

A Comparative Analysis of Cyclical vs. Non-Cyclical Romantic Relationships

by

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Abstract

Existing literature on romantic adult relationships focuses primarily on stable, married intimate dyads. However, up to 60% of couples indicate breaking up and reuniting with their partner at least once; despite their prevalence, cyclical relationships have not been examined much within the empirical literature. The current study aimed to incorporate these partners into the existing literature on relationship functioning and distress. I examined differences between cycling and non-cycling partners in the areas of intimate partner violence, relationship polarization and ambivalence, attachment styles, conflict engagement, relationship attributions, and relational uncertainty. The results suggest that significant differences exist between cycling and non-cycling partners in all above-mentioned areas; cycling partners report greater relationship distress and more negative relationship behaviors. However, an insecure (anxious) attachment style seems to be the only unique predictor of cycling behaviors, once all factors are added into the model together. Furthermore, the relationship between an insecure (anxious) attachment style and cycling seems to be partially mediated by relationship ambivalence.

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Introduction

Relationship research typically focuses on the formation and maintenance of marital relationships (for a review, see Surra, Gray, Boettcher, Cottle, & West, 2006), as well as the determinants of relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution over time (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2007; Merrill & Afifi, 2012; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). A more recent focus is on the formation of intimate partner relationships within “emerging” adulthood (i.e., between 18 and 25 years of age; Arnett, 2000). During this time period, establishing high quality, lasting romantic relationships is an important developmental task (Berscheid, 1999) wherein relationship behavior patterns begin to form and solidify. These patterns may continue into relationships through later adulthood, including marriage.

Research on “emerging relationships” often uses couples who are currently together or who have terminated their relationship (Agnew, Arriaga, & Goodfriend, 2006; Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999). In other words, the data are from couples that have stabilized in one direction (e.g., continuation) or the other (i.e., dissolution). However, the trajectory of some relationships may be more complex than this, perhaps especially for emerging adults. Specifically, couples in early adulthood may repeatedly go through the process of relational development and dissolution with the same partner, or experience what is known as “cyclical relationships” (Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009).

Cyclical relationships are fairly common. Indeed, the literature suggests that up to 60% of couples indicate breaking up and reuniting with their partner at least once (Cupach & Metts, 2002; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000). However, despite their prevalence, cyclical relationships have

not been examined much within the empirical literature. Currently, only a handful of studies have sought to understand the nature and characteristics of cyclical relationships (e.g., relationship length, relationship satisfaction, communication strategies, IPV), as compared to their non-cyclical counterparts (e.g., Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009; Halphern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013).

Although somewhat limited, research examining the nature of cyclical relationships has nevertheless yielded fairly consistent results in terms of relational development and subsequent relationship quality. Broadly, cycling relationships appear to be in greater distress than their non-cyclical counterparts. Moreover, Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, and Clark (2009) discovered that cyclical partners reported less love, communication, and understanding than their non-cyclical counterparts. Additionally, as compared to partners in noncyclical relationships, on-off partners reported more negative behaviors such as conflict and partner aggressiveness, as well as fewer positive behaviors in their relationships, such as validation and understanding. Not surprisingly, cycling partners reported lower relational quality – including less satisfaction and commitment (Dailey, Pfiester, et al., 2009) – and the number of renewals was negatively correlated with positive relationship behaviors, such as validation from partners.

Why Study Cyclical Relationships?

Given the relationship dysfunction and low levels of satisfaction, it is reasonable to assume that individuals in cyclical relationships also, at some point, initiate counseling. As such, there should be an available research-base to foster the development of interventions specifically tailored to their particular treatment needs. However, the state of the literature at present only provides a limited range of empirical information on these couples and the functioning of their relationships. Accordingly, identifying additional sources and types of relational dissatisfaction

and instability within intimate relationships has significant implications for the development of theoretical models for relationship cycling, as well as preventative programs and early interventions for these couples.

The current study aims to incorporate these cycling partners into the existing literature on relationship functioning and distress. Specifically, I aim to build upon previous studies by examining aspects and predictors of relationship functioning shown to be of critical importance or consequence within more stable relationships; namely, inter-partner violence (IPV), adult attachment styles, and relationship attributions. These variables play a critical role in relationship functioning and stability with other types of intimate dyads, and there are reasons to assume their theoretical and clinical relevance to cyclical relationships. Moreover, we will include the constructs of relationship uncertainty and relationship ambivalence; the former of which is studied within the cyclical relationship literature, but its interplay with other known relationship processes requires additional exploration, whereas the latter is a related construct currently unexamined within the context of relationship cycling. In each of the foregoing sections, I will briefly overview these variables and discuss their possible role in relationship cycling.

Predictors of Relationship Functioning

Violence and relationships. The negative physical and psychological consequences of IPV have been well-documented within the literature. Depression, anxiety, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptomology, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviors have all been associated with IPV victimization (Caetano & Cunradi, 2003; Coker et al., 2002; Mechanic, 2004). As such, it is important to examine the risk factors for IPV in order to clarify factors that may help ameliorate its consequences. Notably, there is literature to suggest that individuals in cycling relationships are at an increased risk for IPV. In particular, individuals in cycling

relationships exhibit more dysfunctional communication (Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009; German & Waters, 2013, in preparation) and lower relationship satisfaction overall – both of which have been linked to relationship violence over time in more established couples (Cordova et al, 1993; Jacobson et al., 1994; Margolin et al., 1989; Murphy and O'Leary, 1989). Also, there is evidence to suggest that violence begets intensified violence over time (O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994, year). However, the ways in which this plays out in the context of multiple cycles is unexplored. There has been one study (Halphern-Meehin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013) examining rates of IPV within cyclical relationships, which found that individuals in cycling relationships were twice as likely as those who were stably together or stably broken up to report physical violence occurring in their relationship. Additionally, cyclers were also more likely to report the presence of verbal abuse in their relationships. Given the dearth of research in this area, a more detailed examination of IPV, alongside other variables known to underlie increased risk (e.g., relationship satisfaction) within the context of cyclical relationships, is warranted.

Adult attachment styles and intimate relationships. Adult attachment style predicts satisfaction in romantic relationships (Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). For example, secure attachment in adult intimate relationships is positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Simpson, 1990). Additionally, partners with a secure attachment engage in higher levels of verbal engagement (Collins & Read, 1990), self-disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Pistole, 1993), and mutual discussion and understanding (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994). They are more likely to use integrating and compromising strategies (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Pistole, 1989) and are less likely to engage in withdrawal and verbal aggression (Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999; Senchak &

Leonard, 1992). Conversely, insecure styles of attachment (i.e., preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive) correspond to problems and dissatisfaction within intimate relationships. For instance, a fearful-avoidant attachment style generally leads to an avoidance of intimacy with others for the purpose of self-protection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In general, those exhibiting any of the three insecure attachment styles are likely to report feeling distrust in their partners, low levels of interdependence, problems with commitment and an overall low level of relationship satisfaction (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson, 1990).

Currently, there are no studies that examine the nature of adult attachment styles within cyclical relationships. However, cycling relationships are defined by their tendency to disengage and subsequently renew – a pattern consistent with more avoidant and insecure attachment styles. In any case, an examination of how individuals within cycling relationships identify in terms of attachment style will likely inform our understanding of the relational processes involved in on-again/off-again adult romantic relationships. Moreover, such information may help inform adaptations of Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT; Greenberg and Johnson, 1988), an empirically validated treatment for couples' distress that is based upon attachment theory.

Relational uncertainty. Cycling partners tend to report greater relational uncertainty, both while dating and after breakups (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009). This uncertainty often pertains to the definition, norms, and future of their relationship (Dailey, Pfiester et al., 2009), and is positively correlated with number of renewals. These effects are not entirely surprising. However, it is unclear whether relationship uncertainty plays a unique role in the cycling process, simply is a byproduct of being in a relationship that is evidently unstable, or a result of closely competing levels of costs and rewards within the relationship, which could create a decisional ambivalence. All are plausible explanations. For instance, negative

communication and poorer attachment may underscore relationship uncertainty and instability, which are perhaps two overlapping outcomes (as opposed to one uniquely predicting the other). Alternatively, it is reasonable that uncertainty may play a specific role in relationship cycling. For instance, uncertainty about a relationship's definition may lead to ambiguity in role expectations, which may be a breeding ground for interpersonal dysfunction and conflict. In summary, relationship uncertainty is clearly related to cycling relationships, but the uniqueness and exact theoretical relevance to the process of cycling is currently unknown.

