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Relationship Quality Associations Family Values for Online Graduate Students with Intimate Partners

Tracy J. Jones-Garcia
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tracy Jones-Garcia

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Review Committee

Dr. Denise Horton, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Grant Rich, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Dr. Victoria Latifses, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2017

Abstract

Relationship Quality Associations Family Values for

Online Graduate Students with Intimate Partners

by

Tracy Jones-Garcia (Stage)

MA, The New School for Social Research, 2008

BA, Alfred University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Previous research found that relationship quality (RQ) for intimate couples may be adversely effected in times of stress, potentially decreasing marital satisfaction up to 36% during a four-year period for high stress couples. Previous research indicated family values (FV) may mediate RQ in stressful times; however, no research has examined this relationship for online/blended program graduate students. Students in these programs experience unique stress, change, and at times, physical distance from an intimate partner. Coombs's theory on values consensus postulated that the more alike family values are in a relationship, the better the RQ will be. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine differences between graduate students in online/blended programs and their partners in RQ and FV. Forty-five participants were surveyed using convenience sampling through a university participant pool. The majority of the online/blended program graduate participants were Caucasian and female. Variables were measured using the Family Assessment Device (FAD), the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale (PRQC), and demographic information. Mean scores for FAD were elevated indicating dysfunction in FV. A hierarchical multiple linear regression tested the hypothesis that family values are associated with RQ for study participants. The PRQC and FAD were significantly and negatively associated ($R = -.80, \alpha = .05$) indicating as FAD increases PRQC decreases. Online/blended program students may need supports to maintain FV to mediate decreases in RQ during graduate study. Identifying FV impacts RQ can assist in the development of more targeted intervention, design, planning, and implementation of online and hybrid student assistance programs.

Perceived Relationship Quality and Family Values:
Online Graduate Students and Intimate Partners

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my children for their understanding through this process, and for being the reason I could never quit.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Beginning of Family Values Consensus Theory and Development to Present Use.....	1
Values Consensus and Graduate Students	3
Family Values and Family Assessment Device	7
Background	13
FAD and Interventions.....	16
Family Values and Relationship Quality	17
Statement of the Problem.....	19
Purpose of the Study	24
Social Change	25
Scope.....	25
Assumptions and Limitations	26
Research Questions and Hypotheses	27
Research Question 1	28
Research Question 2	28
Research Question 3	29
Research Question 4	29
Research Question 5	30
Research Question 6	30

Definitions of Theoretical Constructs.....	30
Definition of Terms.....	32
Significance.....	34
Summary.....	36
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	39
Preface.....	39
Family Values Consensus Theory	41
Research Process.....	43
Introduction.....	46
Populations of Interest	47
Variables of Interest.....	49
Introduction of Family Values	49
Introduction of Relationship Quality	51
Studies of Family Values and Relationship Quality Affects	53
Times of Stress: Relationship Satisfaction and Values.....	54
According to Theory: Overview	54
Relationship Stressors and Quality	55
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual Relationship Quality.....	57
Marital Satisfaction and Values in Times of Separation	58
Contraindicators of Coombs Value Consensus Theory	59
Family Functioning Values of Goals and Self-Expansion Associated with Relationship Quality	60
Other Family Functioning Values as Associated to Relationship Quality	62

Interventions to Maintain Relationship Quality with Family Values	65
Implications of Past Research on Present Research	77
Literature Relating to Differing Methodologies	78
Measures for Study on Relationship Quality and Family Functioning	
Values	79
Summary	83
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	85
Purpose of the Study	85
Research Design and Approach	86
Setting and Sample	87
Participants.....	87
Procedures.....	88
Instrumentation	90
Demographics	90
PRQC.....	90
FAD.....	90
Appropriateness	92
Analysis.....	93
RQ1.....	94
RQ2.....	95
RQ3.....	95
RQ4.....	96
RQ5.....	96

RQ6.....	97
Scoring	97
Ethical Considerations	97
Summary.....	98
Chapter 4: Results.....	100
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.....	103
Data Analysis Results	107
Research Question 1	110
Research Question 2	112
Research Question 3	113
Research Question 4	113
Research Question 5	113
Research Question 6	113
Summary.....	113
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	115
Study Overview	115
Interpretation of Findings	116
Limitations of the Study.....	119
Recommendations.....	120
Theoretical Framework and Research Findings	122
Implications.....	122
References.....	124
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter	141

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Relationship Quality and Family Values.....	142
Appendix C: Demographic Survey.....	145
Appendix D: PRQC.....	147
Appendix E: FAD.....	149

List of Tables

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages for Participant Demographics	105
Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients Predicting Perceived Relationship Quality	112

List of Figures

Figure 1. Detrended normal P-P plot for FAD distribution.....	108
Figure 2. Detrended normal P-P plot of relationship quality distribution	109
Figure 3. Normal P-P scatterplot for regression predicting PRQC by FAD.....	110
Figure 4. FAD scatterplot for regression predicting PRQC.....	111

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Beginning of Family Values Consensus Theory and Development to Present Use

Family values are constructs that are held to be important and that keep a family unit functional (Coombs, 1966). Where these values may differ from family to family, several have been found to be stable across cultures (Staccini, Tomba, Grandi, & Keitner, 2014). *Relationship satisfaction* is the degree to which one is content with a relationship (Ng, 2010). Coombs (1966) postulated that the more similar values intimate partners have, the more satisfaction the couple will have in the relationship. In Coombs's landmark study, communication and self-improvement were found to be of utmost importance to the quality of intimate partner relationships. Initially, the values construct, though objectively defined, was more superficial and based on things such as attractiveness and hobbies that couples had in common (Coombs, 1966). The investigation did not yet include in-depth family values; Coombs later added communication and self-improvement as variables. Coombs developed values consensus theory, which focused on positive effects of values in relationships. Coombs, investigated the similarity of likes and dislikes of couples, finding that similarities increased relationship satisfaction. Coombs then conducted further research on communication values and how partners value themselves (Coombs, 1966). The consensus of couples in these areas was found to indicate better relationship satisfaction. This theory was the basis for this current line of research.

Communication was one of the family values selected for the investigation of associations with relationship quality, which included relationship satisfaction as a factor. The investigation included assessment for the consensus of family values in intimate

relationships; however, other possible interactions of family values and relationship quality also constituted an area of assessment.

The Family Assessment Device (FAD; Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1984) is a tool that assesses multiple family values. The values captured in the construct include problem-solving, defined as the manner in which difficulties are resolved and approaches are revised in the family (Epstein et al., 1984). It also includes the communication factor investigated by Coombs (1966), which relates to how people approach one another in conversation, or even if a discussion takes place (Epstein et al., 1984). Roles are an additional factor in the construct, defining responsibilities, how to divide responsibilities, and whether family members meet responsibilities (Epstein et al., 1984). Roles include self-improvement goals of exploring personal interests. Affective responsiveness is another factor, pertaining to how family members express emotions and how interaction takes place in response to them. Affective responsiveness also includes the pursuit of personal goals, and whether or not others are helpful (Epstein et al., 1984). Affective involvement, another factor, relates to what actions are taken to intervene on the behalf of others in distress (Epstein et al., 1984). Behavioral control is yet another factor and addresses rules about functional behavior, disruptive behavior, and consequences of established rules not being followed (Epstein et al., 1984). Finally, general functioning is both a factor and a stand-alone construct that is an overall assessment of functioning that includes components of all of the factors above (Epstein et al., 1984). This approach may be used to investigate the importance of partner support during major decisions in life.

In-depth measures that are currently used, such as those that compose the FAD, continue to include communication in assessing family values (Epstein et al., 1984). This

multidimensional measure also includes other constructs that have proven reliable and valid in assessing the functioning of today's families in terms of values, according to a recent review (Staccini et al., 2015). It assesses how family members interact, how they are involved in each other's lives, how they behave, how they divide responsibilities, and how they treat each other overall to assess functioning.

In this section, I address how values consensus theory can be applied to the evaluation of students in online and hybrid programs and their partners using the FAD and the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale (PRQC) to assess associations between family functioning values and relationship quality. This population has not previously been assessed in terms of consensus theory, or family functioning and its associations with relationship quality. A brief overview of the measures, how they were used, and the intent of their use is presented. Additionally, I explain how this study may promote awareness of these associations for students and promote healthy family values to maintain good relationships throughout a student's graduate career in an online or hybrid graduate program. Finally, I describe the ways in which this research may foster better student intervention programs to assist in maintaining areas of a student's life through graduation other than simply academics.

Values Consensus and Graduate Students

This research was specifically concerned with family values of online and hybrid program graduate students and their partners, and the association of these values with the quality of their relationships. There was little research on the association of family values and relationship quality in graduate students and their partners, and even less for graduate students in online or blended programs. For this study, the term *blended programs* was

used as described by Allen and Seaman (2011) and others who have conducted research on the topic of online learning funded by the U.S. Department of Education (Department of Education, 2010) annually. *Online education* refers to a situation in which more than 80% of learning occurs online, whereas *blended learning* refers to a situation in which between 30% and 79% of content is online (Department of Education, 2010). Blended programs, such as a well-known program for professional psychology, require students to spend a minimum of 52 days of face to face with faculty (Walden University, 2014). This definition exceeds the minimum of 30% specified in the definition to qualify for a hybrid program. Graduate programs considered online rather than hybrid programs only require 16 days of face-to-face time (Walden University, 2014). Other universities with online and blended programs follow similar formats, with blended programs requiring more than 30% face-to-face interaction of graduate students with faculty (Argosy University, 2015; Capella University, 2015; Department of Education, 2014; Fielding University, 2015). These figures do not include professional conferences required of students, which total about 6 days for all students. Researchers on online and hybrid academic programs, including those sponsored by the Department of Education, have focused on the evaluation of academic success or program satisfaction by faculty and students (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Department of Education, 2014). Such research has not included other areas of life quality for students in online and hybrid programs, such as relationship quality. Online and hybrid programs have been successful in academic terms, but further investigation into how students are functioning holistically within them would strengthen both the organization's effectiveness and the programs' recognition as good programs. Such research could also help to ensure the preparedness of students who attend these

programs for graduation from a mental health standpoint. Not functioning well in one or more areas of life signifies dysfunction and therefore lack of holistic functioning (American Psychological Association, 2014). Keeping relationship quality intact is part of maintaining a student's holistic functioning. Identifying the family functioning values that maintain aspects of relationship quality may assist in the development of more targeted intervention design, planning, and implementation.

Research on graduate students in brick-and-mortar doctoral and master's programs has been conducted to assess students' satisfaction in their relationships (Gold, 2006). Gold (2006) examined common areas of marital concern, which are similar to the values discussed by Coombs (1966) and constructs from other, more updated assessment tools (Epstein et al., 1984, Gold, 2006). One such area of marital concern is communication value. Communication involves how partners speak to one another and the content of these communications, rather than whether the couple speaks at all (Gold, 2006). Affective communication, specifically, involves communicating on an emotional level and was found to be a factor in maintaining relationship satisfaction (Gold, 2006). Gold, also found that aggression related negatively to satisfaction, substantiating that communication is not the only value influencing satisfaction. Gold's study reported gender effects, specifically indicating that females in graduate programs had decreased satisfaction in their relationships due to changes in values systems that maintain functionality compared to the mean of the overall sample. There were no main effects found for the relation of graduate programs and satisfaction (Gold, 2006). Satisfaction in a relationship is only one factor in relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas,

2000a). *Relationship quality* refers to the overall worth of the relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

The PRQC was developed to assess multiple aspects of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Relationship satisfaction is the most researched aspect of relationship quality and has been found to be the most stable across conditions (Ng, 2010). This finding leads to the question of how relationship quality overall is affected by family values, and how stable its other aspects are across situations. Other factors in the relationship quality construct are *commitment*, meaning dedication and loyalty; *intimacy*, meaning closeness and understanding; *trust*, meaning the degree of confidence and conviction; *passion*, meaning the degree of enthusiasm; and *love*, meaning the level of adoration (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Later research suggested that partner involvement and support in graduate study predicted relationship satisfaction (Silvester, 2011). Family values that have been shown to influence relationship satisfaction include communication and established expectations (Silvester, 2011). In this study, I sought to explore the influence of family values on satisfaction, as well as the other factors of relationship quality reflected in the PRQC.

In this study, I proposed to expand the understanding of similarities of values and show which family values of functioning possessed by individuals in an intimate relationship are predictors of relationship quality. Prior investigations included stressful life conditions such as finances, disease, and separation. Previous research found that relationship quality for intimate couples may be adversely effected in times of stress, potentially decreasing marital satisfaction up to 36% during a four-year period for high stress couples (Williamson, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013). Previous research indicated

family values may mediate relationship quality in stressful times (Andres, 2014; Archuleta, Grable, & Britt, 2013; Bulik, Baucom, Kirby, & Pisetsky, 2011; Manne, Badr, Zaider, Nelson, & Kissane, 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013). Investigations did not include hybrid and online program students as subjects.

Interventions that include the promotion of family values to increase relationship quality have proven effective (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Bulik et al., 2011; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Knoble & Linville, 2012). During times of stress, separation, or change, such as when one partner strives for self-improvement, relationship quality is influenced by family values (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2014; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Intimate-partner perceived relationship quality among students of online and hybrid graduate programs was suspected of being similarly affected by family functioning values. Students in these programs may experience stress, change, and at times distance from an intimate partner. Interventions may be designed based on this research to maintain relationship quality.

Family Values and Family Assessment Device

One line of research has involved the use of the FAD to assess values of family functioning. *Enrich* is a measure of marital quality used to assess the impact of the family unit when a child in the family has an intellectual disability. It has been used to find the interaction between relationship quality and family values (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a). Research by Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Al Gharaibeh, (2011a) is the only example of an attempt to assess a full scale of family functioning values and their interaction with a full scale of relationship quality in the same line of research. The findings indicated difficulty

in family functioning, with added stressors decreasing relationship quality (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a). This finding was thought to be likely to apply to other stress-inducing conditions such as graduate school attendance.

Researchers have looked at the impact of having a child with an intellectual disability on family values functioning and marital quality (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a). Most research in this area has ignored the multiple factors of relationship quality and attended only to satisfaction (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). The need to flesh out research on relationship quality and family functioning values is evident. Interventions promoting family values strengths are known to increase relationship quality (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). More targeted efforts to examine the factors of both constructs may give an expanded view of how relationship quality and family values interact. Such research may also inform students, administrators, and other support staff of when there is a need for intervention. Research into the overall functioning of graduate students in online and hybrid programs that includes consideration of their family functioning and relationship quality has been nonexistent, and such research is needed to examine the holistic functioning of students in these programs. Academic success and program satisfaction are not the only indicators of how successful individuals are in these programs. As a result of this research, planning, and treatment options for students and partners can develop within online and hybrid programs to help maintain relationship quality via family-functioning-values-strengthening interventions. Blended graduate programs put additional stressors on students by requiring travel, as found in a review of program requirements for multiple blended program schools including Argosy (2015), Capella (2015), Fielding (2015), and

Walden (2015). This line of research may enable online and hybrid program administrators to increase awareness of when interventions and referrals to student support programs are necessary.

Very few studies have shown examples of both individual and cumulative values helping to maintain relationship quality during times of stress (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Blended learning programs put demands on families similar to demands on families of those who have to go away on several business trips per year that interrupt family functioning (Rupert, Hartman, & Miller, 2013). These stressors exist in addition to the stressors of an education in general. Stressors of separation have shown to have effects on relationship satisfaction (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Feunfhausen & Cashwell, 2013; Westman, 2004; Westman, Etziaon, & Gattenio, 2006).

Blended and online graduate programs that are effortful endeavors with multiple stressors, and are thought to affect intimate partner relationship satisfaction and to be mediated by family values. Other researchers have shown in various situations that stress in many situations can be mediated by family values (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Feunfhausen & Cashwell, 2014; Westman, 2004; Westman et al., 2006).

Some difficulty in relationships seems to stem from the convolution of the family functioning value of roles definition (Moore, 2010). Marital satisfaction correlates significantly and positively with affective responsiveness (Moore, 2010). Moore (2010) assisted in identifying which values of functioning are most important in situations where one spouse needs to assume the roles of both partners (Moore, 2010). The need for roles to remain intact in order for families to function well was evident in Moore's research,

which showed that role strain decreased overall family functioning compared to the mean and increased the difficulty in relationships compared to the overall sample. When students engage in a graduate program, they often must spend more time doing school work, which can lead to role strain. Assessing the impact of role adjustment for online and blended program graduate students was another way in which I sought to contribute to prevention and intervention planning.

Further research (Hira & Overall, 2011) has addressed self-improvement in connection with relationship quality. Results suggest that grooming one's partner, or rather leading one's partner into adopting a definition of family values other than his or her own, is not the right way to improve relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011). Grooming has a negative association with relationship quality, whereas self-improvement significantly and positively correlates with relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011). The research suggests the benefit of having goals for self-expansion rather than investing in the partner's benefit for improved relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011). That is not to say that support does not matter, only that having self-expansion goals is of benefit (Hira & Overall, 2011). Having goals for oneself is significantly and positively related to relationship quality in an intimate relationship (Hira & Overall, 2011). This research may have implications for the current study on relationship quality for students in an online or hybrid graduate program and their partners. Involvement in a graduate program could have a positive impact on relationship quality, given that education is a self-improvement endeavor. Continued research along this line (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010a) has reinforced the notion that self-improvement relates to greater relationship quality in intimate relationships. Further, researchers have substantiated the idea that support

provided by an intimate partner is significantly and positively correlated with better relationship quality (Overall et al., 2010). One should not create the goals of one's intimate partner but should be available for support. The message in this area of research is that self-improvement needs to be self-directed but the support of an affectively involved partner is significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (Hira & Overall, 2011; Murray, 2014; Overall et al., 2010).

Overall, relationship quality seems to be influenced by family functioning values. Research on sharing accomplishments, as well as being supportive (Logan & Cobb, 2013), suggests that family functioning values that maintain relationship satisfaction change over time. At the beginning of a relationship, sharing accomplishments with the other partner has a positive influence on relationship satisfaction (Logan & Cobb, 2013). In long-term relationships, being supportive of the other person's endeavors tends to be the better predictor of satisfaction (Logan & Cobb, 2013). This research further supports that assessments of relationship satisfaction and value associations must consider time frames in an intimate relationship (Logan & Cobb, 2013).

Assessment of values behavior and general functioning appear in the investigation of control and maintaining a sense of self (Petrican, Burriss, Bielak, Schimmack, & Moscovitch, 2011). If a person is too enmeshed in a relationship or controlled by his or her partner, then it is said that the person has lost a sense of self that separates him- or herself from the relationship as an individual (Petrican et al., 2011). This research also taps into the role identity of family values, as it indicates that a sense of self or role identity is missing in couples with too much enmeshment (Petrican et al., 2011). Relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly lower in couples where identity

was lost (Petrican et al., 2011). In the research of Petrican et al. (2011), the role of caregiver, regardless of gender, related to loss of self to enmeshment. Family values such as roles and affective involvement are therefore contributory to relationship satisfaction. Further investigation to understand the nature of the association between relationship quality and family functioning values is necessary in relation to other situations with role strain. If a partner is in an educational program, role strain may occur due to added responsibilities.

