

¹ dySEM: An *R* Package for Dyadic Structural Equation Modeling with Latent Variables

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DOI: [10.xxxxxx/draft](https://doi.org/10.xxxxxx/draft)

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Submitted: 01 January 1970

Published: unpublished

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⁵ Summary

⁶ dySEM is an *R* package ([R Core Team, 2024](#)) that was created to make it easier for users to ⁷ deploy the widely popular lavaan package ([Rosseel, 2012](#)) to fit structural equation models ⁸ (SEMs) using latent variables to data sets with dependent observations ([Little, 2013](#)) collected ⁹ from interdependent dyads (e.g., romantic partners, pairs of friends, parents, a parent and a ¹⁰ child, etc.) ([Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006](#)). Initially, the package was exclusively designed to ¹¹ facilitate the testing of dyadic invariance ([Sakaluk, Fisher, & Kilshaw, 2021](#))—the psychometric ¹² equivalence of survey responses across members of dyads. However, the package has since ¹³ been expanded to include functions that streamline the process of specifying, fitting, and ¹⁴ reporting on a variety of models for dyadic data that are amenable to specification in SEM ¹⁵ with latent variables (e.g., [Kim & Kim, 2022](#); [Sakaluk et al., 2025](#)).

Currently, dySEM facilitates the deployment of several kinds of dyadic SEMs, including:

- “uni-construct” dyadic models: models in which both members of the dyad are measured on the same, singular construct (e.g., both partners complete a measure of relationship satisfaction)([Sakaluk, 2021](#); [Sakaluk et al., 2025](#));
- “bi-construct” dyadic models: models in which each member of the dyad is measured on two different constructs, with one being used to predict the other (e.g., the popular Actor-Partner Interdependence Model [APIM], and the less popular Common Fate Model [CFM])([Kenny, 1996, 2018](#); [Kenny et al., 2006](#); [Kim & Kim, 2022](#); [Ledermann & Kenny, 2012](#))
- “multi-construct” dyadic models: models in which each member of the dyad is measured on multiple constructs, such as when both partners are asked to complete a “multidimensional” survey measure (e.g., a measure of relationship quality with subscales for satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, etc.)

²⁹ Statement of Need

³⁰ Models of dyadic data must simultaneously accomplish two analytic goals:

- ³¹ 1. Mitigating the impact of non-independent observations on inference when using data ³² collected from members of dyads (which otherwise would inflate rates of false-positive ³³ effects)([McCoach & Adelson, 2010](#)); and
- ³⁴ 2. Somehow representing the theoretical notion of interdependence or “togetherness” that ³⁵ is central to dyadic research ([Kenny, 1996](#); [Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003](#))

³⁶ Though infrequently adopted ([Ledermann & Kenny, 2017](#); [Sakaluk et al., 2025](#)), the ³⁷ combination of (a) the SEM framework with (b) the use of latent variables can provide ³⁸ researchers a powerful analytic framework to accomplish both of these goals, while ³⁹ simultaneously mitigating the biasing ([Cole & Preacher, 2014](#)) and Type-I/false-positive ⁴⁰ boosting impact of measurement error ([Westfall & Yarkoni, 2016](#)) that is often present in

⁴¹ survey data , and which is particularly pronounced under analytic conditions common to
⁴² dyadic data analysis (Sakaluk et al., 2025).

⁴³ But whereas SEM software—like lavaan (Rosseel, 2012)—can be used to fit dyadic SEMs with
⁴⁴ latent variables, the process of specifying, fitting, interpreting, and reporting on such models
⁴⁵ can be arduous and error-prone, particularly for researchers who are new to SEM or to dyadic
⁴⁶ data analysis. We see these as considerable barriers to adoption of dyadic SEM, and believe
⁴⁷ that open-source software can help to lower these barriers (Sakaluk et al., 2025).

