**Abstract.** This study examines relationship-specific rumination (RSR) as a key cognitive factor corresponding with relational uncertainty (RU) in romantic relationships to extend the relational uncertainty model (Knobloch, 2007). Actor-partner interdependence models were employed to investigate the impact of RSR not only on the ruminators’ own uncertainty, but also on their partner’s uncertainty. One hundred and twenty dating couples completed self-report measures examining their relationship, self, and partner uncertainty as well as RSR. Results revealed that RSR was associated with the ruminators’ own relationship and partner uncertainty as well as their partner’s relationship and self uncertainty. The discussion highlights the theoretical implications of these findings for extending the relational uncertainty model.

1. **Introduction**

Relational uncertainty (RU) is related to various negative outcomes in interpersonal relationships such as negative emotions including anger, sadness, and fear (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007), and avoiding conversations with a partner about important issues (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Synthesizing these findings, Knobloch (2007) proposes a relational uncertainty model, hypothesizing determinants and outcomes of RU. These outcomes have been investigated by past studies (e.g., Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch et al., 2007), but its determinants have not been fully studied (Boucher, 2015) although Knobloch (2007) called for research on the determinants. This study nominates relationship-specific rumination (RSR) as a determinant of RU. Identifying the association between RSR and RU may make it possible to devise preventive measures for high trait ruminators who are at risk of RU.

To extend the relational uncertainty model further, this study examines how an individual’s tendency to ruminate is associated with his or her own as well as his or her
partner’s RU by using an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Previous research suggests a negative influence of individuals’ ruminative coping style on their partner’s relational outcomes such as mood or tension (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; King & DeLongis, 2014). The results will be important in filling a gap in the theories of relational uncertainty and rumination.

Practically, understanding how both partners’ rumination in a couple may contribute to each other’s relational uncertainty may help develop new perspectives for couple therapy. If someone in a romantic relationship experiences much uncertainty about the relationship, encouraging both the individual and his or her partner together (not only the individual) to go to couple therapy might be effective because the relational uncertainty may be caused by his or her partner’s rumination rather than his or her own. Such practical implications to decrease relational uncertainty may be important especially to Japanese people because Japan is the strong uncertainty avoidance culture where people are intolerant of uncertainty in interpersonal relationships (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Therefore, although the current study uses theories developed in Western countries with participants in the U.S., the results of this study have practical value for developing healthy romantic relationships for Japanese people.

1.1 Relational Uncertainty and Its Model

The concept of relational uncertainty was developed by Knobloch and Solomon (2002) by applying Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (URT) to close relationship contexts. URT explains how uncertainty guides people’s communication in the context of initial interaction. On the other hand, Knobloch and Solomon (2002) investigated the role of uncertainty in close relationships and theorized that RU stems from three sources: the relationship, the self, and the partner. Relationship uncertainty includes the doubts individuals experience about the nature of the relationship (e.g., the definition or status of the relationship). Self uncertainty involves individuals’ confidence in their own involvement in a relationship. Partner uncertainty is defined as the ambiguity individuals experience about their partner’s participation in a relationship. In past studies, the results of confirmatory factor analyses showed that relationship, self, and partner uncertainty form distinct constructs (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch et al., 2007).

Knobloch (2007) proposes a relational uncertainty model, hypothesizing three determinants and three outcomes of relational uncertainty (Figure 1). The three types of outcomes of RU are cognition (e.g., the negative perception of their partner’s behavior and the relationship; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), emotion (e.g., anger, sadness, and fear; Knobloch et al., 2007), and communication (e.g., avoiding conversations with a partner about important issues; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004).
The three types of determinants are: qualities of relationships, features of situations, and characteristics of individuals. Among these determinants, identifying the association between certain individual characteristics and RU has theoretical and applied value. Knobloch (2007) suggests there are only a few studies specifying personal characteristics associated with RU. For example, depressive symptoms (Knobloch, Knobloch-Fedders, & Durbin, 2011), an insecure attachment style (Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001), and causal uncertainty (Boucher, 2015) are related to high RU. Thus, identifying more personal characteristics associated with RU will extend what the relational uncertainty model can explain and help to provide preventive measures for those with the characteristics who are at risk of RU. This study specifically nominates such a personal characteristic — the tendency to engage in RSR.