Interventions to maintain relationship quality have been proven difficult due to a multitude of barriers to delivery of services (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). In research on strength-based theory, the most difficult issues appeared in the process of connecting persons who needed services with successful treatment programs (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Populations that experience financial strain, live in remote areas or are undereducated about services available have less access to therapeutic intervention (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Difficulties such as these are inherent to populations whose members need services, and they are less likely to access care even though their needs for care are greater (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). The interventions available may also not fit the desired interventions of the couples who seek treatment for relationship problems (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Relationship satisfaction, however, has proven to be a stable measure within couples that is surprisingly resilient to chronic stressors (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). This research leads to the belief that other factors of relationship quality may be better indicators of a relational discourse. Educational interventions offered to populations that do access services are addressing individuals in different stages of relationships, who have different stressors. Individual conditions of each partnership

increase the difficulty of assessing which values are most important in maintaining relationship quality (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Research with more stressor-specific interventions has been more successful in narrowing down what may work for practitioners in relationship interventions. Stressor-specific interventions for graduate students and their families to strengthen family values can be helpful in maintaining relationship quality for this population and their partners. The creation of interventions is only possible with further knowledge of the interaction between family functioning values and relationship quality for this population.

Background

Family values include communication, problem-solving, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning as defined by Baldwin and Bishop (1985), the developers of the FAD. The following is a brief introduction to various types of family research with values that are in this construct. This research is inclusive of families that have multiple stressors, such as distance or financial stressors. It is also inclusive of specific populations such as veterans' families and nontraditional family constructs. Researchers examine values consensus, cumulative value effects, and opposing values, and the majority of research shows that the similarities and types of value within the partnership are important to relationship satisfaction in times of stress (Arranz Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat et al., 2014). Cutrona and Suhr (1992) found that not only does behavioral control of the person who receives stressful news from their partner matter, but the amount of control of the partner delivering the news also matters. Researchers also found that the similarity of the type of communication between the partners matters as much as the type of

communication in times of stress (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Cutrona and Suhr's study was initial research on the communication component of family values and relationship quality and directly supported Coombs's (1966) consensus theory.

Action promoting supportive communication has been found to be the most effective type of communication in times of stress. Other types of communication did not make a significant difference in comparison to behavior control (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Other more recent research has shown that negative communication, including demanding communication, correlated with poor relationship quality (Arcuri, 2013; Givertz & Safford, 2011). This research was longitudinal, showing the degradation of a relationship over time when one intimate partner suffered from depression (Givertz & Safford, 2011).

Another consideration found in research by Falconier and Epstein (2010) concerns behavioral control and relationship satisfaction. Falconier and Epstein found that the level of behavioral control by the partner in economically stressful situations only affected female relationship satisfaction significantly and negatively (Falconier & Epstein, 2010). This finding showed that only male relationship satisfaction predicted internal levels of behavioral control significantly and negatively. This study leads to the implication that gender differences are of concern in future research regarding family values and relationship satisfaction. It is possible that they are also a concern with the remaining factors of relationship quality in addition to relationship satisfaction. A study that expanded the connection between relationship quality and family functioning values then should include an analysis of gender effects. In studying hybrid program and online graduate students, it is possible to consider these differences. This research may assist in

addressing how interventions could be approached differently with men and women in light of contrasts found.

Research affirms that there does not have to be consensus for partners to have a successful relationship. Relationship satisfaction seems to be mitigated by individual influences rather than similarities, so in researching values, it has been deemed important to attempt to see what each partner contributes (Arranz Becker, 2013). Cumulative possession of certain goals such as communication makes a relationship satisfying (Arranz Becker, 2013). Cumulative effect studies also include the value of self-control (Vohs, Finkenauer, & Baumeister, 2011). There is a need for research on the basis of partners' individual contributions to a relationship in addition to their similarities (Arranz Becker, 2013; Vohs et al., 2011). Research investigating online and blended program students and their partners could examine cumulative effects of values on relationship quality, including the construct of relationship satisfaction.

Longer distances between people in a relationship are becoming increasingly normal and frequent (Merolla, 2010). Research has addressed military and nonmilitary relationships for business purposes (Merolla, 2010). It has been expressed in research that there is a need for a continual scholarly inquiry into *on-the-go* relationships, where copresence is not always possible (Merolla, 2010). Andres (2014) examined work-family conflicts in relation to military separation. These separations are extensive and may induce stressors well beyond those associated with attending online or hybrid program graduate school.

FAD and Interventions

The FAD has been used to assess families in multiple situations in order to design, plan, and implement interventions for the purpose of creating more stable family members (Berge et al., 2014). It has also been shown to be predictive of better health outcomes and individual competence of members of the family (Ahmadi, 2014). Family-functioning values such as those researched using the FAD may be used to assess relationships in multiple scenarios. Such investigative endeavors have provided information on the influence of these values on relationship quality. The situations researched have primarily been psychological and medical in nature. Medical professionals have indicated that family can influence health and healing (Keitner, 2013). Assessment of the need for treatment can be performed using the FAD to assess for functional values (Keitner, 2013). Through research, it can be found which values are important to bolster an intimate relationship during stressful situations and maintain relationship quality.

Other prior studies have used the FAD to assess children and families in at-risk environments for child abuse in order to design successful interventions (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Valdez, Mills, Barrueco, Leis, & Riley, 2011). Volunteers entered homes of at-risk families in order to use the FAD to assess which areas of the families were strengths and weaknesses (Akister & O'Brien, 2011). This investigation was part of the "Keeping Families Strong" initiative (Akister & O'Brien, 2011). This initiative led to the development of strengths-based theory, which identifies family values as strengths rather than functions or values of the family and has made its way across 18 countries in the seven major areas of the world on six continents (Defrain & Asay, 2007). Families in all

of these countries have been found to have similar core strengths for family functioning (Defrain & Asay, 2007).

Family Values and Relationship Quality

Longitudinal research that includes values of family functioning such as communication indicates that over time, relationship quality decreases when one intimate partner has depressive symptoms (Givertz & Safford, 2011). Also shown is that *a mutual constructive* style of communication mediates the effects of relationship quality by decreasing depressive symptoms for men (Givertz & Safford, 2011). This research affirms that supports rather than demands, and collaboration rather than isolation are important in personal as well as partnership wellbeing (Givertz & Safford, 2011). Furthermore, behaviors and lack of support, perceived as hostility have been shown to increase evaluators' negative perception of perceived relationship quality on the PRQC (Hammond & Overall, 2013). Hostile sexism and overt feelings of women seeking control rather than being supportive of their partner's endeavors have led to poor evaluations of perceived relationship quality on the PRQC, as well as negative behaviors (Hammond & Overall, 2013). Once again, the research has indicated that support rather than interference with goals of the intimate partner leads to better-perceived relationship quality.

Research on values of family functioning has shown that certain values, or contributors to values factors, can ameliorate stress (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Manne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Support in the form of affective involvement and responsiveness seems to improve relationship satisfaction during stressful times (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Fivecoat et al.,

2014). Further studies on relationship quality have shown correlations between relationship satisfaction and family functioning values in general (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013).

Communication seems to best predict relationship satisfaction in a multitude of situations (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013). Studies involving students have indicated similar results in times of stress, and when one is pursuing self-improvement, affective responsiveness is a value that is strongly associated with improvement of relationship quality, as measured by the factor of satisfaction (Fivecoat et al., 2014). Studies have been conducted to show student satisfaction with online and hybrid programs, as well as the success of students in such programs (Allen & Seaman, 2011). About two-thirds of academic leaders report that students in online or blended learning programs are just as satisfied with their learning as students in a face-to-face program (Allen & Seaman, 2011). However, satisfaction in other areas of life while attending online and blended learning programs, such as relationship quality, has not been assessed. Further research has been needed to assess how students are functioning in terms of family functioning values and the association of these values to relationship quality. Research in this area has promoted increased awareness of associations so that students can self-monitor changes and seek interventions if necessary. Student assistance programs can better prepare based on findings of associations between values and relationship quality to reinforce values structures found to be pertinent to quality relationships.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate study is a rigorous prospect regardless of the method one chooses to pursue it. There are many barriers and stressors associated with a graduate education, some of which may be unforeseen (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqudeh, & Bufka, 2012). Several researchers have indicated that one stressor with many dynamics is the effect of graduate enrollment on students' families (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Gold, 2006; Legako, 2000; Silvester, 2011; Sweet & Moen, 2007). The perceived quality of marital relationships during graduate school is one of the factors that has been found to be a stressor (Gold, 2006; Legako, 2000; Silvester, 2011).

There is evidence supporting the use of blended programs as a best practice (Allen & Seaman, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010); however, even the best formats for learning have challenges. Blended learning programs put demands on families that are similar to the demands on professionals who have to go away on multiple business trips each year (Walden University, 2013). Business trips for families are also stressful to family relationships (Westman, 2004; Westman, Etziaon, & Gattenio, 2006). Time away creates a stressor related to being in this type of graduate program, possibly causing distress as well as a need for coping mechanisms and strategies. Feunfhausen and Cashwell (2013) investigated the perceived stress of graduate students and their marital satisfaction. Their findings were that perceived stress was not a predictor of marital satisfaction; rather, it was a predictor of the coping mechanisms used. Therefore, if there is an excess of perceived stress, adequate coping skills need to be taught and practiced to maintain marital satisfaction (Feunfhausen & Cashwell, 2013). Family-functioning values such as communication skills and behavioral control, when

adequate, may be coping skills that are effective in maintaining relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is also only one aspect of relationship quality; thus, relationships under strain need further investigation concerning the remaining factors of this construct.

Nonblended programs still carry the weight of many traditional programs. Even though travel is limited for students in nonblended online programs, the coursework demands are the same as those of traditional graduate programs. Further, student learning in an online environment does not have the structure of traditional programs. Students do not have scheduled hours to do their work or constant face-to-face contact with staff. They must make certain that they have an abundance of time set aside for their work, which requires balance and time management (Daymonth & Blau, 2011). Partners of blended and online graduate students must have an understanding of what students in such programs need to do to be successful. There is a need to give up time with the partner to accomplish graduate-level work. This condition creates the complication of being present but not available (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Communication and acceptance were shown to be pertinent in this study (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Further investigation is necessary to determine whether communication is also pertinent in online and hybrid graduate school programs as a means to maintain relationship quality with students and intimate partners. Attention to this matter may assist in the development of support programs specifically designed to increase communication skills between graduate students and their partners, both as preventative measures and as interventions. Further investigation on the remaining constructs of family functioning values would also be helpful in modifying supportive measures and interventions. Some predictive value

could be added to better design programs to sustain the family functioning values most related to relationship quality.

There is a need to develop more research in this area to investigate what support students who are attending graduate programs at online and hybrid program schools require to maintain their relationships. Graduate students in blended programs have to navigate households from varying distances during residencies. Previous research involving marital relationships in which one member was attending graduate school indicated a need to offer students support through knowledge and planning strategies (Gold, 2006; Legako, 2000; Silvester, 2011). Students can also make informed decisions as to how to proceed with graduate school while involving spouses who have themselves expressed concerns about communication in the relationship (Legako, 2000). The studies that have been done on relationship quality in situations in which one partner is in graduate school have not included intimate partners other than spouses. According to a definition on the webpage of the New York State Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (2013),

Intimate partner includes persons legally married to one another; persons formerly married to one another; persons who have a child in common, regardless of whether such persons are married or have lived together at any time; couples who are in an “intimate relationship” including but not limited to couples who live together or have lived together, or persons who are dating or who have dated in the past, including same sex couples.

For the purpose of this study, I applied the definition of *intimate partner* presented above, with the additional criterion that the person was considered part of the

student's family unit by the student. This definition was chosen on the basis that it reflected the desired criteria for inclusion in the study. The intimate partner did not need to be considered legally attached to the student in any way, given that some relationships were still not legally recognized despite the level of intimacy, such as same-sex relationships (Haas & Whitton, 2015). Further investigation in the area of online and blended graduate programs' effects on intimate partner relationships, therefore, was the next likely step in developing the research in this area to support student success. This investigation included assessing what values and norms were in place for the family unit inclusive of the student and intimate partner. This quantitative study used a survey to assess demographic information and established measures of perceived relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000b) and family values (Baldwin & Bishop, 1985) to assess graduate students and partners of students in different years of graduate study in online and blended graduate programs. The assessment tools included the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; 2000) and the McMasters Family Assessment Device (FAD; 1985). The authors of both tools gave permission for the tools' use in educational research, as long as only participants in the research study received a distribution (Baldwin & Bishop, 1985; Fletcher et al., 2000b). The programs represented by participants included blended graduate programs and other online graduate programs that were not blended. Comparisons by years of attendance, duration of the relationship, and other student demographics were used to clarify predictions.

Through my study, I sought to offer students, teachers, and families more information on the associations that hybrid and online degree program formats may have with the perception of graduate students' relationship quality with intimate partners

through the duration of a degree program. It assisted in determining which values associate with perceived quality. This study may contribute to positive social change by helping others to develop supports and coping strategies for students or help students decide whether an online or blended graduate program is a good choice for them. Student intervention programs can monitor and assess why students are calling in and assess whether interventions developed specifically for students with relationship difficulties may be necessary as a result of this study. Implementation of such interventions may help students in online and hybrid programs to remain holistically functional.

Lei and Chuang's (2010) research demonstrated that it is important in choosing a graduate program to ensure that the program fits the student's lifestyle and objectives. The FAD assisted with giving my study predictive value. The values and norms of intimate partners as assessed with the FAD that associated with relationship quality made evident. The study also allows for the schools' administration to reexamine supports available to minimize the impact of graduate programs on the perceived relationship quality of graduate students. Within blended programs, students travel to the school site for face-to-face contact on multiple occasions totaling 30% or more of their time (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Online programs without blending do not include an abundance of face-to-face contact with instructors, but they still have a face-to-face component (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Intervention programs to best assist students in both types of program can adapt to suit the needs of students in intimate partnerships. Such programs can also give students, administrators, and faculty knowledge on how to help maintain healthy holistic functioning for each student by being aware of which areas of family-values functioning may need support throughout students' programs of study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family values and relationship quality for online and blended graduate program students and their intimate partners and to determine whether there are differences between students and their partners. Additionally, I sought to examine changes in family values, relationship quality, and family values associated with relationship quality over time when one partner was in attendance in an online or hybrid graduate program for both groups. There was no causality achieved; however, I conducted an investigation via multiple linear regression methods to find correlative relationships between family functioning values and maintenance of relationship quality for graduate students in an online or hybrid program. Online and hybrid graduate students were recruited through a university participant pool to access the entirely online survey. Once a student agreed to participate, the student received a link to send to his or her partner explaining the study so that the partner might also decide on his or her willingness to participate.

Family-functioning values can mediate stressful situations by maintaining relationship satisfaction (Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Al Gharaibeh, 2011b). This study expanded the examination to include additional aspects of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Studies have shown the successful nature of online and hybrid graduate programs in relation to academics and student satisfaction. However, other aspects of student life, including relationships while engaged in these programs, have yet to be investigated.

Social Change

It is important to help students maintain holistic functioning so that they can meet the criteria for a highly functioning individual outside academia. Part of holistic functioning is the maintenance of the family and social functioning, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20). The stressors of online and hybrid programs include the stressors of traditional graduate school as well as stressors that resemble those associated with business travel. Additionally, many students in these programs are working professionals, for whom time to study means more time away from family. Given these conditions, it is important to find what family functioning values help to make students in hybrid and online graduate programs and their intimate partners more aware of their values and their association with relationship quality. Interventions that are specific may be designed and implemented to help maintain wellbeing in students and families, as family-values treatment interventions have previously been successful (Wen, Simpson, Baur, Rissel, & Flood, 2011).

Scope

The scope of the study included only graduate students who were in online or hybrid programs and their partners. The study assessed relationship quality while one partner was in an online or graduate program and how relationship quality related to various family-functioning values. These values only included the FAD assessment constructs, which were communication, behavioral control, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, problem-solving, and general functioning. The study also only included an assessment of relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC

assessment constructs, which were love, satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, passion, and trust. This study included only participants from one university participation pool and their partners.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that all participants in the study were willing and had not been coerced in any way to participate. Participation in the study did not affect students' standing at school in any way. It was also assumed that the graduate students and their partners were not sharing their individual answers with each other on the honor system, as was asked in the participation agreement. It was also assumed that the participants would complete questionnaires truthfully and to the best of their ability. Further, it was presumed that both instruments, the PRQC, and the FAD, would be appropriate means for measuring the designated variables in the electronic format in which they were distributed.

The generalizability of this study may have been limited beyond similar populations of the hybrid and online graduate students of the single university research pool sampled and their intimate partners. This method may have limited the applicability of the research to graduate students in such programs, as it may not be reflective of undergraduate populations in online or hybrid programs of study. It would also have been useful to have more direct access to the students' partners; however, given the specificity of the population, it was necessary to ensure that participating partners were partners of online or hybrid program graduate students. Therefore, it was necessary to recruit partners via direct links from participating students. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study lent itself to limitations concerning assumptions about long-term

outcomes, as in some previous research (Givertz & Safford, 2011). This study thus presents opportunities for further investigation in the future. It was a correlation study to be analyzed via multiple linear regression equations; therefore, causality could not be drawn. Relationships were assumed to have variables that could not be accounted for by the study. All attempts were made to reduce effects of extraneous variables by examining effects of demographics such as gender, age, the length of relationship, and length of time a student had spent in an online or hybrid graduate program.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses were developed as a result of reviewing the literature in the areas of family strengths values and relationship quality. Chapter 3 contains details on the nature of the study and methodology. This cross-sectional study assessed students in different years of their academic program simultaneously in order to capture a progression of family functioning values and their association with relationship quality over time without extending the study over a long period. It was correlational because the assessment of a population of participants that were all experiencing the condition of being a hybrid program or online graduate students, or partners of these students, did not allow for a control group. Initially, family values as assessed by the FAD constituted the independent variable. Influence on relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC was evaluated using multiple linear regression in order to capture relationships based on subscales and complete measures within the analysis. Demographics of gender and whether the participant was a student or partner were assessed for influence on both family values and relationship quality in the same manner. The demographic assessed was then the independent variable, and the

measures of relationship quality or family values (PRQC or FAD) were the dependent variables.

Research Question 1

Is perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is not predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

Research Question 2

If perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by the family values for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners, are there effects of years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of relationship?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners is moderated by years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by family values as measured by the FAD in online and blended program

graduate students and their partners is not moderated by years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

Research Question 3

Are family values as measured by the FAD predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner?

Alternate hypothesis. Family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner.

Null hypothesis. Family values as measured by the FAD are not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner.

Research Question 4

If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration?

Alternative hypothesis. If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Null hypothesis. If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner, then there are no effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Research Question 5

Is perceived relationship quality predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality is not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

Research Question 6

If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner, are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration?

Alternative hypothesis. If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Null hypothesis. If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are not effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Definitions of Theoretical Constructs

Consensus theory posits that values that are similar increase the likelihood of satisfaction in a relationship (Coombs, 1966). The theory links satisfaction to the integrity of these values remaining similar between partners (Coombs, 1966). This research investigated this link and whether the association between values and relationship quality is necessarily a consensus for online and hybrid program graduate students and their

partners. It further added to this research by determining whether particular family values associate more strongly with relationship quality for this population. Coombs (1966) identified communication as a key value in relationship satisfaction. Since the development of this theory, further constructs have been developed, with valid assessments of family values that include the factor of communication (Epstein et al., 1984). Further investigation in this study assessed associations of relationship quality with other established family values within these constructs.

Some researchers describe family values as *family strengths*. The original family values construct (Coombs, 1966) is part of the construct of family strengths (Defrain & Asay, 2007). These are the values contained in the FAD (Epstein et al., 1984) used to assess family values within this line of research. The term chosen to describe this inclusion is *family strengths values* within the current research in order to denote the updates to the older, more limited definition of *family values*. Recent research (Fivecoat et al., 2014) investigated partner responsiveness to the self-expansion value. A graduate education could be seen as an effort toward self-expansion. This interaction of relationship quality and family functioning values was investigated in the online and blended program graduate student population to determine whether consensus theory applied in this current study as well, or if there are other interactions between the factors that could lead to effective interventions when values or quality are not favorable.