⁴⁸ dySEM is available both on GitHub (<https://github.com/jsakaluk/dySEM>, <https://jsakaluk.github.io/dySEM>)
⁴⁹ and CRAN (<https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/dySEM/index.html>), and was created to
⁵⁰ simplify the process of using dyadic SEM, making it easier for researchers to leverage the power
⁵¹ of dyadic SEMs with latent variables in their own work. Indeed, dySEM can typically take an
⁵² analytic workflow that would otherwise require dozens—if not hundreds—of lines of syntax to be
⁵³ manually written, and reduce it to but a handful or two of lines of (more readable) syntax. For
⁵⁴ example, the lavaan script required for a user to fit a fully distinguishable latent APIM (i.e.,
⁵⁵ no dyadic equality constraints made on any portion of the measurement or structural portions
⁵⁶ of the model; for a more detailed description, see Kim & Kim (2022))—for hypothetical dyadic
⁵⁷ data from couples on relationship satisfaction and commitment—would look something like:

```
apim.script <- '  
  
#Measurement Model  
  
#Loadings  
Sat1=~NA*sat.g.1_1+sat.g.1_2+sat.g.1_3+sat.g.1_4+sat.g.1_5  
Sat2=~NA*sat.g.2_1+sat.g.2_2+sat.g.2_3+sat.g.2_4+sat.g.2_5  
  
Com1=~NA*com.1_1+com.1_2+com.1_3+com.1_4+com.1_5  
Com2=~NA*com.2_1+com.2_2+com.2_3+com.2_4+com.2_5  
  
#Residual Variances  
sat.g.1_1 ~~ sat.g.1_1  
sat.g.1_2 ~~ sat.g.1_2  
sat.g.1_3 ~~ sat.g.1_3  
sat.g.1_4 ~~ sat.g.1_4  
sat.g.1_5 ~~ sat.g.1_5  
  
sat.g.2_1 ~~ sat.g.2_1  
sat.g.2_2 ~~ sat.g.2_2  
sat.g.2_3 ~~ sat.g.2_3  
sat.g.2_4 ~~ sat.g.2_4  
sat.g.2_5 ~~ sat.g.2_5  
  
com.1_1 ~~ com.1_1  
com.1_2 ~~ com.1_2  
com.1_3 ~~ com.1_3  
com.1_4 ~~ com.1_4  
com.1_5 ~~ com.1_5  
  
com.2_1 ~~ com.2_1  
com.2_2 ~~ com.2_2  
com.2_3 ~~ com.2_3  
com.2_4 ~~ com.2_4  
com.2_5 ~~ com.2_5'
```

```

#Residual Covariances
sat.g.1_1 ~~ sat.g.2_1
sat.g.1_2 ~~ sat.g.2_2
sat.g.1_3 ~~ sat.g.2_3
sat.g.1_4 ~~ sat.g.2_4
sat.g.1_5 ~~ sat.g.2_5

com.1_1 ~~ com.2_1
com.1_2 ~~ com.2_2
com.1_3 ~~ com.2_3
com.1_4 ~~ com.2_4
com.1_5 ~~ com.2_5

#Structural Model

#Latent (Co)Variances
Sat1 ~~ 1*Sat1
Sat2 ~~ 1*Sat2
Sat1 ~~ Sat2

Com1 ~~ 1*Com1
Com2 ~~ 1*Com2
Com1 ~~ Com2

#Latent Actor Effects
Com1 ~ a1*Sat1
Com2 ~ a2*Sat2

#Latent Partner Effects
Com1 ~ p1*Sat2
Com2 ~ p2*Sat1
'
```

⁵⁸ To generate the very same script with dySEM:

```
scriptAPI(dvn, lvxname = "Sat", lvyname = "Com",
          constr_dy_x_meas = "none",
          constr_dy_y_meas = "none",
          constr_dy_x_struct = "none",
          constr_dy_y_struct = "none",
          constr_dy_xy_struct = "none")
```

