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Commitment in Close Romantic Relationships: Correlates and Processes Associated with Commitment Phenomena

by

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For Marc,

truly, madly, deeply.

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ABSTRACT

This study measured affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, satisfaction, and personal and constraint commitment in dating, engaged, and married couples, as well as in a group of individuals who had recently broken up from a dating relationship. At the research laboratory, participants completed a brief graphing procedure of how their commitment to their relationship developed and changed over time, a self-report measure of conflict responses and outcomes, satisfaction, trust, and personal and constraint commitment, as well as participating in an Oral History Interview. Consistent with expectations, the three groups of intact couples differed significantly from the group of broken up individuals on all but one of the variables of interest. Comparison of the three groups of intact couples revealed that they were quite similar, however, there were differences in both personal and constraint commitment, with increases associated with more advanced relationship stages. As hypothesized, results of this study indicated that positive affective tone, positive conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, and satisfaction were positively associated with personal commitment, and that trust and cognitive interdependence were positively associated with constraint commitment. An interesting sex difference emerged from the findings, in that while trust was significantly predictive of both types of commitment for females, it was not predictive of either type of commitment for males. Additionally, post hoc analyses revealed that personal commitment mediated the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Having a satisfying marriage is more than just remaining married to someone; it is more than just living by commitments to stay together until 'death do us part.' It demands a harmonious sharing of lives that each partner finds fulfilling" (Veroff, Douvan, Orbuch, & Acitelli, 1998, p. 152). Intimate relationships play a critical role in human psychological development and functioning across the life span, and communication is the primary mechanism through which relationships are both created and sustained. The closeness of the marital relationship is characterized by high interdependence of partners' behaviors, emotions, and thoughts (Berscheid, 1994; Robbins, 1990). Given the primacy of marriage to most people's lives, it is important to understand the processes that underlie relationship phenomena that are believed to be causally linked to the stability of the relationship.

The relationship between marital communication and marital stability has been the focus of researchers for quite some time. The assumption is that understanding the communicative processes that underlie the marital relationship will provide insight into the relationship between marital interaction and marital stability[1]. The relationship is assumed to be reciprocal, with marital interaction affecting marital stability, and marital

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[1] The term stability is used here to refer to the course, or continuous evolution, of a relationship over time as opposed to indicating whether or not a relationship is intact. The distinction is an important one as the former makes it possible to explain changes and/or fluctuations in the course of a relationship over time, while the latter does not. While both definitions emphasize predicting the future state of a relationship, failing to examine change directly prohibits explanation of how relationships achieve different states over time (Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999). As such, examination of relationship trajectories, or how relationships change and develop over time, is essential to understanding commitment processes and outcomes.

stability affecting marital interaction (Noller, 1984; Noller & Feeney, 1998). Based on the extant research, there are two variables that are particularly important components of marital interaction associated with marital stability: affective tone and responses to conflict. That is to say, the regulation of emotional expression and the ability to handle conflict and to solve problems effectively is fundamental to the development of an intimate and stable relationship, and can be conceived of as important developmental tasks over the course of a relationship. An examination of these variables in the context of marital interaction offers the potential for understanding how marital processes are related to marital outcomes.

The marital relationship is a continual learning process. If experience in marriage is cumulative, and if over time, relationship-specific behaviors and motives exert powerful effects on couple functioning, it seems reasonable to expect that the reciprocity of negative affect and ineffectual responses to conflict have the potential to undermine the marital relationship. The degree of negativity that spouses bring to their marital interactions is likely to affect the sorts of behaviors they display, as well as the conclusions they later draw from their interactions about their partner and their marriage. Over a macro period of time, a high degree of negativity and an inability to resolve conflict effectively is likely to erode commitment to preserving the relationship. While the marital interaction literature is replete with investigations examining the expression of emotion and conflict in marriage (e.g., Gaelick, Bodenhausen, & Wyer, 1985; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Levenson & Gottman, 1983;

Levenson & Gottman, 1985), there remains a great deal to be learned about the processes that bind a marriage together or tear it apart – commitment processes.

The purpose of the first part of this paper is to formulate a model of commitment that emphasizes the role of communication behaviors in commitment processes. Within the model, commitment is viewed as a dynamic process that has the capacity to be modified through social interaction. That is, rather than being a static entity, commitment is best conceived of as a process that is manifested and maintained through day-to-day behaviors throughout the course of an extended relationship.[2] On a cognitive level, commitment can be thought of as representing a long-term orientation toward a relationship, with the intention that it will persist, and as characterized by an attachment between partners (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). In terms of examining marital processes, the action is in the doing, and as such, it is difficult to conceive of a model of commitment processes without acknowledging the significance of the behavioral domain. This model is predicated on the assumption that it is how a couple learns to adapt, to regulate, manage, and sustain their relationship generally that will have the most impact on commitment processes and subsequently, on relationship outcomes.

The model being proposed here represents the integration of several conceptual models of commitment with an empirically based theory of marital processes associated with marital dissolution, all within the framework of social learning theory. In an effort to fully explicate the model, a brief overview of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory

[2] This is not to suggest that commitment is so tenuous as to be made or broken on the basis of a single behavioral act. Within the model being proposed here, the suggestion is that commitment develops over a macro, rather than a micro period of time, and similarly, that changes in commitment reflect global as opposed to episodic assessments of relationship events.

will be provided for the purpose of demonstrating its suitability to the study of commitment processes in marriage. Next, in order to demonstrate the importance of affective tone and responses to conflict to commitment processes, Gottman's (1994) theory of marital processes associated with dissolution will be described. Finally, a brief description of three major commitment models will be provided, and an argument will be made that an amalgamation of aspects of each of the models has the potential to enhance our overall understanding of commitment processes.

Social learning theory

A social learning model (and various extensions of it) has served as the foundation for much of the psychological research on marriage and marital interventions over the past two decades, as it provides an effective perspective from which to examine marital processes and how marriages change (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998). It allows for the investigation of the mechanisms by which relationship-specific motives act to shape marital processes and outcomes, and draws attention to the consequences of behaviors that spouses display when needs and interests conflict, making it well-suited to the study of commitment to marriage.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) encompasses an eclectic collection of principles borrowed from several different learning theories, and theoretically unites social psychology, cognitive psychology, and behaviorism (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993). As a theoretical framework, it emphasizes how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are modified through social interaction, and as such, offers insight into how interaction experiences can impact relational outcomes. The theory's basic proposition is that people

internalize patterns of behavior that have been positively reinforced and avoid behaviors that have been costly or punishing (Bandura, 1977). The theory assumes that an individual's behavior is representative of a choice between alternative courses of action, which result from the individual's estimates of the likelihood that a given action will result in rewarding rather than in costly outcomes. As such, it is the individual's cognitive interpretation of the meaning of the stimulus that influences subsequent behavior, which draws attention to the fact that individuals' have the capacity to understand situations symbolically, and to process experiences into models that become guides for future action. This capability allows for the anticipation of consequences, the setting of goals and plans, and the judgement of one's efficacy in dealing with various situations (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993).

From the perspective of social learning theory, the feelings that remain after repeated experiences of unsatisfactory marital interaction have a punishing effect, and as a result, the amount of time spent in interaction is likely to decrease. Withdrawal, for example, may develop over time as a result of negative communication rather than being a cause of the problem. In this sense, withdrawal can be seen as an example of negative reinforcement, in that its performance acts to eliminate an aversive stimulus. According to the theory, this choice would be the result of the individual's estimate of the likelihood that engaging in interaction would result in costly rather than in rewarding outcomes. As far as the model being proposed here, a high degree of negativity and an inability to resolve conflict effectively is likely to lead to a continuing negative interpretation of the

marriage that develops a life of its own, as well as to erode commitment to preserving the relationship.

Marital processes associated with dissolution

Gottman's (1994) empirically based theory of marital processes associated with dissolution comes out of the social learning tradition. Although the theory does not specifically address issues of commitment, it fits with the model being proposed here in that it offers a dynamic view of marital processes, provides insight into how commitment gets communicated, and allows for speculation as to how these processes are related to marital outcomes. Within the model, there are two cascades, the process and the outcome cascades. The process cascade (the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse") is composed of four behaviors that are thought to be especially corrosive to the marital relationship. It suggests that complaining and criticizing lead to contempt, which leads to defensiveness, which leads to withdrawal (stonewalling). The outcome cascade is based on the notion that feelings of dissatisfaction lead to consideration of separation and divorce, which leads to separation, which leads to divorce. Gottman (1994) uses the term "cascade" to suggest that when individuals get to the point of divorce (or any other part of the cascades) they will have gone through all of the earlier stages in getting there.

The process cascade propels couples toward the outcome cascade through the promotion of distance and isolation. Flooding – feeling surprised, overwhelmed, and disorganized by one's partner's expressions of negative emotions – is the hypothesized mechanism for propelling a couple through the process cascade, and ultimately through the outcome cascade. Flooding leads to relationship decay, resulting in withdrawal,

perceptions that relationship problems are severe, and loneliness within the marriage. Gottman (1994) has found that dissatisfied couples reciprocate a lot of negative affect, and are prone to falling into absorbing states – states that are difficult to exit once entered. In the context of negative interactions, these absorbing states act to short-circuit any repair mechanisms or constructive behaviors.

Based on interactive behavior during conflict resolution, Gottman classified couples into two groups: regulated and nonregulated. Regulated couples are satisfied and stable, whereas nonregulated couples are dissatisfied and unstable. What is regulated is the ratio of positive to negative behaviors, and the ratio has consistently been found to be about 5:1 for regulated couples and less than 1:1 for nonregulated couples. This suggests a balance theory of marriage, proposing an ecology of marital behaviors in which a ratio of positivity to negativity that is highly tilted toward positivity needs to be learned and maintained in order for a marriage to continue over time and for both partners to find it satisfying. Regulated marriages represent an equilibrium, an adaptation to balancing positivity to negativity, and it is disequilibrium that places a marriage at risk for entering the cascade toward dissolution. This has been referred to as the bank account model, in that over a macro, rather than a micro period of time, the amount of positive acts generally exceeds the amount of negative acts. The bank account analogy serves as an index of commitment, in that within the model nonregulated couples are operating at a deficit, and as such, commitment to preserving the relationship is likely being eroded.

Attributions and behavior in marital interaction

One of the proposed explanations as to how couples move through the process cascade toward the outcome cascade, and from being regulated and stable to being unregulated and unstable, comes from the research on the relationship between attributions and behavior in marital interaction (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Karney & Bradbury, 2000). In addition to a focus on the behavioral domain, attribution research incorporates a variety of affective and cognitive constructs, permitting a broader examination of the relationship between intrapersonal phenomenon and the interpersonal behaviors that spouses exhibit during interaction. In terms of intrapersonal factors, this research suggests that satisfied and distressed spouses display differences in the attributions they make for behaviors and events in their relationships (Adams & Spain, 1999), and more, that spouses' behaviors in interaction are related to the attributions they make for marital problems (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). Whereas satisfied spouses tend to view their partners' positive behaviors as the result of stable, internal causes and negative behaviors as the result of temporary, external causes, distressed spouses tend to view their partner as the cause of negative behaviors and to attribute positive behaviors to temporary, external causes (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). In other words, satisfied spouses offer attributions that accentuate the impact of positive events (e.g., sentiment override; Weiss, 1980) and diminish the impact of negative events. Conversely, distressed spouses offer attributions that accentuate the impact of negative events (e.g., hypervigilence) and diminish the impact of positive events. Sentiment override can occur in response to positive or negative events (Weiss, 1980). Moreover, this kind of maladaptive attribution

making is associated with negative behaviors and reactions in interaction, which has the potential to develop into a self-perpetuating vicious cycle, leading to declines in satisfaction, and potentially distress (Bradbury & Fincham, 1991). The argument is that attributions play an important role in the course of a relationship, as they are likely to reflect spouses' global evaluations of the relationship and to exert influence on how spouses interpret and evaluate specific marital events. The kinds of attributions that spouses make should change in accordance with changes in their global evaluations of the relationship, which change as a function of ongoing relationship experiences. While changes in attributions and satisfaction are highly associated within spouses over time, it remains unclear whether attributions drive satisfaction or whether satisfaction drives attributions. In all likelihood, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two variables (Karney & Bradbury, 2000).

Attributions and commitment

In terms of how attributions fit within the model of commitment being proposed here, to the extent that couples repeatedly re-energize each other's negative and defensive behaviors, an important change is likely also occurring in the attributions they make in interpreting and evaluating relationship events (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Moreover, it is likely to affect partners' perceived self-efficacy to attain positive goals such as closeness and intimacy (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Over time, goals related to relationship maintenance or showing concern for the partner are likely to seem less and less attainable. Nondistressed couples tend to be more responsive to one another's attempts at repair, and are thereby able to exit from negative exchanges early on.

Additionally, responsiveness tends to be reciprocated, and as a result, helps to build positive feelings (Huston & Houts, 1998). Pro-relationship motivation is powerfully linked with inhibiting destructive impulses and with promoting constructive behaviors in marital interaction. On the other hand, over the course of an extended relationship, the well of trust and consideration will be seriously depleted by reciprocal cycles involving repeated instances of destructive behaviors, and as a result, motivation to accommodate will likely be compromised in the process. Commitment has been found to be a central motive in relationships, reliably influencing partners' willingness to adapt and to accommodate for the good of the relationship (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998). Commitment acts as a key macromotive that promotes pro-relationship behavior across a wide range of situations, and has been found to be associated with more constructive, accommodative responses to negative partner behavior (Tallman, Burke, & Gecas, 1998).

Conceptualizations of commitment

Until this point the focus has been on demonstrating how commitment gets communicated through marital interaction, and how these processes are related to marital outcomes. At this point it is necessary to focus specifically on conceptualizations of commitment, and to demonstrate how they can be used to enhance the understanding of commitment processes. To that end, aspects of the commitment models of Surra, Johnson, and Rusbult will be described, and a discussion of how they fit with the model being explicated here will be provided. Each of these models offers a different approach to the study of commitment. Surra's model focuses on the development of commitment

to marriage, as well as on subjective reasons for becoming committed (Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Johnson's model is primarily concerned with issues of conceptualization and measurement of commitment, and distinguishes between three distinct experiences of commitment (Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). Rusbult's model focuses on cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of commitment processes, and examines how the intrapersonal experience of commitment gets communicated and reciprocated interpersonally (Rusbult, Wieselquist, Foster, & Witcher, 1999; Wieselquist et al., 1999).

