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**Communication Aggression in Relationships: Examining Differences
Between Cyclical and Non-Cyclical Relationships**

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**Communication Aggression in Relationships: Examining Differences
Between Cyclical and Non-Cyclical Relationships**

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family, Oscar, Leslie, and Allison, who have always been by my side and have supported me even in my worst moments. Allison, never give up on your dreams – you are so beyond extraordinary. Mom and Dad, thanks for paying for this degree and still being proud that I've chosen to be a dog trainer.

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Communication Aggression in Relationships: Examining Differences Between Cyclical and Non-Cyclical Relationships

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This study examines the role of aggression in relationships, with special attention to cyclical relationships. Drawing from previous research on communication aggression, intimate partner violence, and cyclical relationships, a paper-and-pencil and online survey was conducted ($N=210$) which included multiple scales and measured communication aggression, relational uncertainty, conflict tactics, and the relationship between those factors and relationship type (cyclical or non-cyclical). Findings reveal: (a) higher levels of aggression in cyclical relationships, particularly psychological aggression and physical assault, (b) no association between communication aggression and any of the subtypes of cyclical relationships, and (c) a significant positive correlation between negotiation and certainty. The findings also provide insight regarding Dailey, et al.'s (2013) cyclical relationship subtypes. This study has implications for individuals who study aggression as well as those who study cyclical relationships.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Study Purpose

The visibility of relational struggles in the media has grown in recent years. Now, more than ever, the media shine a spotlight on relationship issues that were previously thought of as private and solely domestic. One example of this is Rihanna and Eminem's hit song "Love the Way You Lie," which was thought to reference Eminem's turbulent relationship with his ex-wife (Thaller & Messing, 2014). The single featured singer and celebrity Rihanna, who became a well-known face of intimate partner violence (IPV) after her then-partner battered her in 2009 and photos of the effects of the battering were published (Thaller & Messing, 2014). The video for "Love the Way You Lie" alone received 6.6 million views on YouTube in the first 24 hours of its release, raising interest and curiosity about IPV (Copsey, 2010). Similarly, television shows such as *Law and Order* and *Nashville* have featured plots revolving around partner violence, and in 2015 a Super Bowl commercial aired that featured a dramatized emergency dispatcher recording of a victim calling law enforcement on her abuser.

Romantic relationships can be complicated and difficult to manage. These relationships require negotiation and often develop rapidly. As intimate partner relationships change over time, different patterns of behavior emerge. One such pattern is that of cyclical relationships, also known as on-again/off-again relationships. These relationships bring their own set of challenges as partners must repeatedly negotiate their

relationship status and their partner's level of involvement in the relationship. Cyclical relationships are relatively common, with more than four in ten young adults experiencing a cyclical relationship in their present or most recent relationship (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010). These relationships have been defined as cyclical due to the pattern that occurs when relationships develop and dissolve more than once (Dailey, McCracken, Jin, Rossetto, & Green, 2013). Although prior research has focused on the relationships as linear (i.e., simply forming and then maintaining or dissolving), the high levels of occurrence of cyclical relationships has led to recent research on this phenomenon. Despite the potential benefits that researching cyclical relationships could provide, researchers have just begun to explore this pattern of relationships more deeply. Cyclical relationships have also been categorized into five distinct sub-types (Dailey et al., 2013). These subtypes have not been extensively studied although they do have unique characteristics.

Another pattern that might develop in relationships is aggression. Aggression can be exhibited communicatively or physically. Communication aggression has been defined as “any recurring set of messages that function to impair a person's enduring preferred self-image” and “encompasses all forms of communication (i.e., verbal, nonverbal, or acts of omission) that can be experienced as abusive or aggressive” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007, p. 303). Another form of aggression is physical, which is often examined as intimate partner violence (IPV). Approximately 33 million adults in the United States have been a victim of IPV (Harris Poll, 2006). In addition, roughly 6 in 10 adults state that they have known someone who has been in a relationship in which intimate partner

violence has occurred (Harris Poll, 2006). IPV occurs in all countries, regardless of social, cultural, economic or religious systems (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002). These harrowing statistics have led IPV to be classified as an epidemic in the United States (Amaro, 1995; Amaro, Fried, Cabral, & Zukerman, 1990; Cunningham, Stuffman, Dore, & Earls, 1994; Worth, 1989; Wyatt, 1991).

Relational uncertainty, a concept that can be traced to uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), is a phenomenon experienced in every relationship. Because we cannot foresee the future, our relationships can be full of uncertainty. The implications of uncertainty for intimate relationships are vast. Higher rates of uncertainty in relationships have been linked to jealousy (Afifi & Reichert, 1996; Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001) and a lower likelihood for partners to engage in relational maintenance behaviors (Dainton & Aylor, 2001) or to discuss sensitive topics (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Uncertainty has even been linked to divorce (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001).

Research has connected these three phenomena: cyclical relationships, communication aggression, and uncertainty. Cyclical relationships have been shown to have higher levels of communication aggression than non-cyclical relationships (Dailey, Pfiester, Beck, & Clark, 2009) and have been linked to physical violence (Halpern-Meehin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2013). Cyclical relationships have also been shown to have more uncertainty than non-cyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2010).

This study extends previous research by further exploring the links between communication aggression, cyclical relationships and their subtypes, and relational uncertainty. While researchers have found an association between cyclical relationships and communication aggression, communication aggression has not been studied in relationship to the individual subtypes of cyclical relationships. Using paper-and-pencil and online surveys, this study attempts to increase understanding of cyclical relationships and their association with aggression. The following research will provide background on communication aggression and intimate partner violence as well as provide a summary of the current research on cyclical relationships and uncertainty. In addition, the research will explore the link between aggression and cyclical relationships, with hopes of providing additional insight on these two relational patterns.

Inspiration for this study arose from prior research conducted on IPV, particularly in the college-age group. This group in particular has been the main focus for research on cyclical relationships and also has high rates of IPV, with physical aggression occurring in 20 to 30% of college student relationships, psychological aggression occurring in 50 to 80% of college student relationships, and sexual aggression occurring in 15 to 25% of college student relationships (Gover, Kaukinen, & Fox, 2008; Shorey, Stuart, & Cornelius, 2011). Thus, the study's sample included undergraduate students at an urban Southwestern university.

In sum, while research has examined the association between aggression, cyclical relationships, and relational uncertainty, more research is needed on cyclical relationships, particularly regarding the individual subtypes of cyclical relationships.

Family violence researchers have expressed a great need to examine conflict and communication patterns in relationships that exhibit partner violence (Jacobson et al., 1994; Lloyd, 1996; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996; Sabourin, 1996). This work extends the knowledge of not only communication aggression and IPV, but it is linked to the more-recently studied phenomenon of cyclical relationships. The research and findings discussed here open new avenues of knowledge for those experiencing aggression and practical applications for relational therapy and rehabilitation of relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The rationale for this study draws from literature on communication aggression, partner violence, cyclical relationships, and relational uncertainty. Thus, this chapter begins with a general overview of communication aggression and IPV, including multiple models used to illustrate the cycle of abuse. Next, an overview of cyclical relationships is reviewed, including the five distinct subtypes of cyclical relationships. Lastly, a brief overview of relational uncertainty is provided.

