

ROMANTIC REJECTION SENSITIVITY AND NEGATIVE ADOLESCENT
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

The current study used a longitudinal design to examine if romantic rejection sensitivity leads to negative romantic relationship experiences such as dating aggression perpetration, conflict and hostility and relationship dissatisfaction in an adolescent population. This study also examined whether this relationship was mediated by relationship seriousness, how oriented they are towards their romantic partner, relationship insecurity, and experiencing a partner initiated break-up or not. The sample consisted of 434 adolescents (248 girls, mean age = 15.32) enrolled in grades 9-11 who were followed for one year. Results indicated that romantic rejection sensitivity was only associated with relationship dissatisfaction at Time 1 and Time 2. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction was mediated by relationship insecurity and relationship seriousness. This result was only found within time and not longitudinally. These results highlight how romantic rejection sensitivity can influence adolescent romantic relationships.

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Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and Negative Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Over the past decade, the research on adolescent romantic relationships has focused on the influence of these relationships on adolescent development (see Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009 for a review). Much of the focus of this research has been on the negative experiences adolescents have in their romantic relationships, such as the occurrence of dating aggression, the presence of conflict and hostility between romantic partners, break-ups, and relationship dissatisfaction (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). Current research has shifted from a focus on the occurrence of these negative experiences to a focus on the mechanisms that can account for why these negative experiences happen in some romantic relationships but not others (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). In order to accurately explain the individual differences of these negative experiences in romantic relationships, the proposed mechanism must take into account the individual differences between adolescents in their cognitive and emotional processing. Downey, Bonica and Rincon (1999) suggested a cognitive-affective processing system, termed rejection sensitivity, as a possible mechanism to explain the individual differences in adolescent romantic relationship experiences. Rejection sensitivity is defined as an individual's anxious or angry expectations and intense reactions to rejection (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999).

Most of the studies on rejection sensitivity and romantic relationships include young adult and adult samples and little is known empirically about how adolescents are affected by rejection. In terms of this study, rejection is defined as seeking acceptance from another person and not receiving it or experiencing a withdrawal of acceptance after it is obtained. While rejection from a potential romantic partner is a situation that any individual is capable of experiencing, adolescents will have experienced this type of situation for the first time. As these experiences are novel for adolescents, romantic rejection provides opportunities to develop

coping skills in these situations. If these coping skills are not adequately developed some youth may develop a sensitivity that is specifically related to rejection in future romantic relationships (hereafter referred to as romantic rejection sensitivity; Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999).

According to Downey, and colleagues (Downey, et al., 1999), those youth who are high rejection sensitive are more preoccupied than their peers with being rejected by a romantic partner and are more likely to perceive rejection from their partner's ambiguous negative behaviour even if no rejection was intended. In contrast, those who are low rejection sensitive are less likely to perceive rejection in their partner's ambiguous negative behaviour and are less preoccupied with being rejected by their romantic partner. However, if the romantic partner's negative behaviour is unambiguous or has a situational explanation, those who are high rejection sensitive are not more likely to perceive rejection than those who are low rejection sensitive (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999; Downey & Feldman, 1996). Therefore, low rejection sensitive individuals may have more adaptive ways of interpreting ambiguous negative behaviours, but when interpreting unambiguous negative behaviours being high rejection sensitive is just as adaptive as being low rejection sensitive.

As a result of this high preoccupation with being rejected these adolescents may engage in more serious relationships (relationship seriousness), may spend large amounts of time with their romantic partner such that the relationship may interfere with other aspects of their life (romantic partner orientation), may be less secure of their romantic relationship (relationship security), and may experience romantic partner initiated break-ups. Using a rejection sensitivity perspective, this study used a longitudinal design to examine whether romantic rejection sensitivity leads to negative relationship experiences, such as dating aggression, relationship conflict and hostility, and relationship dissatisfaction. This study also examined whether this

relationship was mediated by an adolescent's relationship seriousness, romantic partner orientation, relationship security and experiencing partner initiated break-ups.

Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are mutually acknowledged connections between two adolescents characterized by expressions of passion, intimacy, and commitment (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). While these relationships tend to be short and fleeting, ranging from a few weeks to 12 months depending on the age of the adolescent (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011), they nonetheless have a significant influence on both the adolescents' current and future development. One way in which romantic relationships can have an influence on adolescent functioning is through the negative experiences that can arise from being involved in this type of relationship. The current study examined three negative experiences an adolescent may encounter in a romantic relationship - dissatisfaction with the romantic relationship, perceptions of conflict and hostility, and dating aggression.

Negative Experiences in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

The quality of an adolescent romantic relationship, characterized by the amount of affection, intimacy and nurturance one shows to their partner (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009), can have an influence on whether an adolescent will be satisfied with their romantic relationship. Adolescents may become dissatisfied with their romantic relationship if their partner displays low levels of affection, intimacy and nurturance (Galliher, Welsh, Rostosky & Kawaguchi, 2004). Along with being dissatisfied with the romantic relationship, adolescents can experience conflict and hostility with their romantic partner. Due to the novelty of these relationships adolescents may not have learned to be sensitive or responsive to their romantic partner (Furman & Shomaker, 2008) and these relationships also give rise to new issues, such as jealousy or not

spending enough time with their partner, that can be a great source of conflict and hostility (Furman & Shomaker, 2008). Some adolescents may also experience dating aggression in their romantic relationship as a perpetrator. Dating aggression perpetration in adolescent romantic relationships is a common occurrence with 13-32% of adolescents experiencing physical aggression, such as hitting or punching (Connolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2010; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, Craig & Laporte, 2008).

