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ASSESSING DECISION-MAKING IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A FIRST ITALIAN VALIDATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP DECIDING SCALE

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Recent changes in the development of romantic relationships suggest the need for a thorough assessment of factors underlying decision-making processes about important steps in the couple's life, to prevent constraints that could increase relational distress. This research examines the dimensionality and convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity of the first validation of the Relationship Deciding Scale (RDS) in the European context. Study 1 (N = 426) tests the original RDS three-factor structure with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and provides reliability data for the factors. In Study 2 (N = 337), the replicated RDS factors (Relationship Confidence, Knowledge of Warning Signs, and Deciding) demonstrate acceptable construct validity. Confidence and Deciding further predict relationship satisfaction and conflict management. The results provide evidence for the use of the RDS scale in educational and clinical settings for the assessment of decision-making strategies and relational skills that can be helpful in preventing the risk of negative relational experiences.

Key words: Relationship Deciding Scale; Scale validation; Romantic relationships; Decision-making; Relational inertia.

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In the last 20 years, the age of first marriages in the majority of European countries and outside Europe (e.g., North-America and Australia) has dramatically shifted toward older-aged spousal unions, moving from 25.9 years in 1990 to 30.9 in 2012 (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2015). Furthermore, divorce rates and the option of cohabitation as a stable alternative to marriage has increased at the expense of general marriages rates and inflated the number of children born outside a marriage (27.2% in 2000 to 40.0% in 2012; Eurostat, 2015). These demographic data evidence how the strict, conservative concept of traditional family has been progressively changing, while reaching adult independence, responsibilities, and commitment to the development of a new family have slowly shifted toward the end of the third decade of life.

It seems that patterns of relational instability and ambivalence toward "should I stay" or "should I go" are nowadays more and more common than in the past (e.g., Shulman & Connolly, 2013). This consistent change in the timing and process of marital union puts forth the question about how young adults live their early romantic relationships and what are the principles and decision-making processes implied in either choosing or sliding to commit to a stable, long-term relationship with the partner.

Lack of conscious deciding, defined as *sliding*, about having sex, cohabitation, marriage, and pregnancy, leaves the relational foundations unstable and puts couples at risk of adverse outcomes, such as relational distress, conflicts, lower relationship quality and satisfaction, and eventual partnership breakdown. When asked about their choice of starting cohabitation, many couples often state that "it happened very naturally" or that "it was the obvious thing to do at that point of the relation" or that "it just went with the flow." Shifting across important relational transitions without fully considering the possible consequences for the couple's and individuals' lives has been related to the risk of future constraints and relational distress that can seriously cause the couple to fall apart. In their model based on commitment theory, Stanley, Rhodes, and Markman (2006) explain "sliding versus deciding" with the concept of *relational inertia*, which occurs when "some relational transitions increase constraints and favor the continuance of the relationship regardless of fit, possible relationship problems, or mutual commitment to the future of the relationship" (Vennum & Fincham, 2011, p. 739). In clinical settings too, the evaluation of couple's functioning, starting from their decision-making style, can prove to be useful and sometimes indispensible when planning an intervention tailored to the couple and to the family as a whole where a child presents adjustment problems (Balottin, Nacinovich, Bomba, & Mannarini, 2014).

The assessment of decision-making processes involved in building up a stable relationship seems to be of paramount importance to draw a possible picture of the new relational habits that have been shaping in the last years. Unfortunately, in both the national and international context, no consistent and valid assessment measure of decision-making processes in romantic relationships existed before 2011, when a newly devised measure of factors underlying romantic relationship development and maintenance appeared in the scientific literature, that is, the Relationship Deciding Scale (RDS; Vennum & Fincham, 2011). Before the development of the RDS scale, existing questionnaires in the field of romantic relationship assessment mainly targeted multiple (e.g., Dyadic Adjustment Scale; Spanier, 1976) or single aspects of relationship quality, such as relationship satisfaction (e.g., Quality Marriage Index; Norton, 1983), commitment and partner mutual involvement (e.g., Investment Model Commitment Scale; Rusbult, 1983), negative evaluations (e.g., Relationship Attribution Measure; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), and conflict resolution strategy (e.g., Conflict-Resolution Behavior Questionnaire; Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993). However, none of these measures available in the literature provides a comprehensive look at decision-making processes and foundations of romantic relationships that relate to "deciding versus sliding" dynamics in relationship evolution.