Aggression and Relationships: Prevalence and Effects

The topic of aggression is not new but the way it is defined has evolved as views have changed regarding verbal and nonverbal abuse in intimate relationships. For the first time in 1994, legislation was passed in relation to domestic violence. The Violence Against Women Act helped to improve responses by law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice field to domestic violence and sexual assault. The passage of Violence Against Women Act in 1994, and its reauthorization in 2000 and 2005, is helping to create awareness about intimate partner abuse. However, there is more work that must be done to understand aggression.

Although aggression in relationships has gained attention in the media, the exact statistics on aggression vary widely, likely due to underreporting of IPV based on stigma, fear of increased violence, and the fact that aggression such as IPV is an illegal activity (Emery, 2010). Exacerbating the issue of accurately determining the extent of aggression

is a problem with definitions. In fact, some do not realize they are the victims of aggression and are therefore, locked in abusive relationships without an understanding of their predicament. Pence and Paymar (1986) defined *IPV* as a “pattern of coercive control” (p. 118). Within this pattern, the abusers place their power over their victims using threats, isolation, intimidation, deprivation of resources such as money, and even physical violence (M. A. Dutton & Goodman, 2005). The World Health Organization defines IPV as “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 89). Sasseti (1993), also echoes that IPV should be understood as not only physical, but as episodes of emotional and psychological abuse that perpetrators use to maintain control over their partners.

While many consider types of aggression such as IPV something that happens only in the context of marriage, we now know that abuse can also happen to couples that live together or simply date, a phenomenon that complicates the term *domestic* which implies “in the home.” It is important to understand that IPV occurs across all social strata regardless of marital status, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and age (Koss, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988, 1996).

It is estimated that one in four women will experience some form of violence at the hands of their partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In 2000, former surgeon general Everett Koop labeled domestic violence “the number one health problem for women in the United States, causing more injuries to women than automobile accidents, muggings, and rapes combined” (as cited in Brooks & Silverstein, 1995, p. 283). However as

concerning as these statistics might be, the actual numbers may be even greater because these statistics reflect only reported violence (J. Wood, 2001). The American Medical Association believes the numbers are much higher and has labeled the problem a national “epidemic” (Reuters, 1995). According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2003), partner violence related injuries cost about \$5.8 billion annually in medical care. Rates and forms of partner violence vary widely across cultures (Kishor & Johnson, 2004). IPV is multidetermined and is predicted by a combination of risk factors rather than any one factor alone. The most consistent factors include experiencing or witnessing parental violence, having a low socioeconomic status, frequent consumption of alcohol, low assertiveness, low self-esteem, poor relational satisfaction, a history of verbal aggression, and a history of marital conflict (Feldman & Ridley, 1995).

Partner violence has many different effects on its victims. In addition to any physical injuries that might arise from the violence, there are other physical, psychological, and economic health risks (Giles-Sims, 1998). These effects vary in type and intensity, and include posttraumatic stress disorder (Arias & Pape, 1999; M. A. Dutton, Goodman, & Bennett, 1999; Street & Arias, 2001), lower self-esteem (Kirkwood, 1993; Marshall, 1999; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1996; Sackett & Saunders, 1999) and depression (M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Kent & Waller, 1998; Kent, Waller, & Dagnan, 1999; Migeot & Lester, 1996; Mullen et al., 1996; Pitzner & Drummond, 1997; Sackett & Saunders, 1999; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Anxiety and stress have also been associated with intimate partner violence (Briere, 1988; M. A. Dutton et al., 1999; Kent & Waller, 1998; Kent et al., 1999; Marshall, 1999), as have

eating disorders in females (Kent et al., 1999; Mullen et al., 1996) and suicidal ideation (Marshall, 1999). The economic associations with partner violence or aggression have been studied as well. Browne, Salomon, and Bassuk (1999) researched these associations and found that victims of domestic violence had “one third the odds of working at least 30 hours per week or 6 months or more during the following year as did women who had not experienced partner aggression.” Similarly, Brandwein (1998) and Lloyd (1997) found that victims of partner violence may struggle to work outside of the home as abusers often work against them by depriving their victims of transportation, refusing to make arrangements for alternative childcare, or harassing them while they are at work. Some abusers will even go as far as turning off alarm clocks so that their victims will be late to their place of work.

The effects of aggression are physical, psychological, and relational. Increased levels of hypertension have been discovered in males who are victims or perpetrators (Clark et al., 2014), however, no link to hypertension has been found for women. For those who are in partner abusive relationships while pregnant, consequences can include preterm birth (Silverman, Decker, Reed, & Raj, 2006) and low gestational weight (Moraes, Amorim, & Reichenheim, 2006). Additionally, people are more likely to be hit or killed in their own home by another family member than anywhere else or by anyone else (Gelles, 1974; Gelles & Straus, 1986, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Effects on relationships include less relational satisfaction (Marshall, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999) and a greater tendency to fear injury or death by their partner.

Research investigating the antecedents and effects of domestic violence and IPV has grown over the past three decades as the government and social organizations grapple with ways to treat IPV. The first articles on partner violence appeared in communication journals in the late 1980s (Cahn & Lloyd, 1996). Early work on this phenomenon includes Infante's (1989) article regarding verbal aggression as well as Stamp and Sabourin's (1995) article which identified a single-voiced monologue among abusive couples that privileged a discourse of autonomy rather than connectedness and rigidity rather than flexibility in their communication as compared to non-abusive couples. Stamp and Sabourin's (1995) article is one of only a handful of studies that exist on enacted talk between relational partners (Baxter, 2011). Other communication studies looked at how men account for their violent behavior and identified themes of justification, dissociation, and remorse informed by codes of manhood circulating in U.S. culture (S. M. Wood, 2004). Still, others turned their attention to the perspective of the victim. J. Wood (2000) looked at the discourse of abused women and concluded that the telling of their narrative stories helped move them from disempowerment toward empowerment. She identified a symbolic strategy of blamelessness that women use to make sense of their partner's violence. J. Wood (2001) also examined how women use narratives of gender and romance to make sense of their violent relationship.

Not Just Battered Women

Although research often characterizes the victim as female, this is not to imply that women are never violent against men. In the United States, studies have found that women and men often commit violent acts against each other such as hitting, shoving, or

throwing objects, and have found that the prevalence of these acts does not differ by gender (Archer, 2000, 2002; Brush, 1990, 2005; Frieze, 2005; McHugh & Frieze, 2006)

A number of studies investigated verbally aggressive communication via observation (Burman, John, & Margolin, 1992; Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Jacobson et al., 1994; Margolin, Michelli, & Jacobson, 1988; Sabourin, 1995) and via self report (Infante, 1987; Murphy & O’Learly, 1989; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993), and found that domestically violent persons couples have higher frequency of verbal aggression on the parts of both the husband and the wives, mutual verbal aggression, and feelings of anger, contempt, and frustration that were stronger and longer lasting during conflict-based communication.