Recently, research has moved away from quantifying negative relationship experiences. Instead, researchers are examining why adolescents have these negative experiences and what can account for adolescents' differential experiences (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). This has led researchers to examine contextual factors that can influence adolescents' differential negative experiences such as parent and peer influences (e.g., Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Furman & Shomaker, 2008; Furman, Simon, Shaffer & Bouchee, 2002; Laporte, Jiang, Pepler & Chamberland, 2011; Stocker & Richmond, 2007; Tyler, Brownridge & Melander, 2011; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, Craig & Laporte, 2008). While these studies are important in identifying distal factors predicting negative adolescent dating experiences, this study aims to focus on individual level factors involved in these experiences. One individual level construct that has been put forth as a possible predictor is rejection sensitivity (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009).

Rejection Sensitivity as a Direct Predictor of Negative Relationship Experiences

Rejection sensitivity is a cognitive-affective processing system (CAPS) that individuals use to interpret future rejection-acceptance situations (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). This CAPS develops from relationship schemas established during early rejection experiences in the family and the coping strategies that were used by the adolescent. Rejection sensitive individuals

anxiously or angrily expect and have intense reactions to rejection. Those who are highly rejection sensitive perceive rejection more readily and react to perceived rejection more strongly than those low in rejection sensitivity (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). Downey and colleagues posit that the rejection sensitivity CAPS can be continuously changed or maintained through new experiences and social interactions with peers, parents, and romantic partners across development. Due to the malleability of this CAPS, it is possible that rejection sensitivity can be situation specific where an individual can be highly sensitive to rejection with regards to a romantic partner but not sensitive to rejection from peers or parents (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk & Kang, 2010). Since romantic relationships are a novel experience for adolescents, romantic rejection sensitivity can be developed independently of rejection experiences in other domains of life. For example, if an adolescent who is accepted by peers and family gets repeatedly rejected by romantic partners it is possible for that adolescent to develop romantic rejection sensitivity independent of rejection experiences from their peers and family.

Romero-Canyas and colleagues (Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk & Kang, 2010), in their review on the implications of rejection sensitivity on romantic relationships in an adult population, found that high rejection sensitive individuals display hostility and aggression when perceiving rejection. Also, high rejection sensitive individuals were more likely to get into conflicts with their romantic partner, and are three times more likely to have their romantic relationship end in a break-up than low rejection sensitive individuals. It has not been confirmed whether these findings apply to adolescents, as the majority of the literature on the link between rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences focuses on young adults and adults (Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen & Shoda, 1999; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Feldman &

Ayduk, 2000; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). In an adolescent population, rejection sensitivity appears to be associated with dating aggression (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Wanner, 2002; Purdie & Downey, 2000), conflictual interactions with a romantic partner and lower relationship satisfaction (Gallagher & Bentley, 2010). This research has begun to explore the link between romantic rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences in adolescence. However, these adolescent studies use a rejection sensitivity questionnaire that measures how rejection sensitive an individual is across a variety of situations involving family, peers and romantic partners. Presently, to the author's knowledge, there have been no adolescent studies examining romantic rejection sensitivity outside the context of other rejection experiences. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to use a longitudinal design to examine romantic relationship rejection sensitivity and its direct relation to having negative relationship experiences. Also, since romantic rejection sensitivity can change with new rejection experiences, this study also examined whether past levels of romantic rejection sensitivity can directly predict changes in future negative relationship experiences.

Romantic Rejection Sensitivity as an Indirect Predictor of Negative Relationship Experiences

Romantic rejection sensitivity can also have an indirect effect on negative relationship experiences through how adolescents approach romantic relationships as well as whether or not they have been rejected by a romantic partner in the past. Romantic rejection sensitivity is shaped by an adolescent's previous rejection experiences. Thus, if an adolescent has previously been rejected by a romantic partner then they are more likely to experience high romantic rejection sensitivity than adolescents who have not been rejected by a romantic partner (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). Therefore, having experienced a partner initiated break-up or not can

indirectly influence the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences.

High rejection sensitive adolescents can approach romantic relationships in two different ways that can influence their potential for romantic rejection. The first approach high rejection sensitive adolescents may use is engaging in avoidance behaviours, such as avoiding romantic relationships or being involved in very short-term and superficial relationships. This allows the adolescent to minimize the amount of rejection that might occur as well as the amount of negative relationship experiences that they come into contact with (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). The second strategy is to overinvest in the romantic relationship. Adolescents who are overinvested in romantic relationships are those who value the romantic relationship above all other relationships and ignore other aspects of their lives in order to maintain the romantic relationship (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). However, when classifying an adolescent as high rejection sensitive it is difficult to determine what specific strategy they are employing because of the general view of relationships that high rejection sensitive individuals can have. Therefore, it is important to examine the characteristics of these relationship strategies to better understand what strategy a high rejection sensitive adolescent is likely to employ. For the purpose of this study, adolescents who are overinvested in romantic relationships are those who are extremely serious about the status of their relationship, believing it will last over a long period of time; ignore friends, family, and responsibilities in order to spend more time with their romantic partner; and are more insecure about the continuity of their romantic relationship. In contrast, those adolescents who employ an avoidant strategy would be less serious about the status of their romantic relationship, will not ignore friends, family, and responsibilities in order to spend more time with their romantic partner, and like overinvested adolescents, they are more

insecure about the continuity of their romantic relationship. Downey and colleagues also hypothesize that those adolescents who use the overinvestment strategy are more likely to be in a romantic relationship than those who employ the avoidance strategy because they are more likely to seek out romantic relationships.

