

Going the Distance: Romantic Relationship Satisfaction and
Quality among Endurance Sports Participants

by

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships are often viewed as an important, meaningful part of a person's life. Most romantic relationships do not last forever. Research regarding romantic relationship satisfaction and quality have thus grown. The purpose of this study was to determine whether individuals who train for endurance events such as running, cycling, or triathlons with their romantic partner have greater relationship satisfaction and quality than do individuals who do not train with their romantic partner. Participants, 54 males and 60 females whose mean age was 33.4, completed a demographic questionnaire, the Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI), the Perceived Relationship Quality Component (PRQC), the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), and the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS). Of these 114 participants, 52 trained with their romantic partner. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that individuals who trained with their romantic partner reported higher relationship satisfaction and quality compared to those that did not train for an endurance event with their romantic partner. There were no statistically significant differences in relationship satisfaction or relationship quality between men and women or between married individuals and dating individuals. These findings suggest that couples may benefit from engaging in shared activities.

This thesis is dedicated with eternal gratitude and appreciation to my family, close friends, and triathlon buddies who were relentless in providing their support, faith, motivation, and love.

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Chapter 1

The Problem in Perspective

When people are asked about what makes their lives meaningful, what contributes to their happiness, and what they value, they frequently identify close relationships (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2006). According to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belongingness, humans have a strong need to maintain a minimum number of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. As noted by Demir (2008), romantic relationships, one type of interpersonal relationship, are an important part of most individual's lives.

Researchers have identified different characteristics of romantic relationships. For example, Berschied and Reis (1998) found that romantic relationships often are viewed as interactions in which the partners have exhibited a strong, mutual influence on each other's behavior for an extended period of time. Furthermore, romantic relationships may be perceived as including a deep, emotional connection with another person (Banker, Kaestle, & Allen, 2010), as well as exemplifying love for one's partner (Banker et al., 2010; Berscheid & Reis, 1998).

Not all romantic relationships last forever as approximately 50% of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce (Crouch & Arnold, 2005). Some romantic partners experiencing relationship distress choose to participate in couples counseling; however, Halford and Snyder (2012) found that 25% to 30% of couples who attend counseling together do not exhibit significant improvement in their relationship. This may be due to couple-based counseling primarily focusing on skills-building interventions (Halford & Snyder, 2012) such as communication (Snyder & Balderrama-Durbin, 2012) and acceptance (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996), as well as focusing

directly on the problems in the relationship (Pinsof, 2005). However, given that more than 25% of couples who seek counseling are not any more satisfied with their relationships after completing sessions, it may be beneficial to explore the importance of shared activities for individuals in a romantic relationship. One activity that has been increasing in popularity and allows individuals to spend time with their partner is endurance sport training.

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether the romantic relationships of individuals who train for endurance activities with their romantic partner are more satisfying than are those of individuals who do not train with their romantic partner. The current study will also explore gender differences regarding relationship satisfaction and quality when individuals train for an endurance event with their romantic partner, as well as differences between married and dating individuals who train with their romantic partner.

Review of Literature

The Benefits of Romantic Relationships

Studies have demonstrated that close relationships are key to overall well-being, including happiness, mental health, physical health, and even longevity (Berkman, 1995; Myers, 2000). Romantic relationships specifically, which can range from casual dating to marriage, have also been shown to affect one's mental health and physical health as well as sexuality and financial status (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). In accord with this statement, Umberson and Karas Montez (2010) asserted that there are three broad ways that social ties work to influence health: behavioral, psychosocial, and physiological. Social relationships help to increase positive

health behaviors such as exercise (Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010) and to enhance mental health through reducing stress (Cohen, 2004) and increasing emotional support (Uchino, 2004). Another benefit of relationships is that they help people to fulfill the basic need for the company of other human beings (Gross, 2012).

Additionally, Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model also provides evidence as to why romantic relationships are beneficial. This theory suggests that by being in a close, romantic relationship, individuals can continue growing through the inclusion of another in their life. Aron and Aron suggested that individual growth is an important part of living a satisfied life and helps to prevent habituation or boredom. Romantic relationships can provide this growth by each individual participating in an activity in which their romantic partner is a participant. For example, if one individual in a romantic relationship listens to opera music, their romantic partner may learn and become more involved in the world of opera. This has contributed to that individual's growth on a topic they might not have thought about if it were not for being in that particular romantic relationship. Aron and Aron (1986) also found that romantic relationships allow individuals to expand themselves through the increase of material and social resources, perspectives, and identities.

These observed benefits demonstrate the importance of romantic relationships, however, it seems equally important to understand the subjective benefits or how each individual perceives the benefits of being in an intimate relationship. In a study on perceived benefits and costs of romantic relationships, Sedikides, Oliver, and Campbell (1994) concluded that heterosexual, romantic relationships yield several benefits for partners including companionship or affiliation, sexual gratification, feeling loved or

loving another, intimacy, expertise in relationships, self-growth and self-understanding, more positive self-esteem, exclusivity, feeling secure, social support, feelings of happiness or elation, and learning about the other sex. Of these, the major benefits were companionship or affiliation, feelings of happiness or elation, exclusivity, feeling loved or loving another, intimacy, self-growth and self-understanding, and more positive self-esteem. In general, people appear to feel better about themselves and their lives when they are in a romantic and committed relationship (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005).

