Relational Ethics and Relationship Cycling

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

Romantic relationships continue to be a challenge to many and the break-down of these relationships impacts partners and offspring in many negative ways. Relationship cycling is a relatively common phenomenon, where couples will separate and reconcile their romantic relationship. There is a lack of information on the way that relationship history in general, and relationship cycling in specific, interacts with relational ethics on predicting relational satisfaction and adjustment. According to contextual theory, the perception of fairness and ethical relating in a relationship are connected to couple satisfaction (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Two samples were collected, including an individual response sample (n = 125) and a couple response sample of 68 couples (n = 136). All participants were newly married or engaged heterosexual couples between the ages of 18 and 35. Data were collected using on-line recruitment and surveys. A new instrument measuring relational ethics was used and found to highly correlate with the Relational Ethics Scale. A description of cycling couples was generated, with cyclers most frequently cycling a single time, with the male partners more frequently considered to be responsible for the problems and cycling in the relationship. Differences in relationship satisfaction, vertical relational ethics, and horizontal relational ethics based on cycling status were explored using a MANOVA, with multiple independent t-tests. Structural equation modeling was conducted to test the association between relationship cycling and couple satisfaction, and whether relational
ethics accounts for this association. Results suggest that cycling couples are less satisfied with their relationship, and have lower levels of horizontal relational ethics. An SEM model demonstrated that cycling did negatively predict relationship satisfaction, but this association disappeared when relational ethics were introduced. An SEM model was estimated based on contextual theory. There were no significant effects for vertical relational ethics predicting cycling. There were significant effects for cycling predicting horizontal relational ethics. There were significant actor and partner effects for vertical relational ethics predicting horizontal relational ethics. There were significant actor effects for horizontal relational ethics predicting relationship satisfaction for female partners only. Cycling predicted satisfaction for female partners only. Overall the findings of the study suggest that horizontal relational ethics are negatively impacted by cycling, but act as a buffer between cycling and relationship satisfaction. This suggests that cycling will most likely diminish satisfaction in the relationship, but that other factors that improve relational ethics will mediate that association. Furthermore there seems to be gender differences for how relational ethics and cycling connect with satisfaction.
Dedicated to my family.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ............................................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. v

Vita ........................................................................................................................................ viii

List of Tables ......................................................................................................................... xi

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review ............................................................................................. 8

Chapter 3: Methods .............................................................................................................. 33

Chapter 4: Results ................................................................................................................ 44

Chapter 5: Discussion .......................................................................................................... 63

References ............................................................................................................................ 92

Appendix A: Tables and Figures ......................................................................................... 100

Appendix B: Research Documents ...................................................................................... 112
List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Information................................................................. 101
Table 2. Description of Cycling........................................................................ 102
Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables by Cycling Status......... 103
Table 4. Correlations of Dyadic Variables ......................................................... 104
Table 5. Correlations of Individual Variables...................................................... 105
Table 6. Path Effects for General, Actor, and Partner Effects ......................... 106
Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for Satisfaction by Cycling Status........ 107
Table 8. Modified Path Effects for General, Actor and Partner Effects............... 108
List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Model ................................................................. 109
Figure 2. Measurement Model............................................................. 110
Figure 3. Modified Measurement Model.............................................. 111
Chapter 1: Introduction

Contextual Theory

In the field of family therapy, contextual theory (Boszermenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986) has been influential and enduring due to its unique qualities and contributions. Contextual family therapy was founded on principles of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and systems theories, and seeks to address individual pain and change systemic family interactions (Boszermenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszermenyi-Nagy, 1987). Contextual theory conceptualizes human relationships through five interconnected relational dimensions, including facts, individual psychology, relational transactions, and relational ethics (Boszermenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1989; Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). The fifth dimension is ontic, which is an overall dimension that subsumes the other four dimensions (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). A primary feature of the model is the lack of specific techniques and an emphasis and the capacity to integrate concepts and techniques from other models and approaches, provided they are consistent with the overarching themes of justice and fairness inherent to a contextual approach. The consistent unique feature of the approach is attention to relational justice and fairness through ethical interactions with intimate family members.
Relational Ethics

The key component that sets this theory apart from other intergenerational therapeutic approaches is the inclusion of relational ethics, one of the five dimensions of contextual theory which includes the qualities of trustworthiness, entitlement, and loyalty (Boszernenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Relational Ethics implies a subjective perception of balance in fair giving and taking in intimate relationships, with merit and entitlement being built up through these interactions. The individual’s perception of fair give and take in the context of intimate relationships is formed and carried across time and is passed through generations. Individuals feel most fulfilled and happy when they feel there is a balance of treating other people in a way that fulfills their inherent entitlements and when other people do the same for the individual (Boszermenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). When there is a “fair” balance in the relationship, individuals develop healthy entitlements which involve flexible expectations for care in a relationship with the understanding that such care involves reciprocation. On the other hand, an imbalance can lead to the development of destructive entitlement, where an individual feels an inherent right to demand others behave in a certain fashion in order to make up for the individual’s past imbalance. These destructive entitlements are often carried out in relationships where the other participants are not culpable leading to a perpetuation of imbalanced relationships resulting in further destructive entitlements. This imbalance in relationships is assumed to lead to distress and ill-health in intimate relationships. Thus relational distress is conceptualized as the symptom of an imbalance in the perceived fairness of the
relationship. These perceptions are intergenerationally transmitted, indicating that distress in a couple relationship has roots in an imbalance in family of origin experiences.

The resources of trust are intergenerationally transmitted through a ledger that leaves children vulnerable to the relational injustices of their progenitors. Loyalty is developed in intimate relationships, and when there is an ethical imbalance this loyalty can act to perpetuate unfair interactions (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Indeed, it has been postulated that the majority of unfair interactions between couples can be traced to split and invisible loyalties that children have regarding their parents (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).

**Relationship Cycling**

Research on relationship formation among young adults continues to be a growing area of study. Policy makers in the past twenty years have been concerned about the increasing age of marriage, higher levels of divorce, higher rates of cohabitation and other societal trends (Cherlin, 2010). While there is still debate about the outcomes of these trends, there remains a general interest in the way that these trends emerge, the people that are pioneering and engaging in specific behaviors, and what the outcomes are. One phenomenon that is gaining increasing interest and exploration is the way that couples will separate and reconcile in the same relationship. This has been described as on-again off-again relationships, churning, and relationship cycling. Hereafter this will be referred to as cycling. Cycling is a common occurrence among young adults, and has been connected to several negative outcomes, including risk for intimate violence and
marital instability (Halpern-Meekin, et al., 2013b). Research on cycling remains limited, and there is very little examination of the phenomenon through the lens of relevant theories.

**Research on Contextual Theory**

In the field of marriage and family therapy, contextual theory is among the oldest and most influential lens that informs therapeutic practice (Dankoski, 2000). Developed primarily by Bozormenyi-Nagy (1987), contextual theory seeks to address individual client pain in their systemic interactions with intimate others (e.g. family members, sexual partners) (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). Despite the history and intricacy of the theory, there is very limited research that has been informed by a contextual lens or that supports contextual constructs. This is probably partially due to the difficulty in operationalizing the constructs of the theory. The most salient feature that distinguishes this theory from other intergenerational approaches is the attention to relational ethics, which center on issues of fairness, trust, and justice in family systems. Despite the intricacy of relational ethics as a conceptual construct, relational ethics have proven difficult to operationalize and test empirically, partially due to the subjective and personal nature of what is ethical. From this perspective, ethical does not refer to what is objectively right or wrong, but what is fair and owed to an individual within the contexts of a relationship (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). Due at least partially to this difficulty, contextual theory has remained largely a tool reserved for therapeutic use and not for
research application. Despite this trend, adopting a contextual lens can, and indeed must, impact research and be useful in expanding our knowledge of human interactions.

**Objectives of the Current Study**

The current study is designed to examine the association between relationship cycling and relational ethics on relationship adjustment. There is still very little known about relationship cycling, and this research will add to the body of literature by providing a possible theoretical orientation for viewing cycling behaviors. Creating a cohesive image of the characteristics of individuals that cycle is difficult, primarily due to the lack of diverse samples and simply limited time dedicated to the study of cycling. Perhaps even more so than relationship cycling though, there is very limited research in the field of relational ethics, and this study will contribute to our knowledge of how perceptions of fairness impact relationships. Connecting these two topics together may also provide a theoretical explanation for why cycling is connected to so many negative outcomes, and potentially point towards ways in which cycling may be healthy at times. In addition to providing information on cycling from a contextual lens, the proposed study will also be validating a new measure of relational ethics, which will hopefully expand the amount of research on relational ethics. There are five specific aims to the current study.
**Specific Aim One:** Provide a clearer description of couples that cycle. Using a national sample rather than samples based on local populations, a clearer picture of some characteristics of individuals and couples that cycle should emerge.

**Specific Aim Two:** Determine the role that ethical relations with parents plays on current partner ethical relations. I hypothesize that couples that rate their relationships with their parents as ethical will rate their partner relationships as more ethical.

**Specific Aim Three:** Determine the role that relational ethics has on relationship formation and satisfaction. I hypothesize that couples that report having fewer problems while forming their relationship are more likely to perceive ethical fairness and are more likely to be satisfied with their relationship.

**Specific Aim Four:** Determine the role that relational cycling has on satisfaction, and whether relational ethics mediate this impact. I hypothesize that relational cycling is connected to less satisfied relationships, but relational ethics will mediate this relationship.

**Specific Aim Five:** Provide further evidence for the effectiveness of tools measuring relational ethics. There are two tools that have been created, and neither is in wide usage at this time. Using these tools together will provide further evidence for their effectiveness and validity.
Implications of the Current Study

The current study examines the way that cycling behaviors and relational ethics interact in impacting relationship adjustment. This will add to the growing literature on relationship cycling as well as providing a theoretical lens through which to view the phenomenon. This will increase knowledge of a poorly understood event and the people involved in the event. It should also provide information that will result in further academic inquiry into the nature of cycling relationships. This research will also add to the slowly expanding research on relational ethics and contextual theory by providing further support for its impact on relationship outcomes and its utility in explaining relationship dynamics. This could impact therapeutic practice in general by understanding the connections between relationship cycling and relationship adjustment. The therapeutic practices of contextual therapists might be especially impacted, through the support for the theory. Finally the study will contribute to the validation of a new scale of relational ethics, which will improve and broaden the types of research that can be conducted on the topic.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Development of Contextual Theory

Contextual theory was designed to act as an overarching way of understanding and intervening in human interactions. Specifically, contextual theory is based on existential and humanistic philosophies, the dialogic works of Martin Buber (Buber, 1923), general systems theory, and Nagy’s own experiences as both a therapist and a psychiatrist (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). The inherent and explicit assumptions of the theory are that individuals are relational beings that exist in connection with others, and cannot be separated through any means.

Existential philosophy is a diverse and not always unified subject, and there are relatively few statements on which philosophers were most inspirational to Boszormenyi-Nagy. Other therapeutic modalities have been similarly informed by existential thought, most especially existential psychotherapy. Contextual therapy is generally considered more of a cousin modality than a close sibling, though there are multiple similarities in the assumptions on human existence. The primary difference is contextual theory’s increased humanistic emphasis on possibility over despair (Yalom, 1980). The primary existential component of contextual theory is the understanding that there are critical crises and moments in an individual’s life where they recognize that they are alone and ultimately responsible for their own fate (Krasner & Joyce, 1995). This realization creates
despair and anguish in the individual, and invites the individual to either accept responsibility for their actions or fearfully attempt to blame someone else to hide their fear. Existential theory started with the works of Kierkegaard, who wrote that ethical interactions are ultimately determined by the context of the relationships in which those behaviors occur, and all human life is essentially an endeavor to understand and live ethically in connection with others and with a divine higher power (Kierkegaard, 1983). Contextual theory makes no specific claims at spiritual or divine connection, but attempts to integrate those notions through the ontic dimension of meaning-making that is theorized to be a universal human experience (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002).

The humanistic component in contextual theory is that all human beings possess an inherent capacity for change and improvement, and have the internal resources necessary to make needed changes in their life and relationships (Yalom, 1980). Even more so than the influence of existential philosophy, there are limited explicit statements of specific influences on the development of contextual theory. Instead, humanism is discussed more as a general influence, and is largely seen to permeate most therapeutic modalities to some degree.

Boszormenyi-Nagy began as a psychiatrist working on developing a way of objectively understanding and curing psychological pathologies such as schizophrenia (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). Over time Boszormenyi-Nagy was exposed to more classical psychotherapeutic models, and his emphasis shifted from an individual “within the mind” focus to a more relational object-relations focus (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). There was a specific interest in the
psychoanalytic object relations theory of Fairbairn (1954). This allows for the incorporation of both psychotherapy models and more systemic concepts. Contextual theory is viewed as integrative, implying that diverse therapeutic modalities and techniques are applicable so long as they are understood from the overarching framework inherent to the theory. Central to the incorporation of diverse theories and techniques is the philosophical writings of Martin Buber.

One of the greatest contributors to contextual theory is Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (1923). Buber postulates that all people exist in relation to important others and that there is a constant dialogue between individuals. Everyone has a sense of self in the “I” and part of the challenge in dialogue is learning to not sacrifice one’s “I” to the other. However, the “I” cannot exist and is meaningless without connection to another, and thus the second challenge is learning to be aware of others as real entities that are also seeking to maintain their own sense of self. Based on these basic challenges, Buber postulated that there were two forms of relating. The first and most frequent dialogue is I-It relating, where the individual perceives others through the lens of their own needs and pain, and as objects to be used and acted upon, rather than having their own inherent agency. People relate in this fashion because it is comfortable and requires less work than the other form of relating. The second and more honest relationship is I-Thou, which occurs when the individual can see the other person as they really are, an agent that is responsible for their own choices and actions. I-Thou relationships are dynamic and take place in the space between individuals (Fishbane, 1998). I-Thou relating is an infrequent occurrence that is both healing and tiring in nature, and such relating is encountered with joy but is fleeting.
Finally, general systems theory provides the basic framework for understanding interactions (von Bertalanffy, 1973). In essence people exist in embedded systems that work to maintain viability. Viability of a system is maintained by making meaning of information and determining if this new information requires a change in the way the system functions through negative (change inhibiting) and positive (change promoting) feedback loops. From this perspective, individuals need to be understood in the context of their family system and all behaviors need to be considered in light of the role that they play in maintaining the family system.

Contextual theory takes an intergenerational perspective on family development. All time points, past, present, and future are considered vulnerable to change based on the current interactions and relationships among family members (Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Krasner, 1986). Thus work and living in the present is essential, but ultimately has potential consequences for the meaning of the past, and expression of meaning and health in the future. However, the future is considered the most vulnerable and as such special care for children and future generations is accorded.

Individual and family development are based on earning merit through ethical engagement. We all earn merit in our relationships through an appropriate balance of giving and receiving that is based on individual circumstances and the contexts of the relationship (Krasner & Joyce, 1995). Through relating with others and receiving care, we become indebted, and we pay off that debt through giving to others, thus earning merit. Based on this process of earning merit while relating to intimate others like family members, we develop loyalties, or enduring attachments (Krasner & Joyce, 1995).
Loyalty can exist whether or not merit is earned, and can be manifested in many different ways (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1980). For instance, in cases where merit was not earned individuals might display their loyalty through behaving in the same manner as an estranged parent. Another aspect of earning merit is the development of entitlement. All individuals are entitled to receive due care and consideration from others (Krasner & Joyce, 1995).

Problems in families arise when consistently ethically unfair interactions between family members results in destructive entitlement (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). This entitlement saps the resource of trust in the relationship and acts as a barrier between individuals resulting in an inability to relate in an I-Thou fashion. Family members become focused on their own pain and the things that they do to make the relationship work and become unable to understand other family members’ positions and pain. However, family loyalty keeps these family members engaging with one another, thus preserving the relationship while maintaining individual entitlements.