The current study presents a report on the validation of the RDS for the Italian population. The RDS instrument was developed for the American population, which is denoted by peculiar patterns of romantic relationship observed in the Western European countries (e.g., Kiernan, 2002). We were therefore interested in verifying whether the factors related to decision-making processes and confidence in romantic relationships could hold in a European context, specifically in the Italian context. Following the work by Vennum and Fincham (2011), two studies examined the factorial structure (Study 1) and the construct and predictive validity (Study 2) of the RDS Italian adaptation.

STUDY 1

The objective of the first study was to verify whether the original RDS dimensional structure could be replicated in the Italian context.

METHODS

Participants

The initial sample comprised 426 undergraduate university students from a large University in Northern Italy (77.5% female, M_{age} = 23.74 years, SD = 3.791) who were participating in a bigger research project on "Implicit and explicit adult attachment and romantic relationships involvement" for one course credit reward. Similarly to Vennum and Fincham (2011), students who indicated they had had at least one romantic relationship in their life (78.4%) constituted the final sample used for the analysis. Of those students with romantic relationship experience, the majority reported being heterosexual (91.6%), 51.5% was currently in a relationship, and 6.9% reported to be cohabitating or being married. About 18.6% had been in a relationship for less than one year, 28.1% one-two years, 22.8% two-three years, and 30.5% for more than three years.

Instruments

The Italian version of the RDS scale was administered along with a battery of self-reports. The original version of the scale is composed of 12 items distributed in the following three subscales:

1. *Relationship Confidence*; it reflects the confidence in being able to have and maintain a relationship (four items);
2. *Knowledge of Warning Signs*; the items describe the awareness of and ability to deal with risk factors in a relationship (three items);
3. *Deciding*; it refers to the thoughtfulness regarding any relationship decision (five items; two items are score-reversed).

According to the guidelines developed by the International Committee of Psychologists of the International Test Commission (van de Vijver & Hambleton, 1996), the RDS English version was translated into Italian through a back-translation procedure. A native English speaker and a native Italian speaker translated the questionnaire into Italian. The two versions were then independently translated back into English by two Italian native speakers proficient in the English language and with expertise in personality and social psychology. Comparisons and discussion of differences between these four versions resulted in minor item changes.

Data Analysis

Preliminary RDS items' descriptive analyses were conducted to control for normality requirements. Skewness and kurtosis values for each item were calculated. Given the item ordinal scale of measurement, inter-item polychoric correlations were computed.

Secondly, the three-dimensional structure of the RDS, as devised in Vennum and Fincham (2011), was tested with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify whether the instrument factorial structure was eventually replicated in the Italian version of the scale. The evaluation of model goodness-of-fit was based on multiple indicators: the Satorra-Bentler chi-square

statistic (χ^2), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the RMSEA 90% confidence interval (CI) and test of close fit (PCLOSE), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Values greater than .90 and .95 for CFI and TLI are considered indicative of acceptable and good model fit, respectively (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004). Values smaller than .08 and .05 for RMSEA, and smaller than .10 and .08 for SRMR, support acceptable and good model fit, respectively (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Concerning the RMSEA 90% CI, values below .05 or containing 0 for the lower bound and below .08 and .05 for the upper bound, provide respectively acceptable and good model fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). PCLOSE is the one-sided test of the null hypothesis that RMSEA $\leq$ .05, which indicates a close-fitting model; a probability greater than .05 should be expected. However, these proposed cut-off values should be considered as rough guidelines, not as "golden rules," and when evaluating a model's goodness-of-fit, the integration of these indices with the evaluation of parameter estimates in relations to theory, a priori predictions, and previous research, is recommended (Marsh et al., 2009).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and polychoric correlation values of the RDS items are reported in Table 1. Several skewness and kurtosis *z*-scores 2 *SD*s away from the mean indicated that moderate deviations from univariate normality (and thus from multivariate normality as well) were present in the data, motivating the adoption of a weighted least square (WLS) estimator in the CFA analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The CFA analysis was conducted with LISREL 8.71 (Jöreskog & Sörbon, 2004) using the WLS estimator to account for data ordinal scale of measurement and non-normality. The original RDS three-factor model provided a satisfactory fit to the data, Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2(51) = 97.59$, $df = 51$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .052; RMSEA 90% CI = [.036, .068]; PCLOSE = .382; TLI = .952; CFI = .963; SRMR = .075, supporting the RDS theoretical dimensional structure in the Italian adaptation (path-diagram presented in Figure 1). Table 2 presents Cronbach's alpha coefficients, correlations and correlations corrected for attenuation[1] (Spearman, 1904) among the RDS subscales.