These studies suggest that romantic relationships enhance subjective and psychological well-being, which is defined as a relatively stable attribute that reflects the extent to which people experience positive affect and have favorable views of themselves and their lives (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Kamp Dush and Amato (2005), reported that people who were not in stable romantic relationships (dating multiple people or not dating) tended to report lower self-esteem, less life satisfaction, less happiness, and more distress. It has also been concluded that individuals who are single receive less instrumental and emotional support than do partnered individuals (Soons & Liebroer, 2008), which consequently prevents fulfillment of physical and psychological needs that are linked to poorer well-being.

Relationship Quality and Satisfaction

Research suggests that the involvement in and the quality of romantic relationships is an essential component of positive well-being (Argyle, 2001; Hinde, 1997; Myers, 2000). The quality of an individual's romantic relationship has been shown to correlate with increased positive affect or perceived happiness (Demir, 2008). Relationship quality is subjective in definition. According to Weiss (1974), provisions

individuals seek and/or experience in regards to romantic relationship quality include companionship, help, affection, intimacy, and emotional security.

Relationship quality was found to be highly correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .86$), making relationship satisfaction one of the provisions that strongly affects the perception of relationship quality (Fletcher et al. 2000). Relationship satisfaction can be conceptualized as an individual's belief that he or she feels contentment, enjoyment, and love in their relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 2004; Hendrick, 1988). Acitelli (2001) stated that relationship satisfaction embodies two relationship constructs, maintenance and enhancement. In order for couples to sustain a satisfactory relationship with one another, certain maintenance strategies must be employed. However, the maintenance strategies that are utilized in order to obtain a more satisfactory outcome are not only highly individualized – meaning each person interprets his or her level of satisfaction differently and defines relationship satisfaction in a unique way – but maintenance strategies tend to vary across sexes as well as relationship status (i.e., married and non-married partners; Acitelli, 2001).

Relationship Status and Relationship Satisfaction

Romantic relationships are comprised of different statuses such as dating, cohabitating, and marriage. Throughout a person's life, most individuals will date and/or marry at least one other person, and many individuals will choose to cohabit with their romantic partner (i.e. live with their partner without being married) either between dating and marriage or in lieu of marriage (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004).

Both dating and marriage are defined as voluntary, personal relationships, which are demonstrated by traits such as intimacy and interdependence (VanLear, Koerner, &

Allen, 2006). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines marriage as “the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.” Studies have shown that people who marry report being happier, being more satisfied with life, and having higher psychological well-being than do individuals who are not married (Brown, 2000; Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Hughes & Waite, 2002; Kim, & McKenry, 2002; Lamb, Lee, & DeMaris, 2003; Simon, 2002).

However, as Weiss (1974) found in his studies, relationship satisfaction includes provisions such as companionship and emotional security. It may be possible that when these provisions are challenged – for example becoming a partner’s opponent rather than their companion in an activity – romantic relationship satisfaction may be compromised. Sanders and Suls (1982) found couples who were dating and couples who were married differ when it is possible that their romantic partner may be an opponent instead of a companion. Dating couples are considered to be in an exploratory stage in their relationship and may use competition rather than companionship to help decide whether further commitment with their significant other is desired (Sanders & Suls, 1982). Sanders and Suls also stated that this is different for married couples as marriage is supposed to offer shelter from the anxieties of competition – or a sense of emotional security as suggested by Weiss (1974) – and that it is more likely that once a couple decides to make the relationship permanent, they promote marital stability through minimizing comparisons or competition. However, in contrast to married couples, couples who were dating were also found to work through conflict and view their

relationship as growing closer because of the struggle they worked through (Flora & Segrin, 2003).

Since previous studies have shown that married and dating individuals respond to competition, or a lack of companionship, in different ways (Flora & Segrin, 2003; Sanders & Suls, 1982), one purpose of the current study was to examine romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality among married/cohabitating and dating but not cohabitating individuals who trained with their romantic partner.

Gender and Relationship Satisfaction

Although there are some congruencies between men and women in regards to what might assist in increasing the level of relationship satisfaction, there are still discrepancies. Studying relationship satisfaction and gender differences, Acitelli (2001) found that both men and women agreed that employing attentive behaviors – such as thinking or talking about the relationship or spending time together – resulted in increased relationship satisfaction. Women typically believed thinking or talking about the relationship was more attentive and thus led to better relationship satisfaction. Men argued that spending time together was also an attentive behavior that could lead to an increased satisfactory outcome in the relationship. Acitelli concluded that there was an increase in relationship satisfaction for both men and women when either thinking or talking about the relationship as well as when spending time together participating in a shared activity. One exception was for non-married women whose results showed negative outcomes when participating in a joint activity. Furthermore, men also showed signs of escalated tension with their partner when thinking or talking about the relationship.

Men's increase in relationship tension could be caused by the fact that men are more concerned with the existence of the relationship, whereas women are more focused on the internal workings and emotive quality of the relationship (Acitelli, 2001). However, this increased tension was only true for married men, possibly because they thought that talking about the relationship is unnecessary since they were already in a committed relationship that was not in danger of ending. Non-married men, on the other hand, reported an increase in positive relationships when utilizing relationship talk as a strategic maintenance behavior, because it keeps the relationship in existence. These results were the opposite for women. Married women demonstrated an increase in relationship satisfaction when practicing the maintenance strategy of talking about the relationship and non-married women exhibited a decrease in relationship satisfaction. Acitelli (2001) described these results as "puzzling" and due perhaps to the fact that there has been little research focuses specifically on non-married couples.