Surra's model suggests that there are two important causes of commitment: social-psychological and phenomenological. Her research led her to the compelling hypothesis that those whose commitment could be accounted for by social-psychological causes would likely have relationships that were overall more satisfying and more stable than those whose commitments were based on more subjective reasons (Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988; Surra, Batchelder, & Hughes, 1995). That is, she found that there was an overall difference in the way that the two groups accounted for their commitments. Based on her research, she derived two distinct types of commitment: relationship-driven and event-driven. The biggest difference between the two types of commitment processes is reflected in assessments of relational events, with the former relying primarily on global assessments of events, and the latter relying primarily on episodic assessments of events. The two types of commitment correspond somewhat with Gottman's (1994) regulated and nonregulated marriages described above, with event-driven commitments resembling nonregulated couples. In both cases, the two types of

couples can be discriminated on the basis of an overarching negative quality to the relationship, a higher occurrence of unresolved conflict episodes, and a greater reliance on episodic assessments of events (Gottman, 1994; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Additionally, both types of couples experience a great deal of turbulence and turmoil in their relationships, punctuated by extreme ups and downs driven by conflict episodes. The subjective experience of conflict episodes in these types of couples would appear to be unpleasant, leading to negative relationship attributions. It is important to point out, however, that the two typologies were derived in very different ways and for different purposes.

Johnson's model is based on the notion that commitment is not a unitary phenomenon, but rather is comprised of three distinct experiences of commitment: personal (wanting to stay married), moral (feeling morally obligated to stay married), and structural (constraints or barriers to leaving a marriage) (Johnson, 1999). The three types of commitment are further broken down into component parts. There is considerable empirical support for Johnson's framework, increasing the validity of the tripartite model of commitment. A number of scholars who have focused on developing reliable and valid measures of commitment have independently come to the conclusion that commitment is not a unitary phenomenon. Specifically, three separate factor analyses (none purporting to be based on Johnson's commitment framework) spanning almost 15 years all yielded three factor structures representing personal, moral, and structural commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Attilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Ultimately, Johnson argues that attempts to tap a general concept of commitment

are destined to be reflections solely of personal commitment, and perhaps, merely reflections of satisfaction, one of its components, and that any meaningful concept of global commitment ought to be a function of all three types (Johnson, 1999).

It is apparent that understanding commitment processes requires attention to the distinctions among the various types and components of the phenomenon. Johnson's research suggests that they have different causes and different effects, and that changes in one type induce processes that produce changes in the other types (Johnson, 1999). For example, as long as personal or moral commitment are high, structural commitment, though important, is likely to be largely unrecognized or irrelevant to decisions about the maintenance of the relationship. If, on the other hand, personal or moral commitments are low, the components of structural commitment will become salient and likely exert influence on considerations about the maintenance of the relationship. As such, the model offers an interesting explanation as to why some people stay in relationships that are not satisfying. More importantly, the model offers a dynamic view of commitment processes, in that while all three types of commitment are likely present in most (if not all) relationships, the extent to which any one gets emphasized is likely to change over the course of an extended relationship.

Though not addressed in the model, it is possible that the development of commitment is based on different types of commitment for different types of couples, and as such, that the different types of commitment are more or less important to the stability of the marriage. In addition to classifying marriages on the basis of being regulated or nonregulated, Gottman (1994) derived types within each category. He identified three

types of regulated couples, all of whom had achieved satisfaction and stability, but had done so in very different ways. Based on the descriptions that he provides of the different couple types, it is possible to infer that they emphasize different aspects of relational life, and as such, that they are motivated to maintain their relationships for different reasons. Moreover, Gottman's (1994) marital typology converges substantially with Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital typology, in that his regulated types are remarkably similar to her pure types. In their descriptions of the various couple types, both researchers provide information as to what it is that keeps the couple together, and the three different types correspond somewhat with the three different types of commitment. For example, validators/Traditionals can be viewed as emphasizing moral commitment through their conventional ideological values about relationships, whereas volatiles/Independents can be viewed as emphasizing personal commitment through their strong emotional attachment for one another, manifested in psychological closeness to the relational partner (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1994). This is not to suggest that all three types of commitment are not present in all types of marriages, but rather to suggest that if the reasons that couples become committed are different, it seems reasonable to expect that the reasons they stay together are also different.

Rusbult offers a model of commitment that is based on principles of interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and examines pro-relationship behavior and transformation of motivation on commitment processes (Rusbult et al., 1999). According to interdependence theory, commitment emerges as a result of circumstances of interdependence situations that come to

characterize the relationship. Specifically, interdependence dilemmas – situations where an individual's needs or best interests are pitted against the best interest of the relationship – often provide relational partners with important commitment information. Accordingly, if a partner acts in the best interest of the relationship, foregoing self-interest, it is suggestive of a strong commitment to the relationship, and provides the other partner with commitment information. The argument is that to the extent that individuals observe their partners putting the relationship first, they are also more likely to do so. Reciprocity is at the heart of this model.

Transformation of motivation is thought to result in the development of cognitive interdependence, which involves a shift over time from a largely individual-based internal representation of the self to a relatively more collective representation of self-and-partner (Rusbult et al., 1999). It represents a cognitive shift that results from increasing incorporation of the partner into the self. It is indicative of a strong commitment between partners, and though it involves some loss of unique, individual identity, it yields benefits to the relationship and is associated with superior couple functioning. With regard to types of commitment, cognitive interdependence is likely to enhance one's personal commitment to a relationship. That is, the components of personal commitment: attraction to one's partner (love), attraction to the relationship (satisfaction), and couple identity (Johnson et al, 1999), are more likely to be a function of cognitive interdependence than are the components of moral or structural commitments. Ultimately, this model suggests that strong commitments promote a variety of pro-relationship behaviors and relationship maintenance acts, and that these are

the specific means by which partners manage to sustain long-term, well-functioning relationships.

Each of the three commitment models described above offers a unique perspective on commitment, and each one provides information that has the potential to broaden our understanding of commitment processes in close romantic relationships. Surra's model suggests that while most of the theories of commitment deal with social-psychological causes, by ignoring phenomenological causes, we miss the opportunity to gain important information about the subjective reasons insiders' give for their commitment to relationships. Based on her research findings, neglecting the subjective experience of commitment impairs the ability to develop a model of commitment that reveals factors that insiders' see as influential that outsiders do not, permitting investigation into the role of trait or trait-like qualities that might impact the development of commitment. Johnson's model argues that a complete understanding of the processes of commitment requires attention to the distinctions among the various types and components of the phenomenon. According to the model, each of the types of commitment has different processes and different effects, and cannot simply be aggregated in some sort of additive model. The model specifies that while personal and moral commitment are experienced as internal to the individual, as a function of the person's own attitudes and values, structural commitment is experienced as external to the individual, and is a function of perceptions of constraints to leaving a relationship. These differences are likely to exert influence on how commitment gets communicated in a relationship, and as such are essential to a complete understanding of commitment

processes. Rusbult's model is the most process-oriented of the three, and focuses on how the intrapersonal experience of commitment gets communicated and reciprocated interpersonally, and more importantly, how feelings of strong commitment are manifested in pro-relationship behaviors and relationship maintenance acts. Rusbult and her colleagues have found that feelings of strong commitment yield a variety of cognitive, motivational, and behavioral responses that act to preserve the relationship (e.g., accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, positive illusion, cognitive interdependence, communal orientation, trust, derogation of alternatives, willingness to invest in the relationship).

Overview of model

The purpose of this portion of the paper has been to formulate a model of commitment that captures the complexity of the processes involved in how commitment gets communicated within a relationship. Commitment is best conceived of as a dynamic process that is manifested in day-to-day behaviors that are geared toward preserving the relationship. According to this view, commitment has the capacity to be modified through social interaction. It requires that couples develop a stable adaptation of positive to negative behaviors that is highly slanted toward positivity, that is learned and maintained in order for a relationship to continue over time and for both partners to find it satisfying. Commitment to a relationship is reinforced to the extent that partners' observe one another exhibiting pro-relationship behaviors and engaging in relationship maintenance acts. Repeated instances of negative relationship experiences and conflict

episodes that are not counterbalanced by a higher ratio of positivity are likely to result in an overarching negative quality to the relationship, and as such, to erode commitment to preserving it. The subjective experience of commitment is important as it exerts influence on how partners respond to one another during interdependence dilemmas, as well as to influence the kinds of attributions partners make regarding one another's behaviors. The tripartite nature of commitment suggests that commitment-inspired acts may be motivated by distinct phenomena, but that all are geared toward preserving the relationship. That is, the different types of commitment, though inspired by different processes, are all likely to result in a desire to maintain the relationship, and as such, to motivate pro-relationship behaviors and relationship maintenance acts. Ultimately, it is how a couple learns to adapt, to regulate, manage, and sustain their relationship generally that will have the most impact on commitment processes and subsequently, on relationship outcomes.

Testing a portion of the model

Having fully explicated the model under consideration, the next part of the paper will be devoted to describing the study that was conducted to test a portion of the model. While it has been argued previously that commitment is comprised of three distinct experiences: personal, moral, and structural (Johnson, 1999), this study focused primarily on variables associated with personal commitment, but included assessments of all three types of commitment. With regard to the model explicated above, the goals of this study were such that it lent itself to a focus on personal commitment. Specifically, this study

represented a staggered cohort study, examining commitment processes across relationships at various stages of development and involvement, including dating, engaged, and married couples, as well as a group of individuals who had recently broken up from a dating relationship. Accordingly, it seemed reasonable to expect that the commitment of dating couples, for example, would not be as affected by factors associated with moral and structural commitments as it would be for married couples.

While most research on relational commitment has focused on married couples, investigating commitment at other stages of relational involvement is not without precedent (e.g., Agnew et al., 1998; Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996; Kurdek, 1995; Miller, 1997; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkis, 1991; Rusbult, Matz, & Agnew 1998; Surra, 1987; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Regardless, popular usage equates being married with being committed, and as such, most commitment studies sample from married populations. Unfortunately, this approach imposes a limitation on the study of commitment, in that a failure to examine how commitment emerges (or fails to emerge) in the context of a newly formed relationship and continues to emerge as relational partners' increase their involvement, inhibits researchers' ability to view commitment from a developmental perspective. Commitment is not something that just happens. Rather, it is more appropriately described as a subtle and gradual process, often accompanied by occasional upward or downward turning points (Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981). With regard to this study, the assumption was that as couples' progressed in their relationship from dating to engagement to marriage, they were also likely to commit more strongly to one another. As far as the rationale for including

individuals from relationships that had recently ended, the purpose was to examine the influence of interpersonal processes that resulted in declines in commitment and eventually in relationship termination. Finally, by including groups with different relationship status in the research design, the goal was to represent the full range of possible scores on the variables of interest.

Though all three types of commitment are likely to exert influence on the stability of a relationship, it is the psychological experience of commitment, as opposed to the structural state of dependence, that is likely to exert the most influence on everyday behaviors in relationships (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). As with the other two types of commitment, personal commitment is determined by a combination of factors, rather than by any one factor operating in isolation. As such, the following variables were examined: affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, cognitive interdependence, trust, and satisfaction. What follows is a discussion of each of the variables as it relates to the investigation.

Affective tone

The results of numerous studies on marital interaction show that the expression of negative emotional behavior is one of the best discriminators between satisfied and dissatisfied marriages (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Gottman, 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Manusov, 1995; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996; Teichner & Farnden-Lyster, 1994; Teichner & Farnden-Lyster, 1997). That is, sequences of emotions

expressed during marital interaction differentiate happy from unhappy couples. When the expression of negative affect by one partner is reciprocated by negative affect from the other partner, the pattern constitutes negative affect reciprocity, and is likely to lead to dissatisfaction (Manusov, 1995; Carstenen et al., 1995). More importantly, the temporal sequential stability, or maintenance of negative affective states across time is characteristic of distressed marriages. Ultimately, distressed couples have been found to exhibit greater patterning of interaction that is highly rigid and lacking in variability (Gottman, 1979).

Clements, Cordova, Markman, and Laurenceau (1997) identified three primary interactional and relational markers of marital distress: escalation, withdrawal, and invalidation. Escalation occurs when couples repeatedly allow negative interactions to "snowball." That is, negative messages are met with negative responses, and the process perpetuates itself, often to the point of becoming out of control. The result of the interaction often terminates in verbal or physical abusiveness between partners. Verbal aggressiveness, or the receipt of verbal attacks, is associated with distress and has consistently been found to be psychologically and physiologically harmful (Kinney, 1994). Withdrawal occurs when, rather than engaging conflict openly, relational partners choose to deal with the conflict by avoiding or withdrawing from the confrontation. Invalidation occurs when there is a tendency for one or both of the relational partners to engage in verbal aggressiveness. That is, when angry, one or both members of the couple criticize or attack the other personally. These three negative interactional markers have the potential to accumulate over time, and the result is an eroding effect on the

relationship. As the authors' point out, this process of erosion, or negative spiral, can result in increasing feelings of sadness and loneliness, and eventually, complete deterioration of the relationship.

While research indicates that a high ratio of positivity to negativity in marital interaction is an important determinant of relational satisfaction (Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998), positive affect and positive affect reciprocity have not proven useful in discriminating satisfied from unsatisfied marriages (Gottman, 1994). As a result, most research has focused on negative affect variables such as complaints, criticisms, defensiveness, hostility, anger, disgust, contempt, sadness, and domineeringness. In a study designed to predict marital instability from marital interaction, Mathews et al., (1996) found that in every instance, greater instability was associated with greater amounts of hostility and lesser amounts of warmth. Marriages observed to exhibit high levels of hostile, angry, critical, stubborn, inconsiderate, defiant, or rejecting behavior that was not counterbalanced by considerate, cooperative, or affectionate behavior was characteristic of unstable marriages, and was more likely to actually result in separation or divorce. Their results extend previous empirical findings that hostile marital interaction influences the level of marital distress, and that the quality of marital interaction is related to the level of marital stability (Gottman, 1994). The argument is that the perception of high levels of hostility in marital interaction by spouses may lead to a continuing negative interpretation of the marriage that develops a life of its own.