In two representative national surveys (Straus et al., 1980; Street & Arias, 2001) approximately equal percentages of females (12%) and males (11%) reported being physically aggressive in some manner toward their intimate partner at least once in the past year. However, males tend to engage in more severe forms of aggression and inflict far greater physical harm than female partners (Ridley & Feldman, 2003).

Models of Abuse

Multiple models have been created to address the patterns of relationships that involve IPV. The most popular and widely used model of partner violence is the Power and Control Wheel (see Appendix A) (Pence & Paymar, 1986). This wheel does not explain the pattern of an abusive relationship, but instead outlines many of the tactics used by abusers to control their partner. Battering is only one small aspect of IPV and is characterized by the actions that abusers use to control or dominate their partner. The

words “power and control” are in the center of the wheel because they are the motivation behind abusers’ actions. The spokes of the wheel are the most common behaviors used by batterers. These include using coercion and threats, using intimidation, using emotional abuse, using isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming, using children, using male privilege, and using economic abuse. Many of these previous tactics are communicative in nature. Physical and sexual violence is the rim of the wheel, metaphorically holding the wheel together (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2015).

Although the power and control wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1986) is one of the most widely accepted and used models today, critics of the model have suggested that it is extremely feminist. Updated versions of the model have addressed these concerns and worked to move toward a more comprehensive model of IPV.

An older model of abuse is the Cycle of Abuse model (Walker, 1979), which includes four broad stages including the tension building stage, the incident stage, the reconciliation stage, and the calm stage. During the tension building stage, tension increases, communication breaks down, and the victim becomes nervous or fearful and begins trying to please the abuser. During the incident stage, verbal, emotional, and physical abuse occurs. This stage often includes anger, blaming, threats, intimidation, and other coercive actions by the abuser. During the reconciliation stage, the abuser apologizes and works to keep the relationship by providing excuses for their behavior, denying the abuse occurred, or downplaying the level of abuse. Lastly, during the calm stage the relationship is at its most “normal,” the incident is “forgotten,” and the

relationship is at its best. Following the calm stage, the cycle begins again as tensions build (Walker, 1979).

While some researchers found that Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse accurately described the experiences of the battered women that they had studied, others criticized her for her small research sample (D. G. Dutton & Golant, 1997). Originally, Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse model was used by clinicians to assess and explain violence experienced by women.

The final model of abuse is Heise's (1998) social ecological model (see Appendix B). This model includes a series of five circles, with the labels (from the inside of the circle out) individual, relationship, community, society, and larger society. This model gives a framework for approaching partner violence and suggests that to truly eliminate partner violence, and therefore IPV, one must work from all angles. At the larger society level, gender inequality, national and state laws, and sanction mechanisms regarding abuse must be reformed. At the societal level, patriarchal norms, acceptance of violence against women, rigid gender roles, and notions of masculinity linked to dominance must change. At the community level, poverty, unemployment, and isolation of women and family must change. Relationally, marital conflict, male control of decision making and finance, and the family structure must change (Heise, 1998). Lastly, at the individual level, intergenerational exposure to abuse, educational attainment, employment and income, and social networks outside of the family must change to support women (Heise, 1998).

Situational Couple Violence

Johnson (2008) has argued that there are four independent and distinct forms of partner violence. The term, IPV, overarches these four types of violence and is used as a general term. One form of partner violence is situational couple violence (Johnson, 2005). This violence is unique because it is not a typical general pattern of control and is often not as systematic as IPV (Johnson & Leone, 2005). This violence is most often characterized by verbal arguments that increase in intensity and become emotional or physical violence (Johnson & Leone, 2005). Situational couple violence is best understood through the framework of family conflict theory (Straus et al., 1980) in which “some kinds of family violence are considered acceptable under some conditions; and that, therefore, family conflicts will sometimes lead to violence” (Johnson & Leone, 2005, p. 324). This type of violence describes the most common form of partner violence (Johnson & Leone, 2005).

The other three types of intimate partner violence are intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and mutual violent resistance. With intimate terrorism, the partner is violent and controlling while the individual is not (Johnson, 2008). Intimate Terrorism is one-sided abuse, where the female is typically the victim. An intimate terrorist often uses physical violence in combination with psychological tactics to gain control over his partner (Johnson, 2008). This aggression is usually much more severe than situational couple violence, and many situations “there is more than just entrapment, there is terror” (Johnson, 2008, p. 5). In violent resistance, the partner is violent and controlling while the individual is violent, but not controlling. Violent resistance typically occurs in

response to an intimate terrorist. In mutual violent resistance, both the partner and the individual are violent and controlling. In this study, situational couple violence is most relevant.

One important thing to mention is that the aggression involved in all these types can range from verbal attacks to physical attacks. Therefore, the types of aggression are not defined by frequency or intensity, but by the relationship-level control context in which they are embedded. For example, intimate terrorism is embedded in a general pattern of control; situational couple violence is not (Johnson & Leone, 2005).

Cyclical Relationships

Past research has provided much insight into romantic relationships from short-term relationships to long-term relationships. Relationships are often thought of as linear, with a beginning, middle, and an end. One of the most widely accepted communication theories, Knapp's (1984) relational development model, views relationship development as a process involving multiple steps. These steps take relationships through the stages of coming together and coming apart. During the coming together stages, individuals are initiating the relationship through initial contact, experimenting by learning about one another and common interests, intensifying the relationship by labeling the relationship and becoming closer emotionally, integrating with each other by spending much of their time together, and bonding with each other by sharing life stages and possibly formalizing their relationship. During the coming apart stages, relationships differentiate when partners realize what they do not have in common, circumscribe by decreasing the amount of verbal interaction and information exchange, stagnate by stopping growth in

the relationship, avoid by spending time apart, and terminate by removing themselves from the relationship (Knapp, 1984).

Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) is similar, in that individuals initiating a relationship get to know each other through self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor (1987) compare people to onions with many layers. These layers include biographical data, preferences in clothes, foods, and music, goals and aspirations, religious convictions, deeply held fears and fantasies, and lastly, the concept of self. As individuals become more comfortable with their partner they share more information until they have reached the center of the onion, or the concept of the self. However, when exiting the relationship, partners begin to put up walls to decrease the intimacy; the partner is then removed from having access to the inner parts of the onion.

Although these theories on relational development are fairly complex, relational development might be much more complex than previously thought. While most research has defined relationships as either intact or terminated (Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999), many couples terminate their relationships and later initiate their relationship, often cycling through the process several times (Dailey et al., 2009). Traditional relational models, such as the relational development model and social penetration theory could potentially accommodate breakups and renewals, they do not explicitly address the possibility of relationships terminating and then renewing.

