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Romantic Relationship Schema Complexity

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ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SCHEMA COMPLEXITY

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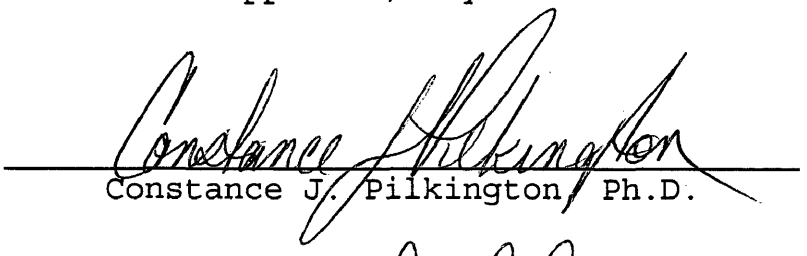
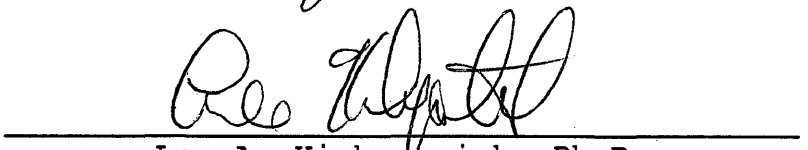


Constance J. Pilkington, Ph.D.



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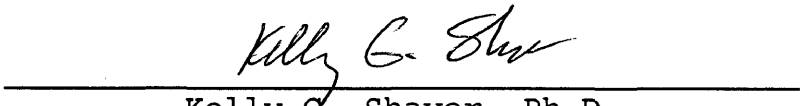

Kelly G. Shaver, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

A measure of romantic relationship schema complexity (RRSC) is proposed and compared with several individual difference measures. Forty-nine undergraduates, each of whom was currently involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship with someone in the local area, completed several questionnaires and a take-home computerized questionnaire. Results showed no relationship between RRSC and Need for Cognition, Attributional Complexity, overall cognitive complexity, gender, relationship length, or affective extremity in response to positive or negative relationship event scenarios. Participants with more complex romantic relationship schemas unexpectedly showed more variability in their evaluations of relationship events over a two-week period than those with simpler schemas. These results were interpreted in light of previous research on self-schema complexity, cognitive complexity, and the social cognition of romantic relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The Utility of the Schema Concept in Relationships Research

In the classical cognitive sense, schemas are cognitive structures which organize prior knowledge in ways that facilitate the processing of new information as well as the retrieval of old information. Schemas facilitate the storage of content knowledge and the use of such knowledge by aiding in both the storage and the retrieval of long-term memory (Fiske & Linville, 1980).

The use of schemas in social psychology has attracted much criticism. The schema concept, when used outside cognitive psychology, has been accused of being vague, unfalsifiable, or simply "old wine in a new bottle" (Fiske & Linville, 1980, p. 545). While some of these criticisms may contain a kernel of truth, Fiske and Linville point out that the advantages significantly outweigh the liabilities when it comes to applying the schema concept to social psychology. The application of schemas to social psychological questions provides a good way to examine complex knowledge. However one looks at it, a mental construct based on experience and memory is a schema, and our knowledge of how to navigate many complex social events should fall under this rubric. The applicability of the schema concept to social psychology, therefore, should not be in doubt. Social events and interactions can be very complex, so good explanations of them must rely on complex cognitive structures, i.e., schemas.

According to Fletcher and Thomas (1996), nowhere are knowledge constructs more useful than in the domain of close relationships, particularly romantic ones. Fletcher and Thomas (1996) offer three reasons why people have such complex schemas relating to social relationships. First, for most people, close relationships represent an enduring, important theme in their lives. Second, people receive an almost constant influx of information about close relationships through fictional and nonfictional media. Third, our lives are fraught with models who help us build close relationship theories even before we are old enough to become involved in them. In this study, an attempt is made to assess romantic relationship schema complexity (RRSC) and relate it to various individual differences in attitudes and emotion.

Cognitive Complexity

The definition of cognitive complexity is intimately tied to the methods used to measure it. In general, however, cognitive complexity is typically defined in terms of differentiation and integration (Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder, 1986). Differentiation refers to the number of characteristics or dimensions into which a cognitive structure may be divided. Integration refers to the degree to which the divisions arrived at by differentiation overlap. Some early studies used measures of cognitive complexity which relied solely on differentiation

(e.g., Zajonc, 1960). Most modern methods of assessing cognitive or schema complexity, including Attneave's (1959) H statistic, combine measures of differentiation and integration. In the current study, differentiation and integration were both considered important components of complexity because to ignore the integrative aspect of complexity wastes information.

Is Cognitive Complexity a General Personality Trait or Is it Domain-specific?

In the past, there has been some dispute over whether cognitive complexity is a general personality trait (Person A is either simple, complex, or somewhere in between) or a characteristic of a particular cognitive domain (Person A is complex in Domain 1, but simple in Domain 2). The findings of a few researchers (e.g. Bieri & Blacker, 1956; Allard & Carlson, 1963) tend to support the "general trait" hypothesis. The studies which report findings supporting the generality of cognitive complexity also tend to be the early ones.

Crockett (1965) argues for the domain-specificity of cognitive complexity, claiming that complexity should be viewed as a characteristic of particular knowledge domains rather than as a general cognitive trait. Experience with a particular knowledge domain, Crockett claims, makes one more aware of subtle differences between units of a knowledge domain, enabling one to behave differentially to these

subtle differences. Complexity in one domain need not predict complexity in another.

The general consensus today is that cognitive complexity is not a general personality trait, but rather a specific trait of particular knowledge domains. As such, it has come to be called "schema complexity" because this term more clearly denotes the domain-specificity of the complexity construct. Many researchers have demonstrated that schema complexity is domain-specific. For example, Fletcher et al. (1986) argue that schema complexity is related to the degree of knowledge and interest in a given area and is thus bound to be domain-specific to some extent. Zajonc (1960) also treats cognitive complexity as a domain-specific variable. However, despite his conclusion that cognitive complexity is domain-specific, Crockett (1965) points out that people with a complex cognitive system in one domain will tend to show a high level of complexity in other domains as well.