Consistent with the literature presented thus far, Carstensen et al. (1995) found negative affect and negative continuance sequences to be present in greater amounts in distressed marriages than in nondistressed marriages. Their study examined emotional behavior in long-term marriage, and found that the relationship between negative affect and marital unhappiness is maintained even in long-term marriages in middle age and old age. An enduring affective state, such as marital distress, is likely not only to influence how spouses process their partner's behaviors, but to influence their own behavioral responses as well. The attribution literature suggests that the negative affect associated with marital distress makes maladaptive attributions chronically active and accessible, and that in the face of a negative marital event, distressed spouses are predisposed to make maladaptive interpretations which then encourage maladaptive behavioral responses (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). The results of the Carstensen et al (1995) study indicated that even in marriages that had lasted more than 35 years, the association between the expression of negative affect and marital unhappiness remained strong. They found that unhappy marriages were marked by a wide range of negative emotions including anger, contempt, sadness, and domineeringness, contrary to the positive emotions (e.g., humor, affection, and validation) apparent in happy marriages even in potentially hostile contexts such as discussions of marital conflict. The findings of this study further indicated that listener positivity and neutrality are highly functional in regulating conflictive interactions and in preventing the escalation of negative affect. Ultimately, the authors' found that happy couples were less likely than unhappy couples

to display sequences of negative affective continuance, a sequence that undoubtedly has negative consequences for the marital relationship.

The Oral History Interview (OHI; Krokoff, 1984) provides an appealing way to examine the affective tone of a relationship (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992; Gottman, 1994). The OHI allows investigators to examine how thoughts and feelings about specific relationship events get expressed in the context of the relationship. In effect, it provides access to partner's subjective assessments and/or perceptions of the climate of the relationship, as well as their subjective reasons for becoming and remaining committed (Flora & Segrin, in press). It represents a semi-structured interview consisting of a series of open-ended questions about the history of a couple's relationship (e.g., how they met, how they decided to be in this committed relationship, what moments stand out as the really good times/as the really hard times, how their relationship has changed, and what they think makes a relationship work).

Couples responses to the OHI are coded along the following dimensions (Buehlman & Gottman, 1996). *Fondness/affection* indicates the level of love or fondness that relational partners seem to have for one another. It is manifested through things like compliments, positive affect, and reminiscing about past romantic experiences. *Negativity toward the spouse* refers to the extent to which each partner exhibits negative affect, criticism, and disagreement toward the spouse during the interview. *Expansiveness/withdrawal* encompasses how expressive and expansive as opposed to withdrawn and withholding a partner is during the interview. *We-ness/separateness* refers to how much a partner sees himself or herself as a part of a couple as opposed to as

an independent individual. We-ness is suggestive of cognitive interdependence. *Chaos* assesses whether or not a couple feels that they have control over their lives, as opposed to feeling that they are burdened with unexpected problems and hardships. *Glorifying the struggle* measures the extent to which couples report that though they have had hard times in their relationship, they made it through and it brought them even closer together. *Disappointment/disillusionment* reflects whether or not couples have given up on their relationship, whether or not they feel defeated by their relationship, and whether or not they feel as though they know what makes a relationship work.

Conflict responses and outcomes

According to the first published study of marital happiness (Terman, Buttenweiser, Ferguson, Johnson, and Wilson, 1938), the greatest single danger to marital satisfaction is for one spouse to like and the other spouse to dislike arguing. A review of the research on marital interaction suggests that of all of the relationship variables that can be selected for understanding marital satisfaction, it is a couple's ability to arrive at consensus in resolving differences that has consistently been found to be of central importance (Gottman, 1979). While no single theory of interpersonal conflict exists, according to Feldman and Ridley (2000), interpersonal conflict perspectives have at least three things in common. First, conflict is viewed as essentially normative. That is, it is considered to be inevitable in all close relationships, resulting from such things as incompatibilities and interdependence dilemmas (Kelley, 1983a). Second, conflict is considered, in and of itself, neither good nor bad. Instead, the focus is on the constructive or destructive relational consequences associated with conflict episodes. Finally, conflict

represents a process with four components: conflicts of interest, conflict orientations, conflict responses, and conflict outcomes. Conflicts of interest refer to disagreements between interdependent parties who perceive that they have incompatible needs, goals, and/or desires. Conflict orientations refer to one's style of dealing with conflict. That is, one's predisposition to approach or avoid conflict, one's attitudes and evaluations regarding conflict, one's tolerance and acceptance of the inevitability of conflict, and so on. Conflict responses refer to overt behavioral reactions to conflict, such as avoidance and withdrawal versus confrontation and negotiation. Conflict outcomes refer to whether or not the conflict is resolved, how it is resolved, and whether or not it results in constructive or destructive consequences for the relationship. This study focused exclusively on conflict responses and outcomes.

There is considerable evidence that responses to conflict are related to marital satisfaction in important ways (Karney & Bradbury, 1995a; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990), and as such, a functional approach to understanding conflict in marital interaction has often been employed. Functional patterns tend to be viewed more positively than destructive patterns, are more likely to promote intimacy, are more likely to result in problem resolution, and as such, are likely to be stress reducing (Noller, Feeney, Bonnell, & Callan, 1994). On the other hand, behaviors that are functional for "keeping the peace" for the moment, may leave critical areas of conflict unresolved, which in turn may act to undermine the relationship across time (Gottman, 1994). Ultimately, experience with conflict can provide relational partners with important commitment information. That is, conflict can serve as a "stress test" that reveals commitment by enabling

individuals to ascertain their own level of commitment to a given relationship (Kelley, 1983b). In fact, in the context of highly committed relationships, conflict experiences have even been found to bolster and promote commitment by influencing subjective appraisals that serve to reinforce one's commitment (Lydon, 1999). That said, there is still disagreement as to the relative merits of confronting versus avoiding conflict (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

Several studies have investigated whether the destructive ways of dealing with conflict which lead to marital dissatisfaction are present prior to marriage, or whether conflict patterns are learned over the course of the marriage (Gottman, 1994; Carstensen et al., 1995; Gottman et al., 1998; Noller et al., 1994; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995b). In a longitudinal study of conflict in early marriage, Noller et al. (1994) found that destructive patterns which cause problems later in marriage are present before marriage. Further, they found that couples lower in relationship satisfaction reported more negativity in the relationship, and were more likely to use threats and to be verbally and physically aggressive in dealing with conflict. In addition, spouses low in satisfaction reported fewer positive behaviors and more avoidance behaviors than did satisfied spouses. Specifically, those lower in satisfaction perceived themselves as less involved in dealing with issues and more involved in avoidance, withdrawal, and withholding as compared with those higher in satisfaction. Based on these findings, the authors argue that avoidance is a negative strategy that does not promote high levels of satisfaction in marriage, and that those who confront their conflicts are happier in both the short and the long term.

There is evidence that those in distressed marriages report more mutual avoidance and less use of conflict engaging behaviors such as mutual expression and negotiation than those in more satisfied relationships. Satisfaction has been found to be positively related to quality of conversational patterns and negatively related to amount of conflict. Noller & Feeney (1998), found that with regard to responses to conflict, satisfaction tended to be associated with high levels of positivity and low levels of disengagement. Their study examined the development of couples' communication problems from the premarital stage through the first two years of marriage. Their results indicated the relative stability of communication patterns established premaritally, the negative effects of conflict on the marital relationship, in both the short and the long term, and finally, the reciprocal relationship between communication and relationship satisfaction.

Patterns of communication are indicative of the relative happiness of the marital relationship, and in terms of responses to conflict, the pattern of demand-withdrawal in marital interaction has been found to be characteristic of distressed marriages. Demand-withdraw communication occurs when one partner attempts to engage the other in discussion of an issue by criticizing, complaining, or suggesting change, while the other partner attempts to terminate the discussion or avoid the topic by changing the topic of discussion, staying silent, or leaving the room. Ultimately, demand-withdraw communication is negatively correlated with relationship adjustment as it represents a pattern of negative start-up by one partner in the name of confronting conflict, that is thwarted by the other partner, who withdraws in an effort to avoid conflict. Klinetob & Smith (1996) proposed a social structural model as a way to explain the demand-

withdraw marital interaction pattern. They found that the demand and withdraw roles were dependent on issue type. Specifically, they found that during discussions of a wife-generated topic, she was the demander and her husband withdrew, and during discussions of a husband-generated topic, he demanded and she withdrew. The social structural model suggests that the spouse with the most to gain by maintaining the status quo is likely to withdraw, and the disconnected spouse demands change. Based on their findings, the authors suggest that healthier couples demonstrate greater flexibility in their communication styles than do maladjusted couples. The implication is that it may be the rigid application of the demand-withdraw style that is more destructive to marriages than simply the existence of the pattern.

Overall, nondistressed couples report more satisfaction with the social-emotional aspects of their relationship, whereas distressed couples report more destructive communication behaviors and conflict avoidance (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Interestingly, distressed and nondistressed couples appear to have conflicts about the same topics. The difference is that distressed couples have more frequent conflicts, spend more time in conflict, and are more prone to eventually withdraw (disengage) from conflict than are nondistressed couples. The degree to which spouses are generally constructive or destructive in resolving conflict may depend on the attributions they make for marital conflicts. That is, a tendency toward making maladaptive attributions for marital problems may contribute to the perpetuation of those problems, potentially having an eroding effect on the relationship (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). As such, it appears that it is not conflict in and of it self that is detrimental to a marriage. Rather it is how

conflict is approached and interpreted in marital interaction that determines whether the outcomes are beneficial or destructive to the relationship (Berscheid, 1998).

Cognitive interdependence

Cognitive interdependence represents a shift from a largely individual-based internal representation of the self to a more collective representation of self-and-other. It reflects a shift that occurs over time, and results from increasing incorporation of the partner into the self. That is, it is reflective of a growing intersection of two people's lives and identities, whereby each individual is increasingly affected by the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the other (Levinger, 1999). While it does involve some loss of unique, individual identity, it is believed to yield benefits to a relationship and to be indicative of a strong commitment to a relationship (Rusbult et al., 1999). Cognitive interdependence is often manifested behaviorally through plural pronoun usage (e.g., we, us, our), suggestive of a pluralistic self-and-partner collective (Agnew et al., 1998). As such, cognitive interdependence is reflective not only of feeling close, but also of behaving close (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). With regard to the commitment model described above, cognitive interdependence is proposed to be instrumental to the development and maintenance of commitment in that as individuals become increasingly committed to a relationship, they are likely to develop a couple-oriented identity and a more pluralistic representation of the self-in-relationship. Additionally, relationship-relevant cognitive activity is likely to increase the accessibility of the partner and the relationship, resulting in a psychological linkage between partners over the course of an extended relationship.

Several studies have examined the effects of cognitive interdependence on close relationships, and the findings of these studies support the notion that cognitive interdependence is beneficial to relational well-being (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1992; Griffin, 1990; McKenna, 1989). Agnew et al. (1998) posited a reciprocal relationship between cognitive interdependence and commitment, suggesting that as commitment is strengthened, partners simultaneously develop a couple-oriented identity, coming to regard themselves as part of a collective unit that includes the partner. Further, cognitive interdependence and commitment are thought to be fundamental to the process of transformation of motivation, a process that encourages pro-relationship motives and behaviors like accommodation and the inhibition of destructive impulses. The results of their study supported their predictions, suggesting that the effects of cognitive interdependence and commitment are reciprocal, that committed individuals regard their relationships as central to their personal identities as well as to their lives in general, and finally, that both cognitive interdependence and commitment generally benefit a relationship.

Trust

At a very general level, trust can be defined as a belief by one person in the integrity of another person (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Trust is important in relationships and in relationship development in that it increases security (an essential factor in the development of dependence), reduces inhibitions and defensiveness, and encourages reciprocity of self-disclosure (Stinnett & Walters, 1977). Perceptions of trustworthiness provide partners with important information for assessing the future of a

relationship, and as such, trust is best conceptualized as an interpersonal phenomenon, or a relationship-specific process (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). That is, trust represents a quality that is specific to a particular relationship and partner, rather than representing a personal attribute that individuals possess to a greater or lesser degree. Trust has been found to be an important determinant of intimacy, to be strongly associated with love and self-disclosure, and to increase with commitment (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). Trust plays an important role in relationship development in that it enables individuals to be less calculative and instead, to focus on longer-term outcomes (Sabatelli, 1999).

Rusbult et al. (1999) argue that the development of trust involves three stages: predictability, dependability, and faith. Predictability develops as a function of the consistency with which a partner behaves. Partners are judged to be dependable to the extent that they are reliable and honest. Finally, faith refers to the belief that one's partner can be counted on to be motivated by concerns for relationship well being, now and in the future. Rusbult et al., (1999) suggest that trust is the mechanism by which partners implicitly gauge one another's feelings of commitment. As such, trust can be seen as one indication of an individual's commitment level. Interdependence dilemmas provide particularly compelling evidence for both a partner's trustworthiness and commitment level. In such situations where one's personal interests are pitted against the best interest of the relationship, the emergence of trust rests upon evidence of an ongoing pro-relationship orientation (Holmes & Rempel, 1989).

Hypotheses and research questions

H1: Positive affective tone will be positively associated with commitment.

H2: Positive conflict responses (i.e., constructive communication) will be positively associated with commitment.

H3: Positive conflict outcomes will be positively associated with commitment.

H4: Trust will be positively associated with commitment.

H5: Cognitive interdependence will be positively associated with commitment.

H6: Satisfaction will be positively associated with commitment.

RQ1: How do satisfaction, personal commitment, trust, constraint commitment, and cognitive interdependence differ at differing stages of relationship development and involvement?

RQ2: How are affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, cognitive interdependence, trust, and satisfaction related to personal and constraint commitment in married, engaged, dating, and broken-up romantic relationships?

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

A sample of $N = 127$ (36 dating dyads, 28 engaged dyads, 32 married dyads, and 31 individuals from a relationship that had broken up, 16 females and 15 males) dyads and individuals volunteered from a large southwestern university in exchange for either extra credit toward their course grade or a payment of $25 per couple. Participants volunteered in response to announcements made in communication and family studies courses or advertisements posted throughout various campus locations (Appendix A). To be eligible for the study, participants were required to either (1) be in an exclusive dating relationship, (2) be engaged to be married, (3) be in a married relationship, or (4) have broken up from an exclusive dating relationship within the last six months.

The average age of participants across the four groups was 23.93 ($SD = 6.55$) for females and 24.83 ($SD = 5.81$) for males. In terms of relationship duration for dating, engaged, and married couples, the average length of relationship for dating couples was 1.28 years ($SD = 1.02$), for engaged couples was 2.28 years ($SD = 1.27$), and for married couples was 5.86 years ($SD = 3.82$). In terms of marital duration, the average length of marriage was 2.80 years ($SD = 2.70$). As far as the group of broken up individuals, the average relationship duration for females was 1.56 years ($SD = 1.33$) and for males was 1.48 years ($SD = 1.32$). They also reported how long it had been since the relationship terminated, the average of which was .38 years ($SD = .59$) for females and .16 years ($SD = .08$) for males. For both males and females, a majority (82%) were White; 10% were

Hispanic; 1% were Black; 3% were Asian or Pacific Islander; 1% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 2% indicated their race as "other or unknown."