Relationship satisfaction is often investigated for association with values (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a; Andres, 2014). Satisfaction, as defined by researchers (Fletcher et al., 2000a), is only part of the overall construct of relationship quality. Satisfaction is the

most studied variable within the construct, and thus this study is among the few that denotes that delineation.

Definition of Terms

Affective involvement: Affective involvement entails actions taken to intervene on behalf of others in distress in the family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Affective responsiveness: Affective responsiveness is how emotions are expressed, and how interaction takes place in response to them within the family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Behavioral control: Behavioral control refers to rules about functional behavior, disruptive behavior, and consequences of established rules not being followed within the family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Commitment: Commitment is dedication, loyalty, and intimacy, meaning closeness and understanding (Epstein et al., 1984).

Communication: Communication involves how people approach one another in conversation, or even whether a discussion takes place within a family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Family values: Family values are constructs that are held to be important and that keep a family unit functional (Coombs, 1966).

General functioning: General functioning is both a factor and a stand-alone construct that is an overall assessment of functioning within the family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Hybrid program: Otherwise referred to as *blended learning*, refers to a program that contains between 30% and 70% online learning and is coupled with face-to-face contact with instructors (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Intimate partner: As defined by the New York State Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (2013),

Intimate Partner includes persons legally married to one another; persons formerly married to one another; persons who have a child in common, regardless of whether such persons are married or have lived together at any time; couples who are in an “intimate relationship” including but not limited to couples who live together or have lived together, or persons who are dating or who have dated in the past, including same sex couples.

Love: Love is the level of adoration in a relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Online program: A program in which more than 80% of all learning is done online (United States Department of Education, 2014).

Passion: Passion is the degree of enthusiasm in a relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Problem-solving: Problem-solving involves how difficulties are solved and how approaches are revised in a family (Epstein et al., 1984).

Relationship quality: Relationship quality is the overall worth of the relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Relationship satisfaction: Relationship satisfaction is the degree to which one is content with a relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Roles: Roles involve defined responsibilities, how responsibilities are divided, and whether responsibilities are met within a family. Roles include self-improvement goals of exploring personal interests (Epstein et al., 1984).

Trust: Trust is the degree of confidence and conviction in a relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000a).

Significance

This study contributes to the understanding of how graduate students perceive relationships with their intimate partners. Specifically, it examined the course of attendance in an online or blended graduate program and monitored changes in relationship quality for students. It offers information as to differences between previous studies of brick-and-mortar graduate students and those of blended program or online program graduate students in terms of relationship quality. This study examined how specific family functioning values relate to online and blended program student and intimate partner relationship quality.

This study may also increase awareness among faculty and students of relationship quality perceptions that can develop throughout the course of students' graduate study. The information about family values gleaned from this study may aid in efforts to plan ahead, implement support systems, and develop courses of action if relationship perceptions do become a cause for concern for graduate students. This support may include implementing prevention and intervention strategies to strengthen the values that have a correlation with increased relationship quality. Traditional brick-and-mortar college programs have investigated how to maintain relationship quality by looking at communication and perceived relationship quality. Findings have shown that

when this aspect of family functioning values suffers, satisfaction with intimate relationship quality between college students and their intimate partners suffers as well (Le et al., 2011).

Other factors of family functioning values have yet to be addressed. This study investigated all factors of perceived relationship quality and family functioning values for this style of educational forum for graduate students to maintain their holistic functioning. This study supports further investigation into family functioning values and relationship satisfaction for nontraditional and graduate students. It may change the manner in which staff of educational programs look at student evaluation and support their wellbeing to help them remain as holistically functional as possible. The potential for perceptions of relationship quality to be affected is exponential for graduate students in a blended program. The similarities of a blended program to not only traditional graduate programs, but also to travel for business creates the potential for additional stress (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Gold, 2006; Legako, 2000; Silvester, 2011; Sweet & Moen, 2007; Westman, 2004; Westman, Etziaon, & Gattenio, 2006). This aspect should be planned for in addition to typical intervention strategies in place for graduate work, coping strategies, and crisis intervention plans.

Legako (2000) implied that family involvement lessens the impact of stressors on the quality of the relationship. It is possible that different structures to include intimate partners to a greater extent in graduate students' education plans are necessary. Such planning may assist in boosting the family values of communication and understanding in the relationship during graduate school. Using the FAD, communication and understanding were assessed in online and hybrid program graduate students as indicators

of strengths. Maintaining these values may reduce the potential for negative impact on the quality of the relationship.

After searches of multiple databases including Google Scholar, WorldCat, dissertation search engines, and other research databases within social sciences resources, I found no studies on perceived relationship quality of online or blended program graduate students other than anecdotal information. This study had a quantitative design, using a survey for demographic information and reliable, valid methods of assessment for perceived relationship quality and family values and norms: the PRQC (Fletcher et al., 2000b) and the FAD (Baldwin & Bishop, 1985). This study may assist in developing interventions necessary for students who are at risk of decreased relationship quality with their intimate partners and may thus assist in the prevention of degradation of the overall holistic functioning of graduate students in online or hybrid programs.

Summary

An abundance of research has established that stressors influence the multiple factors of relationship quality (Arcuri, 2013; Francis, Worthington, Kypriotakis, & Rose, 2010; Markey, Markey, Nave, & August, 2014; Slotter & Luchies, 2014). There has been further research concerning various values, including behavior control and support of one's partner's endeavors (Arcuri, 2013; Mattingly & Clark, 2012a; Overall et al., 2010; Vohs et al., 2011). Research suggests that there may be values that help to hold relationship quality stable during times of stress and that interventions to instill these values can be effective (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Keitner, 2013). If this is the case, then students who are pursuing self-betterment through online and hybrid graduate programs and who are also under the stressors of such programs may benefit regarding maintaining

relationship quality from assessing their family values. This research lays the groundwork for the development of intervention programs to assist students in keeping their holistic wellbeing stable while in an online or hybrid graduate program.

It seems that these programs are enriched in an academic format and provide more than adequate educational pursuits. It also is the case that students must learn to balance these academic pursuits with the challenges they face to remain well functioning in other areas of life. Intervention programs built upon the completion of this study may benefit from the information discerning what family values would be most helpful to instill in students and intimate partners in order to maintain relationship quality, as well when there is fluctuation in relationship quality while graduate students are in a hybrid or online program.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature, including recent updates to the construct of family values through the FAD as well as family strengths theory. I also look at the literature that contests the notion that stressors have an effect on relationship quality. The chapter begins with an outline of family values theory as originated by Coombs (1966). It then follows the development of family values into a factorial construct. Further, it shows how relationship quality is also factorial, and how satisfaction, though the most prevalent of the relationship quality factors examined, may be more stable than others. Then the chapter reviews how stressors affect relationship quality with intimate partners, as well as family values that maintain the factors of relationship quality during stressful times. In conclusion, the chapter highlights how past research has influenced this current line of investigation.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology used to investigate the research questions. I discuss the appropriateness of the use of linear regression to analyze the effects of family values on relationship quality. I also address the use of comparative analysis of cross-sectional samples over years in an online or hybrid graduate program to show changes in the quality of an intimate relationship during one partner's attendance. The chapter includes a description of the sample population, procedures, ethical considerations, measures, and analysis of the data.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Preface

This review of literature establishes that there was a need for continued research into factors affecting students in online and hybrid programs. This chapter includes research on relationship quality or its subscales such as satisfaction and how this variable is associated with family functioning values. Some of the studies described in this review used the measures that were used in this current study, the FAD and the PRQC, whereas other studies used singular factors contained in these measures. The literature review provides an overview of the research that has been done on family values and relationship quality and outlines the gap in the research that this current research helps to fill in the area of family functioning values and their association with relationship quality in online and hybrid program graduate students and their partners. This research included factors outside of academics for students, such as family functioning values and relationship quality. Ensuring that graduates are healthy and stable in multiple aspects of functioning can promote social change by increasing the likelihood that they will contribute to society. Research has established the connection between family values and relationship quality includes satisfaction (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz-Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat et al., 2014; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Logan & Cobb, 2013; Williamson et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). *Satisfaction* has been used almost synonymously with *quality*, even though satisfaction is only one factor of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000a). Developing an understanding of the predictive association between family functioning

values and relationship quality required further research that included all factors of the measure rather than the single factor of relationship satisfaction.

Interventions that include the promotion of family values to increase relationship quality have proven effective (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Bulik et al., 2011; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Knoble & Linville, 2012). During times of stress, separation, or change, such as when one partner is striving for self-improvement, relationship quality is influenced by family values (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat et al., 2014; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Intimate partner perceived relationship quality within online and hybrid programs was investigated as it was thought to similarly be affected by family functioning values, given that enrollment in these programs may involve stress, change, and distance from an intimate partner. The current research may inform the design of interventions to maintain relationship quality. Intimate partner relationships' perceived relationship quality in relation to family functioning values has not previously been researched for online and hybrid program graduate students. Furthermore, in the majority of existing research on relationship quality and family functioning values, only some factors of relationship quality and some factors of family functioning values have been considered. Measures of family functioning values and relationship quality in their entirety are not often measured, especially not simultaneously.

One line of research used the FAD to assess values of family functioning along with Enrich, which is a measure of marital quality to assess the impact of the family unit when a child in that family has an intellectual disability (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). This research was the only example of an attempt to measure both a full scale of family

functioning values and a full scale of relationship quality in the same line of research. The researchers looked at the impact of having a child with an intellectual disability on family functioning values and marital quality (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). Findings showed that the number of children with disabilities in the family was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship quality (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). Age, marital status, and education were found to significantly correlate with less negative correlation with family functioning values and relationship quality. There was no other research that included all factors of relationship quality and looked into its association with family functioning values as I sought to do in the current study. The need to flesh out research on relationship quality and family functioning values was evident. Students in online and blended graduate programs could benefit from this research, particularly if it informs planning and treatment options for students and their partners. For instance, students' relationships might be supported via systems added to student services that strengthen family functioning values, resulting in increased relationship quality.

Family Values Consensus Theory

Family values theory was the root of this study (Coombs, 1966). This theory indicates that the more similar partners' family values are, the more satisfaction there will be in the relationship. Coombs's (1966) research began with the concepts of valuing oneself and communication value. These are just two of many contributors to family functioning that, according to more recent research, involve the multifactorial collaboration of values (Defrain & Asay, 2007; Epstein et al., 1984; Mansfield, Keitner, & Dealy, 2014). Satisfaction is also just one element of relationship quality, as relationship quality has since been proven multifactorial as well (Epstein et al., 1984).

Family-functioning values have also proven to lend themselves to factorial assessment (Fletcher et al., 2000a). In the current study, I sought to expand from the consensus of values to include predictors of relationship quality. Multiple conditions that include finances, disease, separation, and other life conditions have been investigated (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Bulik et al., 2011; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). My intent was to show differences in relationship quality as predicted by family functioning values.

There was a need to investigate relationship quality and family functioning values in relation to graduate students in online and hybrid programs who are in relationships with intimate partners. Research on these variables had not been consistent across conditions, and relationship quality had been predicted by family functioning values. Family values and relationship quality may predict better outcomes for persons in intimate partner relationships with stressful life conditions. Research findings on intimate partners and these variables had been inconsistent, in part or whole, across varied situations, for multiple reasons: (a) all relevant factors of variables had not been investigated for the association between family functioning values and relationship quality; (b) some studies suggested similarity of family functioning values to be predictive of relationship quality, whereas others did not (Arranz Becker, 2013; Demertas et al., 2011; Morry, Kito, & Ortiz, 2011); and (c) a single factor of family values had not emerged as a consistent predictor across situations for relationship quality (Arranz Becker, 2013; Hammond & Overall, 2013; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Williamson et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2013). It was likely that when considering these factors, a different

pattern of predictors would be found for online graduate students in relation to how family functioning values predict relationship quality.

A related theory, family strengths theory, postulates that similar views within the family lead to better satisfaction (Defrain & Asay, 2007). *Family strengths* are synonymous with terms used to describe family values (Epstein et al., 1984; Mansfield et al., 2014). Appreciation and affection, positive communication, commitment to the family, enjoyable time together, a sense of spiritual wellbeing, and the ability to manage stress and crisis are family strengths (Defrain & Asay, 2007). Researchers have found that these areas remain constant worldwide, even when what constitutes these areas changes (Defrain & Asay, 2007). Studies in 18 countries have indicated that the same areas are predictive of family satisfaction (Defrain & Asay, 2007). Though similar to family values theory, family strength theory is not as inclusive or in-depth, and it does not cover the full gambit of family values assessment; however, it was supportive of the family values of interest in this study. Family strengths, where they were synonymous with family values, were reviewed for background purposes in this research.

Research Process

An intensive search involved the use of university resources such as WorldCat and Google Scholar. Multiple databases were used via this method, and these were the primary source of scholarly research. Multiple dissertations were also reviewed to construct my research throughout the process to ensure both the originality of research content and conformity with the format of research design. WorldCat was also used to search for articles on government websites; thus, articles posted on the websites of the Department of Education and the Department of Mental Health were included. The

majority of the research presented was published within the past five years. Some articles outside this time frame were included because they were unique or seminal, thus contributing to a full picture of research available on family values as they relate to relationship satisfaction.

After extensive searches in which I found over 17,000 hits in Google Scholar for WorldCat, Walden University, and other government or education databases on topics relating to relationship quality and relationship satisfaction, I determined that very few of the articles involved intimate partners in the sense of romantic relationships. Many of these articles related to business rather than romantic relationships. Still more were related to the transmission of values to children from parents. Other topics included relationship quality in relation to similarity or consensus of personality or attachment rather than values. On average, the first few pages of the search materials had one or two valid articles addressing the topic of romantic intimate-partner relationships. After page 9 of the Google Scholar search results, none of the articles that appeared in the searches were related directly to this line of research. The search for values theory yielded the same. There were over 17,000 hits from the search; most of them were related to business rather than individuals in intimate relationships, even when the term *family* was added. For every 20 articles on business relationships, there was only one article on romantic relationships, and among the latter, only about one out of every 10 was related to relationship quality and family values of any type. This thinned to zero romantic relationship articles out of every 20 after the first 200 articles searched and reviewed via Google Scholar results for WorldCat and Walden University. Terms searched included *relationship satisfaction*, *relationship quality*, *perceived relationship quality*, *family*

assessment device, communication, behavioral control, roles and relationship quality, roles and relationship satisfaction, family values and relationship quality, family values and relationship satisfaction, affective involvement and relationship quality, affective involvement and relationship satisfaction, intimate relationship quality, romantic relationship satisfaction, and marital relationship quality.

I searched Google Scholar resources for the FAD and relationship satisfaction; again, I found that many articles on quality did not refer to the intimate-partner relationship. Family satisfaction and quality of life were prevalent topics of research. There were, however, articles on marital satisfaction and relationship satisfaction that pertained to the intimate-partner relationship under various conditions. Results were decidedly a little more fruitful, yielding about five valid results out of every 100, especially when the terms *child* and *childhood* were eliminated. When I used the PRQC scales *attachment* and *personality* as search terms, results improved, yielding about 10 valid articles out of every 100. There were only a few hundred articles using the PRQC, however, where the FAD had thousands of research articles involving the tool.

The scant information that was found relating to this issue indicated that family values had been largely ignored in the literature; instead, the focus had been on research focusing on promoting corporate America. It was of some concern that relationship quality and family functioning had not been attended to adequately in research. Research on these areas of functioning is just as necessary as research on academic functioning. Articles stressing research on matching individuals to encourage family building are beginning to emerge as being single and childless becomes a trend in European countries for educated and career-oriented populations (Leslie & Morgan, 2011). Leslie and

Morgan (2011) discussed the importance of communication as a component of the matching process to ensure relationship quality, similar to Coombs's (1966) consensus theory. Communication was one of the family functioning values proposed for investigation in hybrid and online program students and their partners. Leslie and Morgan's research shows the beginning of a new wave of concern for the integrity of family functioning values' association with relationship quality. This new research can help to ensure the promotion of growth that includes family functioning and relationship quality among future educated populations.

Introduction

The life of students in online and blended graduate programs outside the immediate area of academia was underresearched. These programs have been of benefit to many students who lead full lives with families, as well as to students living in rural areas, for whom obtaining an education may be a challenge. With every educational program, there are benefits and costs, and many of these remain unknown. Many people may not even know the differences between online and blended programs. As defined by Allen and Seaman (2011) in research funded by the U.S. Department of Education, an *online program* is one in which more than 80% of learning occurs online, whereas a *blended-learning program* is one in which 30% and 79% of the content is online.

Students in online and blended graduate programs have lives that often include intimate partners. Studying the life of students outside the context of academic achievement during online and graduate programs can be of assistance in efforts to keep students well-rounded, with their previous lives intact or possibly improved. Very little research exists on the effects of family values on relationship quality overall. The

following presents the theory of family values and the present research concerning family values' effects on relationship quality. Both of these variables are multifactorial, and little research was found investigating both constructs in their entirety. The factors that make up each construct as defined by the PRQC and the FAD were part of the background for this research.

Populations of Interest

Blended programs, such as for some developed for professional psychology degrees leading to licensure, require students to spend a minimum of 52 days interacting with faculty face to face (Capella University, 2015; Fielding University, 2015; Walden University, 2015). Graduate programs that are considered online programs rather than blended programs require 16 days of face-to-face time (Capella University, 2015; Fielding University, 2015; Walden University, 2015). These figures do not include professional conferences required of students whose programs have an online component. Graduate students in online and blended programs, as defined by Allen and Seaman (2011), were the persons of interest in this line of research.

There is evidence supporting blended programs as best practice (Allen & Seaman, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), but even the best formats for learning have challenges. The current research on student relationship quality and family values investigated the association of these variables with the condition of being an online or blended program graduate student. According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20), disruption in social and academic success indicates dysfunction in mental health. Further included is dysfunction of behavioral functioning and functioning in the living

environment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20). It stands to reason that research on areas of functioning besides academic for students may assist them in remaining mentally whole and functional. Even though there was previously research done on family values and relationship quality, none of this research has focused on online and blended program graduate students. Gold (2006) researched graduate students in brick-and-mortar programs, finding that satisfaction was significantly and negatively associated with being a female student in both doctoral and master's programs.

Satisfaction is a component of relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000a). This finding led to the need to further assess relationship quality for online and hybrid program doctoral- and masters level students and the influence of values. Gold found relationship satisfaction to be associated with the family values of behavioral control, communication, and roles. Examining students in other educational formats assisted in expanding this research and attending to the growing population of students within these formats.

Researchers have, however, shown that differences in these variables may be dependent upon the situations of the intimate partners involved. Research has shown that certain family values hold relationship quality stable across situations but has not included a measure designed to assess overall family functioning values within the intimate partner relationship. Being involved in an online or blended program is a different life condition than any other area of research on these variables. Helping online and blended program students to maintain relationship quality has required further research into family functioning values and the effects they may have on the stability of relationship quality.

Variables of Interest

Introduction of Family Values

Factors of a family values system have been found to include problem-solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavioral control, and general functioning in the relationship in the Family Assessment Device, and are described as areas of family functioning (Epstein et al., 1984). Specifics of the less descriptive General Functioning value included understanding, crisis support, fears and concerns, acceptance, decisions, and confidence (Epstein et al., 1984). Family functioning values appeared in relationship quality or satisfaction research in the form of smaller aspects of each factor. Studies found were focused on mostly communication, a factor of family functioning not the multiple factors of the FAD construct (Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Le, et al., 2011; Leslie & Morgan, 2011; Manne et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2013; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). Family functioning values of roles and affective involvement were only occasionally researched (Moore, 2010; Petrican et al., 2011).

This current study investigated family values as defined in the Family Assessment Device (FAD) as areas of family functioning (Epstein et al., 1984) and the influences of all seven factors on relationship quality. This method allowed the best investigation possible of family values as they associate with relationship quality for online and hybrid program graduate students and their intimate partners. This method is also an example for further research of other research on intimate partner relationship quality and its relation to family functioning values.