Vannoy (1965) compared twenty different measures of cognitive complexity. He found that the combined test results loaded onto eight distinct factors rather than one unitary factor, indicating that cognitive complexity is not a general personality trait. This is not surprising, as many of the researchers reviewed based their measures on different theories of the nature of cognitive complexity. Other researchers have demonstrated domain-specific schema

complexity in such areas as ingroup-outgroup evaluations (Linville & Jones, 1980; Linville, 1982), attribution (Fletcher et al., 1986), cognitive balance (Scott, 1963), and self-schemas (Linville, 1985). It is assumed in the present study that complexity is domain-specific. While broader measures of a person's tendency toward complexity or simplicity (e.g., need for cognition, attributional complexity, etc.) may influence the complexity of a particular schema, it is also likely that domain-specific expertise, individual experience, and other factors also influence the complexity of any given schema.

Complexity of the self-schema

Linville (1982) showed that people have more complex cognitive representations of their own group than of other groups and that people evaluate members of other groups more extremely than members of their own group. Building on this research, Linville developed a model of self-schema complexity. Linville's (1985) model rests on four assumptions. Her first assumption is that the self is organized as a sort of associative network of interconnected nodes. These cognitive nodes represent aspects of the self. For example, a woman might think of herself in terms of multiple social roles (doctor, real estate agent, musician), interpersonal relationships (provider, employee, mother), and/or traits (beautiful, musically talented, unpleasant).

The second assumption is that different aspects of the

self are linked to varying levels of affect and self-appraisal. A man may simultaneously think of himself as a bad employee but also as a good father. Alternatively, success in one aspect of the self may enhance positive feelings about the self as a whole, while failure may have the opposite effect.

The third assumption is that there are individual differences in the degree of complexity of people's self-representation. According to Linville, self-complexity is a joint function of both the number of self-aspects (or nodes on a person's associative network) and the degree of interrelatedness, or redundancy, among those aspects. In other words, self-complexity is best understood in terms of both integration and differentiation. For example, a woman's role as a mother is independent of her role as a worker to the extent that failure in one role does not affect performance or self-appraisal in the other. The degree of overlap between two aspects may also reflect the degree to which the roles actually depend on each other. For example, if a woman's relationship with her husband depends heavily on her ability to raise children, then failure in one domain can lead to failure in the other. It may also be the case that the woman merely perceives these two aspects of herself to be related, and regardless of the actual degree of overlap, emotional spillover may occur because the two domains are conceptually linked.

Returning to the associative network metaphor, this spillover may be conceptualized as spreading activation. Self-appraisal regarding one aspect of the self will spread to other aspects as a function of the degree of their interrelatedness. For example, if an attorney wins his case, this might lead to a substantial improvement in his feelings about his professional performance, which may in turn lead to a moderate improvement in his feelings about himself as a provider, which may lead to a small improvement in his feelings about himself as a husband. A higher degree of self-schema complexity would lead to a lower degree of this emotional spillover because the boundaries between "nodes" are better defined. In other words, his roles as an attorney and a husband would have less to do with each other; therefore, an affective state resulting from a change in one role would not be likely to generalize to his other roles.

Linville's (1982) fourth assumption is that a person's global appraisal of him- or herself is a function of the affect and self-appraisal associated with all the aspects of the self. Linville postulates that overall affect and self-appraisal are a weighted average of affect and self-appraisal at all levels of the self. Thus, those with simple self-schemas should exhibit more extreme positive and negative self-appraisal because they are more prone to emotional spill-over than are those with complex self-schemas. On the other hand, those with complex self-schemas

are likely to have less extreme and less variable self-appraisals. Linville (1985) found support for the hypothesis that lower levels of self-schema complexity are related to more extreme swings in affect and self-appraisal. She also showed that, over a two-week period, participants with a low degree of self-schema complexity showed more variability in affect than those with a high degree of self-schema complexity.

Linville (1987) also showed that a high degree of self-complexity is beneficial to individuals under high stress, because a complex self-schema can act as a buffer against the negative consequences of stress, such as depression and illness. In conditions of high stress, participants with complex self-schemas showed fewer stress-related symptoms than those with simple self-schemas.

The Romantic Relationship Schema

Fiske and Linville (1980) point out that the schema concept has not been widely linked to interpersonal behavior, describing the link between cognitive schemas and behavior as an "untapped gold mine" (p. 549). Nearly twenty years later, the use of schemas in the study of interpersonal behavior has been explored by many researchers, but it remains a fertile field for scientific enquiry. In response to the challenge put forward by Fiske and Linville, one of the primary goals of the current study is to establish the existence of a construct known as a

"romantic relationship schema," which may be defined as a person's internal working model of a particular romantic relationship. The romantic relationship schema concept is similar in both scope and nature to Linville's (1985) concept of the self-schema.

A romantic relationship schema is closely akin to Andersen's idea of a "relational schema," but more specific. According to Andersen, a relational schema embodies our beliefs and expectancies about a type of relationship (e.g., romantic relationships in general). Violations of this schema (such as inappropriate or excessive intimacy) may result in negative relationship outcomes ranging from dissatisfaction to relationship termination (Andersen, 1992). A relational schema is qualitatively different than a schema for one's romantic partner. Consider the case of a woman who hates her spouse, yet stays married in order to preserve the relationship (Andersen, 1989).