Considerable empirical research has found that continuous interaction and time spent together are highly correlated with positive maintenance outcomes such as relationship satisfaction (Acitelli, 2001; Duck & Pittman, 1994; Gilbertson, Dindia, & Allen, 1998). Studies by Aron et al. (2000) and Reissman, Aron, and Bergen (1993) demonstrated that a major component of relationship satisfaction and quality for both men and women was not merely spending time together as previous studies have established but also spending time together partaking in an exciting activity. An exciting activity was defined as one that allows both individuals the potential to grow through new experiences and was found to be stimulating or arousing, such as hiking, skiing, and dancing (Reissman et al., 1993). Even though there are activities couples may enjoy

sharing together – such as watching a movie or going out to eat – these “pleasant” activities did not contribute to an overall increase in relationship satisfaction and were found to enhance boredom in a relationship as opposed to that of an exciting activity. Reissman et al. (1993), as well as Aron and Aron’s (1986) self-expansion model, concluded that when individuals participate in an exciting activity with their romantic partner, the activity which allows each individual to fulfill their desire to grow then becomes associated with the individual’s partner, thus increasing relationship satisfaction.

Endurance Activities and Romantic Relationships

Aron and Aron (1986) and Reissman et al. (1993) defined an exciting activity as one that can have stimulating or arousing effects and the possibility to foster an individual’s growth through new experiences. It seems reasonable that endurance exercises – also known as aerobic exercises or events that require a person to sustain continuous exercise at a moderately-intense level (Ehrman, 2010) – can also be defined as an exciting activity. Hill (1988) supported the idea of endurance events being accepted as an exciting activity when examining the relationship between shared activities and marital stability. Romantic relationships are more likely to be stable, or have the potential for lasting, when the romantic relationship is viewed as satisfactory. Hill’s research reported that individuals engaged in “recreational activities,” such as outdoor activities or active sports, exhibited better marital stability.

Participating in activities with one’s romantic partner does enable the couple to spend more time together. Spending time with a person’s romantic partner has been considered an important relational maintenance strategy by researchers and couples

(Baxter & Dindia, 1990). Aron and Aron (1986), have posited that over long periods of time or when spending a significant amount of time with a particular person the probability of habituation or boredom in the romantic relationship increases. This might be due to the fact that couples have already disclosed most of their intimate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to one another and have thus exhausted ways to expand themselves through their significant other (Aron & Aron, 1986). However, other research has demonstrated that romantic partners who spend more time together report greater levels of perceived relationship satisfaction and quality (Acitelli, 2001; Duck & Pittman, 1994; Gilbertson et al., 1998). There has also been evidence indicating that couples who spend more time together, particularly by participating in an exciting activity, report greater relationship satisfaction and quality due to each individual in the dyad being able to grow or further improve themselves in a particular area (Aron et al., 2000; Aron & Aron, 1986; Reissman et al., 1993).

In the study conducted by Reissman et al. (1993), couples were asked to individually select activities that they personally found to be exciting or interesting. The researchers then assigned an activity that both individuals in a dyad had listed as interests, theorizing that engaging in an activity that both partners enjoy would increase relationship satisfaction. Consistent with their prediction, their results showed greater relationship satisfaction for couples who participated in an exciting activity together (Reissman et al., 1993). Having things in common with one's romantic partner or sharing similarities is another highly endorsed concept when looking at relationship satisfaction and quality (Gonzaga et al. 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Multiple theories suggest that individuals are attracted to others who have similar interests and that romantic

relationship satisfaction may be stronger for these couples than for those who do not share similarities. For example, Byrne's (1971) similarity-attraction paradigm stated that people are most attracted to others who share similar attitudes and interests. Morgan and Davidson (2008) also concluded that people who share similar ideals, values, and attitudes are more likely to be attracted to one another. It thus seems logical that people who have an interest in endurance events are more likely to be attracted to another person who shares this interest.

Summary and Statement of Purpose

Most people tend to have an innate desire to belong or connect with other human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Romantic relationships, in particular, have been established as being of high importance or value in a person's life. Multiple studies have noted the mental and physical health benefits that can occur from being involved romantically with another individual (Cohen, 2004; Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000; Uchino, 2004); however, a romantic relationship is more beneficial to each individual when both perceive the relationship as having high relationship quality and satisfaction. Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model suggests that joint activities can have a strong positive effect on an individual's perceived relationship satisfaction and quality. Furthermore, previous research has suggested that when couples participate in exciting activities in which each individual can continue to grow through new experiences, this helps to relieve feelings of habituation (Aron & Aron, 1986).

The purpose of the current study was to address the following questions: Do individuals who participate in training for endurance events with their romantic partner

report more relationship satisfaction and better relationship quality in comparison to individuals who do not train with their romantic partner? Are there differences in reports of relationship satisfaction between married and dating individuals who train with their romantic partner? Among individuals who train with their romantic partner, do men and women have different reports in romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality? Three hypotheses were posed:

Based on the literature (Aron & Aron, 1986; Reissman et al., 1993) it was hypothesized that: (H1) Participants who train with their romantic partner for an endurance event will report greater relationship satisfaction and quality than will individuals who train without their romantic partner for endurance events.

