models with latent and observable variables were used for these analyses.

Mediation Effects between Insecure Attachment and Relationship Sabotage. Two mediations were found between insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. Relationship status ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .091, p = .763$) and perceived relationship quality ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .158, p = .691$) were found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and lack of relationship skills. Refer to Figure 32 for the regression weights between variables and Table 26 for the chi-squared differences between model calculations.



Notes: *** $\leq .001$.

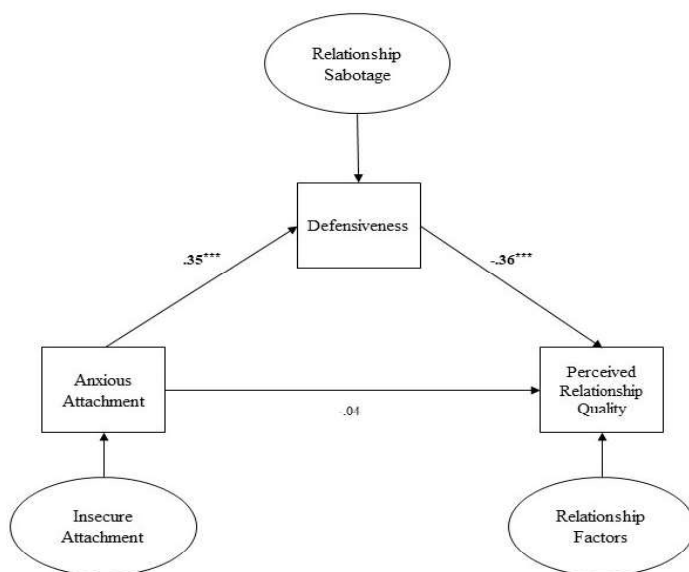
Figure 32. Mediation Models for Relationship Status and Perceived Relationship Quality.

Table 26

Chi-Squared Difference Models for Relationship Status and Perceived Relationship Quality.

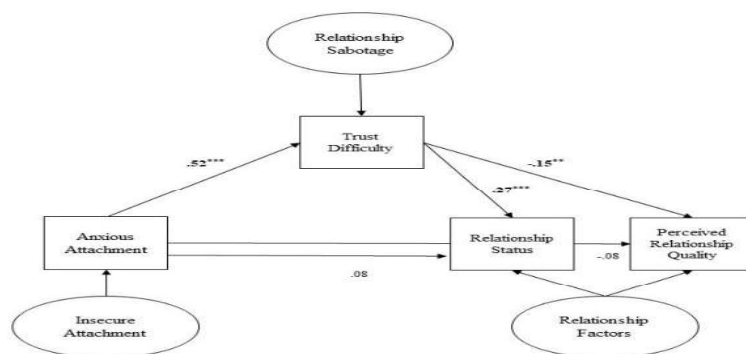
Models	Relationship Status			Perceived Relationship Quality		
	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>
Mediation Model	104.999	43	.000	111.692	43	.000
Non-Mediation Model	104.908	42	.000	111.534	42	.000
Difference	.091	1	.763	.158	1	.691

Mediation Effects between Insecure Attachment and Relationship Factors. Three mediations were found between insecure attachment and relationship factors. Defensiveness ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .072, p = .788$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perceived relationship quality, while trust difficulty ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .000, p = 1$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and relationship status, and trust difficulty ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .033, p = .856$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perceived relationship quality. Refer to Figure 33 and 34 for the regression weights between variables and Table 27 for the chi-squared differences between model calculations.



Notes: *** $\leq .001$.

Figure 33. Mediation Model for Defensiveness.



Notes: *** ≤ .001; ** ≤ .005.

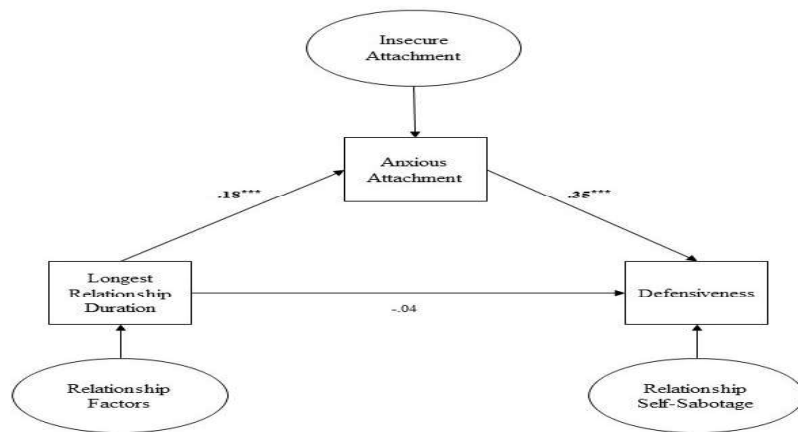
Figure 34. Mediation Models for Trust Difficulty.

Table 27

Chi-Squared Difference Models for Defensiveness and Trust Difficulty.

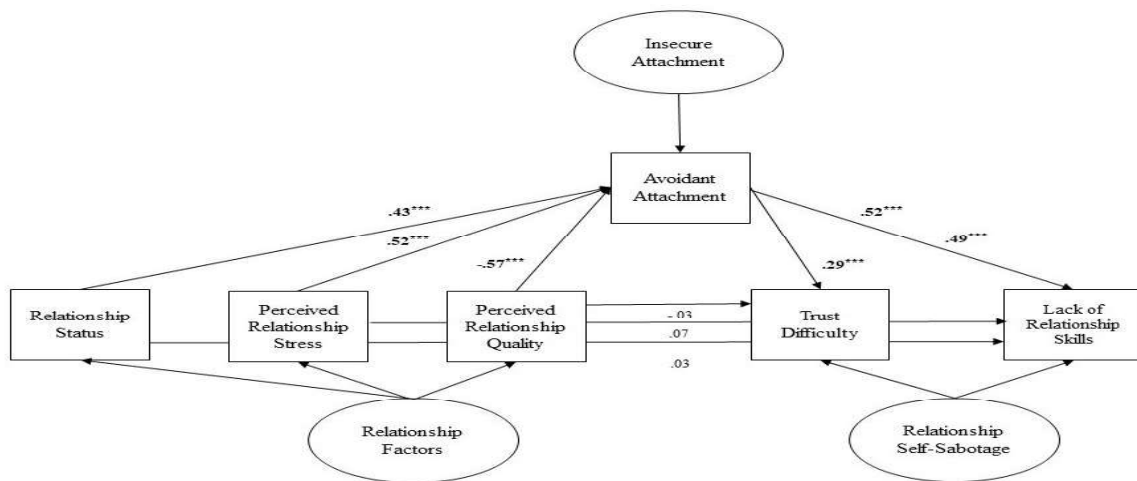
Models	Defensiveness			Trust Difficulty Anxious Attachment & Relationship Status			Trust Difficulty Anxious Attachment & Perceived Relationship Quality		
	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p
Mediation Model	132.55	43	.000	126.38	43	.000	143.02	43	.000
Non-Mediation Model	132.48	42	.000	126.38	42	.000	142.98	42	.000
Difference	.072	1	.788	0	1	1	.033	1	.856

Mediation Effects between Relationship Factors and Relationship Sabotage. Four mediations were found between relationship factors and relationship sabotage. Anxious attachment ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = 2.6, p = .107$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between longest relationship duration and defensiveness, avoidant attachment ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .235, p = .628$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between relationship status and lack of relationship skills, avoidant attachment ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .123, p = .726$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between perceived relationship quality and trust difficulty, and avoidant attachment ($\chi^2_{(1)} \text{ difference} = .063, p = .802$) was found to fully mediate the relationship between perceived relationship stress and lack of relationship skills. Refer to Figure 35 and 36 for the regression weights between variables and Table 28 for the chi-squared differences between model calculations.



Notes: *** ≤ .001.

Figure 35. Mediation Model for Anxious Attachment.



Notes: *** ≤ .001.

Figure 36. Mediation Models for Avoidant Attachment.

Table 28

Chi-Squared Difference Models for Anxious and Avoidant Attachment.

Models	Anxious Attachment			Avoidant Attachment Relationship Status & Lack of Relationship Skills			Avoidant Attachment Perceived Relationship Quality & Trust Difficulty			Avoidant Attachment Perceived Relationship Stress & Lack of Relationship Skills		
	χ^2	df	P	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p
Mediation Model	129.34	43	0.00	425.72	43	.000	384.49	43	.000	365.84	20	.000
Non-Mediation Model	126.74	42	.000	425.48	42	.000	384.36	42	.000	365.78	19	.000
Difference	2.6	1	.107	.235	1	.628	.123	1	.726	.063	1	.802

Discussion

The results found in the current study support the existing literature and go further to offer new ways of understanding romantic relationship sabotage. In accordance with Rusk and Rothbaum (2010), stress was found to be a significant predictor of anxious attachment (as shown in Model 1) and avoidant attachment (as shown in Model 3). Stress was also a significant predictor of defensiveness (as shown in Models 1 and 3) and trust difficulty (as shown in Model 1). However, Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) recognised that dealing with stress is more complex than simply assessing the responsiveness of an attachment figure. It is important that the individual believes in their ability to deal with difficulty and can see their efforts generating results. Therefore, attachment and goal-orientation theory highlight strategies involving interaction between the individual and the context in which they reside. These are cognitive openness (i.e., openness to new information and flexibility to adapt), persistence (i.e., ability to problem solve) and emotional regulation (i.e., ability to seek support in difficult times). These strategies align with the discussion in Study 1 and highlight the importance of understanding cognitive and emotional responses that influence self-sabotaging behaviours. Practising psychologists spoke of clients' difficulty dealing with relationship issues. In turn, seeking help for relationship issues before they manifest as psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety and depression, can re-focus treatment to build individual relationship skills (Peel et al., 2018). In accordance, another relationship factor that predicted insecure attachment was relationship quality. As shown in Model 3, low perceived relationship quality was a significant predictor of avoidant attachment, which indicates the same conclusion that focusing on improving relationship satisfaction is a better way to address insecure attachment. This finding is supported by previous literature, which shows that high relationship quality is a buffer to stress, and can increase coping skills and low self-esteem (Røsand, Slinning, Eberhard-Gran, Røysamb, & Tambs, 2012).

The first mediation model tested relationship factors as mediators of insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. Perceived stress was not found to be a full mediator, which suggests that stress is better understood as a moderator. Other relationship factors, such as relationship status and perceived relationship quality, were found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and lack of relationship skills. This result is encouraging, as it suggests that being in a relationship (especially those of high quality) is possibly a protective factor for insecure individuals seeking to avoid relationship sabotage. Being in a healthy relationship can also help foster relationship skills and subsequently lessen the effects of insecure attachment. This conclusion agrees with research conducted by Riggio et al. (2013) and Byl and Naydenova (2016), which suggested that willingness to learn to be a partner in a romantic engagement, as a product of self-efficacy, can be predictive of healthy relationship outcomes. Further, relationship quality was found to be a significant predictor of relationship skills (as shown in Model 1).

As expected, insecure attachment was also a significant predictor of relationship sabotage. Specifically, anxious attachment was a significant predictor of defensiveness (as shown in Models 1, 2 and 3), trust difficulty (as shown in Models 1 and 3) and relationship skill (as shown in Model 1). Avoidant attachment was a significant predictor of trust difficulty (as shown in Model 3) and lack of relationship skills (as shown in Models 1 and 2). Altogether, these findings suggest that the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship sabotage exists regardless of stress. However, stress would strengthen the relationship between insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. Further, it seems that avoidant attachment is a stronger predictor of sabotage, as evidenced by the R-squared values across all models.