Most recently, the FAD was used in a study where part of the participants sought therapeutic help (Mansfield et al., 2014). The participants who were seeking intervention consistently scored lower on the full-scale FAD than those who were not. This research shows that the FAD was still a valid measure for assessing family values functioning (Mansfield et al., 2014). Further, the family functioning factor of general functioning was found to be correlated with five of the other six factors of values functioning excluding behavior control (Mansfield et al., 2014). This is validating for studies when the FAD was utilized as a stand-alone measure of family functioning in other research (Ali, Hall, Warnock, Wong, & Ratner, 2014; Knafl et al., 2011; Pasalich, Dadds, Hawes, & Brennan, 2011; Rupert et al., 2013; Valdez et al., 2011). Furthermore, the FAD scale's utility had been proven in both research and clinical settings, showing the versatility of the measure to evaluate both clinical and nonclinical populations of interest (Staccini et al., 2014). Stacciani et al. (2014) substantiated the use of the FAD with a nonclinical population such as graduate students in online and hybrid programs.

The FAD was used in a variety of cultural and socioeconomic populations such as inner-city, African-American, French, Chinese, and Icelandic populations as a measure to assess family functioning (Baleyte, 2012; Guada, Brekke, Floyd, & Barbour, 2010; Wang, Miller, & Zhao, 2014; Wang & Zhao, 2012, 2013). This breadth showed the versatility of the measure enough to encompass the varied population that was likely to be found in blended or online graduate programs. A variety of screenings in research for the need of interventions in families had also been done recently utilizing the FAD (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Keitner, 2013; Lester et al., 2012; Valdez et al., 2011). However, the majority of the research recently was focused on the children in the family

unit, rather than the integrity of the relationship quality of intimate partners (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Lester et al., 2012; Valdez et al., 2011). The interest in this research was the partnership, values functioning, and these values' association with relationship quality of that intimate relationship. Further research in this area was necessary to ensure stable values systems are available to be passed on (Herrera, Sani, & Bowe, 2011). The following is a review of research associated with family values influence on relationship quality.

There was a very large body of research that has used the Family Assessment Device to assess the functioning of a family unit regarding values to include what is thought to be necessary to be a healthy family unit (Guada et al., 2010). It had been used to assess for needed interventions, and to determine what situations may indicate a change in family functioning (Lester et al., 2012). There were thousands of articles over the past five years utilizing this assessment. It had yet to be used to assess graduate online or hybrid students in any capacity to include its utility as a predictor of relationship quality for this population.

Introduction of Relationship Quality

Factors of relationship quality had been found to include satisfaction, commitment, passion, trust, love, and intimacy as described in the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale (PRQC) (Fletcher et al., 2000). Much of the research to follow investigated family values but included only one factor of relationship quality, which is satisfaction. Few lines of research included all of the factors in relationship quality and all factors of family values. The quality of the relationship had been shown to fluctuate in other areas rather than satisfaction that seems to hold more stable across situations

(Bradbury & Lavner, 2012), and led to the need for further investigation of relationship quality in its entirety. Most recently the PRQC had been used to investigate persons with medical conditions, psychological conditions, and other various stressful life circumstance and the effects on relationship quality (Givertz & Safford, 2011; Hammond & Overall, 2013; Holder, Love, & Timoney, 2014; Overall & Hammond, 2013). Other research using the PRQC investigated relationship supports through family functioning values to include communication, affective involvement, and other factors of the FAD (Hira & Overall, 2011; Mattingly et al., 2012; Murray, 2014; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010; Roth, 2012). The limited research represented not only failed to investigate online and hybrid program graduate students, but also did not adequately investigate the quality of relationships in consideration of family functioning values as a multi-factorial measure. It did not include all values for family functioning in a single research endeavor for a complete picture of the effects of family values functioning on relationship quality.

Research on attachment and personality was scattered throughout investigations of relationship quality (e.g. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Rubin, 2010; Fritts, 2012; Gillath, Gregersen, Canterberry, & Schmitt, 2014; Girme, Overall, & Simpson, 2013; Givertz & Safford, 2011; Harma, 2014; Howland & Simpson, 2014; Letzring & Nofle, 2010; Mattingly & Clark, 2012; Overall, Simpson, & Struthers, 2013; Saavedra, Chapman, & Rogge, 2010; Shallcross, Frazier, & Anders, 2014; Tan, Overall, & Taylor, 2012). These research endeavors did not focus on family values assessment and its complexity. Much of the research involving quality and intimate partners appeared as the quality of life when one partner was ill rather than the quality of the relationship in

multiple searches through Google Scholar, WorldCat, and university research databases. Also prevalent, was research on family quality or satisfaction, rather than intimate partner relationship quality in its entirety. The following is a review of the research on relationship quality involving one or more family value.

Studies of Family Values and Relationship Quality Affects

Some studies conducted found that both individual, and consensus values to maintain relationship quality in times of stress (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Blended learning programs put demands on families similar to demands on those who have to go away on business. These include several trips per year for residencies (Walden University, 2013). These types of programs are similar in this way to families who have a member leaving on business, or for military purposes. These stressors are in addition to the stressors of a graduate education program in general. These types of stressors had been shown to have effects on relationship satisfaction (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Feunfhausen & Cashwell, 2013; Westman, 2004; Westman, Etziaon & Gattenio, 2006). Blended and online graduate programs are an effortful endeavor that has multiple stressors may affect the intimate partner relationship quality. These effects were shown to be mediated by family values supports, by other researchers in various similar situations. The following encompasses the last five years of research in values and relationship quality with the inclusion of other seminal articles related to the topic.

Times of Stress: Relationship Satisfaction and Values

According to Theory: Overview

Coombs (1966) postulated that the more similar values intimate partners had, the more satisfaction the couple would have in the relationship. This approach set the tone for the importance of partner support during major decisions in life, which includes the choice to pursue a graduate program of study, and all it entails. Family values include communication, problems solving, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning as defined by Baldwin and Bishop (1985), the developers of the Family Assessment Device, which assesses family values.

Further research showed that the similarities and types of values within the partnership are important to the satisfaction of the relationship in times of stress (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Cutrona and Suhr found that not only did behavioral control of the person who received the stressful news from their partner matter, but the amount of control of the partner delivering the news also mattered in maintain relationship satisfaction. Researchers also found that the similarity of the type of communication between the partners mattered as much as the type of communication itself for relationship satisfaction to remain good in times of stress (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992).

Action promoting supportive communication was found to be the most effective type of communication to promote relationship satisfaction in times of stress, and the other types did not seem to make much difference in comparison to behavior control (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Other researchers showed that negative communications, to include demanding communications, were correlative with poor relationship quality (Arcuri, 2013; Givertz & Safford, 2011). These lines of research included longitudinal

research showing the degradation of relationship quality over time when one intimate partner suffered from depression (Givertz & Safford, 2011). More recent research (Fivecoat et al., 2014) investigated partner responsiveness to self-expansion, defined as a desire to meet their personal goals. Active affective responsiveness to a partner's desire for self-expansion predicted relationship satisfaction (Fivecoat et al., 2014). However, this effect was only found in longer term relationships defined as being between 14 and 60 months in duration (Fivecoat et al., 2014). Research suggested that the values in a relationship may also change with time, and needed to be investigated and controlled for similarly (Fivecoat et al., 2014). A graduate education could be seen as an effort for self-expansion, possibly limiting the ability to meet other roles and either eliciting affective responsiveness from the partner or lack thereof. Investigation of how changes in these values within the intimate relationship affect relationship quality serves to draw attention to supporting the maintenance of them.

Relationship Stressors and Quality

Another consideration was in research by Falconier and Epstein (2010) of behavioral control and relationship satisfaction. In their investigation, it was found that the level of behavioral control by the partner in economically stressful situations of economic strain only affected female relationship satisfaction in Argentinian heterosexual couples (Falconier & Epstein, 2010). This finding showed that male relationship satisfaction was only predicted by individual levels of behavioral control, not by partner consensus. This implication was not to say that behavioral control was not a factor affecting their relationship satisfaction, but that their partner's level of control did not predict male levels of satisfaction in the relationship, and thus, there were gender

differences shown (Falconier and Epstein, 2010). This study leads to the implication that gender differences were of concern in this and future research regarding family values and relationship satisfaction. Considering that graduate students are of mixed gender in all programs to include online and blended program study, gender difference was an area to be mindful of as a possible modifier in this investigation. Also, considering education programs have associated costs, graduate school can be associated with economic strain.

Research on stressors to include finances continued in research with college students (Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010). This line of investigation was on married and cohabitating couples. Astonishingly, affection affiliated with the value of effective responsiveness was influenced by economic status (Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010). Less affection was shared by younger couples regardless of relationship status when there were financial difficulties that were long term (Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010). The research supports that age, not just the duration of the relationship was a factor in how stress affects values and, in turn, relationship satisfaction (Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010). Older couples who have been together for longer time periods relationship satisfaction had a less negative association with economic stress (Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010). Results of studies on relationship quality and stress may have depended on the stressor or life condition. For example, the change of roles in the family unit is a direct challenge to an established values system and is associated with poor relationship quality (Moore, 2010). Pursuit of graduate education may change roles for reasons of (a) the student may have had less time to meet roles and demands leaving them for others (b) there may have been a change of the student's status by increasing marketability in higher

paid jobs post graduation; (c) there may have been direct conflict with other established roles of the student in the intimate partnership.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual Relationship Quality

In the research that was available for the past five years, very little had investigated family values and satisfaction for LGBT couples. Research on values and relationship satisfaction by Markey et al. (2014), delve into recent research that looks into how these variables interact. Their research looked specifically into the behaviors of intimate partners for these couples via *interpersonal problems* (Markey et al., 2014). Specifics results were affected by sex; if a woman had a partner that was domineering; the quality of the relationship was found to be *poor*. If either sex partner had a partner that was vindictive that relationship too was *poor*. Further research on the difficulties of same-sex intimate partnerships discusses the implications of the pressure of a woman in the same-sex relationship to conform to the ideal body type (Kidwai, 2013). The effect seems magnified for women in the same-sex relationship likely due to the incessant comparison of herself to other women having a negative effect on relationship quality (Kidwai, 2013). Same-sex couples face discrimination issues of their own, and then also the adages of mainstream society. These factors also point to gender biases that may be a mitigating factor in how family functioning values affects relationship quality.

The definition of an intimate partner in this study includes LGBT populations, whether married or not (New York State Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (2010), and some values or specific values may affect the relationship differently. These results, according to present research depend on the identified genders of those in the partnership (Markey et al., 2014). Behaviors linked to affective responsiveness and do

not support the other's personal interests are shown to implicate the *poor* relationship quality (Markey et al., 2014). Investigation of other areas of the family values system was needed that included intimate partners of this definition to find out more about how the relationships are defined were related to relationship quality.

Marital Satisfaction and Values in Times of Separation

The long distance maintenance of a relationship was becoming increasingly normal and more frequent (Merolla, 2010). This distance includes both military and nonmilitary relationships for business travel (Merolla, 2010). There was a need for a continual scholarly inquiry into 'on the go' relationships, where copresence was not always possible, as travel is also included in graduate online and hybrid programs (Merolla, 2010; Walden University, 2016).

Andres (2014), examined work-family conflicts as associated with military separation. Though these separations were extended and induce stressors well beyond attending school, the patterns of coming, returning, and a couple's adaptations to one member being gone and returning remain similar experiences. Andres's research suggested that attending to life-work balance before separations were key to the delivery of psychological interventions (Andres, 2014). Further, it was found that building networks during separations and continuing communications were a valued method of decreasing the effects of the stressful events on satisfaction (Andres, 2014).

Psychological services were found necessary to maintain relationship satisfaction, and the family value of communication was significantly and positively associated with this maintenance (Andres, 2014). Further, the satisfaction of persons in the relationship did change throughout the pre, during, and, post stages of separation with post-separation

having shown the most negative associations with relationship satisfaction (Andres, 2014). It stood to reason that this was the case for before, during and after stages of other stressful events that affect a couple's relationship quality, making time frames in relationship to adapt to a specific life condition important to consider.

In an article that investigates college relationship maintenance (Le et al., 2011), it was found that missing a partner during brief separation periods was essential to maintaining relationship quality. Findings also associated communication with the maintenance of relationship quality during these periods that reflect support, positivity, and openness (Le et al., 2011). This educational research solidified that regardless of the type and duration of the relationship; family functioning values such as communication maintain the relationship quality during periods of separation from one's intimate partner.

Contraindicators of Coombs Value Consensus Theory

Contrary to some research finding that relationship quality was deteriorated with separations (Andres, 2014; Kelmer, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2013), found that there was more relationship satisfaction at the beginning of a long distance relationship than in couples who are in close proximity. It may be that the constant adjustment of couples coming and going is more the stressor than the actual distance. This result appears with military couples when one partner is deployed (Andres, 2014). The times when relationship quality was measured poorest was in the preparation for separation and after the returns home (Andres, 2014). Therapy to address adjustment during these time frames may be of assistance (Miller et al., 2013). Miller et al.'s (2013) research found that though there are stressors from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and conflict in the relationship, and poor adjustment to return is problematic. Time away and to live an

alternate lifestyle calls for adjustment with some partnerships (Miller et al., 2013). This affect was contingent upon other variables such as education, age, and socioeconomics which more educated, older, and financially stable persons are associated with having the ability to handle stressors better the mean, maintaining relationship quality (Miller et al., 2013). This research leads to the possibility that consistent leaving and returning may alter roles and other family functioning values affecting relationship quality. This was considered as a factor with a blended and online graduate student population since travel from home is a necessity for these students.

Family Functioning Values of Goals and Self-Expansion Associated with Relationship Quality

Individual rather than common goals and values. Concerning common goals and values of partners (Arranz Becker, 2013), it was found that the goals, values, and personalities do not necessarily have to be the same for partners to have a successful relationship. Relationship satisfaction seemed to be mitigated by individual influences rather than similarities, so in researching values, it was considered important to see what each partner contributes (Arranz Becker, 2013). Arranz-Becker found it was rather a cumulative effect of the possession of certain goals, like communication that makes a relationship satisfying.

The cumulative effect was again found in research on the value of self-control (Vohs et al., 2011). It was evident that intimate partners needed to be researched regarding their individual contributions to the relationship, as well as whether their values were similar (Arranz Becker, 2013; Vohs et al., 2011). This research on online and blended program students in this light proposed to examine the family functioning values

of students as well as their spouses. Assessments were to be made separately for students and their partners assessing family functioning values and correlation to relationship quality investigating associations between the variables while assessing for cumulative as well as consensus relations.

Partner and self-expansion value. Self-expansion research indicated that spouses needed to be supportive of self-expansion endeavors just as they support their partners through stressful events (Fivecoat et al., 2014). There seemed to be a consensus that active support was a value necessary for self-expansion, and passive support for stressful events (Fivecoat et al., 2014). In the area of research for online and blended program education, this meant that both types of support would be important as a value for couples to remain satisfied in the relationship. This evaluation was to involve finding what the intimate partner's values were as well as the student in the program, making logical to survey the partner and the student.

Other researchers (Archuleta et al., 2013) have found that in times of financial stress, family functioning values between partners that are similar may aid in the maintenance of relationship satisfaction. This article also showed that common goals are a factor, rather than having a cumulative effect of values and goals in the relationship to be the mitigating factor of relationship satisfaction (Archuleta et al., 2013). It may be that different types of stressors require different levels of similarities or cumulative effects of values to maintain relationships, rather than the simple answer of one or the other being true in all situations. This fact led to the conclusion that teasing out whether differences between intimate partners was a factor in relationship quality overall was an added value when researching blended or online graduate programs.

Further research (Williamson et al., 2013) was suggestive that family functioning values such as types of communication, did not matter much at all in preventing the degradation of intimate relationship satisfaction. This research shows satisfaction as positively correlated with positive communication, but that negative communication was independent of relationship satisfaction (Williamson et al., 2013). In this case when under stress, not valuing communication may have proven to have little or no effect on relationship satisfaction. However, other studies had suggested otherwise (Archuleta et al., 2013; Fivecoat et al., 2014). The indication that these two factors can be unrelated supported that they were, in fact, distinct variables and that communication can influence relationship quality, but is not synonymous with it or its individual factors. Investigating the family functioning value of communication with the blended program and online students was necessary to see if there was a significant influence of the communication value on relationship quality.

Other Family Functioning Values as Associated to Relationship Quality

Relationship quality seemed dependent on family functioning values. Research on sharing of accomplishments, as well as being supportive (Logan & Cobb, 2013) suggested that family functioning values that maintain relationship satisfaction change over time. At the beginning of a relationship, sharing accomplishments with the other partner had a positive relationship with relationship satisfaction (Logan & Cobb, 2013). In long term relationships, being supportive of the other person's endeavors tended to be the better predictor (Logan & Cobb, 2013). This research further supported that relationships as a whole could not be looked at regarding satisfaction and family

functioning values without taking into consideration time frames in an intimate relationship (Logan & Cobb, 2013).

Behavior control and general functioning were assessed in a study (Petrican et al., 2011) via investigating the control of a partner to maintain a sense of self. If a person becomes too enmeshed in a relationship, then he/she had lost a sense of self that separates him/her from the relationship as an individual (Petrican et al., 2011). This research also tapped into role identity of family values, as it inferred a sense of self or role identity is missing in couples with too much enmeshment to the degree that the partner consistently followed the gazes of the other person (Petrican et al., 2011). Relationship satisfaction was significantly lower in these couples where identity was lost (Petrican et al., 2011).

Another values study portrayed that a high value of self-control, identity, and a relatively moderate level of affective involvement rather than high affective involvement leads to better relationship satisfaction. Being involved to the degree where the partner cannot make independent decisions implies involvement to the point intrusion (Petrican et al., 2011). Intrusion is an extreme of the affective involvement value (Epstein et al., 1984). This article (Petrican et al., 2011) was a prime example of how satisfaction, a factor of relationship quality, in an intimate relationship could be predicted, and mitigated by values. It also showed that there were complex dimensions to values, and showing high or low ratings are not necessarily the best predictors of relationship satisfaction (Petrican et al., 2011). The study focused on Parkinson's patients and spouses, giving yet another example of relationship values under stressors (Petrican et al., 2011).

Further research involving the general functioning family functioning value was inclusive of acceptance, fears, and concerns (Epstein et al., 1984). These factors

contained anxiety and avoidance related to attachment in relationships (Epstein et al., 1984). Research on attachment anxiety and avoidance in relationship to partner satisfaction was looked at over the duration of an intimate partnership (Saavedra et al., 2010). Though initially, these aspects of general functioning value may not have had a major impact on the relationship satisfaction, it was shown to grow over time. When behavioral control was also poor; creating hostile conflict, there was an interaction effect creating extremely poor satisfaction in a relationship (Saavedra et al., 2010). When the general function value of mindfulness was added it seemed to ameliorate the effects of avoidance (Saavedra et al., 2010), showing that some family values can be instilled to help retain relationships and regain satisfaction. From this research, there was a reason to believe that if relationship quality is affected, interventions to work on family functioning values can serve to regain the integrity. Interventions can be designed for online and hybrid program graduate students with a further understanding of the association of family values to quality of their relationships.

Additionally, the family functioning values of affective responsiveness and communication were assessed in a study of the sexual and emotional intimacy of heterosexual married couples (Yoo et al., 2013). It appeared that responsiveness via both forms of intimacy had an effect on how a woman evaluates her partner's capability to communicate as well as her satisfaction with the relationship (Yoo et al., 2013). There were some gender differences in relationship satisfaction found. Husband's satisfaction linked to the wives sexual satisfaction, and, therefore, this type of affective responsiveness of their spouses (Yoo et al., 2013).