Cyclical relationships (on-again/off-again relationships) have been defined as relationships that go through periods of relational development and relationship dissolution more than once (Dailey et al., 2013). Prior research has found that cyclical

relationships are relatively common, with more than four in ten young adults experiencing a cyclical relationship in their present or most recent relationship (Dailey et al., 2009). Overall prevalence of these relationships is high, with over 60% of young adults experiencing a cyclical relationship at some point in their dating experiences (Dailey, Jin, Pfiester, & Beck, 2011). Although very common, these relationships have not been extensively studied.

Cyclical relationships differ from non-cyclical relationships in many ways. Partners in cyclical relationships report more negative aspects in their relationships compared to those in non-cyclical relationships, and fewer positive aspects compared to those in non-cyclical relationships. (Dailey et al., 2009; Dailey et al., 2010) Current research supports that partners who are involved in cyclical relationships have lower levels of relational quality than non-cyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2009; Dailey et al., 2010; Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013) and higher rates of relational distress (Vennum & Johnson, 2014). Previous research has emphasized the important role of relational uncertainty in cyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2010), and how relational uncertainty is linked with topic avoidance (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985) and less relational satisfaction (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Roloff & Ifert, 1998). In addition, those in cyclical relationships reported stressors in the relationship including doubt and uncertainty (Dailey et al., 2011). Relational uncertainty has also been linked to more negative emotions and has been linked to increased jealousy between partners (Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009). Hence, overall, relational uncertainty may be one of the reasons for cyclical partners' lower relational quality.

Of particular importance to this study, cyclical relationships have been shown to have higher levels of communication aggression than non-cyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2009), and recent literature has suggested that cyclical relationships are more likely than non-cyclical relationships to include both physical and verbal abuse (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Dailey et al. (2009) also found that those reporting more renewals in their relationship also reported more conflict and communication aggression. Recent research has concluded that those in cyclical relationships were twice as likely as those in traditional relationships to report physical violence occurring in their relationships (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). In addition, research suggests that having a cyclical relationship could be an indicator of distress in the relationship (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Due to these findings, my first hypothesis (H_1) addresses the levels of aggression (including ineffective negotiation, psychological, and physical) in both cyclical and non-cyclical relationships.

H_1 : Cyclical relationships will have higher levels of aggression than non-cyclical relationships.

Cyclical Relationship Subtypes

Cyclical relationships have been categorized into five distinct types: (a) habitual, (b) mismatched, (c) capitalized-on-transitions, (d) gradual separation, and (e) controlling partner (Dailey et al., 2013). Partners involved in a *habitual* cyclical relationship fall back into the relationship without much discussion regarding the transitions between

being together and being apart. These relationships are often renewed out of convenience and comfort. Partners involved in a *mismatched* cyclical relationship have different internal and or external qualities, such as personality, distance, contrasting schedules, and so on. Partners involved in the *capitalized-on-transitions* type of cyclical relationship use transitions to test and change the relationship. These partners also report greater relational quality than other types of cyclical relationships. Those in the *gradual separation* type of cyclical relationships often find that their relationship fades away and ends. Lastly, those in *controlling partner* relationships often have one partner who is in charge and uses manipulation, power and control, to control the other partner in the relationship (Dailey et al., 2013).

These five distinct subtypes of cyclical relationships have been identified, but their relationship with aggression has not been explored in past studies. The mismatched, capitalized on transitions, and gradual separation subtypes do not reflect any part of the power and control wheel, and thus, partners in these types are less likely to report communication aggression. However, the controlling partner and perhaps also the habitual cyclical relationship subtypes resemble the power and control wheel and Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse model used to describe relationships with high levels of intimate terrorism. As previously mentioned, the power and control wheel outlines the coercive methods most used in intimate terrorist relationships. The controlling subtype, in which, one partner takes the role of controlling and the other as controlled, coincides with Johnson's (2006) characterization of an intimate terrorist. In intimate terrorist relationships, the controlling partner then uses multiple avenues to control their partner,

including controlling finances, isolating the controlled individual from family and friends, teaching the children to treat the controlled a certain way or holding custody issues over the controlled, and more (Johnson, 2006). In relationships involving abuse, the abused is already isolated from family and friends and often the abused is afraid of what will happen to their children if they leave, is unable to leave due to financial constraints, or is unable to imagine that there are other relational options, thinking that they likely will not find anyone else who is better for them (Johnson, 2006). Instead, they follow the controlling sub-type route and stay with their partner due to a lack of options. Using manipulation to control a partner is also outlined in the cycle of abuse (Walker, 1979), as the partner continually cycles through tension building, the incident, reconciliation, and a stage of calm in which the relationship cycle begins again.

The habitual sub-type also has parallels with the cycle of abuse model (Walker, 1979). Past research has characterized habitual relationships as relationships that renew due to comfort or lack of other options (Dailey et al., 2013). Individuals who were interviewed in Dailey et al.'s (2013) study reported knowing that the relationship would not last, and even made statements that reflected the cycle of abuse, stating that "when we first got back together.... things were peachy keen, but then things just fell back into the same old routine" (Dailey et al., 2013, p. 387). In the cycle of abuse model (Walker, 1979), couples often dissolve their relationships due to distress and then later reconcile when things are calm and appear less tense. Couples in the habitual sub-type repeatedly get back together due to lack of other options, despite whether or not the relationship has

multiple negative aspects (Dailey et al., 2013). One reason for their lower relational quality might be the occurrence of aggression in the relationship.

Due to the prior research and links between the aspects of controlling and habitual cyclical relationships and the aspects of relationships involving aggression, my second hypothesis addresses aggression (i.e., ineffective negotiation, psychological, physical aggression) in cyclical relationship subtypes.

H2: There will be higher perceived levels of aggression in controlling and habitual relationships than in relationships that capitalize on transitions, are mismatched, or are gradually separating.

Uncertainty

Relational uncertainty has been defined as the degree of confidence in perceptions of involvement in relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). Relational uncertainty has been found to be prevalent in cyclical relationships, as uncertainty increases with each renewal (Dailey et al., 2009). Cyclical relationships often face periods of uncertainty (Dailey et al., 2010), often leading to dissolution of the relationship, followed by periods of certainty that lead to resolution. Research regarding cyclical relationships has found that these partners report more uncertainty in their relationships than those in non-cyclical relationships (Dailey et al., 2010). Relational uncertainty has been linked to the tendency to view relational irritations as much more serious (Knobloch, 2004), having more extreme emotional reactions to events (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b, 2003), changes in sexual intimacy (Solomon & Theiss, 2007), and

jealousy (Knobloch et al., 2001). Stanley, Knopp, Rhoades, and Markman (2014) have argued that relational uncertainty may lead partners to stay in relationships to which they are not dedicated. Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse alludes at the presence of uncertainty, as it contains phases with tension and incidents, followed by reconciliation and calm. When a relationship moves through emotional stages, such as in the cycle of abuse, uncertainty about the relationship often arises. In particular, periods of tension and incidents increase uncertainty, as the partner can be unpredictable. Additionally, Johnson (2006) stated that relationships that are categorized as intimately violent often go through periods of uncertainty, where the abuser must convince the abused to continue the relationship.