1.2 Rumination

The concept of rumination was developed as part of response styles theory by Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) in the clinical psychology context and is defined as thoughts that focus one’s attention on one’s own distress and the implications caused by the distress. Therefore, those with a ruminative response style cannot help but wonder why they are in a negative mood and what the possible consequences would be. This tendency to engage in rumination is considered as an individual characteristic (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 1999), leading to prolonged depression (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) and an increase in aggression (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005).

Drawing upon this general conceptualization of rumination, Carson and Cupach (2000) established a construct of RSR, which is defined as obsessive worry about the security of the relationship. Similar to general rumination, the tendency to engage in RSR is also an individual characteristic (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Previous research shows that
relationship ruminators are more likely to engage in manipulation, negative affect expression, signs of possessiveness, violent communication, violence toward objects (Carson & Cupach, 2000), stalking (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), and jealousy expressions (Bevan & Hale, 2006) than non-ruminators.

According to response styles theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), RSR may be associated with RU. For example, if individuals with high RSR see their romantic partner with a friend of the opposite sex, they may keep worrying about negative consequences such as cheating or breaking up. The negative thoughts may make the ruminator unconfident in the definition of the relationship (i.e., high RU). Related to this idea, Jostmann, Karremans, and Finkenauger (2011) found that the tendency to ruminate impairs the ability to regulate negative affect in response to romantic relationship threat. Taken together, RSR may be an important determinant of RU.

Scholars also suggest the possible negative effect of rumination on the ruminator’s partner (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; King & DeLongis, 2014). In marital relationships, an individual’s rumination in response to life stress is associated with their partner’s marital tension (King & DeLongis, 2014). Considering that dating partners face more possibilities to be left by their partner than marital partners (Kurdek, 1995), rumination in response to relationship threat (i.e., RSR) may be more influential on a partner compared with rumination in response to life stress.

To identify associations between RSR and RU, it is important to consider unique roles of RSR in both the ruminator’s and his or her partner’s RU. However, when studying dyads, traditional methodological and statistical approaches do not take into account interdependent (or correlated) variances between two individuals in a couple. Without distinguishing interdependent variances in the same dyads, results of statistical significant tests are likely to become either too liberal or too conservative. To address this issue, the current investigation employs an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM), which allows us to conceptually and statistically assess the independent effects of both partners in a dyad (Kenny et al., 2006). Specifically, APIM estimates the extent to which a person’s independent variable influences both his or her own dependent variable (i.e., an actor effect) and his or her partner’s dependent variable (i.e., a partner effect). Simultaneously, unique effects of his or her partner’s independent variable on the person’s dependent variable (i.e., a partner effect) and on the partner’s own dependent variable (i.e., an actor effect) are estimated in this model. Thus, APIM is the appropriate method to investigate RSR and RU in romantic couples.

1.3 Rumination and Relationship Uncertainty

Actor effects. Response styles theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) suggests those high
in RSR are expected to experience more relationship uncertainty. When ruminators experience a threat to their romantic relationship, they may keep thinking about how the threat has occurred and what the negative consequences would be (Carson & Cupach, 2000). The negative thoughts caused by the threat may be linked to their own uncertainty about the nature of the relationship (Guerrero & Andersen, 1998; Knobloch & Solomon, 2004).

H1: Rumination about a romantic relationship is positively associated with one’s own relationship uncertainty.

**Partner effects.** Previous studies imply that those ruminating about their romantic relationship could lead their partner to be uncertain about their relationship. Interdependence theory proposes that individuals’ cognitive reactions to relational events can influence their partner’s thoughts (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Past research shows an individual’s ruminative response to life stress is related to their partner’s marital tension (King & DeLongis, 2014). Taken together, an individual’s ruminative response to relationship threat may be associated with their partner’s uncertainty about the relationship.