Entitlements are intergenerationally transmitted when the perceived balance of fairness is carried from one generation to the next through the ledger as children inherit their parents’ resources of trust. Loyalty to their parents and lower levels of trust increase the risk that adult children will develop and display destructive entitlement in their own relationships. An example of this transmission is the way that women are more likely to be dissatisfied in their relationship with their current partner when they perceive unfairness in their relationship with their parents (Gangamma, Bartle-Haring, & Glebova, 2012).
The Five Dimensions of Contextual Theory

Based on this philosophical framework, contextual theory holds that there are four basic dimensions and one unifying dimension that are essential for the understanding of human experience (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). These are not rigidly delineated categories, as any given factor may fit into multiple dimensions. However, each dimension will be explored individually.

Facts

The first basic dimension is facts, which are comprised of the simple, objective realities of an individual's existence. Features such as ethnic identity, biological sex, history of illness, and adoption are all incontrovertible facts that make up an individual’s “destiny” so to speak. Some factual features are unavoidable, such as the biological sex of an individual, while others are part of the created reality of the individual, constructed through choice and agency, such as gender schemes created through interaction with cultural ideals and images. These are features of human existence that influence the individual and become part of the legacy that is passed on through generations (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). Thus the facts of one generation have consequential repercussions through following generations. These same principles hold true for social groups, including families and other social identities, and have similar impacts. For instance, the unjust oppression of one minority group might lead to closer family connection and distrust of majority groups in the following generations.
**Individual Psychology**

The next dimension is individual psychology, which focus on the traditional psychotherapeutic component of the human psyche. This can include things like delusions and hallucinations, or other diagnosable psychological behaviors. Individual psychology is primarily based on the concepts derived from psychotherapy. Perhaps more pertinent to the theory is that psychology includes the symbolic meanings and images created by individuals that are frequently superimposed on others. In other words, individuals develop relationships that they carry with them, leading to interacting with personally held perceptions of others based on individual psychology, rather than interacting with authentic individuals.

**Systemic Transactions**

The third dimension is systemic transactions, which includes the way that people interact with one another and the roles that people play in larger systems. This dimension is derived primarily from systems theory, and includes such concepts as power, structure, roles, and communication sequence (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). Thus families are conceptualized to have patterns that may or may not promote health by enabling the simultaneous achievement of individual and system goals. Family systems are self-regulatory, determining when change is necessary or threatening to the viability of the system. Symptoms in families and relationships are taken to be indicative of
ambiguous, rigid, or diffuse boundaries (Minuchin, 1974), or of the inability to adapt to current circumstances by maintaining healthy patterns or discarding unhealthy ones.

For contextual theory, an important process which all members of a family system must go through is “self-delineation.” This is related to Bowen’s concept of differentiation, and is the dialogic process through which an individual in the context of an intimate relationship creates their identity, identifies boundaries, and learns the need for complementarity (Friedman, 1991). Most of the intervention that occurs in contextual family therapy happens through this dimension.

**Relational Ethics**

The fourth, and most salient feature of contextual theory, is relational ethics. Contextual therapy focuses on dealing with clinical problems through the means and language of relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Relational ethics is the level of fair give and take that takes place in intimate relationships, and when there is a lack of due consideration for an intimate other there is a natural loss of trust in the relationship. An example of this may be that a child may grow up hearing a parent complain about a partner, thus forcing the child to choose between parents, which can damage the trust in all relationships in that family.

Relational ethics is the distinctive feature of the contextual approach (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). It includes the three concepts of trust, loyalty, and entitlement. Trust is the primary resource within relationships and is both earned (through ethical engagement) and comes inherent in the individual (e.g. through being
one’s child), and it is necessary to maintain viable relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1986; Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2003). Loyalty is the connection between close intimate partners, beginning with children and parents in formative years and later expanding to other significant figures (Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Spark, 1984). Entitlement is the feeling that one is owed or due something in a relationship, such as care or affection (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Entitlement is often earned through an individual’s merit in a relationship by caring for another, and when this occurs they develop constructive entitlement. In contrast, an individual can develop destructive entitlement, or the feeling of being owed something by others, or required to behave in patterns of harmful behaviors that can hurt others. This form of destructive entitlement is often fostered in situations of imbalance in relationships, where one individual is giving more to the relationship than the other. Entitlement is connected to the concept of fairness, which is the dialectical process of experiencing ethical concern for the other in the context of a relationship (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1997). A metaphorical ledger of the fairness in relationships is kept of ethical interactions across a person’s life, which can lead to passing on entitlement to subsequent generations. The intergenerational transmission of relational ethics through the ledger is one of the major ethical concerns of one generation to the next.

**Ontic**

The final dimension, ontic, is not specifically spoken of as being a separate dimension from the others, but rather as a unifying factor that all of the four basic
dimensions contribute to. While not originally included as a dimension, evidences of ontic could be found in Bozormenyi-Nagy’s writings, and it was later included by other contextual theorists (Ducommun-Nagy, 2002). The ontic dimension is essentially the assumption that all human beings are inherently relational, and that in the process of relating to others, individuals will cause harm to one another. Coming to understand one’s own relational reality and holding onto this position while still giving space to understand the relational reality of others is at the heart of the ontic struggle. Ultimately every individual is struggling with their own relationships, and so the ontic dimension is also a unifying aspect of human relations, as we all struggle to enter real dialogues with others. While relational ethics might be the means through which therapy works, the purpose of dealing with ethics is to establish a more balanced level of give and take because of the ontic imperative to relate ethically (Krasner & Joyce, 1995).

**Relationship Formation Among Young Adults**

Young adulthood, also called emerging adulthood, is the time of life that extends through the individual’s twenties and often into their thirties (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). In developmental theories it is postulated as a time of exploration, and carries greater responsibilities than adolescence, but fewer than adulthood. There is greater independence associated with emancipation and increased freedoms to legally consume substances. However most emerging adults still rely on their parents to provide economically for their needs, and tend to be more likely to be involved in education for long periods during this time, though the number of households headed by single young
adults is increasing (Cherlin, 2010). Romantic relationships are an important developmental factor during this time, and according to several theorists (in Halpern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013b) is the primary crisis sought to be resolved during this stage. Becoming involved in romantic relationships, and learning how to negotiate them has been termed as arguably the developmental task of young adulthood.

There are several noted trends in relationship formation in the 20th century. The age at first marriage has been steadily increasing over a long period of time (Cherlin, 2010), and the median age at first marriage in 2013 was 29 for men, and 26.6 for women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). Waiting to complete an education and finding a stable job are cited as common reasons for delaying marriage among young adults (Cherlin, 2010). In addition to the increasing age at marriage, fewer individuals in general are getting married, with the exception of those with college education (Cherlin, 2010). Those who have a college education are more likely to marry (especially women), but do so at a later age than those without college education (Martin, 2006). Higher levels of economic stability are also associated with higher marriage rates, especially among men (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). Similarly, there is a tendency, termed assortative mating, for couples to form relationships with those that are similar to themselves across multiple areas, including education and economic status, (Carter & Glick, 1976; De Raad & Doddema-Winseminius, 1992). When couples are more similar in expectations and attitudes they are more likely to be satisfied with their relationship as well (Luo, & Klohnen, 2005). Union formation also seems to be impacted by
intergenerational features, such as whether the children were ever raised in a single-parent-headed household (Ryan, Franzetta, Schelar, & Manlove, 2009).

Separation is a relatively common aspect in many relationships. Between 40% and 50% of individuals will experience a union disruption whether it is a cohabiting or married relationship (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). Divorce and separation rates remain comparatively high, but seem to have stabilized in the past few years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). Higher levels of education are negatively correlated with divorce rates, and there is some indication that this is true regardless of the type of union (Raily & Bumpass, 2003). Increased levels of parental conflict seem to increase instability among offspring, indicating an intergenerational component as well (Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008). Remarriage and union formation after a break-up is receiving greater amounts of attention now but continues to be a poorly researched area, with much of the research focusing on interactions between step-parents and step-children (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2012). In general, instability in relationships for adolescents and emerging adults is considered to be developmentally appropriate, as it is a time of exploration (Halpern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013a). As such, instability among young adult relationships is generally only considered problematic when it is connected to other negative outcomes, or when there are children involved (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013b).

Another new and increasing trend is the formation of non-marital unions, such as hook-ups, visiting relationships, and cohabitation (Sassler, 2010). Cohabitation is still a fairly new research area, though the amount of available literature is increasing rapidly.
In general cohabiting unions are frequent occurrences that can act as a replacement for marriage (Smock, 2000), as a prelude to marriage (Jose, O’Leary, & Moyer, 2010), or as an option for not being single (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990). Cohabiting unions tend to be more unstable than married unions, though many cohabiting couples will either marry or break up shortly after beginning to cohabit (Cherlin, 2010), however other outcomes and general relationship quality does not appear to vary drastically between married and cohabiting unions (Musick, & Bumpass, 2012). While individuals with lower levels of education are less likely to marry, they are more likely to enter into cohabiting unions, though the rate remains high for everyone (Kennedy, & Bumpass, 2008). Entering into a cohabiting union can occur through many different ways, including a gradual change from dating to cohabiting without a definitive decision to do so, or purposefully selecting to cohabit (Manning, & Smock, 2005).

In addition to these general trends, experiences in the upbringing of young adults impact the timing and quality for their later relationships (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Troubled adolescent-parent interactions lead to lower levels of relationship satisfaction and more reported difficulties in young adult romantic relationships (Van Dulmen, Goncy, Haydon, & Collins, 2008). Friendships and early dating experiences, including the number of dating partners and the quality of those relationships, are also connected to relationship satisfaction in young adulthood (Madsen, & Collins, 2011). Experiencing relationship difficulties during adolescent dating was correlated with increased anxiety in young adult intimate relationships.
Relationship Cycling

Relationship cycling, defined as dissolving a relationship, and then reforming into the same relationship, has a limited amount of research on the topic in general, as it is a relatively new phenomenon and has not been studied for a long period (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009b). Research findings have indicated that cycling relationships have multiple potential paths they can follow, including remaining cyclic, breaking up, or becoming more stable, and defining and studying this has proven difficult (Dailey, Brody, LeFebvre, & Crook, 2013a). Compounding this is that previous research on couple relationships have often excluded couples that have broken up from their studies, thus eliminating the possibility of reporting any reconciliation (e.g. Sprecher, 1999).

Cycling poses a conceptual difficulty for both researchers and cycling couples. Cycling relationships are often neither fully separate nor fully together, and a level of ambiguity can be present in the relationship. Cycling seems to be a common occurrence in relationships for young adults, with nearly 50% of young adults reporting having experienced a cycling relationship at least once (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013b; Vennum & Johnson, 2014). Roughly one-third of currently cohabiting couples are found to report cycling, and about one-fifth of married couples report cycling during their courtship (Vennum & Johnson, 2014). While there is some evidence that cycling is less frequent in married relationships, it appears to remain a fairly common occurrence (Binstock, & Thornton, 2003).

Cycling is connected to several negative relationship outcomes. Cyclers have been noted to have lower levels of relationship commitment, and less marital stability
(Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009a; Vennum, Lindstrom, Monk, & Adams, 2013). There also appears to be greater constraints on permanently terminating a relationship when cycling occurs (Vennum et al. 2013). Couples that cycled before marriage have been found to report greater levels of conflict, to be less satisfied, and to report lower levels of closeness (Vennum & Johnson, 2014). Cycling also seems to lead to decreasing levels of dedication, with increasing numbers of cycles leading to increasingly lower levels of dedication to the relationship (Vennum, Hardy, Sibley, & Fincham, 2015). Taken together these findings in general support an overall negative impact of relationship cycling on developing relationships.

Theoretical Perspectives on Relationship Cycling

There are several relevant theories that could be connected to cycling. In general the literature on relationship cycling has only lightly utilized theory in explaining and understanding the process of cycling. Relevant theories that are used in literature on young adult relationship formation are attachment theory and social exchange theory. Across all theories, some degree of cycling would be considered appropriate as young adults develop their relational skills. Indeed, one of the limitations of the literature on relationship cycling is that theoretically cycling should not always have a negative impact on relationships, but empirical research indicates that cycling is connected to negative outcomes.
Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was initially conceived as a way of understanding the interactions between caregivers and children (Cassidy, 2002). More responsive caregiving would result in children that were more comfortable and happy in their caregiver’s presence, and were more comfortable exploring their environment away from their attachment figure. This attachment was postulated to extend into the child’s adult life and influence later interactions. Later theorists adapted the concept of attachment for adult romantic relationships. Individuals that were more anxious in their relationships were postulated to be more likely to worry about their partner and perceive threats to their relationship, while avoidant individuals were more likely to treat their partner as not being essential to their individual well-being and consider their own needs before their partners (Feeney, 1999). Securely attached partners were able to balance these extremes and rely on their partners for satisfaction of their needs without needing to solely rely on their partner (Feeney, 1999).

There is no specific research utilizing attachment theory in cycling literature, despite its prevalence in understanding romantic relationships, though it is frequently used in relationship formation (e.g. Schindler, Fagundes, & Murdock, 2010; Stackert, & Bursik, 2003). One potential reason for this is findings that constructs from attachment theory were not effective in predicting non-marital union dissolution (Le et al. 2010). Despite this limitation, there is some support in the research for this perspective. From an attachment theory lens, cycling behaviors would be conceptualized as the result of
avoidant and anxious attachment in adulthood, and avoidant attachment during childhood. Being raised in a home where parents are abusive and aggressive often results in anxious-avoidant attachment, where the child does not consider the caregiver to be a safe or essential relationship. In adult relationships this can be expressed through anxious or avoidant romantic attachment which has been connected to lower levels of satisfaction, connectedness, and support, and higher levels of conflict (Li, & Chan, 2012).

Attachment style has been found to be associated with breaking up, though not necessarily with cycling (Le et al., 2010). It is also possible that cycling is the result of securely attached individuals separating for a time to explore other possibilities, and then desiring to reconcile due to their enduring attachment. Dailey et al. (2009b) have found that couples do cite enduring emotional attachment as a reason for reconciliation. However, there is some indication that couples where one partner exerts more control over the relationship have a tendency to be in cycling relationships (Dailey, et al., 2013a). This could theoretically be indicative of an anxiously attached partner seeking to control the relationship to mitigate their anxiety with a slightly avoidant attached partner.

**Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory is essentially the extension of economic principles into human interactions. Individuals are postulated to consider the relative benefits and consequences of any particular action before making a decision (Kelley, & Thibaut, 1978). The option that provides the greatest potential benefits with the least possible risks and consequences is selected. A related theory that has been used to conceptualize
relationship cycling is a theory of interdependence. It follows the same basic tenets as social exchange, except it assumes that couple and relational needs of emotional closeness and intimacy are the primary concern and that couples coordinate to create mutually fulfilling interactions (Kelley, & Thibaut, 1978). From a social exchange perspective, relationship cycling is conceptualized as the result of individuals deciding that separating would be the most beneficial for themselves, as the alternatives outside the relationship are currently superior to what is provided inside the relationship. However, upon exiting the relationship the benefits of those alternatives are either temporary, or are discovered to not be as beneficial as originally perceived. This leads to reconciliation. Hence the very process of separating and reconciling might provide desired benefits for the relationship.

From this perspective risk factors would be the perceptions and attitudes that the individual or couple have concerning their relationship and alternatives. Perceiving the relationship as not meeting needs, and being open to other relational possibilities (e.g. being single, finding a new partner), attitudes and history concerning breaking up (e.g. parents’ divorce, societal acceptance of separation) would predict making changes to the relationship, which might include redefining boundaries, attending to negative qualities of a partner or self, or breaking up. Reconciliation would happen when life satisfaction decreases following separation, and viewing the separation and reconciliation as beneficial to the individual would decrease the stress of cycling.

The social exchange perspective and related theories are frequently used to conceptualize stability, and have been extended to cycling (Dailey, Middleton, & Green,
There is limited research on the reasons that couples cycle. Couples that report relationship discord are more likely to permanently separate than cycle (Binstock, & Thornton, 2003), indicating that couples that experience discord are more likely to see this cost as too great for the rewards. Couples that had more ambivalent views about the relationship were found to be more likely to cycle (Dailey et al., 2012), which supports the view that perceptions of the importance of the relationship impact cycling.

**Relational Ethics Perspective on Relationship Cycling**

Contextual theory has not been connected to relationship cycling at this point. This is partly due to the relative novelty of relationship cycling as a topic, and probably partly due to the difficulty in operationalizing relational ethics. Despite this lack of previous connection, relational ethics can provide a unique perspective on cycling behaviors, and potentially explain some of the discrepancies noticed in the research.