Procedure

Upon arrival at the lab, participants were seated in a waiting area, furnished with two couches, and were provided with an overview of the study. They were told that they would first participate individually in a brief task involving a graphing procedure, then complete a questionnaire (in separate areas of the lab, in the case of couples, to prevent discussion of responses) (Appendix B), and finally, participate in an Oral History Interview, all lasting approximately 45 minutes. All subjects participated in all segments of the research study, including those in the broken up group, who participated individually instead of in a dyad. Participants were also informed that they would be videotaped during the interview portion of the research session. During the graphing procedure and the Oral History Interview, participants were escorted into a "living room," containing a loveseat, armchairs, a coffee table, lamps, carpeted floors, pictures, cameras, and a microphone. Following the introduction of the study, one member of the couple was escorted into the "living room" to participate in the graphing procedure, while the other member of the couple started to fill out the questionnaire in the waiting area. Upon completion of the graphing procedure, the first member of the couple was escorted back into the waiting area to fill out the questionnaire, and the other member of the couple was then escorted into the "living room," and was asked to bring their questionnaire with them. When the second member of the couple had completed the graphing procedure, they resumed filling out the questionnaire in the "living room."

When both members of the couple had completed the questionnaire, they were reunited in the "living room," where the Oral History Interview was conducted. The individuals in the broken up group were also provided with an introduction to the study in the waiting area, but were then escorted into the "living room" to participate in the graphing procedure, complete the questionnaire, and finally, participate in the Oral History Interview.

Measures

Conflict responses and outcomes. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen, 1988; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) is a 35-item self-report measure that assesses partners' perceptions of dyadic communication patterns during three stages of conflict: (1) when some problem in the relationship arises, (2) during an argument or discussion of some relationship problem, and (3) after an argument or discussion of some relationship problem. Items of the CPQ that assess the first two stages of conflict served as a measure of *conflict responses*, and items from the third stage served as a measure of *conflict outcomes*. The primary subscales of the CPQ are Demand/Withdraw, Mutual Avoidance, and Constructive Communication. Feldman and Ridley (2000) developed a version of the CPQ that elaborates upon and extends the original version. The adapted version contains 56 items, 53 of which were used in this investigation. The 3 items that were discarded pertained to domestic violence and were not considered relevant to this study. Sample items of conflict responses include, "We both blame, accuse, and criticize each other," "We both express our feelings in words to each other," "We both offer possible solutions or compromises," and "We both threaten

each other with something negative." The subscales and their reliabilities that correspond to conflict responses are mutual problem solving (male $\alpha = .67$, female $\alpha = .80$); mutual verbal aggression (male $\alpha = .80$, female $\alpha = .82$), and constructive communication, which was operationalized as the sum of scores on the 3 items assessing mutual problem solving (i.e., mutual discussion, mutual expression, and mutual negotiation) minus the sum of scores on the 3 items assessing mutual verbal aggression (i.e., mutual blame, mutual threat, and mutual verbal aggression). Sample items of conflict outcomes include, "We both feel that we have understood each others' point of view," "We both act distant and withdrawn from each other after the discussion or fight," "We both feel like the problem has been solved to our mutual liking," and "We both feel hopeless and discouraged about the problem." The subscales and their reliabilities that correspond to conflict outcomes are mutual problem resolution, including 3 items related to both partners understanding the other's point of view, having a say in the problem, and believing the problem was solved (male $\alpha = .79$, female $\alpha = .80$); and mutual emotional distance, including 3 items related to both partners acting distant and withdrawn, feeling discouraged and/or hopeless, and withholding support, attention, sex, and warmth (male $\alpha = .65$, female $\alpha = .71$).

Cognitive interdependence. The Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) was used to assess cognitive interdependence. The IOS Scale presents seven Venn diagrams representing varying degrees of overlap, which converts to a Likert scale for scoring purposes. One circle is labeled as representing the self, and the other circle is labeled as representing the other (or relationship partner). Respondents were asked to

select the diagram that best described their relationship. Diagram choices range form completely separate, nonoverlapping circles (1) to nearly complete overlap (7).

Trust. Interpersonal trust was assessed using the Dyadic Trust Scale (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). It is an eight-item unidimensional scale, and sample items include, "My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me," and "I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me." The reliability for this scale was $\alpha = .83$ for males, and $\alpha = .88$ for females.

Relational satisfaction. Hendrick's (1988) Relational Assessment Scale (RAS) was used to assess satisfaction, as the items are specific enough to measure several relationship dimensions such as love, problems, and expectations, but general enough to apply to both romantic and married dyads. Sample items include "How much do you love your partner?," How many problems are in your relationship?," and "How good is your relationship compared to most?" The reliability for this scale was $\alpha = .85$ for males, and $\alpha = .88$ for females.

Personal commitment. Commitment level was assessed using a seven-item scale (Rusbult et al., 1998). In terms of the study, a strength of this scale is that it is specific enough to tap the concept of commitment, but general enough to be used with both romantic and married dyads. Sample items include, "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner," and "I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now)." The reliability for this scale was $\alpha = .94$ for males, and $\alpha = .90$ for females.

Constraint commitment. Constraint commitment was assessed using 4 of the subscales from the Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Moral commitment was assessed using the Morality of Divorce subscale, which is a six-item scale, and sample items include, "Except when a spouse dies, marriage should be a once-in-a-lifetime commitment," and "It is all right for a couple to get a divorce if their marriage is not working out." Structural commitment was assessed using the other 3 subscales from the Commitment Inventory's constraint commitment items: Availability of Partners, Social Pressure, and Structural Investments. Each of the subscales contain six items, and sample items for the respective subscales include, "I believe there are many people who would be happy with me as their spouse or partner," "It would be difficult for my friends to accept it if I ended the relationship with my partner," and "I would lose money, or feel like money had been wasted, if my partner and I broke up (divorced)." The items were answered on seven-point Likert scales with "1" anchored "strongly agree," and "7" anchored "strongly disagree," which resulted in lower scores reflecting higher constraint commitment. For ease of interpretation, and to be consistent with the other scales in the study, the items were reverse scored, such that higher scores would reflect higher constraint commitment. These were the scores that were used in all subsequent analyses. The items from all of the subscales were combined to form the overall constraint commitment scale, and the reliability for the scale was $\alpha = .79$ for males, and $\alpha = .83$ for females.

Commitment graphing procedure. Subjects were asked to reconstruct from memory the development of their commitment from the beginning of their relationship

until the present (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Subjects were given a blank graph with commitment level (0 = not at all committed to 7 = completely committed) on the vertical axis, and time in months and years on the horizontal axis (Appendix C). This task was completed individually, and served as a priming tool for the Oral History Interview, to get subjects thinking about their reasons for becoming committed as well as for staying committed.

Oral History Interview. The Oral History Interview (Krokoff, 1984) is a semi-structured interview that asks a series of open-ended question about the history of a couple's relationship. Sample questions include, "Tell me how the two of you met and got together," "Tell me how you decided to be in this committed relationship," and "What moments stand out as the really good times in your relationship/as the really hard times in your relationship." The interview took approximately 20 – 25 minutes and was conducted by the principle investigator.

Oral History Interview coding. Three trained coders, all advanced undergraduate Communication majors who were blind to the hypotheses, used the Oral History Interview coding manual (Buehlman & Gottman, 1996) to rate the videotaped couples along the dimensions found to be predictive of relational outcomes by Buehlman et al. (1992). Coders first read the coding manual and then participated in two four-hour training sessions before coding independently. Coders rated the videotaped interview on a series of 5-point Likert scales. For training purposes, one coder (coder 3) served as a reliability checker, and coded 22% of the total sample in common with the other two coders. The intercoder reliabilities for each dimension of the OHI coding for coders 1

and 3 were as follows: fondness/affection (one score per partner, male α = .91, female α = .84), negativity toward spouse (one score per partner, male α = .82, female α = .85), expansiveness/withdrawal (one score per partner, male α = .60, female α = .73), we-ness/separateness (one score per partner, male α = .90, female α = .91), glorifying the struggle (one score per couple, α = .81), chaos (once score per couple, α = .82) and disappointment/disillusionment (male α = .88, female α = .94). The intercoder reliabilities for each dimension of the OHI coding for coders 2 and 3 were as follows: fondness/affection (one score per partner, male α = .74, female α = .74), negativity toward spouse (one score per partner, male α = .74, female α = .87), expansiveness/withdrawal (one score per partner, male α = .61, female α = .46), we-ness/separateness (one score per partner, male α = .82, female α = .89), glorifying the struggle (one score per couple, α = .75), chaos (once score per couple, α = .74) and disappointment/disillusionment (male α = .93, female α = .91). The total sample was coded in common by coders 1 and 2, and the average scores of these two coders were used in all subsequent analyses. For this reason, the low reliabilities between coders 1 and 3 for male expansiveness/withdrawal, and between coders 2 and 3 for female expansiveness/withdrawal should not be considered problematic. Intercoder reliabilities for each dimension of the OHI coding for coders 1 and 2 were as follows: fondness/affection (one score per partner, male α = .84, female α = .68), negativity toward spouse (one score per partner, male α = .77, female α = .79), expansiveness/withdrawal (one score per partner, male α = .84, female α = .70), we-ness/separateness (one score per partner, male α = .91, female α = .79), glorifying the

struggle (one score per couple, $\alpha = .82$), chaos (once score per couple, $\alpha = .89$) and disappointment/disillusionment (male $\alpha = .90$, female $\alpha = .90$).

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Comparing Relationship Status

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to answer research question 1, treating relationship status as the independent variable (dating, engaged, married, and broken up from a dating relationship), and satisfaction, trust, cognitive interdependence, personal commitment, and constraint commitment as the dependent variables. Significant differences were found among the four groups on these dependent measures, Wilks' $\Lambda = .50$, $F(15, 284.74) = 5.43$, $p < .001$ for females, and Wilks' $\Lambda = .28$, $F(15, 284.74) = 11.13$, $p < .001$ for males. The multivariate η^2 based on Wilks' Λ was quite strong at .21 for females and .35 for males. Table 1 contains the means and the standard deviations on the dependant variables for the four groups.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. The ANOVA for satisfaction was significant for both females, $F(3, 108) = 5.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$, and males, $F(3, 107) = 20.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$. The ANOVA for personal commitment was significant for both females, $F(3, 108) = 23.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .61$, and males, $F(3, 107) = 55.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .61$. The ANOVA for trust was significant for both females, $F(3, 108) = 3.51$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .09$, and males, $F(3, 107) = 11.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$. The ANOVA for constraint commitment was significant for both females, $F(3, 107) = 9.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$, and males, $F(3, 107) = 19.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$. The ANOVA for cognitive interdependence was significant for both females, $F(3, 108) = 3.84$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and

males F (3, 107) = 4.09, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$. The combination of the 4 factors in these analyses, combined with the average cell size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .57 to detect a medium sized effect of $F = .25$ in the independent variables (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for "Relational Well Being Measures" by Relationship Status

Dependent Variable	Sex	Scale Range	Relationship Status: dating	engaged	married	broken up	Significance	Effect Size (η^2)
Satisfaction	M	1-5	4.11_a (0.62)	4.39_a (0.52)	4.32_a (0.58)	3.06_b (0.53)	$F(3,107) = 20.43^{***}$	.36
	F	1-5	4.05_a (0.77)	4.38_a (0.57)	4.28_a (0.72)	3.49_b (0.85)	$F(3,108) = 5.88^{***}$	.14
Personal Commitment	M	1-9	7.19_a (1.90)	8.51_b (0.58)	8.66_b (0.69)	3.71_c (1.64)	$F(3,107) = 55.01^{***}$	.61
	F	1-9	7.91_a (1.32)	8.66_b (0.71)	8.67_b (0.72)	5.89_c (1.93)	$F(3,108) = 23.96^{***}$	.61
Trust	M	1-5	4.00_a (0.65)	4.36_a (0.50)	4.32_a (0.73)	3.23_b (0.83)	$F(3,107) = 11.41^{***}$	.24
	F	1-5	4.13_a (0.79)	4.25_a (0.75)	4.30_a (0.85)	3.52_b (0.98)	$F(3,108) = 3.51^{*}$	.09
Constraint Commitment	M	1-7	3.97_a (0.57)	4.41_{ab} (0.58)	4.64_b (0.77)	3.28_c (0.43)	$F(3,107) = 19.09^{***}$	.35
	F	1-7	3.98_a (0.67)	4.34_{ab} (0.78)	4.57_b (0.78)	3.42_c (0.75)	$F(3,107) = 9.83^{***}$	.22
Cognitive Interdependence	M	1-7	5.06_{ab} (1.57)	5.96_b (1.20)	4.94_{ab} (1.54)	4.53_a (1.41)	$F(3,107) = 4.09^{**}$	.10
	F	1-7	5.06_a (1.32)	5.86_{ab} (0.71)	4.63_{ac} (0.72)	4.50_a (1.93)	$F(3,108) = 3.84^{**}$	.10

Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly @ $p < .05$, as determined by the Tukey HSD test, except for Personal Commitment and female Cognitive Interdependence as determined by Dunnett's C due heterogeneous variance. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVAs for the dependent variables consisted of evaluating the significance of all possible differences between the four

groups' means. Using the Tukey HSD test in cases where there was homogeneous variance across the different groups, and the Dunnett's C test in the case of heterogeneous variance, each post hoc test used an α of .05. In terms of satisfaction, the dating, engaged, and married couples mean scores were significantly higher than the individuals in the broken up group. In terms of personal commitment, the dating couples differed significantly from the engaged and married couples, with the engaged and married couples having significantly higher mean scores on personal commitment. Additionally, all three of these groups differed significantly from the individuals in the broken up group, with the broken up group having significantly lower mean scores on personal commitment. In terms of trust, the dating, engaged, and married couples mean scores were significantly higher than the individuals in the broken up group. In terms of constraint commitment, the dating couples had mean scores that were significantly lower than the married couples, but significantly higher than the individuals in the broken up group. The dating couples did not differ significantly from the engaged couples, and the engaged couples did not differ significantly from the married couples, but all three had significantly higher constraint commitment than the individuals in the broken up group. In terms of cognitive interdependence, results were different for females and males. For females, the only significant differences for cognitive interdependence were between the engaged and married couples, with engaged couples having mean scores that were significantly higher than married couples. For males, the only significant differences for cognitive interdependence were between engaged couples and individuals in the broken

up group, with engaged couples having mean scores that were significantly higher than individuals in the broken up group. Results for these analyses appear in Table 1.