H2: Rumination about a romantic relationship is positively associated with a partner’s relationship uncertainty.

### 1.4 Rumination and Self Uncertainty

**Actor effects.** Ruminators may be uncertain about their own participation in the relationship because they may mull over how much they should participate in the relationship to protect it from threats (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). However, Carson and Cupach (2000) suggest that ruminators may be confident in their participation because they believe that their romantic partner is the only source of happiness, which they are eager to protect from threats by participating in the relationship. Considering these mixed accounts, the following research question is proposed:

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between RSR and one’s own self uncertainty?

**Partner effects.** Individuals may feel ambiguity about their participation if their partner ruminates about the relationship. Ruminators tend to be manipulative, possessive, violent (Carson & Cupach, 2000), and aggressive (Bushman et al., 2005). These attitudes may make their partner feel threatened. Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) suggest feelings of being threatened is associated with self uncertainty because those who feel threatened would not be confident in their willingness to commit themselves to such a risky relationship.

H3: Rumination about a romantic relationship is positively associated with a partner’s self uncertainty.
1.5 Rumination and Partner Uncertainty

Actor effects. Those ruminating about their romantic relationship may experience uncertainty about their partner’s involvement in the relationship. According to response styles theory, ruminators who face relationship threat such as seeing their partner with an individual of the opposite sex cannot regulate their negative thoughts (e.g., their partner is cheating) caused by the threat (Jostmann et al., 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). To support this idea, ruminators tend to be manipulative and possessive (Carson & Cupach, 2000) because they want to ensure their partner’s participation in the relationship. Thus, those high in RSR would not be confident in their partner’s involvement in the relationship.

H4: Rumination about a romantic relationship is positively associated with one's own partner uncertainty.

Partner effects. As people have doubts about their partner’s participation in the relationship, the partner may also develop doubts about his or her partner’s participation in the relationship. The partner’s doubt about his or her partner’s participation is a partner’s partner uncertainty. According to past studies on jealousy, those high in RSR may make their partner more confident in the ruminators’ participation in the relationship. Individuals who ruminate about their relationship are likely to express their jealous feeling to their partner (Bevan & Hale, 2006). Jealousy expression may help the partner feel loved (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007), thereby making the partner confident in their partner’s participation in the relationship. On the other hand, ruminating about the relationship without openly expressing their opinion is not a desired way to maintain a relationship (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Consequently, another research question is made:

RQ2: Is there a relationship between RSR and a partner’s partner uncertainty?

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Procedures

A total of 120 heterosexually involved romantic couples (240 individuals) at a large public university in the Southwestern United States participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 years (M = 20.66, SD = 2.06). The majority of participants were Caucasian (n = 109, 45.4%); others were Asian American (n = 52, 21.7%), Hispanic (n = 34, 14.2%), African American (n = 19, 7.9%), Pacific Islander (n = 2, 0.8%), and other ethnicities (n = 24, 10.0%). Relationship length ranged from one month to 106 months (M = 20.50, SD = 18.39).

Two methods were used to recruit participants. The first method involved couples participating in a laboratory setting completing questionnaires. The second involved the use of an online questionnaire in which both partners participated. The two methods were used to increase the number of participants. There were not significant differences in any
variables between these groups recruited through the two methods.

2. Measures

**Relationship-specific rumination.** Rumination about a romantic relationship was assessed by ten items from the relationship-specific rumination scale created by Carson and Cupach (2000). Example items are: “I wonder about how my partner feels about our relationship” and “I spend time thinking about whether or not my partner loves me.” A 5-point Likert scale was employed for all questions (1: Never – 5: Almost always or always); a higher score indicates more rumination. Cronbach’s αs were .91 for both women and men.

**Relationship uncertainty.** Sixteen items of the Relationship Uncertainty Scale developed by Knobloch and Solomon (1999) were employed to assess how uncertain participants were about involvement within their relationship. Example items are: “How certain are you about how you and your partner view this relationship?” and “How certain are you about whether or not you and your partner will stay together?” A 6-point Likert scale was used (1: Completely or almost completely uncertain – 6: Completely or almost completely certain). All items were reverse-coded so that higher values illustrate greater uncertainty. Cronbach’s αs were .96 for women and .95 for men.