Based on the literature (Flora & Segrin, 2003; Sanders & Suls, 1982) it was hypothesized that: (H2) Non-married individuals who train with their romantic partner for endurance events will report greater relationship satisfaction and quality than will married individuals who train with their romantic partner.

Based on the literature (Acitelli, 2001) it was hypothesized that: (H3) Men who train with their romantic partner will report greater relationship satisfaction and quality than will women who train with their romantic partner.

Chapter 2

Methods

Participants

Among the 114 participants (60 female and 54 male), 103 (90.4%) were White, 7 (6.1%) Latino/a, and 4 (3.5%) Asian. Other demographic information collected revealed that most of the participants were college graduates ($n = 46$, 40.4%), currently employed ($n = 72$, 63.2%), dating but not cohabitating ($n = 54$, 47.4%), had been in their romantic relationship for over 10 years ($n = 36$, 31.6%), and participated in triathlons as their endurance activity ($n = 91$, 79.8%). Age ranged from 18 to 65 with a mean age of 33.4 years ($SD = 12.7$). Table 1 shows the complete demographics for the participants.

Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design in that participants were categorized into the levels of the independent variables based on existing characteristics. One independent variable was Partner Training Together which had two levels, 1) Partner Activity: individuals trained with their romantic partner ($n = 52$) and 2) No Partner Activity: individuals trained without their romantic partner ($n = 61$). The second independent variable was sex, either male ($n = 54$) or female ($n = 60$). Marital status had two levels: 1) Married, which included individuals who reported to be married or cohabitating ($n = 60$), and 2) Dating but not cohabitating ($n = 54$).

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of 114 participants

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	54	47.4
Female	60	52.6
Race/Ethnicity		
White	103	90.4
Latino/a	7	6.1
Asian	4	3.5
Level of education		
High school graduate or GED	6	5.3
Some college/technical school	34	29.8
College graduate	46	40.4
Master's degree	24	21.1
Doctorate degree	4	35.0
Employment status		
Employed	72	63.2
Unemployed	8	7.0
Student	31	27.2
Retired	2	1.8
Marital status		
Married	45	39.5
Dating and cohabitating	15	13.2
Dating but not cohabitating	54	47.4
Length of relationship		
Less than 6 months	13	11.4
6-12 months	15	13.2
1-2 years	23	20.2
2-5 years	22	19.3
5-10 years	4	3.5
10+ years	36	31.6
Endurance activity		
Running	10	8.8
Cycling	8	7.0
Triathlon	91	79.8
Years participated in endurance activity		
Less than 6 months	7	6.1
6-12 months	4	3.5
1-2 years	10	8.8
2-5 years	45	39.5
5-10 years	24	21.1
10+ years	23	20.2
Hours per week training for endurance activity	13	11.4

1-5 hours	40	35.1
6-10 hours	40	35.1
11-15 hours	15	13.2
16-20 hours	4	3.5
20+ hours		
Days per week training for endurance activity		
1-2 days	3	2.6
3-4 days	24	21.1
5-6 days	63	55.3
7 days	22	19.3
Hours per day training for endurance activity		
Less than 1 hour	3	2.6
1-2 hours	91	79.8
3-4 hours	16	14.0
5+ hours	2	1.8
If participant trains with their significant other		
Yes	52	45.6
No	61	53.5

Measures

A consent form including information about the study (see Appendix A) and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) were administered to the participants in order to gather information regarding age, sex, ethnicity, education level, employment status, and marital status and whether the participant trains with or without his or her romantic partner. Supplementary questions also asked about the individual's endurance activity as well as time spent training and competing in endurance events. In addition to the consent and demographic forms, four relationship measures were used to assess relationship quality and satisfaction (see Appendix C).

Relationship quality. *The Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI)* was originally developed by Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1991) in order to measure an individual's quality of relationship with another designated person. The QRI consists of 25-items to which participants are asked to respond using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Very much*). This assessment measures and yields scores for three

subscales: Support (sample item is, “To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?”); Conflict (sample item is, “How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with this problem?”); and Depth (Sample item is, “How positive a role does this person play in your life?”). For the current study, only the 7-item Support and 12-item Conflict subscales were used. Total scores for the Support and Conflict subscales were calculated by summing and averaging response values, with higher scores reflecting greater endorsement of support and conflict, respectively. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alphas were .72 for the Support subscale and .85 for the Conflict subscale

Global Perceived Romantic Relationship Quality, also known as the *Perceived Relationship Quality Component* (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000), is an 18-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure perceived relationship quality. The PRQC consists of 6 subscales – satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love – each consisting of three questions that are answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*). Examples of items for each of the 6 subscales include: satisfaction – “How content are you with your relationship?”; commitment – “How devoted are you to your relationship?”; intimacy – “How close is your relationship?”; trust – “How dependable is your partner?”; passion – “How sexually intense is your relationship?”; and love – “How much do you adore your partner?” Addressing all three questions per subscale appears to be redundant, thus this study utilized six items, which have reported good reliability (alpha = .85), and were shown to be the best paradigms for the relationship quality variables (Fletcher et al., 2000). Scores were calculated by averaging the six responses to yield a total score for relationship quality that could range from 1 to 7 with higher scores indicating greater quality of one’s

relationship. For the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .86 for responses to the six items.