From a contextual point of view relationship cycling is a part of the fact and systemic transaction domains, both of which are inseparably and directly connected to relational ethics. The Fact domain is the individual history and events that have occurred in a person’s life. For instance, that a couple separates and reconciles are facts. Systemic transactions are the way that groups of people interact together to create patterns. For instance, relationship cycling might involve one partner that is used to being able to get away from other people when anxious, while the other partner is used to pursuing others when they feel unwanted. These two points are connected to relational ethics through the concept of the ledger and entitlement. Entitlement is the feeling that one is owed or due
something in a relationship, such as care or affection, and is constructively earned through an individual’s merit in a relationship by caring for another (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). In contrast, destructive entitlement, or the feeling of being owed something by others, or required to behave in patterns of harmful behaviors that can hurt others, is often fostered in situations of imbalance in relationships, where one individual is giving more to the relationship than the other. Entitlement is connected to the concept of fairness, which is the dialectical process of experiencing ethical concern for the other in the context of a relationship (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1997). It is possible that relationship cycling is a manifestation of entitlement due to a ledger of ethically unfair interactions that have endured for a long time, either in a relationship or between generations. Individuals may develop a pattern of destructive entitlement that demands attention from intimate partners and makes maintaining a sustainable relationship difficult.

There currently is little validation for this perspective. There is some indication that couples report lower levels of positive relationship qualities before separation (Sprecher, 1999), but not necessarily enduring levels of unethical behavior. Due to the limited research, there is currently no evidence for an intergenerational impact on cycling. Reconciliation in this instance may occur due to observed levels of enduring feelings of love (Dailey et al., 2012, Dailey, McCraken, Jin, Rosetto, & Green, 2013b). Persistent enduring feelings of connection and desire to be understood, connected with memories of positive interactions might lead to a hope for future fairness in the relationship, and lead to reconciliation. Research findings have indicated that positive qualities about the relationship (e.g. greater intimacy in relationship) or one’s partner
(e.g. attributions of positive characteristics) seem to lead to reconciliation, which supports this contextual view of reconciliation (Dailey et al., 2009a; Halpern–Meekin et al., 2013b).

**Research Using the Contextual Lens**

There is only a single tool currently widely used to study relational ethics. While the tool has been found to correlate with marital adjustment, which makes sense from a theoretical perspective, it is not ideal for conducting dyadic research. Dyadic research conceptually makes the most sense, as relational ethics is ultimately about the interaction between people, not just individual perceptions. The format of current tools does not provide as rich or in-depth data in dyadic research, and new tools might better address this issue. Specifically, the current tool is designed to collect individual perceptions of fairness, and to be usable in regression analyses. While the tool is valuable in those circumstances, there are conceptual issues with the tool and research that can be conducted utilizing it. As a result of the limitations of the current tool, part of the study will be to test the properties of a recently developed but not currently validated measure that was specifically designed for dyadic research.

**Development of the RES**

To test the hypothesis, a measure for relationship distress/satisfaction, an item for relationship cycling, and a measure for relational ethics are all needed. For relational ethics there are not many potential measures that can be used. There are currently two
measures that have been designed to study relational ethics, only one of which has any published data verifying it as valid and reliable. The Relational Ethics scale (RES: Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991) will be used in the current study to measure relational ethics. The RES uses 24 likert scale questions. The scale ranges from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) for a series of questions regarding the individual’s perception of their relationship with significant intimate relationship partners, specifically the constructs of trust, justice, loyalty, and entitlement. These constructs are measured for both the respondent’s relationship with their family of origin as well as their relationship with their current partner. The instrument has two subscales, vertical relationships which refer to the individuals’ ethical interactions with their family of origin, and horizontal relationships, which include their interactions with their current partner. This will allow for the research to assess both the intergenerational aspect of relational ethics through the vertical scale, as well as the romantic relationship through the horizontal scale.

**Development of the BOFQ**

The Balance of Fairness Questionnaire (BOFQ: Gangamma, unpublished) is the other instrument that was specifically designed using a contextual lens. The BOFQ is a 50 item instrument that uses a mixture of likert scale and multiple choice questions. All likert scale questions rate how much respondents agree with a statement concerning a targeted relationship, and are on a seven-point scale, one (Strongly Disagree) being the lowest score and seven (Strongly Agree) being the highest. Like the RES, there are two
primary subscales, the vertical subscale (12 items) that measures perceived fairness with the respondent’s family of origin, and the horizontal subscale (38 items) that measures perceived fairness with the respondent’s current partner. One of the primary advantages of the BOFQ is that respondent perceptions of their partner’s perceived fairness is also gathered, and this is the fundamental conceptual difference between the two measures, as the BOFQ is specifically designed to look at the discrepancy between perceptions to create a unified image of the balance of fairness. This would allow for more rich data and comparisons between perceived scores and actual scores. Unlike the RES though, the BOFQ has not yet been validated.

There is a third instrument that measures the ethical dynamics of intimate relationships, but is not from a contextual viewpoint. The Intimate Justice Scale (IJS: Jory, 2004) was designed to screen for intimate partner violence in couples presenting for therapy before the violence becomes an issue, and it is a validated instrument. While it does examine ethical interactions in couple relationships, it is not specifically concerned with matters of trust, justice and fairness. For these reasons the instrument was not selected for use.

**Hypotheses for the Current Research**

**Specific Aim One:** Provide a clearer description of couples that cycle on variables of frequency of cycling, duration of separation, agreement on cycling occurrences, and responsibility for cycling. There is no specific hypothesis, the purpose is to describe.
Specific Aim Two: Determine the role that ethical relations with parents play on current partner ethical relations. This study will construct a theoretically driven model to test the relationship between horizontal and vertical relational ethics. I hypothesize that vertical relational ethics will positively predict horizontal relational ethics.

Specific Aim Three: Determine the role that relational ethics have on relationship formation and satisfaction. The theoretical model will further be designed to empirically examine the relationship between vertical relational ethics and cycling behaviors, and horizontal relational ethics and satisfaction. I hypothesize that vertical relational ethics will not be connected to relationship cycling. I hypothesize that horizontal relational ethics will positively predict relationship adjustment.

Specific Aim Four: Determine the role that relational cycling has on satisfaction, and whether relational ethics mediate this impact. I hypothesize that relational cycling will negatively predict relationship adjustment, and that this relationship will be mediated by horizontal relational ethics.

Specific Aim Five: Provide further evidence for the effectiveness of tools measuring relational ethics. There are two tools, The Relational Ethics Scale (RES) and the Balance of Fairness Questionnaire (BOFQ), that have been created, and neither is in wide usage at this time. Using these tools together will provide further evidence for their effectiveness and validity. In addition, the BOFQ is a newly developed instrument that is still being tested for validity. I hypothesize that the horizontal subscale for both the RES and the BOFQ, and the vertical subscales for both measures will be correlated. In addition, in
keeping with the conceptual model, the vertical subscale for each model will be correlated with the horizontal subscale of the same model.
Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter will present and discuss the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. To test the research hypotheses an APIM model was conceived, and data were collected through on-line data collection.

Data Collection

Data were collected through Research Match and Study Search, which are on-line research sites. Research Match is a national database operating in the USA that connects research volunteers with researchers. Volunteers provide basic demographic and health information and agree to be contacted by Research Match if they qualify for a study. Researchers indicate their target population and can select from the basic demographic and health information, and then send invitations to potential research participants through Research Match. Potential participants that are interested respond to the initial invitation e-mail, and are thus placed into direct contact with the researcher. Study Search is an on-line listing of current research projects at the Ohio State University. Researcher contact information is included with a description of the research, and potential participants contact the researcher via e-mail.
Sample Selection

Approval to collect data was provided by the Institutional Review Board at the Ohio State University. Data was collected entirely through Research Match and Study Search. A $10 gift card to Amazon.com was provided to all participants in the study, and names of those that completed the study within 48 hours of consenting to participate in the study, were placed in a raffle for one of two $50 gift cards. After completing the raffle, all e-mail addresses were deleted from all documents in order to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Couples and individuals were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Heterosexual adults between the age of 18 and 35 that were either newly married within the past six months, or currently engaged were invited to participate in the study.

Data were collected between June, 2016 and October, 2016. The outcome measure was not included in the initial survey, resulting in 84 of the 324 individual responses that do not contain outcome data. Of the 324 responses, there were 97 (n = 194) dyadic responses and 130 individual responses. Two datasets were created, a dyadic dataset and an individual dataset comprised of individual respondents whose partners did not agree to participate. For the individual dataset, five respondents did not complete one or more measures and were excluded from analysis. This resulted in a dataset of 125 individual respondents. The individual data set was used for specific aims one and five. The couple dataset had 26 couples that did not receive the outcome measure, and three couples where at least one member did not complete one or more measures and were excluded from analysis. This resulted in a dataset of 68 couples. Based on the guidelines
provided by Preacher and Coffman (2006) and the number of variables in the study, 64 couples are recommended to perform the analysis. The couple dataset was used to test all five hypotheses.

Procedure of Data Collection

Measurement

The key constructs to the study are relationship cycling, relational ethics, and relationship satisfaction. All three of the major variables were measured through self-report questionnaires administered to participants. Existing measures will be used for both relational ethics and relationship satisfaction. In addition to the previously validated measure for relational ethics, a newly developed measure was used. This new instrument is currently being validated. Relationship cycling is a new research area, and there are limited resources available for this topic, so a new one-item measure was created based on instruments used in previous research.

Demographics

Demographics were assessed using an author constructed instrument. Information such as age, race, relationship status, relationship length, educational background, presence of children, where the participant was responding from, and when the couple started living together were collected.
**Relational Ethics**

**Relational Ethics Scale.** Relational ethics will be measured using the Relational Ethics Scale (RES; Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991). The RES uses 24 likert scale questions. The scale ranges from one (*strongly disagree*) to five (*strongly agree*) for a series of questions regarding the individual’s perception of their relationship with significant intimate relationship partners, specifically the constructs of trust, justice, loyalty, and entitlement. These constructs are measured for both the respondent’s relationship with their family of origin as well as their relationship with their current partner. The instrument has two subscales, *vertical relationships* which refer to the individuals’ ethical interactions with their family of origin, and *horizontal relationships*, which include their interactions with their current partner. These two subscales are further divided into four subscales that measure the constructs trust, justice, loyalty, and entitlement. The instrument was developed through a multistage process. First, relational ethics was defined using current literature. Second, statements concerning trust, justice, loyalty, and entitlement in the context of a relationship were created; the face validity of the statements was assessed by consulting experts trained by Nagy. Some example statements are: “At times, I was used by my family unfairly” (vertical trust and justice); “I continue to seek closer relationships with my family” (vertical loyalty); “I received the love and affection from my family I deserved” (vertical entitlement); “We are equal partners in this relationship” (horizontal trust and justice); “I try to meet the emotional needs of this person” (horizontal loyalty); “When I feel angry, I tend to take it out on this person” (horizontal entitlement). Third, the preliminary scale
was tested for item validity and reliability. Based on the results of the preliminary test a revised instrument was created. Fourth, the revised scale was tested for validity and reliability. Finally the instrument was correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS: Spanier, 1976) and the Personal Authority in the Family System questionnaire (PAFS-Q: Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984). The vertical subscales of the RES were found to correlate moderately with intergenerational subscales of the PAFS-Q, and the horizontal subscale correlated from moderate to high with the spousal subscale. The RES correlated highly with the DAS with the exception of the entitlement scale.

Each respondent receives a combined total score for the scale and a score for both subscales. Higher scores for the combined score and for each subscale are indicative of healthier relational ethics. In a test to further validate the RES, a reliability score of .86 was reported (Hargrave & Bomba, 1993). The current sample had a reliability of .89, and the subscales had a reliability between .86 and .91.

**Balance of Fairness Questionnaire.** In addition to using the RES, the Balance of Fairness Questionnaire (BoFQ: Gangamma, unpublished) will be used to test relational ethics. The BoFQ is a 40 item instrument that uses a mixture of likert scale, multiple choice questions, and short answer questions. All likert scale questions ask respondents to rate how much they agree with a statement about a selected relationship, and are on a seven-point scale, one (*Strongly Disagree*) being the lowest score and seven (*Strongly Agree*) being the highest. Like the RES, there are two primary subscales, the *vertical subscale* (12 items) that measures perceived fairness with the respondent’s family of origin, and the *horizontal subscale* (38 items) that measures perceived fairness with the
respondent’s current partner. The two main subscales are designed to assess the constructs of trust, justice, loyalty, entitlement, and balance of fairness. However there are not specific subscales designed to measure these constructs, rather the instrument is designed as a global measure of fairness. The multiple choice questions gauge how important certain tasks are for assessing the fairness of the relationship, and whether there have been any changes in the balance of fairness over time. The questions were provided to a panel of experts to establish construct validity. An example statement from the vertical subscale is: “Growing up, my emotional needs were met by my family.” The horizontal subscale is further broken into two more subscales, the respondent’s views of their current relationship, as well as their views of their partner’s perception of the relationship. An example statement for the horizontal subscale is: “My partner can speak up for him/herself in this relationship.” This allows the potential for looking at similarities and discrepancies in individual and partner perceptions of relationship dynamics and individual characteristics.

Each respondent receives a combined total score and a score for each of the subscales (vertical, horizontal-self, horizontal-partner). Higher results for the combined scale and each subscale represent healthier relational ethics. This scale is not validated at this time, and it is hoped that this study will provide further validation for the instrument. For the current study only 30 of the 40 items were used. The 10 items that were not used were exploratory in nature and designed to be used in qualitative research or looking at discrepancies between respondents, making them inappropriate for the current analysis.
The current sample had a reliability of .89 for the entire scale and between .87 and .92 for the sub scales.

**Relationship Satisfaction**

Relationship satisfaction will be measured the Revised-Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS: Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995). The RDAS is a 14 item instrument that assesses dyadic adjustment in distressed and non-distressed relationships. The instrument has been validated and found to be reliable. The DAS was found to be highly correlated with other measures of relationship satisfaction (Spanier, 1976). The individual questions are each on a six-point likert scale. The RDAS has three subscales: dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion. Dyadic consensus consists of six questions, and is measured through respondents reporting their level of agreement with their partner on relational facets like “religious matters” and “sex relations.” A five (Always Agree) is the highest score and a zero (Always Disagree) is the lowest score. Dyadic satisfaction consists of four questions, and is measured through asking respondents to rate the frequency of questions such as, “How often do you and your partner quarrel?” The scale ranges from five (Never) to zero (All The Time). The dyadic cohesion subscale consists of four questions, and is measured through reporting how frequently in a month period certain events occur, such as “[You and your partner] work together on a project.” The scale ranges from zero (Never) to five, which indicates more often than once a day.
The DAS was revised due to confusion about whether it was a unidimensional global measure or a multidimensional instrument, and to make it a shorter instrument. The DAS was a 32 item instrument intended to work as both a global measure and a multidimensional instrument, but the subscales had not been validated through empirical research. Several confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to group the items into their subscales. After several iterations, the final three subscale version presented above was found to highly correlate with both the original DAS, and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959), and was found to successfully discriminate between distressed and non-distressed couples.

Total scores are calculated, and in general lower scores suggest more relationship distress while higher scores suggest lower distress. A cut-off point of 48 is suggested, with higher than that indicating lesser distress and a score lower than that indicating greater distress (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). The RDAS was found to have a high level of internal consistency at .90. Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .79 for the entire scale.

**Relationship Cycling**

There is limited research on relationship cycling, and no clear consensus on what to consider a separation or reconciliation in the literature. Given this paucity of research, a short instrument was created based on the Sprecher’s (1999) research on breaking up. Survey participants were asked, “Did you and your current partner ever separate and get back together?” Recipients were further asked to report the dates of the past three
separations and reconciliations. For each break up and reconciliation participants were asked to report on their perceptions of who had accountability for the problems, who was responsible for breaking up, and who was responsible for reconciling. Each question was measured on a seven point likert scale with a one indicating that the respondent was responsible, a seven indicating that the respondent’s partner was responsible, and a four indicating that both were equally responsible. In addition, respondents were asked to report the reasons for the separation and the reconciliation. Couples included in the cycling sample reported breaking up and reconciling at least one time.