The literature often focuses on anxious attachment and its representative traits (e.g., rejection sensitivity) and much work has been done to show how anxious individuals'

expectation of rejection often leads to relationship break-up. To reiterate the discussion from Chapter 2, previous research conducted by Elliot and Reis (2003) suggested that anxious individuals are more prone to avoidance goals. However, Locke (2008) explained that both anxious and avoidant individuals resort to avoidance goals—the difference is that anxious individuals tend to experience approach goals as well. For instance, Meyer et al. (2005) found that anxiously attached females displayed great emotional distress and impulses to express both approaching behaviours (e.g., to engage with the partner) and avoidance behaviours (e.g., to seek distance from the partner). In contrast, avoidant attachment only predicted avoidance behaviours, which would be more aligned with self-sabotage. Further, the results from the current study showing the interaction between relationship factors and relationship sabotage (as tested with Mediation Model 3) highlighted avoidant attachment as a full mediator of the relationship between relationship status and lack of relationship skills, perceived relationship quality and trust difficulty, and perceived relationship stress and lack of relationship skills. These findings suggest that avoidant attachment is a key characteristic of relationship self-saboteurs. Regarding anxious attachment, a full mediation was found between longest relationship duration and defensiveness, suggesting that being in a long-term relationship can be a protective factor against defensiveness for individuals with low anxiety.

Interestingly, the results also showed a negative relationship between avoidant attachment and trust difficulty (as shown in Model 3), which suggest that less avoidance can lead to more trust difficulty. A plausible explanation of this result is based on the relationship between anxious attachment and trust difficulty. It is well known that anxious individuals tend to have difficulty with trust, as evidenced in the previous literature and the current research. In addition, it is understood that individuals who are low in avoidance are not necessarily secure. In turn, they can be anxious and untrusting. The discussion in Chapter 2 explained that underlying the four types of attachment styles are two dimensions showing

avoidance and anxiety at opposite ends of the spectrum. The model in Figure 1 (Chapter 2) shows that the opposite of dismissive avoidance is anxious preoccupation, which would explain the negative relationship between avoidance and trust difficulty. Similarly, a negative relationship between perceived relationship stress and defensiveness (as shown in Model 3), indicates that involvement in the relationship, which is a concept not directly tested, could be central to understanding sabotage (Fletcher et al., 2000; Le et al., 2010; Shelef, Levi-Belz, & Fruchter, 2014).

As hypothesised, insecure attachment was found to be a predictor of relationship factors. Specifically, anxious attachment was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress (as shown in Models 2 and 3). In addition, avoidant attachment was a significant predictor of relationship quality (as shown in Model 3). In turn, relationship sabotage was also a predictor of relationship factors. Specifically, defensiveness was a significant predictor of perceived relationship stress (as shown in Model 3) and relationship skill was a significant predictor of relationship quality (as shown in Model 3). These findings suggest that insecure attachment and relationship sabotage tendencies will influence how people perceive their relationship overall, which in turn will affect how they respond to difficult times in the relationship.

Regarding interaction effects leading to relationship factors, three mediations were found between insecure attachment and relationship factors (as tested with Mediation Model 2). Defensiveness was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perceived relationship quality, trust difficulty was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and relationship status, and trust difficulty was found to fully mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perceived relationship quality. These results are also encouraging and suggest that insecure attachment is not necessarily a 'death sentence', inevitably leading to relationship break-up. Specifically, and as

aforementioned, dealing with defensiveness and trust issues appears to be a key protective factor to help anxious insecure individuals attain a high-quality relationship.

In conclusion, all models displayed interesting results. However, the alternative models to Rusk and Rothbaum's (2010) premise showed a more complete picture of the true nature of romantic relationships, which is not linear and clear. Models 2 and 3 highlighted how different indirect paths could change and reshape the fate of romantic relationships. Further, Model 3 was a non-recursive model showing reciprocal effects between insecure attachment and relationship factors and between relationship factors and relationship sabotage. Moreover, Model 3 was the only model to show a significant path from relationship sabotage to relationship factors. Finally, future research should concentrate on the mediation effects, which suggest ways to break the pattern of relationship sabotage.

Limitations

It is important to note that non-linear models possess limitations. Spiess and Neumeyer (2010) argued that regression weights and the R-squared statistic are inappropriate measures to understand the results from non-linear models. They suggested using Akaike information criterion and Bayesian information criterion as an alternative, which could be explored in future studies. Nevertheless, results interpreted using regression weights and R-squared are still largely acceptable and not invalid (Kline, 2016). Yet, it would be good practice to exercise caution when interpreting the estimation values provided in the current study, which involved cross-sectional. There is also the possibility for confounding conclusions regarding trust difficulty when interpreting results involving the PRQCI-SF and the RSSS. Future studies would also benefit from testing the proposed models with larger samples. Although the sample size for the current study was within the acceptable parameter to run SEM, a larger sample could give the model further flexibility to show additional paths of interest. Finally, gender differences would have been worthy of investigation; however,

this was beyond the scope of this study and the sample was biased towards females. This also means gender could not be appropriately tested as a moderator.

Future Studies

Further work in this area should consider including relationship beliefs in the prediction model. Future studies would also benefit from further exploring the experiences of self-saboteurs across several relationships and the long-term effects of self-defeating behaviours. Other recommendations include testing the newly developed scale with more people in same-sex relationships and couples. For instance, a worthy investigation would be to compare the responses from each of the partners where relationships are broken or have been sabotaged. Also, individual differences—such as gender, age and sexual orientation—need to be further explored regarding their effects on self-sabotage in relationships. Support is already shown in the existing mean differences between the age, gender and sex-orientation groups, as shown in the scale norming information (see Appendix N). Cultural differences are also expected to come into effect.

Conclusion

Overall, the results from this study show that the best model for relationship sabotage is not linear. The way people arrive at relationship sabotage is best demonstrated in a circular manner. While insecure attachment leads to self-sabotage, sabotaging relationships reinforce existing insecure attachment styles or establish new vulnerable styles. Further, self-sabotaging tendencies influence how people perceive quality and stress in the relationship, which means that individuals' own behaviour is preventing them from maintaining successful relationships. The next chapter will provide a general discussion of the findings from this research project with links to previous research and the theoretical background. The final chapter also includes a detailed discussion of how this thesis contributes to the existing literature, with special attention devoted to its implications and limitations.

Chapter 10

Overall Discussion and Conclusion

'Would you like to work on your issues in this relationship, or another one?'

(Perel, 2018)

This project has offered a novel definition of the self-defeating behaviours responsible for relationship dissolution. Relationship self-sabotage has been defined in a similar way to self-handicapping. To reiterate, self-handicapping is a self-protection strategy often employed in the context of education and sporting activities. However, the term 'self-handicapping' does not fully encompass the complex intrinsic behaviours commonly observed in the dissolution of romantic engagements, as it is limited to mainly the physical barriers employed to explicitly hinder performance-driven activities. Thus, the term 'self-sabotage' was proposed as an alternative. The current project was conceptualised to fill the need for theory development and testing and empirical evidence on the topic of self-sabotage in romantic relationships.

The current project established that a romantic self-saboteur is someone who displays a pattern of self-destructive behaviours in relationships to impede success or withdraw effort and justify failure. A self-saboteur who seeks a romantic relationship is equally committed to portraying a win-win outcome. This definition matches the one proposed for self-handicapping, yet it is not exhaustive. Self-saboteurs also appear to hold insecure views of romantic relationships and, although they might be doing all they can to maintain the relationship (Ayduk et al., 2001), failure is an expected outcome (Rusk & Rothbaum, 2010). Therefore, in the context of romantic relationships, the individual guarantees a win if the engagement survives despite the employed defensive strategies, or if the engagement fails and their insecure beliefs are validated (Peel et al., 2019).

Overall, the evidence from the current project aids in differentiating between motivations to self-sabotage and the way in which self-sabotage is enacted in romantic relationships. Five studies were conducted with the overall aim of developing and testing a scale to measure the construct and propose a working model. The next section will summarise each study with attention to the proposed aims and findings.

Review of Studies

Study 1. The overall aim of this study was to investigate how self-sabotage is presented in the counselling context and understood by practising psychologists towards defining the phenomenon, with possible accounts for individual motivation and representative self-sabotaging cognitions, emotional responses and behaviours. A major gap in the literature was addressed by answering two research questions and providing preliminary evidence on how to define relationship self-sabotage and how to identify behaviours that are symptomatic of self-sabotage in romantic relationships.

The expert accounts collected in Study 1 identified a repertoire of possible self-sabotaging behaviours, with explanations for underlying motivations (i.e., cognitive and emotional responses). Overall, the psychologists described behaviours that are well understood to be maladaptive in romantic relationships in accordance with experts in the field, such as John Gottman and Susan Johnson (as cited in Christensen, 1987; Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Greenberg & Johnson, 1998; Shapiro & Gottman, 2005; Sullaway & Christensen, 1983). It seems that people sabotage romantic relationships primarily to protect themselves, and the many ways they do this were further reviewed as the self-sabotage scale was developed and tested. Interestingly, the practitioners highlighted the same behaviours that are initially employed to make the relationship function well as the behaviours that also contribute to relationship dissolution in the long term. Further, Study 1 exposed an unintended finding. Although there are many approaches to

relationship and couple counselling, the psychologists interviewed in Australia appeared to be practising more within the Gottman method, which is not evidence based, rather than using other methods that are endorsed by the APS. This finding highlights the need to revisit how therapeutic approaches are endorsed as evidence-based practice or best practice, and consequently recommended by psychology bodies and medical insurers.

Study 2. This study aimed to evaluate how members of the general community understood relationship sabotage to address the research question pertaining to a comparison with practising psychologists. No clear differences were established between the responses from the practising psychologists and the members of the general public, except that the individuals with relationship experience spoke more deeply of their fears and motivations to self-sabotage. The participants in Study 2 also spoke of the drive to self-protect as a result of insecure attachment styles and past relationship experiences, as originally proposed by the psychologists in Study 1. The intersection between the two studies informed the scale development process, and 60 relationship sabotage items were written to be tested in subsequent studies.

Study 3. This study aimed to test the RSSS using an EFA. This study was the ‘pilot’ analysis of the scale. The analysis involved a two-part EFA. The originally proposed 60 items (showing 15 factors) were reduced to 30 items (showing five factors). The final factors identified in this study were defensiveness, relationship skills, trust difficulty, self-esteem and destructive tendency. Other factors that were not strongly represented in the analysis, most likely because of covariance, were also discussed.

Study 4. This study aimed to retest and cross-validate the RSSS. CFA was used to evaluate the EFA-informed factor structure and psychometric properties. A final scale with 12 items and three distinct factors was confirmed. The three underlying factors for relationship sabotage to result from this study were defensiveness, trust difficulty and

relationship skills. Construct validity for the RSSS was also established in this study using the MTMM matrix and SEM approaches.

Study 5. This study aimed to establish a model for sabotage in romantic relationships. Prior to this project, a theoretical model proposed by Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) merged attachment and goal-orientation frameworks to offer a possible explanation for how patterns of insecure attachment and insecure relationship views could trigger defensive functioning in individuals, and lead to relationship dissolution. However, no conclusive empirical research existed until the current project. Consequently, two research questions were addressed to establish the best model for relationship sabotage and mediating influences between relationship factors, insecure attachment and relationship sabotage. All hypothetical models for this study were proposed from Rusk and Rothbaum's (2010) original propositions. Three competing models were tested—one in accordance with Rusk and Rothbaum (2010) and two alternatives. All models fit; however, the two alternative models showed a more complete picture of the true nature of romantic relationships, which is not linear and clear. For instance, Models 2 and 3 highlighted how different indirect paths can change and reshape the fate of romantic relationships. Further, Model 3 was a non-recursive model showing reciprocal effects between insecure attachment and relationship factors and between relationship factors and relationship sabotage. Finally, Model 3 was the only model to show a significant path from relationship sabotage to relationship factors.