Relationship satisfaction. The 7-item *Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS) was developed by Hendrick (1988) to measure general relationship satisfaction. Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction) with total scores ranging from 7 to 35. Item 4, "How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?" and item 7, "How many problems are there in your relationship?" are both reversed scored. Higher total scores reflect greater relationship satisfaction. The concurrent and predictive validity for the RAS has also been shown to be strong, demonstrating significant correlations among the subscales and the total score distinguishing between couples who subsequently remained together or ended the relationship. Scores were calculated by averaging responses to yield a total score, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. For the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .87.

The 14-item *Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995) is a revised version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) designed by Spanier (1976) to measure an individual's level of relationship satisfaction. The RDAS has improved upon the psychometric properties from the DAS and is shorter, making it more user friendly. The RDAS is a self-report instrument that consists of three subscales: 1) Dyadic Consensus; 2) Dyadic Satisfaction; and 3) Dyadic Cohesion. The Dyadic Consensus subscale consists of six items and measures the degree to which the respondent agrees with their partner in decision making, values, and affection on diverse topics such as religious matters, sex relations, and career decisions. Respondents are asked to select

their perceived agreement using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*Always Disagree*) to 5 (*Always Agree*). Total scores for this subscale range from 0 to 30, with a higher score signifying greater perceived consensus. The Dyadic Satisfaction subscale consists of four items identifying the degree to which a respondent feels satisfied with their partner. Sample items to assess this information include, “How often do you and your partner quarrel?” and “Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?” Respondents indicate their perceived satisfaction using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*All the Time*) to 5 (*Never*). Total scores for this subscale range from 0 to 20, with a higher score signifying greater perceived relationship satisfaction. The Dyadic Cohesion subscale consists of four items identifying the degree to which the respondent and partner participate in activities together. Respondents are asked to select their level of perceived cohesion on topics such as working together on projects or calmly discussing something using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 5 (*More Often*). Total scores for this subscale range from 0 to 20, with a higher score signifying greater perceived relationship cohesion. For this study the two subscales used – dyadic satisfaction and dyadic cohesion – were calculated by averaging responses to each subscale items to yield a total score for satisfaction and for cohesion, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction and greater cohesion. For the current sample, the Cronbach’s alphas were .87 for Dyadic Satisfaction and .65 for Dyadic Cohesion.

Procedures

Of the 114 individuals who participated, 97 were initially contacted in-person after completing a triathlon in Phoenix, AZ and asked to fill out a paper copy of the measures, while the remaining 17 were recruited through an emailed advertisement and

completed an online survey through Qualtrics. All participants were screened to ensure they met inclusion criteria which included (1) being 18 years of age or older, (2) currently involved in a romantic, heterosexual relationship that has been in existence for 3 months or longer, and (3) currently training for an endurance event. Participants were not compensated for involvement in the study and were told that completing the survey was voluntary. The survey took approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete. Individuals who reported training with their romantic partner were placed in the partner activity group ($n = 52$), while individuals who reported training without their romantic partner were placed in the no partner activity group ($n = 61$). Individuals who reported dating and cohabitating with their romantic partner ($n = 15$) were grouped with individuals who reported being married ($n = 45$) since previous research has demonstrated cohabitation more closely resembling a married relationship than a dating relationship (McGinnis, 2003).

Data Analysis Plan

H1. A two group multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with six measures was used to test whether the partner activity group and the no partner activity group differed in overall perceived relationship satisfaction and relationship quality.

H2. A two group MANOVA with six measures was used to test whether married individuals and non-married individuals who train with their romantic partner differed in perceived relationship satisfaction and relationship quality.

H3. A MANOVA was conducted to test whether men and women who reported training with their romantic partners differed in relationship satisfaction and relationship quality.

Chapter 3

Results

Prior to analyzing the study hypotheses, the correlations among the six relationship variables (support, conflict, relation quality, relation satisfaction, dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion) were examined. All 15 correlations were found to be statistically significant at a probability level of .01 (see Table 2); therefore, multivariate procedures were utilized to examine the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. The first hypothesis predicted that participants in the partner activity group ($n = 48$) would report greater relationship satisfaction and quality than individuals in the no partner activity group ($n = 61$). To test for differences between the partner and non-partner activity groups on relationship satisfaction and quality, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the six relationship scales as the dependent variables. The Wilks' Lambda was found to be statistically significant, $F(6, 102) = 2.88, p = .012, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .145$. Follow-up analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed that there were group differences on three of the six relationship measures, including support $F(1, 108) = 4.45, p = .037, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$, relationship quality $F(1, 108) = 4.66, p = .033, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$, and relationship satisfaction $F(1, 108) = 7.84, p = .006, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .07$ (see Table 3 for group means and standard deviations). Individuals who train with their partner reported more support from their partner, more relationship satisfaction, and higher relationship quality than did individuals who do not train with their romantic partner.

Hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis predicted that individuals who trained with their partner who were dating but not cohabitating ($n = 23$) would report greater

relationship satisfaction and quality than individuals in the partner activity group who were married ($n = 25$). A MANOVA was conducted to assess differences between groups. The Wilks' Lambda test was not statistically significant $F(6, 41) = 1.22, p = .31$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$. No further analyses were conducted.

Hypothesis 3. The third hypothesis predicted that men ($n = 21$) in the partner activity group would report greater relationship satisfaction and quality than women ($n = 27$) in the partner activity group. A MANOVA testing for differences between these males and females was not statistically significant, Wilks' Lambda test, $F(6, 41) = .24, p = .96$, partial $\eta^2 = .034$. No further analyses were conducted as the hypothesis was not supported.