**Data Analysis**

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine how the variables of interest distinguish the cycling and non-cycling groups. A significant MANOVA test statistic indicates that the cycling and non-cycling populations had significantly different responses on study variables when taking correlations into account. The results of this were expected to provide further descriptive information on cycling couples and how they differ from non-cyclers. Since only two groups were assessed, independent sample t-tests were conducted after the MANOVA for the variables of interest. Effect sizes were calculated comparing differences in cycling and non-cycling couples for both males and females ($M$ status group – $M$ status group 2 / $SD$ status). Cohen’s guidelines for determining the size of effects were used, with $\geq 0.2$ indicating a small effect size, $\geq 0.5$ a medium effect, and $\geq 0.8$ a large effect.
In addition to testing for differences using the individual dataset, a model using the dyadic data was constructed and tested. Dyadic data analysis means that the relational dyad was the unit of analysis instead of the individual. The first step in running any dyadic data analysis is determining distinguishability between dyad members. Conceptually distinguishable dyads are those that can be differentiated based on some variable. In this case the dyad is conceptually distinguishable based on sex in the heterosexual couple relationship. Empirical distinguishability refers to whether there are statistically significant differences that distinguish the partners. An omnibus test method outlined by Kenny, Kashy and Cook (2006) is used with the estimates from the unconstrained model. In cases where there is empirical distinguishability structural equation modeling (SEM) is recommended as being an easily conducted and interpreted model for dyadic data (Kenny et al., 2006). Sex of partner has been used in past studies to distinguish partners both conceptually and empirically using relational ethics (Gangamma et al., 2014). Based on this sex was used to distinguish dyads in the current study.

A modified actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was conducted using SEM under AMOS 23. An APIM is a specific form of dyadic data analysis that allows for the examination of variables that can differ within dyads as well as between them (APIM; Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006). An APIM allows for the assessment of the effect of the independent variable on the self (actor effect) as well as the effect on one’s partner (partner effect). For instance, in this study the impact of a female partner’s
relational ethics on her marital adjustment and on her partner’s marital adjustment can be explored.

Refer to Figure 1 for the conceptual model for the APIM. In the current study, vertical relational ethics is the latent exogenous variable, with relationship cycling as an observed endogenous variable, and horizontal relational ethics and relationship satisfaction as latent endogenous variables. Vertical relational ethics is modeled to predict relationship cycling and horizontal ethics. Relationship cycling is modeled to predict relational ethics and relationship satisfaction. Horizontal relational ethics is modeled to predict relationship satisfaction.

There were a few missing items in the data. On the BOFQ there was not more than one missing response per item. For the RES the range was between one and three, and for the RDAS the range was between one and five. Since the percent of missing data for each item was at or below 2% items were assumed to be missing at random. Missing values were replaced using linear interpolation to conduct the analysis.
Chapter 4: Results

There were several aims to the current study. The first aim was to provide a clearer description of the population of cyclers. The second purpose was to examine the connection between horizontal and vertical relational ethics. The third purpose was to examine the impact of relational ethics on relationship satisfaction. The fourth aim of the study is to examine the connection between cycling behavior, relational ethics, and relationship satisfaction. Finally an overarching aim is to provide support for the use of a new tool used to measure relational ethics. An APIM model under SEM was used to analyze the data. This chapter presents the results of the model.

Sample Description

All data were gathered through ResearchMatch.org, which is a national database connecting researchers to potential participants. Research Match provides a largely representative sample in terms of representing racial diversity, with a slight over representation of Caucasian Americans. The current sample over represents Caucasian Americans and underrepresents Black Americans compared to both the 2014 U.S. Census and Research Match. In addition, Research Match has an oversampling of female respondents. The sample for the current research also has an oversample of female respondents. Research Match provides no information on education or socioeconomic
status. The sample for the current study over represents those with a bachelor’s degree or higher level of educational attainment.

Two datasets were created with the data collected, an individual sample and a dyadic sample. The individual sample consists of respondents who either participated individually, or whose partner did not complete the survey. The dyadic sample consists of responses where both members of a couple participated. Forty-eight individuals (14.8% of total sample) agreed to participate with their partners, but then one member of the couple did not provide a response. The member of the couple who did respond was included in the individual dataset. A total of 17 (10.5% of total sample) couples agreed to participate with no members providing a response. And 26 individuals (8% of the total sample) agreed to participate individually but provided no response. An analysis using ANOVA revealed no significant differences in demographic variables between the two datasets, except for gender. There was a significantly larger proportion of females in the individual dataset than in the dyadic dataset. In addition, independent sample t-tests conducted revealed that there were no significant differences between the two datasets on all variables of interest. Other than for gender, this indicates that there are no significant differences between the datasets.

A total of 68 couples comprised the dyadic dataset. A total of 25 (20%) individuals reported cycling only one time, and 14 (11.2%) reported cycling multiple times. In the dyadic dataset, seven males (10.3%) and 12 females (17.6%) reported cycling once, while 10 males (14.7%) and 6 females (8.9%) reported cycling more than once. A preliminary analysis using ANOVA post-hoc analysis revealed no significant
difference between those who cycled once and those who cycled many times for both datasets. Accordingly, everyone that reported cycling behaviors was included in the cycling category. Table 1 provides demographic information for both the individual sample and the couple sample.

A total of 125 individuals comprised the sample of individuals. The majority of the sample was female (n = 104). There were only seven male cyclers in this sample, and given the small sample size and the lack of significant difference in variables based on gender, descriptive statistics are provided in aggregate. The mean age in the sample was 27.13 (SD = 3.73). A majority of the sample reported being white (82.4%), with the second highest report being Hispanic (6.4%), followed by black (5.6%) and Asian (1.6%). The remaining 4% of the sample reported differing race/ethnicity, including Native American, Pacific Islander, Indian, Multiracial, and Middle Eastern. The sample was well-educated, with most of the sample having a bachelor’s degree or higher (70.4%). The majority of the sample was engaged (74.4%), and cohabited before getting engaged (72%). Cross tabulation with chi-square test found that there were no significant differences between cyclers and non-cyclers in education, presence of children, race, religion, relationship status, relationship length, age, which state they were located in, and whether they cohabited before marriage.

A total of 68 couples comprised the dyadic sample. The mean age of males in the sample was 28.43 (SD = 4.08) and 26.96 (SD = 4.08) for females. A majority of the sample reported being white (78.7%), with the second highest report being black (8.1%), followed by Asian (7.4%). The remaining 5.8% of the sample reported differing
race/ethnicity, including Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, Indian, Multiracial, and Middle Eastern. The sample was well-educated, with most of the sample having a bachelor’s degree or higher (65.4%). The majority of the sample was engaged (74.3%), and cohabited before getting engaged (67.6%). Cross tabulation with chi-square test found that there were no significant differences between cyclers and non-cyclers in education, presence of children, race, relationship status, relationship length, religion, age, and whether they cohabited before marriage.

Despite no statistical difference noted between cyclers and non-cyclers, there was an observed difference in relationship length. Individuals and couples that reported cycling behaviors reported longer relationship durations.

Cyclers from each dataset are both described in Table 2. General trends from the individual dataset indicate that a higher percentage of respondents reported that their partner was responsible for the problem (36.3%) or that both partners were equally responsible (36.8%). This seems to indicate that there is a slightly greater tendency for individuals to focus on shared or partner contributions rather than on individual contributions. A higher percentage of respondents reported individual responsibility for breaking up (56.4%), followed by partners being responsible (35.9%), with a small percent reporting shared responsibility. This seems to indicate that in general people tend to see one person as being responsible for break-up rather than both people. An equal percent of individuals reported shared responsibility (41%) or partner responsibility (41%) for reconciliation. This seems to indicate that in general people tend to not feel that they initiate reconciling the relationship.
In the couple dataset cyclers most frequently reported cycling a single time (35% of males and 60% of females) or twice (35% of males). Only a single couple reported cycling more than three times. A higher percentage of males reported individual responsibility for creating the problem in the relationship (35.2%) than did females (22.3%). A higher percentage of females reported their partners being responsible for creating the problems in the relationship (27.9.8%) than did males (5.9%). Roughly the same amount reported equal responsibility for creating the problem (58.8% of males and 55.6% of females). This seems to indicate that in general couples view male partners as being more responsible for creating problems in cycling relationships. A higher percentage of females reported that their partners were responsible for initiating the break-up (38.9%) than did males (29.4%). A higher percentage of males reported that break-up was mutual (47.1%) than did females (27.8%). A higher percentage of females (33.3%) than males (23.5%) reported that they were individually responsible for the break-up. This seems to indicate that female partners were more likely to see one partner as being more responsible where male partners seem to have attributed more joint responsibility. Higher percentage of males (29.5%) reported that they initiated reconciliation than did females (16.7%). A higher percentage of females (50.1%) reported their partners were responsible for initiating the reconciliation than males (35.2%). Male reports of who was responsible for reconciliation were fairly evenly split between individual responsibility (29.5.6%), joint responsibility (35.3%), and partner responsibility (35.2%). Female reports of who was responsible for reconciliation more frequently reported partner (50.1%) responsibility or joint responsibility (33.3%). This
seems to indicate that in general couples view male partners as being more responsible for reuniting and maintaining the relationship than female partners.

Preliminary Results

Means, standard deviations and Cohen’s $d$ are reported in Table 3. The correlation coefficients for the variables of interest are provided in Table 4 for the dyadic dataset, and Table 5 for the individual dataset. Both datasets were used to test correlations for variables of interest. Most of the study variables were significantly correlated to at least a moderate degree in the dyadic dataset. Of particular interest, both the horizontal and the vertical relational ethics axes of the RES were correlated with the corresponding axes of the BOFQ. Similar correlations were found in the individual dataset. The strongest and largest correlations were between the two vertical subscales and the two horizontal subscales. In addition, the vertical subscales from both measures were correlated with the horizontal subscales from both measures. This suggests that the BOFQ and the RES are measuring the same constructs. This indicates that there is concurrent validity for the BOFQ, and indicates that it can be used to measure relational ethics. In addition, vertical relational ethics was correlated with horizontal relational ethics for both measures and for men, but only for the BOFQ for women. This suggests that there was a connection between vertical and horizontal ethics that can be explored with further analysis.

For both the individual dataset and the dyadic dataset, MANOVA was used to test the differences between the cycling and non-cycling respondents’ reports of horizontal and vertical relational ethics and relationship satisfaction, with cycling as the independent
variable. There were significant effects based on cycling (individual: Wilk’s Lambda = .87, $p < .01$; dyadic: Wilk’s Lambda = .81, $p < .001$). This implies that there is a difference between individuals based on whether cycling occurred.

There were several effects noted based on the MANOVA. There was a significant effect for cycling on relationship adjustment (individual: $F = 4.71, p < .05$; dyadic: $F = 29.14, p < .001$). There was a near significant effect for cycling on horizontal relational ethics for the RES for individuals ($F = 3.68, p < .06$) and a significant effect for dyads ($F = 21.13, p < .001$). There was a significant effect for horizontal relational ethics for the BoFQ for both datasets (individual: $F = 9.65, p < .01$; dyadic: $F = 14.72, p < .001$). There were no significant differences in vertical relational ethics for either dataset.

Since there were only two groups in each dataset, further investigation was conducted through independent sample t-tests. Results indicated that in general cycling individuals and couples were more likely to report lower levels on relationship variables concerning their current relationship. Supporting past research, relationship satisfaction was found to be lower for cyclers (individual: $t = 2.17, p < .05$; dyadic males: $t = 4.8, p < .001$; dyadic females: $t = 2.8, p < .01$), with a small effect size for individuals (0.48), a large one for males (1.28) and a moderate one for females (0.74). Horizontal relational ethics as measured by the RES was also lower for cyclers (individual: $t = 2.34, p < .05$; dyadic males: $t = 2.85, p < .01$; dyadic females: $t = 3.73, p < .001$) and had a small effect size for individuals (0.45) a moderates one for males (0.76), and a large one for females (0.99). Finally, horizontal relational ethics as measured by the BoFQ was also lower for cyclers (individuals: $t = 3.97, p < .001$; dyadic males: $t = 3.21, p < .01$; dyadic
females $t = 2.31, p < .05$) and had a moderate effect size for individuals (0.77), a large effect size for males (.86) and a moderate effect size for females (.61). Given these results there is evidence that there is a difference between cyclers and non-cyclers based on horizontal relational ethics and satisfaction in their relationships.

**Model Estimation**

A series of models were constructed to test the data. The couple dataset was used to estimate all SEM models. The following fit indices were used in this analysis: the chi-square value, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. The chi-square result indicates the magnitude of discrepancy. Model fit is indicated by an RMSEA of .08 or below (Hair et al., 2006), and .95 and higher for the CFI (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Based on no significant difference on demographic variables related to cycling, control variables were not included in the model.

An initial model to test whether relationship cycling predicted relationship adjustment was constructed. Relationship cycling was included as the single exogenous variable with relationship adjustment for both males and females as endogenous variables. This model poorly fit the data ($\chi^2 = 31.29, p < .01; \text{CFI} = .476, \text{RMSEA} = .16$), but suggested that cycling was predictive of relationship adjustment for both males ($\beta = -.57, p = .001$) and females ($\beta = -.54, p = .001$). This indicates that increasing levels of relationship cycling resulted in lower levels of relationship adjustment for both males and females.
Next a model based on contextual theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987), and current empirical evidence for relational ethics and cycling behaviors was constructed that incorporated vertical and horizontal relational ethics. In keeping with contextual theory, horizontal and vertical relational ethics were both constructed as latent variables, with two indicators being the corresponding subscales from the RES and the BoFQ. Models were estimated using sub-scales from only the RES as indicators, and using the RES or BoFQ as observed variables, but the fit was always inferior compared to using latent variables, hence latent variables were used.

The final model presented in Figure 2 was the best fitting unconstrained model ($\chi^2 = 91.19, p = .085; \text{CFI} = .819, \text{RMSEA} = .059$) which acted as the baseline model for this study. The fit indices indicated moderate fit to the data. Two constrained models were estimated through correlating residuals. The second constrained model had a significant increase in fit, resulting in the best fitting model ($\chi^2 = 75.21, p = .375, \text{CFI} = .966, \text{RMSEA} = .026$). Table 5 shows the actor and partner effects of the final model. Path results for the model are reported in Table 6.

**General Effects**

Cycling had a significant effect on horizontal relational ethics for both males ($\beta = -0.41, p = .001$) and females ($\beta = -0.39, p < .01$). This indicates that individual perceptions of fairness were negatively impacted by the presence of relationship cycling in romantic relationships. For male partners every cycling occurrence resulted in a 0.41 decrease in horizontal relational ethics. For female partners each cycling occurrence
resulted in a 0.39 decrease in horizontal relational ethics. These effects were free to vary, indicating that there was a different association between the variables based on partners. The impact of cycling on relationship satisfaction was not significant for males ($\beta = -0.23, p = .06$) or females ($\beta = -0.18, p = .15$). This indicates that there is no change in relationship adjustment based on the number of times cycling occurred in a relationship. This contradicts previous findings indicating that cycling is connected to lower levels of relationship satisfaction. However, it should be noted that the path for cycling on male relationship satisfaction neared significance, indicating that a larger sample might have produced different results. The model predicted 27.1% of the variance in horizontal relational ethics for female partners and 35.7% of the variance for male partners. This indicates that both vertical ethics and cycling are predictors of horizontal relational ethics, but that there is still considerable variance that can be explained by extraneous variables. In addition the model predicted 80.2% of the variance in relationship adjustment for females and 99.1% of the variance for male partners. This indicates that relational ethics is an effective predictor of relationship adjustment. As vertical relationship ethics was not connected to cycling, none of the variance in cycling was predicted by the model.

