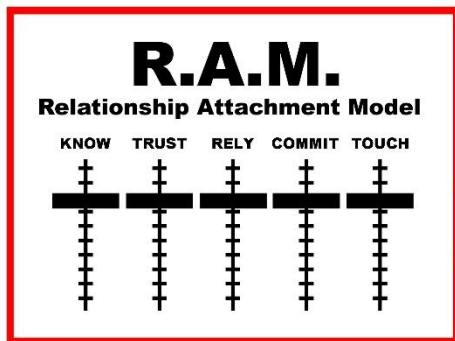


RELATIONSHIP ATTACHMENT MODEL®

THE RELATIONSHIP ATTACHMENT MODEL (RAM)

The Relationship Attachment Model® (Figure 1; Van Epp, 1997) is a copyrighted and registered trademarked model/theory that is restricted in use to Love Thinks certifications and programs unless written permission is granted. Currently, the RAM is used as a framework for five psychoeducational programs: PICK (Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge) a Partner program also titled *How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk or Jerkette*, Couple LINKS (Lasting Intimacy Nurturing Knowledge and Skills), Our Home Runs, Ultimate Spiritual Resiliency and Relationships, and Counseling with the RAM. The programs are for singles, couples, families, individuals, and mental health professionals respectively, and are designed to teach how to develop and maintain healthy and close relationships. These programs, based on the RAM, have been used in social service agencies, regional marriage and family coalitions, universities, school systems, correctional facilities, churches, and by the United States Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Air Force. While this model has served as the organizational framework for these programs, its utility extends beyond these programmatic applications. The RAM has research and clinical utility, which will be explored further throughout this paper.¹

A primary strength of the RAM is its outward simplicity. Although the RAM is a conceptual model that integrates major psychological theories and extensive social and psychological research, to a layperson the model can be understood with little to no explanation beyond the presentation of a picture. Thus, the RAM has intuitive meaning “as is” without much explanation and can be personalized to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of a specific relationship because the five dynamic bonds can be moved into constellations that represent different relationship experiences.



The Relationship Attachment Model was developed by John Van Epp, Ph.D. in 1986 and is based on a review of the literature and the theories of love, intimacy, and attachment, and from the author’s clinical experiences. The RAM is used to understand the constructs that exist in close relationships and how they interact to produce different feelings in relationships, experiences of vulnerability and resilience, closeness and distance, and various relationship states. Additionally, the RAM allows for the ways that external events and stressors impact a relationship and the

functioning of the members of the relationship. The RAM presents a pictorial representation of the five dynamic bonds that comprise relationships: know, trust, rely, commit, and touch. The RAM has four propositions that will be developed in this paper. The four propositions are:

- 1) Relationships are comprised of five major independent yet interacting dynamic bonds and these bonds have ranges of strength—higher levels of a dynamic bond indicates higher degrees of development of that specific bond. The five dynamic bonds are the

¹ The RAM is also explained and applied to dating relationships in John Van Epp’s books, *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk*, and marriage relationships in his book, *Becoming Better Together: the RAM plan for staying together when life is pulling you apart*.

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extent to which you and a person know each other, trust each other, rely on each other, have a commitment to each other, and have attractions and/or expressions of touch. Each dynamic bond makes a unique contribution to the overall experience of closeness in a relationship.

- 2) The five dynamic bonds exist in all relationships because they represent the relational aspects of five universal systems of an individual: the sensory system, the mental system, the emotional system, the volitional system, and the tactile/sexual system.
- 3) Each dynamic bond of the RAM has a reciprocal nature within relationships: there is an extent to which you know someone and are also known by that person; there is an extent that you trust someone and are trusted, etc. Therefore the RAM can measure each individual's evaluation of one's self (how I know you, trust you, etc.), the other (how I believe you know me, trust me, etc.), and overall composite of the relationship (the degree we know each other, trust each other, etc.).
- 4) The five dynamic bonds interact in ways that create different relationship profiles that lead to different emotional experiences within the relationship. However, the sources of the fluctuations—individual processes, interactional patterns, and external events—of each dynamic bond are assumed in the interpretation of why fluctuations occur but are not specified by the model itself.

Definitions

Relationship bonds. Dynamic bonds are the universal constructs of relationships that individually and interactively contribute to the experience of a relationship. The RAM is comprised of five dynamic bonds: know, trust, rely, commit and touch.

Relationship. The overall bond or connection one experiences with another. According to the RAM, this would be the composite of the five dynamic bonds. In the literature, closeness and intimacy are terms often used to describe this subjective global relational bond.

Relationship profile. A relationship profile is the composite of the five dynamic bonds of a relationship at a particular time.

Closeness. Closeness refers to the overall feeling of being connected to another, and varies in degree as a result of things like mutual interests, loyalties, and affections. According to the RAM, closeness describes the overall subjective experience of a specific relationship profile.

Intimacy. Intimacy is often used synonymously with closeness. However, some have used intimacy with a more narrow definition than closeness, in that it tends to be focused on the degree someone knows and/or feels known in a relationship, or the extent of closeness experienced within a physical/sexual relationship (sexual intimacy).

RAM Proposition Number 1

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The first proposition is that relationships are comprised of five major dynamic bonds (Van Epp, 1997). These five dynamic bonds are the extent to which you and another person know each other, trust each other, depend on each other, have a commitment to each other, and have attractions and/or expressions of touch. These bonds have ranges of strength—higher levels of the dynamic bonds indicate higher degrees of development or strength of that specific bond. For instance, if someone rated her trust close to the top then it would indicate that she has a strong trust in the other person, which would also naturally contribute to a more intense degree of closeness or bond. On the other hand, if trust were rated low then this would represent less trust with a correspondingly lower level of closeness. This is true for all the five dynamic bonds of the RAM: getting to know someone, trusting someone, relying on someone, becoming committed to someone, and having chemistry, attraction, and/or expressions of touch—all five dynamic bonds have ranges that leads to different experiences of closeness in a relationship.

The first proposition also states that each of these five dynamic bonds is an independent contribution to the overall experience of intimacy in a relationship. Although it is impossible to completely isolate just one of the dynamic bonds, there are some experiences that come close. For instance, it is common for a person to feel a “bond” with someone who rescues him or her during a life-threatening crisis. Even though they did not know each other, trust each other, or have any previous relationship, the experience of a heightened dependency or reliance (the third dynamic bond of the RAM) on the rescuer creates a feeling of connection within the survivor. This is evident in documentaries of reunions between rescuers and survivors as in the case of the 9/11 attack (*Inside 9/11* The National Geographic Channel, 2010). Even though the survivors did not have any previous relationship with the rescuers, there are often strong emotions and expressions of intimacy.

Although each of the five dynamic bonds of the RAM are independent contributors to the relational bond, they are also constantly interacting, influencing each other and ultimately, the experience of closeness. For instance, as a person knows another they form and revise a mental representation of how this person is in specific situations, resulting in a sense of trust in that individual. In addition, the level of trust also prompts a person to disclose more resulting in a greater knowledge of another. And then, something is discovered or experienced that is aversive, and this new knowledge impacts what one believes and trusts about the other (mental representation), as well as how that person relies on the other, commits and interacts physically with the other. These continuous interactions result in fluctuations of the five dynamic bonds, as well as the subjective experience one has of the relational bond (e.g. the closeness one feels at any given time within a relationship).