Project Highlights and Contribution to Knowledge

Overall, the results from Study 5 showed that the best model for relationship sabotage is not linear. To reiterate, it is proposed that the way people arrive at relationship sabotage is best demonstrated in a circular manner. While insecure attachment leads to self-sabotage, sabotaging relationships reinforces existing insecure attachment styles or establishes new vulnerable styles. Further, sabotaging tendencies influence how people perceive quality and

stress in the relationship, which means that individuals' own behaviour is preventing them from maintaining successful relationships. A novel finding that this project highlighted is how lack of relationship skills also contributes to relationship sabotage and overall perception of relationship quality. Overall, much is known about defensiveness and trust difficulty and their effects on relationship satisfaction and maintenance. Therefore, the focus of research and practice should shift from identifying and treating defensive behaviours to improving the skills of people in relationships to increase their understanding of what it entails to be in a couple engagement and the expectations of a romantic partnership. Nevertheless, regardless of how people sabotage their relationships, the pattern to self-sabotage is breakable. The findings from the current project highlight that sabotage does not have to lead to relationship dissolution. The participants' meaningful testimonials regarding their lived experiences suggest that insights into relationships, managing relationship expectations, and collaboration with partners towards commitment are essential steps towards breaking the cycle of self-sabotage.

Project Limitations

A limitation existed for Study 1. The scope of this study was restricted to practice in Australia and a small group of psychologists. Although the number of participants was not a limitation when interpreting qualitative data (because of having reached data saturation), the number of participants was a limitation when assessing preferred therapeutic approaches among psychologists working in Australia. This was a major finding discussed in the current project, as it highlighted a gap worthy of further exploration. Overall, it is acknowledged that this was the least robust study in this project. Nevertheless, the purpose of the first study was not to assess therapeutic approaches used in therapy. Further, Study 2 was conducted to address the limitations from the first study and strengthen the findings.

Regarding quantitative data, limitations exist when developing a scale. During scale development, limitations, such as high correlations between items, ambiguity of items and total variance explained, were addressed for the initial EFA. First, the appropriate rotation method, ML, was chosen considering the correlation between items (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar et al., 1999). Second, ambiguous items that did not accurately describe the proposed constructs were removed. This remedy was possible by having a high quantity of items per construct (Carpenter, 2018). Finally, although the final overall variance for the scale was low, this could be explained by the choice of rotation method (ML), which is a more stringent method compared with PCA. To reiterate, results using PCA can provide an elevated variance explained, which in turn can be misleading when interpreting structural factors (Carpenter, 2018; Costello & Osborne, 2005).

Further limitations were also considered for CFA. Specifically, items in the relationship skills construct might need to be more specific to represent overt behaviour and differentiate between thought and action (e.g., using positive remarks and shared humour to deescalate conflict, Gottman, 1993b). Another possibility is that items referring to openness to a partner's ideas (which is a cognition or attitude) might be better represented as the overt behaviour of communicating. In general, items in the RSSS are better suited to people in relationships (or those who can recall a past relationship). They do not adequately account for those who sabotage by not engaging in relationships at all. This is further emphasised by the fact that most participants (65%) recruited for Studies 2 to 5 reported being in a relationship (and rated their relationships highly), which would influence how they understood their experiences in relationships. The results could have differed if the sample was composed of single people having difficulties engaging in romance, and this is a future study consideration.

Limitations also exist when interpreting the results from full structural equation models, in special non-linear models. To reiterate, Spiess and Neumeyer (2010) argued that regression weights and the R-squared statistic are inappropriate measures to understand the results from non-linear models. Nevertheless, the results interpreted using regression weights and R-squared are still largely acceptable and not invalid (Kline, 2016). Yet, it would be good practice to exercise caution when interpreting the estimation values provided in the current study. Further, future studies would also benefit from testing the proposed models with larger samples. Although the sample size within the current project complied with the acceptable parameter to run modelling analyses, a larger sample could give the model further flexibility to show additional paths of interest.

An overall limitation of this project was sample diversity (i.e., cultural background, gender and sexual identity). Although the current study recruited a culturally varied sample, the survey was only scored in English. Further, answers from gender- and sexually-diverse individuals were minimal, which could have hindered specific conclusions. Thus, it is a recommended step of scale development to test a newly developed scale with diverse samples and translated items (Carpenter, 2018), and it is expected that this step could provide further information towards making this scale more generalisable.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future studies include re-testing the factors that did not fit within the CFA model when developing the RSSS. Specifically, it is proposed that self-esteem might influence the relationship between insecure attachment and self-sabotage. Additionally, future studies should investigate how self-efficacy might interfere with self-esteem and the practice of self-sabotage. Another consideration for a prediction model is relationship beliefs, which were originally proposed by Knee (1998) to be a key indicator of how people behave in relationships. Although original items in the RSSS (under the

‘relationship belief’ theme) illustrated the main predictions of the literature on destiny and growth beliefs, future projects should include the Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale (Knee, 1998) in the prediction model to evaluate findings. Future studies would also benefit from further exploring the experiences of self-saboteurs across several relationships and the long-term effects of self-defeating behaviours. Other recommendations include testing the newly developed scale with more people in same-sex relationships and couples. For instance, a worthy investigation would be to compare the responses from each of the partners in which relationships are broken or have been sabotaged. Overall, individual differences—such as gender, age, sexual orientation and cultural background—need to be further explored regarding their effect on self-sabotage in relationships.

Practical Implications

Understanding how self-sabotage is presented in romantic relationships has aided in the development of a scale and model from which practitioners can identify relationship issues and treat clients. The RSSS is a brief scale that provides conclusive information about individual patterns in relationships. Further, evaluation of the proposed models can offer explanations regarding the reasons that individuals engage in destructive behaviours from one relationship to the next. The current project also offers clear paths for future research to continue to engage in the development of the scale and model within varied samples.

Conclusion

The current project defined self-sabotage in the context of romantic relationships and identified which behaviours are representative of the construct. Models leading to sabotage in relationships were also reviewed. Further, a side goal of the series of studies conducted in this project was to identify the communalities between what psychologists described as self-sabotage and what members of the general community explained as being the construct. No clear differences were found, which suggests that practitioners in Australia are well informed

(contrary to what clients might assume), thereby offering support for the practice of relationship counselling and the Gottman method when dealing with individuals or couples who are experiencing romantic issues and practising self-sabotage.

Overall, this project has shown that fear is a powerful driver, leading individuals to employ protection over intimacy. Love does not come without risks, which means that individuals who seek to avoid pain can also avoid love. However, the described cycle of fear avoidance and consequential isolation is breakable. Individuals do not have to sabotage relationships to protect from being hurt. An alternative is to seek insight regarding how best to engage with romantic partners towards shared relationship goals. The catch is that only the individual can engage in pursuing what they want, as opposed to self-sabotaging. This project concludes with one key message: if love is the goal, sabotage is not the answer.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Interviewee's ID: _____

Date of the Interview: ____ / ____ / ____

Interview Mode: Interviewee's Gender:

 In Person Male Over the Phone Female**The interview opens with:**

Hello, thank you talking to me today. Before starting, I just need to read you the purpose of this interview and the ethics guidelines for this study.

The purpose of this interview is to explore individual's attitudes and behaviours in romantic relationships. I will be audio recording this interview, which will be de-identified and remain confidential. Taking part in this study is voluntary, and you can stop at any time without explanation or prejudice.

Do you consent to participate and start the recording?

After consent is given, proceed to ask some demographic questions.

Firstly, I would like to know a bit about you.

Demographic Questions

1. Could you please tell me your age?

Age: _____ Prefer not to say

2. What is your cultural background?

3. How long have you been practicing (in years)?

4. Where do you currently work?

5. Could you please describe your experience with romantic relationship counselling?

6. What are some of the therapeutic approaches you use when doing romantic relationship counselling?

7. Lastly, could you describe your client mix when dealing with romantic relationship counselling (e.g., individuals, couples, families, LGBTI, etc)?

*Thank you very much for answering these questions.
Now I will ask you a few questions related to what you see in practice.*

General Question

8. What are some common behaviours presented by clients who feel they are in a romantic relationship that is not working?
PROBING: What happens in the “hot” moments of a romantic relationship?
PROBING: What do people say? What do people do?

Goal Orientation (Self-validation)

9. What expectations do you hear from your clients about romantic relationships?
PROBING: What are some common myths and misperceptions you have come across?
10. How do clients explain their expectations in romantic relationships?
PROBING: How do they explain their relationship goals?
11. How would a client act to meet their romantic relationships’ expectations?
PROBING: How do they engage with their partners?
PROBING: From your experience, can you elaborate on that?
12. How do clients justify their actions in romantic relationships that are not working?
PROBING: Do they have insight into why their relationship is not working?

Self-concept

13. In general terms, how do clients define their role in the romantic relationships?
14. Would you say some clients might find it hard to define themselves apart from their relationship?
PROBING: How would you explain that?

Self-esteem

15. In your view, what role does self-esteem play in romantic relationships?
PROBING: From what you have seen, what does that look like?
16. Is self-esteem more important in any particular stage of a relationship?

Self-protection

17. How do clients protect themselves from getting hurt in romantic relationships?

PROBING: What are some of the protective behaviours people use?

Attachment

18. How do you think your clients' relationship history across the lifespan might be impacting their presenting issues in therapy?

PROBING: What patterns do you see in client's relationships with their parents, siblings, peers, and romantic partners?

19. Would you say that your client's childhood experiences have a role in this?

PROBING: How would you explain that?

Rejection Sensitivity

20. Would you say some clients expect to be rejected by their romantic partners?

If answer is no: How would you explain your anxious clients?

If answer is yes: Proceed to next question.

21. How is this expectation of rejection evidenced to you?

PROBING: How do they engage with their partner?

PROBING: From what you have seen, what does that look like?

Fear of Intimacy

22. On a similar note, would you say some clients avoid intimacy with their romantic partners?

If answer is no: How would you explain your avoidant clients?

If answer is yes: Proceed to next question.

23. How is this avoidance of intimacy evidenced to you?

PROBING: How do they engage with their partners?

PROBING: From what you have seen, what does that look like?

Before the next question, please read this preamble to the interviewee.

Before the next question, I am going to read you a paragraph.

There are two common types of romantic relationship beliefs: (i) destiny and (ii) growth. Generally, individuals who believe in a destined relationship tend to assess their romantic engagements early and quickly and as result they also tend to give up easily. Those are usually the type of individuals who believe in “fairy tale” romance. On the other hand, individuals who believe that relationships are developed through growth tend to invest time and effort on trying to make the relationship work.

Relationship Beliefs (Destiny & Growth Beliefs)

24. Based on your experience with clients, what impact would you say destiny beliefs have on their relationship?

PROBING: Would you say destiny beliefs enable or limit romantic relationships?

25. How do clients explain their destiny beliefs?

PROBING: In your experience, what behaviours do clients engage in?

26. What about growth beliefs?

Self-sabotage

27. Why do you think some people regularly start and end relationships?

PROBING: What are the patterns you see in romantic relationships?

28. Would you say clients' romantic relationship patterns become self-fulfilling?

29. What are the behaviours that drive these patterns?

30. Are there points of the relationship where damaging patterns become more prominent?

31. What do clients do to hold-on to a relationship?

PROBING: Would you say that these strategies are maintaining the relationship long-term or merely prolonging it temporarily?

32. On the other hand, what do clients do to break-up a relationship?

PROBING: Have you heard any obvious ways that people test their relationship to the point of breaking?