In contrast, romantic relationship schemas are specific to particular relationships. They not only dictate relationship-appropriate behaviors (as per Horowitz's (1988) "role-relationship models"), but encompass an individual's entire schematic and memorial representation of that relationship. Like Linville's self-schema, a romantic relationship schema may be thought of in terms of an association network consisting of several nodes. Unlike Linville's self-schema, however, romantic relationship

schemas are conceptualized to represent permanent yet flexible cognitive representations of romantic relationships. While a person's ideal relationship may be represented by a single schema, particular relationships are likely to vary from one to the next, as will the schemas associated with them. Thus, romantic relationship schemas are relationship-specific. For a given individual, the schema for one romantic relationship may be more or less complex than the schema for a different romantic relationship. Like Linville's self-schema, the complexity of romantic relationship schemas should vary between individuals, but also within individuals across relationships (and perhaps within specific relationships over time).

Martin (1991) devised an instrument to measure the complexity of relationship thinking known as the Relational Cognition Complexity Instrument (RCCI). Respondents describe three relationships, and their descriptions are later coded by summing the number of relational constructs to yield a measure of complexity. Rather than combining measures of differentiation and integration, the RCCI relies solely upon differentiation. For this reason, and because the RCCI was designed to assess the complexity of a broader level of relationship thinking than specific romantic relationships represent, it was felt that the RCCI would be an inadequate measure of RRSC. Since some important questions in the

present study revolve around the variability of affect associated with a specific relationship, it was felt that a measure of RRSC specific to a particular romantic relationship would be more appropriate.,

Hypotheses

It follows from Linville's (1987) buffering hypothesis and from Linville (1985) that if a complex self-schema acts as a buffer against the consequences of stress, then a complex romantic relationship schema should act as a buffer against consequences of negative relationship events. In addition, because people with simple self-schemas show more extreme swings in affect and self-appraisal, those with simple romantic relationship schemas should show more extreme swings in relationship-oriented affect. Given that individuals should vary in the complexity of their schemas for their current romantic relationships, it is hypothesized that participants with highly complex romantic relationship schemas will have less extreme emotional reactions to relationship events than will participants with less complex romantic relationship schemas. It is also predicted that these individuals will exhibit less variability in their emotional reactions to relationship events over time than individuals with more complex romantic relationship schemas.

Need for cognition, as defined by Cohen, Stotland, and Wolfe (1955), is "a need to understand and make reasonable the experiential world" (p. 291). Cohen (1957) found that

individuals high in need for cognition were more likely than those low in need for cognition to organize, elaborate, and evaluate information. As defined by Cacioppo and Petty (1982), the need for cognition is the "tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking" (p. 116). Filling the necessity for an adequate measure of the need for cognition, Cacioppo and Petty (1982) developed and tested the Need for Cognition Scale (NCS) and subsequently a short form of the NCS (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984) to measure the need for cognition. Both the full version and the short form have received considerable support (Sadowski, 1993; Sadowski & Gulgoz, 1992; Tolentino, Curry, & Leak, 1990) and show excellent convergent and discriminant validity (Osberg, 1987). Cronbach's alpha as a measure of reliability for the 34-item version of the NCS has been found to range from .65 to .90 (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Cacioppo and Petty (1982) showed that those high in need for cognition preferred a complex task to a simple one, and those low in need for cognition preferred a simple task to a complex one.

Tanaka, Panter, & Winborne (1988) hypothesized that Cacioppo and Petty's (1982) assessment of need for cognition might be better understood in terms of the scale's constituent parts. Upon factor analyzing the 34-item version of the NCS, the authors found that the items loaded onto three factors rather than one, as had been reported by Cacioppo and Petty (1982). Twenty-five items were chosen

from the set of 34; items were retained if they loaded on one and only one factor. The obtained factors were interpreted by the authors to represent subscales measuring Cognitive Persistence, Cognitive Complexity, and Cognitive Confidence. A Cronbach's alpha of .57 was found for the Cognitive Complexity subscale (hereafter referred to as "CC"), indicating a moderate degree if internal consistency. According to Tanaka et al. (1988), an individual scoring high on the Cognitive Complexity subscale tends to prefer complex relative to simple cognitive demands, repeating a conclusion drawn by the original authors regarding the 34-item version of the NCS (1982).

It can be inferred from Cohen (1957), Cacioppo and Petty (1982), and other evidence that at least part of the NCS reflects cognitive complexity (e.g., Tanaka et al., 1988), that people with tendencies to form more complex schemas will be higher in need for cognition than people with tendencies to form less complex schemas. It is hypothesized that people with complex romantic relationship schemas will exhibit a higher need for cognition, as measured by the 34-item version of Cacioppo et al. (1982) scale, than people with simple romantic relationship schemas.

Fletcher et al. (1986) hypothesized that people differ in the complexity of their attributional schemas. They proposed seven attributional constructs which might be

measured along a simple-complex dimension: the level of interest or motivation, the preference for complex rather than simple explanations, the presence of metacognition concerning explanations, the awareness of the extent to which people's behavior is a function of interaction with others, the tendency to infer abstract or causally complex internal attributions, the tendency to infer abstract, contemporary, external causal attributions, and the tendency to infer external causes operating from the past.

To test their theory, Fletcher et al. (1986) devised the Attributional Complexity Scale (ACS). The ACS was found to have an internal reliability coefficient (alpha) of .85, and a test-retest reliability of .80. the ACS was also found to have good convergent and discriminant validity. The authors found that women possessed more complex attributional schemas than men. They also found a moderate positive correlation between scores on the ACS and scores on the NCS, lending credence to the hypothesis that at least one measure of schema complexity is related to the need for cognition. Based on the work of Fletcher et al. (1986), it is hypothesized that individuals with high romantic relationship schema complexity (RRSC) will exhibit a greater degree of attributional complexity than will individuals with low RRSC.

Despite the predictions that RRSC will be positively correlated with other measures of complexity, it is believed

that RRSC is more domain-specific than general cognitive complexity or attributional complexity. Thus, while positive correlations are expected, they should not be particularly strong.