**Self uncertainty.** Self uncertainty was assessed by the Self Uncertainty Scale developed by Knobloch and Solomon (1999). Example items are: “How certain are you about how committed you are to the relationship?” and “How certain are you about how important this relationship is to you?” A 6-point Likert scale was used (1: Completely or almost completely uncertain – 6: Completely or almost completely certain). All items were reverse-coded so that higher scores represent greater uncertainty. Cronbach’s αs were .95 for women and .96 for men.

**Partner uncertainty.** Partner uncertainty was examined by the Partner Uncertainty Scale by Knobloch and Solomon (1999). Example items are: “(How certain are you about) how committed your partner is to the relationship?” and “(How certain are you about) how important this relationship is to your partner?” A 6-point Likert scale was used (1: Completely or almost completely uncertain – 6: Completely or almost completely certain). All items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate greater uncertainty. Cronbach’s αs were .94 for women and .93 for men.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analyses

The means and standard deviations for each of the aforementioned measures are presented in Table 1. There were no significant differences between men and women in
their scores of the study variables. Correlations among all the eight variables are reported in Table 2. There was not a statistically significant association between men’s RSR and women’s RSR, indicating the tendency to ruminate about a relationship is based on personality. RSR and each type of uncertainty were associated in predicted ways. Women’s RSR was associated with their own relationship uncertainty and partner uncertainty as well as their partner’s relationship uncertainty and self uncertainty. Similarly, men’s RSR was associated with their own relationship uncertainty and partner uncertainty as well as their partner’s relationship uncertainty and self uncertainty.

In addition, both women’s and men’s RSR were not significantly related to their partner’s partner uncertainty. However, whereas women’s RSR did not significantly correlate with their own self uncertainty, men’s RSR was significantly associated with their own self uncertainty.

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Combined (Female &amp; Male)</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship-Specific Rumination</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Uncertainty</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Uncertainty</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Uncertainty</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 2 Correlations among Variables

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<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. W RSR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. W RU</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.</td>
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<td>.</td>
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<td>3. W SU</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.74**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
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<td>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. W PU</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. M RU</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.74**</td>
<td>.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. M SU</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. M PU</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes. W = women’s, M = men’s, RSR = Relationship-Specific Rumination, RU = Relationship Uncertainty, SU = Self Uncertainty, PU = Partner Uncertainty.

*p < .05, **p < .01.
3.2 Hypotheses Testing

Three APIMs were formulated to test the associations between RSR and relationship, self, and partner uncertainty by using Mplus 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010) as indicated in Figure 2. Exogenous variables are women’s and men’s RSR. Endogenous variables are women’s and men’s uncertainty, and we examined the three types of uncertainty in separate models. The APIMs are saturated models with zero degrees of freedom, so no measures of fit can be computed.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that RSR would be positively associated with one’s own relationship uncertainty. As shown in Figure 2, women’s ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) and men’s ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) RSR were associated with their own relationship uncertainty. In other words, individuals who ruminate more about their relationship have more questions about the status of their relationship.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that RSR would be positively associated with their partner’s relationship uncertainty. As described in Figure 2, women’s ($\beta = .19, p = .021$) and men’s ($\beta = .18, p = .029$) RSR were associated with their partner’s relationship uncertainty. That is, individuals who date a partner ruminating more about their relationship have more questions about the status of their relationship.