**Actor Effects**

The actor effects of vertical relational ethics on cycling were nonsignificant for both males ($\beta = -0.01, p = .94$) and females ($\beta = 0.02, p = .84$). This indicates that family of origin relationships did not impact the presence or frequency of relationship cycling in
adult children. Vertical relational ethics did have significant actor effects on horizontal relational ethics for both males ($\beta = 0.35, p < .05$) and females ($\beta = 0.18, p < .05$). This indicates that higher levels of vertical relational ethics in the individual’s family of origin are connected to higher levels of horizontal relational ethics. For male partners each one point increase in vertical relational ethics was associated with a 0.35 increase in horizontal relational ethics. For female partners every one point increase in vertical relational ethics was associated with a 0.18 increase in horizontal relational ethics. This is consistent with contextual theory in stating that there is a legacy of trust that is intergenerationally transmitted. These paths appear to be different based on the magnitude of the effects. The actor effects of horizontal relational ethics on relationship satisfaction were significant for both males ($\beta = 0.79, p < .01$) and females ($\beta = 1.01, p < .01$). This indicates that an individual’s perception of fairness in their current relationship was connected to feelings of satisfaction with the relationship. For male partners, an increase of one point in horizontal relational ethics was connected to a 0.79 increase in relationship adjustment. For female partners, a one point increase in horizontal relational ethics was connected with a 1.01 increase in relationship adjustment. These paths appear to be different based on the magnitude of the effects.

**Partner Effects**

The partner effect of male vertical relational ethics on female horizontal relational ethics was significant ($\beta = 0.29, p < .05$). This indicates that a one point increase in a male partner’s vertical relational ethics was connected to a 0.29 increase in his partner’s
horizontal relational ethics. The partner effect for female vertical relational ethics on
male horizontal relational ethics was significant (β = 0.25, p < .01). This indicates that a
one point increase in a female partner’s vertical relational ethics was connected to a 0.25
increase in her partner’s horizontal relational ethics. Taken together this indicates that
increasing levels of vertical relational ethics for an individual was connected with
increasing levels of horizontal relational ethics for an individual’s partner. This suggests
that an individual’s perception of the fairness in their family of origin impacts their
partner’s perception of fairness in their current relationship. This pathway was non-
equivalent, indicating that there was a different association between the variables based
on partners. The partner effect for male horizontal relational ethics on female satisfaction
was not significant (β = -0.24, p = .37). The partner effect for female horizontal relational
ethics on male satisfaction was not significant (β = 0.1, p = .69). There was no connection
between individual horizontal relational ethics and partner relationship adjustment. This
indicates that an individual’s perception of fairness in their current relationship was not
connected to their partner’s relationship satisfaction in the relationship when controlling
for vertical ethics, and other variables in the model.

2nd Model Estimation

Following the original model we were concerned about the high r-squared result
for relational adjustment for males and females (.99 and .80 respectively). This indicated
that practically all the variance in adjustment was explained by horizontal relational
ethics, and might possibly be an indication that the RDAS and horizontal relational ethics
were effectively measuring the same construct. Previous studies using the RDAS have found a high correlation between it and the RES (Gangamma et al., 2014). This seems to indicate that there might be an issue in using the RDAS and Relational Ethics scales together. The content of the two measures were examined for overlap in the questions, and were found to be conceptually different. To further examine this connection the correlations between the subscales for the RDAS and the horizontal ethics subscales of the RES and BOFQ were examined.

**Correlations**

The correlations for both the cohesion and the consensus subscales of the RDAS were highly correlated with the horizontal relational ethics subscale for both the RES and the BOFQ. Based on the results of these correlations a new model was conducted that only used the satisfaction subscale. This removed both the cohesion and the consensus subscales of the RDAS as these seemed to overlap the highest with the trust domains of the relational ethics scales. Three questions from the satisfaction subscale of the RDAS were used. These questions included, “How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?”; “Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together?)”; “How often do you and your mate ‘get on each other’s nerves’?” A new model using these three items as indicators for relationship satisfaction was conducted, with the measurement model shown in Figure 3. Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations of the items, including the new satisfaction variable used in the new model.
Model Estimation

An initial model to test whether relationship cycling predicted relationship adjustment was constructed. Relationship cycling was included as the single exogenous variable with relationship satisfaction for both males and females as endogenous variables. This model fit the data fairly well ($\chi^2 = 18.3$, $p = .11$; CFI = .966, RMSEA = .89), but suggested that cycling was predictive of relationship adjustment for both males ($\beta = -.42$, $p = .001$) and females ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$). This indicates that increasing levels of relationship cycling resulted in lower levels of relationship adjustment for both males and females.

The model based on theory was conducted next, and the best fitting unconstrained model ($\chi^2 = 113.05$, $p = .002$; CFI = .943, RMSEA = .089) which acted as the baseline model. The fit indices indicated moderate fit to the data. Five constrained models were estimated through correlating residuals. The final constrained model had a significant increase in fit, resulting in the best fitting model ($\chi^2 = 71.9$, $p = .35$, CFI = .994, RMSEA = .029). Table 8 shows the actor and partner effects of the final model. In general the results of the new model are similar to the initial model, with a few significant differences.

General Effects

Cycling had a significant effect on horizontal relational ethics for both males ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = .001$) and females ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = .01$). This indicates that individual
perceptions of fairness were negatively impacted by the presence of relationship cycling in romantic relationships. For male partners every cycling occurrence resulted in a 0.45 decrease in horizontal relational ethics. For female partners each cycling occurrence resulted in a 0.45 decrease in horizontal relational ethics. Based on the observed difference in the results these effects appear to be roughly equivalent. The impact of cycling on relationship satisfaction was not significant for males (β = -.21, p = .12). This indicates that there is no change in relationship adjustment for males based on the number of times cycling occurred in a relationship. This contradicts previous findings indicating that cycling is connected to lower levels of relationship satisfaction. However female satisfaction was impacted (β = -.31, p < .01). This indicates that female satisfaction decreases by .31 for each cycling event. This indicates that satisfaction for females is connected to cycling even when accounting for relational ethics. The model predicted 39.5% of the variance in horizontal relational ethics for female partners and 38.1% of the variance for male partners. This indicates that both vertical ethics and cycling are predictors of horizontal relational ethics, but that there is still considerable variance that can be explained by extraneous variables. In addition the model predicted 52.6% of the variance in relationship adjustment for females and 40.1% of the variance for male partners. As vertical relationship ethics was not connected to cycling, none of the variance in cycling was predicted by the model.
**Actor Effects**

The actor effects of vertical relational ethics on cycling were nonsignificant for both males ($\beta = -0.08, p = .52$) and females ($\beta = 0.07, p = .35$). This indicates that family of origin relationships did not impact the presence or frequency of relationship cycling in adult children. Vertical relational ethics did have significant actor effects on horizontal relational ethics for both males ($\beta = 0.33, p < .01$) and females ($\beta = 0.25, p < .01$). This indicates that higher levels of vertical relational ethics in the individual’s family of origin are connected to higher levels of horizontal relational ethics. For male partners each one point increase in vertical relational ethics was associated with a 0.33 increase in horizontal relational ethics. For female partners every one point increase in vertical relational ethics was associated with a 0.25 increase in horizontal relational ethics. This is consistent with contextual theory in stating that there is a legacy of trust that is intergenerationally transmitted. These paths appear to be different based on the magnitude of the effects. The actor effects of horizontal relational ethics on relationship satisfaction were significant for females ($\beta = 1.02, p < .01$). This indicates that an female partner’s perception of fairness in their current relationship was connected to feelings of satisfaction with the relationship. For female partners, an increase of one point in horizontal relational ethics was connected to a 1.02 increase in relationship adjustment. Horizontal relational ethics did not predict relationship satisfaction for males ($\beta = .83, p < .07$). This is surprising and does not fit with previous findings. However, it should be noted that the effect was near significance. These paths appear to be different based on the magnitude of the effects.
**Partner Effects**

All partner effects were consistent with the previous model. The partner effect of male vertical relational ethics on female horizontal relational ethics was significant ($\beta = 0.37, p = .001$). This indicates that a one point increase in a male partner’s vertical relational ethics was connected to a 0.37 increase in his partner’s horizontal relational ethics. The partner effect for female vertical relational ethics on male horizontal relational ethics was significant ($\beta = 0.24, p = .001$). This indicates that a one point increase in a female partner’s vertical relational ethics was connected to a 0.24 increase in her partner’s horizontal relational ethics. This pathway was non-equivalent, indicating that there was a different association between the variables based on partners. The partner effect for male horizontal relational ethics on female satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = -0.59, p = .1$). The partner effect for female horizontal relational ethics on male satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = -0.39, p = .35$).

**Summary of the Results**

The final APIM model showed a mix of actor and partner effects. Based on the multiple significant actor effects and the two significant partner effects, this could be considered primarily an actor oriented model with significant couple oriented pathways (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010).

The results of these data analyses support some of the hypotheses. The preliminary results provide information concerning characteristics of cycling behaviors
and those that engage in cycling (Specific Aim One). In addition there were several observed differences between cycling and non-cycling participants, and the MANOVA results support that there are statistically significant differences between these groups.

Specific Aim Two was partially supported with mixed results. The results of the APIM support the hypothesis that ethical vertical relationships positively predict ethical horizontal relationships. This supported the theory driven conceptual model of the association between vertical and horizontal relational ethics. However, the correlations between variables suggested that vertical and horizontal relational ethics variables of the RES were nonsignificant for females. The vertical and horizontal scales of the BoFQ were correlated, so the analysis could be meaningfully performed. The lack of correlation in the RES for females does raise some questions.

Specific Aim Three was supported by the results of the analyses. Vertical relational ethics were not connected to cycling. In the APIM, cycling was found to be significantly connected to horizontal relational ethics. In addition, cycling was found to be associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Additionally the model that only tested the relationship between cycling and relationship adjustment indicated that cycling negatively predicted relationship adjustment, which supports previous research on the topic.

Specific Aim Four was partially supported by the results of the analysis. In the simple model cycling was negatively predictive of relationship satisfaction, but when relational ethics were added into the model, the effect of cycling on relationship adjustment disappeared for males, and diminished for females. This finding supports the
hypothesis for Specific Aim 4, that horizontal relational ethics acts as at least a partially mediating variable between the effect of cycling on relationship satisfaction.

Specific Aim Five was supported by the analyses. As the BOFQ is a new instrument it lacks testing and validation. The correlation coefficients between the horizontal subscales for both the BOFQ and the RES were significant. Similarly the correlation coefficients between the vertical subscales for both the BOFQ and the RES were significant.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Relationship cycling is the action of breaking up a union, and then reconciling into the same union. This is a relatively common phenomenon among young couples, with reports of up to 50% reporting having cycled at least once in their lives (Vennum & Johnson, 2014). Cycling has been found to have several negative consequences for individuals and couples, including lower levels of satisfaction, higher levels of marital instability, and increased risk for violence (Dailey et al., 2013a; Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013a; Vennum et al., 2015). These findings clearly mark cycling as a concern for researchers, policy makers, and therapists. While the concern surrounding the outcomes of cycling is based on growing empirical evidence, the theoretical perspectives on cycling present conceptualizations that frequently do not match the observed empirical evidence. There are several theoretical perspectives that could be used to explain the role that cycling plays in relationship formation. In general, most theories can be used to predict both positive and negative relational outcomes from cycling behaviors. Qualitative research has also found positive results to cycling that have not been replicated in quantitative research (Dailey et al., 2009). This disparity between potentially positive benefits and observed negative outcomes has largely not been explored. In general research on cycling remains fairly limited, and there is practically no application of theory explaining the observed impacts of cycling on romantic relationships. A gap in the
literature is the exploration of theoretical understanding of how cycling connects with relational variables. More specifically, cycling is becoming increasingly likely to be a topic during therapy, and there currently is limited information for therapist consumers to use when working with cycling clients.

Using contextual theory and relational ethics is one way to address some of the gaps in the current literature on cycling. Relational ethics is one of the five dimensions of contextual theory and is the most salient aspect of the approach. Relational ethics includes trust, loyalty, entitlement, justice and awareness of the balance of fair giving and taking in the context of a relationship. While the theory and approach is old and generally accepted, there is still very little research on the constructs of the theory and how they connect to relationship variables. Applying contextual theory to relationship cycling incorporates the currently disparate topics of therapy and cycling, and advances our knowledge of both topics.

The current research aimed to fill the gaps in literature on two main topics, first by providing a theoretical viewpoint through which to understand cycling, and second to provide further evidence for the utility of relational ethics as a construct. Relational ethics was used to conceptualize the manner in which cycling would impact relationship adjustment. A new instrument testing relational ethics was used in conjunction with a previously tested instrument, and respondents were then examined for differences based on whether they cycled. The belief was that cycling was a complicated variable and that the application of theory would reveal different effects based on relational ethics. By examining this relationship the study was intended to provide information for research
consumers on the variations of cycling, and bring these variations to the attention of therapists in specific.

**Instruments of Relational Ethics**

Before discussing the association between cycling and relational ethics, it is important to consider the instruments used to assess relational ethics. Providing further validation for the instruments used to test relational ethics was a major component of the current research. Up to this point there was a single valid instrument that has been used in conducting research on relational ethics, and even then the instrument is rarely used. The lack of instruments and the lack of research on relational ethics have worked together to leave a large gap in literature as to how effective contextual theory is as a lens for understanding human interaction in general and relationship formation in specific. The current research provides support for the use of both the RES and the BOFQ as means of assessing relational ethics.

There were several correlations between the RES and the BOFQ. The high correlations of these subscales indicate that the scores vary together, and most likely indicates that both instruments are measuring a similar construct. The horizontal ethics subscale of the RES was highly correlated with the horizontal subscale of the BOFQ in both datasets and for both males and females in the dyadic dataset. Similarly the vertical ethics subscale of the RES was highly correlated with the vertical ethics subscale of the BOFQ in both datasets and for both males and females in the dyadic dataset.
Taken together these correlations effectively state that participants that responded in a specific fashion on one instrument were highly likely to respond in a similar fashion on the other instrument. This correlation between variables provides support for the concurrent validity of both instruments. The RES has been previously used and tested, but there has never been a second instrument that tests relational ethics to test the concurrent validity of the instrument. The results of this finding are more important for the BOFQ though, as it is a new instrument that has not been used or validated as a tool up to this point. These correlations support the concurrent validity of the tool and support its continued usage.

In addition to the concurrent validity, there were significant correlations within the instruments. From a theoretical perspective, vertical relational ethics would be connected to horizontal relational ethics through the concept of the ledger. Thus we would expect significant correlations between vertical and horizontal relational ethics, and these correlations support the theoretical construct. For male respondents, the vertical relational ethics were significantly correlated with horizontal relational ethics for both the RES and the BOFQ, which supports the model construct. For female respondents, vertical relational ethics were significantly correlated with horizontal relational ethics for the BOFQ.

There are some concerns with the correlations though. There was not as strong a connection between vertical and horizontal relational ethics as theory would predict. There is a correlation for female subscales in the BOFQ, but not between the subscales of the RES. Interestingly, the vertical and horizontal subscales were correlated in both
measures in the individual dataset. It is unclear why vertical and horizontal relational ethics are not more strongly correlated for female respondents. However, there was a correlation between the subscales in both datasets.

Taken together this seems to indicate that the BOFQ is performing at least as well as the RES in measuring both horizontal and vertical relational ethics. This seems to indicate that the BOFQ should be usable in examining ethics in dyadic research that uses some form of regression analysis. However, the instruments might not be performing in the fashion that theory would expect. The lack of correlation within the instruments is surprising and there are no theoretical explanations for this.

**Cycling Couples**

Roughly 30% of both samples reported cycling at least once, with cycling a single time being most commonly reported. This connects with previous findings on the percent of couples that cycle. A smaller group did cycle more than once, but there were no statistical differences between multiple cyclers and single time cyclers. This seems to indicate that any differences based on cycling does not increase with more cycling events. There are a few possibilities that could describe this finding. One possibility is that differences in cycling are based on the types of people that cycle rather than on the actual events of cycling. That is to say that the outcomes of cycling might be more dependent on the type of people that engage in cycling. Another possibility is that a single event is enough to change the relationship, and further cycling events are not salient enough to create further significant change. A third possibility is that there is a difference that the
current data set was not able to detect. A final possibility is that multiple cycling events do not occur, because couples are more likely to permanently break-up after one or two cycling events. Regardless of the lack of difference based on the number of times participants cycled, there were several noted differences between cycling and non-cycling participants.