Ambivalence and polarization. The concepts of relationship polarization and ambivalence may be related to cycling behaviors along the same mechanisms as relationship uncertainty. These two concepts represent components of one's overall attitude toward a romantic relationship. Relationship satisfaction is typically measured on a one-dimensional measure, where participants are asked to rate their overall relationship satisfaction on scales ranging from *extremely unhappy* to *extremely happy*. Because these attitudes are placed on the same response continuum, endorsing favorable evaluations toward the relationship (e.g., very happy) equates to the endorsement of the absence of unfavorable ones (i.e., a little unhappy). Therefore, measuring relationship satisfaction in this way effectively reduces the definition of relationship satisfaction to the absence of dissatisfaction and vice versa (see Fincham & Bradnury, 1987). However, Mattson, Rogge, Johnson, Davidson, & Fincham (2013) suggested measuring relationship satisfaction across separate positive and negative attitude dimensions and, in doing so, allowed for the examination of ambivalence (i.e., a coexistence of opposing emotions and desires towards the other person) and polarization (i.e., portion of the overall attitude that is unilaterally in either one direction). Related to cycling behaviors, higher scores on polarization indices would most likely correlate with relationship satisfaction, which has been

demonstrated to correlate with relationship cycling. Higher scores on an ambivalence measure may indicate vacillation – partners who are high in ambivalence may not be able to commit to a decision either way, thus leading to multiple terminations and reconciliations. Although it has not yet been examined within the literature, ambivalence may pull the individual and the relationship in different directions, which might create an atmosphere of uncertainty and unpredictability, in turn leading to instability and cycling between partners. The current study may help to examine the ways in which ambivalence and uncertainty are related within the context of cycling behaviors, and whether these two related concepts are uniquely predictive to cycling behaviors in romantic relationships.

Relationship attributions. Attributions refer to the explanations that partners make for events that occur within the relationship, as well as for behaviors exhibited by their partners (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Fincham, Bradbury, & Beach, 1990). Intimate partners utilize attributions in order to develop, maintain, and update schemas about their relationship. They are also shown to correlate with general levels of relationship satisfaction. For example, dissatisfied couples tend to attribute *negative* events or *negative* partner behaviors to more global, stable, and internal causes (i.e., make maladaptive causal attributions) and view such behaviors as more intentional, selfish, and worthy of blame (i.e., make maladaptive responsibility attributions). Overall, attributions represent a major component of contemporary thinking on relationship functioning and stability (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Rehman, & Marshall, 2002; Osterhout, Frame, and Johnson, 2011). However, the consequences of making positive and negative relationship attributions have not been examined within the context of cyclical relationships. As such, research in this area may help link our understanding of cycling relationships to theoretical advancements made in the broader relationship literature. Moreover, such information may help

inform adaptations of Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT; Jacobson and Christensen, 1996) and other empirically validated treatments for couples distress (e.g., traditional behavioral couple's therapy; TBCT), which are based upon attribution change.

The Current Study

The primary aim of the current study was to replicate and extend consistent trends in the literature on adult cyclical romantic relationships. First, I hypothesized that cycling partners would demonstrate more negative communication behaviors, less polarization, greater relationship ambivalence and uncertainty toward the relationship, as well as more maladaptive attributional styles, instances of IPV, and more problematic attachment styles (i.e., anxious-ambivalent, avoidant) than those in non-cycling relationships. Second, I examined whether or not any of these variables play a unique role in predicting the likelihood of being in a cycling relationship or not, as well as if their influence was mediated by relationship uncertainty or ambivalence. In general, I wanted to determine a) whether aspects of relationship dysfunction or maladaptive relational styles uniquely predict relationship cycling either directly or indirectly through relationship uncertainty; b) if relationship uncertainty played a mediational role linking relationship dysfunction to relationship cycling or if its association with an on-off pattern was best accounted for by some third variable (e.g., negative attributional styles predicted both cycling and uncertainty); and c) whether uncertainty about the relationship is a distinct construct from relationship ambivalence or more polarized attitudes towards the relationship (satisfaction versus dissatisfaction). Additionally, although studies examining cyclical relationships have used relatively younger samples (i.e., mean age of participants is 20-years old), the current study examined the nature of romantic relationships within a broader age range of emerging adult relationships in order to increase the generalizability of the existing literature.

Method

Participants

A total of 457 participants initiated the study, and of those, 76 participants were excluded from data analysis because they a) were multivariate outliers, and/or b) failed to complete one or all of the study measures (e.g., the CTS) and/or c) responded in a random fashion (i.e., random letters, rather than actual responses). The final sample included 379 individuals.

Table 1 displays the descriptive characteristics of our sample. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 69, with a mean age in years of 34 ($SD = 9.71$). Fifty-four percent of the participants identified as male. Forty-five percent of the sample identified as European/White and 41% of the sample identified as Asian American/Asian Origin/Pacific Islander. The remaining participants identified as either African American/Black (5%), Latino/Latina/Hispanic (4%) or Other (5%). Fourteen percent of participants reported being divorced; of these participants, 94% reported being divorced once, while 5% reported being divorced two to three times previously. Regarding relationship type, 53% of participants reported being married, while 34% reported being in a dating relationship and 13% reported being engaged.

One hundred and fifty-nine (42%) of participants indicated being in a cyclical relationship; of these individuals, 95 (60%) reported only one break in their relationship, 49 (31%) endorsed breaking up twice, and 15 (9%) endorsed separating three or more times. When asked about their most recent break-up, most individuals in a cyclical relationship indicated that they kept in contact during their break. Only 18% of participants in a cyclical relationship indicated having no contact with their partner during their most recent separation. Furthermore,

41% of participants reported being sexually intimate with their partner while they were on a break. Forty percent of participants in a cyclical relationship reported engaging in sexual intimacy with someone other than their partner during their most recent break, whereas 45% of individuals reported dating other people during their most recent break from their partner. Finally, individuals in cycling relationships were significantly more likely than their non-cycling counterparts to be divorced – 22% of cycling partners vs. 12% of non-cycling partners reported being divorced [$t(377) = 2.15, p < .05$]. Additionally, cycling partners were significantly more likely to have children with a previous partner (30%) than their non-cycling counterparts (10%) [$t(377) = 5.17, p < .001$].

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire consisted of a number of category variables, such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, education level, and work status. Also, a number of relationship-specific variables were included in the demographic questionnaire, such as relationship length and the current living arrangement with their partner.

Cyclical relationships. Participants were asked to respond to the question “Is this a relationship where you have broken up and gotten back together at least once?” Those individuals who answered “Yes” were categorized as being in a cyclical relationship. Participants were then asked to indicate how many times they have broken up and gotten back together with this partner, using an open-ended response. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate the number of break-ups and the length of the *most recent* separation. Furthermore, participants were asked to report on any behaviors they engaged in during their most recent break from their partner (i.e., sexual contact with their partner or another individual, dating behaviors).

Relational Uncertainty Scale. The Relational Uncertainty Scale (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) has three 21-item Likert-type scales measuring the respondent's uncertainty about his or her own relational involvement (self-uncertainty; [*When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about your feelings for your partner?*]), the partner's relational involvement (partner uncertainty; [*When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about how important this relationship is to your partner?*]), and the relationship itself (relationship uncertainty [*When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about the state of the relationship at this time?*]). Participants are asked to report their level of uncertainty for each item on a 6-point scale, (1 = *completely or almost completely uncertain*, 6 = *completely or almost completely certain*). Higher scores on the measure correlate with higher levels of relationship certainty. Due to significant correlation between the three subscales of the measure ($r = .80, .79, .83$), the individual subscales of the RUS were combined into a general measure of relational uncertainty. Total scores ranged from 64 to 354 ($M = 292.27, SD = 55.75, \alpha = .99$)

Positive and Negative Semantic Differential (PN-SMD). The PN-SMD (Mattson et al., 2013) is a general measure of relationship satisfaction. This 14-item measure asks participants to rate the positive and negative aspects of their relationship separately. Items within each subscale (e.g., all positive items) were administered together. Participants are instructed to consider only the positive (negative) qualities of their relationship and to ignore the negative (positive) ones, when evaluating their relationship on specific qualities (e.g., "*My relationship is enjoyable*," "*My relationship is lonely*"; 7 per subscale). For the current study, we utilized the polarization and ambivalence indices, which were constructed from rating on the separate positive and negative subscales. The polarization and ambivalence indices represent subcomponents of the overall attitude. Polarization refers to the portion of the overall attitude that is unilaterally in either one

direction (e.g., positive) or the other (i.e., negative), and is quantified by the absolute difference between the PSD and NSD scores (i.e., $|\text{PSD} - \text{NSD}|$). The ambivalence component represents the degree of opposing sentiments of equal magnitude and is computed by subtracting the polarization score from the magnitude of the overall sentiment (i.e., $[\text{PSD} + \text{NSD}] - |\text{PSD} - \text{NSD}|$). According to Mattson et al., this construction allows for a cleaner measure of relationship satisfaction-dissatisfaction (by way of the Polarization index), whereas the ambivalence index has shown to be distinctly related to other constructs in the current analysis (e.g., hostile communication). For the polarization scale, total scores ranged from -49 to 50 ($M = 26.18$, $SD = 18.86$). For the ambivalence scale, total scores ranged from 0 to 52 ($M = 14.69$, $SD = 10.16$).

Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM). The RAM (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) measures the ways in which members of an intimate dyad make responsibility and causal attributions for their partners' behavior (e.g., “*My partner is cool and distant on purpose rather than unintentionally*”). In the interest of space, a truncated version of this scale was used. It contains 12 items that assess attributions across two domains: a) your partner is cool and distant and b) your partner is not paying attention to what you are saying. Items were summed to form an omnibus index, with higher scores indicating more maladaptive attributions for partner behavior. Total scores ranged from 12 to 72 ($M = 39.11$, $SD = 13.75$, $\alpha = .93$)

The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised. The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996) was designed to measure the various types of behaviors used to solve conflicts between intimate partners. It consists of 39 item pairs, asking respondents to report how frequently in a given time period they or their partner engaged in a particular behavior during relationship conflict. For the current study, we utilized items from the physical assault subscale only, which comprises minor and severe subcomponents. There were 24 items in the scale, 12

items pertaining to perpetration of violence, and 12 indicating victimization. For the perpetration scale, total scores ranged from 9 to 94 ($M = 23.91$, $SD = 20.70$, $\alpha = .98$). For the victimization scale, total scores ranged from 3 to 96 ($M = 24.40$, $SD = 21.59$, $\alpha = .98$)

Psychological Maltreatment Inventory (PMI). Although the CTS2 is useful in examining instances of physical aggression, it does not include a broad range of psychological aggression items. In order to examine this, we plan to use the PMI (Kasian & Painter, 1992). The PMI is a revised gender-neutral version of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI; Tolman, 1989) developed for dating populations. The scale contains 58 items (rated from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very frequently*), and consists of five psychological maltreatment subscales: jealousy, isolation and emotional control, withdrawal, verbal abuse, and undermining partner's self-esteem. The scale also contains a subscale measuring positive relationship behaviors (i.e., praising a partner in front of others, asking for a partner's opinion in an issue). Factor analyses have supported a two-factor structure, which consists of dominance/isolation and emotional/verbal abuse. The dominance/isolation items refer to items related to demands for subservience and isolation from resources. The emotional/verbal abuse items refer to withholding emotional resources, verbal attacks, and behavior that degrades partners. Due to the currently observed high correlations between the subscales of the PMI (.73 - .86), the items were combined into one measure of psychological maltreatment. For the positive items scale, total scores ranged from 19 to 152 ($M = 104.72$, $SD = 31.95$, $\alpha = .94$). For the negative items, total scores ranged from 39 to 311 ($M = 126.49$, $SD = 66.50$, $\alpha = .98$).

Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR). The ECR is a 36-item self-report attachment measure developed by Brennan et al. (1998). The items were derived from a factor analysis of most of the existing self-report measures of adult romantic attachment. The ECR consists of two

subscales: the *anxiety* subscale reflects the degree to which a person worries that the partner will not be available in times of need, while the *avoidance* subscale measures the extent to which a person distrusts their partner's good will and, therefore, strives to maintain independence and emotional distance from him/her. Eighteen-item subscales measure each dimension. Participants respond to questions using a 7-point, partly anchored, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). Secure adults are characterized as low-scoring in both attachment anxiety and avoidance. For the anxiety subscale, total scores ranged from 16 to 115 ($M = 56.45$, $SD = 25.48$, $\alpha = .95$). For the avoidance subscale, total scores ranged from 17 to 107 ($M = 52.21$, $SD = 19.08$, $\alpha = .91$).

Inventory of Marital Problems (IMP). The IMP (Geiss & O'Leary, 1981) is a measure designed to assess the nature and severity of intimate partners' relationship problems. The measure asks participants to rate 19 potential problems (e.g., trust, jealousy, sex, children, money management, household management) on an 11-point Likert scale, (1 = *not a problem*, 11 = *major problem*). When used with dyadic data, this scale has demonstrated good internal consistency (Chronbach's alpha = .91).

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI). The CRSI (Kurdek, 1994) is a 16-item measure derived from previously explicated definitions of conflict styles. Items assess four conflict strategies: positive problem solving, conflict engagement, conflict withdrawal, and compliance. Items are rated on a 1 to 5 Likert-style scale and summing the four items in each domain generates a global composite score. Higher scores indicate more conclusive endorsement of a given conflict strategy. Due to the high co-linearity between subscales, the conflict engagement, conflict withdrawal, and compliance subscales were combined into a single measure of negative conflict resolution style. Total scores on this scale ranged from 12 to 60 (M

= 27.29, $SD = 10.34$, $\alpha = .94$). Total scores on the positive problem solving scale ranged from 4 to 20, ($M = 13.82$, $SD = 3.70$, $\alpha = .89$)

Procedure

The current study was conducted entirely on-line, and participants were recruited on Mechanical Turk, an Amazon site that matches “workers” with small jobs. Participants were restricted to those who were currently in a romantic relationship, were at least 19 years of age, and English-speaking. Participants were presented with an informed consent and brief demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Those participants indicating that they were in a cycling relationship (i.e., broke up and reinitiated a relationship with their partner at least once) were asked to report on the details of their most recent break-up (i.e., reason for break, length of break, contact during break, etc.). All participants were asked to describe the current nature of their relationships regarding general relationship satisfaction, relationship problems, relational uncertainty, relationship attributions, attachment style, and the presence of psychological and physical aggression. Study materials and the debriefing screen, which includes referrals for mental health services if any relational or personal distress arises, followed thereafter. Participants were compensated with a \$1 credit to their Mechanical Turk account. The study took, on average, approximately 20 minutes to complete. Study-related materials can be found in Appendix A.

Planned Analyses

We first analyzed the mean differences between cycling and non-cycling relationships on the various measures. Next, we utilized bivariate logistic regression analyses in order to address whether the various individual and relationship variables uniquely discriminate between cycling versus non-cycling romantic relationships. Each predictor of interest was entered into a

hierarchical logistic regression model with relationship type (i.e., cycling versus non-cycling) as the criteria. We used a stepwise approach when adding in the demographic and relationship variables, as well as polarization, given the expected high intercorrelations between them and the overall number of predictors to be added to the model. This method allowed for the determination of which relationship variables represent the largest contributors to cycling without attenuating degrees of freedom or inflating standard errors due to the presence of high intercorrelations amongst the predictors (see Kerlinger & Padhazur, 1973). Step 3 of the hierarchical regression included the measures of relationship uncertainty and relationship ambivalence using the standard method of variable entry. This was done to determine whether either of these variables uniquely predicted cycling over the other and beyond the variables remaining in the model from the preceding blocks. A third variable association would be indicated if neither significantly add to the explained variance in the model (presuming significant bivariate correlations with criterion), whereas mediation may be indicated if either of these variables significantly predict in block three while accounting for significant associations demonstrated by other variables in previous blocks (see MacKinnon, 2008). In that case, I will run an additional analysis to explore whether the significant relationship predictors from the prior block significantly associate with the either relationship ambivalence or uncertainty in a separate OLS regression and use the obtained coefficients to test for mediation using the PRODCLIN (distribution of the PRODUCT Confidence Limits for INDIRECT effects) approach (Tofighi & MacKinnon, 2011).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Variables were screened for normality. Outliers were constrained to +/- 2 interquartile ranges around the median of each variable. The unstandardized regression weights were scale dependent, making interpretation of the indirect effects harder to interpret. Therefore, the variables were standardized. All variables fell within previously suggested ranges of acceptability for skew (+/-3; Curran, West, & Finch, 1996) and kurtosis (i.e., < 5). Means, *SDs* and intercorrelations between study variables are displayed in Tables 1 through 4.

Differences between Cycling and Non-Cycling Relationships across Relationship Domains

Intimate partner violence and conflict-engagement styles. I hypothesized that cycling partners would exhibit higher rates of IPV (both physical and psychological aggression) than their non-cycling counterparts. The hypothesis was supported. In particular, cycling partners endorsed significantly higher levels of physical aggression than their non-cycling counterparts [$t(377) = -5.22, p < .001$]. With respect to rates of psychological aggression, cycling partners reported overall significantly higher levels of psychological aggression than their non-cycling counterparts. These findings were significant among all subscales of the psychological maltreatment scale: isolation and emotional control [$t(377) = -6.01, p < .001$], attacks on self-esteem [$t(377) = -5.19, p < .001$], jealousy [$t(377) = -5.14, p < .001$], verbal abuse [$t(377) = -4.09, p < .001$] and withdrawal [$t(377) = -3.90, p < .001$].