When perceiving rejection, overinvested adolescents may engage in strategic responses in order to lower the chances that rejection by the romantic partner will occur. To prevent rejection from occurring, overinvested adolescents may engage in coercive behaviours including the threat of or use of aggressive acts, such as punching or hitting, or they may be hostile towards their romantic partner (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). Overinvesting adolescents are more likely to be in a romantic relationship than adolescents using the avoidance strategy, but these relationships may not be long lasting due to “fit failures” between the overinvested adolescent and their romantic partner. These “fit failures” occur when romantic partners differ in meeting their partner’s romantic needs (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009) and adolescents using the overinvestment strategy usually have romantic needs that are often more serious than their romantic partner’s and this is likely to result in the ending of the romantic relationship (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). The overinvestment strategy that these adolescents employ in order to stave off rejection from their romantic partner can have the opposite effect resulting in the adolescent being rejected by their romantic partner. These two differing approaches to romantic relationships, avoiding or overinvesting, can have an influence on whether or not an adolescent has negative relationship experiences. Therefore, another goal of this study was to determine if the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences was mediated by (a) an adolescent's insecurity about the continuity of their romantic relationship

(relationship security), (b) how serious an adolescent was about their romantic relationship (relationship seriousness), (c) whether the amount of time spent with their romantic partner was interfering with other relationships and responsibilities (romantic partner orientation), and (d) whether an adolescent has experienced a partner initiated break-up.

Gender Differences

Rejection sensitivity has been theorized to have different risks based on the gender of the adolescent. Downey and colleagues (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999) hypothesize that high rejection sensitive boys may be more at risk for aggression perpetration than high rejection sensitive girls due to boys being socialized to interpret the feelings associated with rejection as anger which they may express towards their romantic partner. In support of this hypothesis, several studies have found that rejection sensitivity significantly predicts dating violence perpetration among adolescent boys (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Wanner, 2002; Volz & Kerig, 2010). The above hypothesis only takes into account aggression perpetration and no other negative relationship experiences such as conflict and hostility and relationship dissatisfaction. The hypothesis also does not take into account the avoidance and overinvestment strategies used by the high rejection sensitive adolescent. When negative experiences and elements of overinvesting in the relationship are examined, it has been found that rejection sensitivity is related to adolescent girls' low relationship satisfaction and dating violence perpetration (Galliher & Bentley, 2010; Purdie & Downey, 2000). All of the above studies however, do not examine romantic rejection sensitivity specifically and only examine specific negative relationship experiences. Therefore, this study sought to examine the role that gender plays in the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences. Consistent with Downey and colleagues' (1999) suggestion, it was hypothesized that adolescent

boys who are high romantic rejection sensitive would have more negative relationship experiences than girls.

Purpose of the Study

In the adolescent romantic relationship literature there has been a recent shift from exploring the occurrence of negative relationship experiences to exploring the mechanisms that explain the individual differences in negative relationship experiences, such as partner conflict, dating aggression perpetration, and relationship dissatisfaction (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). Rejection sensitivity has been posited as one such mechanism (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999; Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). However, due to the novel nature of romantic relationships to those adolescents involved and developing experience adolescents have in them, it is possible that adolescents could become sensitive to rejection from a romantic partner but not peers or family. Therefore, a romantic rejection sensitive construct might be a good mechanism to explain individual differences in adolescents' negative romantic relationship experiences. With the majority of the adolescent rejection sensitive literature being longitudinal in nature, the primary goal of this study was to determine whether romantic rejection sensitivity (RRS) scores in year one directly predicted changes in adolescents' future negative relationship experiences one year later (see Figure 1, path c). The secondary goal of this study was to determine whether the relationship between RRS and negative relationship experiences was mediated by (a) being insecure about the continuity of the romantic relationship (relationship security), (b) being overly serious about the romantic relationship (relationship seriousness), (c) spending time with the romantic partner to the point of ignoring other relationships and responsibilities (romantic partner orientation), and (d) experiencing partner initiated break-ups. The third goal of this study

was to determine if gender moderates the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and negative relationship experiences.

Study Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were examined:

- 1) Romantic rejection sensitivity (RRS) at Time 1 will be significantly associated with each negative relationship experience within Time 1 as well as one year later;
- 2) RRS at Time 1 will be significantly associated with the proposed mediators: how secure an adolescent was about the continuity of their romantic relationship (Relationship Security); how serious they were about their romantic relationship (Relationship Seriousness); how much time they spent with their romantic partner to the detriment of other responsibilities and relationships (Romantic Partner Orientation); and experiencing a partner initiated break-up (Break-Ups) for some romantic rejection sensitive youth (see Figure 1, Path a);
- 3) Relationship Security, Relationship Seriousness, Romantic Partner Orientation, and Break-Ups will be significantly associated with each negative relationship experience (see Path b);
- 4) Relationship Security, Relationship Seriousness, Romantic Partner Orientation, and Break-Ups will mediate the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and each negative relationship experience (see Path c’);
- 5) The proposed model will be significant within time as well as across time;
- 6) Gender will moderate the relationship between RRS and Negative Relationship Experiences and will show that high rejection sensitive boys will have more negative relationship experiences than girls.