Preventing Self-sabotage

33. In your practice, what changes have you seen your clients make to break damaging patterns in their relationships?
34. What have you heard clients do to maintain a successful relationship?
PROBING: How do they nurture relationships?
PROBING: In your experience, what behaviours do clients engaged in?

Finishing Question

35. Is there is anything else you would like to add?

*Thank you very much for answering these questions.
We really appreciate your contribution!*

Appendix B

Information Sheet for Study 1

**INFORMATION SHEET**

PROJECT TITLE:

What do Psychologists have to say about Romantic Relationships?

Dear psychologist,

You are invited to participate in the above-named research project.

Purpose of study

The aim of this study is to explore individual's attitudes and behaviours in romantic relationships.

Involvement in this study

You have been identified as a psychologist with experience in romantic relationships, and we would therefore like to invite you to participate in this study. We would greatly value your input. It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. There will be no consequences to you if you decide not to participate. Should you wish to, you may withdraw at any time without explanation. You may also request that any data you have supplied to date is removed.

Procedures

If you agree to be involved in the study:

- You will be invited to participate in an individual interview.
- The interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should only take approximately 30 minutes.
- The interview will be conducted either face-to-face or via telephone.
- The interview will be conducted by the primary investigator, who is currently completing a PhD at JCU.
- Details of the time and venue will be arranged with you before the interview.

Possible Risks

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. However, if you have any personal concerns related to the study, you may choose to discuss these concerns confidentially with the JCU Human Ethics Research Office, Townsville, QLD 4811. Phone: (07) 4781 5011 (ethics@jcu.edu.au)

Confidentiality

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports (e.g., journal articles, and thesis). You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact **Raquel Peel** or **Kerry McBain**

Principal Investigator: Raquel Peel
Psychology/ College of Healthcare Sciences
Sciences
James Cook University

Primary Advisor: Dr. Kerry McBain
Psychology/ College of Healthcare
Sciences
James Cook University

Content has been removed for privacy reasons

Content has been removed for privacy reasons

We look forward to your response to this request!

If you know of others that might be interested in this study, please pass on this information sheet to them so they may participate as well.

Appendix C

Ethical Clearance for Study 1

This administrative form
has been removed

Appendix D

Survey Protocol

The Relationship Style Survey**PART I – DEMOGRAPHICS**

Firstly, we would like to know a little bit about you:

1) Please indicate your gender:

1. Male
2. Female
3. Other

If other – Please specify.

2) What is your age (in whole years)?

3) Please indicate where you were born:

4) In what country do you currently reside?

5) What culture do you identify most with?

6) What is your sexual orientation?

1. Heterosexual
2. Homosexual
3. Bisexual
4. Other
5. Prefer not to answer

If other – Please specify.

7) Are you currently studying or working at James Cook University?

- 1. Student
- 2. Staff
- 3. Both Student and Staff
- 0. Neither

8) Have you either studied or worked in Mental Health?

- 1. Yes
- 0. Never

9) How long has your longest relationship been (in whole years)?

10) Have you ever had an affair outside a committed relationship?

- 1. Yes
- 0. Never

11) Have you ever seen a counsellor or psychologist for issues regarding a romantic relationship?

- 1. Yes
- 0. Never

12) **If yes** - How satisfied were you with the therapy?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

13) How would you describe your current relationship status?

- 1. Committed Relationship
- 2. Defacto
- 3. Married
- 0. Not in a relationship

14) **If in a relationship** – How long have you been in your current relationship (in whole years)?

PART II – PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP QUALITY COMPONENTS SHORT-FORM
(PRQC-SF; Fletcher et al., 2000)

- 1) **If in a relationship** – How satisfied are you with your current relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 2) **If in a relationship** – How committed are you to your current relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 3) **If in a relationship** – How intimate is your current relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 4) **If in a relationship** – How much do you trust your current partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 5) **If in a relationship** – How passionate is your current relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 6) **If in a relationship** – How much do you love your current partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

PART II – PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP QUALITY COMPONENTS SHORT-FORM
(PRQC-SF; Fletcher et al., 2000)

*Modified for people not in a relationship.

- 7) **If not in a relationship** – How satisfied were you with your previous relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 8) **If not in a relationship** – How committed were you to previous relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 9) **If not in a relationship** – How intimate was your previous relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 10) **If not in a relationship** – How much did you trust your previous partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 11) **If not in a relationship** – How passionate was your previous relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

- 12) **If not in a relationship** – How much did you love your previous partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

PART III – RELATIONSHIP SELF-SABOTAGE SCALE (RSSS)

The following statements concern how you feel and behave in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. If you are not in a relationship, think back to your last relationship. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I often criticise my partner.
2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.
3. When I think about my partner, I focus on the things that attracted me in the first place.
4. I communicate well with my partner.
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
9. I get anxious when I think about my partner breaking up with me.
10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.
12. I sometimes hide my emotions from my partner.
13. I prefer to avoid fighting with my partner as I do not like conflict.
14. I try not to get too intensely involved in romantic relationships.
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
16. Sometimes I feel that distancing myself from the relationship is the best approach.
17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
20. I have valid reasons for when things go wrong in the relationship.
21. I feel like I am unlucky in romantic relationships.

22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.
24. The way my partner behaves sometimes makes me feel embarrassed.
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.
27. I feel respected by my partner.
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
29. I feel like I always fail at relationships.
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.
31. The success of my romantic relationships reflects how I feel about myself.
32. I would do a lot better in my relationships if I just tried harder.
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.
35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.
36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe I need to know where my partner is at all times.
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner I know best.
39. I believe that I do not have to change how I am in relationships.
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.
44. I often get jealous of my partner.
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
47. I like to spoil myself more than I should.

48. I enjoy partying and I am always looking to have a good time.
49. My partner often complains about how much money I spend.
50. My partner often complains I drink too much.
51. I would forgive my partner if I found out they had an affair.
52. I believe having affairs is part of being in a romantic relationship.
53. My partner should forgive me if I have affairs.
54. If I have an affair it will be because my partner neglects me.
55. If my relationship is not working I will end it and look for another one.
56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.
58. I believe that some relationships are doomed from the start.
59. I am happy when I feel like my relationship is just meant to be.
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.

Scoring Information:

Partner Attack = 1-5
Partner Pursuit = 6-11
Partner Withdraw = 12-17
Defensiveness = 18-23
Contempt = 24-28
Self-Esteem = 29-33
Controlling Tendencies = 34-38
Relationship Skills = 39-42
Trust Difficulty = 43-46
Destructive Tendencies = 47-50
Attitude to Affairs = 51-54
Relationship Belief = 55-60
Reverse Questions – 3, 4, 7, 15, 26, 27, 35, 40, 41, 42, 57, 60

PART IV - EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP SCALE-SHORT FORM
(ECR-SF; Wei et al., 2007)

The following statements concern how you feel and behave in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. If you are not in a relationship, think back to your last relationship. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- 1) It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- 2) I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- 3) I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
- 4) I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- 5) I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
- 6) My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
- 7) I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- 8) I do not often worry about being abandoned.
- 9) I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
- 10) I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
- 11) I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
- 12) I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Scoring Information:

Anxiety = 2, 4, 6, 8 (reverse), 10, 12

Avoidance = 1 (reverse), 3, 5 (reverse), 7, 9 (reverse), 11

PART V – SELF-HANDICAPPING SCALE SHORT-FORM
(SHS-SF; Strube, 1986)

Below is a list of statements concerning general feelings and behaviours. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- 1) I tend to make excuses when I do something wrong.
- 2) I tend to put things off until the last moment.
- 3) I suppose I feel “under the weather” more often than most people.
- 4) I always try to do my best, no matter what.
- 5) I am easily distracted by noises or my own daydreaming when I try to read.
- 6) I try not to get too intensely involved in competitive activities so it will not hurt too much if I lose or do poorly.
- 7) I would do a lot better if I tried harder.
- 8) I sometimes enjoy being mildly ill for a day or two.
- 9) I tend to rationalize when I do not live up to other’s expectations.
- 10) I overindulge in food and drink more often than I should.

PART VI – PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP STRESS SCALE
(PSS; Cohen et al., 1993)

*Modified for people in a romantic relationship.

The following questions ask you about your feelings and thoughts during your most recent or occurring relationship. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count-up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5 where:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

1. How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly in your relationship?
2. How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your relationship?
3. How often have you felt nervous and “stressed” in your relationship?
4. How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle problems in your relationship?
5. How often have you felt that things were going your way in the relationship?
6. How often have you found that you could not cope with all the stressors in your relationship?
7. How often have you been able to control irritations in your relationship?
8. How often have you felt that you were on top of your relationship?
9. How often have you been angered in your relationship because of things that were outside of your control?
10. How often have you felt relationship stressors were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Scoring Information:

Reverse Questions – 4, 5, 7, 8.

PART VII – OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Please respond to each question with a detailed description of your experience in romantic relationships.

1. What do you expect of your romantic relationships?
2. How do you protect yourself from getting hurt in romantic relationships?
3. What patterns of behaviour do you see in yourself in your romantic relationships?
4. What do you do to hold-on to a relationship that is no longer working?
5. How do you usually break-up a relationship?
6. What are some of the things you do or would like to do to maintain a successful relationship?
7. What holds you back from maintaining a successful relationship?

Appendix E

Information Sheet for Studies 2-5



INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE:
The Relationship Style Survey

You are invited to participate in the above-named research project.

Purpose of study

The aim of this study is to explore individual's attitudes and behaviours in romantic relationships.

Involvement in this study

Involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. There will be no consequences to you if you decide not to participate. Should you wish to, you may withdraw at any time without explanation or prejudice. However, as you are not required to identify yourself, once you have responded to a question, we will not be able to remove any of your responses from the data, if you stop taking part.

Procedures

If you consent to be involved in the study:

- You will be invited to participate in an online survey.
- The survey should only take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
- The survey is available online using this link <http://bit.ly/TheRelationshipStyleSurvey> or by scanning the bar code bellow.
- For those seeking credit points for psychology subjects, you will have to access the survey via your SONA account.

**Possible Risks**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. If you have concerns related to the study, you may choose to discuss these concerns confidentially with the JCU Human Ethics Research Office, Townsville, QLD 4811. Phone: (07) 4781 5011 (ethics@jcu.edu.au)

Confidentiality

The researcher and her supervisor cannot identify you at any time. Psychology JCU students using SONA are identifiable only for the purpose of being awarded credit points and responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports (e.g., journal articles, and thesis) and you will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact **Raquel Peel** or **Kerry McBain**

Principal Investigator: Raquel Peel
Psychology/ College of Healthcare Sciences
James Cook University

Primary Advisor: Dr. Kerry McBain
Psychology/ College of Healthcare Sciences
James Cook University

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for privacy reasons

Content has been removed
for privacy reasons

We look forward to your response to this request!

If you know of others that might be interested in this study, please pass on this information sheet to them so they may participate as well.