Additionally, I hypothesized that more negative communication behaviors would yield an increased risk of cycling. This hypothesis was also supported. Regarding conflict resolution

styles, individuals in cycling relationships were significantly more likely to endorse using negative conflict engagement strategies, such as launching personal attacks and exploding and getting out of control than their non-cycling counterparts, [$t(377) = -4.45, p < .001$]. Additionally, cyclers were significantly more likely to endorse using withdrawal strategies (i.e., remaining silent for long periods of time) [$t(377) = -4.16, p < .001$] and being compliant (e.g., not being willing to stick up for oneself) [$t(377) = -2.74, p < .05$] than their non-cycling counterparts.

Relationship attributions. Consistent with our hypotheses, individuals in cycling relationships tended to make more negative attributions for their partner's behavior. Specifically, cyclers were more likely to endorse both maladaptive causal [$t(377) = -3.02, p < .001$] and responsibility [$t(377) = -4.81, p < .001$] attributions for their partner's behavior, as well as blame their partner (i.e., make a negative evaluative judgment involving fault and liability) for a relationship transgression [$t(377) = -5.45, p < .001$], more so than their non-cycling counterparts.

Polarization and ambivalence. Regarding polarization, I hypothesized that non-cycling partners would score higher on the measure than their cycling counterparts, indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported. Non-cycling partners had higher overall scores than cycling partners [$t(377) = 5.35, p < .001$], meaning that there was a greater magnitude of difference between the PSD and NSD in non-cycling partners than cycling partners. Given the way the Polarization index was constructed, this would indicate that those in non-cycling relationships tended to be more satisfied (versus dissatisfied) than their cycling counterparts. In terms of ambivalence, cycling partners reported higher levels of ambivalence (i.e., higher degrees of opposing sentiments of equal magnitude) than non-cycling partners [$t(377) = -5.70, p < .001$]. In other words, cycling partners were more likely to endorse attitudes equally as high (or low) on both the positive and negative aspects of their relationship, indicating

that, to varying degrees, those in cycling relationship more so held some sentiment about their relationship that was neither uniformly positive or negative.

Relational uncertainty and attachment style. Consistent with our hypothesis, cycling partners endorsed lower levels of relational certainty ($M = 275.92$, $SD = 58.14$) than their non-cycling counterparts [$M = 304.09$, $SD = 50.91$, $t(377) = 5.01$, $p < .001$]. Additionally, cycling partners endorsed more insecure attachment styles than their cycling counterparts. Specifically, cycling partners were more likely to endorse anxious attachment styles [$t(377) = -5.95$, $p < .001$], as well as avoidant attachment styles [$t(377) = -3.38$, $p < .001$], than their non-cycling counterparts.

Predicting Cycling vs. Non-cycling Relationships

Logistic regression analyses were utilized in order to examine the effects of all of the predictors in tandem. Standardized coefficients of the predictors were used in order to enable the comparison of the relative effects of the explanatory variables, given that the predictors were represented with different units of measurement. Predictors were entered in hierarchically to facilitate interpretation, with the regression weights in the final block representing each variable's unique contribution to the prediction of group membership.

In the first block of the regression model, demographic variables were entered in a stepwise fashion. In particular, I entered age, children with a previous partner, number of previous marriages, divorce, relationship length, religion, and number of previous relationships as initial controls. These factors were previously shown in our analyses to significantly correlate with cycling behaviors. Therefore, accounting for this variance up front allows to better examine the predictive power of other variables in later steps of the analyses. In Model 1, age, previous

children, and previous marriages ($\beta = -.05, .92, .88$, respectively) were all uniquely predictive of cycling, whereas the remaining variables were removed from the equation.

In Step 2, the variables I presumed would have a mediated effect through relationship uncertainty or ambivalence (relationship attributions, intimate partner violence, conflict resolution styles, attachment style) were entered into the model. This allowed me to examine whether these variables uniquely contribute to the criterion (i.e., cycling). In addition, adding these predictors in before more “global” relationship quality characteristics allowed me to test the hypothesis that cycling and negative relationship behaviors are associated, irrespective of demographic and relationship quality characteristics. The control variables still emerged as significant predictors in this step. However, attachment anxiety ($\beta = .47$) was the only predictor that *uniquely* associated with the criterion (cycling or non-cycling). Considered alongside the zero-order correlations, which showed high intercorrelations between attachment anxiety and the other predictors, this model suggests that attachment anxiety may subsume all of the association between these other variables and cycling. This may indicate that attachment anxiety is a third variable that accounts for the association between the other predictors and cycling or that, potentially, attachment anxiety predicts cycling by way of its influence on relationship dysfunction.

However, as planned, we examined a full mediation model with the significant variables from Step 2 (i.e., attachment anxiety) influencing cycling through relationship uncertainty and ambivalence. That is, examined whether attachment anxiety predicts cycling because attachment anxiety predicts uncertainty or ambivalence, which in turn predicts cycling. The significant effects from the previous model were entered first, as they were known to be uniquely predictive and attachment anxiety was the only significant variable for which we wished to test for

mediation. The results suggested that, when controlling for relationship uncertainty, relationship ambivalence predicted cycling, even with attachment anxiety in the model ($\beta = .32$). These results suggest that attachment anxiety predicts cycling, and that both attachment anxiety and ambivalence uniquely predict cycling when entered together. The last step in the analyses was to determine whether attachment anxiety predicts ambivalence and then test for mediation. During this final step, the non-significant variables from Step 2 were added into the model. Regression analyses demonstrated that an insecure attachment style (i.e., anxious attachment) did, in fact, significantly predict ambivalence ($\beta = .15$).

We used PRODCLIN (Mackinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007) to test the significance of the indirect effect of attachment anxiety on cycling through ambivalence. PRODCLIN produces a confidence interval, which is a range of possible values for an effect given the error within the sample. If these values contain 0, it is statistically non-significant. Our findings suggest that an insecure attachment style (i.e., anxious attachment) has a negative indirect effect on cycling, 95% CI [.001, .123], indicating a small to moderate effect size. In essence, these results suggest a pathway in which an insecure, anxious attachment style exerts an effect on cycling behaviors through a mediator—in this case, ambivalence about one's relationship. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to replicate and extend the current literature on adult romantic cyclical relationships. Thus far, there is a dearth of research on this type of romantic relationship, despite their prevalence and documented negative relationship behaviors (Cupach & Metts, 2002; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Halphern-Meekin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013). In terms of replication, this study demonstrated significant differences between cycling and non-cycling relationships in the areas of intimate partner violence, conflict engagement, and relational uncertainty. Specifically, as was previously observed, cycling partners endorsed significantly higher rates of these relationship factors than their non-cycling counterparts. Regarding extension, this study was the first to compare cycling vs. non-cycling partners in the areas of relationship attributions, polarization and ambivalence, and attachment style. Significant differences between the two groups were demonstrated in these predictor variables as well; cycling partners were more likely to make negative attributions for their partner's behavior, endorsed lower levels of polarization, endorsed higher levels of ambivalence, and were significantly more likely to have an insecure (anxious) attachment style. Furthermore, an insecure (anxious) attachment style was the only unique predictor of cycling behaviors, once all factors are added into the model together. Finally, the relationship between an insecure (anxious) attachment style and cycling seemed to be partially mediated by relationship ambivalence.

The current study also suggests that relationship cycling seems to extend past the ages of “emerging adulthood,” given that the mean age of our cycling sample was 33 and that the average relationship length was less than 10 years (meaning that the majority of these

relationships were initiated after the ages represented within the “emerging adulthood” categorization). In other words, the process of relationship termination and subsequent reconciliation may not be a phenomenon specifically unique to a younger-adult population, as was explicitly assumed in prior research (e.g., Dailey, Pfiester, Jin, Beck, & Clark, 2009). Moreover, there was evidence that the link between various relationship problems and cycling was through attachment anxiety. Taken together, rather than being developmentally-specific, relationship cycling may be predictive of an underlying, more pervasive relational pattern tied to an insecure (anxious) attachment style.