Interventions to Maintain Relationship Quality with Family Values

Delivery of services to maintain relationship quality have proven challenging (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Strength-based theory found that it is difficult to deliver services to those who need them (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Strength-based theory looks at family functioning values regarding strengths, and research finds a strong positive association between these strengths and relationship quality (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Couples with financial difficulties or in rural areas were less likely to access them due to expense, and time (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). The interventions available may also not fit the needs of the couples who sought treatment for relationship problems indicating a need for more expanded programs (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). If more populations and stressors were assessed, there would be a better likelihood of meeting the needs of more couples with relationship quality difficulties. Relationship satisfaction has proven to be a stable measure within couples, showing to be surprisingly resilient to stressors (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Other researchers show a significantly negative association between satisfaction with stressors under extreme financial strain and military induced separations (Andres, 2014; Falconier & Epstein, 2010). This finding leads to the belief that other factors of relationship quality may be better indicators of a relational discourse under stressful situations that are less severe. Educational interventions with populations that do access services are also often in different stages of their relationship increasing the difficulty of assessing what values are most important in maintaining the quality (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Research with more stressor-specific interventions seemed to be more successful in narrowing down what may work for practitioners.

Further research showed interventions at work with stressors involving finances as a burden on relationship satisfaction (Bradley et al., 2012). The participant classifications are *violent* and *low income* by the researchers (Bradley et al., 2012). Teaching the family functioning values of behavioral control and problem-solving skills to couples in distress helped ameliorate violent behavior and increase relationship quality (Bradley et al., 2012). Males showed more difficulty to adjustment within the therapeutic context but were less likely to engage in conflict after therapeutic interventions which included psychoeducation on relationship skills (Bradley et al., 2012). There was a high attrition rate in the study; however, those who remained had a higher likelihood of remaining in the relationship than controls. Family values skill building can be successfully learned and used to prevent relationship quality deterioration (Bradley et al., 2012). The designs of these interventions were for extreme situations, and may or may not prove useful in circumstances less critical. Psychoeducation appears to be an important part of a successful intervention. Couples gaining control through the knowledge of the situation improves relationship quality (Bradley et al., 2012). This research speaks to the family functioning value of behavioral control association with maintaining relationship quality.

Proof of interventions working to help improve relationship quality through family values was also found in research on couples when one is facing anorexia nervosa (Bulik et al., 2011). This research was on improving couple's communication when one partner has the disease (Bulik et al., 2011). Cognitive behavioral therapy was shown to improve the quality of the relationship, by promoting improved communication skills to be supportive (Bulik et al., 2011). This research lay the groundwork to helping to find out

how best to improve a family values system to facilitate relationship quality (Bulik et al., 2011). It gave one methodology that was possible to teach what appears to be the cornerstone of the entire family values system, which was communication.

In the limited research on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual (LGBT) populations and relationship quality, one study looked into interventions related to family values. In the LGBT population, there are stressors that are inherent in relationships that affect satisfaction (Knoble & Linville, 2012). Much of the couple's satisfaction was affected by whether the partners share their relationship in the open or if they are hidden from society, especially if one partner is openly gay, and the other is not (Knoble & Linville, 2012). Discrimination of the relationship type was one factor that inhibited the potential for increases in relationship satisfaction that can come from living an open life (Knoble & Linville, 2012). It depended largely on the reaction of each partner to the discrimination regarding attitudes and behaviors (Knoble & Linville, 2012). How one control's behavior in the relationship in response to dealing with the stressors associated was however only one factor of relationship quality, and other values and influences needed to be researched (Knoble & Linville, 2012). This research included a definition acceptant of all intimate partners, rather than the narrow definitions of straight or gay.

As will be discussed further in the following sections, stress on the relationship induced by times of separation needs specific well-planned interventions. With military couples, it had been found that pre-planning, and therapy before deployment was key (Andres, 2014). Communication throughout the different stages facilitated by professionals had proven to help maintain relationship quality before, during, and after the separation (Andres, 2014). This plan has established that before the actual separation

tends to be a time where relationship quality is at its lowest (Andres, 2014). This study supported that research involving time frames during separations or other stressful situations for intimate partners and shows that careful planning for these time frames can be helpful.

Family Assessment Device and relationship stress interventions. The FAD was utilized in research assessing families in multiple situations to design plan and implement interventions for the purpose of creating more stable members (Berge et al., 2014). It has also been shown to be predictive of better health outcomes and individual competence of members of the family (Ahmadi, 2014). Family functioning values such as those researched by using the FAD in assessing relationships were shown to improve relationships in multiple scenarios. These investigative endeavors inform on the influence of these values on relationship quality. Situations researched have primarily been psychological and medical related situations. Medical professionals indicated that family can influence health and healing (Keitner, 2013). Assessing need for treatment can be done using the FAD to assess for functional values (Keitner, 2013). Through research, what values are important to bolster the intimate relationship during stressful situations, and maintain relationship quality were found. One such study (Lester et al., 2012) used it to evaluate military families before deployment. After the assessment, it was clear which areas the family needed to work on to improve functioning, and they needed reinforcement as their scores were significantly lower for the FAD assessment than the norm (Lester et al., 2012). Families Over-Coming Under Stress (FOCUS), which is a family skills-building program, was administered to the families of both active and nonactive military personnel to assist in the improvement in this area, to include conduct

problems. A separate assessment examined specifically behavioral conduct issues called the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Families upon completion of the program had stronger family functioning values according to the FAD, and significantly fewer conduct problems. Behavioral control, a subscale of the FAD, also is a measure of behavioral control. Families included in the prevention interventions also reported that they were satisfied with the results of the treatment, and distress levels were reportedly decreased upon completion of the intervention program (Lester et al., 2012). Long-term evaluations of the study found that the interventions that used the FAD and other measures to establish that the behavioral control family value needed work indicate that the changes using this method called (FOCUS) were stable over a six-month duration (Lester et al., 2013). The current study assessed family values functioning in hybrid and online graduate program students and further investigated to find associations of relationship satisfaction with the family functioning value of the FAD.

Other prior studies utilized the FAD to assess children and families in at-risk environments for potential child abuse to design successful interventions (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Valdez et al., 2011). Volunteers entered homes of at-risk families to assess families using the FAD and establish if family functioning values were an area that needed support (Akister & O'Brien, 2011). Volunteers, social workers, and other professionals gave both practical and emotional support, teaching families how to interact with one another. The result was stronger family functioning values as assessed by the FAD (Akister & O'Brien, 2011). One year later, the families gave feedback confirming the lasting effectiveness of the received training and support (Akister & O'Brien, 2011). This study was a part of the Keeping Families Strong initiative (Akister & O'Brien,

2011). This initiative leads to the strengths-based theory, where family values included in the FAD are termed ‘strengths’ rather than functions or values of the family. The initiative made its way across 18 countries, finding that values that support family strength remain stable cross-culturally (Defrain & Asay, 2007).

Hundreds of more interventions for families have begun with the FAD assessment as indicated in a research review (Staccini et al., 2014). Few implemented the interventions for exclusively the romantic relationship at the heart of the family unit though many indicate that interventions for the treatment of intimate partners leading to increase in overall functioning and specific values are helpful. Family dispute resolutions, couples PTSD counseling, and mood symptom interventions have been developed to target the partner in the unit using the FAD (Cowlshaw, Evans, Suomi, & Rodgers, 2014; Kumar & Singh, 2014; Weinstock & Miller, 2010). Cowlshaw et al., Kumar and Singh, and Weinstock and Miller’s studies all found that interventions designed as the result of a FAD assessment have been successful in increasing romantic relationship quality. In stroke research, it was suggested that the general functioning that overarches all of the other factors of the FAD (Mansfield et al., 2014) except behavior control, predicted better outcomes for the patient when scoring indicates good functioning on this measure (King, Hartke, & Houle, 2010). This finding suggested that further assessment using a full-scale FAD could be fruitful in defining which values of functioning have more influence over outcomes for families under stress. Both family functioning values and relationship quality were predictors of patient outcome success (King et al., 2010).

Research with veterans and family functioning has shown five of the family functioning values as related to marital satisfaction when the spouse is the caregiver after

congestive heart failure (Moore, 2010). Difficulty seemed to stem from the convolution of the family functioning value of roles (Moore, 2010). Marital satisfaction increases associated positively with affective responsiveness (Moore, 2010). This research assists in identifying which values of functioning are most important in medical situations with spouses as a caregiver, as well as when one spouse needed to assume the roles of both partners (Moore, 2010). Current research with the FAD also helped to understand the effects of value deficits when a family member is affected by drug addiction (Ziaaddini, Ebrahim-Nejad, & Nakhaee, 2013). Interventions in group treatment that focused on family functioning showed to increase functioning and decrease conflict within the intimate partnership (Ziaaddini et al., 2013). Caution is advised that this may take many sessions over a long duration to accomplish moderate results in a group format, as only slightly significant findings were found over 29 sessions twice per week (Ziaaddini et al., 2013). This research supported a more person-centered approach rather than research on the couple, as was the approach in most research on relationship quality and values functioning research. The current study continued research on individuals in the relationship.

Like drugs, depression has the propensity to impede family values of functioning within the intimate partnership (DiBenedetti et al., 2012). Current research showed that the functioning interruptions were more severe across factors of FAD for men than women (Febres, Rossi, Gaudiano, & Miller, 2011). This research highlighted a population that may be capable of dangerously hiding depression as a result of struggling to maintain functioning. Those with milder depression were shown to have better family functioning than normal populations (DiBenedetti et al., 2012). Measures of relationship

quality in tandem with values of functioning were shown to as necessary when assessing the overall wellbeing of an intimate partnership. Satisfaction assessment included in this research on functioning, and still, depression showed only modest effects on the functioning of values for intimate partnerships (DiBenedetti et al., 2012). This result could potentially have been the case for other aspects of relationship quality.

Therapeutic interventions for divorce applicants have shown to increase family functioning values and marital relationship satisfaction with therapeutic interventions designed to focus on the deficit of the intimate partnership (Mahmoodabadi, Bahrami, Ahmadi, Etemadi, & Zadeh, 2012). After the breakdown of the partnership, couples are forced to communicate for multiple reasons. Therapy at this point assisted in maintaining cordiality in daily dealings for the good of the entire family unit (Mahmoodabadi et al., 2012). This phase is very different than a relationship where the partners are staying together. Intervention designs need to be for appropriate situations with appropriate populations based on needs of values functioning to improve relationship quality for intimate partners. Difficulties in romantic relationships for graduate and online program students were researched in this current study and can assist in the design of intervention could begin successfully as it utilized the FAD assessment, looked at relationship duration, and included all types of intimate relationships. Interventions may be designed based on findings to increase the relationships' quality by reinforcing family functioning values that were found to be associated.

PRQC to assess relationship quality and the influence of values. A modest body of research has assessed relationship quality using the PRQC to find what predictive association family values have with intimate partners. To make it easier to see the scope

of situations PRQC investigations cover, the research was broken down into stressful and general categories.

Relationship quality and family values in general conditions. Some of the research that was done using the PRQC for the evaluation of relationship quality related to values in intimate partners included other dissertations or theses. The spirit of family values and relationship quality for intimate relationships seemed to be returning to research interest. One such recent study (Murray, 2014) investigated the value of support. *Cheerleading* is the term used to describe support (Murray, 2014). Findings indicated strongly positive correlations with relationship quality for intimate partners (Murray, 2014). *Truth-seeking* did not show this correlation and indicated that to retain the quality of a relationship it may be better to give support to an intimate partner rather than fact find (Murray, 2014).

Further research (Hira & Overall, 2011) looked at self-improvement. Results suggested that *grooming* the partner, or molding them to be different was not the right answer to better relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011). Grooming, in fact, does not improve the relationship at all, where self-improvement focus does (Hira & Overall, 2011). The research suggested that having goals for self-expansion rather than investing in the partner's benefit for improved relationship quality (Hira & Overall, 2011). That is not to say that support did not matter, only that having self-expansion goals was more beneficial than trying to set goals and plan for the intimate partner's future (Hira & Overall, 2011). In short, being the best person one can and having goals for oneself was shown to improve relationship quality in an intimate relationship (Hira & Overall, 2011). This research had implications for the current research study for students and intimate

partners of which one was an online or hybrid program graduate student on relationship quality. Continued research on this line (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010), reinforced that self-improvement leads to greater relationship quality in intimate relationships. Also, researchers substantiate that support provided by the intimate partner led to better relationship quality as well as more self-improvement (Overall et al., 2010). So, one should not create their intimate partner's goals for them but should be available for support. The message in this area of research seemed to be not to set out to prove the intimate partner wrong, but rather to support and be effectively involved in their goals both individual and common of achievement (Hira & Overall, 2011; Murray, 2014; Overall et al., 2010).

Research on initiating relationships indicated that self-expansion opportunities were a motivator to choose a particular intimate partner (Mattingly & Clark, 2012b). Additionally, when self-expansion opportunities exist in the intimate partner relationship, relationship quality was rated higher on the PRQC. The amount of support may be for naught; however if it was not visible to the other intimate partner (Girme et al., 2013). There was less self-expansion and less relationship quality as measured by the PRQC when the affective support was invisible (Girme et al., 2013). The partner needed to know that they were supported to have a positive effect on relationship quality. Research in a recent thesis (Roth, 2012) indicated that spousal support may help reverse the poor health brought on by previous nonsupportive environments. Though the results were not as strong as one would hope, showing only modest effects (Roth, 2012).

While support was a promoter of relationship quality in intimate partnerships as investigated using the PRQC, it was not the only value that had sway in relationship

quality. Trust or lack thereof was shown to create fluctuations in relationship quality in an intimate relationship to the degree that there was a significant variance from one day to the next (Campbell et al., 2010). The rift also promoted a lack of behavioral control, seeming to keep the relationship in a varying cycle of perceived good quality and perceived poor quality (Campbell et al., 2010). If there was mistrust, the evaluation of perceived relationship quality may not have reflected an accurate presentation of relationship quality (Campbell et al., 2010). Fluctuations, however, in perceived relationship quality seemed to even out with the increase in the time of the relationship (Ng, 2010). Also, with an increase in time came increases in intimacy, passion, and commitment in a Chinese sample of intimate partners (Ng, 2010). This indicator was something to be aware of in further research on perceived relationship quality investigations using the PRQC with intimate partners and had the potential to vary with hybrid and online graduate student participants that were multicultural.

Relationship quality and family values in stressful conditions. Research previously mentioned showed the benefits of having a spouse on wellbeing. This wellbeing was contingent upon the support, trust and communication in the relationship (Arcuri, 2013; Campbell et al., 2010; Givertz & Safford, 2011; Manne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). The following looks into times of stress and relationship quality as examined with the PRQC. Though conditions may have made relationship quality difficult to maintain, effects of conditions and quality of life for a person affected by a stressor could be mediated a by values of family functioning in a romantic relationship (Holder et al., 2014). Persons with alexithymia, for example, have been shown to have poor relationship quality compared to normal populations (Holder et

al., 2014). However, this condition was found in relationships with poor trust, satisfaction, and love, indicating that it could have been the poor conditions of the relationship promoting the alexithymia.

In research on body mass index and image, one thesis raised the same questions (Lee, 2011). Due to the correlative nature of the studies, it was difficult to tell if poor elements of PRQC promoted distorted body images, or if these distortions promoted poor PRQC evaluations. This thesis found that body image distortions were related to lower trust and intimacy, though not overall perceived relationship quality on the PRQC (Lee, 2011). Research by Yu (2013) investigated eating disorders and self-evaluation as a method of coping, albeit a poor one supports this view. Partner behaviors speculatively under such distorted conditions helped demystify perceived relationship quality during stressful conditions. Looking at both partners' scores for values of family functioning and personality quality could have been helpful.

Longitudinal research that included values of family functioning such as communication provided that over time, relationship quality decreases with one intimate partner having depressive symptoms (Givertz & Safford, 2011). Also shown, was that style of communication was meditative to the effects of relationship quality deteriorations via decreases in depressive symptoms in men with *mutual constructive communication* (Givertz & Safford, 2011). This finding affirmed that supports rather than demands, and collaboration rather than isolation was important in personal as well as partnership wellbeing (Givertz & Safford, 2011). Furthermore, behaviors and lack of support perceived as hostility have shown to increase the evaluators' negative perception of perceived relationship quality on the PRQC (Hammond & Overall, 2013). Hostile sexism

and overt feelings of women seeking control rather than support of the partner's endeavors showed poor evaluation for perceived relationship quality as evaluated on the PRQC and negative behaviors (Hammond & Overall, 2013). Research indicated that the family value of affective involvement with goals of the intimate partner led to better-perceived relationship quality (Hammond & Overall, 2013).

Implications of Past Research on Present Research

Studies on values of family functioning showed that certain values or contributors to values factors can ameliorate stress (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Manne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Support in the form of affective involvement and responsiveness seemed to improve relationship satisfaction during stressful times (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Fivecoat et al., 2014). Further studies on relationship quality, and on its factor of relationship satisfaction were also shown to have correlations with some family functioning values in general (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013).

Communication seemed to best predict relationship satisfaction in a multitude of situations (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Manne et al., 2010; Merolla, 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013). Studies involving students indicated similar results in times of stress, and when one was pursuing self-improvement, affective responsiveness seemed to be the value that improved relationship quality or its satisfaction factor (Fivecoat et al., 2014). Studies have been conducted to show student satisfaction with online and hybrid programs, and the success of students in such programs (Allen & Seaman, 2011).

Rather than exclusively being concerned with the integrity of the programs, investigation of individual factors maintaining solidarity in the student body needed to be

examined. DSM-5 indicated that academic and occupational successes were only two factors making a person whole and functional rather than mentally disordered (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20). Factors such as family functioning maintaining the holistic success of students needed attention. Investigation of values of family functioning and satisfaction during online and blended programs was necessary for this to occur. First, it helped to identify when and if families need supportive assistance when a member was in an online or hybrid graduate program. Second, it affirmed if the values of family functioning that have been shown to help improve relationship quality during times of stress or other general life occurrences are helpful during these programs. This study that investigated values of family functioning and relationship quality can help guide intervention services, as shown with studies in families with diseases and poor socio-economic conditions (Bradley et al., 2012; Bulik et al., 2011).

Literature Relating to Differing Methodologies

Studies were done with perceived relationship quality components to assess its correlation to other factors in a relationship in a couple of ways. One of these was to have a series of correlations to compare variables to the entire scale, and to factors of relationship quality, such as relationship satisfaction (Costa & Brody, 2007). Another method, more commonly used was multiple regression equations. This was because relationship quality has multiple factors, and can be affected by multiple variables not controlled for such as age, gender, and relationship duration (Nofhle & Shaver, 2006). By using multiple regression, it was possible to investigate all of these variables that may affect relationship quality and its relationship to other variables as The Big Five personality traits and attachment (Nofhle & Shaver, 2006).

If correlation coefficients were used, each pair of variables had to be looked at individually as in Costa and Brody (2007), where relationship quality was shown to correlate with penile-vaginal intercourse orgasm and frequency. This research shows the strength of each relationship, but results skewed by extraneous variables were possible (Costa & Brody, 2007). Multiple regression can help discern whether it was possible that the relationship between variables is by chance, as well as control for known variables (Noftle & Shaver, 2006). Correlation, however, could assist in gaining results with a lesser number of participants when the pool is limited (Costa & Brody, 2007).

Measures for Study on Relationship Quality and Family Functioning Values

Past uses of measures. The FAD was used in research evaluating the effects on the family when a child from that family has an intellectual disability (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). In this study, several other measures were used to show distress within the family unit, to include one that assessed relationship quality. In this study, multiple regression was also used to show how strong the relationships between a child having an intellectual disability and various effects on the family. Both the FAD and the marital quality measure were shown to have a strong negative relationship with having a child with intellectual disabilities (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). The relationships were all found simultaneously, avoiding the necessity to run the data multiple times eliminating increased chances of error. In the large body of research using the FAD, this was the only research found that also examines relationship quality. Due to the multifactorial nature of the FAD, it was also sometimes not utilized in its entirety. General Factors was often used by itself, as it correlates most highly with five of the remaining six subscales (Ali et al., 2014; Knafl et al., 2011; Pasalich et al., 2011; Rupert et al., 2013; Valdez et al.,

2011). In these instances, linear regression methods were also used to assess the strength of the General Functioning scale of the FAD to variables such as parental stress, depression, and hostility (Pasalich et al., 2011).

