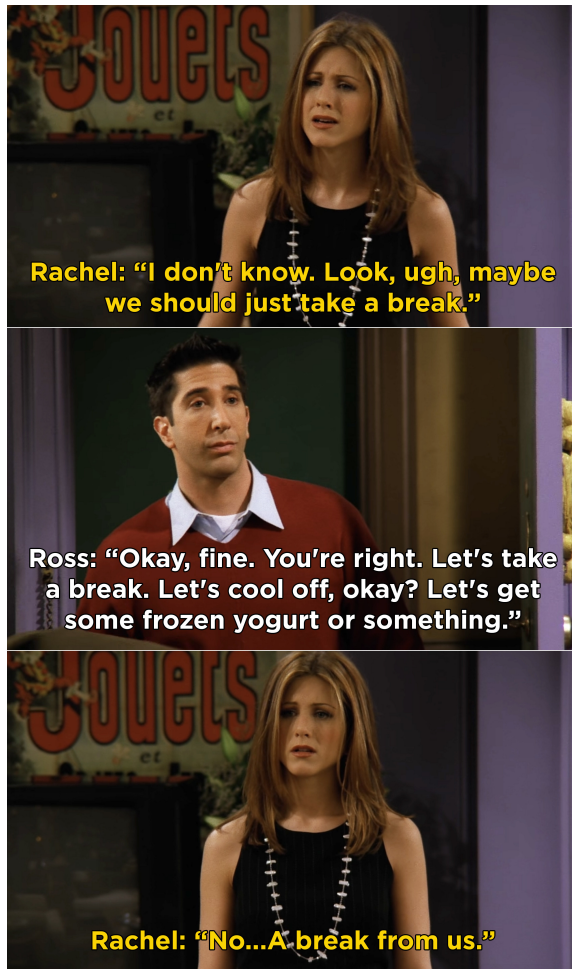




Relationship Churning

Understanding on-again/off-again relationships

Sarah Halpern-Meekin





What are churning relationships?

- On-again/off-again relationships
 - Broken up and gotten back together
 - Can occur in dating, cohabiting, and marital relationships
 - Partners may or may not agree on whether they have “churned”
- Some studies also examine having “sex with an ex”
- Topic is understudied—limited data, limited samples

How common is churning?

- Among young adults:
 - Nearly half reported churning in present/most recent relationship
 - Average number of churning episodes: 2.5
 - Over half who broke up continued sexual relationship
 - Nearly 9 in 10 exes who had sex attempted to reconcile

I think we should stop ambiguously dating and start being ambiguously broken up.



som^{ee}cards

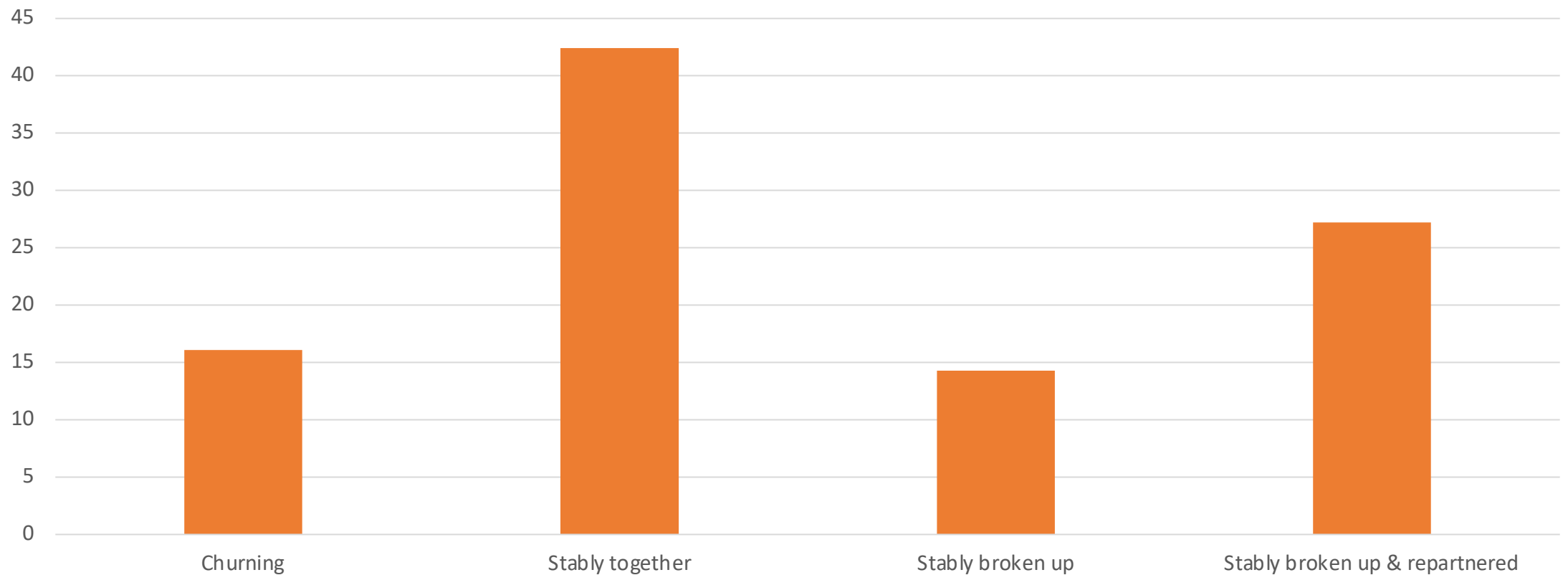
How common is churning?