One observed but not statistically significant difference between non-cycling and cycling participants was the duration of the relationship. Cyclers were observed to report longer relationships than non-cyclers. This makes sense in that increased duration of the relationship would provide increased opportunity for separation to occur. Previous studies have also found an inverse relationship between relationship duration and satisfaction (Jose, Daniel O’Leary, & Moyer, 2010). This means that there would be increasing problems in a relationship giving greater impetus to make a change in some form. Thus breaking up might be one of the behaviors that couples engage in to deal with the problems that arise from diminishing satisfaction in the relationship. However as the difference in duration was not significant no real tests could be performed to examine differences based on the duration of the relationship.

There were several significant differences between cyclers and non-cyclers. One difference was in the levels of reported horizontal relational ethics. In both datasets cyclers were found to have significantly lower levels of horizontal relational ethics, but no difference in vertical relational ethics. This seems to indicate that the cyclers’ experiences with family of origin do not differ that strongly with non-cyclers, but something about being a cycler results in perceiving their romantic relationship as less
fair than non-cycling partners do. This might indicate that the experience of cycling itself has an impact on how fair a relationship is perceived to be by partners. It is possible that cycling places stress on the relationship and drains some of the inherent resource of trust in the relationship. This would account for the lower levels of horizontal relational ethics. Similarly, since causality cannot be established in the present model, it may also indicate that lower levels of perceived fairness leads to cycling behaviors.

The other difference between cyclers and non-cyclers was the level of reported satisfaction. Cycling couples were significantly less satisfied with their relationship than non-cyclers in both datasets. This is again a place where an increased relationship duration would explain some of the difference, but there was not a statistical difference in the relationship duration. While a causal relationship is impossible to establish with the conducted research, the possibility that cycling does negatively impact relationship satisfaction of young couples is supported by the current data analysis. This supports previous research on cycling couples (Dailey et al., 2013a).

In addition to multiple differences, cyclers and non-cyclers were similar in several significant ways. Cyclers did not differ in their reports on vertical relational ethics. There was an observed but non-significant lower level of vertical ethics for partners in the dyadic dataset, and an observed but non-significant higher level of vertical ethics in the individual dataset. This was in keeping with the theory proposed. It was hypothesized that cycling itself might be either a healthy or an unhealthy strategy depending on the circumstances of the couple relationship and the individual. If there were a significant difference in the means for vertical relational ethics it would be presumed that cycling
was in general connected to the destructive entitlement inherited through the legacy of family relationships. As there was no significant difference in vertical relational ethics based on cycling status, we can conclude that cycling appears to occur regardless of the level of relational ethics. This could indicate that there are extraneous variables that predict cycling, and that there might be a difference in couples that cycle based on their relational ethics.

A final way that cyclers and non-cyclers were similar was in the magnitude of their satisfaction. There was a significant difference in the level of reported satisfaction, but both cyclers and non-cyclers were above the cutoff for distressed couples for the RDAS. This indicates that in general all couples were satisfied in their relationship. Cycling seems to stress couples and diminish satisfaction, but it does not necessarily connect to significant issues in the couple dynamic.

Taken together this indicates that cycling couples are in general less satisfied with their relationships, but remain mostly satisfied. Cycling does not appear to be connected to the balance of fairness in cyclers’ family of origin experience. This seems to indicate that cycling does not necessarily occur because of destructive entitlement. Theoretically it makes sense that destructive entitlement would be connected with cycling, but it is possible that healthy entitlement might also be connected to cycling. This means that there might be further differences within the cycler group and that cycling might have a different effect based on relational ethics.

Another finding of the study is possible gender effects on whether cycling occurs. A majority of the respondents in the individual sample are female, so the response can be
interpreted is more representative of the female response. Men and women seem to agree that both partners tend to be responsible for problems in the relationship, but that if someone is responsible for the problem it is more likely to be a male. However, there seems to be a trend for females to report that either they or their partner is more responsible for separation than male partners do, and that male partners are more frequently responsible for separation. There is a similar trend in the individual dataset; there was a much higher chance of respondents reporting that one person was more responsible for the problem than the other. In addition, the female respondents from the dyadic dataset reported that their partners were more likely to report that their partner was more responsible for the reconciliation in the relationship. This was one of the few places where the report of one partner being more responsible was greater than the report of partners being equally responsible. There was a similar trend in the individual dataset.

Taken together there seems to be a tendency for males to be perceived by female partners as more responsible for every aspect of cycling, including the problem, separating, and reconciling. In contrast to this, males tend to seem to agree that they caused the problem, but seem to vary in reports on who is responsible for separating and reconciling. It is possible that there is a thread of patriarchy in this, where women seem to be more likely to remain open to their male partner’s return, and to perceive males as being in control of the relationship. Males do not seem to see the relationship in the same way, though this might also be an example of the privilege afforded men in patriarchy, where they do not consider these things as closely as their female partners do.
Vertical and Horizontal Ethics

Relational ethics had several significant associations in the study. Vertical relational ethics were found to positively predict horizontal relational ethics in the SEM model. There were significant actor effects for both males and females, indicating that their family of origin experience was important in the development of their own perceptions of fairness in their current romantic relationship. This is consistent with theory, and previous empirical evidence, that vertical relational ethics transfers the balance of fairness to a new generation, and impacts the way that offspring perceive their own romantic attachments. The more ethical the relationship is growing up with one’s family of origin, the more likely the relationship will be ethical with one’s romantic partner.

There was also an observed partner effect for vertical ethics on horizontal ethics for both male and female partners. This indicates that the vertical ethics of one partner not only predicts their own perception of fairness in the relationship, but also their partner’s perception of fairness in the relationship. This was the only observed partner effect in the model, and fits with theory. Based on contextual theory relational ethics is not something that exists solely within the individual, but between partners (Gangama et al., 2012). Horizontal relational ethics is co-created by couples as they work together incorporating the balance of fairness inherited from separate family circumstances. Thus partners’ vertical ethics would be individual in the sense that it is their own family experience that they bring with them, but the effect on the couple is a couple-wide effect as both partners are impacted by the ethical reality that an individual inherits.
Vertical relational ethics did not predict cycling, which was in keeping with the hypothesis of the study. As stated earlier, vertical relational ethics negatively predicting cycling would mean that lower levels of relational ethics are connected to higher levels of cycling, and theoretically this would occur due to destructive entitlement. Conversely if vertical relational ethics positively predicted cycling, then cycling would occur more often with higher levels of relational ethics, and we would theoretically assume cycling to be healthy. The lack of significant correlation indicates that either there is no connection between vertical relational ethics and cycling, or that the relationship is not linear.

Theoretically speaking it is difficult to conceptualize that relational ethics do not impact the occurrence of cycling in some manner. One possibility is that the relationship between cycling and relational ethics is not linear, and that the occurrence of cycling is more common at higher and lower ethical levels. Another possibility is that the connection between vertical relational ethics and cycling might be due to some variable around cycling, but not specifically to whether cycling occurs. For instance, it is possible that vertical relational ethics is associated with which partner is considered responsible for the problem, for separating, and for reconciling. Theoretically, individuals that are in more ethically fair relationships are able to see how others are trying to do the best that they can, and would be able to see how both individuals contribute to any unfairness in the relationship. This seems like it would lead to a greater chance of individuals reporting that responsibility for the relationship outcomes were shared. On the other hand, individuals from families with little ethical fairness might be more likely to either blame themselves or their partner for problems or breaking up. Similarly, higher vertical
relational ethics might be connected to whether the cycling event is perceived as a positive or negative event for the couple. Individuals that grew up with greater levels of vertical relational ethics might view their own cycling as helpful or beneficial to the relationship.

In addition, there was an actor effect for horizontal relational ethics significantly predicting relationship satisfaction for female partners. This indicates that the perception of fairness in the relationship was connected to more satisfied relationships for female partners. This is consistent with past findings (Gan gamma et al., 2014) and theory on relational ethics. Individuals seem to be able to handle the normal stressors of relationships and feel more connected to their partners when they are able to acknowledge the efforts both partners make to keep the relationship strong. Essentially when an individual feels that their partner is giving to the relationship, and that they feel free and able to give back into the relationship, they are more likely to be satisfied with the relationship.

It is somewhat surprising that male partners’ satisfaction is not associated with their horizontal relational ethics. This is contrary to the theory in general and past findings. It is possible that this is connected to the gender differences noted earlier in the way partners view their relationship differently. Due to males seeming to be more privileged in the relationship, it is possible that males are more tolerant of unfairness and inequality in the relationship. It is possible that unfair interactions are more easily overlooked by male partners since the unfairness might be in their favor, as evidenced by a higher reported percentage of male partners being responsible for problems in the relationship.
relationship. Similarly, if the unfairness is not in the male’s favor it might be easier for males to shrug the problems off due to a general social trend for patriarchy and privileging the male experience. It should be noted that the association between horizontal relational ethics and satisfaction was near significance, and a larger sample might find a stronger result.

There was no partner effect for horizontal relational ethics on relationship satisfaction. This indicates that an individual’s relationship satisfaction was not impacted by their partner’s perception of fairness in the relationship. This is a surprising finding that contradicts past research on the connection between horizontal relational ethics and relationship satisfaction (Gangamma et al., 2014). It was expected that there would be a partner effect for horizontal ethics. Theoretically speaking the satisfaction in the relationship is something that is co-constructed through the balance of fairness in the relationship. Couples that have more fair relationships would vary together to have more satisfied relationships. One person not perceiving this fairness would hypothetically impact the satisfaction of the entire relationship. The findings imply that only the individual’s perceptions of fair give and take matter to their personal feelings of satisfaction in the relationship, regardless of how their partner perceives the relationship. However, horizontal relational ethics were correlated between partners indicating that partners’ perceptions of fairness in the relationship varied together. This does support theory that horizontal relational ethics exists between couples, but it challenges assumptions of how that couple dynamic impacts satisfaction.
It is possible that this discrepancy reflects the issues of lower levels of relational ethics. At lower levels of relational ethics an individual is conceptualized as having a difficult time separating their own emotions, desires, and experiences from those of others, but at higher levels are able to maintain a healthy sense of self in the presence of emotional expression by others. While there is no express cut-offs for healthy relational ethics, it is possible that the current sample is of primarily ethically fair relationships. The mean RDAS for both members of the couple is above the cutoff for distress for both cyclers and non-cyclers though, which lends credence to this possibility. Thus the lack of partner effect may indicative that healthy couples are able to own their own emotions, even though the balance of fairness in the relationship is co-created.

Taken together, this seems to indicate that relational ethics were not associated with the occurrence of cycling, but are connected to the couple’s satisfaction. Theoretically this makes sense, but it is also possible that the association between cycling and vertical relational ethics is more complicated. It is possible that there is not a linear relationship between the two variables, or that vertical relational ethics is better conceptualized as impacting the perception of cycling rather than the likelihood of cycling occurring.

Satisfied Cyclers

Another major point of the study was to examine whether relational ethics impacted the association between cycling and relationship satisfaction. As previously noted, cyclers were in general not as satisfied with their relationship as non-cycling
couples or individuals. Similarly, in the simplified model used to test the mediation effect of relational ethics, cycling was negatively predictive for relationship satisfaction. This indicates that cycling is connected to significantly lower levels of relationship satisfaction.

Following the hypothesis that relational ethics would mediate the association between cycling and satisfaction, the inclusion of relational ethics in the more complicated model both increased the fit and resulted in non-significant paths between cycling and satisfaction. While this is not the most complex or powerful way of testing mediation, it does support the hypothesis of Specific Aim Four. Cycling seems to impact satisfaction through the balance of fairness in the relationship. The pathway for cycling on female satisfaction was still significant, so it appears that cycling still has a negative effect on satisfaction regardless of the balance of fairness in the relationship.. This would indicate that relational ethics only partially mediates the association between the variables and that cycling does lower satisfaction, but horizontal relational ethics mitigates that effect.

It is a little surprising that male satisfaction is not predicted by either horizontal relational ethics or cycling. Males in cycling relationships are noted to have significantly lower levels satisfaction, but neither cycling nor relational ethics were predictive of satisfaction. It is possible that the two variables have diluted the variance too much for the sample size. Similarly, the correlation between partner’s satisfaction might mean that the effect of horizontal ethics for males is lost due to the correlation with female satisfaction. Horizontal relational ethics was near significance for males, and cycling was
near enough to significance that it is possible that a larger sample might have found
significant results. It is also possible that there is some other factor that is commonly
associated with cycling connected to satisfaction that is not currently captured by the
model.

Cycling also negatively predicted horizontal relational ethics in the model. This
indicates that couples who experienced cycling at least once perceived more imbalance in
the couple relationship. Since cycling is negatively predictive of horizontal relational
ethics, cycling would not generally improve relationship outcomes, but it may not
necessarily negatively impact satisfaction either. For instance, in a relationship where
there is a high base level of relational ethics passed on through the ledger from the family
of origin for both partners, cycling will negatively impact horizontal relational ethics, but
the couple might still be satisfied in the relationship due to the higher base level of
relational ethics. In other words cycling stresses the couple relationship, but having
sufficiently high horizontal relational ethics seems to act as a buffer partially mitigating
the effect of cycling on relationship outcomes.

Taken together this suggests that couple relationships are negatively impacted by
cycling, but the fairness of the couples’ relationship protects the relationship from the
more extreme effects of cycling. Theoretically, being able to understand and exonerate
important others for the harm done in the relationship is a major feature of ethical
relating. This process of exonerating and forgiving one’s partner and taking
accountability for one’s own contributions to the problem may be the reason for the
mediating effect of relational ethics.
Furthermore, this suggests that there is a gender effect, where males are less impacted by both the relational ethics and the cycling events than their female partners are. Males might feel more control in most cycling situations than their female partners, which could lead to a lack of association between cycling and satisfaction. It is also possible that males are socialized to be more independent than female partners, and to feel that their satisfaction is not specifically connected to the issues in the relationship.

**Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

There are multiple limitations to consider concerning the current study. First, it should be noted again that the BOFQ was not initially intended to be utilized in regression analyses. The BOFQ was created to be used in dyadic research, but the emphasis was on looking at discrepancies between partner reports. However, a majority of the items were interval questions utilizing likert-like scales, and were thus appropriate for use in regression analyses. Thus there should be caution when drawing conclusions concerning the use of the BOFQ in this study. The results should not be taken as demonstration of the effectiveness of the BOFQ as designed, but as an indication that the tool has broader applications than what it was designed for. Thus the research still supports the use of the BOFQ, simply not in the way that was initially intended.

There are a couple of issues with the data that limit the statistical approach. One issue is that the vertical subscale of the RES and BOFQ is administered at the same time as the horizontal subscale, and is measuring the perceived fairness in family of origin
from both the past and in the present. Respondents are asked to consider all their relations with the family that they spent their childhood in, and are also asked to rate how they currently feel and interact with that family. This form of data does not really provide a clear image of the history of relational ethics and any interpretations about the timing of events and impact of vertical ethics needs to be made with caution. Having longitudinal data that showed the vertical relational ethics at multiple time points in the past would provide more information about the ledger, and would make interpretations of its effects more meaningful. Furthermore, studies have questioned whether it is appropriate to rely on individual’s memories of past events and interactions, given the adaptive nature of human memory (Anderson & Milson, 1989). It is possible that vertical RES and BOFQ are more accurately interpreted as the current balance of fairness, rather than of past relations. It is even possible that scores obtained might be due to horizontal ethics as a more currently salient relationship in the individual’s life. Similarly, having a measure of horizontal relational ethics both before and after cycling occurred would provide a clearer image of the impact of cycling behavior.

In connection with this, it is impossible to establish any causality in the relationship between the variables in the study. While SEM models are technically able to establish causal relationships, all the responses were collected at the same time thus making it impossible to establish any form of temporal causal links. Therefore predictive paths discussed should be considered as theoretical links, not causal ones. For example, the model included cycling predicting horizontal relational ethics, and it is just as possible that horizontal relational ethics predicts cycling.
There are several issues with the measurement of cycling and its use in the study as well. One issue is that the relationship cycling question is practically a categorical variable, which complicates conducting the model under SEM. The item was designed as a continuous variable in order to provide a wide enough range to conduct the SEM. However the range of cycling reported by respondents was so small (between 1 and 3) that the variable was practically categorical. Because the variable was technically continuous it was used in the SEM like a continuous variable, but interpretation should be made with caution. Another issue is that there are no predictors for relationship cycling outside of vertical relational ethics. It is possible that there are other variables that are responsible for both the observed relational ethics and the cycling.