This multi-factorial instrument gives itself to the methods of regression. Through this method, it could not only be compared to other instruments simultaneously, but subscales could also be compared from within the instrument (Mansfield et al., 2014). This subscale design allowed further verification of the scales as independent measures for future research. Another subscale, affective involvement, was used to assess factors of family functioning values in children with eating disorders (Topham et al., 2011). Multiple regression was also used here to assess whether affective involvement had a relationship with both authoritative parenting and affective responsiveness.

Two scales of the FAD were used here to assess predictors of an eating disorder (Topham et al., 2011). Direct one to one correlation methods were used less often, as these methods only predicted if there was a relationship where regression helps determine probabilities. The FAD was used to assess risk, or examine interventions making this method appropriate in some instances (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Keitner, 2013; Lester et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2014; Valdez et al., 2011; Wen et al., 2011), the projection was more useful. Correlation methods were useful when the FAD was utilized to compare one point in time to another in longitudinal studies. The direction and strength could be assessed to determine if relationships maintenance over time. Long term dysfunction in the family functioning values system was assessed after a member has experienced traumatic brain injury (Kurowski et al., 2011). Parenting styles that are nonpermissive showed better outcomes and may help to promote interventions (Kurowski et al., 2011).

In this research, the intervention had not happened yet, and the nature of the study being longitudinal negated the need for projections obtained through regression. In this study, cross-sectional data was collected. Given this factor, projections were useful in predicting when interventions would be beneficial.

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) scale (Fletcher et al., 2000) had research uses in correlation studies that assess other measures of wellbeing and compare one spouse's perceptions to another's (Overall & Hammond, 2013). The focus here was on the strength of measures of self-esteem, depression, and other's perceptions of a partner's perceived relationship quality on the PRQC (Fletcher et al., 2000; Overall & Hammond, 2013). Similar to the FAD, the PRQC is also multi-factorial, and scales within the PRQC have compared to others, and the measure in its entirety (Fletcher et al., 2000). The correlation method is also used to assist with discriminate validity in this study as there may have been questions as to whether relationship quality could be interfering with another measure such as reactivity in certain situations such as humor (Howland & Simpson, 2014). In this situation, PRQC scales are eliminated as possible extraneous variables. Given that the PRQC scales were the dependent variables of FAD scales and time frames spent in online and hybrid graduate programs, the multiple regression methods was likely the best choice. This procedure was the methodology used with the PRQC in a similar study with the Big Five being the independent variables used to predict PRQC scale scores previously mentioned (Nofle & Shaver, 2006).

Recently the PRQC had been used in research on attachment, personality, sexual interaction and family values for romantic partnerships, friendships, business relationships and sports teams. Overall, correlative method and regression methods had

been used with PRQC for investigations including family values research (Arranz Becker, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2012; Overall et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2013). General findings indicated that negative communications predicted poor relationship quality across situations (Arcuri, 2013; Manne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2012, 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). Specifically demanding and withdrawing communications were predictive of lower perceived quality (Manne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2013). Research with the PRQC showed that being supportive of an intimate partner was predictive relationship quality (Fivecoat et al., 2014; Girme et al., 2013; Overall et al., 2010; Roth, 2012; Wang et al., 2014). Support does not mean intervening in self-expansion or setting the goals for the partner, as this is indicated to decrease relationship quality (Murray, 2014; Overall et al., 2010).

In attachment research, anxiously attached persons tended to have overall poorer relationship quality (Mattingly & Clark, 2012b; Nilforooshan, Ahmadi, Fatehizadeh, Abedi, & Ghasemi, 2013; Noffle & Shaver, 2006; Overall et al., 2013; Slotter & Luchies, 2014). The exception to this was when they have made their intimate partners feel guilty, improving their perceived relationship quality but diminishing their partner. Avoidant persons also tended to be hurt in a relationship more often with or without the partner's aggressive behaviors, and whether or not overall perceived relationship quality was good (Mattingly et al., 2012; Overall, Girme, Lemay Jr, & Hammond, 2014). In long term relationships, insecure or avoidant attached persons tended to be depressed and have depressed partners as well (Fivecoat et al., 2014). In personality research with the PRQC to assess relationship quality, the general factor of personality and anxious or avoidant attachment seemed to be directly related to perceived relationship quality using a

structural equation model (Nilforooshan et al., 2013). In investigations using the big five categories, well-adjusted personalities seemed to predict relationship quality (Nofhle & Shaver, 2006). In sports teams and friendships, trust and commitment seemed to foster strong friendships and teams (Giorgi, 2013; Magnusen, Kim, & Kim, 2012; Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013).

PRQC had been used to assess the quality of multiple types of relationships across a myriad of situations. It was reasonable that it would be successful in helping to assess intimate partnerships for graduate students in online and hybrid programs. The PRQC data can now be used to help design and implement intervention programs when relationships are struggling, or as a preemptive method to maintain the quality of relationships with students. Patterns of data indicated that self-expansion was a positive endeavor in a relationship (Fivecoat et al., 2014; Mattingly et al., 2012); however, stressors were found to damage a relationship without proper supports (Andres, 2014). Both were conditions of being an online or blended program graduate student and further investigation was needed to assess the needs for intervention appropriately.

Summary

Multiple studies had been conducted evaluating the effects of family functioning values on relationships (Andres, 2014; Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat et al., 2014; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Logan & Cobb, 2013; Williamson et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2013; Yoo et al., 2013). Evidence had provided that they were important to aspects of relationship quality, to include satisfaction (Costa & Brody, 2007). Satisfaction is not the only aspect of relationship quality, and further investigation was needed to find affects of

family functioning values on relationship quality in its entire multi-factorial structure (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, 2000a). Stress shows to have effects that change family functioning values, and thus affect relationship quality (Fivecoat et al., 2014). Self-improvement endeavors have also found to change how the family functions regarding values affecting relationship quality (Fivecoat et al., 2014; Mattingly et al., 2012). Interventions that strengthen family values were found to improve relationship quality in various aspects (Akister & O'Brien, 2011; Keitner, 2013; Lester et al., 2012; Palinkas et al., 2014; Valdez et al., 2011; Wen et al., 2011). Finding what family functioning values affect overall relationship quality during enrollment that is a time of stress and self-improvement was intended for hybrid and online program students and their partners. Now discoveries have been made determining what family functioning values were essential to relationship quality, and work can be done to maintain the integrity of the relationship quality between students and their intimate partners. Also, relationship quality affected negatively during attendance can now receive more appropriate intervention upon request for help in the area of maintaining an intimate partnership.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter includes a description of the methodology used to conduct this study. I provide details on the sample, including the size and characteristics. The instruments used are described. Also included in this section are dissemination, data collection, data analysis, and ethical concerns related to the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relation between family values and relationship quality for online and graduate program students and their intimate partners. Stressful experiences have been found to be mitigated by family functioning values maintaining relationship satisfaction (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a). This study expanded the examination to include further aspects of relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000). Studies for the Department of Education have shown the successful nature of online and hybrid graduate programs, both academically and in terms of student satisfaction (Allen & Seaman, 2013). However, yet to be examined have been other aspects of student life, including relationships students maintain while in attendance in these programs.

It is important to help students maintain holistic functioning so that they can meet the criteria for highly functioning individuals outside of academia. Part of this task is helping students to maintain family and social functioning, in keeping with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 20). The stressors of online and hybrid program studies include stressors of traditional graduate school, as well as stressors that resemble those associated with business travel (Rupert et al., 2014). Additionally, many students in these programs are working professionals, for whom study time means further time away from family.

Given these conditions, it was important to determine which family functioning values help to maintain relationship quality for online and hybrid program students. Programs may be designed and implemented to help maintain students and families, as family-values treatment programs have previously been successful (Wen et al., 2011).

Research Design and Approach

Through this study, I sought to increase knowledge of the relationship quality of online and hybrid program graduate students and their partners over the course of these students' programs of study. I also sought to improve awareness of which family values are the driving force in the effort to maintain relationships over the years spent in such programs via cross-sectional sampling of participants in different years of a hybrid or online graduate program. The intent was to help students maintain greater holistic functioning through awareness, good decision making, and interventions.

This quantitative study used the approach of logistical regression equations and investigated the strength of relationship quality over time as mediated by family values. It also investigated program impact on relationship quality over time. Further, I investigated which values maintain intimate partner relationships over time in online and hybrid programs. I proposed to include a comparison of students and partners' family values association to relationship quality.

The multiple regression approach was appropriate for this study because it was a cross-sectional study that included ordinal data of time, among other demographic variables that were either binomial or ordinal. I proposed to divide participants into two groups: (a) students in an online or hybrid program and (b) partners of students in an online or hybrid graduate program. With the use of regression, there was no presumed

cause and effect, given that there was not a control group. All students had already entered an online or hybrid program. In this way, all data could be quantified to maintain the integrity of a quantitative study.

Additionally, participants were not randomly assigned to a particular group. Instead, the assignment was based on the preexisting group membership of participants. These groupings were to include graduate program students in online programs or hybrid programs and partners of graduate program students in online or hybrid programs.

Relationship quality and family values research is well established. However, online program and blended program student investigations have omitted the variables of family functioning values and relationship quality. Family values have been found to be correlative to relationship quality or factors of this variable such as relationship satisfaction under a variety of conditions (Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013; Burleson & Denton, 2014; Georgellis & Lange, 2012). These conditions have included stressors and self-improvement variables (Andres, 2014; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Fivecoat et al., 2014; Hira & Overall, 2011; Manne et al., 2010; Mattingly, et al., 2012; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010; Slotter & Luchies, 2014; Williamson et al., 2013; Yu, 2013). Being a graduate student in an online or hybrid program is a condition in relation to which the association between relationship quality and family values has not previously been investigated.

Setting and Sample

Participants

The participants in this study were a convenience sample of students from online and hybrid graduate programs and their intimate partners. Participants were selected on

the following basis: (a) they were an accessible population; (b) they were at least 18 years of age and could provide informed consent; (c) they were presumed to be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, and education level; (d) their program of study or their intimate partners' program of study was either an online or hybrid program, and (e) they were in a relationship defined as *intimate* in this study.

Procedures

Dissemination methods included providing information via a link provided to those interested in being participants before the inquiry began using Survey Monkey (SurveyMonkey, 2012). This link was disseminated to the research participant pool and was available to graduate-level students, along with a brief explanation of the study's background, the study's purpose, and the time necessary for participation. Participants could access the link and decide to discontinue participation at any time. General information about the study in addition to the survey link was provided in brief to all potential participants, including the study's title, purpose, and nature as doctoral research, as well as contact information for me and the supervisor of the research (Appendix A). Further information, including the background of the study, the definition of an online or hybrid program graduate student, informed consent, participation procedures, and ethical concerns, was provided to the participant upon entry into the survey on Survey Monkey (SurveyMonkey, 2012; Appendix B). Instructions were provided to the graduate student participant to e-mail the link to the study to his or her intimate partner. The student's participation was not contingent upon the participation of the partner, as explained in the consent document. The analysis of responses did not depend on matched pairs. A copy of the informed consent and information page is in Appendix B. An e-mail address was

provided for any additional questions that potential participants had. All potential student participants had a university e-mail to engage in their studies, so access to e-mail was not likely to be problematic for interested student participants who were initially contacted for study recruitment.

Individuals interested in the study began the survey on the page following the informed consent for participation (Appendix B). Each section of the survey began with further instructions before the first question. Demographic information was the first of three sections. Section 1 included gender, age, education, type of participant, the number of years in school, the number of years in a relationship, ethnicity, and relationship type. A copy of the demographic section of the questionnaire is in Appendix C. The next section of the questionnaire was the PRQC, for which instructions were provided before the first question. Section 3 was the final section of the questionnaire and consisted of the FAD (Appendices C & D). It also had instructions provided before the first question on how to proceed as a participant. The instruments were in the public domain for use in research but not for other distribution. The FAD was not copyrighted, so permission to include it was not necessary; however, both the FAD and the PRQC authors have been asked for permission to include the assessment tools in the appendix.

Any participants who were interested in receiving the results of the study could indicate this by e-mail. Dissemination of aggregated results will occur via Walden's dissertation publishing. I will not contact participants again due to confidentiality concerns.

Instrumentation

Demographics

A demographic questionnaire assessed basic information regarding the participants' age, gender, education, ethnicity, relationship status, relationship length, program length, and program type. Previous research has indicated that these may be factors in relationship quality (Demirtas, 2010; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Francis et al., 2010; Halliday Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Knoble & Linville, 2012). The exception was program length of attendance, which was a focal point of this research.

PRQC

The PRQC is an 18-item self-report measure that assesses six different aspects of relationship quality rated on Likert scales (Fletcher et al., 2000). The construct was designed to have extremely high face validity, with the questions being as closely related to the constructs as possible. It was assessed as having very high internal reliability measures of all factors (mean $r = .69$, range $r = .54$ to $.80$), after going through two versions of the scale before finding the best factorial arrangement of the scale (Fletcher et al., 2000). Possible uses of the PRQC include (a) screening to identify perceived changes in relationship quality, (b) assessing change following treatment, and (c) identifying specific areas of relationship quality that need improvement. This assessment should have taken about 2 or 3 minutes to complete.

FAD

According to Epstein et al. (1984),

The FAD, based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF), measures structural, organizational, and transactional characteristics of

families. It consists of 6 scales that assess the six dimensions of the MMFF— affective involvement, affective responsiveness, behavioral control, communication, problem-solving, and roles—as well as a 7th scale measuring general family functioning. The measure is comprised of 60 statements about a family; respondents (typically, all family members ages 12+) are asked to rate how well each statement describes their own family. The FAD is scored by adding the responses (1-4) for each scale and dividing by the number of items in each scale (6-12). Higher scores on the FAD indicate decreased family functioning. The FAD has been widely used in both research and clinical practice. Uses include: (a) screening to identify if families are experiencing problems, (b) identifying specific domains in which families are experiencing problems, and (c) assessing change following treatment. (p. 1)

The FAD has been shown to be reliable ($r = .66 - .92$) and to have construct, content, criterion, and predictive validity; low correlations with social desirability; and moderate correlations with other self-report measures of family functioning, as well as to differentiate significantly between clinician-rated healthy and unhealthy families (Miller et al., 1985). This assessment should have taken about 10 minutes to complete.

I obtained copies of both instruments via a university library Tests and Measures link provided by the EBSCOhost search engine. Exact copies of the measures appear in the survey, which was taken by participants via Survey Monkey and is provided in Appendices D and E. Disclosure statements were contained in the electronic copies of both assessments, giving permission for the measures to be used for research purposes. Disclosure statements for both instruments appear at the bottom of each measure

contained in the appendices. Researchers have found the PRQC to be an effective measure in electronic as well as paper-and-pencil form (Brock, Barry, Lawrence, Dey, & Rolffs, 2012). The FAD has been reproduced electronically to be identical to the paper version and was assumed to be as valid and reliable in this format as it is in paper-and-pencil format.

Appropriateness

The PRQC was appropriate for this study. It measures the perceived quality of relationships and has flexible use with multiple populations and intimate relationship types (Arcuri, 2013; Costa & Brody, 2007; Defrain & Asay, 2007; Giorgi, 2013; Kelmer, et al. 2013; Kidwai, 2013; Markey et al., 2014; Morry et al., 2011; Overall et al., 2010; Sessoms, 2010; Slotter & Luchies, 2014; Vohs et al., 2011). The study was concerned with relationship quality and its association with family values as measured by the FAD. The FAD was appropriate, as it identifies family-functioning values in separate factors in order to assess more specifically which values are related to relationship quality over the course of graduate student attendance in an online or hybrid program. Included were the two original values discussed by Coombs (1966) early in the development of family values studies, as well as additional factors that have been shown to improve family functioning when present. An alternative measure of family functioning and values, the Family Assessment Measure (FAM), measures similar constructs; however, it was necessary to assess didactic relationships within the entire family (Skinner et al., 2000). The instrument did not lend itself to assessing the intimate partnership as the FAD did. Additionally, the FAM separates values from functioning, whereas all factors on the FAD are considered values, with no separate section for norms and values; thus, the FAD was

sufficient for the study without being excessive or prohibitive to participants. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is similar to the PRQC; however, it includes consensus as one of the constructs of relationship adjustment (Spanier, 1976). Including consensus as necessary for relationship quality would not have allowed for adequate evaluation of consensus theory, given that it would have made the measures redundant. Additionally, the construct was not as expansive as the PRQC and had not been tested thoroughly for reliability.

Analysis

This study used a correlation research design via linear regression analysis. The instruments used for variable measurement in this study allowed data to be analyzed with regression. An a priori power analysis revealed that for multiple linear regression methods for this study as $p < .05$ to detect an effect size of .20 with a power of at least .80, the study would require a sample of at least 108 participants (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The levels of the categorical independent variables necessary for the study needed coding into dichotomous variables for the regression equations to determine this assessment. There was to be a maximum of five levels of an independent variable at any one time. The overall regression equation would indicate the need for only 90 participants ($50+8(k)$), but analysis of individual variables within the equation required 108 participants, according to the equation suggested of $104+k$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Relationship quality was the independent variable in Research Questions 1, 2, 5, and 6. The dependent variable was either perceived relationship quality or one of its subscales. In these hypotheses, there was the student group and the partner group. The participants were further investigated regarding gender, the length of time the student in the

relationship had spent in an online or blended graduate program, and length of relationship as moderators. An analysis was run separately for each moderator. The FAD was an independent variable in every analysis for questions one, two five and six. A separate analysis was done using individual factors of the FAD, such as communication and behavior control. In research questions three and four, the FAD was the dependent variable, however, the group of the participant (i.e., online/hybrid program student or partner) was the independent variable in Research Question 4, and the demographic of the participant, age, time the student had spent in program, gender, or time in the relationship was the independent variable in Research Question 5. Preliminary analysis of the data was done to determine if the data followed a normal curve and to assess for outliers. In this instance, the data would have been transformed, and any such modifications would have been explained. Displays of results are in scatter plots with lines of best fit representing a visual aid to understanding the relationship of the correlations that were being investigated. The research questions and hypotheses reflect this type of analysis. The research questions and hypotheses are listed here again for the reader's review.

RQ1

Is perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is not predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

RQ2

If perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by the family values for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners there are effects of years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of relationship?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by the family values as measured by the FAD in online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners are their effects of years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by the family values as measured by the FAD in online and blended program graduate students and their partners is not moderated by years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

RQ3

Are family values as measured by the FAD predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner?

Alternate hypothesis. Family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner

Null hypothesis. Family values as measured by the FAD are not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

RQ4

If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program or relationship duration?

Alternative hypothesis. If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program or relationship duration.

Null hypothesis. If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner, then there are no effects of gender, years of attendance in a program or relationship duration.

RQ5

Is perceived relationship quality predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner?

Alternate hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

Null hypothesis. Perceived relationship quality is not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

RQ6

If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Alternative hypothesis. If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Null hypothesis. If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are not effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Scoring

The instruments were scored after collection through Survey Monkey. Data analysis was through the most current Statistical Package for Social Sciences at the time of the data collection completion. Gender, age, ethnicity, and relationship status was treated and assessed as possible extraneous variables, due to the findings of these differences in prior research (Demirtas, 2010; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Williamson et al., 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Careful ethical consideration was given to the nature of this study and its possible effects. The informed consent form was distributed to all possible participants discussing procedures, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of the study as well as risks and benefits of participants. An e-mail to contact the researcher and her advisor was also provided.