As a preliminary analysis to testing the hypotheses, correlations were calculated between all of the major variables in the study, and the results for females and males are presented in matrices in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. The sample size in these analyses and $\alpha = .05$ resulted in power = .90 to detect a medium sized effect of $r = .30$ in the variables of interest (Cohen, 1988). To test hypotheses 1 through 6, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Due to the significant differences between the four groups on the variables of interest, relationship status was treated as a covariate in each of the analyses, and was entered as three dummy coded variables. The criterion variables for each of the analyses were personal commitment and constraint commitment.

Table 2
Female Intercorrelations

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.	Satisfaction	--														
2.	Trust	.72	--													
3.	Personal Commitment	.63	.50	--												
4.	Constraint Commitment	.39	.29	.53	--											
5.	Constructive Communication	.65	.54	.33	.10†	--										
6.	Mutual Problem Resolution	.65	.56	.40	.18†	.74	--									
7.	Mutual Emotional Distance	-.58	-.51	-.34	-.10†	-.70	-.61	--								
8.	Fondness	.63	.57	.48	.30	.54	.51	-.41	--							
9.	Negativity	-.62	-.55	-.51	-.27	-.49	-.59	.36	-.74	--						
10.	We-ness	.64	.48	.57	.27	.45	.50	-.37	.68	-.75	--					
11.	Expansiveness	.39	.27	.34	.13†	.40	.35	-.25	.67	-.57	.56	--				
12.	Chaos	-.60	-.55	-.40	-.16†	-.45	-.49	.34	-.69	.73	-.65	-.44	--			
13.	Glorifying	.45	.37	.53	.49	-.16†	.30	-.16†	.43	-.47	.54	.32	-.37	--		
14.	Relational Disappointment	-.72	-.62	-.51	-.26	-.52	-.63	.43	-.61	.79	-.77	-.37	.80	-.50	--	
15.	Cognitive Interdependence	.36	.22	.34	.21	.29	.24	-.16†	.20	-.15†	.26	.11†	-.29	.15†	-.25	--

Note. Significant @ $p < .05$ except where indicated by †. $N = 112$.

Table 3
Male Intercorrelations

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.	Satisfaction	--														
2.	Trust	.58	--													
3.	Personal Commitment	.76	.47	--												
4.	Constraint Commitment	.46	.30	.59	--											
5.	Constructive Communication	.49	.38	.25	.20	--										
6.	Mutual Problem Resolution	.51	.52	.31	.24	.56	--									
7.	Mutual Emotional Distance	-.50	-.43	-.34	-.19†	-.48	-.54	--								
8.	Fondness	.55	.38	.45	.24	.28	.37	-.42	--							
9.	Negativity	-.70	-.48	-.54	-.34	-.39	-.45	.47	-.80	--						
10.	We-ness	.66	.46	.67	.41	.28	.42	-.43	.75	-.76	--					
11.	Expansiveness	.40	.25	.34	.17†	.29	.32	-.32	.79	-.64	.62	--				
12.	Chaos	-.53	-.34	-.30	-.11†	-.38	-.48	.33	-.63	.68	-.63	-.48	--			
13.	Glorifying	.58	.30	.60	.49	.25	.24	-.39	.39	-.48	.61	.32	-.37	--		
14.	Relational Disappointment	-.71	-.47	-.56	-.34	-.40	-.45	.38	-.71	.77	-.79	-.51	.80	-.57	--	
15.	Cognitive Interdependence	.46	.22	.40	.31	.23	.32	-.22	.20	-.28	.34	.18	-.28	.30	-.27	--

Note. Significant @ $p < .05$ except where indicated by †. $N = 111$.

Positive Affective Tone and Commitment

To test hypothesis 1, the association between participants' affective tone and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Personal commitment and constraint commitment were treated as the criterion variables. Relationship status was entered as the covariate in the first step as three dummy coded variables, and affective tone, operationalized through the Oral History Interview variables (fondness/affection, negativity toward partner, we-ness vs. separateness, expansiveness, chaos, glorifying the struggle, and relational disappointment), was entered simultaneously as a block as predictor variables in the second step. These were repeated for females and males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .89 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of 7 predictor variables (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Tables 4 and 5.

As demonstrated in Table 4, *female positive affective tone* was significantly related to personal commitment, but not to constraint commitment. Consistent with hypothesis 1, the block of Oral History Interview variables was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 15% of the variance over and above that accounted for by relationship status ($R^2 = .55$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .15$ for affective tone block, $p < .001$). In terms of the individual Oral History Interview variables, fondness was the only one that was a significant predictor of personal commitment ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$). While the overall block of Oral History Interview variables was not a significant predictor of

constraint commitment (R^2 = .29 overall, ΔR^2 = .08 for affective tone block, *ns*), glorifying the struggle was (β = .25, p < .05).

As demonstrated in Table 5, *male positive affective tone* was also significantly related to personal commitment, but not to constraint commitment. Consistent with hypothesis 1, the block of Oral History Interview variables was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 10% of the variance over and above that accounted for by relationship status (R^2 = .71 overall, ΔR^2 = .10 for affective tone block, p < .001). Male negativity was the only significant predictor of personal commitment of the block of affective tone variables (β = -.32, p < .01), and while the block of variables was not a significant predictor of constraint commitment (R^2 = .41 overall, ΔR^2 = .06 for affective tone block, ns), male negativity was (β = -.29, p < .05). Hypothesis 1 received support, in that positive affective tone was positively associated with commitment. Although positive affective tone was significantly associated with personal commitment, the relationship between positive affective tone and constraint commitment was not significant.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Results for Female Affective Tone Variables Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1 :		
Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.49***	.26
Engaged	.66***	.40**
Married	.68***	.50***
Block 2: Female Fondness	.27*	.21
Female Negativity	-.09	-.14
Female We-ness	.08	-.11
Female Expansiveness	.04	-.07
Chaos	.00	.09
Glorifying the Struggle	.09	.25*
Female Disappointment	.09	.07
R	.74***	.54
R^2	.55***	.29
ΔR^2 for block 1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.15***	.08

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Results for Male Affective Tone Variables Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.57***	.30*
Engaged	.80***	.50***
Married	.80***	.60***
Block 2: Male Fondness	-.06	-.09
Male Negativity	-.32**	-.29*
Male We-ness	.15	.04
Male Expansiveness	.06	.01
Chaos	.10	.18
Glorifying the Struggle	.11	.16
Male Disappointment	.12	.02
R	.84***	.64
R^2	.71***	.41
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.10***	.06

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Conflict Responses and Commitment

To test hypothesis 2, the association between participants' responses to conflict and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Personal commitment and constraint commitment were treated as the criterion variables. Relationship status was entered as a covariate in the first step as three dummy coded variables, and constructive communication, the predictor variable in this analysis, was entered in the second step. These were repeated for females and males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .99 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of the predictor variable (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Tables 6 and 7.

As demonstrated in Table 6, *female constructive communication* was significantly associated with personal commitment, but not with constraint commitment. Consistent with hypothesis 2, constructive communication was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 7% of the variance over and above that accounted for by relationship status ($R^2 = .47$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for constructive communication, $p < .001$).

Table 7 demonstrates similar results with regard to the relationship between *male constructive communication* and commitment. As with females, male constructive communication was significantly predictive of personal commitment, but not of constraint commitment. In the case of male participants', however, constructive communication only accounted for 1% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .62$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .01$ constructive communication, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 2 received partial support, as conflict responses were positively associated with personal

commitment, and the relationship was significant. Conflict responses were not, however, associated with constraint commitment.

Table 6
Multiple Regression Results for Female Constructive Communication Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment		
Predictors	β	β
Block 1:		
Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.62***	.32**
Engaged	.77***	.48***
Married	.81***	.63***
Block 2:		
Female Constructive Communication	.27***	.04
R	.69***	.46
R^2	.47***	.22
ΔR^2 for block 1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.07***	.00

Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 7
Multiple Regression Results for Male Constructive Communication Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment		
Predictors	β	β
Block 1:		
Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.78***	.42***
Engaged	.98***	.63***
Married	1.06***	.80***
Block 2:		
Male Constructive Communication	.12*	.09
R	.78*	.60
R^2	.62*	.36
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.01*	.00

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Conflict Outcomes and Commitment

To test hypothesis 3, the association between participants' conflict outcomes and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Personal commitment and constraint commitment served as the criterion variables for the analyses. Relationship status was entered as the covariate in the first step as three dummy coded variables, and mutual problem resolution and mutual emotional distance were entered simultaneously in the second step as predictor variables. These were repeated for females and males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .98 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of 2 predictor variables (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Tables 8 and 9.

As indicated in Table 8, *female conflict outcomes* were significantly associated with personal commitment, but not with constraint commitment. Consistent with hypothesis 3, conflict outcomes significantly predicted personal commitment for females, accounting for 7% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .47$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for conflict outcomes block, $p < .001$). Of the two variables used to assess conflict outcomes, *female mutual problem resolution* was a significant predictor of personal commitment ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), while *female mutual emotional distance* was not ($\beta = -.13$, *ns*).

Table 9 demonstrates that *male conflict outcomes* were also significantly associated with personal commitment, but not with constraint commitment. Conflict outcomes significantly predicted personal commitment for males, accounting for 2% of

the variance over and above that accounted for by relationship status ($R^2 = .63$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for conflict outcomes block, $p < .05$). The pattern of results for conflict outcomes was different for males than for females, however, in that *male mutual emotional distance* was a significant predictor of personal commitment ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$), while *male mutual problem resolution* was not ($\beta = .04$, *ns*) . Note that while the betas for female mutual emotional distance and male mutual emotional distance are the same, female mutual emotional distance was not a significant predictor of female personal commitment, while male mutual emotional distance was. The reason for this difference in significance is most likely due to the difference in how much of the variance in conflict outcomes is explained by relationship status, with relationship status accounting for more of the variance in male conflict outcomes than in female conflict outcomes. Hypothesis 3 received support, as positive conflict outcomes were positively associated with commitment, however, although the relationship between conflict outcomes and personal commitment was significant, the relationship between conflict outcomes and constraint commitment was not.

Table 8
Multiple Regression Results for Female Conflict Outcome Variables Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment		
Predictors	β	β
Block 1:		
Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.55***	.29*
Engaged	.71***	.45***
Married	.76***	.61***
Block 2:		
Female Mutual Problem Resolution	.18*	.13
Female Mutual Emotional Distance	-.13	.06
R	.69***	.47
R^2	.47***	.22
ΔR^2 for block1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.07***	.01

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 9
Multiple Regression Results for Male Conflict Outcome Variables Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment		
Predictors	β	β
Block 1:		
Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.74***	.38***
Engaged	.95***	.60***
Married	1.02***	.78***
Block 2:		
Male Mutual Problem Resolution	.04	.14
Male Mutual Emotional Distance	-.13*	.03
R	.79*	.60
R^2	.63*	.36
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.02*	.02

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Trust and Commitment

To test hypothesis 4, the association between participants' trust and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were performed. The criterion variables for the analysis were personal commitment and constraint commitment. Relationship status was entered in the first step as the covariate as three dummy coded variables, and trust was entered as the predictor variable in the second step. These were repeated for females and for males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .99 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of the predictor variable (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Tables 10 and 11.

As demonstrated in Table 10, *female trust* was significantly associated with both personal commitment and constraint commitment for female participants. Consistent with the hypothesis, trust significantly predicted personal commitment for females, accounting for 11% of the variance over and above that accounted for by relationship status ($R^2 = .51$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .11$ for block of trust, $p < .001$). Similarly, trust significantly predicted constraint commitment for females, accounting for 3% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .24$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for block of trust, $p < .05$).

As indicated in Table 11, the association between trust and commitment was different for males than it was for females. Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, for males, trust was not a significant predictor of personal commitment ($\beta = .12$, *ns*) or of constraint commitment ($\beta = .03$, *ns*). Hypothesis 4 received mixed support. Trust was

positively associated with both personal and constraint commitment for females, however, it was not associated with either type of commitment for males.

Table 10
Multiple Regression Results for Female Trust Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.53***	.26*
Engaged	.69***	.42***
Married	.71***	.56***
Block 2: Female Trust	.34***	.18*
R	.71***	.49*
R^2	.51***	.24*
ΔR^2 for block 1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.11***	.03*

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 11
Multiple Regression Results for Male Trust Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment		
Predictors	β	β
Block 1:		
Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.73***	.41***
Engaged	.93***	.63***
Married	1.00***	.80***
Block 2:		
Male Trust	.12	.03
R	.79	.59
R^2	.62	.35
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.01	.00

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Cognitive Interdependence and Commitment

To test hypothesis 5, the association between participants' cognitive interdependence and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. Personal commitment and constraint commitment were treated as criterion variables. Relationship status was entered as a covariate in the first step as three dummy coded variables, and cognitive interdependence was entered as the predictor variable in the second step. These were repeated for females and males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .99 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of the predictor variable (Cohen, 1988). Results of these analyses appear in Tables 12 and 13.

Table 12 demonstrates that *cognitive interdependence* was significantly associated with both personal commitment and constraint commitment for females. Consistent with the hypothesis, cognitive interdependence was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 7% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .47$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for block of cognitive interdependence, $p < .001$). Likewise, cognitive interdependence was significantly predictive of constraint commitment, accounting for 4% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .25$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for block of cognitive interdependence, $p < .05$).

As indicated in Table 13, the pattern of results was similar for males. As with females, *cognitive interdependence* was significantly associated with both personal commitment and constraint commitment for males. As hypothesized, cognitive interdependence was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 7%

of the variance over and above relationship status (R^2 = .68 overall, ΔR^2 = .07 for block of cognitive interdependence, $p < .001$). Likewise, cognitive interdependence was significantly predictive of constraint commitment, accounting for 6% of the variance over and above relationship status (R^2 = .41 overall, ΔR^2 = .06 for block of cognitive interdependence, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 5 was supported, as cognitive interdependence was positively associated with both personal and constraint commitment, and in both cases, the association was significant.