One or more of the dynamic bonds that comprise the RAM, know, trust, rely, commit, and touch, have been identified by some and assumed or implied by others within past theories of love, attachment, and close relationships. In addition, as individual constructs, many have been researched and developed into assessment measures of relationships. Yet, no one has organized and combined them into a comprehensive picture of the bonds that comprise relationships. Therefore, each of the five dynamic bonds will be defined and the theory, research, and literature underlying them will be briefly reviewed.

Know

To know another and to be known is bonding and produces feelings of closeness. The concept of knowing has been implicit in many theories of close relationships and most researchers

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have considered intimacy to be synonymous with self-disclosure (Berscheid, et al., 1989; Derlega & Chaikin, 1975; McAdams, 1988; Sternberg, 1986). However, these theories have not clearly defined the process of knowing nor explained how knowing produces feelings of closeness in relationships.

Being known and getting to know another enhances the relational bond (Van Epp, 1997). This was also stated by past theorists who described the very feeling of intimacy and love as self-revelation, mutual self-disclosure, and sharing what is most private with another (Berscheid, et al, 1989; McAdams, 1988; Reiss, 1960). However, Van Epp (1997) argues that getting to know another and becoming known extends beyond just mutual self-disclosure. Knowing is a process that does require talking with one another, but also includes diverse shared experiences, and the accumulation of these interactions and experiences over time (Van Epp).

Mutual self-disclosure has been primarily discussed in the literature in the framework of romantic relationships (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Reis & Shaver, 1988). However, self-disclosure, even when it is one sided, contributes to a bond in all types of relationships. This is evident in the therapeutic relationship when client disclosure leads to a deepening bond with the therapist, despite the therapist's minimal disclosure.

Knowing and feeling known enhances the relational bond not solely through self-disclosure but also through various shared activities and situations. Harvey and Omarzu (1997) stated, "each and every person represents an intricate set of experiences, personal qualities, dispositions, hopes, plans and potential reactions to environmental stimuli" (p. 234). Because getting to know someone is multidimensional, it is crucial to get to know him or her in many settings. People change in different situations; thus, the more experiences individuals share and the more diverse their interactions, the more opportunities they will have to get to know each other and the closer they will become.

While getting to know someone and feeling known is an interaction that produces closeness through mutual disclosure and diverse shared activities, time is another crucial impetus to the development of this dynamic bond. Time is an essential ingredient to both mutual self-disclosure and various shared activities. Time ensures a testing method of the knowledge obtained through the getting to know process with an individual. Sophisticated forms of human behavior are only learned and understood over a significant period of shared experience. In order to become fully aware of an individual's repertoire, the knowing process requires time. Both Whyte (1984) and Grover, et al. (1985) found that longer premarital courtships were correlated with greater stability in marriage. They argued that the underlying principle was that the greater the opportunities for couples to know each other prior to deciding to marry, the greater their chance to experience some of the ordinary problems, irritations and frustrations; thus, the more informed they were when choosing a marital partner.

Staying in the know with another is incredibly important to maintaining a close, bonded relationship, whether it be a marital relationship or close friendship. In a study based on data collected from a 17-year longitudinal study of marital instability (Booth, Amato, & Johnson, 1988), 2,033 married individuals were asked an open-ended question, "what do you think caused your divorce?" (Amato & Previti, 2003). Eighteen categories were created from the analysis of responses and four of the eighteen were directly related to the know dynamic in a relationship with several others being indirectly related. For example, the fourth most common reason was that the couple was "incompatible" in that they had little in common anymore. The fifth most common reason was that the couple "grew apart" and that their interests and priorities changed. The seventh

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most common reason was stated as a “communication problem” and described as the couple not talking anymore. Finally, the ninth most common reason for divorce was “personal growth” in that one partner had a life changing event and re-evaluated their life. All of these reasons for divorce relate to the bonding dynamic of getting to know another and being known. Those who felt “incompatible” did not engage in consistent talking and time together to preserve and or develop the compatibilities they had when they entered into their marriage. Those who “grew apart” did not stay in the know with their partner.

The idea of growing apart is a common reason for divorce throughout the research (Amato & Previti; Gigy & Kelly, 1992; Kitson, 1992; Levinger, 1966). Knowing another and being known enhances the relational bond and contributes to the feeling of closeness in a relationship. Conversely, if the dynamic bond know is disrupted and chronically ill-maintained then the other dynamic bonds (i.e. trust, reliance, commitment, and touch) will be adversely affected, diminishing the feeling of closeness and love in a romantic relationship.

Ultimately, knowing another and being known contributes to an increase in the relational bond and likewise a feeling of intimacy. However, as stated above, Van Epp does not define intimacy as just “knowing” in and of itself as some past theorists did (Berscheid, et al., Birtchnell, 1993). Mutual self-disclosure, shared activities, and time are three aspects of the getting to know and be known process that enhance the relational bond of intimacy. The process of knowing and feeling known develops into a sense of predictability and trust, which is the second dynamic bond.

Trust

Trusting another and being trusted contributes closeness to the overall relational bond (Van Epp, 1997). The construct of trust has long been considered to be an important aspect in close relationships; however trust’s explicit mention in relationship theories is virtually nonexistent (Couch & Jones, 1997; Fehr, 1988, 2006, Harvey & Omarzu, 1997). Trust is typically an underlying theme or an implicit prerequisite for feeling comfortable self-disclosing, relying on another, or entering into and maintaining a commitment (Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Maxwell, 1985). The RAM overtly presents trust as an integral dynamic bond, central to the formation and maintenance of close relationships.

According to Van Epp, trust is defined as the feeling of confidence one has in another based on the mental representation or opinion held of that person; it is the degree of positive cognitive and affective attributions persons hold in their mental representation of another (Couch & Jones, 1997; Rempel, et al., 1985; Van Epp). As a person gets to know another, a mental profile is constructed of that person. Initially, stereotypes, associations and ideals are used to “fill in the gaps” of what is assumed to be true about the person (Van Epp). As time allows for more interactions and experiences, the mental profile is often adjusted to reflect a more accurate knowledge gained about the other person. This ongoing process of investing and testing out one’s belief in another contributes the feelings of trust to the relational bond in close relationships. Trust has long been viewed as an integral aspect to romantic relationships and has been related to feelings of love and the intimacy of self-disclosures among married partners (Larzelere & Huston, 1980).

Little research has been done on the bonding aspects of trust, but the importance of trust in close relationships has been echoed in numerous research articles (Fehr, 1988, 2006; Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Maxwell, 1985; Feeney, 2005; Larzelere & Huston, 1988). One example is demonstrated through the research on marital infidelities. Zitzman and Butler (2009) found that when wives learned that their husbands viewed pornography, their lowered trust generalized into

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a global mistrust toward their husbands and a breakdown in their overall bond to their husbands. This study demonstrated how trust contributed to the relational bond, and how a broken trust resulted in a decrease of closeness. This study also differentiated between the bond of knowing and trusting. When the wives' knowledge of their husbands increased by learning of their involvement in porn, their trust actually decreased. Although knowing another is one of the dynamic bonds that contributes to closeness, the content of what is known is filtered by what a person believes and how they configure that knowledge into their mental representation. Simply stated, it is possible to know someone really well but trust them very little. This is one example of how identifying and differentiating between the dynamic bonds of the RAM, and understanding the ways they interact will greatly help to clarify the mixed feelings experienced in a relationship.