DISCUSSION

Study 1 provides evidence about the replication of the dimensional structure of the RDS scale proposed by Vennum and Fincham (2011) for the Italian population. A CFA analysis confirmed the theoretical three-dimensional model underlying the scale, which resulted to be similarly

TABLE 1
RDS item descriptive statistics: Inter-item polychoric correlations, item mean and standard deviation (*SD*), kurtosis and skewness values, and standardized kurtosis and skewness scores

	RDS1	RDS2	RDS3	RDS4	RDS5	RDS6	RDS7	RDS9	RDS10	RDS11	RDS12	RDS13
RDS1	–											
RDS2	.140	–										
RDS3	.170	.636	–									
RDS4	.288	.527	.588	–								
RDS5	.153	–.041	–.014	.022	–							
RDS6	.097	.096	.168	.176	.174	–						
RDS7	.125	.163	–.014	.096	.026	.483	–					
RDS9[a]	.147	.030	.120	.066	–.014	.315	.323	–				
RDS10	.281	.079	.083	.309	.342	.187	.195	.115	–			
RDS11	.176	.131	.247	.226	.487	.237	.093	.117	.379	–		
RDS12	.194	.243	.309	.305	.058	.281	.254	.169	.103	.178	–	
RDS13[a]	.101	.071	.120	.145	.093	.344	.321	.399	.111	.104	.375	–
Mean	3.070	3.260	3.150	3.080	2.970	2.600	3.150	2.750	2.520	2.790	3.460	2.710
SD	.504	.751	.798	.747	.701	.863	.762	.755	.709	.587	.678	.777
Kurtosis	.882	.297	–.206	–.228	–.100	–.643	.046	–.038	–.216	1.081	.269	–.344
Kurtosis *z*-score	3.314	1.116	–.775	–.856	–.375	–2.418	.174	–.143	–.814	4.062	1.013	–1.291
Skewness	.123	–.804	–.627	–.442	–.274	–.083	–.634	–.359	–.176	–.641	–1.003	–.170
Skewness *z*-score	.920	–6.028	–4.699	–3.312	–2.055	–.621	–4.749	–2.693	–1.320	–4.807	–7.518	–1.273

[a] Item reverse-scored.