Although Knobloch, et al. (2007) found that partners in relationships involving relational uncertainty perceived more threat and anger in their relationships, the link between aggression and uncertainty has not been extensively researched.

Therefore, hypothesis three (H_3) addresses the link between these two variables.

H3: Relational uncertainty will be positively associated with perceived levels of aggression.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The foregoing literature review discussed the importance of researching aggression, particularly in relation to new literature about cyclical relationships. Due to the negative effects of partner aggression and its high prevalence, it is important that research on partner aggression continues as research on relationships grows and evolves. The introduction of the research on cyclical relationships is of particular interest as past studies have indicated that communication aggression is often present in these types of relationships (Dailey, 2009), as is physical abuse (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013) and uncertainty (Dailey, 2009).

This chapter will explain in detail the study's design and the procedures that were used to collect data. The study design and statistical analysis will be discussed.

Participants

Undergraduate students at an urban Southwestern university ($N = 210$; 61 men and 146 women) ranging in age from 18 to 29 years ($M = 21$ years; $SD = 1.8$ years) volunteered to participate. The participants were given the opportunity to complete the study whether they were currently in a relationship or not. Of the participants, 30% ($n=63$) were reporting on a past relationship, while 70% ($n=147$) were reporting on a current relationship. Fifty-five participants (26%) considered their relationship an on-again-off-again (cyclical) relationship. The average length of all relationships was 603 days (1.6 years) and the relationships were renewed an average of 2 times. The ethnicity

of the sample included 57% ($n = 119$) Caucasian, 3% ($n = 7$) African American, 21% ($n = 44$) Asian/Pacific Islander, 19% ($n = 40$) other.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin. Following approval, participants for the study were solicited from an undergraduate, communication major participant pool. The study was advertised by instructors of undergraduate courses. Students received extra credit for participating in the study. Using parallel versions of the same survey, those who were currently dating received a survey asking about their current partner, and those who had recently terminated a relationship were given a survey asking about their most recent romantic partner. Students who completed the survey online ($n = 195$) had identical questionnaires to those who did the paper and pencil survey ($n = 15$). Although dyadic data are not assessed in the current study, students were asked to bring their current or past relational partner with them to the paper and pencil surveys if possible, and were given additional extra credit if they did so. Those who completed the survey online were also offered additional extra credit if their partner completed the survey as well. Partners were encouraged to not interact with each other while completing the survey and were seated apart in the room.

Measures

The survey assessed aggression, cyclical relationships, relationship type, and relational uncertainty. These measures were randomized to mitigate order effects by the construction of multiple versions of the questionnaire.

Aggression

Aggression was measured using the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The Conflict Tactics Scale measures the prevalence of physical and psychological abuse in a relationship and has been used widely in studies on IPV (Straus et al., 1996). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale is composed of five subscales (Straus et al., 1996). The first subscale, Negotiation, focuses on how the partners respond to emotional issues in their relationship by asking about patterns of communication within the relationship. The Psychological Aggression subscale asks participants about times that their partner acted aggressive in verbal and non-verbal ways, but excludes physical violence (Straus et al., 1996). The Physical Assault subscale measures the frequency in which the participant was assaulted physically by their partner, including kicking, punching, grabbing, assault by a weapon, and more. The fourth subscale is the Sexual Coercion subscale, which measures times that the participant's partner committed sexual assault on the participant. Lastly, the Injury subscale measures the frequency of injury of the participant by the partner in the relationship (Straus et al., 1996).

For this survey, the Negotiation scale, the Psychological Aggression scale, and the Physical Assault scale were used due to the focus on communication and physical aggression in the relationship (see Appendix C). The total number of items in the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale is 39, but only 26 were used in our study. The participant was asked to indicate how many times their partner had done these things within the past year. The participant then used a response scale of 0 to 7 to rate how often their partner had

done the acts described. In this scale, 0 = *this has never happened*, 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*, and 7 = *not in the past year, but it has happened before*. Once the data were collected, they were recoded as suggested in Straus et al. (1996), with the midpoints for the response categories being represented in the coding (i.e., If a participant chose “3”, which means that their partner had committed the act 3-5 times in the past year, the midpoint of 4 was used) with 1 = 0, 2 = 1, 3 = 2, 4 = 4, 5 = 8, 6 = 15, 7 = 25, and 0=0. These values were then separated into their subscales and added to create an overall score for each participant in each of the subscales (negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault), where higher scores indicate higher incidences of negotiation within the relationship ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 74.31$, $SD = 47.09$, $Mdn = 66.5$, ranging from 0 to 150), higher scores indicate higher frequencies of psychological aggression within the relationship ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 21.15$, $SD = 33.21$, $Mdn = 6$, ranging from 0 to 200), and higher scores indicate higher levels of physical assault within the relationship ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 6.05$, $SD = 27.87$, $Mdn = 0$, ranging from 0 to 300). Importantly, because the items for negotiation are worded such that higher scores indicate better relationship functioning, we would expect the associations between negotiation and the variables of interest in this study to be the opposite as those for the psychological and physical aggression variables.

Normality tests were run for all subscales using the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine whether data was normal. All of the scales were nonparametric ($p < .05$). As such, these variables were split into groups for H2 and H3. The negotiation scale was

recoded into three groups, ‘low’ ($n = 66$), ‘medium’ ($n = 73$), and ‘high’ ($n = 67$) (low negotiation scores = 0 – 43, medium negotiation scores = 44 – 90, high negotiation scores = 91+). The psychological aggression scale was split into three groups: ‘no psychological aggression’ ($n = 71$), ‘low psychological aggression’ ($n = 63$) and ‘medium psychological aggression’ ($n = 69$) (no psychological aggression = 0 - 2, low psychological aggression = 3 -14, medium psychological aggression = 15+). Lastly, the physical assault scale was split into two groups, ‘no physical aggression’ ($n = 146$) and ‘some physical aggression’ ($n = 57$) (no physical aggression = 0, some physical aggression = 1+).

Cyclical Relationships

Participants were asked whether or not they considered their relationships to be on-again/off-again (cyclical; see Table 1, see Appendix D). If they responded yes to this question, they were asked to read through five paragraphs (see Appendix E) and indicate which paragraph best described their relationship (see Table 2). These five paragraphs described the five types of cyclical relationships as outlined by Dailey et al. (2013).