The results of this study suggest that cycling relationships are correlated with significantly more relationship difficulties than their non-cycling counterparts (e.g., maladaptive attributions, IPV, etc.). However, the phenomenon of cycling (i.e., breaking up with a partner and then subsequently reuniting, sometimes multiple times) cannot be explained by looking at these variables alone. For example, relationship satisfaction does not necessarily correspond to relationship stability. Research on marriages has shown that some highly stable relationships are marked by relatively high levels of conflict or low levels of satisfaction (e.g., Cuber & Harroff, 1965; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981), suggesting that unhappy, dissatisfied couples often decide to stay together. This current study helps to account for the phenomenon of breakup(s) and subsequent renewals by suggesting that these relationship difficulties and their association with cycling is potentially explained by insecure (i.e., anxious) attachment styles. In other words, attachment anxiety seems to predict both cycling and relationship dysfunction, and therefore may function as a third variable accounting for the two. Indeed, none of the above-mentioned relationship characteristics were significant when entering in attachment anxiety. Alternatively, though not currently tested, these findings are consistent with a mediation framework.

Specifically, attachment anxiety may predict cycling because it predicts distress, and couples in distress may decide to terminate their relationship (Kurdeck, 1998; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988). Subsequently, an individual with an anxious attachment style may be more likely to make exaggerated attempts to reestablish the relationship, given their over-dependence in interpersonal relationships and a sense of anxiousness that only recedes when they reconnect with their partner (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Feeny & Noller, 1992).

The link between attachment anxiety and cycling behaviors has not yet been examined within the literature. However, much has been examined in the way of adult attachment styles and general relationship functioning. Insecure styles of attachment (i.e., preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive) correspond to problems and dissatisfaction within intimate relationships. For instance, a fearful-avoidant attachment style generally leads to an avoidance of intimacy with others for the purpose of self-protection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In contrast, couples with secure attachment styles are less likely to engage in withdrawal and verbal aggression (Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999), as well as rate higher on relationship satisfaction measures (Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Simpson, 1990). The current study found effects for the anxious attachment style; avoidant attachment did not seem to be uniquely related to cycling. Feeney's (1999) research on individual needs for closeness and distance within romantic relationships could help explain the currently observed link between anxious attachment styles and cycling behaviors. His findings suggest that issues of closeness and distance were highly salient, especially for those individuals who demonstrated insecure attachment styles. Specifically, the pattern of demanding closeness and simultaneous pulling away/distancing was present in relationships in which *at least one* partner had an insecure attachment style. Additionally, a qualitative data analysis conducted by Baxter (1986)

examining break-up accounts from respondents demonstrated that difficulties managing partners' needs for autonomy and connection accounted for a significant portion of terminations in relationships. Furthermore, an examination of attachment style and post-break-up behaviors demonstrated that individuals with an anxious attachment style displayed preoccupation with the lost partner, greater perseveration over the loss, more extreme physical and emotional distress, and exaggerated attempts to reestablish the relationship (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003). These findings are consistent with those currently found, together suggesting that an insecure attachment style may lead couples to break up and subsequently renew their relationship, due to issues related to a simultaneous desire for closeness and need for distance/autonomy.

Another explanation for the prevalence of higher levels of attachment anxiety in cycling partners in the current sample may have to do with relationship length. On average, a significantly greater percentage of non-cyclers in the current study were together for 10 years or more. Feeney (1994) found that an effect of age in examining attachment style and satisfaction across the life cycle of marriage; couples married for more than 20 years reported lower anxiety than did those married for up to 10 years. Feeney hypothesized that a developmental process may be involved, whereby the security afforded by marriage allows spouses who are initially anxious about their relationships to revise their negative internal working models (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Ricks, 1985) and, therefore, become less anxious. Alternatively, relationships in which at least one partner displays an anxious attachment style may be less likely to persist, given the demonstrated link between this attachment style and relationship conflict and dissatisfaction (Feeney et al., 1994). It is plausible that our cyclers in the current sample, who rated higher on levels of attachment anxiety, may gain some relationship stability, if they are able to achieve a perceived level of security within the relationship.

In the current study, further mediation analyses examining the influence of attachment anxiety on cycling through multiple predictors (relationship uncertainty and ambivalence) suggested that, when controlling for relationship uncertainty, relationship ambivalence predicted cycling, even with attachment anxiety in the model. That is, attachment anxiety may predict cycling, in part, because attachment anxiety predicts ambivalence, which in turn predicts cycling. The more general notion that relationship characteristics (e.g., social support) mediate the association between attachment and relationship outcomes has been documented within the literature. Specifically, Meyers and Landsberger (2002) examined the mediation and moderation effects of both psychological distress and social support in the link between adult attachment styles and marital satisfaction. They found that psychological distress mediated the association between secure attachment and marital satisfaction, and social support mediated the relation between avoidant attachment and marital satisfaction. In addition, psychological distress moderated the relation between both secure and avoidant attachment styles and marital satisfaction. Our findings therefore build upon past research in showing that attachment anxiety potentially links to cycling through other important relationship variables. Although neither one of these factors (social support, psychological distress) were examined in the current study, it is plausible that one/both of these factors may have mediated the current association between attachment anxiety and cycling. For example, individuals with higher levels of attachment anxiety are more likely to engage in emotional reactivity (the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli with emotion flooding, being emotionally labile or hypersensitivity to the point of being consumed by them), and this engagement is often correlated with a negative mood state (Wei, Vogen, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005). Individuals with attachment anxiety may utilize an emotionally reactive affect regulation strategy because it may initially draw others' attention

to their negative mood or interpersonal problems. However, if this strategy is constantly utilized, others may eventually become tired of their overreactions and start to act negatively toward the individual, or even start to avoid or reject them. These reactions from others may lead individuals with attachment anxiety to ultimately experience increased negative mood, interpersonal distress, or loneliness. Therefore, it is entirely plausible that the individuals within this study who demonstrated anxious attachment styles were more likely to cycle due to partner's breaking up with them due to frustration and feeling overwhelmed by their affect regulation strategy. In terms of social support, research has documented a link between insecure or ambivalent attachment styles and reduced social support (Davis et al., 1998; Mikulincer et al., 1993); which may account for cycling relationships more generally, rather than only for romantic partners. The desire to renew a previously terminated relationship may be accounted for by a want to increase social ties and support.

The current findings also highlight potential differences between the constructs of relational uncertainty and ambivalence. Although relational uncertainty refers to ambiguity arising from self, partner, and relationship sources (Berger & Bradac, 1982), relationship ambivalence seems to suggest strong feelings or attitudes in opposing directions. That is, partners scoring high in relationship ambivalence may endorse equally high levels of relationship discord and relationship satisfaction, whereas partners high in relationship uncertainty have doubts about the status of their relationship, their role in the relationship, and their partner's views of the relationship. Additionally, the construct of relationship ambivalence seems to be more present-focused, whereas a facet of relationship uncertainty pertains to feelings about the relationship in the long-term. The current study suggests that although both relationship uncertainty and ambivalence correlate with cycling behaviors, the mechanisms behind these

relationships may differ between the two concepts. In particular, partners that are endorsing simultaneous high levels of relationship discord and satisfaction may terminate the relationship and subsequently reunite, depending on which aspect of the relationship they are focusing on in the current moment. One (or both partners) may decide to terminate the relationship due to high levels of relationship distress, yet subsequently determine to reunite because they were satisfied. Further research is needed in this area in order to better parse out the relationships between ambivalence, uncertainty, and relationship cycling.

Clinical Applications

This study laid out potential pathways in which relationship behaviors and attitudes may affect relationship cycling. Although in no way conclusive, these models can serve as a starting place for theory, as well as practice. Cycling behaviors are quite prevalent and are present in approximately 40-60% of those individuals in romantic relationships (Cupach & Metts, 2002; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000). Given the relationship dysfunction and low levels of satisfaction endorsed by those in cycling relationships, it is reasonable to assume that individuals in cyclical relationships, at some point, will initiate counseling. As such, there should be an available research-base to foster the development of interventions specifically tailored to their particular treatment needs. According to the current study, treatments for relationship distress that target attachment styles (i.e., Emotion Focused Couples Therapy; Greenberg and Johnson, 1988) may be more beneficial for couples that have broken up and subsequently reconciled. Specifically, Emotion-Focused therapy for couples views the attachment bond and the security it provides as a central concern and ascribes to Bowlby's (1988) notion that early emotional relationships are the foundation for later ones. Additionally, Hazen and Shaver (1987) argued that adults appear to experience bonds of attachment toward romantic partners that have many of the same

characteristics of infant-caretaker bonds. An anxious attachment style describes partners who have a great deal of anxiety and vigilance concerning rejection and abandonment, and they may cope with this anxiety by utilizing an emotionally reactive affect regulation strategy (Wei, Vogen, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005). Therefore, an emphasis on the techniques of self-soothing within the framework of Emotion-Focused therapy for couples may be most useful for these cycling couples (and specifically for the partner(s) who is/are anxiously attached).