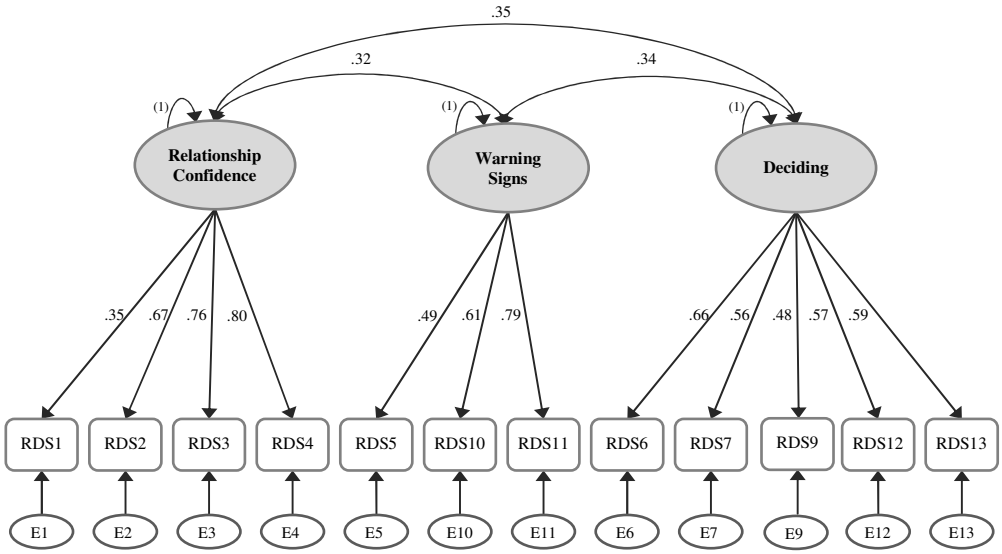

FIGURE 1
Confirmatory factor analysis of the RDS Italian version. Standardized parameters.

TABLE 2
Observed correlations (below the diagonal), Cronbach's alpha coefficients (between brackets) and disattenuated correlations (above the diagonal) among the RDS subscales

	Relationship Confidence	Knowledge of Warning Signs	Deciding
Relationship Confidence	(.68)	.31**	.34**
Knowledge of Warning Signs	.20**	(.60)	.34**
Deciding	.23**	.21**	(.65)

** $p < .01$.

structured as the original English version. The three subscales, namely Relationship Confidence, Knowledge of Warning Signs, and Deciding, presented an acceptable internal consistency equal to or slightly above .60, and resulted to be positively correlated to each other, providing validity about the interrelation among self-efficacy and confidence in maintaining a relationship, ability to recognize and deal with potential risks for the relationship, and awareness of taking relevant decisions about the relationship. These findings give sufficient support to the dimensional validity of the Italian adaptation of the RDS scale and prompt further exploration of the construct and predictive validity of the measure.

STUDY 2

In this study, construct and predictive validity of the Italian RDS scale was further explored. According to Vennum and Fincham's (2011) hypotheses and results, the RDS subscales

should be differently related to adult attachment orientations and measures of relational and social cognitive abilities, such as empathic self-efficacy and relational egoism and conflict management (Mannarini, 2010).

It is expected that the Relationship Confidence subscale will be positively related to attachment security to a greater degree than the other two RDS subscales, and negatively related to anxiety and avoidance attachment components to a lower extent. Knowledge of Warning Signs and Deciding are expected to be moderately negatively correlated to attachment avoidance, whereas only Knowledge of Warning Signs is expected to be negatively correlated to an anxious attachment orientation.

Relationship Confidence and Knowledge of Warning Signs subscales are also expected to be positively correlated with the self-efficacy perception of being sufficiently empathic with others. The acknowledgement of potential risks for the relationship status and the confidence in being able to commit to and handle a romantic relationship are not disjointed from the perception of being able to empathize with others and understand their intentions and feelings. According to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), people who perceive themselves as efficacious in doing some tasks or engaging in some behaviors, such as taking the perspective of and understanding other's feelings, are more likely to manifest these behaviors or perform better the required tasks. It follows that perceiving themselves as able to empathize with others should be a relationship skill related to the ability to recognize any warning sign within the relationship and to the confidence in "being tuned" with the partner.

Deciding in romantic relationships is further hypothesized to be negatively related to relational strategies people use when facing possible conflicts in the relationship, which can create risks for distress within the relationship and worsen the partners' interaction. It is expected that the three RDS subscales would show negative correlations with the tendency to be selfish and favor oneself during a disagreement with the partner. The correlation between the RDS subscales with a social desirability measure controlled for self-presentation and desirability strategies. To test the predictive validity of the Italian RDS, participants' relationship satisfaction and relational egoism in conflict management were used as main criterion variables, expecting the RDS subscales to positively predict relationship satisfaction and negatively predict self-centered conflict management orientation.