State of the Field

⁵⁹ There are several other *R*-based tools for dyadic data analysis available for free use, owing to a research culture that promotes the generous provision of methodological and analytic support (e.g., [Campbell & Kashy, 2002](#); [Ledermann & Kenny, 2015](#); [Stas, Kenny, Mayer, & Loeys, 2018](#)). dySEM, however, is distinctive in both its scope, licensing (and underlying values), and analytic robustness. A comparison of dySEM versus competitor offerings for dyadic SEM with latent variables and observed variable path analysis is available below in [??](#). At a high level, dySEM is distinguished by being fully open-source (i.e., all source code is available to interested users, and can be modified and built upon by others following a GNU General Public License) and supported by a large number of (transparent) unit-tests, while offering

convenient functionality for scripting, calculating, and outputting for a large variety of dyadic SEM models (of which, it is further distinguished by offering the greatest amount of support for [and variety of] latent variable models). And when compared to all alternatives, dySEM appears to be the only offering for which unit testing for quality-control is extensive (and growing) and made transparent to the user. We therefore immodestly believe dySEM is—and will continue to be—among the more competitive software solutions for dyadic SEM.

Table 1: Comparison of dyadic SEM software.

Software	Free	OS Code	OS Tests	Active	Scripting	Documentation
<i>dySEM</i> (<i>R</i> Package: GitHub/CRAN)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	13 distinct uni-, bi-, and multi-construct dyadic SEMs	Extensive
“DyadR” Shiny Apps (GUI-Based)	Yes	No	No	Yes	6 models (only 1 latent)	Extensive
<i>srm</i> (<i>R</i> Package: GitHub/CRAN)	Yes	Yes	No	No	1 model (non-latent)	Minimal
<i>lavaan.srm</i> (<i>R</i> Package: GitHub)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	1 model (non-latent)	Moderate
<i>lavaan</i> (<i>R</i> Package: GitHub/CRAN)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Extensive
Proprietary software (MPlus, AMOS, SAS, etc..)	No	No	No	Mixed	None	Minimal

75 Software Design

76 Design Philosophy

77 *dySEM* has been designed for users to follow a generalized 4-step workflow:

- 78 1. *scrape* variable information from a data frame of dyadic data
- 79 2. *script* the dyadic SEM of interest with one of *dySEM*'s “scripter” functions
- 80 3. *fit* the scripted model with *lavaan*
- 81 4. Use *dySEM* “outputter” functions to generate reproducible tabular and graphical summaries of the fitted model

83 By building on *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), *dySEM* leverages a widely used, open-source SEM package (and its companion packages) with a large and active user base, and which is under ongoing development. *dySEM*'s capacities should therefore be able to grow alongside *lavaan*'s.

86 With *dySEM*, we strive to promote an inclusive data analytic ecosystem. The added demand and complexity of implementing certain dyadic models or calculating certain “corrections” (Olsen & Kenny, 2006) may be one (among many) causes of the under-representation of certain types of couples in research (McGorray, Emery, Garr-Schultz, & Finkel, 2023). To that end, all scripting functionality in *dySEM* has been designed to default to an “indistinguishable”

91 model (i.e., one amenable to analyzing gender- and sexuality-diverse couples)—the user must
 92 deliberately over-ride these defaults, putting the burden of proof on them to defend the choice
 93 of a distinguishable model and their distinguishing feature (Kenny et al., 2006)—and offers
 94 helper functionality to navigate additional indices that are requested when fitting such models
 95 (Olsen & Kenny, 2006).

96 Functionality

97 dySEM requires dyadic data to be available in a data frame that is “dyad” or “wide” form
 98 (i.e., one row per dyad) (Kenny et al., 2006), and with variable names that follow a discernible
 99 pattern. dySEM “scrapes” this information about variables into a list, which serves as a key
 100 input of its scripter functions. For more information, see our tutorial on naming conventions,
 101 and documentation for `scrapeVarCross()`.