Table 1

Cyclical and Non-Cyclical Relationships

	Frequency	%
Yes	55	26.6
No	152	73.4
Total	207	100

Table 2

Cyclical Relationship Type

	Frequency	%
Habitual	3	5.4
Mismatched	19	34.4
Capitalizing on Transitions	18	32.6
Gradually Separating	6	10.9
Controlling	9	16.3

Relational Uncertainty

Knobloch, Miller, Bond, and Mannone's (2007) 12-item scale measures participants level of relationship uncertainty on a scale from 1 (*completely or almost completely uncertain*) to 6 (*completely or almost completely certain*). Participants currently in a relationship were asked to complete the questionnaire about their current relational uncertainty, and asked those who had recently terminated their relationships to complete the questionnaire about their level of uncertainty during their past relationship. This measure has three subscales: Self uncertainty, Partner Uncertainty, and Relationship Uncertainty (see Appendix F). All items were reverse scored and combined into one variable of relational uncertainty ($\alpha = .96$ $M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.29$).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Aggression by Relationship Type

Hypothesis 1 (H_1) suggested that cyclical relationships will have higher levels of aggression than non-cyclical relationships. To address relationship status (i.e., partner responses might vary based on whether they are currently together or have experienced a breakup), the data were split into two separate data sets, one including only participants reporting on current relationships and the other including only participants reporting on past relationships. Due to the aggression variables being skewed, independent sample mann-whitney U-tests were run for each of the scales in the two categories. For those who reported on a past relationship, the level of negotiation was not significant, $z = -.243$, $p = .808$, the level of psychological aggression was not significant, $z = -.132$, $p = .895$, and the level of physical assault was not significant, $z = -.540$, $p = .589$. For those who reported on a current relationship, the level of negotiation was not significant, $z = -.497$, $p = .620$, the level of psychological aggression was significant, $z = -4.673$, $p < .05$, with those in cyclical relationships having a mean rank of 107.54 and those in noncyclical relationships having a mean rank of 66.11, and the level of physical assault was significant, $z = -3.520$, $p < .05$, with those in cyclical relationships having a mean rank of 94.63 and those in noncyclical relationships having a mean rank of 69.15.

Cyclical Relationship Subtypes

Five subtypes of cyclical relationships were outlined in Dailey et al. (2013). These five types include the habitual type, mismatched type, capitalizing on transitions type, gradually separating type, and controlling type. Hypothesis 2 (H2) suggested that there will be higher perceived levels of aggression in controlling and habitual relationships than in relationships that capitalize on transitions, are mismatched, or are gradually separating. To address this hypothesis, a chi-square test was conducted to assess the relationship between aggression and the sub-types of cyclical relationships. The independent variable, the type of cyclical relationship, included five subtypes: habitual, mismatched capitalizing on transitions, gradually separating, and controlling. The dependent variables were the categorical variables of negotiation, psychological aggression, or physical assault in the relationship. Due to the low number of those in cyclical relationships, those in current and past relationships were assessed together.

None of the tests were significant. There was no significant association between negotiation and the sub-types, $\chi^2(8, n = 54) = 8.67, p = .37$. There was no significant relationship between psychological aggression and the five sub-types, $\chi^2(8, n = 52) = 3.68, p = .88$. Lastly, there was no significant relationship between physical aggression and the sub-types, $\chi^2(4, n = 50) = 2.62, p = .62$.

Relational Uncertainty

Hypothesis 3 (H3) suggested that relational uncertainty will be positively associated with perceived levels of communication aggression. ANOVAs were run for all three scales. The categorical variables of negotiation, psychological aggression, and

physical aggression served as the independent variables, and relational uncertainty served as the dependent variable. Current relationship status (i.e., current vs. past relationship) was included as a control variable.

There was a significant relationship between negotiation and uncertainty $F(2, 199) = 12.96, p < .001$. A post hoc Tukey test revealed that low negotiation differed significantly at $p < .05$ ($M = 3.28$) than the medium ($M = 2.54$) and high ($M = 2.50$) negotiation groups. There was no significant relationship between psychological aggression and uncertainty, $F(2, 196) = 0.31, p = .733$. There was also no significant relationship between physical assault and uncertainty, $F(1, 197) = 0.01, p = .926$.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Aggression in relationships is an unfortunate occurrence. Prior research estimates that 66% of university-aged students in dating relationships have experienced intimate partner violence (Smith et al., 2003). Partner violence occurs across all demographics (Koss, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988, 1996), and it is estimated that one in four women will experience some form of violence at the hands of their partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Due to the prevalence and impact of partner aggression (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995; Kishor & Johnson, 2004; Reuters, 1995; Smith et al., 2003), it is important for researchers to better understand this phenomenon within relationships, particularly to assist those who are currently or have previously been involved in a relationship that contains aggression. The objective of this study was to approach aggression from a new perspective to contribute to research about its risk factors. Thus, this study drew from recent research on cyclical relationships and examined the association between aggression, cyclical relationship subtypes, and relational uncertainty.

Previous studies on cyclical relationships suggest that cyclical relationships are predictors of distress in a relationship. (Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013). However, specific cyclical relationship subtypes have not been assessed as predictors of aggression. Interestingly, findings of this study showed no associations between relational uncertainty and negotiation, psychological aggression or physical assault.

Communication Aggression in Cyclical Relationships

Consistent with previous research (Dailey, Rossetto, Pfiester, & Surra, 2009; Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013), this study's findings showed that cyclical relationships have higher perceived rates of aggression. However, this study was more in-depth, analyzing not only relationship type (cyclical or noncyclical) and perceived levels of aggression, but breaking down aggression into three subscales. This study also analyzed how those reporting on a past relationship and those reporting on a current relationship differ in terms of perceived levels of aggression in their relationships.

When separately analyzing those who were currently dating and those reporting on a past relationship, findings showed that only current daters had higher rates of psychological aggression and physical assault in their relationships. Those in the group reporting on past cyclical relationships, however, did not have significantly higher rates of aggression in their relationships. This finding is interesting because it opens the door for more research on how individuals perceive past relationships. Researchers could study the ways in which people reflect on current as compared to past relationships. For example, a longitudinal study could be created in which researchers study perceived aggression in cyclical couples during 'on' and 'off' periods of the relationships. It would also be interesting to go into more depth on why the individuals who have higher perceived rates of psychological aggression and physical assault in relationships that continue to renew. Other research might draw on Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse, where the partners go through a period of tension building, the incident, reconciliation, and then calm before starting the cycle over.

This study was the first to examine possible differences between the cyclical relationship subtypes and aggression. Although this study did not find an association between cyclical relationship subtype and the three types of aggression, it still extends the literature by providing a new line of thought connecting aggression and cyclical relationship subtypes, particularly because the description of the controlling subtype of cyclical relationships and Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse contain many similarities. The controlling subtype of cyclical relationships is described as:

One partner in our relationship seemed to be more in control. This partner typically initiated the breakups as well as the renewals, and he/she also seemed to have more influence on the progression of the relationship. At least one of us had hesitations about renewing even though the other partner was fairly persistent about getting back together. At times, the interactions in our relationship were hostile or aggressive, and our breakups tended to include conflicts that escalated to a breaking point. Overall, the power in our relationship seemed to be imbalanced (Dailey et al., 2013, p. 409).