Method

Participants

This study is part of the Teen Relationships study, a larger three-year longitudinal study examining peer aggression and dating violence among high school students in seven Toronto, Ontario area high schools. All students in grades 9 through 12 were invited to participate in the study. The sample initially included 1627 adolescents. Of these students, 1253 also participated in the second wave of data. No significant attrition effects were found when evaluating the demographics (gender, ethnicity) at Time 1 and Time 2. A further inclusion criterion was that participants had to have had at least one past romantic partner at Time 1. Based on this, 324 participants were excluded from the study. Another inclusion criteria was that participants had to have been in a romantic relationship at Time 2. Based on this, a further 495 participants were excluded from the study. The final sample consisted of 434 adolescents. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics as well as adolescent romantic relationship history.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the York University Human Participants Research Council. High school students were provided with an overview of the research project as well as a description of what their involvement would entail by research assistants from a Toronto area University. Parents of students were mailed a description of the research project along with consent forms for participation. In order to participate in the study, informed parental/caregiver consent and youth assent must have been obtained. Once informed consent was obtained, research assistants from York University administered questionnaires to participants that took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Participants completed the questionnaires during a single class period or at another time and setting during the school day. Students completed the questionnaire containing all of the measures during the months of April and May and again one year later. Participating students received a \$5.00 honorarium for taking part in the study.

Measures

Demographics.

Participants completed a questionnaire assessing age, gender, ethnicity, family composition, parental education, length of time in Canada and whether or not they have been in a romantic relationship.

Negative Relationship Experiences.

Relationship dissatisfaction. One question from The Dating Questionnaire (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg & Pepler, 2004) was used to measure relationship dissatisfaction. Adolescent dissatisfaction with their current dating status (e.g., “How happy are you with your current dating status”) was assessed on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very happy*), with lower scores indicating an adolescent is unhappy with their current dating status.

Relationship Conflict and Hostility. The Conflict and Antagonism subscales of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was used to determine if conflict and hostility were present in adolescents’ romantic relationships. Adolescents responded on how true each statement was of them on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). The Conflict subscale (e.g., “My boyfriend/girlfriend and I argue with each other”) and Antagonism subscale (e.g., “My boyfriend/girlfriend and I get annoyed with each other’s behaviour”) contained three items each. The internal consistency for the Conflict subscale was Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ (Time 2). The internal consistency for the Antagonism subscale for Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$ (Time 2). A mean score across the three items for each subscale was used, with a higher score indicating more conflict and hostility present in the relationship.

Dating Aggression. Dating aggression perpetration was measured using seven items adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979), as well as two items to capture behaviours that may be more typical to adolescent behaviour (Gray & Foshee, 1997). These items included: “pushing, grabbing, shoving”; “slapping, kicking, biting”; “physically twisting”; “throwing smashing, hitting or kicking an object”; “slamming or holding against the wall”; “hitting or trying to hit with an object”; “choking, punching or beating during an argument” (CTS items); “spitting”; and “pulling hair or scratching”. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) indicating how often these actions were used during arguments. Total scores were used to determine the total number of aggressive acts an adolescent has perpetrated. Internal consistency was Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$ (Time 2).

Mediator Variables

Romantic Partner Orientation. A modified version of the Extreme Peer Orientation questionnaire (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993) was used to measure adolescent romantic relationship investment and whether the time spent with a romantic partner interfered with other relationships and responsibilities. Sample items include “How much does the amount of time you spend with your boyfriend/girlfriend keep you from doing the things you should do, like homework or chores?” and “How often do you act less smart or talented than you really are in order to make your boyfriend/girlfriend like you?”. The measure contained six items and they were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*little or none*) to 5 (*all the time*). The mean scores of the items were used with higher scores indicating more romantic partner orientation. Internal consistency was Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$ and Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$ (Time 2).

Relationship Security. The Reliable Alliance subscale of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was used to assess how secure adolescents feel about the length of their romantic relationship . Adolescents responded on how true each of three statements was for them (e.g., “I feel sure that this relationship with my romantic partner will last in spite of fights”). The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). A mean score across the three items were used with a higher score indicating more relationship security. Internal consistency for the Reliable Alliance subscale was Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$ (Time 2).

Relationship Seriousness. The Commitment subscale of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was used to assess the seriousness of adolescent romantic relationships. Three true or false items were used to indicate whether a relationship was considered serious (e.g., “My boy/girlfriend and I are in a serious relationship”; “My boyfriend/girlfriend and I are planning to get engaged, married, or live together”). Responses were then dichotomized to indicated whether the relationship was serious or not. Internal consistency was Cronbach's $\alpha = .48$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .43$ (Time 2).

Relationship Break-ups. The Dating Questionnaire (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg & Pepler, 2004) was used to measure relationship break-ups. Partner initiated break-ups were assessed with one question, with the adolescent reporting on who typically ends their romantic relationships (e.g., “In the past, who usually decided to end your romantic relationships?”). Responses were dichotomized to indicate whether an adolescent experienced a partner initiated break-up or not.

Predictor Variable

Romantic Rejection Sensitivity. Romantic Rejection sensitivity was measured using select items of the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ; Downey & Feldman, 1996). Only items relating to romantic partners and expectations of acceptance/rejection were used for this study. The selected items presented six hypothetical situations (e.g., “You ask someone you don’t know well out on a date”; “You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend if he/she really loves you”) and participants were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert type scale how likely, ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), the other person would provide an accepting response (e.g., “I would expect that the person would want to go out on a date with me”; “I would expect he/she would answer yes sincerely”, respectively). Items were reverse scored with higher scores indicating more expectations of rejection. An overall rejection expectation score was calculated consisting of the mean of all the items with higher scores indicating high rejection sensitivity. Internal consistency for an overall rejection sensitivity score was Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$ (Time 1) and Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$ (Time 2).