102 The largest source of value in dySEM’s code-base are its scripters (i.e., functions beginning
 103 with the term “script”), which generate character objects of syntax for dyadic SEMs that can
 104 be immediately passed to lavaan for model fitting, with whatever optionality (e.g., estimator
 105 selection, missing data treatment) the user desires. These scripters generally have optionality
 106 for:

- 107 ▪ what method of scale-setting one uses (i.e., “fixed factor”/standardized latent variance
 or “marker variable”/constraining a factor loading to 1)(Little, 2013)
- 108 ▪ what kinds of dyadic equality constraints one wants to impose on the measurement
 and/or structural portions of the model (e.g, for dyadic invariance testing; to facilitate
 dyadic comparisons of structural parameters)(Sakaluk, Fisher, et al., 2021)
- 109 ▪ whether to include lavaan syntax to compute “boutique” estimates and tests (e.g., the
 k parameter of dyadic patterns for an APIM) (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010), and
- 110 ▪ whether to write and export .txt file of the generated script (e.g, to post on the Open
 Science Framework)

116 Some examples (with varied use of these arguments):

```
#Example 1: A fully invariant APIM with actor effects constrained
# across partners, partner effects freely estimated

apim.script <- scriptAPIM(dvnx, lvxname = "Sat", lvynname = "Com",
constr_dy_x_meas = c("loadings", "intercepts", "residuals"),
constr_dy_y_meas = c("loadings", "intercepts", "residuals"),
constr_dy_xy_struct = c("actors"), est_k = TRUE,
scaleset = "FF")

apim.mod <- lavaan::cfa(apim.script, data = commitmentQ)

#Example 2: A correlated dyadic factors model that is
# "residually invariant" (i.e., constraints on
# the pattern, loadings, intercepts, and residuals across dyad members,
#but none for the parameters in the structural portion of the model)
# and which writes ResidualInvariance.txt to working directory

sat.resid.script <- scriptCor(dvn, lvname = "Sat",
                                constr_dy_meas = c("loadings",
                                "intercepts",
                                "residuals"),
                                constr_dy_struct = "none",
                                writeTo = ".",
                                fileName = "ResidualInvariance")
```

```
sat.resid.mod <- lavaan:::cfa(sat.resid.script, data = commitmentM,
estimator = "mlr", missing = "ml")
```

117 dySEM also provides assistance with easy, reproducible reporting from these models. Outputter
 118 functions (beginning with “output”) can be used to:

- 119 ■ generate tables of parameter estimates from either/both the measurement portion and/or
 120 structural portion of a model
- 121 ■ generate path diagrams via the semPlot package ([Epskamp, 2015](#)) for visualizing model
 122 structure and parameter estimates
- 123 ■ generate tables of model comparisons (e.g., in dyadic invariance testing)
- 124 ■ generate tables of “boutique” estimates and tests (e.g., Langrange multiplier tests for
 125 identifying item/parameter-sources of noninvariance; correlations among latent variables),
 126 and
- 127 ■ compute “boutique” values (e.g., alternative metrics of reliability; effect sizes of dyadic
 128 noninvariance)

129 When tables are created, they can be kept in either data frame form (e.g., to supply
 130 visualizations), or exported as .rtf, while path diagrams are exported as .png.