There is ample evidence to suggest that women think more complexly about relationships than do men. Women have more complex constructs of other people than do men (Supnick, 1964). Women have more complex explanations for marital separation than do men (Fletcher, 1983). Fletcher et al. (1986) found that women are more attributionally complex than men. In addition, Martin (1991) found that women are more relationally complex thinkers than are men. Although Tanaka et al. (1988) did not detect gender difference in the cognitive complexity subscale of the 34-item NCS, Waters and Zakrajsek (1990), with a larger sample, contradicted this finding by showing that women scored higher on the cognitive complexity subscale of the NCS than men. It is therefore hypothesized that women will show a greater degree of RRSC than will men.

It is also predicted that the complexity of a person's romantic relationship schema will increase with the length of the relationship. For example, a person on a blind date knows virtually nothing about her date on their first meeting, and thus knows very little about how the relationship will progress (i.e., she has a very simple schema regarding her relationship with her date). Once the

relationship has had time to develop and both partners have had ample opportunity to become familiar with facets of each other's lives, we would expect her romantic relationship schema to become more complex and multi-faceted. This hypothesis is perfectly in line with Crockett's (1965) prediction that the degree of domain-specific complexity probably depends on the amount of interaction one has with the domain in question. In addition, Linville and Jones (1980) suggest that the reason why in-group schemas are more complex than out-group schemas is because in-group schemas are based on large amounts of rich experience with in-group members, while out-group schemas are based on less experience.

Of course, the direction of causality might point in the opposite direction. Crouse, Karlins, and Schroder (1968) showed that the happiest married couples were the most cognitively complex ones. Perhaps complexity leads to relationship longevity just as much as longevity leads to complexity. Regardless, the relationship between longevity and complexity should be positive.

To summarize, seven major hypotheses will be tested. RRSC is expected to be negatively related to the extremity and variability of evaluation to relationship events. RRSC is expected to positively related to Need for Cognition, Attributional Complexity, and relationship length. In addition, women are expected to have more complex romantic

relationship schemas than men, and the measure of RRSC used in the present study is expected to be moderately correlated with a more general measure of cognitive complexity.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 30 female and 19 male undergraduates. Participants were screened prior to the study to ensure that they were currently involved in romantic relationships with local partners. Local partners were required in order to maximize the probability that participants would interact with their partners on a daily basis. Participants were contacted via telephone and invited to participate in a three-part program of study, as described below.

Procedure

After giving their informed consent, participants performed a card-sorting task closely resembling the one used by Linville (1985) to assess self-complexity. In Linville's study, participants were asked to sort a collection of 34 self descriptors into meaningful piles, from which a measure of self-complexity (H) was calculated. A pilot study, using 11 participants, was conducted to assess the feasibility of transferring Linville's card-sorting task to the current situation. Participant performance conformed to expectations.

In the present study, self descriptors were replaced with 34 different romantic relationship descriptors (e.g.,

intimate, spontaneous, unhealthy), gleaned from studies by Fehr and Russell (1991) and Preslar and Pilkington (1997). Each participant was presented with a deck of 44 3" x 5" index cards. Thirty-four of the cards each contained a different relationship descriptor (see Appendix A) and a number, and the other ten were left blank. Participants were instructed to create as many piles as they wanted, with each pile representing a particular aspect of the participant's current romantic relationship. Each pile could have as many or as few cards as the participant desired, and a descriptor could be placed in more than one pile if necessary (the blank cards were included for this purpose). Participants were instructed to record the groupings of card numbers on a sheet of paper. These groupings were later used to calculate an H statistic (Attneave, 1959; Scott, 1962) for each participant, which in turn was used as an index of RRSC.

During the same session, participants completed the 34-item version of the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; see Appendix B), which includes the subscale measuring cognitive complexity first identified by Tanaka et al. (1988). Participants also completed the Attributional Complexity Scale (Fletcher et al., 1986; see Appendix C), which was ambiguously called the "Person Perception Questionnaire." Reliability estimates were computed for the current sample and were similar to those reported by other researchers (NCS: α=.84; ACS: α=.89; CC: α=.58).

In addition, participants completed a questionnaire designed to assess the extremity of affective response to two positive and two negative relationship scenarios (see Appendix D). These scenarios were constructed to describe mildly positive and negative relationship events. Participants were asked to imagine themselves taking part in each scenario. For example, one scenario asks participants to imagine that their romantic partners have prepared a special meal for them. Another scenario invites participants to imagine that their partners have backed out of dinner plans in order to study. After reading each relationship scenario, participants rated the extent to which they would feel five positive and four negative emotions using a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much). The card-sorting task and administration of the questionnaire set were counterbalanced to prevent order effects. Questionnaires were not counterbalanced within a questionnaire set.

Micro Experimental Laboratory (MEL; Schneider, 1988), a programming language intended to aid in the creation of computerized psychological and behavioral measures, was used to create a program to assess variability and extremity in relationship-oriented evaluations over time. Before participants left the experimental session, they were each given a diskette to take home. Participants were instructed to find a computer at approximately the same time every day

for 14 consecutive days and to answer questions posed to them by a MEL program provided on the diskette (see Appendix E for a list of the questions). The program collected daily measures of satisfaction, degree of love and commitment, trust, jealousy, anger, etc. for up to 14 consecutive days. The majority of the questions assessed how the participants felt at that moment on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much). Example questions are "How angry do you feel with your partner right now?" and "How worried are you right now about your relationship breaking up?" Responses to these questions were used to compute a variability score for each participant. In addition, 14 questions were included to assess the extremity of relationship-oriented evaluations over time (see Appendix E). A MEL program was felt to be not only appropriate, but necessary, for two reasons. First, it allowed an opportunity to ascertain that participants did, in fact, complete their evaluations on a daily basis rather than complete multiple evaluations on a single day. Second, it prevented participants from either reviewing or changing their own responses from previous days.

Upon leaving, participants signed up to attend one of several debriefing sessions to be held after the disks were returned at the end of the designated two-week period.