Appendix F

Ethical Clearance for Studies 2-5

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has been removed

Appendix G

Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies (COREQ): 32-item Checklist
(Tong et al., 2007)

No	Item	Guide Questions/Description	Answers
Domain 1: Research Team and Reflexivity			
Personal Characteristics			
1.	Interviewer/Facilitator	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?	Raquel Peel.
2.	Credentials	What were the researcher's credentials? <i>E.g., PhD, MD.</i>	Raquel Peel holds a Bachelor of Arts with double major in Art History and Music from Sydney University, a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours from James Cook University, and is completing a PhD in Health from James Cook University.
3.	Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	Raquel Peel was a PhD candidate and was also employed as a Research Officer for Generalist Medical Training at James Cook University.
4.	Gender	Was the researcher male or female?	Female.
5.	Experience and Training	What experience or training did the researcher have?	The researcher had experience working as a qualitative researcher in other projects.
Relationship with Participants			
6.	Relationship Established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	No.
7.	Participant Knowledge of the Interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher? <i>E.g., Personal goals, reasons for doing the research.</i>	Participants did not know the researcher prior to interviews. N/A.
8.	Interviewer Characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? <i>E.g., Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic.</i>	

Domain 2: Study Design			
Theoretical Framework			
9.	Methodological orientation and Theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? <i>E.g., Grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis.</i>	Applied Thematic Analysis. This is addressed in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 6.
Participant Selection			
10.	Sampling	How were participants selected? <i>E.g., Purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball.</i>	Purposive (Study 1) and Convenient/Snowball (Study 2). This is addressed in Chapter 3
11.	Method of Approach	How were participants approached? <i>E.g., Face-to-face, telephone, mail, email.</i>	Participants were approached by email for Study 1 and via various methods to promote a web link for Study 2. This is addressed in detail in Chapters 4 and 6.
12.	Sample Size	How many participants were in the study?	There were 15 participants (Study 1) and 696 participants (Study 2). This is addressed in Chapters 4 and 6.
13.	Non-Participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	None.
Setting			
14.	Setting of Data Collection	Where was the data collected? <i>E.g. Home, clinic, workplace.</i>	Data for Study 1 was collected face-to-face and over the phone, and data for Study 2 was collected online, via a survey.
15.	Presence of Non-Participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?	No.
16.	Description of Sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample? <i>E.g., Demographic data, date.</i>	The sample for Study 1 includes Psychologists with specialisation in relationship counselling. The sample for Study 2 includes members of the general public. Demographic data is detailed in Chapters 4 and 6.
Data Collection			
17.	Interview Guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	The interview and survey protocols are available in Appendices A and D. Both

			protocols were pilot tested.
18.	Repeat Interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out? If yes, how many?	No.
19.	Audio/Visual Recording	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	Yes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
20.	Field Notes	Were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group?	No.
21.	Duration	What was the duration of the interviews or focus group?	Interviews ranged between 15 minutes to 1 hour. This is discussed in Chapter 4.
22.	Data Saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	Yes. This is discussed in Chapter 3.
23.	Transcripts Returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?	No.
Domain 3: Analysis and Findings			
Data analysis			
24.	Number of Data Coders	How many data coders coded the data?	Two Data Coders – Raquel Peel and Nerina Caltabiano. Two additional researchers, Kerry McBain and Beryl Buckby, reviewed codes and themes.
25.	Description of the Coding Tree	Did authors provide a description of the coding tree?	Yes.
26.	Derivation of Themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?	Themes were derived from the data.
27.	Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	The software <i>N-Vivo</i> (QSR International), version 12Plus, was used to manage the data.
28.	Participant Checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No.
Reporting			
29.	Quotations Presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes / findings? Was each quotation identified? <i>E.g., Participant number.</i>	Yes. See Chapter 4 and 6.
30.	Data and Findings Consistent	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes.
31.	Clarity of Major Themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes.
32.	Clarity of Minor Themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes.

Appendix H
Complete Scale Pattern Matrix with Maximum Likelihood Extraction and Oblimin Rotation

Items (N = 60 items)	Factors															h ²
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
1. I often criticise my partner.	-.034	-.067	-.014	-.020	.029	-.910	-.056	.011	-.084	-.041	-.012	-.110	-.005	-.078	-.021	.789
2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.	.032	.066	.034	.016	.042	-.564	.098	.054	-.027	-.039	.015	-.054	-.022	.035	-.009	.440
3. When I think about my partner, I focus on the things that attracted me in the first place.	.123	.116	-.075	-.041	.037	-.115	-.054	-.123	-.058	-.322	-.037	-.012	.028	-.004	.071	.221
4. I communicate well with my partner.	.209	.514	-.280	-.003	.047	.040	.015	.130	-.084	-.082	.043	.016	-.089	.152	-.198	.596
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.	.427	-.047	-.028	-.028	-.016	-.324	-.061	-.036	-.049	.140	.109	.232	-.258	-.016	.026	.540
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.	-.113	.018	.375	-.067	-.026	.002	-.134	-.047	-.155	.012	-.036	-.094	-.247	.217	-.265	.507
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.	-.023	.471	.234	-.048	.169	-.087	-.092	.042	-.102	.097	-.068	-.030	-.147	.139	.243	.568
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.	.051	.072	.028	.022	.031	-.064	-.016	-.071	-.016	.057	.037	-.055	-.729	-.050	.000	.642
9. I get anxious when I think about my partner breaking up with me.	-.039	-.145	.161	-.178	.079	.056	-.309	.030	.086	.022	.000	-.260	-.214	.045	-.104	.439
10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.	.005	-.395	.138	-.089	.194	-.002	.032	-.117	-.038	.084	-.054	.017	.057	.091	-.129	.337
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.	-.162	-.095	.085	-.034	.233	.032	-.036	.014	.085	.012	-.065	-.150	-.342	.286	-.004	.427
12. I sometimes hide my emotions from my partner.	.142	.108	.029	.016	-.030	-.098	.010	.154	.316	-.147	-.045	.034	.077	.102	-.325	.464
13. I prefer to avoid fighting with my partner as I do not like conflict.	.003	.080	-.004	.003	.078	.085	-.047	-.035	.714	.046	-.098	-.065	-.044	.061	.047	.512
14. I try not to get too intensely involved in romantic relationships.	-.135	.095	-.059	.011	.127	-.014	.431	.321	.027	-.127	.065	-.005	-.174	.027	.003	.469
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.	-.006	.614	-.163	-.008	-.043	-.022	-.084	.064	.294	-.119	.026	.064	-.062	-.085	-.075	.595
16. Sometimes I feel that distancing myself from the relationship is the best approach.	.094	.053	.059	.049	.025	-.167	.226	.198	.079	-.427	.092	.067	-.067	.195	-.150	.665
17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.	.027	-.005	.075	.049	.035	-.243	.329	-.016	.232	-.230	.094	.024	-.028	.150	-.059	.456
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.	.580	.087	-.066	-.022	-.065	-.134	.084	.037	.094	.230	.013	-.006	-.083	.299	-.026	.687
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	.345	.138	-.200	-.024	-.087	-.261	.053	.215	.059	.198	-.061	-.021	-.020	.364	-.144	.697
20. I have valid reasons for when things go wrong in the relationship.	.049	-.083	.043	-.037	.000	-.012	.028	-.007	.081	.083	-.025	.057	.558	.007	.051	.364
21. I feel like I am unlucky in romantic relationships.	.210	-.038	-.012	-.022	-.018	-.038	-.080	.822	.018	.064	-.117	-.082	-.034	-.008	.024	.822
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	.436	.038	.142	.075	.244	-.028	.099	.186	.125	.035	-.135	-.048	-.009	-.033	-.175	.561
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	.757	-.014	.033	.040	-.032	-.118	-.010	.115	.070	-.023	-.016	-.085	.020	.026	.021	.742
24. The way my partner behaves sometimes makes me feel embarrassed.	.081	.059	-.012	.054	-.053	-.430	-.017	-.037	.120	-.063	-.063	.035	-.078	.192	.020	.370
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.	.429	.002	-.039	.118	.320	.095	.059	.218	-.001	-.009	-.010	-.020	-.109	.006	-.041	.530
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.	.094	.642	.102	.099	.014	-.099	-.014	-.113	-.057	-.060	.063	-.160	.053	-.091	-.236	.565
27. I feel respected by my partner.	.636	.179	-.001	.006	-.070	.040	-.066	.196	-.133	-.213	-.036	.089	-.054	.069	.021	.723
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.	.815	-.092	.111	.046	.042	-.004	-.089	.047	.032	-.187	.071	-.051	-.133	.007	.071	.829
29. I feel like I always fail at relationships.	.149	.008	-.058	-.133	.297	-.045	.108	.549	.039	-.027	.018	-.052	.013	.057	-.063	.644
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.	.000	-.049	-.095	.044	.479	-.249	-.187	.013	.064	-.088	-.049	-.053	-.038	-.059	-.272	.549
31. The success of my romantic relationships reflects how I feel about myself.	.004	-.034	.083	-.027	.140	-.006	-.198	.112	.125	.151	.083	.054	-.014	.037	-.100	.185
32. I would do a lot better in my relationships if I just tried harder.	-.013	.135	.010	-.057	.267	-.065	.152	.079	.116	.156	-.066	.066	-.110	-.131	-.446	.476
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.	-.021	-.004	-.044	-.004	.643	.003	.009	.136	.100	-.011	-.066	-.121	-.039	.034	-.018	.550
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.	-.067	.065	.338	.130	.111	-.287	.017	.060	-.196	.088	-.018	.045	-.084	-.015	.033	.365
35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.	-.052	.217	.166	.074	.043	.001	-.379	.062	-.048	.050	-.014	-.087	-.068	-.075	.100	.307
36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.	.102	.057	.083	.119	.022	-.224	.148	.070	.134	.001	-.002	-.006	-.382	-.094	.064	.450
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe I need to know where my partner is at all times.	.086	.080	.590	-.086	.144	-.015	-.021	-.022	-.094	.087	-.085	-.064	-.171	.023	.045	.570
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner I know best.	.074	-.020	.470	.012	-.168	-.015	.043	-.009	.085	.016	.059	.010	.067	.034	-.001	.273
39. I believe that I do not have to change how I am in relationships.	.033	.017	.132	.033	-.113	.014	.138	-.003	.098	.104	.183	-.084	.072	-.104	.130	.186
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.	.082	.561	.037	-.010	.222	-.008	.033	.048	.002	-.161	.135	-.002	-.032	-.143	.135	.604
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.	-.036	.603	.090	.018	-.067	-.101	-.036	-.057	.040	.021	-.084	-.076	-.137	-.058	.009	.482
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.	.021	.691	.028	-.072	.049	-.037	-.001	-.006	.011	.022	-.031	.062	.043	-.007	.147	.542
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.	.122	-.077	-.017	-.022	-.004	-.048	.038	.276	.007	-.285	.018	.001	-.396	.120	.085	.516
44. I often get jealous of my partner.	.024	-.040	-.045	-.041	.021	-.131	-.128	.051	.016	-.024	.032	-.133	-.536	-.027	-.072	.446
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.	.002	.037	.337	-.107	.035	.037	.076	.020	-.009	-.031	.009	-.046	-.0295	.009	-.144	.324
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.	.200	.045	.069	.069	-.033	.025	.068	.123	.010	-.017	.041	.100	-.0565	.070	.014	.530
47. I like to spoil myself more than I should.	.015	.042	-.076	-.037	.030	-.105	.107	.071	.071	-.019	.153	-.644	.023	.029	.033	.502
48. I enjoy partying and I am always looking to have a good time.	-.016	.060	-.033	.094	.009	.071	-.007	-.056	-.110	-.030	.745	-.124	-.054	.100	.002	.579
49. My partner often complains about how much money I spend.	.231	.068	.052	.136	.036	-.132	-.086	.009	-.028	.054	-.085	-.326	-.143	.036	.003	.357
50. My partner often complains I drink too much.	.158	.087	-.052	.082	.376	-.131	.019	-.056	-.034	.075	.366	.110	-.080	-.032	.054	.405
51. I would forgive my partner if I found out they had an affair.	.033	-.149	-.031	.771	.161	.046	-.076	-.081	-.007	-.036	.011	.049	.165	.024	-.075	.649
52. I believe having affairs is part of being in a romantic relationship.	.043	.077	-.015	.627	-.016	.026	.177	-.049	-.010	.061	.159	-.090	-.193	-.085	.048	.590
53. My partner should forgive me if I have affairs.	-.070	-.053	.013	.878	-.136	-.050	-.059	.036	.033	.031	-.016	-.001	-.056	.001	-.013	.759
54. If I have an affair it will be because my partner neglects me.	-.021	.077	.088	.161	-.087	-.214	-.115	.133	-.010	.015	.143	.096	.006	.062	.078	.278
55. If my relationship is not working I will end it and look for another one.	-.011	-.051	.078	.005	-.119	-.054	.357	.138	.038	-.175	.165	-.147	-.046	-.068	.012	.341
56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.	-.061	-.081	.169	-.006	.024	.057	.544	-.040	-.086	.110	-.017	-.179	.048	-.028	.002	.421
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.	.075	.318	-.052	.260	.151	.100	.010	.069	-.075	-.091	-.262	.096	.029	.038	.096	.396
58. I believe that some relationships are doomed from the start.	-.154	-.110	.066	.031	-.025	-.077	-.034	.177	.167	-.076	.188	.138	.058	.043	-.066	.216
59. I am happy when I feel like my relationship is just meant to be.	-.034	-.199	.131	-.083	-.132	.092	-.142	.149	.007	.190	.169	-.042	.044	-.003	-.302	.383
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.	.030	.357	.043	.003	-.029	-.051	-.029	.109	.001	.052	-.118	.000	.040	-.268	.326	.443
Eigenvalues	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591	16.591
% Variance	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	49.794
Trace	6.125	5.051	2.180	2.756	2.868	4.892	1.693	4.290	1.873	1.730	1.526	1.514	5.310	2.343	2.035	