Another potential drawback for this form of research is the relatively small sample size. By nature, dyadic data divides the sample size in half when compared to most research in social sciences. While measuring the couple instead of the individual allows for new and interesting results to be studied, there are simply fewer data points to examine. A minimum of 35 couples is recommended in order to test for non-independence (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998), and based on the recommendations of Preacher and Coffman (2006) a minimum of 64 couples were required to have the necessary power for the theoretical model. The minimum was achieved in total couples, but only about 30% of the participants ever cycled. The description of cycling participants would be improved by a larger sample. The sample also provides some of the strength of the study. Previous studies have largely focused on gathering local samples, frequently from a single campus (e.g. Vennum et al., 2015). While this approach makes
sense in that it creates a homogeneous sample, it limits the generalizability of the findings. The current sample was collected from volunteers across the United States. Issues of generalizability still exist, but the sample is likely to be more nationally representative than data collected from a single university.

Despite these limitations there are several strengths to the study. The primary strength is that there is such limited research on cycling and relational ethics in general that any information is a significant contribution. Cycling has been a topic of research for a relatively limited period of time, and what information that exists has not focused on understanding cycling through a theoretical lens. Similarly, relational ethics is a poorly researched topic, and studying these two disparate topics together advances our knowledge of both.

In connection with relational ethics, one of the strengths of the study is the introduction of the new instrument. Relational ethics has previously only been measureable through a single instrument. The BOFQ was designed to collect a more rich and detailed picture of relational ethics, and to specifically be used in dyadic research, which is more theoretically sound. While the instrument was not initially designed to be used in regression style analyses, it was at least as effective as the RES if not more so in predicting the hypothesized relationships. This suggests that the BOFQ might be useful in a wide variety of studies expanded beyond what it was initially designed for, and beyond how the RES is currently used.

Beyond those points, there is very limited research examining cycling in a dyadic fashion. Examining the way cycling impacts the dyad as a unit provides a more complete
picture of the role that cycling plays in human interactions than simply examining the impact on individuals. Cycling is clearly a variable that has ramifications for both partners, and seems to be better conceptualized as a variable for the entire relationship rather than one for the individual.

Another strength of this research is that it starts to connect therapeutic principles to cycling. Similar relationship information (e.g. sliding vs. deciding) have therapeutic implications and inform practitioners of how relationships might be influenced by the variable. Cycling is a behavior that has been occurring and potentially nuancing relationships, without therapists having information on the role that cycling plays in a relationship.

**Therapeutic Implications**

Based on contextual theory, low levels of relational ethics is the primary concern of therapists, and low ethics tend to be connected to less satisfied couple interactions that continue to perpetuate entitlement through the ledger (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1980). The symptoms of poor relational ethics in the family can include depression (Gangamma et al., 2014) and other relational issues that generally lower life satisfaction (Grames, Miller, Robinson, Higgins, & Hinton, 2008). The current study indicates that cycling couples tend to have lower levels of horizontal relational ethics that might put them at risk for some of the mentioned negative outcomes. The findings of the current study suggest that therapists should be open to discussing the fairness of relational ethics, both in current romantic relationships and in the family of origin, and that cycling may
play a different role in couple dynamics depending on the couple’s level of relational ethics, and based on the gender of the partner. It is possible that female partners are more likely to be negatively impacted by the actual cycling event, and might need to discuss the imbalance in fairness and the cycling event.

Discussing relational ethics and cycling might not directly help male partners with their satisfaction in the relationship. From a contextual perspective, it would still be important to bring up issues of ethical fairness to male partners, but it might not be an issue that males consider to be connected to their satisfaction. It is possible that focusing on relational ethics would draw connections between how the fairness in the relationship impacts both themselves and their partner in the relationship. Therapists might also need to explore aspects surrounding cycling events that impacted the male partner but are not necessarily part of the actual separation and reconciliation. It should be noted that the sample was not clinical, and that even reports of lower levels of satisfaction were usually above the cutoff for distressed couples. Based on this, therapeutic implications might not be generalizable to a clinical population. However, due to the lack of contrary evidence, there is no reason to assume that findings are not at least theoretically applicable to clinical populations and settings. In addition, there seems to be a trend for couples to present for therapy when they are not in distress (Shannon & Bartle-Harring, 2016), indicating that the lack of distress might not preclude seeing couples in therapy. Regardless of whether clients are distressed or not, the chances of therapists interacting with couples that have cycled seems fairly high. Cycling is a relatively common occurrence, with reports of around 30% of relationships among young adults having
cycled at least once, and up to 50% of young adults having experienced cycling at least once in their life. The chances are that therapists have already seen cycling clients and will continue to see them. While the current data might not be generalizable to distressed couples presenting for therapy, it does provide some implications that therapist should consider when working with cycling couples.

There are several implications of the study for relational therapists. The first implication is the utility of the contextual perspective in conceptualizing cycling couples. While contextual theory is certainly not the only theoretical perspective that can conceptualize cycling systemically, relational ethics do seem to provide a plausible way of understanding the impact of cycling on relationship, and a way of addressing the problems that come with cycling. Incorporating constructs similar to relational ethics or a related construct more adapted to the therapist’s theory of change might help to conceptualize and address issues in couples where cycling occurred.

Primarily it is important to note that cycling may or may not be an issue for couples that cycled, and that it might impact members in the relationship differently. In relationships where partners did not receive their due care in childhood and then cycled with their partner it is very likely that the particulars of the cycling relationship might need to be discussed and worked on in therapy. However, if cycling is the only issue, it is possible that it will not have any therapeutic ramifications. Couples with higher levels of relational ethics in their family of origin and with higher resources of trust are less likely to be negatively impacted by the events of cycling. These clients might not view the cycling behaviors as a negative experience and therefore not need to process the events.
surrounding cycling. Another possibility to consider is based on the finding that horizontal relational ethics was still negatively impacted by cycling. Even if there are higher levels of relational ethics, cycling still is negatively connected to horizontal ethics, and it is possible that it will need to be explored regardless of other ethical considerations. As a result of these disparate possibilities, therapists should be cautious in the assumptions they make about the impact of cycling on their clients, and should explore the meaning of the events with the clients before intervening.

In general cycling seems to be more of a problem for clients that are vulnerable to issues due to their lower levels of relational ethics. Similarly, individuals seeking therapy are probably more likely to have lower levels of relational ethics. Based on this it seems likely that when there are issues with cycling, there are probably other issues with one or both partners’ family of origin that will need to be explored and processed as well. Cycling seems to be likely to co-occur with other issues. Contrary to that point though, distressed couples with low levels of relational ethics will not necessarily have cycled, and they might not consider cycling to be a problem if they did. Again, therapists should approach cycling with a curious attitude to determine the meaning that is attached to the cycling before intervening.

Research Implications

In addition to the therapeutic implications, there are several implications for the future direction of research on cycling and relational ethics. There are a number of issues that arose while conducting the study. The first and most obvious direction in connection
to therapeutic practice is to conduct the study with a clinical population. The possibility remains that there is a distinct difference between cyclers that present for therapy and a more generalizable sample. At this time this is the first study that has addressed the possible association between cycling and therapy. Replicating the study with a clinical population would provide more support for the clinical implications of cycling.

Possibly the next most obvious future direction is to attempt to establish the temporal relationship between relational ethics and cycling. Future researchers collecting data across multiple time points would be able to effectively test the exact same model and examine the horizontal relational ethics and satisfaction both before and after a cycling event. Cycling appears to be a common enough event that it is plausible that a random sample of young adults will likely include individuals that will cycle.

Another research implication became apparent while collecting the data and attempting to get a sufficiently large sample of cycling couples. Roughly 30% of the sample in both datasets cycled with their current partner, which connects with the numbers of previous research. However, there was no question assessing previous cycling. From a contextual perspective, unfairness in relationships is often manifested in entitlement in unrelated relationships. Thus it is possible that an individual that experienced unfair cycling in one relationship might be more likely to experience unfairness in later relationships. Again the impact of cycling would be expected to differ based on the levels of relational ethics in the relationship when the cycling occurred. Thus fair relationships that cycle might be expected to lead to more satisfied later
relationships, while unfair cycling might be expected to lead to previously observed negative outcomes.

Connected to this idea that cycling might be healthy or unhealthy depending on the context of the relationship, another future direction for research would be to test the perception of cycling events and whether this was connected to relational ethics. While vertical relational ethics was not predictive of cycling itself, it might be predictive of how individuals interpret the cycling event. Individuals that experienced higher levels of vertical relational ethics might be more likely to report the cycling event as a positive experience.

The meaning that is placed on cycling events is another implication for future research. The current study looked at whether people did or did not cycle, and then how many times they cycled. It is possible that there is a difference in the characteristics of cyclers that choose to cycle intentionally versus those that find themselves sliding in and out of relationships. In previous research sliding and relationship ambiguity were connected to lower levels of commitment and dedication to the relationship, and hence higher levels of instability (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman., 2006; Vennum, 2015). It is also possible that the intention to cycle as a healthy way of delineating the relationship might lead to different relational outcomes than cycling without the intention of reconciling. In connection to this point, in qualitative analyses cyclers have reported cycling in order to “reset” their relationship and get a fresh start together. It is possible that couples in ethical relationships that decide to cycle together might clear out some of the difficulties in the relationship. It is possible that it is more accurate to track the
duration of the couple’s relationship with their most recent ethical cycle, rather than when they first formed a relationship.

In addition to impacting the meaning attached to cycling, vertical relational ethics might be associated with who decides to separate or reconcile, and who has the power to do so. Ethical relations are connected to a sense of agency and power in relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Relationships with high levels of relational ethics might be more likely to have a sense of agency and power in the relationship, and view reconciling and separation as a joint decision. In contrast, relationships with lower levels of relational ethics might be more likely to engage in faultfinding and blame one’s partner for ruining the relationship, or conversely blame oneself and feel powerless to make a change because any undesired outcome is justified.

Another implication for future directions of therapy is to examine whether the association between cycling and satisfaction changes dependent on the relational ethics in the relationship. The current study only generally establishes that there is a mediating effect of horizontal relational ethics on the association between cycling and relationship satisfaction. Further testing this mediation would support these findings. It is also possible that relational ethics moderates that association between cycling and satisfaction. Exploring this possible association is a further step that would add to our knowledge of cycling and relational ethics.

A final implication for future research is the connection between the RDAS and the horizontal ethics items. One of the issues with the results of the initial theoretical model includes how much of satisfaction was explained by horizontal relational ethics.
With 99% of the variation in satisfaction accounted for by relational ethics, this leaves very little variance open to be explained by other factors. This appears to indicate that the RDAS and the scales of horizontal relational ethics were effectively measuring the same construct. While the second theoretical model accounted for this issue, the connection between these tools should be explored. It is possible that items measuring horizontal relational ethics are effectively measuring satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

Relationship cycling has generally been found to be connected to negative relationship outcomes, including decreased satisfaction and commitment, increased marital instability, and increased risk for violence (Dailey et al., 2013a; Vennum et al., 2015). However, these empirical findings seem to contradict theoretical conceptualizations that cycling might not be detrimental to couples. Qualitative research has pointed towards the possibility that there might be both positive and negative outcomes to cycling (Dailey et al., 2009b). From contextual theory, it can be conceptualized that relational ethics would mitigate the influence of cycling on the relationship. In effect, ethical interactions protect the relationship from the difficulties associated with stressors on the relationship. The findings of the current study partially support this theoretical conceptualization. Cycling only negatively predicted satisfaction for females when relational ethics were considered, though cycling was negatively associated with relational ethics for both partners. This suggests that cycling impacts members of the relationship differently, and that it does not necessarily have a negative
impact on couple satisfaction, and that sufficient care to relate fairly in the relationship might improve the satisfaction of cycling couples. The ethical relationship with respondent’s family of origin was not connected to increased levels of cycling. In addition, there might be gender differences in cycling with vestiges of patriarchy leading to female partners feeling that they have to wait for male partners to return to the relationship. While the results of the current study are preliminary and more research is called for, relational ethics seems to effectively nuance the relationship between cycling and relationship satisfaction.


93


95


Appendix A: Tables and Figures
## Table 1: Demographic information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male (n = 48)</th>
<th>Female (n = 48)</th>
<th>Dyadic Total (n = 96)</th>
<th>Individual (n = 86)</th>
<th>Male (n = 20)</th>
<th>Female (n = 20)</th>
<th>Dyadic Total (n = 40)</th>
<th>Individual (n = 39)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>28.68 (4.17)</td>
<td>27.00 (4.16)</td>
<td>27.83 (4.23)</td>
<td>27.13 (3.73)</td>
<td>27.85 (3.89)</td>
<td>26.9 (3.89)</td>
<td>27.38 (3.87)</td>
<td>27.26 (3.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship length</td>
<td>3.56 (2.69)</td>
<td>3.63 (2.65)</td>
<td>3.59 (2.65)</td>
<td>3.73 (2.3)</td>
<td>5.1 (2.71)</td>
<td>5.25 (2.92)</td>
<td>5.18 (2.78)</td>
<td>4.44 (2.98)</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Parental Status</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Married</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Engaged</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>67.7</td>
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<td>1.50 (.95)</td>
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<td>% Who initiated breakup</td>
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Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for variables by cycling status.

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<th>Cohen’s d</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Female (n = 48)</td>
<td>Individual (n = 86)</td>
<td>Male (n = 20)</td>
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<td>RES Vertical</td>
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<td>42.35 (10.88)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RES Horizontal</td>
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<td>51.36 (6.95)</td>
<td>48.4 (6.81)</td>
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<td>50.69 (14.99)</td>
<td>50.45 (15.29)</td>
<td>48.18 (10.86)</td>
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<td>125.73 (12.47)</td>
<td>127.28 (9.96)</td>
<td>117.75 (14.1)</td>
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* P = .05
** P = .01
*** P = .001
Table 4: Correlations of dyadic variables.

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<th>Female RES Horizontal</th>
<th>Female BOFQ Vertical</th>
<th>Female BOFQ Horizontal</th>
<th>Male RDAS</th>
<th>Male RES Vertical</th>
<th>Male RES Horizontal</th>
<th>Male BOFQ Vertical</th>
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** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
Table 5: Correlations of individual variables.