Additionally, couples therapy in which the goal is to resolve relationship ambivalence via therapeutic techniques previously demonstrated to resolve ambivalence (i.e., Motivational Interviewing) may be helpful for those individuals in cycling relationships in order to clarify relational patterns and polarize relational attitudes. That being said, the key target of treatment utilizing this technique may be to resolve ambivalence and, therefore, the end goal might be permanent dissolution of the relationship. However, the alternative could be relationship reconciliation alongside strategies to prevent subsequent dissolutions, perhaps via scaffolding through distress tolerance and emotion regulation techniques found within Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan, 1991).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The study participants were varied and diverse, spanning a wide age range, multiple racial/ethnic groups, as well as relational status allowing for wider generalizability of the sample. Additionally, the current study was able to expand on the current relationship literature by including a demographic sample that has not yet been extensively examined.

Regarding limitations, the cross-sectional nature of our data means that it is hard for us to determine the direction of influence between our relationship variables of interest and cycling behaviors. It should be noted that I do not assume a causal relationship between the independent

and dependent variables. I assumed that various relationship characteristics were predictive of cycling behaviors. However, it is also equally likely that relationship instability and cycling leads to relational uncertainty and ambivalence and more negative relationship behaviors. Additionally, I did not assess whether cycling in intimate partner relationships is a unique phenomenon related to attachment style; in other words, cycling romantic relationships may just represent one type of relationship instability for those individuals with more insecure attachment. Future research should examine the cycling nature (i.e., termination and subsequent reconciliation patterns) across multiple relationship domains in individuals with both secure and insecure attachment styles. Additionally, I did not utilize dyadic data and only received reports from one member of the couple; as such, we were not able to examine any factors of interest (i.e., attachment style) from the other member of the intimate dyad. Lastly, I used a stepwise regression approach to develop a smaller set of predictor variables within the model. Stepwise regression is known to capitalize on sample-specific variation and, as such, the extent to which the current findings will generalize to other samples requires additional study.

The results and limitations of the present study point to other areas for future research. In particular, studies of a longitudinal nature are needed to help clarify the association of these constructs. For instance, longitudinal studies would allow researchers to determine whether relationship attitudes and behaviors themselves leads to increases in relationship cycling, whether the reverse association exists, or whether these constructs are bi-directionally connected. Additionally, future research should expand upon the criterion of cycling relationships; these types of intimate dyads have only recently been examined and defined within the relationship literature. Further investigation is needed to determine whether differences exist within this subgroup of individuals in terms of predictor variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction, IPV) and

other relationship characteristics (e.g., number of breaks, length of breakup(s), post-break-up behaviors). Additionally, future research should examine these relationship constructs (i.e., relationship attributions, attachment styles) utilizing dyadic data in order to determine the influence of these interactions and their impact on cycling.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the role of various relationship behaviors and attitudes on the process of relationship cycling. To that end, we were able to demonstrate that the presence of intimate partner violence, relationship ambivalence, lower levels of polarization, relational uncertainty, negative conflict resolution styles, and insecure attachment indeed associate with relationship cycling. In addition, we were able to demonstrate that attachment anxiety plays a unique role in accounting for cycling behaviors, and was the only significant predictor of relationship cycling after accounting for all the other relationship variables in the model. Further investigation determined that this relationship between attachment anxiety and cycling was partially mediated by relationship ambivalence. Findings suggest that for those individuals exhibiting insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious attachment), relationship cycling may be more common by way of feelings of ambivalence (i.e., simultaneous endorsement of both positive and negative aspects of the relationship). Our findings highlight the importance of attachment and ambivalence in the relationship system. In addition, interventions that target attachment anxiety and relationship ambivalence may be helpful in stabilizing relationships and decreasing cycling behaviors.

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Table 1

Demographic data

	<u>Non-Cycling</u>		<u>Cycling</u>	
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Frequency (n)</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Frequency (n)</u>
Sex (Male)	54	119	54	86
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	51	111	38	60
African-American/Black	3	7	8	13
Hispanic	4	8	3	5
Asian American/Asian/ Indian	37	82	47	75
Other	6	12	3	5
Religion*				
Catholic/Protest	30	66	33	52
Hindu	30	66	40	64
Not Religious	28	61	19	30
Other	12	26	8	12
Children with current partner (yes)	46	102	53	84
Children with previous partner* (yes)	10	21	30	47
Divorced** (yes)	12	27	22	33
Previous marriages**				
None	81	177	54	86
One	17	37	34	54
2-3	2	5	12	19
Relationship Type				
Dating	35	76	37	58
Engaged	11	24	18	29
Married	54	120	45	72
Relationship Length*				
0-12 months	18	39	21	34
12-24 months	16	36	31	49
2-5 years	24	52	28	44
5-10 years	17	38	10	16
10+ years	25	54	10	16
Age** (years)	Mean: 35.13	SD: 9.81	Mean: 32.56	SD: 9.41

Note. $N = 379$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 2.

Means and standard deviations of predictor variables

	<u>Non-Cycling</u>		<u>Cycling</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Relational	304.09	50.91	275.92	58.14
Uncertainty*				
Polarization	30.44	17.04	20.30	19.70
Ambivalence	12.26	7.59	18.05	12.14
Conflict Resolution				
Styles Inventory				
Conflict Engagement	7.65	3.54	9.45	4.28
Positive Problem	14.11	3.68		
Solving				
Conflict Withdrawal	9.07	3.66	10.69	3.85
Compliance	8.66	3.81	9.79	4.17
Relationship				
Attributions				
Causal	19.23	6.74	21.36	6.82
Responsibility	11.70	5.03	14.21	5.00
Blame	5.55	2.82	7.17	2.90
Conflict Tactics Scale	39.14	31.99	61.01	49.55
Psychological				
Maltreatment				
Positive Behaviors	107.83	31.49	100.41	32.16
Isolation/Emotional	30.55	21.22	45.18	26.04
Control				
Self-Esteem	24.29	14.56	32.77	17.19
Jealousy	20.77	10.21	26.65	12.01
Verbal Abuse	15.47	9.08	19.38	9.34
Withdrawal	19.80	10.32	24.10	10.96
Attachment Style				
Anxious Attachment	50.11	23.87	65.23	25.11
Avoidant	49.43	19.59	56.04	17.71
Attachment				

*Note higher numbers on this measure indicate higher levels of relational certainty

Table 3.

Correlations of demographic variables with criterion

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	
1. Age		-.14**	-.30**	.039	-.09	.17**	-.24**	.11*	.17**	.43**	-.13*	
2. Sex			.01	.02	-.04	-.03	.03	.00	.02	.08	.00	
3. Race				-.15**	-.31**	.07	.10	.12*	.24**	-.22**	.08	
4. Religion					.16**	.05	-.02	-.10	-.11*	.02	-.12*	
5. Children with current partner						.02	-.05	-.13*	-.58**	-.37**	-.06	
6. Children with part partner							.42**	-.57**	.06	.07	-.26**	
7. Divorce								-.54**	.08	.05	-.11*	
8. # Prev Marriages									.03	-.15**	.30**	
9. Relationship type										.47**	-.06	
10. Relationship length											-.20**	
11. Cycling Relationship												1