Trust is not just important in romantic relationships. Fehr and Sprecher (2009) conducted a prototype analysis of passionate love over six studies in both the United States and Canada and concluded that some features of passionate love were mentioned consistently across all six studies, one being trust. Rotenberg and Boulton (2013) found that children who demonstrated trustworthiness to others had higher quality peer relationships. Even in today's ever increasing online relationships, trust has been put forth as an important indicator of one's willingness to self-disclose more information and invest commitment in online friendships (Henderson & Gilding, 2004). Trust has also been highlighted as a key variable to consider in the quality and amount of conflict in sibling relationships (Gamble, Yu, & Kuehn, 2011). Research has found that trust is a critical element to feelings of connectedness in patient-provider relationships (Phillips-Salimi, Haase, & Kookan, 2011). Bachelor (2013) also found that in the therapeutic relationship a sense of trust in the therapist was the strongest source of bond a client felt toward a therapist. Trust, then remains an integral source of closeness in all relationships.

Rely

The RAM presents rely as the third dynamic bond that contributes to the relational bond in close relationships. Reliance is defined as meeting another's needs, being dependable, and being able to depend upon others. Examples of needs in relationships include: being understood, mental stimulation, affection, nurturance, sex, recreation, entertainment, emotional connections, social activities, companionship, support, and spiritual interests (Van Epp).

This third dynamic bond is most clearly explained as mutual need fulfillment and is consistent with Reiss's (1960) personality need fulfillment component and Moss and Schwebel's (2003) notion of mutuality, both of which are characterized as elements that precipitate intimacy between partners. Le and Agnew (2001) argued that within the context of close interpersonal relationships, some of the most important outcomes are those related to need fulfillment and that need fulfillment is closely linked to emotional experiences within the relationship.

The relational bond grows as specific needs are met. The reciprocity of need fulfillment results in a deeper experience of intimacy than unidirectional need fulfillment. A study by Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann and Greenbeger (1984) on equity within relationships and marital satisfaction, found that when individuals participated in inequitable relationships, they became more distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress they felt. Another study found that when examining four different types of relationships: friend, romantic partner, boss, and employee that dependability was found to be one of the most important and valued characteristics (Cann, 2004).

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Only the dynamic bond of *know* with the books and programs on communication skills comes close to rivaling the dynamic bond of *reliance* with the amount of practical applications and publications. The concept that relationships bond when people are meeting each other's unique needs has spawned numerous lay books about reciprocity for couples, parent-child relationships, work relationships, and friendships (e.g. *Men Are From Mars, and Women Are From Venus; His Needs, Her Needs; Love and Respect; Love Languages*, and the many applied Organizational Psychology books for business management to just name a few). However, when this dynamic bond of *reliance* is considered in conjunction with the other four represented in the RAM, then one's understanding of relationships is expanded even more, and these applications of *reliance* can be more logically integrated with the other practical works on communication, positive attitudes, trust, forgiveness, reconciliation, commitment, affection and sex.

Commitment

Committing to another and having that commitment reciprocated also enhances the relational bond (Van Epp, 1997). The construct of commitment is commonly associated with theories and conceptualizations of love (Fehr, 1988, 2006; Sternberg, 1997); however the explicit mention of commitment is almost absent from theories of close relationships and attachment. The power of commitment is critical to understanding close relationships and remaining in a relationship even when it proves difficult (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1973). Therefore, commitment is the fourth dynamic bond in the RAM. According to Van Epp, commitment is defined as the personal investment in and obligation/dedication to another, associated with a sense of belonging and union that surpass time and space, and a determination to preserve the relationship.

Including the dynamic bond of commitment as a major construct of relationships is consistent with Sternberg's commitment/decision making component (Van Epp, 2007). Relationship researchers agree that commitment is a central component of relationships (Duemmler & Kobak, 2001). It has been argued that three types of commitment exist: personal commitment or the sense of wanting to stay in a relationship; moral commitment or feeling morally obligated to stay; and structural commitment or feeling constrained to stay regardless of personal or moral commitment (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). These three types of commitment or motivations to stay committed were supported by the findings of Fennell (1987) who asked couples married over 20 years to describe their reasons as to why they are still married.

The concept of commitment has been examined in other numerous studies. Beverly Fehr (1999) examined laypeople's conceptions of commitment using a prototype analysis and generated 419 different types of commitment and 182 were idiosyncratic. She also found that participants who held a relational conception of commitment had more positive relationship outcomes. Also, in relationship-driven commitments, commitment evolved smoothly and with few reversals (Surra & Hughes, 1997). In addition, shifting into more committed relationships has been shown to be followed by improvements in subjective well-being (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). According to Harvey and Omarzu (1997), bonding is defined by a public commitment or an act which serves as an indication that individuals have formed a close relationship. In a study on the level of commitment in relationships and the tendency to express complaints, Roloff and Solomon (2002) found that relational commitment is positively related to willingness to confront a partner, which is indicative of the desire to work through minor to major issues within the relationship. Some researchers even define love and commitment as one and the same (Money, 1980; Forgas &

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Dobosz, 1980). It has also been demonstrated that a person feels and thinks more positively toward another once a decision to commit is made (Brehm & Cohen, 1962). Beach and Tesser (1988) found that the more commitment a person feels toward another, the more he/she will focus cognitive and affective attention toward that individual.

Commitment is an aspect in all relationships, not just love relationships. A more recent study looked at friends with benefits relationships and found that commitment was rated lower by those who sought to continue with the friends with benefits relationship than those who sought a friendship or romantic relationship (VanderDrift, Lehmilller, & Kelly, 2012). Furthermore those who wanted no relationship at all rated commitment the lowest. This study demonstrated the presence and variations of commitment in different types of relationships. A longitudinal study of early and middle adolescents found that commitment mediated satisfaction among best friendships (Branje, Frijns, Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2007). The importance of commitment in the therapeutic relationship was highlighted by Bachelor (2013) who found that higher client commitment and therapist-perceived client commitment was related to more positive therapeutic outcomes. Therefore, all relationships have some level of commitment that contributes to the relational bond, with higher levels of commitment resulting in greater feelings of investment, obligation, dedication and belonging.

Touch/Sex

Physical touch and sexual expressions are the last dynamic bond included in the RAM that contributes feelings of connection and closeness to the relational bond (Van Epp, 1997). Physical expression is a common construct in relationship theories. For example, passion was a major component in Sternberg's (1986) theory of love, physical intimacy was a subscale in the PAIR (Schaefer & Olson, 1981), and a criticism of attachment theory was its lack of integration with sexual behavior (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). All ranges of physical expression are considered aspects of this dynamic bond of touch. Even in casual friendships, touch may be present in the form of a handshake or an affectionate hug. And in romantic relationships, touch may represent more intimate behaviors such as kissing or intercourse.

Sexual interactions are an attachment provoking dynamic that intensifies the feeling of closeness between individuals. "Physical contact is the most direct form of closeness. Lovers usually enjoy physical contact and it, in turn, intensifies their experience of closeness" (Birtchnell, 1993). Intimacy is often equated with sexual involvement in the literature—the greater the sexual involvement, the more intimacy. In an attempt to define intimacy, Moss and Schwebel (1993) proposed five components, one being physical intimacy. Physical intimacy refers to the extent of shared physical encounters as well as to the physiological arousal state experience toward the partner at each level of the physical encounter. The sexual aspect of this dynamic bond includes everything from extended gazing to uninhibited sexual intercourse.