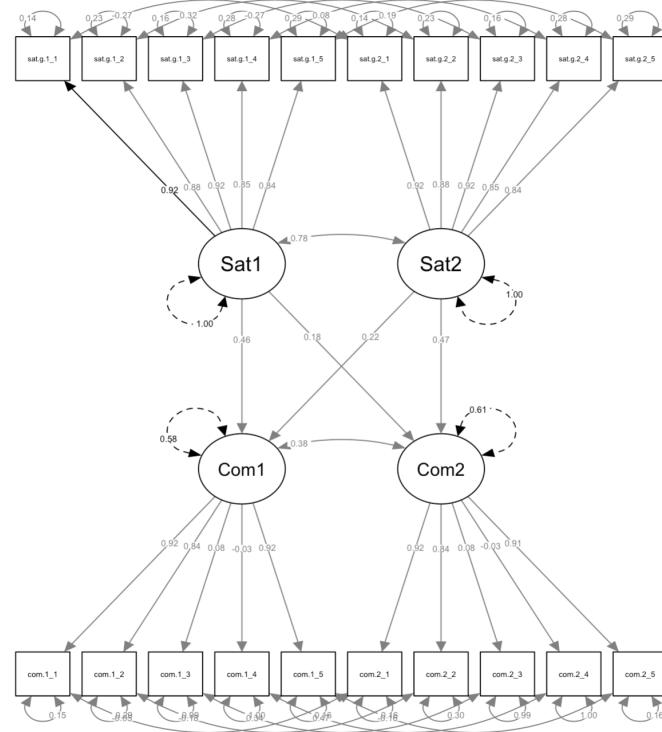
131 For example:

```
#Example 1: Export a table of measurement parameter estimates
# named APIM_Measurement_Table, to working directory.
# Table is generated by gt::gt()
outputParamTab(dvnxy, model = "apim", gtTab = TRUE ,
               apim.mod, tabletype = "measurement",
               writeTo = ".", fileName = "APIM_Measurement_Table")
```

Latent Factor	Indicator	Loading	SE	Z	p-value	Std. Loading	Intercept
Sat1	sat.g.1_1	1.976	0.129	15.290	<.001	0.925	6.609
Sat1	sat.g.1_2	1.858	0.137	13.612	<.001	0.878	6.591
Sat1	sat.g.1_3	1.980	0.130	15.175	<.001	0.917	6.391
Sat1	sat.g.1_4	1.775	0.133	13.387	<.001	0.851	6.673
Sat1	sat.g.1_5	1.891	0.145	13.075	<.001	0.844	6.445
Sat2	sat.g.2_1	1.976	0.129	15.290	<.001	0.925	6.918
Sat2	sat.g.2_2	1.858	0.137	13.612	<.001	0.878	6.927
Sat2	sat.g.2_3	1.980	0.130	15.175	<.001	0.917	6.727
Sat2	sat.g.2_4	1.775	0.133	13.387	<.001	0.851	7.155
Sat2	sat.g.2_5	1.891	0.145	13.075	<.001	0.844	6.864
Com1	com.1_1	1.459	0.092	15.875	<.001	0.921	7.527
Com1	com.1_2	1.348	0.094	14.374	<.001	0.842	7.236
Com1	com.1_3	0.194	0.177	1.096	0.273	0.083	4.809
Com1	com.1_4	-0.076	0.176	-0.430	0.667	-0.032	4.300
Com1	com.1_5	1.440	0.090	15.933	<.001	0.918	7.282
Com2	com.2_1	1.459	0.092	15.875	<.001	0.916	7.327
Com2	com.2_2	1.348	0.094	14.374	<.001	0.835	7.345
Com2	com.2_3	0.194	0.177	1.096	0.273	0.080	5.118
Com2	com.2_4	-0.076	0.176	-0.430	0.667	-0.031	4.136
Com2	com.2_5	1.440	0.090	15.933	<.001	0.914	7.191

132 : outputParamTab().

```
#Example 2: Export a path diagram named
# APIM_Diagram.png to working directory
# named APIM_Measurement_Table, to working directory
outputParamFig(apim.mod, figtype = "standardized",
               writeTo = ".", fileName = "APIM Diagram")
```