Table 12
Multiple Regression Results for Female Cognitive Interdependence Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.60***	.29*
Engaged	.71***	.42***
Married	.84***	.62***
Block 2: Female Cognitive Interdependence	.28***	.20*
R	.69***	.50*
R^2	.47***	.25*
ΔR^2 for block 1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.07***	.04*

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 13
Multiple Regression Results for Male Cognitive Interdependence Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.74***	.39***
Engaged	.89***	.55***
Married	1.05***	.79***
Block 2: Male Cognitive Interdependence	.28***	.25***
R	.82***	.64***
R^2	.68***	.41***
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.07***	.06***

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Satisfaction and Commitment

To test hypothesis 6, the association between participants' satisfaction and their commitment, a series of hierarchical regressions were performed. Personal commitment and constraint commitment served as the criterion variables. Relationship status was entered in the first step as the covariate as three dummy coded variables, and satisfaction was entered in the second step as the predictor variable. These were repeated for females and males. The combination of the number of variables in these analyses, combined with the sample size and $\alpha = .05$, resulted in power = .99 to detect a medium sized effect of $R^2 = .13$ in the block of the predictor variable (Cohen, 1988). Results appear in Tables 14 and 15.

As demonstrated in Table 14, *satisfaction* was significantly associated with both personal commitment and constraint commitment for females. As hypothesized, satisfaction was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 18% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .58$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .18$ for block of satisfaction, $p < .001$). Similarly, satisfaction was significantly predictive of constraint commitment, accounting for 6% of the variance over and above relationship status ($R^2 = .28$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .06$ for block of satisfaction, $p < .01$).

Table 15 demonstrates that the pattern of results was similar for males. As with females, *satisfaction* was significantly associated with both personal commitment and constraint commitment for males. Consistent with the hypothesis, satisfaction was significantly predictive of personal commitment, accounting for 14% of the variance after controlling for relationship status ($R^2 = .75$ overall, $\Delta R^2 = .14$ for block of satisfaction, p

< .001). Likewise, satisfaction was significantly predictive of constraint commitment, accounting for 3% of the variance over and above relationship status (R^2 = .38 overall, ΔR^2 = .03 for block of satisfaction, p < .05). Hypothesis 6 received support, as satisfaction was positively associated with both personal and constraint commitment, and in both cases, the association was significant.

Table 14
Multiple Regression Results for Female Satisfaction Explaining Variance in Female Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Female Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.48***	.23
Engaged	.58***	.35**
Married	.64***	.51***
Block 2: Female Satisfaction	.46***	.27**
R	.76***	.53**
R^2	.58***	.28**
ΔR^2 for block 1	.40***	.21***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.18***	.06**

Note. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Table 15
Multiple Regression Results for Male Satisfaction Explaining Variance in Male Commitment

	Criterion Variables	
	Personal Commitment	Constraint
Commitment Predictors	β	β
Block 1: Male Relationship Status (dummy coded):		
Dating	.46***	.27*
Engaged	.62***	.47***
Married	.70***	.64***
Block 2: Male Satisfaction	.47***	.22*
R	.86***	.62*
R^2	.75***	.38*
ΔR^2 for block 1	.61***	.35***
ΔR^2 for block 2	.14***	.03*

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Comparing Relationship Status on the Relationship between the Variables of Interest and Commitment

In an effort to address research question 2, how the variables of interest (positive affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, and satisfaction) were differentially related to personal commitment and constraint commitment in each of the four groups, a set of correlation matrices were calculated within each type of relationship status. These were repeated for females and males. The sample size in these analyses and $\alpha = .05$ resulted in power ranging from .20 to .45 to detect a medium sized effect of $r = .30$ in the variables of interest (Cohen, 1988). Results of the analyses appear in Tables 16 and 17. Overall, the pattern of results suggests that most of the differences were between the three groups of intact couples and the group of broken up individuals, with a general lack of association between the variables of interest and the two types of commitment among the broken ups. These results are somewhat descriptive and exploratory, in that pairwise comparisons were not conducted to test for significant differences in the correlations, as to do so would have entailed dozens of tests, and would have resulted in a severely inflated family-wise error rate.

Table 16
Correlations between the Variables of Interest and Commitment by Relationship Status for Females

	Relationship Status							
	Dating		Engaged		Married		Broken Up	
	P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.
1. Satisfaction	.62**	.33	.56**	.22	.68**	.18	.43	.47
2. Trust	.58**	.30	.52**	.29	.55**	.02	.17	.24
3. Constructive Communication	.46**	.17	.45*	-.10	.57**	.08	-.03	-.01
4. Mutual Problem Resolution	.40*	.18	.46*	.20	.49**	-.02	.06	.10
5. Mutual Emotional Distance	-.42*	-.18	-.27	.15	-.59**	-.11	.05	.34
6. Fondness/Affection	.71**	.42*	.37	-.05	.55**	.14	.30	.32
7. Negativity	-.70**	-.29	-.41*	-.26	-.57**	-.17	.30	.27
8. We-ness	.71**	.32	.17	-.05	.40*	.05	.05	-.21
9. Expansiveness	.49**	.28	.24	-.15	.39*	.18	.33	.02
10. Chaos	-.54**	-.43**	-.25	.12	-.52**	-.03	.13	.32
11. Glorifying	.50**	.37*	.02	.24	.18	.27	.63**	.54*
12. Relational Disappointment	-.51**	-.24	-.33	-.17	-.51**	-.04	.24	.26
13. Cognitive Interdependence	.54**	.46**	.30	-.15	-.07	.11	.44	.43

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. PC = Personal Commitment. CC = Constraint Commitment

Table 17
Correlations between the Variables of Interest and Commitment by Relationship Status for Males

		Relationship Status							
		Dating		Engaged		Married		Broken Up	
		P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.	P.C.	C.C.
1.	Satisfaction	.80**	.41*	.51**	.06	.65**	.24	.28	-.22
2.	Trust	.20	.06	.31	-.03	.25	.19	.31	.30
3.	Constructive Communication	.22	.20	.15	-.23	.44*	.25	-.07	-.12
4.	Mutual Problem Resolution	.33*	.36*	.13	.00	.23	.23	-.10	-.44
5.	Mutual Emotional Distance	-.21	-.10	-.13	.08	-.26	-.25	-.58*	.42
6.	Fondness/Affection	.52**	.24	.05	-.09	.21	.04	.31	.30
7.	Negativity	-.54**	-.32	-.50**	.08	-.28	-.25	-.29	-.07
8.	We-ness	.60**	.29	.29	-.13	.15	.17	.15	.10
9.	Expansiveness	.51**	.24	.06	-.10	.40*	.17	.43	.18
10.	Chaos	-.36*	.27	-.16	-.44*	-.06	.00	.29	-.18
11.	Glorifying	.45**	.40*	.32	-.02	.28	.11	-.19	.30
12.	Relational Disappointment	-.47**	-.24	-.24	.08	-.12	.03	.17	-.12
13.	Cognitive Interdependence	.48**	.52**	.25	.24	.40*	.22	.62*	-.06

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. PC = Personal Commitment. CC = Constraint Commitment.

Post Hoc Analyses

After testing the research questions and hypotheses, two post hoc tests were conducted. The first test involved examining satisfaction as a possible moderator of the relationship between personal and constraint commitment, such that as satisfaction with a relationship decreases, the relationship between personal and constraint commitment increases, and likewise, as satisfaction with a relationship increases, the relationship between personal and constraint commitment decreases. This test was motivated by claims in the literature with regard to the relationship between personal and constraint commitment. For example, Johnson (1999) has suggested that as long as personal commitment is high, constraint commitment (i.e., structural commitment), though important, is likely to be largely unrecognized or irrelevant. Similarly, Stanley and Markman (1992) have argued that constraints will only be perceived negatively to the extent that personal commitment and satisfaction are low. To test satisfaction as a moderator of the relationship between personal and constraint commitment, a hierarchical regression was conducted using procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), and the interaction was not significant. In other words, the relationship between personal and constraint commitment did not change as a function of satisfaction level (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

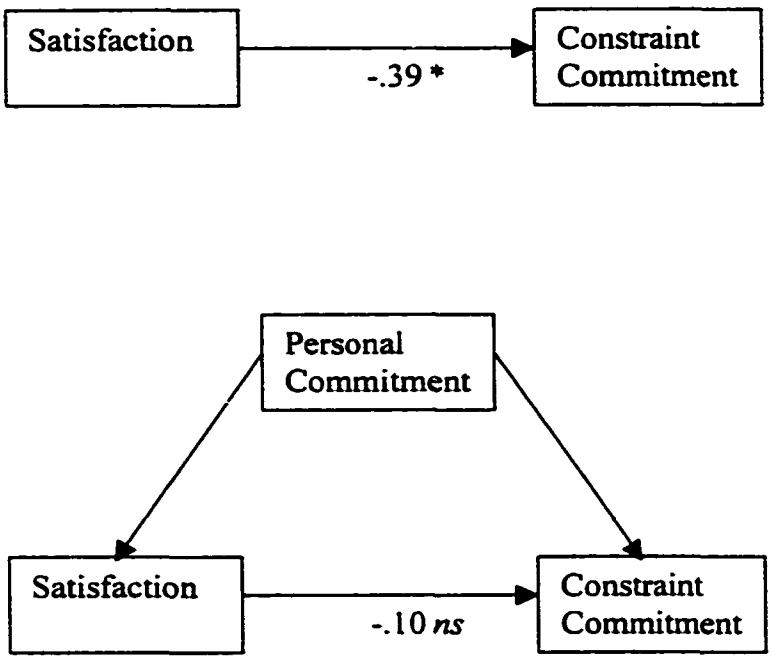
The second test involved examining personal commitment as a possible mediator of the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment. This test was motivated by a desire to more fully elucidate the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment. Specifically, hypothesis 6 predicted that there would be a

positive relationship between satisfaction and commitment. That hypothesis was supported, and the results indicated that satisfaction was a significant predictor of both personal and constraint commitment. Conceptually, it makes sense that satisfaction would be related to personal commitment, and as such, it was not surprising that they were also empirically related. The observed relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment, on the other hand, is not as easy to account for conceptually. In an effort to interpret the relationship, it seemed plausible that the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment was a function of personal commitment. In other words, that personal commitment would explain the significant relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment. To test this relationship, path modeling of the mediational model was conducted. Results appear in Figures 1 and 2.

As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, personal commitment did mediate the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment for both females and males. For females, the path from satisfaction to constraint commitment was significant (β = -.39, $p < .05$) until personal commitment was added to the model as a mediating variable, at which point the relationship became nonsignificant (β = -.10, *ns*). Similarly, for males, the path from satisfaction to constraint commitment was significant (β = -.46, $p < .05$) until personal commitment was added to the model as a mediating variable, at which point the relationship became nonsignificant (β = -.07, *ns*). Examination of the betas reveals that when the paths from satisfaction to personal commitment and from constraint commitment to personal commitment are controlled for, the previously significant relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment is no longer significant

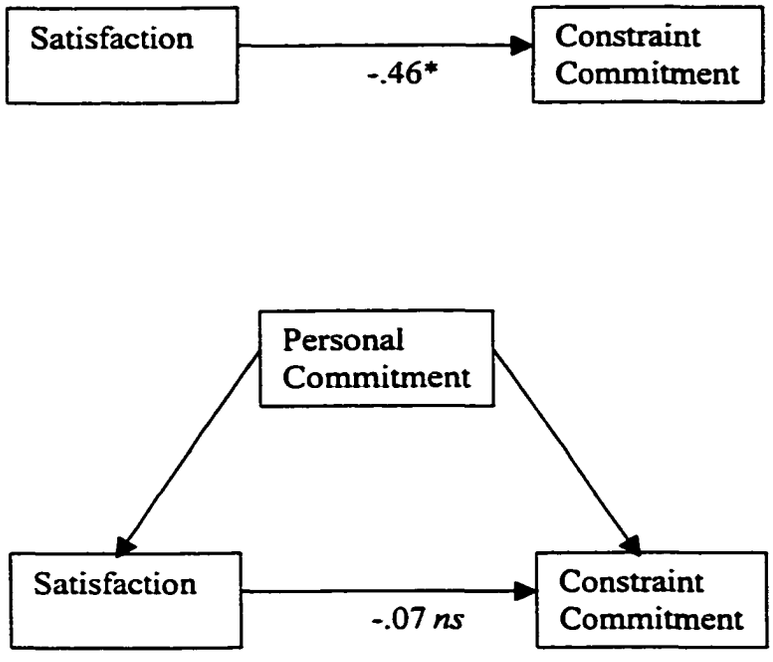
(Baron & Kenny, 1986). Personal commitment significantly decreased the path between satisfaction and constraint commitment, thereby accounting for the relationship between the two.

Figure 1
Path Model Results for Female Personal Commitment as a Mediator of the Relationship between Satisfaction and Constraint Commitment



Note. * $p < .05$

Figure 2
Path Model Results for Male Personal Commitment as a Mediator of the Relationship between Satisfaction and Constraint Commitment



Note. * $p < .05$

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study measured affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, satisfaction, and personal and constraint commitment in dating, engaged, and married couples, as well as in a group of individuals who had recently broken up from a dating relationship. By including groups with different relationship status in the research design, the goal was to represent the full range of possible scores on the variables of interest. At the research laboratory, participants completed a brief graphing procedure of how their commitment to their relationship developed and changed over time, a self-report measure of conflict responses and outcomes, satisfaction, trust, and personal and constraint commitment, as well as participating in an Oral History Interview. Consistent with expectations, the three groups of intact couples differed significantly from the group of broken up individuals on all but one of the variables of interest. Comparison of the three groups of intact couples revealed that they were quite similar, however, there were differences in both personal and constraint commitment, with increases associated with more advanced relationship stages. As hypothesized, results of this study indicated that positive affective tone, positive conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, and satisfaction were positively associated with personal commitment, and that trust and cognitive interdependence were positively associated with constraint commitment. An interesting sex difference emerged from the findings, in that while trust was significantly predictive of both types of commitment for females, it was not predictive of either type of

commitment for males. Additionally, post hoc analyses revealed that personal commitment mediated the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment.

Comparing Relationship Status

When relationship status was compared across several of the study variables (satisfaction, personal commitment, trust, constraint commitment, and cognitive interdependence), a predictable pattern emerged. As was expected, most of the differences were between the three groups of intact relationships and the group of broken up individuals, with effect sizes ranging from small to quite large. Within the three groups of intact relationships, while there were no significant differences in terms of satisfaction and trust, an examination of the means for personal commitment supports the notion that its development is a subtle and gradual process, with increases being apparent as couples move from dating relationships, to engagement, and finally to marriage (Huston et al., 1981). The pattern of results for constraint commitment was similar to that of personal commitment, and is consistent with what has been found in other studies, suggesting that constraints are associated with relationship stage, with increases being apparent as commitments are formalized (Markman & Stanley, 1992).