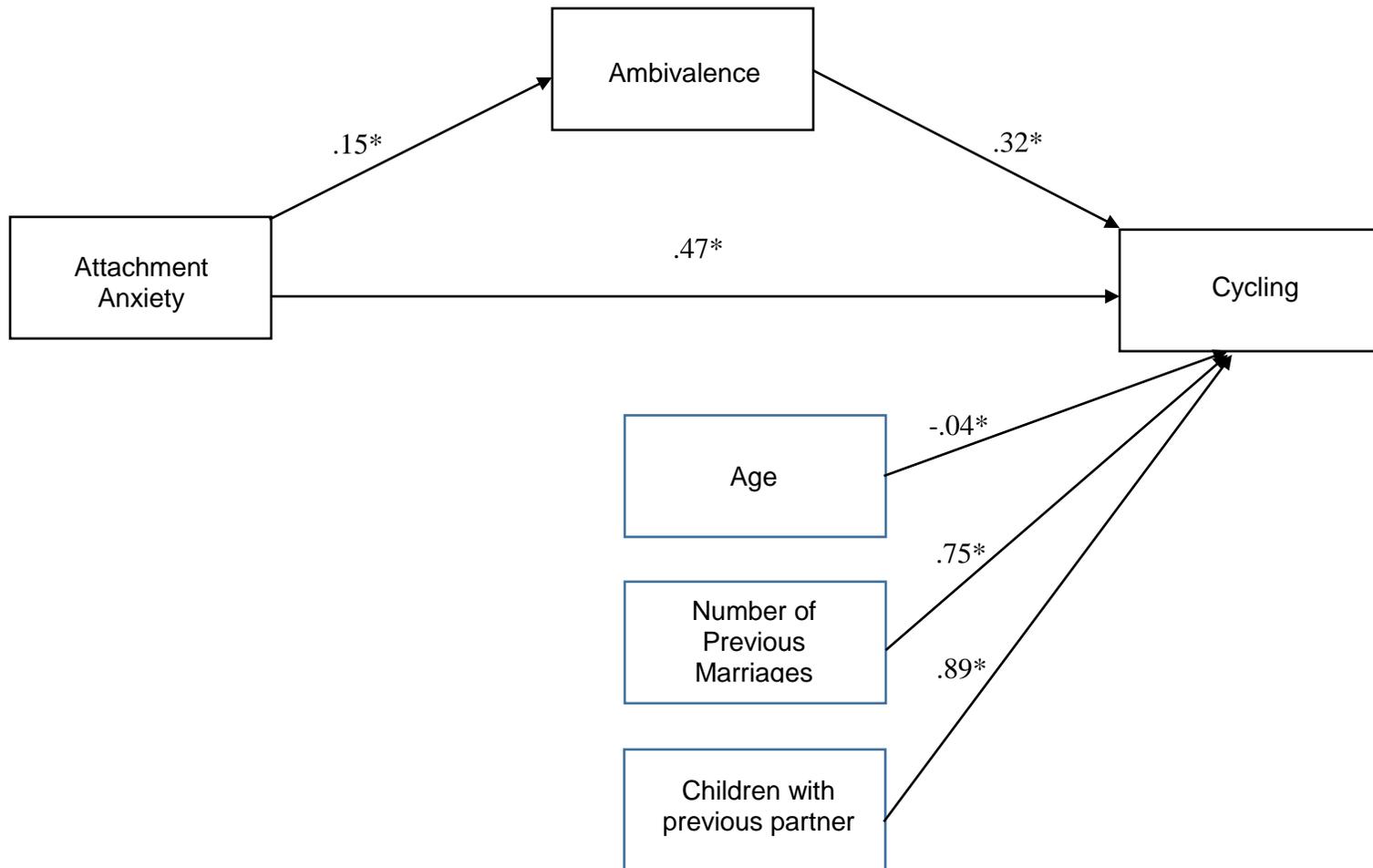
Table 4.

Correlations of relationship measures with criterion

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>
1. Relational Uncertainty		.60**	-.28**	.42**	-.31**	-.28**	-.40**	-.48**	-.61**	-.25**
2. Relationship Polarization			-.61**	.27**	-.47**	-.50**	-.53**	-.53**	-.52**	-.27**
3. Relationship Ambivalence				-.02	.49**	.45**	.57**	.48**	.28**	.28**
4. CRSI Positive Problem Solving					-.03	-.06	-.10*	-.20**	-.40**	-.10
5. CRSI Negative						.65**	.78**	.63**	.38**	.22**
6. Relationship Attributions							.59**	.63**	.40**	.23**
7. Intimate Partner Violence								.65**	.38**	.29**
8. Anxious Attachment									.58**	.29**
9. Avoidant Attachment										.17**
10. Cycling Relationship										1

Figure 1

Partial mediation of attachment anxiety on cycling. Results are presented as standardized estimates.



Appendix
Questionnaire Items Included in the Analysis

Demographics Form

Age (type your answer in the following box)
_____years

Sex

- Male
- Female
- Other

How many years of education have you completed? (type your answer in the following box)
_____years

What educational degrees do you hold?

- None
- GED
- High School Diploma
- Associate
- Bachelor
- Master
- Law (J.D.)
- Doctorate

Please indicate your racial identity:

- African American
- Asian
- American Indian
- Latino/a
- Middle Eastern
- White
- Other: _____

Please indicate your religious affiliation:

- Catholicism
- Protestant
- Eastern Orthodox
- Hindu
- Islam

- Judaism
- None
- Other: _____

Not including your partner's income, what was your income last year, before taxes?

- \$0-\$9,999
- \$10,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000 or above

Do you have children with your current partner?

- Yes
- No

Do you have children with a previous partner?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever gotten divorced?

- Yes
- No

Indicate the number of your previous marriages (not including current, if married)

- 0
- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 5+

Not including your current partner, indicate the number of your previous serious relationships

- 0
- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 5+

Indicate the average length of your past relationships

- 0-6 months
- 6 months- 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2+ years

Are you currently:

- In a dating relationship?
- Engaged to be married?
- Married?

Have you and your partner ever lived together?

- Yes
- No

Are you and your partner currently living together?

- Yes. We have lived together for ___ months. Enter # of months below)

- No

How long have you been with your current partner?

- 0-6 months
- 6-12 months year
- 12-18 months
- 18-24 months
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10+ years

Is your current relationship a relationship where you have broken up and gotten back together at least once?

- Yes
- No

Cyclical Relationship Questionnaire

How many times have you and your partner broken up and gotten back together?

- Yes
- No

The following questions pertain to **the most recent** breakup with your partner. Please answer the following questions as they pertain to the **most recent** separation with your partner.

How many times have you and your partner broken up and gotten back together?

- Once
- Twice
- Three or more times

Briefly state the reasons for the most recent breakup with your partner.

How long did the most recent separation from your partner last?

- One week or less
 - 2-3 weeks
 - 1-2 months
 - 3-6 months
 - 6 months or more
 - Other
-

During the most recent separation from your partner, how often did the two of you keep in contact?

- No contact
- Spoke once a month
- Spoke once a week
- Spoke every few days
- Spoke every day

During the most recent separation from your partner, were you sexually intimate with your partner?

- Yes
- No

During the most recent separation from your partner, were you sexually intimate with another individual?

- Yes
- No

During the most recent separation from your partner, did you spend time with another individual for the purpose of pursuing a romantic relationship with him/her?

- Yes
- No

Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory

Conflict Engagement Subscale

Using the scale provided, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements your romantic partner.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the Time
Launching personal attacks.					
Exploding and getting out of control.					
Getting carried away and saying things that aren't meant.					
Throwing insults and digs.					

Positive Problem Solving Subscale

Using the scale provided, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements your romantic partner.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the Time
Focusing on the problem at hand.					
Sitting down and discussing differences constructively.					
Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us.					
Negotiating and compromising.					

Conflict Withdrawal Subscale

Using the scale provided, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements your romantic partner.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the Time
Remaining silent for long periods of time.					
Reaching a limit, shutting down, and refusing to talk any further.					
Tuning the other person out.					
Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested.					

Compliance Subscale

Using the scale provided, rate how frequently you use each of the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements your romantic partner.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the Time
Not being willing to stick up for myself.					
Being too compliant.					
Not defending my position.					
Giving in with little attempt to present my side of the issue.					

Inventory of Marital Problems

All couples experience some difficulties or differences of opinion in their relationship, even if they are only very minor ones. Listed below are a number of topics that might be difficulties in your relationship. For each topic fill in the circle to indicate how much it is a source of difficulty or disagreement for you and your partner.

	<i>Not a Problem</i>			<i>Medium Problem</i>			<i>Major Problem</i>		
Children	<input type="radio"/>								
Religion	<input type="radio"/>								
In-laws, parents, relatives	<input type="radio"/>								
Recreation and leisure time	<input type="radio"/>								
Communication	<input type="radio"/>								
Household management	<input type="radio"/>								
Making decisions/Solving problem	<input type="radio"/>								
Friends	<input type="radio"/>								
Unrealistic expectations	<input type="radio"/>								
Our tempers and moods	<input type="radio"/>								
Money management	<input type="radio"/>								
Sex	<input type="radio"/>								
Jealousy	<input type="radio"/>								
Trust	<input type="radio"/>								
Independence	<input type="radio"/>								
Showing affection/Intimacy	<input type="radio"/>								
Drugs and alcohol	<input type="radio"/>								
Career decisions	<input type="radio"/>								
Amount of time spent together	<input type="radio"/>								

Please add any other difficulties:

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire

The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Somewhat Disagree

4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree

5 = Somewhat Agree

6 = Strongly Agree

7 = Strongly Agree

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.
6. I worry a lot about my relationships.
7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.
8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.
9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.
11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.
14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.
16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.
17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.
18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.
19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.
28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
30. I tell my partner just about everything.
31. I talk things over with my partner.
32. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.

33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.
35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.
36. My partner really understands me and my needs.

Psychological Maltreatment Inventory

This questionnaire asks about actions you may have experienced in your relationship with your partner. Answer each item as carefully as you can by indicating a number next to each statement according to the following scale.