Data Analytic Plan

Descriptive analyses using IBM SPSS 20, were first conducted followed by simple correlations of Time 1 and Time 2 variables in order to explore the relationships amongst all of the variables (Table 2). The first objective of the analyses was to evaluate hypotheses 1-3 by examining the correlation matrix to determine whether there were significant relationships among the study variables in order to determine what variables would be included in the within and across time multiple regression analyses. The variables that were significantly associated with the predictor variable, Romantic Rejection Sensitivity, were included in the analyses. To evaluate hypotheses 4 through 6, multiple linear regressions were conducted to predict adolescent negative relationship experiences from Romantic Rejection Sensitivity with

Relationship Security, Romantic Partner Orientation, Relationship Seriousness, and Partner Initiated Break-up entered into the regression as mediator variables. For objective 2, the within time analysis, Time 1 variables were used while for objective 3, the across time analysis, Time 1 and Time 2 variables were used. In the across time analysis, Time 1 variables were entered as control variables in order to determine if Romantic Rejection Sensitivity predicted changes in negative relationship experiences at Time 2. For both objective 2 and objective 3 the Sobel test was used to determine if mediation was present.

Prior to conducting the central analyses the data was explored to determine the amount of missing data. A high percentage of missing data for some of the variables was found at Time 1. Romantic Partner Orientation had missing data of over 20%, and Relationship Security, Conflict and Hostility, and Dating Aggression Perpetration had 9% missing data. Due to this, multiple imputation using IBM SPSS 20 was conducted in order to estimate the values of the missing data (Howell, 2012). The data was also screened for multicollinearity, normality, heteroscedasticity, linearity, and the presence of outliers prior to conducting the multiple regression analysis. Multicollinearity among the variables was not present as the values for the variance inflation factors, condition indices, and variance decomposition proportions were all within normal limits (Myers & Well, 2003). The assumptions of multiple regression concerning normality, heteroscedasticity, and linearity were maintained as the probability and scatter plots of the residuals were within normal range (Myers & Well, 2003). Leverage and Cook's Distance were examined to identify outliers and influential data points. A total of 12 outliers were present; however, Cook's distance values were less than 1 (Myers & Well, 2003) indicating that these outliers were not significantly influencing the analysis.

Results

Objective 1: Correlations among Variables Within and Across Time

Simple correlations within and between Time 1 and Time 2 data points were computed. As can be seen in Table 3, Time 1 Rejection Sensitivity was significantly negatively correlated with Relationship Dissatisfaction at both time points but not significantly correlated with any other outcome variable, Conflict and Hostility and Dating Aggression. Time 1 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was significantly correlated with all of the mediator variables, with the exception of Romantic Partner Orientation at both time points and Time 2 Relationship Seriousness. All mediator variables with the exception of Partner Initiated Break-Up were significantly associated with Relationship Dissatisfaction. Due to Romantic Rejection Sensitivity being significantly correlated with Relationship Dissatisfaction and no other negative relationship experience, multiple regression analyses were conducted with Relationship Dissatisfaction as the only dependent variable.

Objective 2: Relationship between Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 1

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted in order to determine whether Romantic Rejection Sensitivity is predictive of adolescent's current Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 1 through Relationship Security, Romantic Partner Orientation, Relationship Seriousness and Partner Initiated Break-Up (Table 4). In order to evaluate gender differences in Romantic Rejection Sensitivity, gender was included both as a main effect and as a moderator. In the first step, gender and Romantic Rejection Sensitivity were entered. In the second step, Relationship Security, Romantic Partner Orientation, Relationship Seriousness, and Partner Initiated Break-Up were entered to determine if any of these variables mediated the initial relationship. Finally,

in the third step, the interaction between Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and gender was entered to determine if gender moderates the relationship.

As can be seen in Table 4, Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was significantly negatively associated with Relationship Dissatisfaction while gender (boys $M = 2.92$, girls $M = 3.19$) was also a significant main effect. When the mediators were entered into the second step, Romantic Rejection Sensitivity dropped in significance, $p > .05$, while the main effect of gender maintained significance, and Relationship Security and Relationship Seriousness were significantly associated with the dependent variable, $F(2, 428) = 17.45, p < .01$. In the third step, the results of the second step remained the same with the exception of Romantic Rejection Sensitivity, which became significantly associated with the dependent variable again. Sobel tests were run to determine whether Relationship Security and Relationship Seriousness significantly mediated the relationship between Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Dissatisfaction. Both Relationship Security (Sobel test statistic $z = -4.89, p < .05$) and Relationship Seriousness (Sobel test statistic $z = -2.89, p < .05$) significantly mediated the relationship between the predictor and dependent variable.

Objective 3: Multiple Regressions Predicting Changes in Relationship Dissatisfaction from Romantic Rejection Sensitivity

Multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to assess whether Romantic Rejection Sensitivity at Time 1 predicted changes in adolescent's Relationship Dissatisfaction from Time 1 to Time 2 (refer to Table 5). In order to evaluate gender differences in Romantic Rejection Sensitivity, gender was included both as a main effect and as a moderator. Gender was entered into the first step, and it significantly predicted Time 2 Relationship Dissatisfaction. In order to account for changes in Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 2, the Time 1 dependent

variable was entered into the second step and significantly predicted Time 2 Relationship Dissatisfaction. This association is no longer significant when Time 1 mediator variables were entered into step 3, with gender being the only significant main effect. Due to the Time 1 mediator variables being non-significant, these variables were collapsed into the category Time 1 Mediators in step 4. Time 1 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was also entered into this step and was non-significant. Due to all of the Time 1 variables, except for gender, being non-significant in the model they were collapsed into the category Time 1 Variables at step 5. Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was entered into Step 5 in order to determine if it was a better predictor of adolescent Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 2 than Time 1 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity. All of the Time 2 mediator variables were entered into step 6. In step 7, the interactions in the previous analysis and between gender and Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity were entered.