Notes: Coefficients greater than .32 are in bold; Final traces are the transformed eigenvalues variance accounted for statistic after rotation.

Appendix I
Complete Scale Structure Matrix with Maximum Likelihood Extraction and Oblimin Rotation

Items (N = 60)	Factors															h ²	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15		
1. I often criticise my partner.	.234	.172	.105	.129	.146	-.869	-.028	.144	-.016	-.129	.110	-.116	-.300	.085	-.071	.789	
2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.	.276	.228	.104	.145	.140	-.636	.121	.215	.056	-.143	.121	-.083	-.279	.143	-.040	.440	
3. When I think about my partner, I focus on the things that attracted me in the first place.	.178	.232	-.175	.047	.044	-.166	-.015	-.066	-.083	-.363	-.070	.020	-.028	.000	.119	.221	
4. I communicate well with my partner.	.463	.559	-.295	.111	.223	-.233	.013	.309	.043	-.272	-.028	.035	-.264	.151	-.117	.596	
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.	.549	.173	.038	.128	.108	-.502	-.075	.186	-.014	.058	.137	.170	-.385	.146	-.007	.540	
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.	-.075	-.078	.498	-.160	.091	-.094	-.196	.017	-.109	.146	-.059	-.229	-.383	.281	-.309	.507	
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.	.184	.550	.292	.059	.255	-.266	-.150	.116	-.143	.070	-.089	-.130	-.403	.070	.257	.568	
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.	.252	.260	.234	.056	.254	-.318	-.047	.150	-.041	.043	.047	-.241	-.781	.066	-.037	.642	
9. I get anxious when I think about my partner breaking up with me.	-.064	-.166	.294	-.287	.166	.021	-.309	.087	.101	.162	-.057	-.340	-.315	.156	-.254	.439	
10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.	-.143	-.470	.159	-.194	.136	.111	-.017	-.123	-.027	.195	-.088	-.017	.062	.152	-.260	.337	
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.	-.032	-.093	.229	-.122	.331	-.084	-.075	.154	.121	.048	-.084	-.253	-.447	.357	-.185	.427	
12. I sometimes hide my emotions from my partner.	.285	.101	-.028	.020	.095	-.256	.053	.382	.468	-.217	.007	.042	-.096	.270	-.400	.464	
13. I prefer to avoid fighting with my partner as I do not like conflict.	.060	.062	-.012	-.049	.117	.003	-.022	.188	.680	.010	-.061	-.077	-.069	.145	-.119	.512	
14. I try not to get too intensely involved in romantic relationships.	.099	.156	-.025	.063	.199	-.170	.471	.433	.173	-.254	.156	-.079	-.265	.077	-.043	.469	
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.	.227	.648	-.220	.109	.083	-.210	-.054	.232	.310	-.265	.009	.071	-.148	-.090	.012	.595	
16. Sometimes I feel that distancing myself from the relationship is the best approach.	.341	.156	-.010	.134	.122	-.418	.315	.450	.272	-.533	.184	.034	-.264	.358	-.203	.665	
17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.	.196	.056	.051	.121	.061	-.380	.391	.233	.331	-.328	.211	-.020	-.156	.260	-.121	.456	
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.	.715	.198	.004	.080	.085	-.394	.071	.330	.204	.072	.053	-.022	-.321	.422	-.102	.687	
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	.593	.199	-.107	.051	.107	-.463	.035	.456	.251	-.007	-.008	.009	-.282	.493	-.235	.697	
20. I have valid reasons for when things go wrong in the relationship.	.106	-.173	.070	-.055	-.026	-.083	.033	.125	.178	-.073	.094	-.005	-.043	.577	-.075	.364	
21. I feel like I am unlucky in romantic relationships.	.445	.131	.046	-.001	.183	-.240	-.015	.864	.265	-.020	-.010	-.079	-.321	.205	-.139	.822	
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	.552	.193	.116	.110	.399	-.273	.106	.424	.234	-.012	-.099	-.108	-.313	.141	-.275	.561	
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	.831	.234	-.003	.161	.111	-.400	.056	.380	.170	-.118	.038	-.080	-.273	.220	-.072	.742	
24. The way my partner behaves sometimes makes me feel embarrassed.	.298	.187	.024	.144	.051	-.532	-.009	.162	.168	-.169	.022	.034	-.247	.300	-.035	.370	
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.	.560	.202	-.055	.178	.446	-.189	.083	.421	.105	-.084	-.021	-.054	-.342	.135	-.128	.530	
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.	.256	.660	.086	.212	.131	-.291	-.009	.016	-.055	-.126	.038	-.191	-.190	-.155	-.046	.565	
27. I feel respected by my partner.	.758	.404	-.110	.152	.077	-.283	-.014	.375	-.030	-.313	-.038	.097	-.275	.195	.053	.723	
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.	.860	.224	.051	.180	.167	-.363	.002	.343	.095	-.223	-.397	.093	-.085	-.397	.223	.010	.829
29. I feel like I always fail at relationships.	.368	.115	-.035	-.084	.421	-.235	.153	.692	.272	-.124	.042	-.082	-.286	.222	-.239	.644	
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.	.158	.069	-.076	.044	.593	-.322	-.158	.183	.135	-.093	-.117	-.064	-.262	.085	-.399	.549	
31. The success of my romantic relationships reflects how I feel about myself.	.032	-.061	.133	-.050	.176	-.057	-.210	.183	.175	.192	.057	.028	-.110	.116	-.202	.185	
32. I would do a lot better in my relationships if I just tried harder.	.107	.097	.061	-.083	.419	-.151	.088	.248	.219	.123	-.092	-.033	-.250	-.019	-.506	.476	
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.	.129	.094	-.024	-.015	.700	-.113	-.006	.281	.161	-.030	-.136	-.167	-.280	.101	-.202	.550	
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.	.069	.165	.405	.192	.167	-.362	-.018	.089	-.188	.124	.056	-.051	-.289	.017	.043	.365	
35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.	.007	.279	.206	.090	.098	-.069	-.385	.021	-.112	.124	-.049	-.109	-.186	-.099	.129	.307	
36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.	.325	.275	.178	.205	.177	-.437	.169	.291	.155	-.073	.113	-.123	-.514	.040	.022	.450	
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe I need to know where my partner is at all times.	.098	.122	.654	-.086	.209	-.151	-.076	.058	-.128	.231	-.070	-.251	-.414	.075	-.011	.570	
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner I know best.	.007	-.066	.460	.009	-.198	-.065	.062	.032	.084	.116	.151	-.066	-.023	.078	-.002	.273	
39. I believe that I do not have to change how I am in relationships.	-.025	.007	.157	.072	-.186	.016	.185	-.009	.069	.113	.257	-.104	.078	-.139	.179	.186	
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.	.278	.694	-.031	.174	.268	-.234	.072	.173	-.012	.173	.100	-.053	-.234	-.200	.230	.604	
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.	.160	.647	-.119	.114	.065	-.065	.035	-.015	-.050	-.080	-.140	-.287	-.124	.135	-.482	.482	
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.	.201	.717	-.027	.086	.100	-.176	-.032	.056	-.036	-.091	-.069	.037	-.116	-.132	.275	.542	
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.	.350	.127	.027	.033	.152	-.307	.103	.462	.131	-.349	.080	-.075	.512	.298	-.025	.516	
44. I often get jealous of my partner.	.205	.118	.135	-.037	.225	-.309	-.122	.230	.055	-.029	.038	-.249	-.623	.130	-.159	.446	
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.	.055	.038	.417	-.133	.141	-.110	.055	.147	.029	.051	.026	-.214	-.415	.105	-.194	.324	
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.	.408	.225	.177	.126	.166	-.297	.067	.360	.071	-.072	.094	-.045	-.647	.219	-.038	.530	
47. I like to spoil myself more than I should.	.096	.089	.078	-.036	.071	-.161	.204	.149	.132	-.065	.200	-.641	-.187	.031	-.009	.502	
48. I enjoy partying and I am always looking to have a good time.	.007	.022	.073	.198	-.087	-.090	.106	.033	-.043	-.038	.725	-.135	-.082	.041	.085	.579	
49. My partner often complains about how much money I spend.	.350	.229	.157	.155	.180	-.294	-.072	.135	-.019	.029	-.051	-.355	-.373	.099	-.020	.357	
50. My partner often complains I drink too much.	.281	.223	-.016	.236	.366	-.311	.041	.130	-.007	.010	.327	.065	-.234	-.008	.042	.405	
51. I would forgive my partner if I found out they had an affair.	.058	-.048	-.118	.737	.116	-.036	-.043	-.084	-.040	-.046	.075	.175	-.179	-.011	.004	.649	
52. I believe having affairs is part of being in a romantic relationship.	.174	.235	.045	.674	.025	-.178	.226	.035	-.048	-.016	.283	-.092	-.192	-.129	.182	.590	
53. My partner should forgive me if I have affairs.	.072	.092	.026	.852	-.087	-.188	-.013	.037	.002	-.014	.156	.088	-.023	-.014	.107	.759	
54. If I have an affair it will be because my partner neglects me.	.148	.122	.126	.237	-.058	-.334	-.088	.209	.062	-.037	.219	.113	-.126	.268	.068	.278	
55. If my relationship is not working I will end it and look for another one.	.049	-.006	.099	.047	-.122	-.125	.449	.202	.122	-.217	.287	-.195	-.085	-.019	.025	.341	
56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.	-.133	-.154	.216	-.043	-.041	.117	.527	-.076	-.079	.112	.066	-.256	.047	-.098	.024	.421	
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.	.218	.425	-.168	.308	.213	-.037	-.024	.074	-.104	-.179	-.274	.135	-.051	-.034	.172	.396	
58. I believe that some relationships are doomed from the start.	-.102	-.153	.056	.033	-.057	-.089	.021	.218	.259	-.066	.247	.146	.055	.125	-.132	.216	
59. I am happy when I feel like my relationship is just meant to be.	-.149	-.360	.222	-.189	-.121	.139	-.138	.107	.104	.299	.163	-.062	.051	.077	-.356	.383	
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.	.100	.476	.020	.157	-.056	-.104	.013	.059	-.077	.003	.148	-.009	-.021	-.355	.441	.443	
Eigenvalues	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	10.591	
% Variance	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	16.709	
Trace	6.125	5.051	2.180	2.756	2.868	4.892	1.693	4.290	1.873	1.730	1.526	1.514	5.310	2.343	2.035		

Notes: Coefficients greater than .32 are in bold; Final traces are the transformed eigenvalue variance accounted for statistic after rotation.