RESULTS

Measuring Schema Complexity

Many tests have been designed to measure cognitive or

schema complexity. Scott, Osgood, and Peterson (1979) describe a number of statistics which could be used as measures of cognitive dimensionality, among them Attneave's H (first described in Attneave, 1959). Likewise, Linville (1985) and Scott (1962) use Attneave's H as measures of cognitive dimensionality.

Attneave's H (also known as Scott's H) has become one of the most popular measures of schema complexity in current literature. Thus, Attneave's *H* was used in the present study. To calculate H, participants are asked to sort instances of a particular domain (e.g., attributes of a person, adjectives relating to the self, etc.) into meaningful categories. The categories may overlap to any extent, and there can be as few or as many categories as desired. The H statistic is designed to combine the number of categories with the degree to which the categories overlap. A larger H indicates a higher degree of complexity in the domain under investigation.

H is derived from the following equation:

$$H = \Sigma p_i \log_2(1/p_i) = \log_2 n - (1/n)\Sigma n_i \log_2 n_i$$

where n is the total number of attributes or traits used, n_i is the number of these traits that are used in a particular grouping, and $p_i = (n_i/n)$. Scott (1962) warns that H may only represent a sort of lower bound for cognitive complexity, as it is unlikely that such a measure will entirely exhaust a participant's category system. He also

warns that H can only be interpreted as a structural property of a cognitive domain, that it is separate from content. Thus, a schema may be complex, yet entirely erroneous.

Millar and Tesser (1986) successfully used Atteave's H statistic, as well as a simple count of card piles formed by each participant, to assess schema complexity. Although a simple pile count is admittedly less suited to the purpose than Attneave's H, the fact that participants showed that they had more complex schemas about individuals than about groups was reflected by both the number of piles formed by subjects and Attneave's H statistic. This "simple count" method was also used by Linville (1987) as an additional measure of self-complexity. In the present study, A simple pile count, in addition to Attneave's H, was used to measure RRSC, whereas "cognitive complexity" was assessed using the NCS subscale described by Tanaka et al. (1988).

A measure of evaluative variability was obtained by reverse scoring negative variability items, collapsing all 15 responses for a particular day, and then computing the standard deviation of the resulting means to arrive at a single measure of variability for each participant. These scores were intended to reflect the variability of each participant's responses over a two-week period. Variability scores ranged from .03 to .87 (M=.35, SD=.20), with higher scores indicating greater affective variability.

Of the original 49 participants, 42 (27 men and 15 women) contributed to the analyses involving affective variability. One participant failed to turn in his MEL disk. Another participant's MEL disk malfunctioned. Five additional participants answered questions on fewer than six of the 14 days of data collection. Their data were discarded as unreliable. Very few participants contributed data for the full 14 days (M=11 days, Mode=12 days), but one participant provided data from 15 days. Many participants attempted to cheat the system by answering several days' question sets in one sitting. Careful comparison of the dates entered by participants and those recorded by the MEL program made apparent the days for which data were fabricated. In such cases only the first answer set provided on a given day was considered valid.

Four scores of affective extremity were measured by averaging each participant's score on the five positive emotion questions within the two positive scenarios (M=6.02, SD=.98), the five positive questions within the two negative scenarios (M=5.98, SD=1.1), the four negative questions within the two positive scenarios (M=3.68, SD=1.02), and the four negative questions within the two negative scenarios (M=2.81, SD=.98). Two additional affective extremity scores were obtained by averaging participants' responses to a positive question (M=7.23, SD=.92) and a negative question (M=3.3, SD=1.07) about their partners which were included in

the MEL program (See Appendix E). Relationship length, measured in weeks at the time of arrival at the lab, ranged from 7 weeks to 4.17 years (M=60.02 weeks, SD=53.4 weeks).

H was calculated for each participant using Linville's H program (P. W. Linville, personal communication, 1997). H ranged from 1.703 to 4.889 (M=3.208, SD=.83). H and the simple pile count were independently correlated with affective extremity (all six measures), affective variability, and participants' scores on the ACS, the NCS, the cognitive complexity subscale of the NCS, gender, and relationship length. See Table 1 for a summary of the overall findings and Tables 2 and 3 for findings subdivided by participant gender.

Out of the entire battery, very few of the findings were statistically significant. The simple pile count as a measure of RRSC was, contrary to predictions, positively related to affective variability ($r=.38$, $p<.014$), particularly for women ($r=.57$, $p<.002$). A Fisher's r to z transformation showed that the male and female correlation coefficients, -.30 and .57 respectively, were different ($Z=2.71$). In addition, regression analysis revealed a significant interaction between sex and variability in their ability to predict RRSC as measured by the number of card piles (R^2 change=.27, $p<.01$).

DISCUSSION

The positive correlation between the number of card

piles and variability was unexpected, but not inexplicable. Stein (1994) found that individuals with low self-schema complexity reacted less strongly to negative feedback than did those with high self-schema complexity. Stein suggests that in low complexity individuals, a defensive reaction causes the individual to discount negative feedback, reaffirming a strongly positive view of the self. This finding contradicts Linville's buffering hypothesis and offers a possible explanation for the positive correlation. That is, Stein (1994) would argue that a simple romantic relationship schema, not a complex one, should act as a buffer against negative relationship events by causing an individual to discount them, reaffirming a positive view of the relationship.

The finding that the number of piles predicts affective variability for women but not for men is illuminating. Reasons why the effect was not found for men could include the small sample size (n=15). Future research could address the question of why low RRSC acts as a buffer against negative reactions to relationship-related events for women but not for men.

The relationship scenario questions were always presented immediately after the NCS and ACS. The lack of a relationship between H and affective extremity might be due in part to a failure to counterbalance the order of questionnaires within a questionnaire set, though it is not

entirely clear how or why this would occur. Approximately half of the participants completed the questionnaires after the card-sorting task. It is theoretically possible that fatigue from filling out other questionnaires and sorting cards led participants to devote less than optimal attention to the task at hand.