RQ 1 was proposed to ask if there is a relationship between RSR and one’s own self uncertainty. As depicted in Figure 3, women’s RSR was not correlated with their own self uncertainty ($\beta = .08, p = .401$). However, men’s RSR was positively associated with their own self uncertainty ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). In short, men who ruminate more about their relationship are less confident in their involvement in their relationship.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that rumination about a romantic relationship would be associated with their partner’s self uncertainty. As shown in Figure 3, women’s ($\beta = .23, p = .008$) and men’s ($\beta = .17, p = .045$) RSR were associated with their partner’s self uncertainty.
Hypothesis 1 predicted that rumination about a romantic relationship would be associated with one’s own partner uncertainty. As indicated in Figure 5, women’s \( (\beta = .35, p < .001) \) and men’s \( (\beta = .39, p < .001) \) RSR were associated with their own partner uncertainty. In short, individuals who ruminate more about their relationship have more doubts about their partner’s participation in their relationship.

RQ 2 was proposed to ask if there is a relationship between RSR and their partner’s partner uncertainty. As described in Figure 5, neither women’s \( (\beta = .11, p = .173) \) nor men’s \( (\beta = .07, p = .413) \) RSR was correlated with their partner’s partner uncertainty.

4. Discussions

The relational uncertainty model lacks enough empirical evidence to explain what kind of uncertainty. In other words, individuals who date a partner ruminating more about their relationship are less confident in their involvement in their relationship.

Figure 3. Model of Relationship Uncertainty as an Outcome
Notes. RSR = Relationship-Specific Rumination. Numbers indicate standardized beta coefficients.
\*\*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .005

Figure 4. Model of Self Uncertainty as an Outcome
Notes. RSR = Relationship-Specific Rumination. Numbers indicate standardized beta coefficients.
\*\*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .005
of personal characteristics are associated with RU (Knobloch, 2007). This study proposed and assessed the role of RSR as a determinant of RU. APIM was used to assess the effects of both partners in a dyad, taking into consideration the correlated variables of dyad members that traditional statistical methods cannot deal with. As predicted, the results revealed that RSR was associated with ruminators’ own relationship uncertainty and partner uncertainty as well as their partner’s relationship uncertainty and self uncertainty. Theoretical explanations of each association are discussed below.

4.1 Rumination and Relationship Uncertainty

Relationship uncertainty is defined as the ambiguity about the nature and definition of the relationship. Results revealed that RSR was associated with ruminators’ own and their partner’s relationship uncertainty. As response styles theory suggests, ruminators lack skills to regulate their negative thoughts in response to relationship threat (Jostmann et al., 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). The recursive negative thoughts may make the ruminator uncertain about the nature of the relationship.

Results also showed that if people date a partner ruminating about the relationship, they feel more uncertain about the nature of their relationship. Ruminators’ possible characteristics such as being violent (Carson & Cupach, 2000) and aggressive (Bushman et al., 2005) might have made their partner less confident in maintaining the relationship. These socially inappropriate behaviors create an atmosphere in which partners feel uncertainty (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). These findings illustrate the importance of examining both partners’ response styles to relationship threat as they are associated with each other’s relationship uncertainty.

Figure 5. Model of Partner Uncertainty as an Outcome

Notes. RSR = Relationship-Specific Rumination. Numbers indicate standardized beta coefficients.

*p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .005
4.2 Rumination and Self Uncertainty

Self uncertainty is conceptualized as individuals’ doubts about their own participation in a relationship. As predicted, individuals who date a partner ruminating about a relationship experience more self uncertainty than those whose partner is not a ruminator. On the basis of Waller’s (1937) principle of least interest, RSR is considered an indicator of interest in the relationship, granting more power to the partner of the ruminator. Consequently, these partners may question their own involvement in the relationship. This explanation is in line with Theiss and Solomon’s (2006) argument that individuals who have power in the relationship tend to experience self uncertainty.

Chilling effects, however, might provide a different explanation of the results (Cloven & Roloff, 1993). A chilling effect occurs when an individual withholds complaints against a relational partner in order to avoid potential conflicts with the partner who has much relational power (Cloven & Roloff, 1993). Thus, it is possible that individuals who can determine the degree to which they participate in a relationship (i.e., those high in self uncertainty) may make their partner suppress and mull over their worry about the relationship (i.e., high RSR). Researchers of future studies should be encouraged to explore which explanation is more plausible to explain the association between RSR and a partner’s self uncertainty.