"Sexuality is woven into the fabric of close relationships" (Christopher & Sprecher, 2001, pg. 218). For instance Baxter and Bullis (1986) reported that first intercourse with a partner was perceived as an experience that increased commitment to a partner. No matter what is the degree or intensity, sexual intimacy is an interaction that produces feelings of closeness and will have a powerful effect on the relationship.

Sexual touch in romantic relationships is critical to overall satisfaction. Research has consistently found that the frequency of sex in romantic relationships is positively correlated to sexual satisfaction and overall relationships quality (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). However, the sexual

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relationship does not exist in isolation. Nonsexual aspects of a relationship also influence sexual satisfaction and the frequency of sex in relationships. For example, the quality of communication, the amount of self-disclosure, perceived empathy provided by a partner, feeling loved, feeling emotionally close, and being overall satisfied with the relationship are all related to higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Davidson & Darling, 1988; MacNeil & Byers, 1997; Sprecher & McKinney, 1993; Young, Denny, Young, & Luquis, 2000). The interaction of touch with other relationship dimensions demonstrates the interplay touch has with other dynamic bonds represented in the RAM.

Although humans are sexual beings and touch activates the sexual system, not all touch is experienced as sexual. This is evidenced by the bonding effects of touch in other types of relationships. In the therapeutic literature, touch that is expressed within appropriate boundaries and perceived as congruent and fitting has been shown to be positively experienced by the client, fostering trust and healing (Horton, Clance, Sterk-Elifson, & Emshoff, 1995). Additionally, this study found that appropriate touch facilitated communication on a deeper level in the therapeutic relationship, “more than two thirds of the respondents *writing* that touch communicated or reinforced a sense that their therapist genuinely cared, and that the safety created by this bond helped them open up, go deeper, and take risks” (Horton, et al., pg. 454). This finding demonstrated again the interplay of the different RAM dynamic bonds. When touch is viewed as appropriate by the client, it enhanced the *know* dynamic and deepened overall intimacy. This finding was echoed in a qualitative study of mental health service recipients. One participant stated, “I try to shake hands with as many people as I can because I believe that once you touch that person, you’re making a commitment that goes on as they touch you...you have a connection” (Shattell, Starr, & Thomas, 2007, p. 250). However, all touch has the potential of activating the sexual system, and in cases where touch became sexual between the therapist and the client, the effects on the client were almost always harmful (Brown, 1988; Pope, 1990; Feldman-Summers & Jones, 1984).

Expressions of touch and affection may vary across contexts and relationship types. Touch is expressed as affections in non-sexual ways in non-romantic relationships like friendships. A recent study found that expressions of affection were even present and common among college students using Facebook (Mansson & Myers, 2011). In this study the researchers identified over 51 expressions of affection through Facebook (Mansson & Myers). Another study looked at levels of oxytocin released after engaging in touch and subsequent trust and cooperative behavior among strangers (Morhenn, Park, Piper, & Zak, 2008). Overall, this study found that touch increased sacrificial behavior by 243% relative to a control group, which highlights the bonding aspect of touch and how it interacts with other dynamics such as trust and commitment to others.

In conclusion, all five dynamic bonds represented in the RAM—the extent that one knows, trusts, relies, commits and touches another contribute and interact to develop the relational bond in all relationships. All five dynamic bonds have been independently and extensively researched in the literature, although, to date they have never been theoretically assembled to create a holistic representation of the major bonding connections that comprise relationships.

RAM Proposition Number 2

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Although there is no known research or theory on the origin of the constructs represented in the RAM, the second proposition asserts that these five dynamic bonds exist in all relationships because they represent the relational aspects of five universal systems of an individual: the sensory system, the mental system, the emotional system, the volitional system, and the tactile/sexual system (Van Epp). Each system is a neuro-psychological cluster of related functions of the self. These five systems are identified throughout psychological and social science theory and research, as well as within the terminology of most common vernacular with words like awareness, mental, emotional, willful, and sexual. These five systems of the self are similar to the way that the biology of the human body is described. There are various independent yet interacting systems in the body: the pulmonary system, the cardio-vascular system, the nervous system, the skeletal system, etc. Although the body is a single organism, each of these systems is a cluster of related functions that provide unique contributions to the overall health and functioning of the body.

In the same way, the self is a single entity that has various neuro-psychological systems that are independent yet interacting and provide unique contributions to the overall health and functioning of an individual. In addition, each of these systems contributes a unique aspect of relational connection in human interactions. The sensory system provides the ability to be aware of others, resulting in some level or degree of knowing another. The mental system organizes into cognitive schemas and representations that which has been experienced from the sensory system, resulting in beliefs about others that form levels of trust (or mistrust). The emotional system provides a dynamic array of feelings and needs that result in human exchanges that form various dependencies. The volitional system provides motivations, desires, and willfulness that result in relationship investments and commitments. And finally, the tactile/sexual system provides the self with affectionate, sexual, and tactile needs, drives and desires that result in attractions, expressions of affectionate and sexual interactions. Thus, the second proposition of the RAM asserts that each of the five dynamic bonds which create relationships emanate from five major systems of the self. The following table summarizes some of the supporting research and theory for each of the five major systems of self.

<p>The Sensory System of Self</p> <p>Getting to know anything or anyone is guided by our sensory system (Martin, 2007). The integration of our sense of smell, touch, taste, hearing, and sight form our experiences and our understanding of the world around us (Suied, Bonneel, & Viaud-Delmon, 2009). The sensory system does not operate independently from our cognitive system; rather these two systems work together to shape our experiences. However, the sensory system provides the initial mechanism through which we get to know the world around us and, thus will be the focus of this section.</p>	
<p>Relevant Theory</p>	<p>Sensory integration theory is the “neurological processes that organize sensations from one’s body and from one’s environment and makes it possible to use the body effectively within the environment” (Ayers, 1972, p. 5).</p> <p>Sensory integration theory asserts three things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning is dependent on the ability to take in and processes sensation in the environment and use it to organize behavior 2. Individuals who have decreased sensory ability may have difficulty producing appropriate actions which may impact their learning and people with enhanced sensations and ability to process these sensations have