The lack of a correlation between relationship length and RRSC can be explained by restriction of range. Because the sample consisted entirely of college students, relationship lengths tended to be short. It is possible that, had the sample consisted of older married or dating couples, an effect for relationship length would have emerged. Also, because relationships were relatively short in duration, it is possible that variability in relationship length was restricted. If there was a restriction of range problem, future research should include relationships varying widely in length. In addition, it is possible that the relationships studied were too long to gain a proper understanding of the relationship between schema complexity and relationship length. In other words, perhaps RRSC reaches a maximum level relatively early in a relationship. If that is the case, then future research should examine relationships in relatively early stages of development.

The lack of a relationship between Attributional Complexity and the number of card piles is disappointing, but not perplexing. If the ACS had been modified to refer

specifically to one's romantic relationship partner instead of to people in general, perhaps an effect would have emerged. The ACS assesses the complexity of a higher-order, broadly applicable level of information processing, whereas the focus of the present study is on processing relevant to a specific other. Thus, attributional complexity and RRSC (as measured by the number of card piles) represent different levels of schema specificity and should not be expected to bear a strong relationship.

Similarly, the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), Cognitive Complexity subscale (Tanaka et al., 1988), and Attributional Complexity Scale (Fletcher et al., 1986) were uncorrelated with RRSC as measured by Attneave's H statistic. It is not clear why no relationship is evident. However, the fact that the NCS and ACS were positively correlated ($r=.53$, $p<.01$) confirms the findings of Fletcher et al. (1986), and suggests that these two scales operated in a similar way for current participants as they did for those in Fletcher et al.'s (1986) original study. The fact that the ACS and NCS "behave" correctly indicates that something was wrong with the method of assessing RRSC using Attneave's H.

It must be concluded that there is not much support for the method of assessing relationship schema complexity presented in this study. There is little question that people have schemas unique to each romantic relationship

(how else could a person navigate the intricacies of relationships with unique individuals?), and that complexity must be an individual difference associated with them. The problem must lie in the assessment of that complexity. While the card sorting task (Linville, 1985) remains an excellent method of assessing self-schema complexity, the method may not be transferable to romantic relationship schemas. Because the 34 relationship descriptors could be taken to describe one's partner, it is possible that participants envisioned their romantic partners rather than their relationships with those partners. A representation of one's romantic partner is probably more easily accessible than an abstract concept like a relationship.

The fact that the number of card piles was related to affective variability whereas H was not suggests that a measure of differential complexity might be a better assessor of RRSC than a measure which combines differential and integrative complexity. It is not clear why such measures should provide a better assessment of complexity, considering that they, by definition, rely on less information, but Martin (1991) was able to demonstrate the test-retest reliability of the RCCI, as well as discriminant validity relative to measures of verbal intelligence and cognitive complexity. In addition, Millar and Tesser (1986) showed that a simple count of card piles agreed roughly with an estimate of complexity obtained by calculating Attneave's

H statistic.

It could be argued that the present study contains certain methodological flaws which rendered the detection of significant relationships between variables unlikely. For example, due to the scarcity of undergraduates meeting the criteria for participation, the sample size was quite small. However, the small effect sizes tend to argue against the usefulness of including more participants in the design. In addition, inadequate measures of affective variability were obtained from the participants using the take-home MEL program. Because of attrition, inattentiveness to the data collection regimen, and outright data fabrication, only about 70% of the potential data were collected. Furthermore, because participants could not be trusted to deliver the appropriate number of daily reports, it is highly likely that the data that were delivered are flawed in other respects. For example, it is quite likely that participants gave only cursory attention to the questions being asked or entered random answers "just to get it over with." Future studies may benefit from varying the order of question presentation or including lie scales in order to detect fraudulent responses. Another reasonable line of argument is that the card sorting task is a good method of assessing RRSC, but that something was wrong with the other measures of individual differences. For example, threats to the validity and reliability of the variability and extremity

measures have already been discussed.

This line of research should not be abandoned. Future studies should seek to establish the validity of the card-sorting method of assessing RRSC by measuring the relationship between it and Martin's RCCI (1991). Since romantic relationship schemas are expected to change over time, test-retest reliability may be difficult to establish unless a short inter-test interval is used.

In addition, it should be made more explicit to participants that they are to envision the relationship, not the partner, when sorting relationship descriptors into meaningful groups. It could be that the romantic relationship is inseparable from the romantic partner. In other words, the romantic relationship schema may be merely one part of a more complex and extensive "romantic partner schema." If this is the case, perhaps the schema of interest is not the relationship at all, but the specific partner schema. If such schemas exist (and they surely do), complexity is certainly an attribute worthy of investigation because it can lead to very interesting predictions. For example, perhaps those with relatively simple partner schemas are more extreme in their evaluations of the partner, or on the impact of the partner's behavior on the relationship.

Even though romantic relationship schema complexity was not found to be strongly related to the extremity or

variability of affective responses to relationship events, it may be related to other measures of relationship-related individual differences. For example, RRSC could be related to the willingness to continue to invest in the relationship. In addition, RRSC could be a factor in predicting whether a romantic partner is likely to respond in an extreme manner to relationship dissatisfaction (see Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). Overall, there is still much territory to cover in close relationships research, and schema complexity should not be ignored as a potential moderating factor in individual differences in how people approach relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Relationship Descriptors

Adjectives used for relationship complexity card-sorting task

all-consuming
boring
caring
comfortable
companionate
conflictual
confusing
demanding
emotional
exciting
frustrating
fulfilling
fun
happy
intimate
meaningful
open
overwhelming
painful
passionate
physical
rewarding
scary
serious
spontaneous
steady
stressful
superficial
tender
unconditional
unhealthy
unpredictable
variable
worthwhile