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<th>BOFQ Vertical</th>
<th>BOFQ Horizontal</th>
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<td>.2*</td>
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**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
Table 6: *Path Effects for General, Actor and Partner Effects*

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<th>p</th>
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<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → fHRE</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Cycle → mHRE</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → fSAT</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cycle → mSAT</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>fVRE → Cycle</td>
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<td>.84</td>
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<td>.94</td>
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<td>Actor</td>
<td>fVRE → fHRE</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
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<td>mVRE → mHRE</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>fHRE → fSAT</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>fVRE → mHRE</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>mVRE → fHRE</td>
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<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>fHRE → mSAT</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>mHRE → fSAT</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations for modified variables by cycling status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Non Cycler Male (n = 48)</th>
<th>Female (n = 48)</th>
<th>Individual (n = 86)</th>
<th>Cycler Male (n = 20)</th>
<th>Female (n = 20)</th>
<th>Individual (n = 39)</th>
<th>Independent t-test Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Cohen’s d Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>12.97 (1.2)</td>
<td>12.9 (1.51)</td>
<td>12.41 (2.2)</td>
<td>11.25 (2.55)</td>
<td>11.35 (1.84)</td>
<td>11.26 (2.18)</td>
<td>3.79***</td>
<td>3.61***</td>
<td>2.4*</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES Vertical</td>
<td>45.02 (11.75)</td>
<td>44.51 (11.24)</td>
<td>42.35 (10.88)</td>
<td>42.63 (10.43)</td>
<td>41.5 (11.15)</td>
<td>45.15 (10.51)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES Horizontal</td>
<td>53.21 (6.14)</td>
<td>52.29 (5.04)</td>
<td>51.36 (6.95)</td>
<td>48.4 (6.81)</td>
<td>46.85 (6.43)</td>
<td>48.10 (7.79)</td>
<td>2.85**</td>
<td>3.73***</td>
<td>2.34*</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BoFQ Vertical</td>
<td>52.48 (15.32)</td>
<td>50.69 (14.99)</td>
<td>50.45 (15.29)</td>
<td>48.18 (10.86)</td>
<td>50.1 (10.88)</td>
<td>52.36 (13.35)</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BoFQ Horizontal</td>
<td>127.39 (9.89)</td>
<td>125.73 (12.47)</td>
<td>127.28 (9.96)</td>
<td>117.75 (14.1)</td>
<td>117.5 (15.44)</td>
<td>118.33 (14.78)</td>
<td>3.21**</td>
<td>2.31*</td>
<td>3.97***</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*, P = .05
**, P = .01
***, P = .001
Table 8: Modified Path Effects for General, Actor and Partner Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Effects</th>
<th>Pathways</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → fHRE</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → mHRE</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → fSAT</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>.008</td>
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<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Cycle → mSAT</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>fVRE → Cycle</td>
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<td>mVRE → Cycle</td>
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<td>Actor</td>
<td>fVRE → fHRE</td>
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<td>Actor</td>
<td>mVRE → mHRE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>fVRE → mHRE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>mVRE → fHRE</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>fHRE → mSAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>mHRE → fSAT</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Conceptual Model
Figure 2: Measurement Model with Significant Paths

\[
\chi^2 = 91.19, p = .085; \text{CFI} = .819, \text{RMSEA} = .059
\]
Figure 3: Modified Measurement Model with Path Effects

χ² = 71.9, p = .35, CFI = .994, RMSEA = .029
Appendix B: Research Documents
A research team with The Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, believes you might be a good match for the following study:

Are you engaged or recently married?

Researchers at The Ohio State University, College of Education and Human Ecology are studying (via a survey) how relationships with parents may be connected to forming romantic relationships.

You may be eligible for this study if you are:

• Born after December 1980 and before January 1999
• Heterosexual
• ENGAGED for the first time OR have been MARRIED for the first time within the past SIX MONTHS.

If you are eligible and decide to participate in this study:

• The first 200 survey respondents will receive an Amazon $10 gift card (via email). If you complete this survey within 48 hours of receiving your personalized survey link, you will be entered into a drawing to win an additional $50 Amazon gift card.
• The same survey will be provided to your partner as well, should they choose to participate.

• Both your and your partner will individually receive the $10 incentive if among the first 200 responding and both of you have an opportunity to be entered into the drawing for the additional gift card if you both meet that criteria for entry.

• The survey may take approximately 1 hour to complete.

If you are interested in this study and having the research team contact you directly, please select the "Yes, I'm interested" link below. By clicking the "Yes, I'm interested" link, your contact information will be released to the research team. If you select the "No, thanks." link or do not respond to this study message, your contact information will not be released to the research team.

Yes, I'm interested! No, thanks.

Thank you for your interest in ResearchMatch.

ResearchMatch Disclaimer

You are receiving this email message since you have registered in the ResearchMatch registry. Should you wish to edit your profile please click here to login and update your profile.

ResearchMatch is a free and secure tool that helps match willing volunteers with eligible researchers and their studies at institutions across the country. ResearchMatch is only providing a tool that allows you to be contacted by researchers about their studies. ResearchMatch therefore does not endorse any research, research institution, or study. Any recruitment message that you may receive about a study does not mean that ResearchMatch has reviewed the study or recommends that you consider participating in this study.

If you no longer wish to be part of ResearchMatch, please remove your account by clicking here.
Subject Line: Research Match Invitation to Participate in Research at the OSU

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Samuel Shannon, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Human Sciences Department at the Ohio State University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Human Development and Family Science.

I am studying the association between relationships with parents and forming romantic relationships among young adults. Eligibility for this research is based on being between the ages of 18 and 35, being in a heterosexual relationship, and either being engaged for the first time or married for first time in the past six months. If you are eligible and decide to participate you will be asked to complete an on-line survey about your relationship with your parents and your current romantic relationship that can take up to 60 minutes to complete. I am interested in getting responses from both you and your partner and invite your partner to participate in the research as well. The same survey will be provided to your partner should they choose to participate.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Although you probably won’t benefit directly from participating in the study, we hope that the study will benefit communities through leading to the creation of new interventions.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the Ohio State University. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Once we have your
responses, all identifying information will be erased from our files and your data will be de-identified. All reports from this survey will be in aggregate form, no family or individual will be identified.

You will receive a $10 gift certificate to Amazon.com to reimburse you for your time in completing the survey. In addition, if you complete the survey within 48 hours of receiving your personalized survey link, you will be included into a raffle for one of two $50 gift certificates to Amazon.com. Each partner in the relationship will receive a gift certificate for participating, and will be independently entered into the raffle.

Taking part in the study is voluntary; you do not have to be in the study and may leave at any time. Your participation or not will have no impact on your relationship with The Ohio State University. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. Feel free to contact me at (Shannon.152@osu.edu) or the principle investigator, Suzanne Bartle-Haring, Ph.D. (haring.19@osu.edu) at (614) 688-3259.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate please contact me at Shannon.152@osu.edu and let me know that you are interested in participating in the survey. Please indicate if your partner is interested in participating as well, and provide the best e-mail address for contact. I will respond within 48 hours with a personalized survey link and instructions for completing the survey.
Thank you for your time.

Samuel Shannon, M.S.
PhD Candidate, Couples and Family Therapy
The Ohio State University
College of Education and Human Ecology, Department of Human Sciences
1787 Neil Ave., 145 Campbell Hall, Columbus, OH 4321
shannon.152@osu.edu
Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research study about family relationships and development during young adulthood. The purpose of this study is to understand how relationships with parents is connected to forming romantic relationships. The data collected from the online surveys will be aggregated and analyzed to gain a better understanding of romantic relationship formation patterns in young adults.

Please follow the instructions as you go along and answer the questions by selecting the appropriate response. If for any reason you don't wish to answer a question, just skip that one and go on to the next. We understand that you may experience discomfort when reporting on your family relationships. Our hope is that the information gathered through this study might help researchers and clinicians devise interventions.

Once we have your responses, we will erase your identifying information from our files and your data will be de-identified. All reports about this survey will be in aggregate form, no family or individual will be identified. We will work to make sure no one sees your online responses without approval. But, because we are using the Internet, there is a chance that someone could access your online responses without permission. Since that means they could have access to your IP address or e-mail address, this information could be used to identify you.

We thank you in advance for completing this survey. It should take you no more than 60 minutes to complete. For questions or if you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Suzanne Bartle-Haring, Ph.D. (haring.19@osu.edu) at 688-3259. She will be glad to speak with you about the survey or what may be making you uncomfortable about completing it.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time simply by closing your browser. Your decision to participate or not will in no way impact your relationship with The Ohio State University. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

As an expression of our gratitude to you for agreeing to participate in this survey, we will email you an Amazon gift card worth $ 10.00. If you complete this survey within 48 hours of receiving your personalized link, we will also enter you into a drawing to win an additional $50.00 Amazon gift card. Each participating individual's odds of winning this drawing would be 1 out of 100.

Please select an option below.

Yes, I consent to participate in this study

No, I decline to participate
Demographics

What is your gender?
Female
Male

Please indicate the highest level of education completed.
Less than High School
High School or Equivalent
Some College
Vocational/Technical School/2-year College Degree (2 year)
4-year College Degree (4 year)
Master’s Degree (MS)
Doctoral Degree (PhD)
Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)

How many children under 18 years old currently live in your household?

How old are you today?

How long have you been in a relationship with your current partner?
<1 year, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, 6 years, 7 years, 8 years, 9 years, 10 years, >10 years
What race/ethnicity do you most identify with?

White/Caucasian

Black or African American

Hispanic

Asian

Native American

Pacific Islander

Other (Please specify)

Concerning your current relationship, did you start living with your partner:

Before you were engaged

When you got engaged

When you got married

Please indicate the religious affiliation you identify with.
Cycling Questions

Please respond to the following questions, referring to your current relationship.

How many times did you and your current partner ever separate and get back together?

The following questions will be concerning the timing of the most recent separations and reconciliations.

When did the three most recent separations and reconciliations occur?

1.

Separation Month______, Year______

Reconciliation Month______, Year______

Rate the following statements on a 7 point scale.

1 = You were entirely responsible.

4 = You and your partner were equally responsible.

7 = Your partner was entirely responsible.

Who was responsible for the problems that led to the separation?

Who was responsible for the separation?

Who was responsible for reconciling?

What were the reasons/problems that led to this separation?

What were the reasons that led to this reconciliation?
2.

Separation Month______, Year ______

Reconciliation Month______, Year_______

________________________________________________________________________

Rate the following statements on a 7 point scale.

1 = You were entirely responsible.

4 = You and your partner were equally responsible.

7 = Your partner was entirely responsible.

________________________________________________________________________

Who was responsible for the problems that led to the separation?

Who was responsible for the separation?

Who was responsible for reconciling?

________________________________________________________________________

What were the reasons/problems that led to this separation?

What were the reasons that led to this reconciliation?

________________________________________________________________________

3.

Separation Month______, Year ______

Reconciliation Month______, Year_______

________________________________________________________________________

Rate the following statements on a 7 point scale.

1 = You were entirely responsible.
4 = You and your partner were equally responsible.

7 = Your partner was entirely responsible.

Who was responsible for the problems that led to the separation?

Who was responsible for the separation?

Who was responsible for reconciling?

What were the reasons/problems that led to this separation?

What were the reasons that led to this reconciliation?
Relational Ethics Scale

Relational Ethics Scale Directions: This scale is designed to measure some of the emotions that:

-existed in the family in which you were raised. -currently exist in one of your other relationships.

Since each person and family is unique, there are no right or wrong answers. Just try to respond as honestly as you can. Please respond to every statement.

Rate statements 1-12 as they apply to the family and parent(s) with whom you spent most of your childhood.

In reading the following statements, apply them to yourself and your family and then circle the rating that best fits.

5 = STRONGLY AGREE with the statement. 4 = AGREE with the statement. 3 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE with the statement. 2 = DISAGREE with the statement. 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement.

1. I could trust my family to seek my best interests.

2. Individuals in my family were blamed for problems that were not their fault.

3. Pleasing one of my parents often meant displeasing the other.

4. I received the love and affection from my family I deserved.

5. No matter what happened, I always stood by my family.

6. At times, it seemed one or both of my parents disliked me.

7. Love and warmth were given equally to all family members.
8. At times, I was used by my family unfairly.

9. I felt my life was dominated by my parents’ desires.

10. Individuals in my family were willing to give of themselves to benefit the family.

11. I continue to seek closer relationships with my family.

12. I often felt deserted by my family.

Please respond to statements 13-24 as they apply to one relationship in your life.

- If you are MARRIED, rate the statements as they apply to your relationship with your spouse.  
- If you are WIDOWED, rate the statements as you recall they applied to your relationship with your spouse.  
- If you are DIVORCED OR SINGLE, rate the statements as they apply to your closest relationship excluding parents or children.

In reading the following statements, apply them to yourself and the appropriate relationship and then circle the rating that best fits.

5 = STRONGLY AGREE with the statement. 4 = AGREE with the statement. 3 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE with the statement. 2 = DISAGREE with the statement. 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement.

13. I try to meet the emotional needs of this person.
14. I do not trust this individual to look out for my best interests.

15. When I feel hurt, I say or do hurtful things to this person. 16. This person stands beside me in times of trouble or joy.

17. Before I make important decisions, I ask for the opinions of this person.

18. There is unequal contribution to the relationship between me and this individual.

19. When I feel angry, I tend to take it out on this person.

20. We are equal partners in this relationship.

21. We give of ourselves to benefit one another.

22. I take advantage of this individual.

23. I am taken for granted or used unfairly in this relationship.

24. This person listens to me and values my thoughts.
**Balance of Fairness Questionnaire**

Section A: Intimate Partner Relationship.

*The following questions are about your relationship with your current partner. Please circle the number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following key.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree Somewhat</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can trust my partner to have my best interests at heart.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I trust my partner to be faithful to me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I trust my partner to support me when times are tough</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I trust my partner to act in the best interests of our relationship</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I feel heard by my partner</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can speak up for myself in this relationship</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am loyal to my partner</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I have to choose between my partner and the rest of my family</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. I have to choose between my partner’s needs and my needs

10. My partner values my efforts in this relationship

The following questions are about your partner’s experiences in your relationship.

Please circle the number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following key.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree Somewhat</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. My partner trusts me to have his/her best interests at heart

2. My partner trusts me to be faithful to him/her

3. My partner trusts me to support him/her when times are tough

4. My partner trusts me to act in the best interests of our relationship

5. My partner feels heard by me

6. My partner can speak up for him/herself in this relationship

7. My partner is loyal to me
8. My partner has to choose between me and the rest of his/her family

9. My partner has to choose between my needs and his/her needs

10. My partner feels his/her efforts in this relationship are by valued me

11. How important are the following in your assessment of fairness in your current relationship with your partner? Please circle the most relevant option for each.

A. Dividing household chores
   Extremely important -------- Somewhat important --------- Not important

B. Child rearing responsibilities
   Extremely important -------- Somewhat important --------- Not important

C. Meeting your emotional needs
   Extremely important -------- Somewhat important --------- Not important

D. Meeting your physical needs
   Extremely important -------- Somewhat important --------- Not important

E. Allowing space for your growth
   Extremely important -------- Somewhat important --------- Not important
F. Financial contribution

Extremely important --------Somewhat important----------Not important

12. How would you rate the balance of fairness in your relationship right now? Circle the most appropriate option:
   - Not balanced, I give more
   - Not balanced, my partner gives more
   - Somewhat balanced, my partner and I give equally

13. Has the balance of fairness in your relationship changed over the years? Circle the most appropriate option:
   - It has become more balanced
   - It has become less balanced
   - It has stayed the same
13a. If there has been a change, describe what you think is related to the change.
Section B: Family of Origin Relationships

Please answer the following questions keeping in mind your *family while growing up*.

Please circle the number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following key.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree Somewhat</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Growing up my physical needs were met by my family
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Growing up my emotional needs were met by my family
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. My family listened to me
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I was a valued member of my family
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I could rely on my family to take care of me
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I was pulled in different directions by the needs of my family members
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I had to choose between competing sides in my family
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. Taking care of my needs meant betraying my family
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. Has your experience of fairness in your family of origin changed over the years?

- It has become more balanced

- It has become less balanced

- It has stayed the same

12a. If there has been a change, describe what you think is related to the change.
Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

RDAS-Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale
Name_____________________ Date__________________ Session #_____________
Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Always Agree</th>
<th>Almost Always Agree</th>
<th>Occasionally Agree</th>
<th>Frequently Disagree</th>
<th>Almost Always Disagree</th>
<th>Always Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religious matters</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrations of affection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making major decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sex relations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Career decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>All the Time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>More often than not</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How often do you and your partner quarrel?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How often do you and your mate &quot;get on each other's nerves&quot;?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Every Day</th>
<th>Almost Every Day</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

134
How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than once a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a week</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>More often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Work together on a project</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Calmly discuss something</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


RDAS Scoring Sheet

a) For each spouse, score their RDAS according to the values given above (lower = more distressed).
b) Add items 1-6: _____ (Consensus: 22 = the cutoff score to discriminate between distress/nondistress)
c) Add items 7-10: _____ (Satisfaction: 14 = the cutoff score)
d) Add items 11-14: _____ (Cohesion: 11 = the cutoff score)
e) Add all items: _____ (Total: 48 = the cutoff score)
f) List scores in appropriate box on each partner’s copy.

For additional information on each of the scales/subscales, the questions related to each are listed below:

Consensus: Items 3 & 6 = decision making, 1 & 5 = values, 2 & 4 = affection

Satisfaction: Items 7 & 9 = stability, 8 & 10 = conflict

Cohesion: Items 11 & 13 = activities, 12 & 14 = discussion