The results for between group differences on cognitive interdependence are admittedly a little perplexing. Specifically, while the mean scores for the individuals in the broken up group are the lowest, they are not, as one would expect, significantly different from the mean scores for the three groups of intact couples. Because this variable was assessed using a single item measure, it is impossible to examine its reliability, and as such, determine if the unclear pattern of results is due to an unreliable

instrument. The fact that the pattern of results is different for females and males compounds the problem of interpretation, however, there is one commonality that may allow for some speculation. In the case of both females and males, it is the engaged couples that differ significantly from at least one of the other groups, and an examination of the mean scores reveals that they have the highest means on this item. Because cognitive interdependence represents a growing intersection of two people's lives and identities, and a shift away from an individual-based internal representation of the self to a more collective representation of self-and-other, it seems reasonable to expect that cognitive interdependence may peak when a couple formalizes their commitment by announcing their intention to share their lives. That is, despite the fact that more marriages end in divorce than not, most people who decide to get married do so with the belief that it is a life time commitment. As such, it seems as though it would be quite functional for people at this stage of relationship development to emphasize a couple-oriented identity and a pluralistic representation of the self-in-relationship more than at other stages of relationship development.

The pattern of results for this variable are further confused by the finding that, while not significantly different from one another, dating couples had higher mean scores on cognitive interdependence than did married couples. This finding contradicts an earlier finding by Agnew et al. (1998), who found a reciprocal relationship between cognitive interdependence and commitment, such that as commitment is strengthened so is cognitive interdependence and vice versa. One possible explanation for the discrepancy in findings is that Agnew et al. (1998) did not directly assess the association

between cognitive interdependence and relationship status relative to commitment, as their sample consisted solely of individuals involved in dating relationships. It is possible to imagine that once a union is established through marriage, processes other than cognitive interdependence function to keep a couple together. For example, while dating couples have fewer barriers to dissolving a relationship relative to married couples, a strong couple-oriented identity would seemingly be fundamental to the processes that encourage pro-relationship motives and that inhibit destructive impulses. Married couples, on the other hand, generally have more barriers to dissolving the relationship, and as such, constraint commitment may be one important process by which they maintain a long-term perspective, weathering difficult periods, encouraging pro-relationship behaviors, and inhibiting destructive impulses. For this reason, cognitive interdependence may not be as vital an issue as it is in the earlier stages of a relationship. Additionally, as relationships move from dating through engagement to marriage, changes may also be occurring in the extent to which a couple emphasizes interdependence over autonomy and vice versa (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1988). Ultimately, the pattern of results found in this study suggests a curvilinear relationship between relationship stage and cognitive interdependence.

Positive Affective Tone and Commitment

As expected, positive affective tone was found to be positively associated with commitment, however, while it was significantly predictive of personal commitment for both females and males, the relationship between positive affective tone and constraint commitment was not significant for females or for males. Positive affective tone was

operationalized using the Oral History Interview variables. Although the overall block was a significant predictor of personal commitment for both females and males, the individual Oral History Interview variables that predicted personal commitment differed for females and males. For females, personal commitment was predicted by their fondness, whereas for males it was predicted by their negativity during the interview. Specifically, for males, there was a negative relationship between negativity and personal commitment, such that a lack of negativity was associated with higher personal commitment. Fondness represents the level of love or affection that relational partners demonstrate to one another, and is manifested through compliments, positive affect, and reflecting on past romantic experiences. Negativity, on the other hand, reflects the extent to which relational partners exhibit negative affect, criticism, disagreement, and so on. These dimensions really reflect opposite sides of the same coin, and these results resonate with the vast literature on the relationship between affective tone and relational well being (e.g., Carstensen et al., 1995; Cordova et al., 1993, Gottman et al., 1998; Manusov, 1995; Mathews et al., 1996).

While the block of variables used to measure affective tone were not significantly predictive of constraint commitment for females or for males, in both cases, there was a different individual variable that held up as significant. For females glorifying the struggle was positively related to constraint commitment, and again for males, negativity was negatively related to constraint commitment. Glorifying the struggle refers to the extent to which relational partners report that while they have experienced hard times in their relationship, they made it through and it brought them even closer together. The

relationship between glorifying the struggle and constraint commitment demonstrates the idea that hardships and conflict situations can serve as "stress tests" for relationships, revealing important commitment information by allowing partners to assess their own as well as their partner's level of commitment to the relationship (Kelley, 1983b). Moreover, the experience of surviving relational struggles may even serve to reinforce feelings of commitment to a relationship through the promotion and bolstering of positive subjective appraisals of its future (Lydon, 1999).

For males, as the barriers to leaving a relationship increase, the expression of negativity decreases. This is consistent with the notion that regardless of the type of commitment, constraint or personal, the end result is a desire to preserve the relationship, and as such, to motivate pro-relationship behaviors such as inhibiting negativity. All together, the results regarding the relationship between positive affective tone and commitment are consistent with the idea that commitment to a relationship requires that couples develop a stable adaptation of positive to negative behaviors that is highly slated toward positivity that is maintained over time. According to the bank account model of relationships, this ensures that couples are operating at a surplus rather than a deficit, encouraging relationship preservation and preventing the erosion of commitment.

Conflict Responses and Commitment

Hypothesis 2 was supported, in that positive conflict responses were found to be positively associated with commitment. Specifically, for both females and males, positive conflict responses were significantly predictive of personal commitment, but not of constraint commitment. Conflict responses refer to overt behavioral reactions to

conflict, which was operationalized as constructive communication, created by subtracting three destructiveness ratings (blaming, threatening, and being verbally aggressive) from three constructiveness ratings (discussion, expression, and negotiation) (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996).

Constructive communication in response to conflict situations is linked to satisfaction, the promotion of intimacy, a higher likelihood of problem resolution, and in all, it has been found to be stress reducing for relational partners (Karney & Bradbury, 1995a; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Noller et al., 1994; Noller & Feeney, 1998). It is not surprising then that it is also significantly predictive of personal commitment, as it likely serves a reinforcement function, allowing partners to observe one another demonstrating pro-relationship motives by engaging in relationship maintenance behaviors. So, commitment is not merely a consequence of constructive communication behaviors, but rather a function of the cognitive processes that accompany the interpretation and evaluation of conflict response behaviors. This finding is consistent with the idea that responses to conflict provide partners with important commitment information, and as such, that positive responses to conflict are associated with the enhancement of commitment. The relationship between these two variables is probably best thought of as cyclic, in that just as positive responses to conflict are likely to reinforce and increase feelings of commitment, so too are strong feelings of commitment likely to encourage positive responses to conflict situations. It is possible to conceive of these variables as operating in a sort of feedback loop, providing information that functions for the purpose

of maintaining awareness of long-term goals geared toward preserving the relationship, rather than focusing on immediate self-interests.

Conflict Outcomes and Commitment

Support was found for hypothesis 3, as positive conflict outcomes were positively associated with commitment. Conflict outcomes refer to whether or not the conflict was resolved, how it was resolved, and whether or not it resulted in constructive or destructive consequences for the relationship. Conflict outcomes were operationalized as mutual problem resolution and mutual emotional distance, and while the overall block was significant for both females and males, the individual variables that held up as significant differed. As with conflict responses, while conflict outcomes were significantly predictive of personal commitment, the association between conflict outcomes and constraint commitment was not significant. For females, mutual problem resolution, which reflects understanding the other person's point of view, having had a say in the problem discussion, and believing ultimately that the problem was resolved, was significantly predictive of personal commitment, while mutual emotional distance was not. For males, on the other hand, mutual emotional distance, which relates to partners acting distant and withdrawn, feeling discouraged and/or hopeless, and withholding support, attention, sex, and warmth after a conflict episode was a significant predictor of personal commitment, while mutual problem resolution was not.

The pattern of results for females and males was similar in that in both cases there was a positive relationship between mutual problem resolution and personal commitment, and a negative relationship between mutual emotional distance and personal

commitment. The difference was in which variable was a significant predictor of personal commitment, but ultimately, the results support the notion that positive conflict outcomes enhance feelings of commitment whereas negative conflict outcomes diminish feelings of commitment. It is equally plausible, however, that stronger feelings of commitment encourage mutual problem resolution, resulting in positive conflict outcomes, and inhibit negative conflict outcomes that result in mutual emotional distance. In all likelihood, the relationship is bi-directional, with conflict outcomes affecting commitment level and commitment level affecting the way that partners respond to conflict and as such, their conflict outcomes. Positive conflict outcomes should enhance partners' feelings of efficacy to deal effectively with conflict situations when they arise, as well as to motivate constructive, accommodative responses. Likewise, commitment acts as a key macromotive in relationships, encouraging transformation of motivation, and as such, putting the relationship first (Rusbult et al., 1998). The most reasonable interpretation of the results obtained in this study is that there is a reciprocal relationship between conflict outcomes and commitment.

Trust and Commitment

Hypothesis 4 received mixed support, in that while trust was a significant predictor of both personal and constraint commitment for females, it was not a significant predictor of either personal or constraint commitment for males. As far as the results for females, the positive association between trust and commitment is consistent with what has been found in other studies (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Rusbult et al., 1999). In this study, as in many other studies examining the relationship

between trust and relational well being, trust is conceived of as an interpersonal phenomenon, as a quality that is relationship- and partner-specific. Interpersonal trust refers to the expectation that one's partner can be counted on to behave in a benevolent manner and be responsive to one's needs (Holmes, 1989; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). As such, it has been argued that trust acts as a filter through which relationship events are interpreted and evaluated (Homes & Rempel, 1989; Rempel et al., 1985; Rempel , Ross, & Holmes, 2001), and more, that trust can be used to gauge the strength of an individual's commitment to a particular relationship (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001). The idea is that trust will be manifested through behaviors that put the relationship first, such as accommodation and sacrifice, derogation of alternatives, and a willingness to invest in the relationship, and that these behaviors reflect a long-term orientation toward a relationship. Trusting one's partner is fundamental to both the development and maintenance of commitment, and the results of this study suggest that for females, higher levels of trust are associated with higher levels of commitment. In all likelihood, the relationship between trust and commitment is interdependent, in that changes in one are likely to produce changes in the other. Likewise, the behaviors and cognitions that lead to high levels of trust are a subset of those that lead to high levels of commitment.

If trust is a significant predictor of commitment for females, why would it not also be a significant predictor for males? The answer to this question remains unclear, as it does not represent an established finding in the sex differences literature. In fact, it would appear as though no one has attempted to test for sex differences in the

relationship between trust and commitment, and that most models containing these variables assume no sex differences (e.g., Rusbult's Mutual Cyclic Growth Model). Admittedly, these findings are difficult to account for, however, one possible explanation can be located in the research on evolutionary psychology and mate selection. For example, Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford (1997) examined the role of sex differences in personality mate preferences from a sociobiological perspective. They found that women expressed more extreme preferences in the personality characteristics of their ideal mate, and that women were more exacting than men across a range of personality characteristics. According to Buss (1994), "women's preferences in a partner are more complex and enigmatic than the mate preferences of either sex of any other species" (p. 19), and more, that evolution has favored women who were highly selective about their mates. This argument is based on the notion that reproduction as a consequence of sexual intercourse is far more costly for females (i.e., gestating, bearing, nursing, and protecting a child) than it is for males, and as such, females need to be more exacting in their selection of potential mates. This discrepancy in the investment of offspring motivates females to select mates that have the potential to provide the resources necessary to ensure survival, and more importantly, to select mates that demonstrate a willingness to commit those resources consistently (i.e., dependably) and exclusively. The costs associated with reproduction for females are likely to lead to an increased dependence on one's mate and the resources they can provide, and as a result, it seems reasonable for them to require commitment in return. To the extent that trust acts as a gauge of the strength of one's partner's commitment level, it seems plausible that females may have

evolved to place a greater emphasis on the importance of trust in providing commitment information. According to Buss (1994), sex is the most valuable reproductive resource that women have to offer, and as such, they have evolved psychological mechanisms that prevent them from giving it away indiscriminately.

Cognitive Interdependence and Commitment

Hypothesis 5 was supported, as cognitive interdependence was found to be a significant predictor of both personal and constraint commitment for both females and males. Again, cognitive interdependence represents a shift that occurs over time from a largely individual-based internal representation of the self to a more collective representation of self-and-partner. It is reflective of the growing intersection of two peoples' lives, whereby each individual is increasingly affected by the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the other, while simultaneously perceiving greater overlap between the self and the partner. The development of a psychological linkage in the form of a couple-oriented identity, or self-in-relationship perspective, is fundamental to the development of commitment. It reflects a restructuring of cognitive processes, such that relationship-relevant cognitions become readily accessible reflecting the centrality of the relationship to the individual's life, and as such, cognitive interdependence represents an important cognitive maintenance mechanism (Rusbult et al., 2001).

Although the discussion thus far has focused on cognitive interdependence as it relates to the psychological experience of commitment, or personal commitment, in this study, cognitive interdependence was also significantly predictive of constraint commitment. This is not surprising, given that the two types of commitment are not

independent, as it is usually strong feelings of personal commitment in the early stages of relationship development that lead couples to increase constraints through committing to marriage, joint possessions, children, and so on. As Stanley and Markman (1992) astutely point out, "today's dedication is tomorrow's constraint" (p. 597). The more central a relationship becomes to one's life, the more likely one is to invest in that relationship, to downplay the attractiveness of alternatives, to have others expect and want the relationship to continue, and to make it harder to dissolve. As such, cognitive interdependence and commitment are likely to be mutually sustaining, with each exerting influence on the other.

Satisfaction and Commitment

Support was found for hypothesis 6, as satisfaction was significantly predictive of both personal and constraint commitment for both females and males. While satisfaction was positively associated with both types of commitment, the association between satisfaction and personal commitment was stronger (β = .46 vs. .27 for females, and β = .47 vs. .22 for males). This finding demonstrates that satisfaction is more highly correlated with personal commitment than constraint commitment, however, it does not demonstrate that satisfaction and personal commitment are one in the same. In fact, the results of this study suggest that while satisfaction may be important to the development of personal commitment, as well as being an important predictor of ongoing personal commitment, it does not come close to explaining all of the variance in personal commitment. Evidence from this study that supports the argument that satisfaction and personal commitment are independent concepts is demonstrated in Tables 16 and 17.