APPENDIX B

Need for Cognition Scale

and

Cognitive Complexity Subscale

[Items found to load onto the cognitive complexity factor by Tanaka et al. (1988) are indicated by asterisks. Reverse-scored items are indicated by a †]

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your own perceptions. Please answer each question as honestly and accurately as you can, but don't spend too much time thinking about each answer. Please rate the following questions on the scale below each question, where 1 equals "disagree completely" and 9 equals "agree completely":

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
disagree completely			neither agree nor disagree					agree completely

---

_____.		I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.
_____.		I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.
_____.	*	I tend to set goals that can be accomplished only by expending considerable mental effort.
_____.		I am usually tempted to put more thought into a task than the job minimally requires.
_____.	†	Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.
_____.	†	I am hesitant about making important decisions after thinking about them.
_____.		I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.
_____.	†	I prefer just to let things happen rather than try to understand why they turned out that way.
_____.	†	I have difficulty thinking in new and unfamiliar situations.
_____.	†	The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me.
_____.	*†	The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me.
_____.		I am an intellectual.

_____. † I only think as hard as I have to.

_____. † I don't reason well under pressure.

_____. † I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

_____. † I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.

_____. † I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.

_____. † I find little satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

_____. * I more often talk with other people about the reasons for and possible solutions to international problems than about gossip or tidbits of what famous people are doing.

_____. † These days, I see little chance for performing well, even in "intellectual" jobs, unless one knows the right people.

_____. † More often than not, more thinking just leads to more errors.

_____. † I don't like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.

_____. I appreciate opportunities to discover the strengths and weaknesses of my own reasoning.

_____. † I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.

_____. *† Thinking is not my idea of fun.

_____. † I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.

_____. * I prefer watching educational to entertainment programs.

_____. * I think best when those around me are very intelligent.

_____. * I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

_____. * I would prefer complex to simple problems.

_____. † Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me.

_____. † It's enough for me that something gets the job done, I don't care how or why it works.

_____. † Ignorance is bliss.

_____. I enjoy thinking about an issue even when the results of my thought will have no effect on the outcome of the issue.

APPENDIX C

Attributional Complexity Scale

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Person Perception Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed to investigate the different ways that people think about themselves and other people. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your own perceptions. Please answer each question as honestly and accurately as you can, but don't spend too much time thinking about each answer. Please rate the following questions on the scale below each question, where 1 equals "strongly disagree" and 9 equals "strongly agree":

---

1 disagree completely 2 3 4 neither agree nor disagree 5 6 7 8 9 agree completely

---

_____. I don't usually bother to analyze and explain people's behavior.

_____. Once I have figured out a single cause for a person's behavior I don't usually go any further.

_____. I believe it is important to analyze and understand our own thinking processes.

_____. I think a lot about the influence that I have on other people's behavior.

_____. I have found that the relationships between a person's attitudes, beliefs, and character traits are usually simple and straightforward.

_____. If I see people behaving in a really strange or unusual manner I usually put it down to the fact that they are strange or unusual people and don't bother to explain it any further.

_____. I have thought a lot about the family background and personal history of people who are close to me, in order to understand why they are the sort of people they are.

_____. I don't enjoy getting into discussions where the causes for people's behavior are being talked over.

_____. I have found that the causes for people's behavior are usually complex rather than simple.

_____. I am very interested in understanding how my own thinking works when I make judgments about people or attach causes to their behavior.

_____. I think very little about the different ways that people influence each other.

_____. To understand a person's personality/behavior I have found it is important to know how that person's attitudes, beliefs, and character traits fit together.

_____. When I try to explain other people's behavior I concentrate on the person and don't worry too much about all the existing external factors that might be affecting them.

_____. I have often found that the basic cause for a person's behavior is located far back in time.

_____. I really enjoy analyzing the reasons or causes for people's behavior.

_____. I usually find that complicated explanations for people's behavior are confusing rather than helpful.

_____. I give little thought to how my thinking works in the process of understanding or explaining people's behavior.

_____. I think very little about the influence that other people have on my behavior.

_____. I have thought a lot about the way that different parts of my personality influence other parts (e.g., beliefs affecting attitudes or attitudes affecting character traits).

_____. I think a lot about the influence that society has on other people.

_____. When I analyze a person's behavior I often find the causes form a chain that goes back in time, sometimes for years.

_____. I am not really curious about human behavior.

_____. I prefer simple rather than complex explanations for people's behavior.

_____. When the reasons I give for my own behavior are different from someone else's, this often makes me think about the thinking processes that lead to my explanations.

_____. I believe that to understand a person you need to understand the people who that person has close contact with.

_____. I tend to take people's behavior at face value and not worry about the inner causes for their behavior (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, etc).

_____. I think a lot about the influence that society has on my behavior and personality.

_____. I have thought very little about my own family background and personal history in order to understand why I am the sort of person I am.

How long have you been involved in your current romantic relationship?

_____ years, _____ months, and _____ weeks.

APPENDIX D

Extremity Questions

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Relationship Evaluation Extremity Measure

Read the following scenarios that could occur in romantic relationships. Think about these scenarios as if they happened in your present relationship. Really try to put yourself in the situation. What types of emotions would you feel in these situations? After reading each scenario and thinking about how the situation would make you feel, answer the questions following each paragraph using this scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very much

You come home from a hard day of classes to find your significant other making a special meal for you. He/she has also bought you something that you have been wanting for a long time. It is not your birthday or anniversary.

Using the scale printed above, to what extent would you feel each of the following?

___ happy
___ worried
___ upset
___ jealous
___ secure
___ in love with your partner
___ excited
___ loved by your partner
___ angry

You have been noticing that your significant other is not paying as much attention as usual to your relationship. A friend of yours tells you that he/she has seen your significant other at a party the night before with another guy/girl. Your significant other told you that he/she was at a party with his/her friends.

Using the scale printed above, to what extent would you feel each of the following?