Similarly, "hostile or aggressive" interactions are present during the tension building and incident stages of the cycle of abuse (Walker, 1979), with conflicts escalating to "a breaking point". Then, during the reconciliation and calm phases, the abusive partner is persistent about continuing the relationship or getting back together.

None of the sub-types were significant in relation to aggression. However, this could be explained by the sample size given that only 55 participants reported having this

relationship type. Within these 55 participants, the controlling sub-type had only three respondents, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions.

Relational Uncertainty

Although previous research has linked characteristics of communication aggression (anger, self threat, relational threat) with uncertainty (Knobloch et al, 2007), this study showed a lack of robust findings between aggression and uncertainty. Overall, there was an association between uncertainty and negotiation in that those who reported low levels of negotiation also reported higher relational uncertainty. This parallels previous research on relational uncertainty which has shown that partners who report higher levels of uncertainty view relational irritations as much more serious (Knobloch, 2004), have more extreme reactions to events (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b, 2003), experience changes in sexual intimacy (Solomon & Theiss, 2007), and experience more jealousy (Knobloch et al, 2001). Greater relational uncertainty is also correlated with higher levels of anger, self-threat, and relational-threat (Knobloch et al., 2007). The findings in this research study are meaningful because they have implications for relational therapists who are working with couples who experience aggression in their relationships. By teaching couples how to better negotiate, relational therapists may be able to prevent or lessen communicative aggression and uncertainty in relationships. Future studies should expand on this to further understand the role of negotiation in relationships with aggression, and how increased or decreased levels of uncertainty impact the level of aggression within the relationship.

Limitations

All research has limitations, and this study is no exception. The findings of this study do have minor implications for future research, but they must be understood as having limitations as well. This study unfortunately had a smaller sample size than preferred. This small sample size is one of the key limitations, as it produced an even smaller sample size of those who considered themselves to have cyclical relationships, and when broken into groups of those reporting on current relationships and those reporting on past relationships, the sample size became even more limiting. In addition, due to the skew of the CTS variables, they were split into categories in order to conduct the analyses. The splits for negotiation and psychological aggression were based on frequencies (i.e., splitting into relatively even numbered groups), and physical aggression was split into no aggression or some aggression given the high number of those who had not experienced aggression. Thus, the creation of these categorical variables was not theoretical, and it is not ideal to include, for example, people who have experienced two acts of physical aggression and people who have experienced 50 acts of physical aggression in the same category.

All participants were students at a large Southwestern university, and although ethnically and socially different, it would be interesting to broaden the study to those who are from other educational and socio-economic backgrounds, as culture may play a role in how individuals interpret partner aggression. Although intimate partner violence has been found to affect individuals regardless of socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity, Garcia et al. (2005) found the highest rates of partner violence among highly acculturated

women. An additional limitation is that research on cyclical relationships, particularly the sub-types of cyclical relationships, is new and the measure is not well validated. This could have led to a misrepresentation of the five subtypes of cyclical relationships. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study do have implications for this budding area of research by providing new ideas about both cyclical relationships and aggression.

Directions for Future Research

As future research is conducted on cyclical relationships, there are many areas to continue to explore and many additional questions to be answered. This study was the first to explore cyclical relationship sub-types and aggression, and there are plenty of different ways to continue the research regarding that link. As mentioned above, researchers should consider focusing on the types of cyclical relationships, examining closely if any of the types might be a predictor of aggression. Looking specifically at the controlling subtype, there are opportunities to better understand both cyclical relationships and aggression through additional research on the controlling sub-type of cyclical relationships and Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse.

Abuse is often understood as a cycle (Walker, (1979), as are cyclical relationships. Researchers should consider examining cyclical relationships by interviewing women in battered women's shelters to obtain a new view on cyclical relationships. By interviewing those currently or previously involved in relationships with aggression about whether or not their relationship was cyclical, researchers may gain insight into possible predictors of partner violence. In addition, gained information about the sub-types of cyclical relationships and their relationship with partner violence

may provide these shelters with additional screening and education materials to provide individuals who are seeking their help.

Uncertainty and aggression are under-researched. With previous studies showing a positive correlation between uncertainty and aggression, this study shows only one significant relationship between the aggression variables (i.e., negotiation) and uncertainty, raising questions as to why. A methodological explanation is that the aggression variables were split into groups arbitrarily, lacking a theoretical base, and therefore some participants with different levels of aggression were grouped together (e.g., a participant who has experienced one act of physical violence is grouped with a person who has experienced ten acts of physical violence). This study also had participants from two groups: those who were reporting on a current relationship, and those who were reporting on a past relationship; the language in the uncertainty scale, however, was not changed based on whether they were reporting on a past or current relationship (ie. all participants were asked “How certain are you about the status of this relationship?”). It is possible that those reporting on a past relationship were overall less uncertain because their romantic relationship was completely dissolved. Even those participants who had experienced high levels of psychological or physical aggression in their past relationships may have low levels of uncertainty because they are confident about the status of their relationship (e.g., they are certain that they do not want to initiate a relationship with that individual, and they are certain about their view of and goals for the relationship). Researchers should consider further exploring uncertainty and

aggression in different types of relationships separately to better understand how they relate to each other.

Conclusion

Despite the extensive research that has been done on IPV, research on cyclical relationships is recent and the link between the two has not been extensively explored. This study examined the similarities between relationships containing aggression and cyclical relationships, suggesting that aggression may also be cyclical. Communication aggression and relational uncertainty are present in both IPV and cyclical relationships, suggesting that these relationships have more in common than what is presently known. As cyclical relationships are just beginning to be explored, the research on cyclical relationships can have implications for prevention and education on aggression. Consequently, it is essential that researchers continue to broaden their understanding of cyclical relationships and aggression with hope that the knowledge gained can assist in understanding romantic relationships and intimate partner violence.

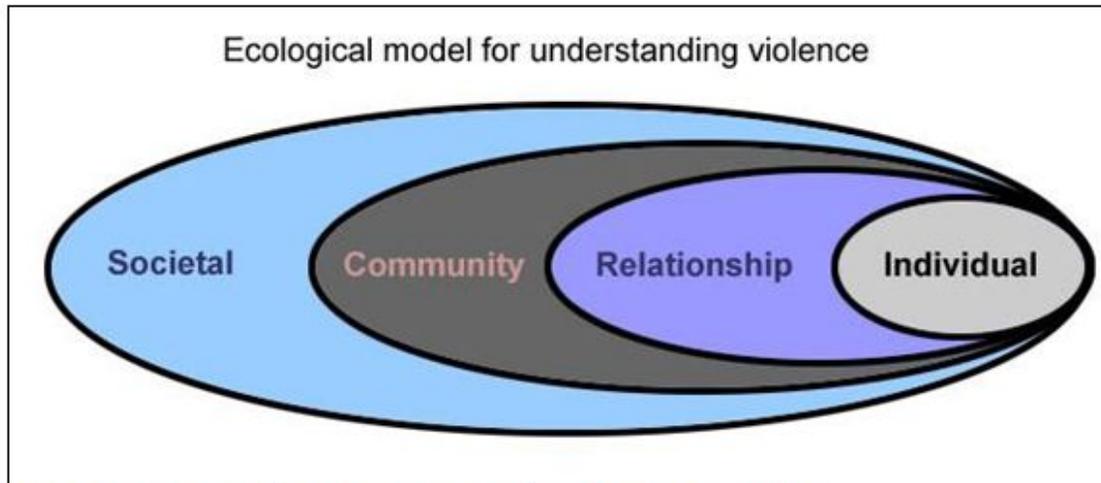
Appendix A



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT

202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781
www.duluth-model.org

Appendix B



Source: Heise et al., 1999; Krug et al., 2002; CDC, 2004

Ecological Model for Understanding Violence. 2015

Appendix C

Instructions: 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 your partner did these things in the past year. If your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before that, note “7.”