1 = Once in the past year
2 = Twice in the past year
3 = 3-5 times in the past year
4 = 6-10 times in the past year

5 = 11-20 times in the past year
6 = More than 20 times in the past year
7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen
0 = This has never happened before

1. My partner put down my appearance.
2. My partner insulted or shamed me in front of others.
3. My partner trusted me with members of the opposite sex.
4. My partner treated me like I was stupid.
5. My partner was insensitive to my feelings.
6. My partner treated me as if my feelings were important and worthy of consideration.
7. My partner told me I couldn't manage by myself.
8. My partner said things to spite me.
9. My partner brought up things from my past to hurt me.
10. My partner called me names.
11. My partner respected my independence.
12. My partner swore at me.
13. My partner yelled and screamed at me.
14. My partner respected my choice of friends.
15. My partner treated me like I was an inferior.
16. My partner sulked and refused to talk about a problem.
17. My partner was willing to talk calmly about problems.
18. My partner stomped out of the house or yard during a disagreement.
19. My partner gave me the silent treatment.
20. My partner said things to encourage me.
21. My partner withheld affection from me.
22. My partner did not let me talk about my feelings.
23. My partner took responsibility for his or her problems or behaviors.
24. My partner was insensitive to my sexual needs and desires.
25. My partner monitored my time and made me account for my whereabouts.
26. My partner praised me in front of others.
27. My partner treated me like his/her personal servant.
28. My partner ordered me around.
29. My partner told me my feelings were reasonable or normal.
30. My partner was jealous and suspicious of my friends.
31. My partner was jealous of other men/women.
32. My partner treated me like an equal.
33. My partner did not want me to go to school or to other self-improvement activities.
34. My partner did not want me to socialize with my same sex friends.

35. My partner respected my intelligence.
36. My partner accused me of seeing another man/woman.
37. My partner tried to keep me from seeing or talking to my family.
38. My partner respected my confidence or kept my secrets.
39. My partner interfered in my relationship with family members.
40. My partner tried to keep me from doing things to help myself.
41. My partner let me talk about my feelings.
42. My partner told me my feelings are irrational or crazy.
43. My partner encouraged me to go to school or other self-improvement activities.
44. My partner blamed me for his/her problems.
45. My partner tried to turn my family and friends against me.
46. My partner was affectionate with me.
47. My partner blamed me for causing his or her violent behavior.
48. My partner tried to make me feel like I was crazy.
49. My partner encouraged me to socialize with my same sex friends.
50. My partner's moods changed radically, from very calm to very angry or vice versa.
51. My partner blamed me when upset even when I had nothing to do with it.
52. My partner was sensitive to my sexual needs and desires.
53. My partner tried to convince my family and friends that I was crazy.
54. My partner threatened to hurt him-/herself if I left him/her.
55. My partner threatened to have an affair with someone else.
56. My partner made requests politely.
57. My partner threatened to leave the relationship.
58. My partner encouraged me to see or talk to my family.

The Conflict Tactics Scale-Revised

RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIORS

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please indicate how many times you did each of these things in the PAST YEAR, and how many times your partner did them in the past year. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before that, please choose "Not in the past year, but it did happen before."

How often did this happen?

1 = Once in the past year

2 = Twice in the past year

3 = 3-5 times in the past year

4 = 6-10 times in the past year

5 = 11-20 times in the past year

6 = More than 20 times in the past year

7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen

0 = This has never happened before

1. I threw something at my partner that could hurt.
2. My partner did this to me.
3. **I twisted my partner's arm or hair.**
4. **My partner did this to me.**
5. I pushed or shoved my partner.
6. My partner did this to me.
7. **I grabbed my partner.**
8. **My partner did this to me.**
9. I slapped my partner.
10. My partner did this to me.
11. **I used a knife or gun on my partner.**
12. **My partner did this to me.**
13. I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.
14. My partner did this to me.
15. **I choked my partner.**
16. **My partner did this to me.**
17. I slammed my partner against a wall.
18. My partner did this to me.
19. **I beat up my partner.**
20. **My partner did this to me.**
21. I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.
22. My partner did this to me.
23. **I kicked my partner.**
24. **My partner did this to me.**

Positive Negative Semantic Differential

Considering only the *positive qualities* of your relationship and *ignoring the negative ones*, evaluate your relationship on the following qualities:

My relationship is...

	Not at all 0	A tiny bit 1	A little 2	Somewhat 3	Mostly 4	Very 5	Extremely 6	Completely 7
Interesting	<input type="radio"/>							
Full	<input type="radio"/>							
Sturdy	<input type="radio"/>							
Enjoyable	<input type="radio"/>							
Good	<input type="radio"/>							
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>							
Hopeful	<input type="radio"/>							

Considering only the *negative qualities* of your relationship and *ignoring the positive ones*, evaluate your relationship on the following qualities:

My relationship is...

	Not at all 0	A tiny bit 1	A little 2	Somewhat 3	Mostly 4	Very 5	Extremely 6	Completely 7
Bad	<input type="radio"/>							
Lonely	<input type="radio"/>							
Discouraging	<input type="radio"/>							
Boring	<input type="radio"/>							
Empty	<input type="radio"/>							
Fragile	<input type="radio"/>							
Miserable	<input type="radio"/>							

Relational Uncertainty Scale

Self-Scale

When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about:

1. how committed you are to the relationship? (*Desire subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

2. your feelings for your partner? (*Desire subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

3. whether or not you want this relationship to work out in the long run? (*Goals subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

4. whether or not you want this relationship to last? (*Goals subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

5. how much you like your partner? (*Desire subscale*)

6. how much you want this relationship right now? (*Desire subscale*)

7. how important this relationship is to you? (*Evaluation subscale*)

8. how you feel about this relationship? (*Desire subscale*)

9. how much you are romantically interested in your partner? (*Evaluation subscale*)

10. whether or not you will want to be with your partner in the long run? (*Goals subscale*)

11. how much you want to pursue this relationship? (*Desire subscale*)

12. your goals for the future of the relationship? (*Goals subscale*)

13. how ready you are to get involved with your partner? (*Evaluation subscale*)

- 14. whether or not you are ready to commit to your partner? (*Desire subscale*)
- 15. whether or not you want to stay in a relationship with your partner? (*Goals subscale*)
- 16. whether you want a romantic relationship with your partner or to be just friends? (*Desire subscale*)
- 17. whether or not you want to maintain your relationship? (*Evaluation subscale*)

- 18. your view of this relationship? (*Evaluation subscale*)
- 19. where this relationship is going?
- 20. how you can or cannot behave around your partner?
- 21. where you want the relationship to go? (*Goals subscale*)

Partner Scale

When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about:

1. how committed your partner is to the relationship?

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

2. your partner's feelings for you?

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

3. whether or not you want this relationship to work out in the long run?

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

4. whether or not you want this relationship to last?

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

5. how much your partner likes you?
6. how much your partner wants this relationship right now?
7. how important this relationship is to your partner?
8. how your partner feels about this relationship?
9. how much your partner is romantically interested in you?
10. whether or not your partner will want to be with you in the long run?
11. how much your partner wants to pursue this relationship?
12. your partner's goals for the future of the relationship?
13. how ready your partner is to get involved with you?
14. whether or not your partner is ready to commit to you?
15. whether or not your partner wants to stay in a relationship with you?
16. whether your partner wants a romantic relationship with you or to be just friends?
17. whether or not your partner wants to maintain your relationship?
18. your partner's view of this relationship?
19. where this relationship is going?
20. how your partner can or cannot behave around you?
21. where your partner wants the relationship to go?

Relationship Scale

When thinking about your relationship, how certain are you about:

1. the definition of this relationship? (*Definition subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

2. whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other? (*Mutuality subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

3. whether or not you and your partner will stay together? (*Future subscale*)

1 2 3 4 5 6

*Completely or
almost completely*

*Completely or
almost completely*

uncertain

certain

4. how you and your partner would describe this relationship? (*Definition subscale*)

1

2

3

4

5

6

*Completely or
almost completely
uncertain*

*Completely or
almost completely
certain*

5. the future of the relationship? (*Future subscale*)

6. what you can or cannot say to each other in this relationship? (*Behavioral norms subscale*)

7. the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship? (*Behavioral norms subscale*)

8. whether or not this relationship will end soon? (*Future subscale*)

9. how you and your partner view this relationship? (*Mutuality subscale*)

10. the state of the relationship at this time? (*Definition subscale*)

11. whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him/her? (*Mutuality subscale*)

12. the current status of this relationship? (*Mutuality subscale*)

13. whether or not this is a romantic or platonic relationship? (*Definition subscale*)

14. the norms for this relationship? (*Behavioral norms subscale*)

15. where this relationship is going? (*Future subscale*)

16. how you can or cannot behave around your partner? (*Behavioral norms subscale*)