- Among parents:
 - Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study



Parents' relationship status by child's 5th birthday

Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study



How common is churning?

- Among adults:
 - Similar across opposite-sex and same-sex relationships
 - Partners can disagree about whether they churned

Relax, I'll see you later in round three of our on-again, off-again ridiculous relationship.



your  cards
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What do we know about churning?

- For individuals
 - One episode predictive of future episodes
 - Including after beginning to cohabit or marrying
 - Predictive of psychological distress, lower relationship satisfaction, lower dedication/commitment, and worse communication
 - But also higher intimate self-disclosure
 - Churners more likely to report conflict and intimate abuse
 - Desistance from abuse more likely among those who stably separate than churners



What do we know about churning?

- For children
 - Churning fathers more involved than stably broken up fathers
 - Churning parents report higher parenting stress than stably together or broken up parents
 - Differences in children's outcomes mostly due to demographic and economic characteristics
 - Child internalizing or externalizing
 - Adolescent romantic relationship behaviors
- Churning is not randomly or equally distributed across the population



Why do people get back together?

- Relationship factors
 - One-sided breakup (vs. mutual)
 - Higher intimate self-disclosure
 - Uncertainty about why they broke up
 - Lingering feelings and attachments post-breakup
 - Feeling the breakup improved the relationship
 - Living together (sex with an ex)
- Structural/situational factors
 - Economic distress
 - Incarceration
 - Parents' relationship history
 - Race/ethnicity

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What does churning say about a relationship?

- Buffeted by countervailing forces
- Liminality in status
- Ambiguity in feelings and commitment
- Difficulty managing conflict productively

lim·i·nal

'limənəl/

adjective:

1. of or relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process.
2. occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold.

Implications for program administration

Breakups may not be stable

Who is recruited into couple versus individual relationship education?

How to collect information –
romantically involved or not?

- On participant characteristics
- To assess program outcomes

Implications for program content

Past relationships and partners may be future relationships and partners

Avoid simplistic presentations of relationships

- Not good or bad relationships, partners, etc. – relationships can be experienced as both

Support deciding, not sliding

- Constraints can make it harder to avoid sliding into reconciliation

Are there ways to help reconciliations be beneficial turning points?

Thank you!

Please be in touch:
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RELATIONSHIP STATUS:



IN A RELATIONSHIP



WELL, ONE OF US
IS MONOGAMOUS



MARRIED. BACK OFF.



IT'S OVER, BUT ONLY
ONE OF US KNOWS IT



JUST BROKE UP



BROKEN UP TOGETHER
AGAIN, BROKEN UP,
TOGETHER AGAIN,...



BACK TOGETHER,
BUT IT'S HANGING BY
A THREAD



IT'S COMPLICATED.
NO, I MEAN REALLY
COMPLICATED.



STAYING TOGETHER
FOR THE KIDS



PURELY PHYSICAL



IN A RELATIONSHIP,
BUT OPEN-SOURCED,
IF YOU GET MY DRIFT



PARENTS OF SMALL
CHILD. NO SEX IN PAST
24 MONTHS.

Research on churning

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