As can be seen in Table 5, when controlling for Time 1 variables, Time 1 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was not a significant predictor of Relationship Status Satisfaction. When Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was entered into the model it was significantly associated with the dependent variable while controlling for all Time 1 variables. In step 6 Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity was no longer significant while all of the Time 2 mediator variables were significant with the exception of Partner Initiated Break-Up, $F(12, 421) = 23.29$, $p < .01$. In step 7, all of the interaction effects entered were non-significant. Sobel tests were used to determine whether Time 2 Relationship Security, Romantic Partner Orientation, and Relationship Seriousness were significant mediators. Time 2 Relationship Security (Sobel test statistic $z = -6.75$, $p < .01$) and Relationship Seriousness (Sobel test statistic $z = 3.15$, $p < .05$) significantly mediated the relationship between Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and Time 2 Relationship Dissatisfaction. Time 2 Romantic Partner Orientation did not significantly

mediate this relationship. Thus, these analyses partially support the study hypotheses in that the proposed model of the relationship between Romantic Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Dissatisfaction was only significant within time and not across time.

Discussion

The current study examined whether adolescent romantic rejection sensitivity was predictive of later negative relationship experiences including relationship dissatisfaction, conflict and hostility in the romantic relationship, and dating aggression perpetration. The study also examined whether romantic rejection sensitivity was indirectly related to these negative experiences through how secure adolescents' are about the continuity of their relationship, whether they are oriented towards their partner to the point where they are paying less attention to other aspects of their life, how serious they are about their relationship, and whether their relationships are more likely to end due to a partner initiated break-up. In partial support to the study hypotheses, romantic rejection sensitivity was significantly correlated with one of the three proposed negative relationship experiences - relationship dissatisfaction - within time as well as across time. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the proposed model was unable to account for changes in later relationship dissatisfaction but was able to account for current relationship dissatisfaction at both time points with the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction being mediated by how secure and how serious the adolescent was in their romantic relationship.

Rejection Sensitivity and Relationship Dissatisfaction - An Indirect Relationship

In partial support to the study hypotheses, romantic rejection sensitivity was associated with relationship dissatisfaction at both time points but was not associated with conflict and hostility in the romantic relationship nor was it associated with dating aggression perpetration

cross-sectionally or longitudinally. These results are in contrast to previous adolescent research showing a link between rejection sensitivity and conflict and hostility (Gallagher & Bentley, 2010) and dating aggression (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Wanner, 2002) in adolescent romantic relationships and adult romantic relationships (see Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk, & Kang, 2010 for a review). This could be due to this study only examining romantic rejection experiences and not other rejection experiences, such as from family or peers, that could contribute to an adolescent's overall rejection sensitivity. These differences could also be due to the low romantic rejection sensitivity scores found in this study. Adolescents have not had many romantic experiences and the experiences they do have tend to be fleeting and less serious (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). Due to this, adolescents may not have many rejection experiences, compared to adults, which would allow for romantic rejection sensitivity to increase. Thus, with romantic relationships in adolescence being fleeting and family and peer rejection experiences not being taken into account it could be that romantic rejection sensitivity scores may not be as stable as overall rejection sensitivity scores in an adolescent population.

Romantic rejection sensitivity was correlated with relationship dissatisfaction in that high rejection sensitive adolescents were not satisfied with their relationship at either time point. However, in partial support to the study hypotheses, the multiple regression analyses indicated that the direct relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction was only significant within time and not across time suggesting that romantic rejection sensitivity is not predictive of future relationship dissatisfaction. These are due to the mediated relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction. In support of the study hypotheses, the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction is mediated by how secure an adolescent was in their relationship and how serious

they were about their relationship. High rejection sensitive adolescents can engage in one of two strategies in order to stave off rejection from romantic partners - avoidance or overinvestment (Downey, Bonica & Rincon, 1999). The results of this study also found that adolescents high in rejection sensitivity were not likely to engage in the overinvestment relationship strategy. That is to say high rejection sensitive adolescents were not likely to value the romantic relationship to the point where they were ignoring other relationships and other aspects of their lives. Rather, it appears that high rejection sensitive adolescents were not only less secure about the continuity of their romantic relationship but they were also less serious about their romantic relationship in that they did not believe their relationship would last over a long period of time. This suggests that those adolescents who were high rejection sensitive were engaging in the avoidance strategy as these adolescents appeared to be preoccupied with the possible rejection from their romantic partner resulting in them being insecure about how long their relationship would last. Along with this insecurity, these adolescents distanced themselves from their romantic partner by being less serious about the romantic relationship.

Gender Differences

The current study did not assess gender differences in dating aggression perpetration and conflict and hostility in relationships due to their non-significant relationship with romantic rejection sensitivity. Contrary to the study hypothesis no gender differences in the relationship between romantic rejection sensitivity and relationship dissatisfaction were found. Previous studies on adolescent rejection sensitivity are mixed, suggesting that both boys and girls who are rejection sensitive are likely to have negative relationship experiences (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Wanner, 2002; Downey, Bonica, & Rincon, 1999; Galliher & Bentley, 2010; Purdie & Downey, 2000; Volz & Kerig, 2010). By finding no gender differences this study contributes

to this literature by suggesting that in terms of romantic rejection sensitivity it appears that boys and girls have more similar experiences than different experiences.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