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	<p>enhanced learning and behavior (Ayers, 1972; Bundy, Lane, & Murray, 2002).</p> <p>3. Sensory integration relates to adaptive interactions with the environment, which then enhances sensory integration leading to one being better equipped to have subsequent adaptive interactions (Bundy, et al.).</p> <p>This theory is important for understanding how people form close relationships because in order to develop a close relationship, one must have the capacity to get to know the world around them, integrate this knowledge, and act accordingly. If this capacity were deficient in some way, one’s ability to form close connections would be impaired.</p>
<p>Application to Bonding Relationships</p>	<p>In an extreme example, this is seen in people with developmental disorders such as Autism. Autism is a spectrum disorder of neural development often characterized by impaired communication and social interaction abilities (Johnson, 2007). Some characteristics of Autism are: less social understanding, more nonverbal communication, less eye contact, difficulty interpreting facial expressions and emotion, delayed or stunted speech, resistance to change, difficulty expressing needs, and over or under-active senses. Often sensory integration is difficult for individuals with autism, which may lead to experiencing a soft touch as painful or ordinary noises as extremely loud. Impairment in sensory integration results in difficulties in getting to know the world and experiencing it in a way that is relatable to others. Sensory integration theory (Ayers, 1972) states that some individuals may have enhanced sensory integration abilities while others may be deficient and that the ability to integrate senses is critical to adaptive interactions in the world. Therefore each person has a particular capacity to integrate the world around him/her that he/she brings into a close relationship with another. This ability to integrate senses ultimately impacts how this person will get to know another and become known in a relationship (Van Epp, 1997). This application of sensory integration theory to the understanding of knowing in close relationships is novel and is exclusive to the underpinnings of the RAM. Because of this no known research exists on the application of sensory integration theory to close relationships.</p>
<p>The Mental System of Self The capacity for an individual to trust arises from the mental system of self (Van Epp, 1997). Our sense of trust in another comes from our belief in that person which is based on the mental representation or what is often called a “working model” we have of that person.</p>	
<p>Relevant Theory</p>	<p>Object Relations Theory (Fairbairn, 1952). Object relations theory describes the cognitive development of infants in relation to their interactions with others in the environment. Early caregivers are perceived as objects and defined by their function. Over time, patterns emerge based on experiences with caregivers which are then internalized. The internalized objects may or may not be accurate representations of others, but these mental representations guide how the child interacts with the caregiver and others in the environment.</p> <p>Mental Representations come out of attachment theory. Mental representations are formed from early interactions with caregivers and how caregivers respond to the infant’s needs. Mental representations are formed the basis of the infant’s trust in his/her caregiver. It is out of these mental representations that attachment styles develop.</p>
<p>Application to Bonding in Relationships</p>	<p>Attachment styles are thought to remain relatively stable throughout the life course (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Femlee & Sprecher, 2000). These attachment styles have been shown to influence the quality of adult relationships later in life especially in regards to how trust is formed and maintained. Specifically, research has found that securely attached adults feel more trust toward their partner and</p>

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	<p>utilize more constructive coping strategies when trust was violated (Mikulincer, 1998). Mikulincer concluded that “working models are closely related to the way people construe and process trust-related memories, experience, goals, and coping strategies” (p. 1219). Another study found that securely attached adults reported less maladaptive attributions of partners than insecurely attached adults, suggesting that securely attached individuals have more forgiving mental representations of others than insecurely attached adults (Sumer & Cozzarelli, 2004). These studies demonstrate that feelings of trust in another result from the cognitive beliefs and representations we have formed.</p>
<p>The Emotional System of Self Reliance is defined as meeting another’s needs and being able to depend upon others (Van Epp, 1997). The capacity to rely upon others and to be relied upon stems from the emotional system of self.</p>	
<p>Relevant Theory</p>	<p>Attachment Theory. Mental representations, a critical component of attachment theory, were discussed above in terms of trust and the mental system of self; however, the emotional system interacts with the mental system to create attachment styles. Attachment styles arise from how well caregivers meet the emotional (and physical) needs over the course of early development. The emotional system of the child is assumed, although it is clearly established in the literature. Thus, mental representations are the cognitive schema individuals develop about close relationships and attachment styles are the emotional patterns of exchanges of reliance individuals practice in their relationships (Van Epp, 1997).</p> <p>Social Exchange Theory (Thaibaut & Kelly, 1959). Social exchange theory takes an economical approach to explaining relational exchanges or mutual need fulfillment. Social exchange theory incorporates the constructs of rewards and costs. The more rewards one feels is in their relationship, the more attractive the relationship appears. The more costs one experiences, the less attractive the relationship becomes. Applied to the marriage relationship, social exchange theory describes the maintenance and decay of marriages in terms of the balance between the rewards that partners obtain and the costs they incur from their marital relationship (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008). This mutual need fulfillment and maintenance, or lack thereof, in the relationship has the capacity to impact the overall relational bond. Nakonezny and Denton (2008) argue that “this axiom of social exchange theory suggests that when profits (rewards minus costs) from exchanges are perceived as equitable, there tends to be a development of solidarity within the marital relationship” (p. 404).</p>
<p>Application to Bonding in Relationships</p>	<p>Attachment styles reflect the emotional needs one brings into a relationship, impacting how a person <i>feels</i> in a relationship. For instance, an anxiously attached individual has different emotional needs than a securely attached person and has a different capacity to meet other’s needs. Specifically, an anxiously attached person <i>feels</i> more anxious about being abandoned or unloved but is somewhat comfortable with closeness and trusting other’s dependability; whereas, an avoidant attachment style <i>feels</i> uncomfortable with closeness and is untrusting of other’s dependability. In contrast, a secure individual <i>feels</i> comfortable with closeness and being able to depend on others (Chongruska, 1994; Collins & Read, 1990; Garbarino, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These feelings stem from the mental representations of others and guide the emotional exchanges in close relationships.</p>
<p>The Volitional System of Self Feeling committed to and committing is the fourth dynamic bond of the RAM that is important to the development and maintenance of relationships (Van Epp, 1997). The capacity to form commitments is best described as the volitional system of self.</p>	

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<p>Relevant Theory</p>	<p>Theories of the Will. Alexander Bain (1859) was one of the first to write about volition in <i>The Emotions and the Will</i>. Bain argued that the antecedent to every volition is a feeling and that our conduct is ruled primarily by the operation of the will. His work paved the way for Wilhelm Wundt’s (1892) writings on volition and the will. He described the will as the active power that sustains other elements of an individual such as feelings and thoughts. Wundt believed that humans possess free will and therefore we make choices between different actions. Throughout the literature, will is reference with terms like volition, motivation, and self-control (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Vohs & Baumeister, 2009).</p>
<p>Application to Bonding in Relationships</p>	<p>Research has been conducted on topics related to volition, motivation, and will; many of which include reaction time experiments that were developed by Wundt. The findings of this research suggest that there are individual differences in people’s capacity for enforcing self-control (Hofmann, Gschwendner, Friese, Wiers, & Schmitt, 2008; Kuhl, 2008). Self-control is inherent to maintaining commitments. Therefore, individual differences in the execution of self-control suggest that people have different capacities to form and maintain commitments. The most obvious example is the control of sexual impulses, which have been shown to deplete self-regulatory resources (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Research has also found that self-control is associated with psychological adjustment, less alcohol and drug use, better emotional responses, better interpersonal skills, better social skills, and secure attachment styles (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Furthermore, effortful decision making and corresponding behaviors deplete mental resources (Vohs & Baumeister, 2007). Therefore the volitional system of the self provides a unique contribution of commitment to the formation and maintenance of all relationships.</p>
<p>The Sexual/Tactile System of Self Sexual involvement is the fifth dynamic bond of the RAM. This dynamic originates from a tactile/sexual system. The bonding contribution of this neuro-psychological system is evident throughout the lifespan, from early developmental experiences of nurturing and affectionate touch to later developmental experiences of attraction and sexual behavior.</p>	
<p>Relevant Theory</p>	<p>Theories of Sexual Attraction and Touch and Bonding. Sigmund Freud (1951) was the first to theorize that sexuality existed throughout a person’s life because humans from birth have a libido, an organically generated and instinctual sexual/psychic drive or energy which is shaped throughout the stages of development. According to Freud, the libido becomes fixated on specific erogenous zones in different developmental stages, and the resolution of each stage greatly influences the health of the adult experience.</p> <p>Theories of Touch and Bonding. Harry Harlow was one of the first researchers to examine the role of touch in development in his series of experiments between 1957 and 1963. Harlow (1962) examined how rhesus monkeys reacted when raised with either a terry cloth or wire mother, some providing food to the monkeys and some not. Harlow found that the young monkeys clung to the terry cloth mother whether or not she provided food, but only chose the wire monkey if she provided food. Whenever something frightening was brought into the cage, the baby monkey would cling to the cloth mother. In another experiment the monkeys were separated from their cloth mothers for several days and when reunited, the baby monkeys clung to the cloth mother as opposed to exploring their environment. In contrast, the monkeys that were raised by wire mothers had difficulty digesting food and suffered from frequent digestive issues. Harlow concluded that contact comfort, or touch, is critical to the formation of a parent-child bond and that a lack of this contact is psychologically stressful. He also found that monkeys who were raised in complete social deprivation were severely psychologically disturbed.</p>