Table 2

Reported Correlations for the Relationship Measures Support, Conflict, Relation Quality, Relation Satisfaction, Dyadic Satisfaction, and Dyadic Cohesion

	M	SD	Support	Conflict	Relation Quality	Relation Satisfaction	Dyadic Satisfaction	Dyadic Cohesion
Support	3.548	.422	-					
Conflict	1.743	.479	-.332**	-				
Relation Quality	6.155	.865	.538**	-.559**	-			
Relation Satisfaction	4.372	.629	.504**	-.579**	.814**	-		
Dyadic Satisfaction	4.205	.805	.290**	-.592**	.425**	.507**	-	
Dyadic Cohesion	3.488	1.056	.423**	-.376**	.504**	.540**	.533**	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Relationship Satisfaction and Quality across Partner Activity and No Partner Activity Conditions

	Partner Activity		No Partner Activity	
	M	SD	M	SD
Support*	3.63	0.33	3.46	0.47
Conflict	1.66	0.48	1.82	0.48
Relationship Quality*	6.35	0.63	5.99	1.01
Relationship Satisfaction**	4.55	0.52	4.22	0.68
Dyadic Satisfaction	4.15	0.91	4.25	0.72
Dyadic Cohesion	3.53	1.03	3.45	1.09

*. Significant at the 0.05 level.

**.. Significant at the 0.01 level.

Chapter 4

Discussion

This study was intended to address three questions: (1) Do individuals who participate in training for endurance events with their romantic partner report more relationship satisfaction and better relationship quality in comparison to individuals who do not train with their romantic partner? (2) Are there differences in reports of relationship satisfaction between married and dating individuals who train with their romantic partner? and (3) Among individuals who train with their romantic partner, do men and women differ in reports in romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality?

With regard to the first question, as predicted, results indicated that individuals who reported training for an endurance event with their romantic partner also reported greater relationship satisfaction and quality, particularly in the areas of support, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction, than did individuals who reported training without their romantic partner. A reason for this finding might be due to the ability for each individual in a dyad to simultaneously grow by including an “exciting” event in their repertoire, as suggested by Aron and Aron’s (1986) self-expansion model. This theory also suggests that when individuals partake in an “exciting” activity that enables them to fulfill a desire to continue growth through a new experience with their romantic partner, they may then associate the growth and exciting activity with their romantic partner, thus increasing romantic relationship satisfaction.

Another explanation for higher reports of support, relationship satisfaction, and relationship quality may be that each individual is more supportive of the other. It is

possible that each individual participating in an endurance event may have a deeper understanding regarding what the activity entails physically, mentally, and emotionally and can thus be more supportive of their romantic partner. Research has found that people tend to view support and companionship as an important factor in a romantic relationship (Sedikides et al., 1994; Weiss, 1974), while having a lack of support or companionship in a romantic relationship may be detrimental to the relationship, possibly hindering romantic relationship satisfaction (Sanders & Suls, 1982). This would possibly explain the results for the first hypothesis regarding support. It is also possible that couples who train together may also attribute a feeling of accomplishment and pride to the romantic relationship when acknowledging that each individual in the romantic relationship has been completing similar activities and has been working hard to achieve similar goals.

An additional possible explanation for this finding may be due to the timing of data collection. A majority of the surveys were collected immediately after individuals had completed a triathlon. It may be that the participants who completed the survey after finishing the triathlon were affected by a “feel good” effect caused by an increase in endorphins that are released after physical activity (Hyde et al., 2011). This may have unconsciously influenced the participants to answer questions in a more positive state-of-mind than what their normal thought process may be. This may help explain why the variables conflict, dyadic satisfaction, and dyadic cohesion were not statistically significant. Questions pertaining to these variables asked about negative situations or experiences in the relationship. Perhaps the questions that were asked in a negative manner were answered less accurately due to most participants being influenced by an

increase of endorphins, giving these individuals a temporarily more positive outlook on life.

While these possible explanations for these findings require further research, the finding from this study support the hypothesis that individuals who train for an endurance event with their romantic partner report more relationship satisfaction and better relationship quality than do those individuals who train for an endurance event without their romantic partner. This particular finding is important because it demonstrates that the endurance activity itself, rather than other variables such as gender or age, has an influence on an individual's perceived romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality.

The second question asked whether there were differences in reports of relationship satisfaction and relationship quality between married and dating individuals who train with their romantic partner. It was predicted that individuals who were dating and trained with their romantic partner would report greater romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality than married individuals who trained with their romantic partner. This was proposed based on previous research by Sanders and Suls (1982) suggesting that individuals who were dating may utilize competition as a way of testing the strength of the romantic relationship and, therefore, relationship satisfaction and relationship quality may not be negatively influenced when dating couples trained together. On the opposite end, married individuals believe marriage helps to shelter them from competing with their romantic partner (Sanders & Suls, 1982), and may then possibly affect the relationship satisfaction and relationship quality if both individuals

train together for a competitive endurance event. Results did not support the second hypothesis and did not show any statistically significant differences between groups.