Appendix J

Reduced Scale Pattern Matrix with Maximum Likelihood Extraction and Oblimin Rotation

Items (N= 39)	Factors								h ²
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.	.840	-.056	.130	-.014	.008	-.006	.026	-.160	.780
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	.843	-.001	-.065	-.094	-.016	.044	.081	.001	.744
27. I feel respected by my partner.	.721	.193	.064	.043	.086	-.065	-.083	-.040	.655
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.	.707	.004	.034	-.109	.032	-.033	.109	.199	.618
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	.534	.048	-.031	-.006	-.385	.083	.178	.059	.525
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.	.511	.045	.129	.107	-.365	.094	-.088	-.060	.536
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.	.450	-.088	.146	-.309	.109	-.158	-.013	-.167	.464
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	.547	.054	.013	-.238	-.045	-.055	-.015	.404	.667
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.	-.003	.746	-.056	.011	.000	-.015	.056	.021	.533
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.	.024	.607	-.064	-.143	-.083	.040	.133	-.010	.444
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.	.012	.652	.020	-.049	-.011	.034	-.232	.153	.500
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.	-.073	.639	.102	-.091	.026	-.056	.140	.038	.462
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.	.054	.644	.030	-.009	-.125	.127	-.046	-.190	.579
4. I communicate well with my partner.	.281	.482	.107	.009	-.097	-.010	-.261	.206	.562
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.	.012	.487	.231	-.045	-.027	-.140	.278	-.055	.498
10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.	-.019	-.446	-.027	.018	-.203	.009	.182	.088	.306
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.	-.012	.463	-.085	-.021	.153	.055	.036	-.293	.386
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe I need to know where my partner is at all times.	.065	.053	.295	.027	-.062	-.061	.599	-.106	.575
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner I know best.	.106	-.043	-.020	-.032	.183	.106	.418	.048	.222
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.	-.110	-.096	.416	-.033	-.019	-.123	.373	.192	.451
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.	-.040	.077	.100	-.286	-.078	-.001	.323	-.160	.303
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.	-.003	.005	.398	.042	-.054	.075	.263	.043	.291
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.	.016	.052	.090	.038	-.719	.052	-.043	-.003	.567
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.	-.007	-.057	.030	-.267	-.603	-.141	-.119	.003	.515
49. My partner often complains I drink too much.	.157	.070	.048	-.192	-.167	-.005	-.051	-.226	.223
1. I often criticise my partner.	-.051	-.018	-.030	-.886	-.062	-.025	.026	-.073	.753
2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.	.050	.103	.028	-.584	-.040	.113	.031	.008	.452
24. The way my partner behaves sometimes makes me feel embarrassed.	.142	.072	.076	-.438	.046	-.014	-.037	.166	.337
56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.	-.102	-.058	-.045	.099	-.050	.483	.254	-.065	.334
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.	.154	.385	-.067	.117	-.112	-.127	-.098	-.057	.263
35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.	-.048	.244	.092	.008	-.053	-.250	.184	-.117	.223
55. If my relationship is not working I will end it and look for another one.	-.027	.056	.090	-.064	.052	.686	-.039	-.031	.488
17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.	.096	.018	.056	-.290	-.034	.347	-.085	.140	.311
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.	.022	.103	.651	-.092	-.011	-.041	.037	-.119	.560
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.	.260	.064	.604	.001	.068	.094	-.074	-.053	.535
44. I often get jealous of my partner.	.014	-.019	.525	-.158	-.098	-.066	-.044	-.029	.398
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.	.238	.005	.499	-.057	.013	.186	-.222	-.005	.463
36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.	.142	.153	.293	-.229	-.049	.184	.037	-.091	.396
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.	-.100	-.105	.466	.029	-.244	-.007	.087	.171	.380
Eigenvalues	8.714	3.473	2.850	1.935	1.593	1.535	1.262	1.165	
% Variance	20.876	7.368	6.179	3.1777	3.333	2.723	1.798	1.471	46.924
Trace	6.051	4.684	4.480	4.132	2.309	1.246	1.807	1.069	

Notes: Coefficients greater than .32 are in bold; Final traces are the transformed eigenvalue variance accounted for statistic after rotation.

Appendix K

Reduced Scale Structure Matrix with Maximum Likelihood Extraction and Oblimin Rotation

Items (N = 39)	Factors								h ²
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
28. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.	.859	.253	-.390	-.368	-.162	.066	-.042	-.117	.780
23. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.	.853	.248	.258	-.401	-.147	.121	-.044	.026	.744
27. I feel respected by my partner.	.771	.421	.258	-.277	-.064	-.024	-.180	-.064	.655
18. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.	.744	.183	-.316	-.389	-.119	.049	.013	-.212	.618
22. I feel like I am always being tested in my relationships as to whether or not I am a good partner.	.589	.194	-.306	-.274	-.467	.104	.094	.071	.525
25. I feel like my partner is ashamed of me.	.602	.231	.345	-.193	-.469	.100	-.127	-.026	.536
5. Fights with my partner often end with yelling and name calling.	.552	.188	-.340	-.486	-.046	-.091	-.008	-.140	.464
19. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.	.676	.177	.294	-.462	-.193	.021	-.105	.407	.667
42. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.	.186	.726	.071	-.138	-.041	-.092	-.011	-.175	.533
26. When I notice that my partner is upset, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can understand where they are coming from.	.235	.632	.147	-.287	-.131	-.017	.082	-.170	.444
15. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.	.270	.644	.094	-.198	-.078	-.023	-.281	.004	.500
41. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.	.155	.639	.239	-.243	-.059	-.115	.133	-.139	.462
40. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.	.287	.715	.175	-.208	-.178	.047	-.076	-.338	.579
4. I communicate well with my partner.	.511	.553	.236	-.241	-.218	-.033	-.320	.115	.562
7. I understand if my partner does not reply to my text or phone call straight away.	.197	.548	.400	-.249	-.149	-.184	.304	-.199	.498
10. I check-in with my partner after arguments to see if we are still okay.	-.153	-.481	-.003	.099	-.159	.046	.203	.197	.306
60. A successful relationship takes hard work and perseverance.	.070	.506	-.050	-.078	.155	.000	.005	-.418	.386
37. I believe that to keep my partner safe I need to know where my partner is at all times.	.082	.109	.477	-.150	-.164	-.060	.664	-.151	.575
38. When it comes to my relationship with my partner I know best.	.022	-.074	.069	-.060	.173	.141	.401	.034	.222
6. I like to know what my partner is doing when we are not together.	-.047	-.116	.478	-.129	-.137	-.100	.485	.191	.451
34. I like to have control over my partner's spending.	.086	.170	.299	-.351	-.141	-.002	.374	-.199	.303
45. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.	.089	.025	.466	-.124	-.164	.080	.357	.040	.291
33. I feel that I am not worthy of my partner.	.175	.116	.292	-.109	-.744	.001	-.024	.018	.567
30. I am the reason why there are issues in my relationships.	.191	.074	.260	-.327	-.650	-.157	-.091	.038	.515
49. My partner often complains I drink too much.	.292	.242	.207	-.305	-.230	-.010	-.039	-.229	.223
1. I often criticise my partner.	.273	.185	.286	-.860	-.160	.023	.078	-.077	.753
2. I tend to focus on the things my partner does not do well.	.323	.241	.287	-.650	-.136	.143	.055	-.013	.452
24. The way my partner behaves sometimes makes me feel embarrassed.	.356	.182	.267	-.525	-.070	.032	-.031	.152	.337
56. I do not waste time in relationships that are not working.	-.159	-.164	-.038	.114	.029	.469	.266	-.042	.334
57. I believe someday I will have a great romantic relationship with someone.	.221	.436	.006	-.006	-.137	-.174	-.165	-.147	.263
35. I would respect my partner's decision to leave me if that is what they want.	.008	.290	.167	-.061	-.102	-.286	.201	-.204	.223
55. If my relationship is not working I will end it and look for another one.	.095	.013	.097	-.134	.062	.684	-.003	-.005	.488
17. Sometimes I spend time with my friends or go online to have a break from the relationship.	.280	.057	.188	-.373	-.089	.378	-.075	.165	.311
8. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.	.280	.266	.716	-.354	-.225	-.041	.200	-.136	.560
46. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.	.473	.239	.657	-.319	-.150	.119	.039	-.040	.535
44. I often get jealous of my partner.	.249	.128	.599	-.350	-.278	-.053	.095	-.010	.398
43. I find it difficult to trust my romantic partners.	.461	.163	.538	-.323	-.169	.215	-.127	.037	.463
36. I sometimes pretend I am sick to prevent my partner from getting upset with me.	.382	.298	.467	-.442	-.187	.192	.099	-.111	.396
11. I like to check if my partner still loves me.	.038	-.098	.505	-.109	-.360	-.004	.211	.208	.380
Eigenvalues	8.714	3.473	2.850	1.935	1.593	1.535	1.262	1.165	
% Variance	20.876	7.368	6.179	3.1777	3.333	2.723	1.798	1.471	39.554
Trace	6.051	4.684	4.480	4.132	2.309	1.246	1.807	1.069	

Notes: Coefficients greater than .32 are in bold; Final traces are the transformed eigenvalue variance accounted for statistic after rotation.

Appendix L

Correlations Matrix for the Reduced List of Items for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

	RSSS28	RSSS23	RSSS18	RSSS19	RSSS33	RSSS30	RSSS22	RSSS25	RSSS8	RSSS46	RSSS44	RSSS45	RSSS42	RSSS15	RSSS41	RSSS40	RSSS37	RSSS38	RSSS6	RSSS34
RSSS28	1	.726**	.635**	.605**	.200**	.108**	.547**	.546**	.314**	.452**	.229**	.135**	.178**	.238**	.146**	.238**	.130**	.043	.022	.221**
RSSS23		1	.677**	.661**	.230**	.168**	.564**	.583**	.287**	.385**	.286**	.167**	.199**	.261**	.158**	.292**	.159**	.090*	.034	.152**
RSSS18			1	.619**	.185**	.162**	.503**	.535**	.287**	.380**	.300**	.197**	.218**	.189**	.136**	.242**	.193**	.146**	.102*	.221**
RSSS19				1	.227**	.257**	.491**	.510**	.310**	.370**	.289**	.192**	.173**	.200**	.214**	.202**	.191**	.115**	.090*	.200**
RSSS33					1	.372**	.369**	.313**	.195**	.121**	.215**	.151**	.002	.174**	.101*	.148**	.167**	.010	.119**	.050
RSSS30						1	.238**	.187**	.196**	.154**	.156**	.148**	.110**	.156**	.095*	.108**	.116**	.047	.124**	.056
RSSS22							1	.476**	.285**	.396**	.308**	.203**	.151**	.214**	.225**	.220**	.214**	.121**	.092*	.093*
RSSS25								1	.319**	.423**	.359**	.189**	.181**	.191**	.084*	.171**	.192**	.041	.092*	.117**
RSSS8									1	.421**	.467**	.343**	.097*	.080*	.139**	.157**	.396**	.216**	.320**	.253**
RSSS46										1	.398**	.272**	.145**	.150**	.102*	.195**	.286**	.153**	.202**	.170**
RSSS44											1	.325**	.040	.090*	.134**	.117**	.418**	.156**	.344**	.195**
RSSS45												1	-.034	-.020	.072	.044	.357**	.164**	.333**	.122**
RSSS42													1	.367**	.323**	.422**	.063	.037	-.111**	.091*
RSSS15														1	.313**	.432**	.097*	.012	-.129**	.068
RSSS41															1	.323**	.157**	.143**	-.036	.069
RSSS40																1	.136**	.071	-.084*	.124**
RSSS37																	1	.295**	.434**	.272**
RSSS38																		1	.235**	.152**
RSSS6																			1	.185**
RSSS34																				1