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	<p>Harlow attempted to rehabilitate these isolated monkeys with very limited success and found that they had severe deficits in all social behaviors.</p>
<p>Application to Bonding in Relationships</p>	<p>Early caregiver touch has also been studied among infants and their parents. This research has looked at skin-to-skin contact immediately following birth and the subsequent outcomes. Immediate skin-to-skin contact following cesarean section has been found to promote vocal interaction between parents (Velandia, et al., 2010). Another study found that separation and swaddling at birth versus, immediate skin-to-skin contact, interfered with mother-infant interaction during a breastfeeding session at Day 4 and that these mothers were rougher with their infants (Dumas, et al., 2012). Immediate skin-to-skin contact also has benefits for the mother in that research has shown that it lessens mother’s stress and postpartum depressive symptoms within the first month after childbirth (Bigelow, et al., 2012). These studies highlight the importance of touch at the earliest point of a person’s life and how this touch or lack of it has impacts on the developing infant-caregiver relationship.</p> <p>It is common to refer to touch as sexual or nonsexual. However, all humans have a sexual system which is integrated with the tactile system in ways that make categorizing touch in this way an inaccurate descriptor. A “nonsexual” handshake or hug will still activate/interact with the sexual system of the individual. However, this complex interaction does not mean that all touch is experienced as sexual or stimulating. The research on touch in early development is critical to the understanding of touch in close relationships. Affectionate and nurturing touch, early in life, provides a sense of safety, security, and love which is similar to the effects of this type of touch in adult relationships. Harlow (1962) and the skin-to-skin studies demonstrated early experiences with touch, or contact comfort, shaped humans socially and psychologically which has implications for an individual’s capacity to form and maintain healthy close relationships. And yet, as the sexual aspect of this system develops, the experience of touch expands to include feelings of attraction, arousal and sexual behaviors.</p>

RAM Proposition Number 3

The third proposition asserts that each dynamic bond of the RAM has a reciprocal nature within relationships: there is an extent to which you know someone and also are known by that person; trust someone and are trusted; rely on someone and are relied upon; commit yourself to another and have that person commit him/herself to you; be attracted to another/touch another and have that person attracted to you/touch you. The RAM, therefore can represent each person’s contributions of the five dynamic bonds to the overall relationship bond within a relationship *and* the composite measure of the relational bond which must factor in the reciprocal nature of all five bonds.

However, individuals are likely to perceive their relationship somewhat differently and consequently portray their relationship with the RAM accordingly. Relationships are a sum of the complex contributions and interactions of each individual within that particular relationship, creating actual and perceived differences. In other words, differences in both the actual contributions of the five bonds and the perception of these five bonds will most likely result in differences between how each person within a relationship characterizes their relationship on the

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RAM. Therefore the RAM can measure each individual's evaluation of one's self toward another (how I know you, trust you, etc.), the other towards one's self (how I believe you know me, trust me, etc.), and the overall composite of the relationship (the degree we know each other, trust each other, etc.).

For instance, an individual may be prone to quickly developing high levels of reliance on others in their relationships (e.g. dependent or co-dependent). However, this reliance may not be mutual. Therefore, they could describe their reliance as very high on the RAM, but the reliance of the other toward them as low. The composite measure of reliance within their relationship would be a subjective rating of how these two different individual contributions fit together in the overall bond of reliance. This is equally true for all of the dynamic bonds of the RAM. Individuals can be described as possessing characteristics of being self-disclosing, trusting, dependent, committed or affectionate regardless of how the other functions. In all these cases, each dynamic bond of the RAM represents the individual's experience and contribution. However, these individual perceptions are likely to be reflected in that individual's description of their overall relationship when portraying a composite view of their relationship with the RAM.

The differences between the individual composite ratings on the RAM have been shown to correlate with the overall ratings of satisfaction in the relationship. For instance, a wife may want her husband to help more with household tasks and rate the reliance in their relationship in the midrange. On the other hand, her husband may rate reliance high because he is satisfied with the ways that he can depend on his wife and what he believes he does for her. Even though there would be two RAM composite profiles of the relationship (his and hers), these differences would likely correlate with the individual measures of closeness and satisfaction. In other words, you would expect the wife to rate her satisfaction and relational bond in the marriage a bit lower as a result of her perceived lower level of reliance. And all things equal, you would also expect the husband to rate the reliance within the marriage higher as well as his overall satisfaction and relational bond.

This assertion was supported in a qualitative study on the RAM. The study included four married couples and examined whether the five constructs that make up the RAM existed in their relationships as well as how they interacted to produce different feelings of closeness and satisfaction (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013). An interesting finding was that while each spouse was interviewed alone, they recalled similar times in their marriage but discussed them in different ways. For example, one spouse discussed a time when he went back to school and felt immense support from his wife in "picking up the slack" at home. He reported high degrees of closeness, intimacy, and marital satisfaction at that time in his marriage. Conversely, his wife also discussed this time in their marriage but talked about it being a time of great difficulty for her. She said she felt that her husband was absent, not helpful when he had free time, and spent too much time with the females in his educational program. Not surprisingly, she reported low marital satisfaction, levels of intimacy, and closeness during this time (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013).

This study demonstrated the importance of considering the reciprocal nature of the RAM dynamics as well as how individuals are likely to view and portray their relationships differently on the RAM.

RAM Proposition Number 4

The fourth proposition of the RAM asserts that the five dynamic bonds interact in ways to create different relationship profiles. Even though each bond is distinct and independent from the

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others, they still interact to affect the overall relationship bond. In addition, any change or fluctuation in one bond will naturally impact the functioning of the others. As described in the second proposition, the five dynamic bonds are the relational characteristics of five major systems of the self. Therefore, just as one system of the self will naturally affect the other systems of the self, so one relationship bond will affect the others. For instance, it is certainly possible to know someone very well (high level on the *know* bond), but actually dislike that person. This would be portrayed by a high level of know but much lower levels of the other five dynamics. The overall relational bond would be significantly lower than if just trust and rely were raised to match the know level.

The specific effect one bond has on the others is not automatic, but rather subjective. However, there are common patterns which frequently occur when one of the dynamic bonds increase or decrease in intensity. For example in a romantic relationship, a broken trust often leads to lowered levels of reliance, commitment, and sexual interaction. On the other hand, an increase in trust (or belief in another) tends to lead to an increase in reliance, commitment and sexual interest. In a similar way, an increase in reliance could occur when a partner “comes through for you” or “surprisingly meets your needs.” In this case, it would be common for the trust or belief in that partner to increase prompted by an increase in reliance.