METHODS

Participants

Three-hundred and thirty-seven undergraduate university students from a large University in Northern Italy (65% female, M_{age} = 24.40 years, SD = 4.63) participated in the study for one course credit reward. Students who indicated they had had at least one romantic relationship in their life (78.9%) constituted the final sample used for the analyses. Of these students, the majority reported being heterosexual (93.2%), 46.6% was currently in a relationship and 11.7% reported to be cohabitating or being married. About 19.6% had been in a relationship for less than one year, 26.8% one-two years, 23% two-three years, and 30.6% for more than three years.

Instruments

Relationship Deciding Scale (RDS). Participants completed the RDS scale described in Study 1 and the following self-report measures in counterbalanced order.

Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ). Adult attachment scale developed by Feeney, Noller, and Hanrahan (1994) and composed by 40 items rated on an agreement Likert-type scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*). According to Stein et al. (2002) and Mannarini and Boffo (2014) three items were removed (Items 30, 31, and 33) and the five subscales converged into three main attachment constructs: Confidence (6 items), Avoidance (17 items; Discomfort with Closeness and Relationships as Secondary), and Anxiety (14 items; Need for Approval and Preoccupation with Relationships). The Italian version by Fossati et al. (2003) was administered.

Perceived Empathic Self-Efficacy scale (PESE). The PESE was designed according to Bandura's (2006) guidelines for constructing self-efficacy measures and assesses the individual's perceived ability to empathize with others and take their perspective, to respond emotionally and compassionately to others' distress and misfortune, and to be sensitive to how one's actions affect others' feelings (Caprara, Gerbino, & Delle Fratte, 2001). The PESE is composed of 12 items to be rated on a perceived ability Likert rating scale from 1 (*not able at all*) to 5 (*totally able*).

Relational egoism and conflict management. In the absence of measures specifically designed to assess relational egoism and conflict style in romantic relationships, 10 items were created for this study to evaluate how respondents react to conflicting situations within the couple relationship and what is their conflict management and resolution style. The items describe a self-centered, competitive, and not collaborating conflict attitude, such as: "I think in the couple relationship only my needs are important," "During an argument I use to leave without any reason," "I'm more careful in satisfying my desires rather than my partner's." The agreement to the items is rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*). The agreement to the items is rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*).

Social Desirability Scale (SDS). The Italian version of the SDS scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Maino & Aceti, 1997) was used in the present study. The scale is a shorter version of the original Marlowe-Crowne SDS, composed of 20 items rated on an agreement Likert-type scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*).

Relationship satisfaction. Participants were asked how happy and satisfied they were with their current relationship on a Likert rating scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*).

RESULTS

Construct Validity

Observed correlations and correlations corrected for attenuation (Spearman, 1904) were computed among the RDS subscales and the other variables assessed (see Table 3). As expected Relationship Confidence resulted to be differently correlated to the three attachment constructs: it was more positively related to attachment security than to anxiety attachment, with which it presented a very low negative correlation value. Contrary to expectations, the self-confidence to stay into a relationship was mostly negatively related to an avoidant attachment orientation, rather than to security, suggesting that the less a person strives to proximate relations, the more it is likely

that he/she would be more at ease with the "challenge" of a romantic relation. On the other hand, being preoccupied for others' closeness has little to do with feeling insecure and not able to carry on a romantic relation. As predicted, the ability to deal with any negative hint in the relationship resulted to be positively related to Attachment Security and inversely related to Anxiety. The third RDS subscale, Deciding, unexpectedly presented no statistically significant association with any attachment orientation.

TABLE 3
Observed correlations and disattenuated correlations (between brackets) for the RDS subscales; internal consistency for all measures

Variable	Relationship Confidence	Knowledge of Warning Signs	Deciding	Cronbach's alpha
ASQ confidence	.28**(.42)	.23**(.33)	–.06(–.10)	.70
ASQ anxiety	–.15*(–.22)	–.30**(–.39)	–.01(–.02)	.80
ASQ avoidance	–.34**(–.47)	–.09(–.11)	.05(.08)	.84
PESE	.12(.18)	.37**(.50)	.03(.04)	.74
Relational egoism/conflict	–.29**(–.41)	–.16**(–.21)	–.07(–.11)	.78
SDS	–.11(–.15)	–.16*(–.21)	–.12(–.19)	.74

Note. ASQ = Attachment Style Questionnaire; PESE = Perceived Empathic Self-Efficacy scale; SDS = Social Desirability Scale.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

As hypothesized, Knowledge of Warning Signs resulted to be significantly positively related to the empathic self-efficacy (PESE). This is not true for the Relationship Confidence subscale, which resulted to be independent of the individual perception of being "tuned" and empathic to others.