Notes: * < .05; ** < .005; *** < .001

Appendix M

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for the Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

	Initial Model			Model Modification 1			Model Modification 2			Composite Model			
χ^2	625.311			131.288			34.962			2.530			
df	165			117			39			1			
p	< .001			.173			.655			.112			
RMSEA [90% CI]	.068 [.062, .073]			.014 [0, .026]			< .001 [0, .024]			.05 [.001, .131]			
p	< .001			1			1			3.62			
GFI	.903			.979			.990			.997			
CFI	.880			.996			1			.993			
TLI	.862			.994			1			.978			
SRMR	.071			.036			.020			.020			
	<i>M (SD)</i>	B (SE)	β	R²	B (SE)	β	R²	B (SE)	β	R²	B(SE)	β	R²
Factor 1 – Defensiveness		1.184 (.064) ***	.858	.736	1.161 (.064) ***	.851	.724	1.206 (.109) ***	.873	.761	1.000	.809	.655
Factor 2 - Self-Esteem Difficulties		.714 (.075) ***	1.006	1.013	.602 (.081) ***	1.099	1.209						
Factor 3 - Trust Difficulties		.718 (.057) ***	.733	.537	.640 (.059) ***	.762	.580	.594 (.075) ***	.708	.501	1.000	1.292	1.670
Factor 4 - Relationship Skills		-.302 (.039) ***	-.441	.195	-.290 (.039) ***	-.418	.175	-.322 (.045) ***	-.468	.219	1.000	-	-2.930
Factor 5 - Controlling Tendencies		.475 (.060) ***	.417	.174	.394 (.059) ***	.355	.126						
RSSS Item 28	2.40 (1.693)	1.000	.816	.665	1.000	.811	.658	1.000	.816	.666			
RSSS Item 23	2.88 (1.805)	1.135 (.046) ***	.869	.755	1.151 (.047) ***	.871	.759	1.138 (.047) ***	.872	.761			
RSSS Item 18	3.29 (1.820)	1.037 (.048) ***	.787	.620	1.041 (.049) ***	.785	.615	1.037 (.049) ***	.787	.620			
RSSS Item 19	3.62 (1.787)	.992 (.048) ***	.766	.587	.995 (.048) ***	.761	.580	.988 (.048) ***	.763	.583			
RSSS Item 33	2.91 (1.745)	1.000	.407	.166	1.000	.316	.100						
RSSS Item 30	3.40 (1.477)	.647 (.109) ***	.311	.097	.717 (.125) ***	.267	.071						
RSSS Item 22	3.15 (1.859)	1.884 (.206) ***	.720	.518	2.400 (.320) ***	.704	.495						
RSSS Item 25	2.37 (1.572)	1.599 (.175) ***	.722	.522	1.997 (.260) ***	.693	.480						
RSSS Item 8	2.38 (1.474)	1.000	.665	.442	1.000	.574	.329	1.000	.569	.324			
RSSS Item 46	2.47 (1.692)	1.149 (.092) ***	.666	.443	1.458 (.141) ***	.719	.517	1.499 (.166) ***	.743	.552			
RSSS Item 44	2.85 (1.680)	1.111 (.091) ***	.648	.420	1.146 (.103) ***	.574	.330	1.085 (.103) ***	.543	.295			
RSSS Item 45	3.46 (2.024)	.935 (.102) ***	.453	.205	.920 (.118) ***	.383	.147	.870 (.120) ***	.362	.131			
RSSS Item 42	2.30 (1.140)	1.000	.601	.361	1.000	.610	.372	1.000	.604	.365			
RSSS Item 15	2.33 (1.308)	1.194 (.115) ***	.626	.392	1.154 (.111) ***	.616	.380	1.183 (.115) ***	.623	.388			
RSSS Item 41	2.28 (1.146)	.835 (.093) ***	.500	.250	.817 (.090) ***	.497	.247	.834 (.092) ***	.500	.250			
RSSS Item 40	1.75 (.940)	.942 (.088) ***	.687	.472	.909 (.085) ***	.676	.457	.932 (.087) ***	.683	.466			
RSSS Item 37	2.42 (1.453)	1.000	.785	.616	1.000	.777	.604						
RSSS Item 38	3.57 (1.432)	.488 (.069) ***	.388	.151	.438 (.070) ***	.342	.117						
RSSS Item 6	4.13 (1.634)	.777 (.092) ***	.542	.294	.781 (.101) ***	.536	.288						
RSSS Item 34	2.29 (1.394)	.445 (.066) ***	.364	.132	.412 (.067) ***	.329	.108						
Defensiveness Composite											.777	.604	
Trust Difficulties Composite											.612	.375	
Relationship Skills Composite											-	-.518	

Notes: *** < .001

Appendix N

Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale Manual

Relationship Self-Sabotage Scale

Raquel Peel, Kerry McBain, Nerina Caltabiano, Beryl Buckby

Reference: Peel, R., McBain, K. A., Caltabiano, N., & Buckby, B. (2019, March). *The Romantic Self-Saboteur: How do people sabotage love?* Presented at the International Convention of Psychological Science. Paris, France.

This scale has been developed by Raquel Peel, Kerry McBain, Nerina Caltabiano, and Beryl Buckby.

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RELATIONSHIP SELF-SABOTAGE SCALE (RSSS)

The following statements concern how you feel and behave in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. If you are not in a relationship, think back to your last relationship. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. My partner makes me feel a lesser person.
2. I constantly feel criticised by my partner.
3. I get blamed unfairly for issues in my relationship.
4. I often feel misunderstood by my partner.
5. I get upset about how much time my partner spends with their friends.
6. I do not always believe when my partner tells me where they have been or who they have been with.
7. I often get jealous of my partner.
8. I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles.
9. I am open to my partner telling me about things I should do to improve our relationship.
10. I like to discuss issues in the relationship with my partner.
11. I will admit to my partner if I know I am wrong about something.
12. I am open to finding solutions and working out issues in the relationship.

Instructions:

- Items should be randomised.
- A 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), is employed where high scores indicate high levels of the measured dimensions.
- Defensiveness Subscale = 1, 2, 3, 4.
- Trust Difficulty Subscale = 5, 6, 7, 8.
- Relationship Skills Subscale = 9, 10, 11, 12.
- Reverse questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 to represent Lack of Relationship Skills.

This scale has been developed by Raquel Peel, Kerry McBain, Nerina Caltabiano, and Beryl Buckby.

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Norms for the relationship self-sabotage scale were obtained from a sample of 1365 participants. See the table below for participants' means and standard deviations scores across age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, longest relationship duration, history of affairs, mental health literacy, and country of origin.

	Defensiveness		Trust Difficulty		Relationship Skills	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall Sample (N=1365)	2.87	1.51	2.74	1.22	2.11	.82
Age (N = 1355)						
10-20 (N=404)	2.81	1.32	3.06	1.12	2.17	.81
21-30 (N=475)	2.79	1.53	2.73	1.24	2.02	.78
31-40 (N=181)	2.83	1.56	2.53	1.29	2.01	.85
41-50 (N=151)	3.18	1.60	2.51	1.25	2.25	.87
51-60 (N= 99)	3.03	1.71	2.35	1.11	2.19	.85
61-70 (N=34)	3.05	1.65	2.41	1.04	2.20	.79
71-80 (N=11)	2.24	1.45	1.50	.50	2.00	.64
Gender (N=1365)						
Male (N=382)	3.12	1.44	2.66	1.23	2.13	.89
Female (N=976)	2.78	1.53	2.77	1.22	2.11	.80
Other (N=7) (gender fluid, gender neutral, non-binary, queer, transgender male)	2.66	1.01	2.47	.99	2.15	.35
Sexual Orientation (N=1365)						
Heterosexual (N=1065)	2.88	1.50	2.77	1.23	2.14	.83
Homosexual (N=50)	2.79	1.53	2.46	1.06	1.98	.89
Bisexual (N=204)	2.87	1.51	2.61	1.20	1.98	.73
Other (N=31) (androphilic, asexual, bicurious, confused, demisexual, heteroflexible, homoromantic, panromantic, pansexual, polysexual, romantic, queer, questioning)	2.51	1.50	2.46	1.17	2.19	.86
Prefer not to answer (N=15)	3.48	1.65	3.64	1.33	2.59	.98
Relationship Status (N=1365)						
Committed (N=564)	2.39	1.29	2.52	1.14	1.92	.73
Defacto (N=262)	3.16	1.47	3.00	1.20	2.18	.85
Married (N=197)	2.81	1.55	2.23	1.15	2.24	.84
Not in a Relationship (N=342)	3.50	1.57	3.20	1.21	2.31	.87
Longest Relationship Duration (N=1365)						
0-5 (N=895)	2.83	1.42	2.89	1.19	2.11	.89
6-10 (N=159)	2.75	1.62	2.63	1.31	1.94	.64
11-20 (N=169)	3.22	1.66	2.46	1.21	2.21	.86
21-30 (N=92)	3.03	1.77	2.33	1.15	2.23	.88
31-40 (N=23)	2.46	1.29	1.96	1.03	2.09	.93
41-50 (N=16)	3.12	1.66	2.01	1.03	2.27	.88
51-60 (N=8)	2.35	1.79	2.28	1.68	2.07	.90
61-70 (N=1)	1.88	-	1.26	-	2.28	-
History of Affairs (N=1365)						
Yes (N=375)	3.06	1.65	2.68	1.29	2.19	.87
No (N=990)	2.80	1.44	2.76	1.20	2.08	.80
Mental Health Literacy (N=1365)						
Yes (N=542)	2.83	1.51	2.67	1.19	2.06	.82
No (N=823)	2.91	1.51	2.78	1.24	2.14	.82
Country of Origin (N=1363)						
Australia (N=614)	2.92	1.56	2.72	1.19	2.17	.81
New Zealand (N=16)	2.81	1.62	1.67	.61	2.51	.98
United States of America (N=252)	2.79	1.61	2.47	1.27	1.98	.75
Canada (N=29)	2.39	1.35	2.27	.96	1.71	.63
United Kingdom (England, Ireland, Scotland) N=60	2.33	1.26	2.22	1.06	2.02	.75
Western Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Spain) N=33	2.87	1.50	2.69	1.13	2.03	.58
Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine) N=16	2.86	1.46	2.66	1.27	1.94	.60
Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) N=14	2.58	1.38	2.73	.94	2.04	.62
Southeast Asia (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) N=194	3.03	1.37	3.32	1.18	2.14	.89
East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan) N=40	2.98	1.22	3.34	1.18	2.44	.84
South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) N=24	3.51	1.32	3.18	1.31	2.35	1.01
South Pacific Islands (Fiji, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Island) N=12	2.54	1.29	2.91	1.25	2.11	1.06
Africa (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe) N=25	2.88	1.49	2.57	.97	1.77	.46
Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Turkey) N=5	3.58	2.11	3.19	1.19	1.59	.47
South America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago) N=29	2.70	1.22	2.63	1.19	1.90	.85

This scale has been developed by Raquel Peel, Kerry McBain, Nerina Caltabiano, and Beryl Buckby.

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