However, some “unhealthy” relationships are also intuitive. The classic co-dependent relationship might have high levels of reliance with low levels of trust, while the “rose-colored glasses” relationship may have high levels of trust with low levels of knowing. It is the imbalances of these relationships which often increase the experience of risk or vulnerability. But in all of these various “relationship profiles” it remains true that an alteration in one dynamic bond will have some effect on the others.

Vulnerabilities in relationships can be identified by different high and low combinations of the dynamic bonds. This was repeatedly demonstrated in a dissertation that conducted a qualitative examination of the RAM among married couples (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013). For example, one of the participants talked about her husband getting really involved with his friends and leaving her behind. She described how her need to have him around would go unmet during these times, indicating a drop in her ability to depend on him (the rely dynamic). She articulated that she then would communicate less (know) and feel overly distant from him. In order to recalibrate the imbalances in the relationship, she would usually have to go to him to rebuild the communication and express that she felt distant from him, or her husband would do something thoughtful for her, like washing the dishes. When he met her needs she would feel close to him again which would then repair the distance in their relationship. Had this minor imbalance not been addressed, the relationship would have grown in its vulnerabilities. One minor decrease in reliance and knowing, could have led to major decreases in the sexual relationship, trust, and further decreases in know and rely ultimately leading one to question their commitment to the relationship (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013).

Another example of this is evident among military couples who experience the separation of deployment. As previously stated, the RAM forms the skeletal framework for the LINKS relationship course for couples. This course is widely taught in military settings and has applications specific for couples dealing with the effects of deployment. When asked to move the sliders on the RAM to represent the experience of being separated during a deployment, couples readily show that the know, rely and touch sliders automatically go down (although, in many ways, the rely goes up for the deployed partner and down for the stay-at-home partner). The trust and

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commitment bonds are not necessarily lowered; however, they are always tested by the lowered levels of the other three. In other words, the lowered knowing, relying, and sexual relationship interacts with the trust in one's partner and increases vulnerability to doubt, and interacts with one's commitment by increasing one's vulnerability to unfaithful thoughts and behavior. Military couples talk frequently about their struggles with real or imagined mistrust, and the importance of "guarding" their commitment during deployments.

The example of deployments is similar to the many life experiences that can impact one of the bonds of the RAM and consequently interact with the other bonds to reconfigure the profile of a relationship. This is not always an indication of a wrongdoing or even something bad. In fact, the celebration of a new baby can also disrupt the levels of one or more of the bonds in the RAM, interacting with the remaining bonds and altering the overall closeness a couple feels in their relationship (e.g. the sexual relationship may lower when interacting with the other areas to result in a feeling of being distanced or out of touch with each other). One would expect numerous life events to impact the levels of the five dynamic bonds creating various relationship profiles throughout the course of time, and that the "successful" relationship would regularly identify these profiles and work together to strengthen the levels whenever they were lowered.

APPLICATIONS OF THE RAM

The RAM has several applications that extend beyond previous relationship theories. The first application of the RAM is to relationship development. The RAM provides a pictorial representation of how relationships develop. The order in which the five dynamic bonds are developed can also provide insights into the emotional experiences one has in the relationship. Another application of the RAM is around relationship maintenance. This application applies to people already in relationship. The RAM is a pictorial representation of the relationship and the often difficult to articulate bonds that make up the relationship. By being able to verbalize and visualize what a person or couple is trying to manage in a relationship (their relationship profile), the ability to repair disconnections and manage the relationship is enhanced. Finally, the RAM has implications for counseling and assessment.

Relationship Development & Pacing

The first application of the RAM is to relationship development and pacing. The RAM provides a visual of the dynamic bonds that make up a relationship and therefore provides a picture of the specific areas of a relationship to grow and develop. The PICK a Partner course for singles uses the RAM as a framework for teaching singles how to intentionally pace a developing romantic relationship as well as presenting five areas found to be important, throughout research, to get to know about a potential partner in a relationship. The five areas are family background, the conscience, examples of relationship scripts or patterns, compatibility, and relationship skills. This program has been evaluated for effectiveness and has been shown to increase participants knowledge about how to build a healthy relationship, increase intentions to pace their relationship safely, and increase positive beliefs about marriage and mate selection (Van Epp, Futris, Van Epp, & Campbell, 2008).

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Singles have aspirations for happy, lifelong romantic relationships yet feel increasingly confused about how to build and maintain a healthy relationship (Van Epp, in process; Silliman, 2003; Cobb, Larson, & Watson, 2003). However, singles today are not provided with guidance for selecting a partner and are rarely taught how to develop a healthy relationship (Van Epp, et al.). It is for this reason that this application of the RAM is such an important contribution. The RAM is a picture of what is to be developed in a new relationship that will lead to feelings of closeness, what bonds need to be managed and, where boundaries can be set. In this way, the RAM is an empowering model. It equips singles with a visual as well as provides the language to what is happening when a relationship develops. This will enable them to pace their attachment to another so that they do not become overly vulnerable or blinded to red flags in relationships. The PICK course teaches that one dynamic bond of the RAM should never exceed the previous and that staying within this safe zone minimizes vulnerability and maximizes discretion in a new relationship. There is a logical developmental progression when moving from left to right in the RAM. Trust should not exceed what you know; reliance and your trust should grow together so that one's belief are proven out by real life exchanges; the degree of commitment or investment should be not exceed the previous three; and finally, sexual touch has clear physical and emotional risks when experienced prior to the development of knowing and trusting a partner.

The RAM enables individuals to think about their developing relationship in a global way, using the architecture of the five sliders on the RAM to create a representational profile of major strengths and weaknesses at any given time. This visual empowers individuals to be more understanding and intentional about how they proceed in their relationships.

Relationship Sustainment

The second application of the RAM is to relationship sustainment. This application, to date, has primarily been made to couples in committed relationships; however relationship sustainment could be applied to friendships, family, a relationship with one's spiritual source, employee relationships, and even therapist-client relationships. The Couple LINKS program is an example of a programmatic application of the RAM to relationship maintenance. This program is for committed couples and teaches couples how to be relationship managers and that the five dynamic bonds of the RAM are what should be managed. When the levels of these dynamic bonds are high, feelings of love and closeness are maximized. Maximizing feelings of love and closeness is important for the health and longevity of close relationships (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Holmberg, Orbuch, & Veroff, 2004; Ponzetti, 2005) and has been shown to be the first and foremost predictor for whether a couple belonged to a high or low well-being group with higher well-being associated with greater love (Riehl-Emede, Thomas, & Willi, 2003). The LINKS course uses the RAM to teach couples how to maintain feelings of love through the management of the five dynamic bonds.

The LINKS course also emphasizes that life will often imbalance the RAM dynamics and typically relationships are not self-correcting, therefore it is important to be intentional and diligent about recalibrating the imbalances to minimize the development and deepening of vulnerabilities. Because marital struggles are difficult to describe in words and losing loving feelings are hard to repair, a dynamic picture of the relational bond is useful to struggling couples. In particular, the

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dynamic pictorial of the RAM allows couples and individuals within the dyad to operationalize their bond. This would provide the couple and/or individual with the language to discuss their marital difficulties and a visual representation of deficits in their relationship. Also, normalizing imbalances in relationships for couples serves as a method to instill hope in repairing these imbalances and to restore feelings of love and closeness in the relationship.