133 : outputParamFig().

```
#Example 3: Generate a table of Langrange Multiplier tests
# for a dyadic invariance model. Do not filter for
# significance, and output as a gt::gt() table.
outputConstraintTab(sat.resids.mod, filterSig = FALSE, gtTab = TRUE)
```

param1	constraint	param2	chi2	df	pvalue	sig
Satf =~ sat.g1_f	==	Satm =~ sat.g1_m	1.131	1	0.288	NA
Satf =~ sat.g2_f	==	Satm =~ sat.g2_m	0.633	1	0.426	NA
Satf =~ sat.g3_f	==	Satm =~ sat.g3_m	0.060	1	0.806	NA
Satf =~ sat.g4_f	==	Satm =~ sat.g4_m	1.839	1	0.175	NA
Satf =~ sat.g5_f	==	Satm =~ sat.g5_m	3.603	1	0.058	NA
sat.g1_f ~1	==	sat.g1_m ~1	0.057	1	0.812	NA
sat.g2_f ~1	==	sat.g2_m ~1	1.316	1	0.251	NA
sat.g3_f ~1	==	sat.g3_m ~1	0.048	1	0.827	NA
sat.g4_f ~1	==	sat.g4_m ~1	0.103	1	0.748	NA
sat.g5_f ~1	==	sat.g5_m ~1	2.090	1	0.148	NA
sat.g1_f ~~ sat.g1_f	==	sat.g1_m ~~ sat.g1_m	22.977	1	0.000	***
sat.g2_f ~~ sat.g2_f	==	sat.g2_m ~~ sat.g2_m	0.263	1	0.608	NA
sat.g3_f ~~ sat.g3_f	==	sat.g3_m ~~ sat.g3_m	0.317	1	0.573	NA
sat.g4_f ~~ sat.g4_f	==	sat.g4_m ~~ sat.g4_m	2.422	1	0.120	NA
sat.g5_f ~~ sat.g5_f	==	sat.g5_m ~~ sat.g5_m	17.185	1	0.000	***

134 : outputConstraintTab().

135 Research Impact

136 Since its initial release on GitHub in 2021, dySEM has been accepted to CRAN (where it has
 137 been downloaded more than 4,000 times). dySEM has been used in published research, both by
 138 members of our research team (e.g., [Sakaluk, Quinn-Nilas, et al., 2021](#)) and by other teams in
 139 the field (e.g., [Girme & Overall, 2025](#)). dySEM has also featured in workshops we have delivered
 140 at conferences for which dyadic data analysis is an emphasis, and dyadic SEM as a framework,
 141 more generally, is enjoying a phase of renewed methodological interest (e.g. [Joel, Eastwick, &](#)
 142 [Khera, 2025](#); [Sakaluk et al., 2025](#)).

143 AI Usage Disclosure

144 dySEM's development began in 2019, well before the advent of mainstream AI tools, and the
 145 bulk of the package's current design, functionality, and roadmap have been developed without
 146 AI assistance. Our development team now uses AI tools (e.g., Copilot autocompletion within
 147 RStudio; increasing use of Cursor as an AI-boosted IDE), though primarily to assist with
 148 rote and/or repetitious tasks (e.g., to increase testing coverage of various input or output
 149 requirements; to increase consistency of documentation across related functions, etc.). A
 150 critical mass of new functionality and its more substantive testing remains done "by hand", and
 151 this manuscript was written and submitted with limited AI assistance (i.e., table formatting;
 152 proper implementation of the Open Journals PDF Generator GitHub action).

153 Acknowledgements

154 We wish to thank Drs. William Chopik, Christopher Chartier, Lorne Campbell, and Brent
 155 Donnellan for their facilitating the special issue of Personal Relationships that led to dySEM's
 156 creation ([Chopik, Chartier, Campbell, & Brent Donnellan, 2020](#)). We are also very appreciative
 157 for the late Dr. Deborah Kashy's enthusiasm towards dySEM's creation and functionality.

158 The development of dySEM has been supported by three internal grants from Western University:

- 159 ▪ Western Knowledge Mobilization and Research-Creation Grant (2024-2025)
- 160 ▪ Western Research Mobilization, Creation, & Innovation Grants for SSHRC-related
- 161 Research (2023-2024)
- 162 ▪ Western Knowledge Mobilization Innovation Grants (2021-2022)

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