While previous research suggests that there are gender differences regarding romantic relationship satisfaction (Acitelli, 2001; Wan, Jaccard, & Ramey, 1996), hypothesis three, which suggested that men who train with their romantic partner would report greater relationship satisfaction and relationship quality than women who train with their romantic partner, was not supported by the data. Acitelli's (2001) study stated that men typically believed that spending time together with their romantic partner would help maintain relationship satisfaction whereas women believed talking about the relationship would assist in maintenance of satisfaction and quality. The study concluded that both men and women experienced an increase in relationship satisfaction when employing attentive behaviors, such as spending time together partaking in a shared activity. Since both men and women reported spending time together on an activity as beneficial to their relationship, it is possible that this may be a possible reason for the lack of significance regarding the third hypothesis. Another possibility explaining the lack of significance may be that all of the participants who completed the survey were the ones competing in the endurance event. This detail may suggest that all participants, regardless of gender, enjoy partaking in the "exciting" endurance activity and believe it helped maintain romantic relationship satisfaction. Perhaps these men and women participants share similar views and thus may have completed the survey in a more similar fashion. It is also possible, as stated above, that both men and women were influenced by an increase in endorphins and answered questions in a more positive light, overshadowing any sex effect.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study that need to be noted. The most prominent limitation is the lack of cultural diversity regarding race/ethnicity and sexual orientation among the sampled population. The majority of the participants were White, and the entirety of the sample identified as heterosexual, thus making it difficult to generalize the study's findings across diverse ethnicities as well as sexual orientation. While some studies suggest that same-sex couples report similar ratings of romantic relationship satisfaction (Peplau & Spalding, 2003), making it possible to generalize the current study across sexual orientation, there are still key differences between heterosexual and LGBTQ relationships that should be explored.

Another limitation to this study is the lack of dyadic data. A majority of the surveys collected were completed by only one partner in the romantic relationship. The one partner who completed the survey was also the one participating in the "exciting" endurance activity. Therefore, information regarding romantic relationship satisfaction amongst a couple was not addressed in this study, and comparisons between both partners in a romantic relationship could not be made. This limits the understanding of the couples who do not train or partake in endurance activities and how satisfied they are in their romantic relationship as well as the similarities and/or differences between the partner who participates in the event and the partner who does not participate in the event.

The timing and manner in which data collection occurred are other limitations of the present study. The timing in which participants filled out the questionnaire was not consistent as approximately 85% of the surveys were completed by individuals shortly after completing a triathlon, while the remaining 15% were free to fill out the

questionnaires during any convenient time online. This also provides an issue with the setting in which participants completed the survey. While some individuals participated in the study by completing the online survey and more than likely in the comfort of their own home, a majority of the participants filled out a paper version of the survey in an outside, noisy environment, after competing in a triathlon.

Conclusion and Future Research

Based on Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model, this study was an examination of whether individuals in a heterosexual romantic relationship who with their romantic partner train for "exciting" activities such as endurance events would report greater romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality than would individuals who did not train for the an "exciting" event with their romantic partner. The results of this study indicated that individuals who trained for an endurance activity with their romantic partner reported better relationship satisfaction and higher relationship quality than did individuals who do not train with their partner. There were no significant gender differences regardless of whether they did or did not train and compete with their partner. There were also no significant differences between married and dating but not cohabitating individuals who trained with their romantic partner. These findings are important because they demonstrate that the "exciting" endurance activity itself, as opposed to gender or relationship status, may be vital in that these individuals perceived a more satisfying romantic relationship when participating with their significant other.

This study provides insight into romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality for individuals who participate in endurance activities; a population that has not been as commonly studied in the realm of romantic relationships. When individuals who

train for an endurance event without their romantic partner may express dissatisfaction in their romantic relationship, perhaps the causes of the dissatisfaction and how it is linked to the endurance activity should be addressed in couples counseling. Previous research (Aron & Aron, 1986; Reissman et al., 1993) noted that participating in an exciting activity with their romantic partner that may allow an individual to continue growing or enhance their potential self-efficacy can foster better romantic relationship satisfaction and relationship quality. This study's findings may be beneficial to counselors who are working with individuals who are experiencing romantic relationship dissatisfaction and poor relationship quality. By knowing that participating in an exciting event, such as an endurance activity, with one's romantic partner may be related to more positive relationship satisfaction and relationship quality, counselors may be better able to help couples explore activities they could do together. Counselors may be able to enhance the effectiveness of couples therapy by utilizing shared activities. As the literature (Reisman et al., 1993) and this research have shown, being active together is related to increased relationship satisfaction and perceived relationship quality.

One recommendation for future research that would enhance the findings of the present study would be to ensure the sample reflects a diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, and endurance activities. Specifically collecting data for same-sex romantic partners would be intriguing due to the fact that if both individuals in the same-sex dyad are participating in the endurance activity, they could potentially be competing against each other since endurance races distribute awards based on gender and age classes. A second recommendation would be to collect dyadic data. It would be interesting to compare one individual's report of

romantic relationship satisfaction and quality to the report made by his or her romantic partner. A third recommendation for future research would be to add a question to the survey that asks participants who train with their romantic partner the duration in which they have been training together. This would allow researchers to address an additional question regarding whether individuals who have trained with their romantic partner for longer periods of time report better or worse relationship satisfaction and relationship quality than do individuals who have been training with their significant other for a shorter amount of time.

Romantic relationships have been noted as being an important element in a person's life. Romantic relationships can enhance an individual's mental and physical well-being, bringing joy and happiness. However, if romantic relationships are not satisfying and become habitual over time, they may be found as stressful and not enjoyable and thus have an adverse effect on well-being. The current findings provide a possible solution to habituation by supporting the idea that individuals who participate in an "exciting" activity with their romantic partner, such as an endurance event, may experience more satisfying romantic relationships and better relationship quality, helping to maintain the romantic relationship.