In addition, relationship skills are categorized under each of the five dynamic bonds and are considered a means to the end goal of developing and maintaining the bonds of the RAM. For instance, communication should foster a deeper understanding of each other (know). Cognitive skills like maintaining positive attitudes and reframing, forgiveness and thought-stopping, and interactional skills of earning trust are the means to the end of forming and maintaining a belief in another that is associated with closeness (trust). Empathy skills are often included in the communication category, but also enhance one's ability to meet the unique needs of another (rely). Skills of impulse control and resilience increase one's ability to maintain and deepen commitment. And finally, skills of expressing affection, sexual feelings and touch are some of the ways that the touch dynamic bond of a relationship is enriched.

A qualitative study on the RAM was conducted with married couples (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013). Participant checks were conducted in this study, which applied participants' comments about their marriage to the RAM and asked them to provide feedback on how accurate the interpretation of their comments was, as well as how well the comments fit the RAM. One participant said, "It's been so long since the topics summarized were issues in our marriage, so it was really interesting to look back and see it more clearly because of the distance and because of how it was depicted on the model. Overall, it makes so much sense." He also said that he thought "it was an accurate depiction of what was happening in our marriage at the time. I wish we would have had the clarity on it then, maybe it would have helped us through that difficult time." Another participant stated that the depiction of her relationship on the RAM "was so accurate, it was really interesting to read the summary and get perspective on our relationship, it actually explained a lot." Another participant said that she felt the perspective presented in the interpretation really captured how she felt at those moments. Responses like these demonstrated how a simple dynamic picture can provide clarity on the difficult to describe and articulate emotional experiences in relationships. Additionally, these responses demonstrated how the model could have been helpful to these couples during difficult times in their marriage by providing a framework of how to repair their issues.

Counseling/assessment

The final application of the RAM is its therapeutic and assessment utility. The RAM can be used by the therapist or client(s) as an assessment or projective tool to evaluate a relationship. The RAM provides a framework to guide the discussion of an individual's or couple's relationship, to normalize fluctuations in relationships, to instill hope, and to suggest needed skills to actualize the lacking areas of the relational bond.

The RAM is a picture of the relational bond and it is this bond that creates feelings of closeness. Emotional experiences in relationships are often difficult to articulate and the RAM provides a tool to help organize a conversation about relationships in therapy. One example could be a couple that has vastly different emotional experiences in their relationship. The RAM could be presented and explained to both and then the levels of each of the five dynamics could be moved

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by each client to depict their relational experiences. A discussion around how each person in the couple rated the dynamic bonds could help to stimulate insight into both partners' perspectives of the relationship. A conversation around the similarities and differences in ratings would be helpful in elucidating the disparities in perspective.

In addition, because relationship skills can be categorized around the five dynamic bonds of the RAM (know-communication skills; trust-attitude/cognitive reframing, conflict management skills, forgiveness, trust building; rely-skills for meeting unique needs of another, love languages; commit-skills for setting relationship priorities, practicing fidelity, enhancing feelings of belonging; touch-skills for expressing affection, skill sets for a positive sexual experience), lowered ratings on the RAM would suggest skills that would be needed to be developed and/or practiced in order to raise those particular dynamic bonds, revitalizing the feelings of closeness and connection within the relationship.

Another example of how the RAM can be used to guide a therapeutic discussion about relationships would be someone with a problematic pattern of relationship development. This person could be asked to adjust the RAM dynamics to capture his/her experience in relationships and then also be asked to move them to represent how he/she believes others feel toward him/her. This exercise could stimulate discussion around how others may perceive this client, her expectations of others, and how she builds her relationships. This can be useful to facilitate insight with clients who are a co-dependent type of relationship developer (too much reliance), a naive relationship developer (too much trust), one who jumps into commitments without really knowing another, or a client who builds the relationship by first engaging in physical touch.

In general, how close a couple feels today isn't necessarily how close they felt yesterday or will feel tomorrow. The existing theoretical frameworks on close relationships do not capture this phenomenon. However, the RAM's ability to capture fluctuations of love and closeness in a relationship also has implications for practitioners. One implication is that by the very pictorial presentation of the model and the five bonding dynamics on continua that go both ways, it normalizes fluctuations of closeness within relationships. This normalization can provide immediate relief to a couple in a crisis or worried about feeling less close in their marriage. Normalizing fluctuations in love feelings throughout a marriage can serve to instill hope in couples. Researchers have asserted that treatment outcomes are more positive if the therapist can uncover or instill hope in clients (Cooper, Darmody, & Dolan, 2003). More specifically, Ward and Wampler (2010) used grounded theory to study the importance of instilling hope in couples counseling and found that couples who moved up on a continuum of hope had greater levels of marital satisfaction after therapy. The presentation of the RAM could assist in normalizing couples imbalances and serve to foster hope that loss of love feelings can change and improve. This installation of hope is an important therapeutic advantage of the RAM.

Another therapeutic implication is that the RAM operationalizes the experience of love and closeness in a relationship in terms of the five dynamic bonds. This gives definition to the feelings of non-love or "we've fallen out of love" and provides definition to what can be repaired and rebuilt. Rather than out of love or in love being an all or nothing category, the RAM allows for different levels of dynamics that contribute to love feelings and clearly implies that these levels can be strengthened. Overall, these implications suggest that the RAM can serve to help practitioners normalize fluctuations in closeness, instill hope regarding loss of love feelings, define areas of the relationship that should be strengthened through the therapeutic work, and point to the skill sets needed to accomplish progress.

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Finally, the RAM has implications for assessment in therapy. The RAM is a simple and projective model that can be quickly explained and used at various times in the counseling relationship. Specifically, progress on the RAM could be tracked intermittently throughout the course of counseling: at the beginning of discussion about the relationship; regularly after 2-4 sessions; and then at termination. This could be accomplished by providing clients a picture of the RAM and then asking them to circle where they feel each dynamic bond is at that specific period in time. Given the increase in short-term therapy models, this could help therapists hone in on the crucial issues to address with that client or couple as well as demonstrate where improvements have occurred. It is also a relationship map that can be used in conjunction with a solution-focused approach because it provides an organization of their relationship but allows for a projected solution to the lowered levels of any of the five dynamic bonds (e.g. use of scaling questions, the miracle question, past success and preferred future questions).

A pictorial measure of the RAM was used in a study with female soldiers examining reasons for the high divorce rate among this population (Van Epp Cutlip, 20?? *In progress*). The participants were provided definitions of each of the five dynamic bonds of the RAM and then asked to rate each of these constructs on a likert-scale from 1-9. When only the married females were used (n = 341), ratings on the RAM were able to distinguish between those who were dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied in their marital relationship. Furthermore, the measure of the RAM contributed to 54% of the variance in marital satisfaction which was greater than using the number of marital problems reported as a predictor.

Another study examined the extent that the Passionate Love Scale (CITATION), the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (CITATION), and the measure of the RAM predicted marital satisfaction among 425 married individuals. The results found that the PLS was not a significant predictor, but that the RAM and MSIS predicted 74% of the variance in relationship satisfaction and that the RAM alone predicted 68.9% of the variance in relationship satisfaction (Van Epp Cutlip, *in progress*). These findings provide preliminary evidence of the clinical utility of the RAM as an assessment.

An assessment using the RAM can be quickly administered and used in counseling as a quick gauge of relationship satisfaction. Yet the RAM contributes above and beyond the existing measures of relationship satisfaction in that it also provides insight into the health of each of the five dynamic bonds in that individual or couple's relationship, suggesting points of focus and intervention in therapy.