The absence of an egoistic "style" of conflict management within the relationship was concurrent to a higher level of self-confidence to commit to a relationship and the capability of detecting potential conflicting situations in it. Furthermore, Knowledge of Warning Signs resulted to be the only facet of relational decision-making not considered as a desirable behavior. Deciding subscale presented no statistically significant correlation with any of the variables assessed. No gender differences were evidenced for any RDS subscale, *t*s range = [–.474, .575], $df = 262$, $p > .05$, whereas participants currently involved in a stable relationship were more confident in their relational competence ($t = –2.047$, $df = 261$, $p = .042$), while being as capable in deciding and looking out for the warning signs as those not in a long-term love affair (*p*s > .05).

Predictive Validity

To examine predictive validity, two hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted on the RDS subscales with relationship satisfaction and relational egoism and conflict as dependent variables. Only data of participants currently involved in a relationship were used ($n = 199$). Relationship Confidence was the only RDS subscale predicting greater satisfaction and happiness with the ongoing relation ($\beta = .352$, $p < .001$), whereas an egoistic and self-favoring

attitude in conflicting situations was mostly negatively predicted by Relationship Confidence (β = –.398, $p < .001$), followed by the Knowledge of Warning Signs (β = –.154, $p = .019$).

DISCUSSION

Study 2 provides further evidence about the construct and predictive validity of the RDS scale in the Italian context. As in Vennum and Fincham's (2011) original study, Relationship Confidence subscale substantially correlated with the other measures: all adult attachment components and relational egoism and conflict management showed are related to the confidence in carrying on a couple relation, confirming what the authors already found in their first study. When measuring young adults' relationship skills you cannot disregard the strength of individuals' confidence in the ability to sustain close and intimate bonds with others, since Relationship Confidence also resulted to be the main predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction and, to a lower degree, of relational egoism and poor conflict management style. Interestingly, the strongest association was found between an avoidant attachment orientation and the RDS Confidence, suggesting that an avoidant strategy to deal with any threat to attachment security is mostly related to not being confident to handle the "challenges" of a close relationship with the partner (e.g., Mannarini & Boffo, 2014). A satisfactory security in romantic relationships seems to be substantially related to not presenting a general avoidant attachment orientation.

The Knowledge of Warning Signs subscale also evidenced to be related to the secure and anxious attachment components and to the ability to empathize with others, but, contrary to Vennum and Fincham (2011), it was not related to an avoidant attachment orientation. The more a person is anxious and perceives him/herself as less capable of understanding and taking other's perspective, the easier the acknowledgment of any difficult issue in the relation. The last result confirms indeed the social cognitive perspective on the effects of self-efficacy perception on the outcome of the inquired skill or task. Furthermore, the ability to promptly detect warning signs in the relation prevents from using a poor conflict management style and having a self-centered and selfish attitude when starting a discussion with the partner. This result is also associated to the fact that the more a person is able to recognize the warning signs in the relation, the less he/she tends to present himself or herself as socially desirable. As in the original version of the scale, only Knowledge of Warning Signs subscale was indeed weakly related to social desirability, but in the opposite direction: being able to capture any negative signal in the romantic relation appeared not to be a desirable feature in young adults' love affairs.