Informed consent forms state (Appendix B) that all records in this study will remain confidential. Only the researcher will have access to records. Participants were informed that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, it was made clear that their participation has no bearing on grades or student status in their online or blended graduate program. Also, participants were notified that they have no obligation to complete any part of the study for which they are not comfortable. Informed consent was obtained when the participant clicks the *Yes* option to the first question of the survey asking for consent. This electronic agreement was transmitted to the researcher through Survey Monkey when results were collected. The participant was allowed to print this page and the information page for their records. Clicking *Yes* on the consent, proceeding with the study, and submitting the survey indicated that the participant understood the study and agrees to participation and conditions of the study. There was a minimal level of risk to participants, as the measures were straightforward and nondeceptive. The participants had the option to discontinue assessment at any time. Data will be stored in Survey Monkey (SurveyMonkey, 2012), with a password locked database for the duration of the research process and publication. Once the necessary information had been utilized from the database, it was archived in a secured electronic drive exclusively for research information.

Summary

Multiple linear regression was a method of correlational study that causality could not be drawn from, but was necessary for the nature of inquiry of this research design, as there was not a control group. Students were surveyed through online methods, and anonymity will be maintained. The study was cross-sectional to avoid long term study

that would be necessary to follow one group over time. Students were from online and hybrid programs of study, and spouses were recruited via sharing the link. An assumption that answers would not be shared between partners was made and could have been an issue with the validity of results obtained. Data will be maintained in a locked file, but no identifying information other than demographics and group identity was necessary for the study. General results will be available for participant review upon request, or upon publishing. The benefit of knowing how family values change over the course of study and the association of these values with relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC outweighs the risks of involvement in such a study since results are not couple specific, and no participants were indicated as having answered in a particular fashion eliminating possible detriment to the couple on the basis of answers.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this nonexperimental quantitative study was to examine the association between family values and relationship quality for online and hybrid program graduate students and their intimate partners. It also was to examine changes in family values, relationship quality, and family values as associated with relationship quality over time when one partner was in attendance in an online or hybrid graduate program. This chapter describes the participants sampled in the study, the design of the study, procedures followed in the study, and a summary of the analysis results found. IRB approval was gained, and I was given approval number 07-11-16-0188560 to proceed. In particular, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners?

H_{1o}: Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is not predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

H_{1a}: Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by family values as measured by the FAD for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners.

2. If perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC is predicted by the family values for online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners, are there effects of years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of relationship?

H2_o: Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by the family values as measured by the FAD in online and blended program graduate students and their partners is not moderated by years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

H2_a: Perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC and predicted by the family values as measured by the FAD in online and blended program graduate students and their intimate partners is not moderated by years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship.

3. Are family values as measured by the FAD predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner?

H3_o: Family values as measured by the FAD are not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

H3_a: Family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or an intimate partner.

4. If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration?

H4_o: If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner, then there are no effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

H4_a: If family values as measured by the FAD are predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

5. Is perceived relationship quality predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner?

H5_o: Perceived relationship quality is not predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

H5_a: Perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or a partner.

6. If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is an online/blended program graduate student or partner, are there effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration?

H6_o: If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are not effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

H6_a: If perceived relationship quality is predicted by whether or not the participant is in an online/blended program or a partner, there are effects of gender, years of attendance in a program, or relationship duration.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Participants completed surveys during a three-month time frame. The participants were recruited through Walden's participant pool and were given a link to access the study online via Survey Monkey at their leisure within the recruitment period. The recruitment criteria specified that the participant must be a graduate-level student. Participants were asked to forward the link to their intimate partners in an attempt to collect data from this group for comparison. No partner data were collected. A total of 59 participants took part in the study. There were 15 incomplete surveys, which eliminated these participants from the study. Data analysis was conducted on the remaining 45 student participants. All categorical variables were recoded into binomial variables for regression analysis. The majority of the participants were female (45, 76%), were White (34, 58%), and had completed graduate school (45, 76%). The second most prevalent ethnicity was Black or African American (20, 34%; participants could identify with more than one ethnicity). The majority of the participants were also married (34, 58%). Three persons identified as *Other* in terms of ethnicity; these participants specified Iranian, Middle Eastern, and Puerto Rican as their ethnicity. They were later recoded into categories of Latino and Asian as appropriate. The demographics of the sample appeared to be representative of the online graduate student population, the majority of which recent research has shown to be Caucasian and female (Evers, Livernois, & Mancuso,

2006; Hansen, Brady, & Thaxton, 2016). Table 1 presents frequencies and percentages for participant demographics.

Two scales, the FAD, and PRQC, that were open to the public for research purposes were used to answer the research questions. Both instruments have been proven valid and reliable (Epstein et al., 1984; Fletcher et al., 2000). Each of the scales has multiple factors, which can be used independently from the scales in their entirety.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages for Participant Demographics

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	14	24
Female	45	76
Age		
22-31	10	17
32-41	16	27
42-51	18	31
52+	15	25
*Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	2
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	3
Black or African American	20	34
Hispanic or Latino	3	5
White/Caucasian	34	58
Prefer not to answer	2	3
Other (Specified as Iranian; Puerto Rican)	2	3
Highest education level completed		
Associates degree	1	2
Bachelor's degree	13	22
Completed graduate school	45	76
Years in relationship		
<1	8	14
11-15	12	20
15+	15	25
Relationship status		
Married	34	58
Engaged	6	10
Cohabiting	7	12
Dating	6	10
Single not married or seeing anyone	4	7
Other relationship not defined	2	3

Table 1 continued

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
1 st	11	19
2 nd	19	32
3 rd	7	12
4 th	8	14
5 th or more	14	24

Note. Participants could select more than one response.

Data Analysis Results

Another a priori power analysis was performed given the change in the population and number of variables being assessed. A large anticipated effect size, (f^2) = .35, may be found with 43 participants when $p = .05$ and power is .80 or higher if only five predictors are considered at one time (Soper, 2015). To consider seven factors, the effect size would have to be considerable ($f^2 = .40$) for a population of 44. This means that assessments utilizing the six factors of the FAD in a regression analysis as well as the full scale would have to have a very large effect size before results would be found. The preliminary analysis examined the overall scores of the FAD and PRQC for the online or hybrid program graduate students and their partners as perceived by the student, as partner data were not obtained. It was assumed that because the participants were graduate students, they could read and understand the survey. It was also assumed that they would answer consistently, honestly, and to the best of their ability to assess their own values and relationship. Additionally, the relationship between family values as assessed by the FAD and perceived relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC could be the result of many contributing variables, and these background variables were included and controlled for in the analysis to accommodate this assumption. Data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 for Windows. FAD mean yielded above-average scores in this population ($M = 2.06$, $s = .47$, $\epsilon = .35$, $\beta_1 = .57$), as scores above 2.00 are considered to be approaching dysfunction (Epstein et al., 1984). PRQC mean yielded above-average scores within this population ($M = 5.26$, $s = 1.54$, $\epsilon = .33$, $\beta_1 = -.82$), as scores above 4.00 are considered to be of good perceived quality. Figure 1 presents a scatter plot for these scores for FAD. Figure 2 presents a scatter plot for these scores for PRQC.

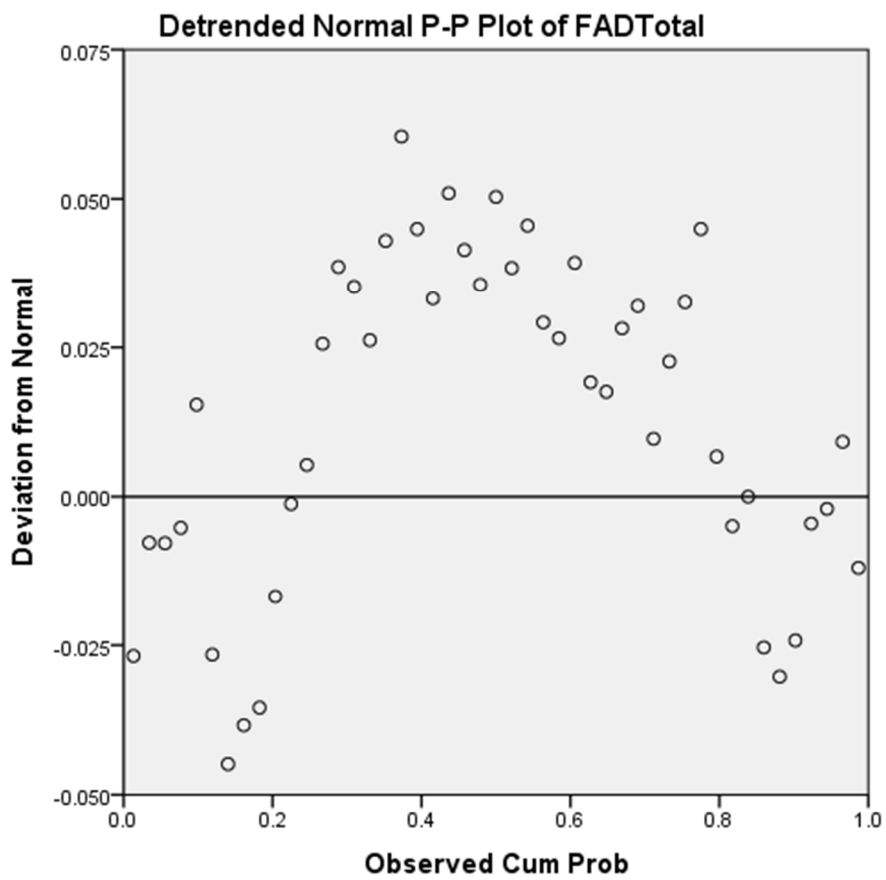


Figure 1. Detrended normal P-P plot for FAD distribution.

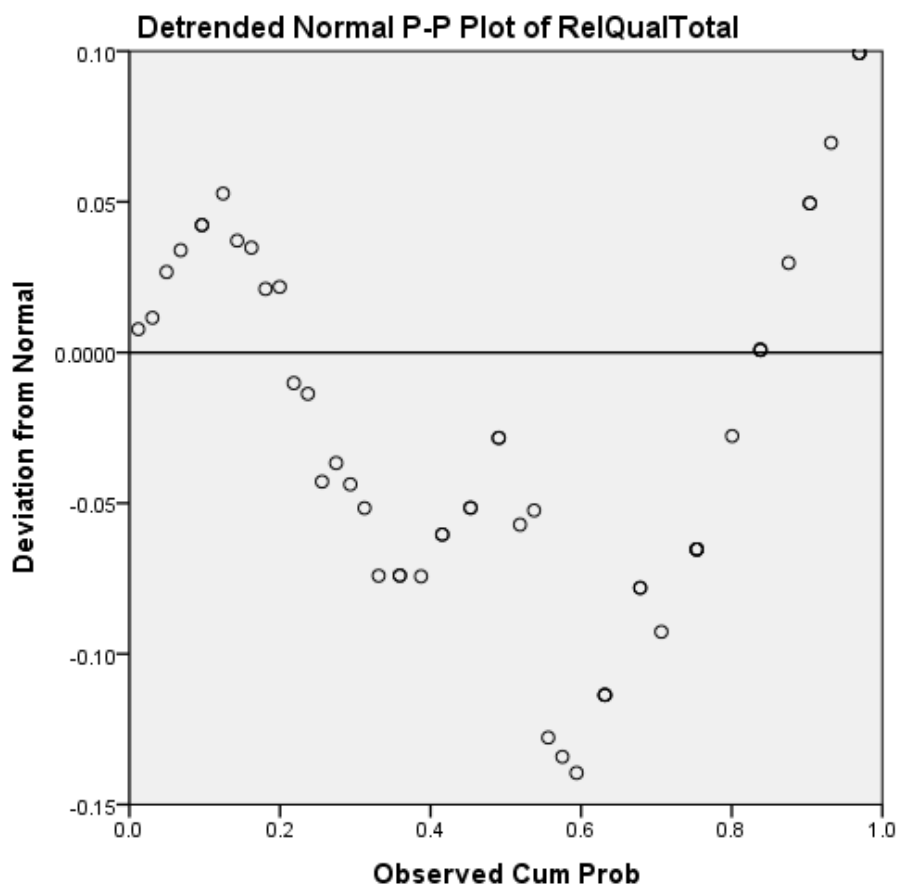


Figure 2. Detrended normal P-P plot of relationship quality distribution.

Research Question 1

To examine Research Question 1, a hierarchical multiple linear regression equation was conducted to assess the relationship of FAD to PRQC as well as Relationship Quality factors of Satisfaction, Love, Passion, Trust, Intimacy, and Commitment. The analysis yielded a strong correlation of the main effect between FAD and PRQC ($r = -.80$, $\alpha = .01$). All subsequent correlations yielded strong correlations ($r = -.46$ to $r = -.81$, $\alpha = .01$). Results are displayed in Figure 3 showing that the assumption that FAD predicts PRQC was met, meaning family functioning values as measured by the PRQC are a predictor of perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC.

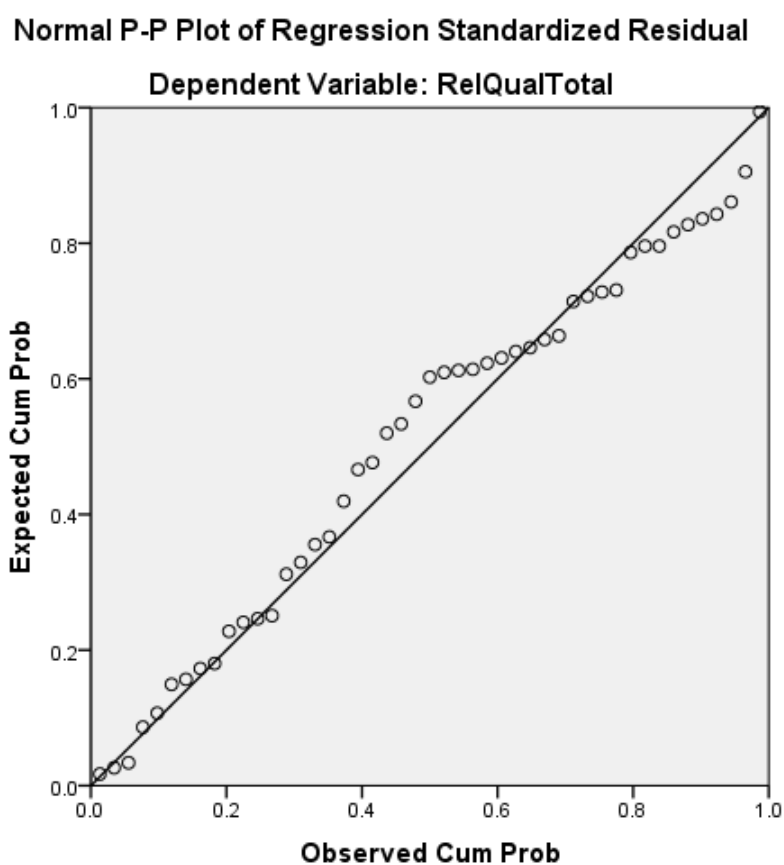


Figure 3. Normal P-P scatterplot for regression predicting PRQC by FAD.

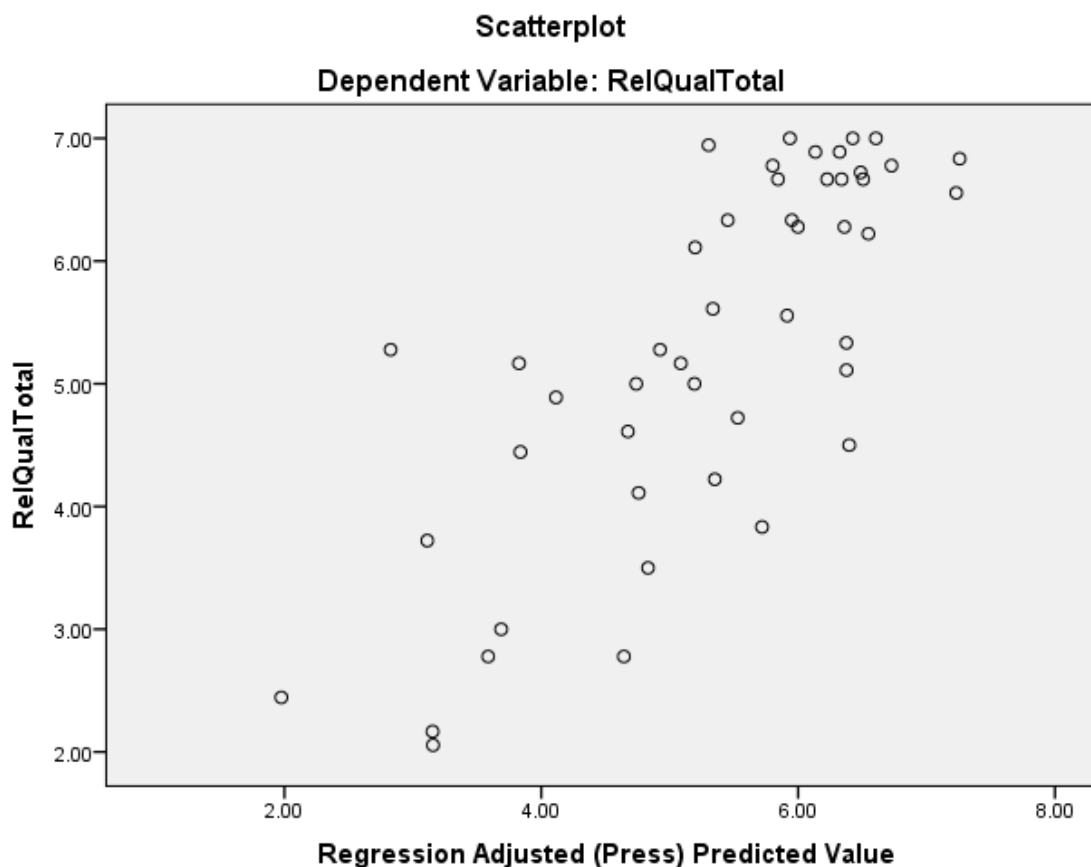


Figure 4. FAD scatterplot for regression predicting PRQC.

Results of the regression showed that FAD accounted for (R^2) 73% of the variance in relationship quality as measured by PRQC ($p < .001$). The regression model was significant, $F(7,45) = 14.71$, $p < .001$, $B = -.80$. This suggests that for every unit of family functioning values measured by the FAD increase, perceived relationship quality decreases by .80 units. Significance was found, and the null hypothesis can be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. The only factor of the FAD that significantly predicted relationship quality without the full scale was Affective Responsiveness. Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple linear regression for the factors of FAD, and their predictability of perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC.

Table 2

Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients Predicting Perceived Relationship Quality

Source	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Problem Solving	-.18	.22	-.10	-.78	.44
Communication	.56	.37	.18	1.48	.15
Roles	.62	.52	.14	1.17	.25
Affective Responsiveness	-1.11	.41	-.53	-2.69	.01
Affective Involvement	-.37	.31	-.14	-1.19	.24
Behavior Control	.01	.38	.00	.03	.98
General Functioning	-.75	.40	-.39	-1.88	.07

Subsequent analysis revealed that family functioning values as measured by FAD were least correlated with the Commitment variable of the perceived relationship quality as predicted by PRQC, however, the relationship is still significant ($R^2=33\%$, $p<.001$). Meaning that Commitment may be slightly higher even when functioning is slightly poor, as the unit of Commitment will only increase .33 with a unit decrease on the FAD.