___ happy
___ worried
___ upset
___ jealous
___ secure
___ in love with your partner
___ excited
___ loved by your partner
___ angry

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
not at all very much

You have been upset about several things lately. Your problems have nothing to do with your relationship, but you have told your significant other about them. You come home from classes and the first thing your significant other asks you about is if you have worked out some of the problems. He/she listens attentively and offers several good suggestions.

Using the scale printed above, to what extent would you feel each of the following?

___ happy
___ worried
___ upset
___ jealous
___ secure
___ in love with your partner
___ excited
___ loved by your partner
___ angry

You and your significant other have had dinner plans for a week now. The day of the dinner, your significant other backs out of the plans saying he/she has too much studying to do to take time out to go to dinner.

Using the scale printed above, to what extent would you feel each of the following?

___ happy
___ worried
___ upset
___ jealous
___ secure
___ in love with your partner
___ excited
___ loved by your partner
___ angry

APPENDIX E

Affective Variability and Extremity Scale

[*Items used to calculate affective extremity]

Remember, we are interested in how you feel <u>right now</u>.

How satisfied are you with your relationship right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How much do you love your partner right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How committed do you feel to your relationship right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How loved by your partner do you feel right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How much do you trust your partner right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How secure do you feel about your relationship right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How jealous do you feel right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How worried are you right now about your relationship breaking up?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How angry do you feel with your partner right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How excited are you to see your partner again?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

not at all very much

How much change would you like to see in your partner's behavior?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

none at all very much

How glad are you to be in this relationship right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very glad

How much do you like your partner right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very much

How rewarding is your relationship to you right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very rewarding

How irritating is your partner to you right now?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very irritating

*Think about the most positive thing that your partner did today. How positive was that?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very positive

*Think about the most negative thing that your partner did today. How negative was that?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all								very negative

Table 1

Pearson's Correlations among Gender, Relationship Length, and Complexity, Variability, and Extremity Measures

	Piles	NCS	ACS	CC	Lgth	Sex	Var	PosScen	NegScen	MELpos	MELneg
RRSC	.77**	.09	-.13	.24	.00	.09	.27	-.19	-.28	-.27	-.03
MELneg	.09	-.19	-.23	-.14	-.06	.06	.31*	-.24	-.37*	-.28	
MELpos	-.23	.01	.15	-.13	-.07	-.01	-.36*	.20	.06		
NegScen	-.27	.27	.16	.20	.11	.16	-.13	.18			
PosScen	-.09	.13	.26	.09	.21	-.19	.12				
Var	.35*	-.15	-.13	-.10	.22	-.15					
Sex[a]	.01	-.10	-.26	.07	-.19						
Lgth	.09	-.21	-.04	-.21							
CC	.17	.76**	.35*								
ACS	-.19	.53**									
NCS	.06										

*p<.05, **p<.01; RRSC = Romantic Relationship Schema Complexity; Var=Variability, PosScen=Positive Scenario extremity, NegScen=Negative Scenario extremity, MELpos=Positive MEL extremity, MELneg=Negative MEL extremity, Lgth= Relationship Length, CC=Cognitive Complexity, ACS=Attributional Complexity Scale, NCS=Need for Cognition Scale. [a]Sex was scored 1=female, 2=male.

Table 2

Pearson's Correlations among Relationship Length and Complexity, Variability, and Extremity Measures for Females (n=30)

	Piles	NCS	ACS	CC	Lgth	Var	PosScen	NegScen	MELpos	MELneg
RRSC	.80**	-.11	-.16	.19	.01	.40*	-.28	-.39*	-.32	.06
MELneg[a]	.12	-.08	-.24	-.05	-.12	.37	-.18	-.42*	-.19	
MELpos[a]	-.33	.05	.29	-.20	-.09	-.47*	.11	.08		
NegScen	-.27	.27	.09	.19	.14	-.19	.24			
PosScen	-.08	.25	.27	.10	.29	.10				
Var[a]	.57**	.27	-.14	.09	.22					
Lgth	.12	-.37*	-.11	-.22						
CC	.19	.64**	.18							
ACS	-.14	.50**								
NCS	-.04									

*p<.05, **p<.01; RRSC = Romantic Relationship Schema Complexity; Var=Variability, PosScen=Positive Scenario extremity, NegScen=Negative Scenario extremity, MELpos=Positive MEL extremity, MELneg=Negative MEL extremity, Lgth= Relationship Length, CC=Cognitive Complexity, ACS=Attributional Complexity Scale, NCS=Need for Cognition Scale. [a]Only 27 female participants contributed to the MEL extremity and variability measures.

Table 3

Pearson's Correlations among Relationship Length

and Complexity, Variability, and Extremity Measures for Males (n=19)

	Piles	NCS	ACS	CC	Lgth	Var	PosScen	NegScen	MELpos	MELneg
RRSC	.69**	.40	.02	.33	.05	-.06	.05	-.07	-.12	-.22
MELneg[a]	-.22	-.33	-.19	-.30	.15	.25	-.32	-.37	-.47	
MELpos[a]	-.12	-.06	-.25	-.01	-.03	-.06	.44	.03		
NegScen	-.29	.34	.49*	.19	.15	.13	.17			
PosScen	-.12	-.03	.12	.12	-.08	.09				
Var[a]	-.30	-.49	-.25	-.46	.13					
Lgth	.01	-.05	-.03	-.18						
CC	.15	.91**	.76**							
ACS	-.31	.62**								
NCS	.22									

*p<.05, **p<.01; RRSC = Romantic Relationship Schema Complexity; Var=Variability, PosScen=Positive Scenario extremity, NegScen=Negative Scenario extremity, MELpos=Positive MEL extremity, MELneg=Negative MEL extremity, Lgth= Relationship Length, CC=Cognitive Complexity, ACS=Attributional Complexity Scale, NCS=Need for Cognition Scale. [a]Only 15 male participants contributed to the MEL extremity and variability measures.

VITA

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