The current study does have several limitations. This study administered self-report questionnaires that rely on participants' own interpretation and willingness to answer sensitive questions. In particular, it relied on participants' own interpretation as to whether the amount of time they were spending with their romantic partner interfered with other aspects of their daily lives rather than asking another source, such as a peer or parent, for their interpretation. This study is also limited by asking about adolescents' satisfaction with their current dating status rather than, or in conjunction with, the quality of their current romantic relationship. While the information obtained with the current question was useful and informative, asking about the quality of the romantic relationship could have provided more in depth information of adolescents' views and insights into their romantic relationship functioning. This study was also limited by not having romantic partner reports of participating adolescents to determine whether the romantic partner's level of romantic rejection sensitivity influenced whether an adolescent had a negative relationship experience. Another limitation of this study is the low reliability of the scale measuring how serious an adolescent romantic relationship was. This low reliability could be due to the format of the questions which ask an adolescent to choose whether their romantic relationship is serious or not. Future studies examining how serious a romantic relationship is may gain more reliability from asking adolescents to rate how serious their relationship is on a Likert-type scale as this would provide adolescents greater flexibility in determining how serious they are in their romantic relationship.

With these limitations in mind there are several directions future research in this area could explore. This study has focused exclusively on one aspect of the rejection sensitivity construct by only taking into account romantic relationship rejection experiences. It would be beneficial to examine whether taking into account past rejection experiences from peers and family has an influence on adolescent negative relationship experiences. This study also focused on dating aggression perpetration and not victimization. According to Downey and colleagues (Downey et al., 1999) overinvested adolescents can engage in one of two strategies in order to maintain their romantic relationship: using coercive behaviours such as violence to maintain the romantic relationship or engage in compliance behaviours where they may put the romantic relationship above their own personal safety in order to stave off rejection from their romantic partner. This theory suggests that overinvested adolescents may also be at risk for dating violence victimization and further exploration in this area is needed.

Conclusion

In summary, the current study has made an important contribution to the rejection sensitivity and adolescent romantic relationship literature. This study has shown that romantic relationship specific rejection sensitivity may influence adolescent romantic relationships by making adolescents less secure, less serious and overall less satisfied with their current relationship. These results speak to the importance of individual cognitive processes and the influence they can have on adolescents' approaches to and experiences of romantic relationships. These results also speak to the importance of studying individual cognitive processes and their influences on adolescent dating experiences. With more insight into how and in what way adolescents are processing information related to the novel situations that arise out of romantic

relationships researchers will be able to better understand why some adolescents and not others will have negative relationship experiences.

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Figure 1

Proposed relationship between RRS and Negative Relationship Experiences

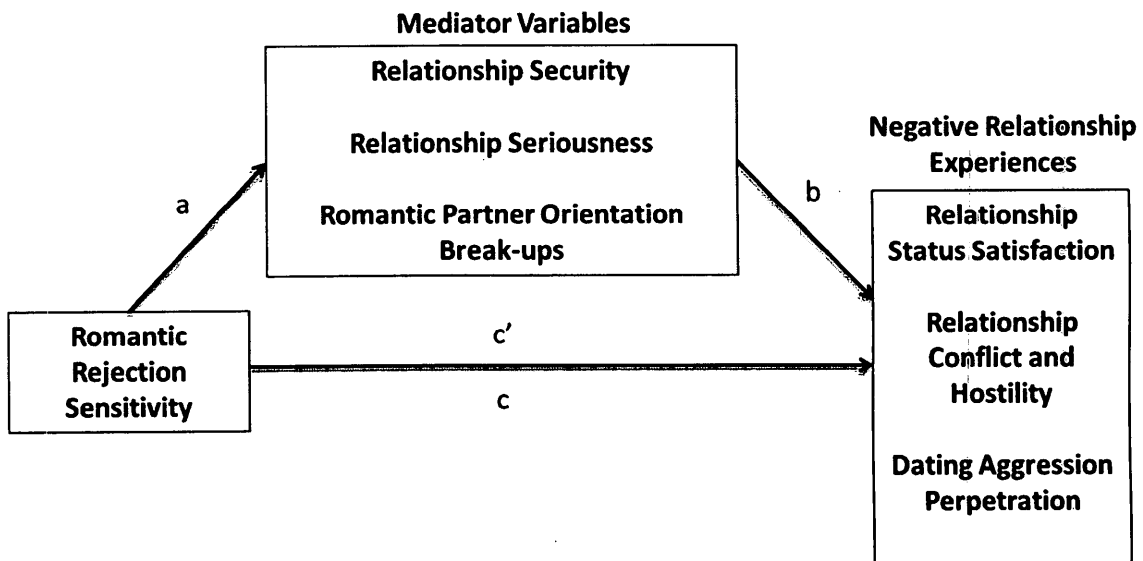


Table 1
Demographic characteristics and Romantic Relationship History at Time 1

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age			15.32	.93
Grade at Time 2				
10	138	31.9		
11	169	39.0		
12	125	29.1		
Gender				
Boys	186	42.9		
Girls	248	57.1		
Ethnicity				
European-Canadian	304	70.2		
African/Caribbean-Canadian	37	8.5		
Asian-Canadian	37	8.5		
South-Asian-Canadian	10	3.2		
Other	41	9.4		
Relationship Status at Time 1				
In a romantic relationship	211	48.6		
Not in a romantic relationship	233	51.4		
Total Number of Romantic Partners at Time 1				
0	28	6.8		
1	97	23.6		
2-4	203	56.0		
5-9	65	15.8		
10+	18	4.2		
Total Number of Romantic Partners at Time 2				
1	53	12.6		
2-4	193	45.8		
5-9	124	29.4		
10+	51	12.2		

Note. *N* varies for each individual variable due to missing data. Valid percentages are reported. Grade at Time 2 is reported due to missing data at Time 1.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Stability Correlations for Time 1 and Time 2 Variables.