Research Question 2

To examine Research Question 2, a hierarchical multiple linear regression was conducted to assess effects of years of attendance in an online or blended graduate program, gender, or length of the relationship. Ethnicity was divided into two groups of White or majority and Nonwhite participants in the interest of group sizing. Relationship definition was also divided into two groups of Married, Engaged or Cohabiting and other. No significant data was found indicating that these covariates had an effect on the

relationship between the FAD and PRQC. Further demographic analysis revealed that those who defined their relationship as Married, Engaged or Cohabiting rather than dating, relationship not defined, or single had a mild influence on the main effect accounting for about 2% of the variance with an adjusted R^2 , $p=.06$, which is not within acceptable significance. It is possible that the effect size is too small. The null can therefore not be rejected.

Research Question 3

Data could not be analyzed for this question due to the lack of partner data.

Research Question 4

Data could not be analyzed for this question due to the lack of partner data.

Research Question 5

Data could not be analyzed for this question due to the lack of partner data.

Research Question 6

Data could not be analyzed for this question due to the lack of partner data.

Summary

Based on the findings of regression analysis, the alternate hypothesis regarding the association between FAD and PRQC in online or hybrid program graduate students was accepted. The overall results support the alternative hypothesis based on the findings of multiple-regression analysis finding a significant relationship between family functioning values as measured by the FAD and perceived relationship quality as measured by PRQC. The variable of relationship status showed a slight, yet nonsignificant relationship within the model with regard to FAD and PRQC of the 45 hybrid and online graduate students surveyed. The Commitment factor of the PRQC was

found to have the weakest relationship to the FAD family functioning values, however, was still significant at the $p < .001$ level. Regression showed that FAD family functioning values accounted for 73% of the variance in perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC. Affective responsiveness was the only factor of the FAD found to have an effect on the PRQC without the cumulative effect of the scale on a significant level ($\beta = .53$, $p = .01$).

The research adds to the current knowledge base with regard to relationship quality as a contribution to an online or hybrid program graduate student's overall functioning. It also adds to the research of family values as a predictor of relationship quality as a whole. Chapter 5 provides a brief summary of the study and an explanation of how the study was performed. Conclusions are drawn based on the findings and discussed in terms of social change. Recommendations for future research are also suggested.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter is arranged in five sections. The first provides an overview of why and how the study was conducted and reviews the research questions. The second includes an interpretation of the findings within the context of the peer-reviewed literature in conjunction with the theoretical framework. Limitations of generalizability of findings are discussed in the third section. The fourth section gives recommendations for future research based on limits and findings of the study. Finally, in the fifth section, I examine implications for social change. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of the overall study.

Study Overview

The purpose of this nonexperimental quantitative study was to examine the association between family values and relationship quality for online and hybrid program graduate students and their intimate partners. It also was to examine changes in family values, relationship quality, and family values as associated with relationship quality over time when one partner is in attendance in an online or hybrid graduate program. I attempted to analyze six research questions in order to address a gap in the literature concerning how values and relationship quality are associated for online and hybrid program graduate students and their partners. This inquiry included an effort to determine which values, as assessed by the FAD, may help with stability of relationship quality, which aspects of relationship quality hold most stable, and which aspects of relationship quality are most malleable when values are not strongly intact. Researchers have shown that family values maintain aspects of relationship quality in times of stress (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Similar family values have also been shown to lead

to better satisfaction, a factor of relationship quality, within couples (Arranz Becker, 2013; Coombs, 1966).

I intended to add to existing findings and show that family values as measured by the FAD are strongly associated with relationship quality as measured by the PRQC. In so doing, I sought to substantiate the claim that people with similar values have similar levels of perceived relationship quality. Through this assessment, I also found what contributors there are to the relationship between values and relationship quality, and which factors of each are more significantly related to the full scale of the other. This can assist with the assessment of student relationships, help to provide support for students' holistic functioning while in an online or hybrid graduate program in terms of supporting values when necessary and increasing awareness of which values support a healthy relationship.

Interpretation of Findings

Initially, it was found that online and blended program graduate students have a high average score on FAD indicating possible dysfunction. PRQC scores were also high showing good relationship quality. This raised the concern that the two variables may not be related. A significant negative relationship was found between family functioning values as measured by the FAD and perceived relationship quality as measured by the PRQC. These findings could suggest that with increased values impairment, there is a decrease in perceived relationship quality. Findings suggest that with awareness and intervention to decrease negative functioning, perceived relationship quality could be improved. This would improve the overall functioning of students in online or hybrid graduate programs, as relationships are part of their daily lives. Specifically, the

Affective Responsiveness factor of FAD is in itself significantly related to perceived relationship quality. This suggests that training for appropriate responsiveness to a partner may increase the perceived quality in a relationship. Interventions such as those addressing affective behavior within the “Keeping Families Strong” initiative could be repeated with couples, as they were with mothers and children (Valdez et al., 2011). This initiative teaches appropriate responsiveness, teaches emotional regulation, and has been proven to solidify the strength of the familial relationship (Valdez et al., 2011).

Preliminary analysis found that family functioning values scores, according to FAD assessment for graduate students in an online or hybrid graduate program, were high overall. This indicates that this particular population on average is having relative difficulties in family functioning. Further preliminary analysis, however, showed that relationship quality overall for this population was relatively high. Results displayed relationships as possessing fairly good quality as indicated by the PRQC. The initial interpretation would support the belief that such a strong association between the two measures would not be found. This could be due to the differences in how the measures are rated, as there is more room to express mediocrity of relationship quality on a scale of 1-7 than there is on the FAD’s scale of 1-4. The expected result, according to research after analysis, was still found with overwhelming significance. Relationship quality and family functioning values are strongly related, as has been assessed in part in previous research on relationship satisfaction and family functioning values (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011a).

Analysis for the first research question revealed that the strength of the relationship between FAD and PRQC was such that with every unit that the FAD

decreased, the PRQC increased by .80. This is a very strong negative relationship between the two variables. FAD is scored on functioning, and the higher the score, the lower the level of functioning, making this relationship indicative of how important stable family functioning is to relationship quality. Affective Responsiveness singularly is highly predictive of relationship quality, supporting that how one expresses one's feelings is extremely important to relationship quality. Relationships, where emotional responses are withheld or not expressed in an inappropriate way, may have poor quality. This was found in research between parents and children with externalizing behaviors as well (Pasalich et al., 2011). In this instance, the relationship between partners is similar, helping to generalize this affect throughout relationship types. Given the small population analyzed, it must be mentioned that other FAD factors may have an effect on PRQC scores directly, however, the effect size for Affective Responsiveness was large enough even under these conditions. This means that how one reacts emotionally to one's partner who is a graduate student in an online or hybrid graduate program is of utmost importance to maintaining relationship quality perception.

In assessing the second research question, various background and demographic information was assessed for the possibility of accounting for the association between relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC and family functioning values as assessed by the FAD. It was found that background does not have a significant effect in terms of age, length of relationship, time in an online or hybrid graduate program, gender, or years in a relationship. This was also expected, as FAD and PRQC have been widely used across the world, under various conditions, and with different populations, to assess for relationship quality and values (Fletcher et al., 2000; Francis et al., 2010; Guada et al.,

2010; Staccini et al., 2015). There was only a mild trend showing that how graduate students define their relationship may have influence over how they perceive relationship quality.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was that individuals had to take the initiative to belong to the participant pool before becoming aware of the study and then were asked to complete the survey independently. This may have led to surveys being incomplete, as well as surveys not being passed on to partners, as no further direction was given to participants beyond the recruitment announcement. High scores for both affective involvement and receptive involvement as the students perceived them may be indicative that they felt that their partners might not want to participate for purely altruistic purposes. It is also possible that the student participants' assumptions were correct about the involvement values of their partners, and that their partners would not have wanted to fill out the surveys even if the link had been passed on to them. For either of these or other possible reasons, no partners filled out surveys. This limited the ability to fully answer the research questions as originally intended in the study. Additionally, participants who did not complete surveys, either in full or in part, were eliminated, as data were deemed unacceptable if the respondent did not answer every question. This sample was chosen to meet the appropriate effect size; however, due to limited resources and the 3-month service period purchased for Survey Monkey, further efforts to obtain partner data were not pursued.

Participants may have had a tendency to respond in a direction favorable to expectations, which may have impacted results. This pattern of response could have

skewed the data by giving an inaccurate impression of the individual with regard to values and relationship quality. This was considered during data analysis, but results were consistent throughout the survey for participants. This sample was drawn from Walden University graduate students, who were, by nature of the university, online or hybrid program students. These participants being from the same graduate school may limit the generalizability of the study to all online and hybrid program graduate students, however, the demographics of students varied and were likely representative of the larger population, with the exception of the population being mostly White and female. Research on Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes (Hansen et al., 2016) indicated that although Osher's blended learning institutions, constituting over 100 programs, strove for ethnic diversity, the majority of their students were well educated and Caucasian. This finding supports the notion that it is not abnormal for online and blended programs to have mostly White students. Recent literature has indicated that within higher education, there has been a general shift away from a gender imbalance in favor of men toward an imbalance in favor of women (Evers et al., 2006). This supports the idea that there is likely no difference between the population surveyed and overall graduate student bodies.

Recommendations

Given the lack of intimate partner participation in this study, recruitment methods should be modified in further research on online graduate students and their intimate partners. Going through the participant pool limited the amount of external advertising I could conduct for study purposes. It would be possible in future studies to recruit at other universities in person; however, partners would likely not be present. Other methods of online recruiting, such as paying more for Survey Monkey to target a participant pool,

might be an option if more resources are available. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that graduate students be aware that their level of commitment in a relationship is more resilient than other factors of relationship quality. This means that they are likely to remain committed even when functioning values are suffering in the context of the relationship. This is contrary to findings with other populations showing more resiliency with relationship satisfaction (Andres, 2014). It is also recommended that overall general functioning is assessed for maintenance within the context of a relationship while in an online or hybrid graduate program, as values and relationship quality remain highly associated for this population as research as shown for others. The level of values functioning on average for this population is considered poor within the context of the intimate relationship. Attendance to these values is, therefore, pertinent while attending an online or graduate program for relationship maintenance. I would also recommend that staff of student support centers be aware of the possibility that students' holistic functioning includes relationship quality, and that poor values are associated with a decrease in relationship quality. Outreach to families to support values and maintain functioning would be one method of offering assistance to students.

I found that relationship quality as associated with functioning values was linked with relationship status for online and hybrid program graduate students. This was regardless of the duration of the relationship. Future researchers should investigate this association to relationship quality, and possibly determine whether the definition of the relationship may have an influence on the perception of relationship quality.

Theoretical Framework and Research Findings

The theoretical framework for this study, Coombs's values consensus theory, supported the idea that those who have similar values will have better relationship satisfaction (Coombs, 1966). Later research investigated whether cumulative values or individual values better-predicted relationship satisfaction, a factor of relationship quality (Archuleta et al., 2013; Arranz Becker, 2013). There really is no argument here, as those who have better values appear to have better relationship quality. Partners and student participants could not be compared; however, within subjects, it was found that with increasing FAD, indicating dysfunction, there was a decrease in PRQC indicating poorer relationship quality. Those who have good family functioning values as assessed by the FAD also have good relationship quality as assessed by the PRQC, indicating similar values leading to improved relationship quality. Values on the FAD seem to be the values that partners must have in common, which was not surprising given the variety of populations the instrument has been used with successfully (Baleyte, 2012; Guada et al., 2010; Juliusdottir & Olafsdottir, 2014).

Implications

This study has implications for positive social change, in that awareness of how values affect relationship quality may lead to changes in a student's overall functioning while in a hybrid or online graduate program. For instance, students may become aware of how commitment level may be intact yet inconsistent with the quality of a relationship. Students may be extremely committed yet not have high relationship quality. There may be a need to evaluate where commitment lies, as well as reexamine strengthening other values more malleable with changes in relationship quality. Student support centers may

offer assistance to support values that have been shown to be highly associated with the satisfaction factor of relationship quality, such as communication (Arranz Becker, 2013).

It is recommended that persons are aware that family functioning may suffer during an online or hybrid program graduate education, which is similar to other stressful situations such as being a caregiver to someone who is disabled (Al-Krenawi et al., 2011b). This is due to the combination of FAD factors, rather than just one stand-alone factor. The combination of compromised roles, lack of involvement, inappropriate responding, behavioral control, and overall general functioning may be compromised. This is likely due to increased stress and decreased available time, especially for personal goals (Arranz Becker, 2013; Lipschitz, Yen, Weinstock, & Spirito, 2012).

Oddly enough, it was found that commitment was the relationship quality factor that was the least affected by family functioning values. This factor showed a mild trend toward this population remaining committed regardless of how dysfunctional values were in the context of the relationship. This indicates that some online and hybrid program graduate students may want to reassess often and evaluate whether there is a functioning values issue, even if they are highly committed to a relationship. Students could then seek the supports needed to maintain values and avoid the possibility of a breakdown of overall relationship quality.

This research could also assist in clinical practice. It supports previous bodies of research relating relationship quality to family values. This research may help raise awareness, and design intervention programs for other populations that have excessive stressful situations.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Graduate students and faculty of Walden University:

My name is Tracy Stage, and I am currently a doctoral candidate with Walden. I am researching relationship quality and family values to assist with the research promoting strength in intimate relationships of students and their partners while in a hybrid or online program. This will also help to ensure students are well rounded upon graduation of their programs from an online or blended graduate program by assessing needs in the areas of relationships and values strengths to maintain them throughout the course of their studies. If you are interested in being a participant as an online or blended program graduate student, please proceed to the link below to read more and evaluate your desire to contribute to the study by your participation. I believe at the very least asking some of the questions in this study could lead to contemplation and self-awareness. It should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. If you decide to participate, please forward the survey monkey link to your partner, and allow them to determine if they would like to participate. Your surveys will not be linked to one another, and data will be anonymous, so personal results of you and your partner will not be assessed to maintain this anonymity.

Sincerely,

Tracy Stage

Doctoral Candidate

Tracy.stage@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Relationship Quality and Family Values

The following survey is to assess the perceived relationship quality and family values between you and your partner. You are selected for this survey because you are a university graduate student in either a hybrid or online program or a partner of such a student, and are in a relationship. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions before continuing with this survey. This study is being conducted by Tracy Stage, a doctoral candidate at Walden University.

Background

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the intimate partner relationships of online and hybrid program graduate students and their partners. This will enable planning and interventions in the future to assist in keeping relationships of these students healthy.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, please continue, and click "yes" on the following page to consent to permission to administer the survey to you. After you complete the survey, if you are the graduate student, please forward the link to have your spouse review the survey to evaluate their desire to participate. Participants are on the honor system, and should not view each other's answers. There is one demographic form, and two assessments included in this survey. The first assessment is with regard to relationship quality, and the second assesses family values. The first assessment questions are evaluated on a seven-point rating scale, and the measure is 18 questions long. The second is on a four-point rating scale and is 53 questions. The entire survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Some questions will lead to a

disqualifying page, if you feel that you meet the qualifications of the survey and have reached the page in error, please begin the survey again.

Anonymity

The records of this study will be kept anonymous. In any report that is published, it will not be possible to identify participants due to the anonymity. Records will be kept on a password protected computer file, and only the research team will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the process of completing the surveys by closing the screen. Your decision to participate in this study will not affect your relationship with your university in any way. If you decide to withdraw your participation, you may do so without effect to your relationship with your university.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no physical risks and no benefits to participating in the survey. Emotional upset while completing the questionnaires might be a possibility. Participants are not obligated to complete any parts of the questionnaires that they are not comfortable completing.

Benefits of participation include being able to obtain an intrinsic analysis of current family values on the quality of one's relationship. Upon completion of the study, further evaluation of current relationship health can be made by the student. On a macro level, results will provide data to assess family values and their association with relationship quality for online or hybrid program students and their partners. Results of the study will be accessible in the Walden research database upon completion or asked for via e-mail

request. If you find the results distressing in any way, further discussion of the results can be had with the researcher via this e-mail address and assistance will be given to find mental health resources if necessary. All e-mails regarding the study will be deleted immediately after completion of correspondence.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Tracy Stage. She can be reached by email at tracy.stage@waldenu.edu. The researcher's advisor is Dr. Denise Horton, who can be reached by email at denise.horton@waldenu.edu. You may print this page for your records. The following page will ask for your consent.

1. Do you consent to participation in this survey?

Yes

No

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

Demographic Information

Please fill out the following demographic information. This information is necessary to assist in assessing generalizability of study.

2. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

3. What is your age range?

- 22-31
- 32-41
- 42-51
- 52+

4. What is your ethnicity?

- African American
- Caucasian
- Native American
- Asian, Asian American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Other

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School
- Some College
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate

6. How many years have you been in your current relationship?

- <1yr
- 1yr
- 2yrs
- 3yrs
- 4yrs+

7. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- Married
- Engaged
- Cohabiting
- Dating
- Single, not married or seeing anyone

8. How many years have you or your partner been in an online or hybrid graduate program at Walden University?

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year

- 5th year or more
- 9. Are you the hybrid program or online program graduate student, or a partner of an online or hybrid program graduate student?
 - I am an online or hybrid program graduate student.
 - I am the partner of an online or hybrid program graduate student.
 - I am neither a graduate student or a partner of a graduate student.

Appendix D: PRQC

The following is a survey about relationship quality.

10. Evaluate the following questions about your relationship satisfaction

Not at all	Somewhat		Mostly		Very	
How satisfied are you with your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How content are you with your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How happy are you with your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Evaluate the following questions about commitment in your relationship.

How committed are you to your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How dedicated are you to your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How devoted are you to your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Evaluate the following about intimacy in your relationship.

How intimate is your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How close is your relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How connected are you to your partner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Evaluate the questions about trust in your relationship.

How much do you trust your partner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How much can you count on your partner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How dependable is your partner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Evaluate the following about passion in your relationship.

How passionate
is your relationship?

How lustful
is your relationship?

How sexually intense
is your relationship?

15. Evaluate the following about love in your relationship.

How much do you love
your partner?

How much do you adore
your partner?

How much do you cherish
your partner?

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Appendix E: FAD

Please answer the following questions on a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

16. After our family tries to solve a problem, we usually discuss whether it worked out or not.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. We resolve most emotional upsets that come up.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. We confront problems involving feelings.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. We try to think of different ways to solve problems.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. When someone is upset the others know why.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. You can't tell how a person is feeling from what they are saying.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. People come right out and say things instead of hinting at them.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. We are frank with each other.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

24. We don't talk to each other when we are angry.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. When we don't like what someone has done, we tell them.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. When you ask someone to do something, you have to check that they did it.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

27. We make sure members meet their family responsibilities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

28. Family tasks don't get spread around enough.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

29. We have trouble meeting our bills.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30. There is little time to explore personal interests. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31. If people are asked to do something, they need reminding. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32. We are generally dissatisfied with the family duties assigned to us. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 33. We are reluctant to show our affection for each other. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34. Some of us just don't respond emotionally. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35. We do not show our love for each other. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36. Tenderness takes second place to other things in our family. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37. We express tenderness. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38. We cry openly. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39. If someone is in trouble, the others become too involved. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40. You only get the interest of others when something is important to them. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41. We are too self-centered. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42. We get involved with each other only when something interests us. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43. We show interest in each other when we can get something out of it personally. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44. Our family shows interest in each other only when they can get something out of it. | | | |

- | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45. Even though we mean well, we intrude too much into each other's lives. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 46. We don't know what to do when an emergency comes up. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47. You can easily get away with breaking the rules. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 48. We know what to do in an emergency. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 49. We have no clear expectations about toilet habits. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50. We have rules about hitting people. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51. We don't hold to any rules or standards. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 52. If the rules are broken, we don't know what to expect. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 53. There are rules about dangerous situations. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 54. Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55. In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 56. We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 57. Individuals are accepted for what they are. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 58. We avoid discussing our fears and concerns. | | | |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 59. We can express feelings to each other. | | | |

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
60. We feel accepted for what we are.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
61. We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
62. We don't get along well together.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
63. We confide in each other.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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