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 before

0 = This has never happened

1. _____ My partner showed me that s/he cared even though we disagreed.
2. _____ My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue.
3. _____ My partner said s/he was sure we could work out a problem.
4. _____ My partner explained his/her side of a disagreement to me.
5. _____ My partner suggested a compromise to a disagreement.
6. _____ My partner agreed to try a solution to a disagreement I suggested.
7. _____ My partner insulted or swore at me.
8. _____ My partner shouted or yelled at me.
9. _____ My partner stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.
10. _____ My partner said something to spite me.
11. _____ My partner called me fat or ugly.
12. _____ My partner destroyed something belonging to me.
13. _____ My partner accused me of being a lousy lover.

14. _____ My partner threatened to hit or throw something at me.
15. _____ My partner threw something at me that could hurt.
16. _____ My partner twisted my arm or hair.
17. _____ My partner pushed or shoved me.
18. _____ My partner grabbed me.
19. _____ My partner slapped me.
20. _____ My partner used a knife or gun on me.
21. _____ My partner punched or hit me with something that could hurt.
22. _____ My partner choked me.
23. _____ My partner slammed me against a wall.
24. _____ My partner beat me up.
25. _____ My partner burned or scalded me on purpose.
26. _____ My partner kicked me.

Appendix D

PLEASE THINK ABOUT YOUR **CURRENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP** AND YOUR PARTNER WHEN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

What is your romantic partner's sex? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your partner's age? _____

What is your partner's ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

_____ African-American or Black _____ Hispanic or Latino/a
_____ Asian or Pacific Islander _____ Middle Eastern
_____ Caucasian/White _____ Native American
_____ Other, please specify _____

When did you first start dating this romantic partner?
If you can't recall exactly, please approximate. Date:

How would you characterize your relationship now? Please choose only one.

_____ We are casually dating
_____ We are seriously dating
_____ We are in a long-term, committed relationship
_____ We are engaged
_____ We are in a domestic partnership
_____ We are married

How much contact have you had with your partner in the past 30 days?

I had no interaction with my partner at all		I sometimes interacted with my partner		I interacted with my partner every day		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Are you currently cohabitating/living with this partner?

_____ No
_____ Yes

Do you consider this a long-distance relationship?

_____ No
_____ Yes

If yes: Approximately how far (in miles) do you live from your partner? _____

Is this romantic relationship an “on-again/off-again” relationship? In other words, has this relationship broken up and renewed once or more?

_____ No → You have finished **PART 1**. Please *skip* to **PART 2** and proceed.

_____ Yes → Please continue to the next page.

What is your sex? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your age? _____

What is your ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

_____ African-American or Black _____ Hispanic or Latino/a

_____ Asian or Pacific Islander _____ Middle Eastern

_____ Caucasian/White _____ Native American

_____ Other, please specify _____

Appendix E

COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF YOUR CURRENT RELATIONSHIP IS AN ON-AGAIN/OFF-AGAIN RELATIONSHIP.

How many times have you and your partner renewed your relationship? _____

Who initiated your most recent renewal?

I initiated
the renewal

We mutually
initiated the renewal

My partner initiated
the renewal

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

What do you think are the chances that you'll ever break up again? _____

Very little chance
we'll break up again

I'm uncertain if we'll
break up again

Very good chance
we'll break up again

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Please read through the following paragraphs and indicate which one BEST describes your on-off relationship. It may not be a perfect description, but indicate which one comes closest.

_____ My partner and I tended to breakup and renew without a lot of discussion or drama. Our breakup(s) and renewal(s) seemed to be part of habitual cycle which didn't require much discussion about the nature of our relationship. It was relatively easy for us to get back into our old patterns when we got back together. Yet, I wasn't always clear about when we officially broke up or got back together. And to be honest, I maintained the relationship with my partner because it was just easier to be with my partner than to look for a new partner or be by myself.

_____ There was always something mismatched in our relationship. Either it was circumstances such as living in different cities, school, or family and friend influences, or we had different goals or desires for the relationship. Our relationship would not have had an on-off nature if it had not been for certain circumstances. At certain points, the timing just wasn't right in our relationship. Overall, my partner and I cared about each other, but circumstances or having different views on the relationship kept getting in the way.

_____ Overall, the breakup(s) and renewal(s) helped to improve our relationship. The relationship got better because the breakups led to changes in ourselves or the relationship. When renewing, we openly discussed our past relationship issues in hopes of resolving them. And I was confident that we would stay together after we renewed because of these changes. We would not be as committed as we are today if it weren't for those experiences.

_____ My partner and I tried to make our relationship work, but we came to realize that we just weren't meant to be together. Over time, we had less interest in the relationship, and we gradually drifted apart. I think we both put less effort into the relationship as it progressed. With each breakup, I increasingly felt that the relationship was over.

_____ One partner in our relationship seemed to be more in control. This partner typically initiated the breakups as well as the renewals, and he/she also seemed to have more influence on the progression of the relationship. At least one of us had hesitations about renewing even though the other partner was fairly persistent about getting back together. At times, the interactions in our relationship were hostile or aggressive, and our breakups tended to include conflicts that escalated to a breaking point. Overall, the power in our relationship seemed to be imbalanced.

How well does the paragraph you selected describe your relationship?

Does not describe
our relationship
very well

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Describes our
relationship very
well

Appendix F

Instructions: Please rate how certain you are about the degree of involvement that you and your partner have in your relationship at this time. Please note, we are not asking you to rate how much involvement there is in your relationship, but rather how certain you are about whatever degree of involvement you perceive.

How certain are you about...	Completely or Almost Completely UNCERTAIN					Completely or Almost Completely CERTAIN
1. How I feel about this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. My view of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. How important this relationship is to me?	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. My goals for the future of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. How my partner feels about this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. My partner's view of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. How important this relationship is to my partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. My partner's goals for the future of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6

How certain are you about...	Completely or Almost Completely UNCERTAIN Completely or Almost Completely CERTAIN 					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. How I can or cannot behave around my partner						
The status of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. The definition of this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. The future of this relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6

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