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APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM

Going the Distance: Satisfaction with Romantic Relationships among Endurance Athletes

02/03/14

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a Master's student in the Counseling program at Arizona State University. To complete my program, under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius, I am conducting research with individuals who partake in an endurance activity and are in a long-term, romantic relationship. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how individuals who partake in endurance activities and are currently in a long-term, romantic relationship perceive their level of relationship satisfaction and quality with their significant other. To participate in this study you must be 18 years of age or older, currently involved in a romantic, heterosexual relationship that has been in existence for 3 months or longer, currently training for an endurance event, and willing to participate.

What we will ask you to do: Participation in this study will involve answering surveys which will take approximately 30 minutes. If you agree to participate, you will be given the direct Qualtrics website url for the study and the password to access and complete the provided study packet. Qualtrics is a password protected website that will be used to initiate the consent form, self-report demographic questionnaire, endurance event questionnaire and the relationship satisfaction and quality measures.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

Your answers will be anonymous. Your responses to the survey will not be linked to any personal information. The records of this study will be kept private. The results from this study may be used in reports, publications or presentations, but your name will not be used. **Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: You may contact Erica Minopoli at eminopol@asu.edu or Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius at Sharon.kurpius@asu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at 480-965-6788.

By completing the survey, you agree to participate in this study.

Sincerely,
Erica M Minopoli
Please print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please check one answer per question---

Gender:

1. Male _____
2. Female _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity:

1. Hispanic or Latino _____
2. White Not Hispanic or Latino _____
3. American Indian or Alaska Native _____
4. Asian _____
5. Black or African American _____
6. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander _____

Highest Level of Education Completed:

1. Some high school _____
2. High school graduate or GED _____
3. Some college/technical school _____
4. College graduate _____
5. Master's degree _____
6. Doctorate degree _____

Employment Status:

1. Employed _____
2. Unemployed _____
3. Student _____
4. Retired _____

Relationship Status:

1. Married _____
2. Dating and cohabitating _____
3. Dating, not cohabitating _____

How long have you been in your relationship?

1. Less than 6 months_____
2. 6 - 12 months_____
3. 1 – 2 years_____
4. 2 – 5 years_____
5. 5 – 10 years_____
6. 10 + years_____

What type of endurance activities do you partake in?

1. Running_____
2. Cycling_____
3. Triathlon_____
4. Other (please specify) _____

How long have you been training and/or competing in this endurance activity?

1. Less than 6 months_____
2. 6 – 12 months_____
3. 1 – 2 years_____
4. 2 – 5 years_____
5. 5 – 10 years_____
6. 10+ years_____

How many hours a week do you train/compete in this endurance activity?

1. 1 – 5 hours_____
2. 6 – 10 hours_____
3. 11- 15 hours_____
4. 16 – 20 hours_____
5. 20+ hours_____

How many days per week do you train/compete in this endurance activity?

1. 1 – 2 days_____
2. 3 – 4 days_____
3. 5 – 6 days_____
4. 7 days_____

How many hours each day do you train/compete in this endurance activity?

1. Less than 1 hour per day_____
2. 1 – 2 hours per day_____
3. 3 – 4 hours per day_____
4. 5+ hours per day_____

Do you train and/or compete in this endurance activity with your significant other?

1. Yes_____
2. No_____

APPENDIX C
MEASURES

Relationship Inventory

	Not At All			Very Much
1. To what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?	1	2	3	4
2. How often do you have to work hard to avoid conflict with this person?	1	2	3	4
3. To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?	1	2	3	4
4. How upset does this person sometimes make you feel?	1	2	3	4
5. To what extent can you count on this person to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?	1	2	3	4
6. How much does this person make you feel guilty?	1	2	3	4
7. How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?	1	2	3	4
8. To what extent can you count on this person to help you if a family member very close to you died?	1	2	3	4
9. How much does this person want you to change?	1	2	3	4
10. How critical of you is this person?	1	2	3	4
11. If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that this person would be willing to do something with you?	1	2	3	4
12. To what extent can you count on this person to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?	1	2	3	4
13. How much would you like this person to change?	1	2	3	4
14. How angry does this person make you feel?	1	2	3	4
15. How much do you argue with this person?	1	2	3	4
16. To what extent can you really count on this person to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?	1	2	3	4
17. How often does this person make you feel angry?	1	2	3	4
18. How often does this person try to control or influence your life?	1	2	3	4
19. How much more do you give than you get from this relationship?	1	2	3	4

Relationship Quality

	Not at all						Extremely
1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. How committed are you to your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. How intimate is your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. How much do you trust your partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. How passionate is your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. How much do you love your partner?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Relationship Assessment

	Low				High
1. How well does your partner meet your needs?	1	2	3	4	5
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How good is your relationship compared to most?	1	2	3	4	5
4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?	1	2	3	4	5
5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	1	2	3	4	5
6. How much do you love your partner?	1	2	3	4	5
7. How many problems are there in your relationship?	1	2	3	4	5

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	
5. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	0	1	2	3	4	

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

	Never	Less than one month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
6. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. Work together on a project	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. Calmly discuss something	0	1	2	3	4	5