Decision-making strategies in romantic relationships are not related to any of the criterion variables measured, suggesting that the Deciding subscale taps on something different from individual differences in relational processes and constructs, such as the attachment orientation and the empathic perceived self-efficacy. No gender differences emerged for any RDS subscale, whereas having previous experience but not being currently involved in a relationship yields less confidence in carrying on a relation. This suggests the presence of fluctuations of relational confidence depending on the relational status a person finds him/herself in and on the relationship experience, while keeping intact the level of Deciding and Knowledge of Warning Signs.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Major changes in young adults' emerging romantic relationships and in the formation of steady and long-term committed couple unions bring about the reflection on what makes a relationship work out and long-lasting, and which factors mostly contribute to avoiding sliding, in favor of consciously deciding about the natural transitions in a relationship development. According to a model based on commitment theory, the sliding-versus-deciding effect on the relation functioning has been explained with the concept of *relational inertia*, which describes the occurrence of important changes in a couple's life without fully considering their consequences and consciously taking the step toward them. Sliding into having sex, marriage, cohabitation, or into any substantial changing event, may put the couple at risk of incurring in stressful conditions and impediments in the relationship, which can potentially result in the partnership breakdown. Research on the factors contributing to a more adaptive deciding process in relationships stimulated the development of a new measuring instrument to capture what is at the basis of a good relationship development. The Relationship Deciding Scale was then put forth in the American context (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). The hypothesis about its usage outside the specific cultural and social context of development, namely the USA, and the observation of similar phenomena in the marital and family union formation encouraged the study of this measure also in the European context, such as Italy.

Altogether, the results of the present research provide evidence for the validity of the RDS measure in the Italian context. The three factors devised in the original version of the scale hold in the same scale adapted for the Italian population, suggesting that the confidence in being able to maintain a relationship, the ability to deal with warning signs in a relation, and the thoughtfulness about relation decisions, are key aspects characterizing romantic relationships also in a different cultural context.

Although the lack of a proper cross-cultural validity approach may limit the generalizability of these results, to the best of our knowledge this is the first study addressing the validity of the RDS measure and of the theoretical model behind the development of the scale in a different language and context. The adaptation of the scale for use in other European and Western countries is of primary importance to support the cross-cultural validity of this instrument.

Our results further indicate that the three RDS subscales can provide an insight into how individuals generally approach their romantic relationships and into individual differences in the relationship management (e.g., the association with the attachment orientation and the individual perception of empathic self-efficacy). Furthermore, the scale predicts the degree of relational satisfaction and what kind of strategy is used to handle conflicting situations in the couple. In particular, relationship confidence was shown to predict above and beyond the other RDS subscales, meaning that regardless of deciding or being sensitive to dynamics occurring in the relationship, having higher relationship confidence will lead to greater relationship satisfaction and develop a more collaborative and constructive attitude toward conflicts (e.g., Knopp, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2015; Owen, Roades, & Stanley, 2013; Yoshida, 2013).

The latter results speak about the predictive validity of the RDS scale and the implications for its use in the clinical setting. For instance, assessing sliding behavior may help the planning of couple therapy or individual therapy. In the case of unsatisfactory or conflicting relationships, the RDS may suggest the target of specific interventions of counseling to help people change their behaviors and cognitions, such as successfully resolving interpersonal conflicts and promoting skills to handle issues in the relational context.

One of the limitations of the present research is the use of a university student sample. Nonetheless, young adults are more susceptible to significant changes and transitions through relationships and/or "sliding versus deciding" behaviors, therefore suitable for testing the measurement properties of the RDS scale. However, the use of the RDS with more stable adult couples should be taken into account also longitudinally at different time points to better define the scale validity. Concerning the validity analyses, it might be also interesting to examine different couple typologies such as married couples, couples where husband and wife live separated, not married couples. Further, in line with recent studies on relationships in the couple and in the family, the necessity to devise, in future researches, a "decision-making" dyadic score for the couple should be taken into consideration (Korsgaard, Brower, & Lester, 2015).

NOTE

1. Spearman's (1904) disattenuated correlation estimate, which is corrected for measurement error, is the raw correlation between x and y (r_{xy}) divided by the square root of the product of the reliability of x (r_{xx}) and the reliability of y (r_{yy}): r_{xy}/sqrt(r_{xx} * r_{yy}).

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