	Time 1				Time 2				Time 1- Time 2 R
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	%	
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	4.02	.78			3.80	.82			.46**
Relationship Security	3.20	1.23			3.76	1.06			.24**
Romantic Partner Orientation	1.88	.75			1.78	.72			-.03
Relationship Seriousness									.24**
Not Serious			251	59.2			110	26.4	
Serious			173	40.8			307	73.6	
Partner Initiated Break-Up									1.00**
No			344	84.7			363	85.0	
Yes			62	15.3			64	15.0	
Relationship Dissatisfaction	3.11	.99			3.63	.65			.16**
Conflict/Hostility	4.84	1.82			4.70	1.81			.31**
Dating Aggression	1.13	2.81			1.38	3.90			.34**

Note. *N* varies for each individual variable due to missing data. Valid percentages are reported. *R* represents correlations between Time 1 and Time 2. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix for Romantic Rejection Sensitivity, Mediator Variables, and Negative Relationship Experiences

	Romantic Rejection Sensitivity		Relationship Dissatisfaction		Conflict/ Hostility		Dating Aggression	
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity								
Time 1	-	-	-.29**	-.13**	.02	-.07	-.05	-.09
Time 2	-	-	-.15**	-.27**	-.06	-.03	-.07	.03
Mediator Variables								
Relationship Security								
Time 1	-.30**	-.05	.54**	.14**	-.14**	.04	-.03	-.05
Time 2	-.15**	-.36**	.17**	.58**	-.03	-.03	-.06	-.06
Romantic Partner Orientation								
Time 1	.04	-.07	-.04	-.03	-.05	.02	-.00	-.04
Time 2	.09	.05	-.07	-.19**	.06	.24**	.19**	.42**
Relationship Seriousness								
Time 1	-.29**	-.07	.49**	.11*	-.09	.10*	.12*	.02
Time 2	-.13**	-.23**	.19*	.41**	-.02	.13*	.07	-.08
Partner Initiated Break-Up								
Time 1	.15**	.17**	-.09	-.08	-.03	.02	-.01	.00
Time 2	.15**	.15**	-.09	-.08	-.03	.02	-.01	-.00

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. N varies for each individual correlation due to missing data

Table 4 *Multiple Regressions predicting Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 1 from Romantic Rejection Sensitivity at Time 1 (N = 434)*

Variable	B	SEB	95% CI	R ²	ΔR ²
Step 1				.08**	
Gender	.22	.10	.03, .42*		
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.34	.06	-.47, -.22**		
Step 2				.31**	.23**
Gender	.23	.09	.06, .39**		
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.10	.06	-.22, .03		
Relationship Security	.26	.05	.16, .36**		
Romantic Partner Orientation	-.02	.06	-.14, .11		
Relationship Seriousness	.51	.11	.29, .73**		
Partner Initiated Break-Up	-.15	.18	-.60, .20		
Step 3				.32**	.01
Gender	.21	.09	.05, .38*		
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.27	.13	-.52, .03*		
Relationship Security	.26	.05	.16, .36**		
Romantic Partner Orientation	-.02	.06	-.14, .11		
Relationship Seriousness	.51	.11	.29, .73**		
Partner Initiated Break-Up	-.26	.21	-.75, .23		
Romantic Rejection Sensitivity X Gender	.16	.12	-.08, .39		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Gender was coded 0 for boys and 1 for girls; Relationship Seriousness was coded 0 for not serious and 1 for serious Partner Initiated Break-Up was coded as 0 for no and 1 for yes;

Table 5 *Multiple Regressions predicting Relationship Dissatisfaction at Time 2 (N = 434)*

Variable	B	SEB	95% CI	R ²	ΔR ²
Step 1				.02**	
Gender	.22	.06	.09, .34**		
Step 2				.04**	.02**
Gender	.19	.06	.07, .31**		
Time 1 Relationship Dissatisfaction	.09	.03	.02, .15**		
Step 3				.05**	.01
Gender	.20	.06	.05, .33**		
Time 1 Relationship Dissatisfaction	.05	.04	-.03, .13		
Time 1 Mediators					
Relationship Security	.05	.04	-.02, .12		
Romantic Partner Orientation	-.03	.05	-.12, .05		
Relationship Seriousness	.01	.09	-.16, .18		
Partner Initiated Break Up	-.13	.08	-.29, .04		
Step 4				.05**	
Gender	.20	.06	.08, .32**		
Time 1 Relationship Dissatisfaction	.05	.04	-.03, .13		
Time 1 Mediators***					
Time 1 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.05	.04	-.13, .03		
Step 5				.11**	.06**
Gender	.22	.06	.10, .34**		
Time 1 Variables***					
Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.23	.04	-.32, -.16**		
Step 6				.37**	.26**
Gender	.11	.05	.01, .22*		
Time 1 Variables***					
Time 2 Romantic Rejection Sensitivity	-.05	.04	-.12, .03		
Time 2 Relationship Security	.29	.03	.23, .35**		
Time 2 Romantic Partner Orientation	-.12	.04	-.19, -.04**		
Time 2 Relationship Seriousness	.20	.07	.06, .34*		
Time 2 Partner Initiated Break-Up	-.00	.22	-.45, .45		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p > .05$ for all variables included in this category. The Time 1 variables that were entered were Relationship Dissatisfaction, Relationship Security, Romantic Partner Orientation, Relationship Seriousness, Partner Initiated Break-Up, and Romantic Rejection Sensitivity. Gender was coded 0 for boys and 1 for girls; Relationship Seriousness was coded 0 for not serious and 1 for serious; Partner Initiated Break-Up was coded as 0 for no and 1 for yes.