Regarding RQ 1, men’s RSR, but not women’s RSR, was associated with their own self uncertainty. In a romantic relationship, men tend to have more power and be less emotionally involved in the relationship compared to women (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997; Sprecher, Schmeecle, & Felmlee, 2006). Thus, a ruminating man may perceive he has less power than his female partner. Therefore, the man would be worried about the discrepancy between his cognitive behavior and social norms for males in romantic relationships. According to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), to mitigate the discrepancy, they might cognitively modify their involvement in the relationship to secure more power in the relationship. For example, a ruminating man might think that “I worry about our relationship (i.e., rumination), but I’m not even committed to the relationship anyway.” This intention might have manifested in the association between men’s RSR and their own self-uncertainty.

4.3 Rumination and Partner Uncertainty

Partner uncertainty involves the doubts about their partner’s participation in a relationship. Results revealed that participants who ruminate about a relationship experienced more partner uncertainty than those who did not ruminate. As response styles theory suggests, rumination functions to aggravate negative thoughts caused by relationship threat (Jostmann et al., 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Thus, ideas of negative consequences
such as a partner’s cheating may repeatedly come to the ruminator’s mind, leading to high uncertainty about their partner’s participation.

With regard to RQ 2, the degree to which people ruminate about a relationship is not related to their partner’s partner uncertainty. Individuals dating a ruminating partner could be confident in the ruminating partner’s participation (i.e., partner certainty). For example, ruminators tend to express their jealousy to their partner (Bevan & Hale, 2006) and such jealousy expression may help the partner feel loved by the ruminator (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007). However, RSR might not be an ideal way to show intimacy to a partner (Stafford & Canary, 1991) and so RSR would not be effective to make the partner certain about the ruminator’s participation in the relationship. Thus, these mixed accounts may help explain why there was not an association between RSR and partners’ partner uncertainty.

4.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings extend the relational uncertainty model by showing RSR is another individual characteristic related to RU besides other characteristics such as depressive symptoms (Knobloch, Knobloch-Fedders, & Durbin, 2011), insecure attachment style (Knobloch et al., 2001), and causal uncertainty (Boucher, 2015). Relational uncertainty model suggests RU can mediate the association between RSR and cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal outcomes (Knobloch, 2007). For example, those ruminating about their romantic relationship tend to manipulate their partner (Carson & Cupach, 2000). The manipulative behavior can be caused by high relational uncertainty that ruminators are likely to experience. That is, the extended relational uncertainty model may be now more useful to examine the mechanism to explain the association between outcomes in interpersonal relationships.

Practically, these results could help practitioners realize appropriate approaches to improving a relationship of couples who experience relational uncertainty. Suppose that an individual experiences strong uncertainty about a relationship, which tends to coincide with negative feelings such as anger, sadness, and fear (Knobloch et al., 2007), avoiding a conversation with a partner (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), and low relationship quality (Knobloch & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010). According to the theoretical background of cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT; Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Baucom, Epstein, Kirby, & LaTaillade, 2009), which is a widely used therapeutic strategy, changing a client’s negative cognition about the relationship (i.e., rumination about a relationship) is considered to be effective in increasing his or her confidence in the relationship. However, changing only the client’s cognition would not necessarily make him or her confident because the partner’s rumination could also contribute to the client’s uncertainty. Thus, both partners’ rumination should be taken into consideration to bolster confidence in the
development of the relationship, thus resulting in the better quality of relationship.

5. Conclusion

Knobloch (2007) developed a relational uncertainty model recognizing the lack of enough research on determinants of RU. The results of this study suggest RSR might be one of the personal characteristics associated with RU. RSR was associated not only with the ruminator’s own relational uncertainty, but also with their partner’s relational uncertainty. These findings emphasize the importance of considering both romantic partners’ response styles to relationship threat because of their associations with RU of partners. Besides the contribution to the development of a relational uncertainty model, the findings could offer new insights into response styles theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), chilling effects (Cloven & Roloff, 1993), and the principle of least interest (Waller, 1937).

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