Examination of the tables reveals that across the four groups, for both females and males, although satisfaction is significantly associated with personal commitment in the three groups of intact couples, the association between satisfaction and personal commitment is not significant for individuals in the broken up group. Additionally, the magnitude of the association between satisfaction and personal commitment differs across the three groups of intact couples, lending further credence to the argument that the two concepts are distinct. As such, satisfaction may be necessary but not sufficient to the development of personal commitment. This is consistent with what has been found in other studies (e.g., Stanley & Markman, 1992), and suggests that while these two concepts are associated, they are best thought of as independent from one another. In other words, personal commitment is not merely a reflection of how satisfied an individual is with his or her relationship.

The strength of the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment was similar to that of the relationship between cognitive interdependence and constraint commitment, and it seems reasonable to invoke a similar explanation for the association. Namely, increased feelings of satisfaction with a relationship may lead an individual to develop strong feelings of personal commitment for that relationship, which may in turn result in engaging in behaviors and cognitions which lead to the development of constraints (i.e., increased investments, derogation of alternatives, social pressures, and difficulties in dissolving). Unlike cognitive interdependence, however, satisfaction is only indirectly associated with constraint commitment through its direct relationship to personal commitment. In other words, personal commitment mediates the relationship

between satisfaction and constraint commitment, in that when the paths from satisfaction to personal commitment and from constraint commitment to personal commitment are controlled for, the previously significant relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment is no longer significant (β = -.39 vs. -.10 for females, and β = -.46 vs. -.07 for males) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The fact that personal commitment accounts for the relationship between satisfaction and constraint commitment makes intuitive sense, in that mere satisfaction with a relationship should not have the effect of increasing barriers to dissolving that relationship. Instead, as argued above, it is more likely the case that the feelings of personal commitment that develop as a result of high satisfaction lead to the development of constraints to exiting a relationship.

Comparing Relationship Status on the Variables of Interest and Commitment

Research question 2 sought to examine the different associations between the variables of interest (positive affective tone, conflict responses and outcomes, trust, cognitive interdependence, and satisfaction) and personal and constraint commitment as a function of relationship status. In general, the pattern of results confirmed expectations; suggesting that most of the differences in personal and constraint commitment were between the three groups of intact couples and the group of broken up individuals. Specifically, there was a general lack of association between the variables of interest and the two types of commitment among the broken ups. That is, the variables seem to operate differently for the intact couples than they do for the individuals in the broken up group. Satisfaction, for example, was significantly associated with personal commitment in the three groups of intact couples, but not in the group of broken up individuals.

Likewise, the magnitude of the association for constructive communication and mutual problem resolution with personal commitment was much lower in the group of broken up individuals than it was in the three groups of intact couples. These are just a couple of examples, and admittedly, this is a very broad interpretation of the results that appear in the correlation matrices. What the results seem to suggest, however, is that what serves as the glue in certain relationships (i.e., trust, satisfaction, constructive communication, mutual problem resolution, etc.), binding couples together, does not function the same way in other relationships. Specifically, it would appear as though for the individuals in the broken up group, whether for example, they trust their partner or not no longer mattered in terms of their commitment to their relationship. The general lack of association between the variables of interest and the two types of commitment suggests that breaking up renders all of these factors inert, such that they no longer compel the individual to maintain the relationship. Due to the fact that pairwise comparisons were not conducted to test for significant differences, these results are most appropriately regarded as descriptive and exploratory. Additionally, by breaking the sample into four groups, the statistical power to detect a medium effect size was greatly reduced, further emphasizing the need to interpret these results with caution.

Toward a Theory of Commitment in Close Romantic Relationships

So how does this study move us forward in our understanding of how the correlates and processes associated with commitment phenomena function to maintain (diminish or enhance) close romantic relationships? Because this study was cross sectional and the data are correlational, it is impossible to determine the direction of the

relationships between predictor and criterion variables. That said, the results of this study suggest that the variables of interest are best thought of as existing and operating in a sort of feedback loop, providing information to relational partners and subsequently, affecting decisions about the selection and performance of behaviors. In terms of level of commitment to the relationship, partners are not only able to garner information from the other partner's behavior, but from their own behavior as well. Both types of information are likely to be quite compelling, albeit for different reasons, and both are equally important to maintaining strong commitments. Whereas attribution processes are most likely to guide the interpretation and evaluation of partner behaviors, self-perception processes are most likely to guide the interpretation and evaluation of one's own behaviors – especially in the case of interdependence dilemmas. In a sense, self-perception processes can be conceived of as a specific type of attribution process, in that self-perceptions lead to attributions regarding one's own behavior. Interpretations and evaluations that might be occurring in response to specific behaviors and events are likely affecting specific perceptions and assessments of the relationship. It is important to recognize, however, that over time, they have the capacity to develop into global perceptions and assessments of the relationship (Karney, McNulty, & Frye, 2001). The valence of these perceptions and assessments no doubt affects the behaviors individuals display in interaction with their partners, emphasizing the cyclic nature of commitment-related processes.

Based on the argument that behaviors displayed in interaction and attribution processes reciprocally influence one another, it is possible to examine the variables

assessed in this study and to speculate as to how they relate to specific versus global perceptions and assessments of commitment. For example, positive affective tone and conflict responses and outcomes are reflective, broadly speaking, of behaviors. As such, they are most likely to be processed episodically, resulting in specific perceptions and assessments of the relationship. In turn, these assessments are likely to impact satisfaction with a relationship, which has the capacity to fluctuate in response to the conditions of the relationship. Cognitive interdependence and trust, on the other hand, are reflective of cognitive orientations, are more enduring and stable, and as a result, are more likely to represent global perceptions and assessments of the relationship. The suggestion here is that specific perceptions and assessments are more susceptible to change than are their global counterparts. Ultimately, all of these variables have the capacity to impact perceptions and assessments of commitment at either the specific or the global level, and importantly, to reciprocally influence one another. Based on this argument, the key to understanding why some commitments are maintained and even enhanced while others deteriorate lies in understanding the ways in which specific and global assessments are integrated.

Understanding the process of integration of specific and global perceptions and assessments may be facilitated by examining the relationship between the predictor variables and the two types of commitment measured in this study. Specifically, while all of the predictor variables were predictive of personal commitment, only cognitive interdependence and trust were predictive of constraint commitment[3]. These results

[3] Though trust was not a significant predictor of either personal or constraint commitment for males.

suggest that many of the factors that lead to the development and maintenance of personal commitment are distinct from those that result in constraints to staying in a relationship. Strong feelings of personal commitment are likely to be cultivated in a relationship that is satisfying, that is characterized as predominately positive, in terms of affective tone and conflict responses and outcomes. Positive relationship experiences are likely to lead to increased feelings of trust for one's partner, as well as to facilitate the creation of a strong couple-oriented identity. All of these factors appear to be instrumental not only to the development of personal commitment, but to its maintenance as well. As demonstrated in this study, the development of personal commitment is a gradual process, with increases being apparent as couples move from dating, to engagement, and finally, to marriage.

Although personal commitment is undoubtedly necessary to sustaining and maintaining quality long-term relationships, the factors associated with personal commitment are likely to fluctuate over the course of an extended relationship. In other words, even in the most satisfying relationships, there are likely to be periods when personal commitment wanes and other processes kick in to facilitate preservation of the relationship. These processes involve adopting a cyclic versus a static view of relationships, and particularly of relationship problems or difficulties, such that relational partners recognize and accept that relationships are organic, and consequently, continuously evolving. Constraint commitment may be one such important process, in that it motivates a long-term orientation toward a relationship, and as such, its functional properties may help individuals to sustain their commitments through periods of

relationship difficulty and dissatisfaction. As demonstrated in this study, constraint commitment is associated with relationship stage, with increases being apparent as couples formalize their commitments and in so doing, increase the barriers to dissolving the relationship. Constraint commitment has the potential to stabilize a relationship when personal commitment is low, and so it seems reasonable that many of the factors predictive of personal commitment would not necessarily be predictive of constraint commitment. The suggestion here is that one of the main purposes that constraint commitment serves is to provide a rationale for preserving a relationship during times of difficulty and dissatisfaction. It is of necessity then that the factors associated with constraint commitment not be as prone to fluctuate over the course of an extended relationship as are many of the factors associated with personal commitment.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the limitations of this study did not become apparent until after the data collection had been completed and the analyses had begun. The investigation was designed to sample equally from the four groups of relationship status, including those in the broken up group. This turned out to be short sighted, however, as it resulted in 16 females and 15 males from relationships that had recently ended, as compared with 36 dating females and males, 28 engaged females and males, and 32 married females and males. In order to have equal representation across groups, the sample should have included approximately 30 females and 30 males from relationships that had recently ended. The under representation of the individuals in the broken up group may have had an impact on some of the analyses, and it certainly reduced statistical power to detect

significant differences in comparing the broken up individuals with the three groups of intact couples. Additionally, it is important to point out that the individuals in the broken up group were reporting retrospectively on a relationship that had recently ended. This is a potential limitation, as the information they were providing may have been qualitatively different from the information provided by the three groups of intact couples. That said, the information provided by the three groups of intact couples can be seen as being somewhat retrospective, as they too were asked to report information about their relationship that required them to consider events that had taken place over the course of their relationship.

Another potential limitation of this study is that because the design was cross sectional, the resulting data are correlational. It is therefore impossible to determine the direction of the relationship between variables. Moreover, it is impossible to determine if the relationships are unidirectional or bidirectional, or for that matter, to infer causation. That said, this investigation provides an important first step in the scientific process, in that it clearly establishes covariation between the variables of interest. The results of this study, and the interpretations that were offered for the findings, however, suggest the need to study commitment processes longitudinally. A longitudinal design would not only provide a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between variables, but would also permit investigation of the interplay between affect, cognitions, and behavior as they relate to and influence commitment processes. The real benefit of a longitudinal design is in the ability to assess change, and in the case of commitment

processes, to potentially disentangle the contributions of specific relationship-relevant affect, behaviors, and cognitions in producing changes in commitment over time.

Some of the findings from this investigation provide suggestions for future research. First, the curvilinear relationship between cognitive interdependence and relationship stage (i.e., dating, engagement, and marriage) contradicts a previous finding by Agnew et al., (1999), who found a reciprocal relationship between cognitive interdependence and commitment, such that as commitment increased, so did cognitive interdependence and vice versa. In this study, commitment increased with relationship stage, but cognitive interdependence did not. In fact, in this study, the engaged couples had the highest scores on cognitive interdependence, followed by dating couples, and then married couples. This finding may represent an anomaly, or as acknowledged earlier, it may be due to a problem with the measurement instrument. Regardless, any confidence in this finding would require replication.

Second, the fact that trust was a significant predictor of both personal and constraint commitment for females but not for males warrants further investigation. The sex differences in trust and commitment were unexpected and difficult to account for, as there has been no evidence to date that would suggest that these differences exist. In fact, researchers who study interpersonal trust in close romantic relationships assume no sex differences, and report no sex differences (e.g., Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Rempel et al., 2001; Rusbult et al., 2001). Future researchers would do well to explore potential sex differences in trust and commitment, and more importantly, to investigate possible reasons for the differences. In addition to the sex differences in trust and commitment,

there were other sex differences in the magnitude of association between some of the independent variables and the two types of commitment (e.g., conflict responses and outcomes), as well as sex differences in which dimensions of the independent variables were predictive of personal and constraint commitment. For example, with regard to positive affective tone, fondness was predictive for females, whereas negativity was predictive for males, and with regard to conflict outcomes, mutual problem resolution was predictive for females, whereas mutual emotional distance was predictive for males. These differences suggest a need to examine further the role of sex in both the development and maintenance of commitment. Finally, although all of the predictor variables in this study were significantly associated with personal commitment, most of them were not significantly associated with constraint commitment. This suggests a need to discover the variables that do predict constraint commitment, and as such, represents an interesting opportunity for future research.

Conclusion

In this investigation of commitment in close romantic relationships, the findings suggest that the correlates and processes associated with relational well being significantly impact commitment outcomes. Thus, to the extent that relational partners display positive affect in interaction, employ positive conflict responses, yielding positive conflict outcomes, develop a couple-oriented identity, trust for the partner, and satisfaction with the relationship, they are also more likely to experience high levels of personal commitment to their relationship. Many of these same variables, however, seem unrelated to constraint commitment. Additionally, to the extent that couples develop a

pluralistic representation of self-in-relationship, coupled with perceptions that their partner can be counted on to be trustworthy, they are also more likely to perceive more barriers to exiting the relationship in the form of constraint commitment. Commitment to a close romantic relationship represents the blending of two people's lives, created through an increasing interdependence of partners' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Although the development of a strong commitment to a relationship does not ensure its survival, the results of this investigation provide important information as to how strong commitments can be sustained and maintained throughout the course of an extended relationship.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT POSTER

ARE YOU MARRIED OR ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED?

WOULD YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE OR FIANCE BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A RESEARCH STUDY?

EARN $25 FOR AN HOUR OF YOUR TIME

Researchers in the Communication Department are conducting a study to examine how relationships develop and change over time and are seeking participants for the investigation.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information about the investigation, please contact:

Michelle Givertz
(520)326-2844
mgivertz@u.arizona.edu

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

COMMUNICATING COMMITMENT IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

This survey contains questions that ask you about yourself and your feelings about the communication in your relationship. Please read all of the instructions and questions carefully and try to answer each to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers. It is only your opinions and feelings that we are interested in. When you have finished the questionnaire, please double check to make sure that you have answered all of the questions. Thank you very much for participating in this study.

CODE # _____ _____ _____

Instructions: the statements below relate to how you and your partner typically deal with problems in your relationship. It will be helpful if you think about some specific times when you have had a conflict or problem come up between you. If you are no longer together, please answer all statements in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person. Please read each of the statements below and rate it according to its corresponding scale. Circle the appropriate number that best describes how likely it is (or was) that the things described below occurred.

When some problem in the relationship arises...

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
1. We **both** avoid discussing the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. We **both** try to discuss the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. **I** try to start a discussion while **he/she** tries to avoid a discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. **He/she** tries to start a discussion while **I** try to avoid a discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

During an argument or discussion of some relationship problem...

5. We **both** blame, accuse, and criticize each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. **I** blame, accuse, and criticize **him/her** while he/she gets defensive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. **He/she** blames, accuses, and criticizes me, while **I** get defensive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. **I** blame, accuse, and criticize him/her, while **he/she** tries to calm things down and do more listening.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. **He/she** blames, accuses, and criticizes me, while **I** try to calm things down and do more listening.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. We **both** express our feelings in words to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. **I** express my feelings in words to him/her, while **he/she** does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. **He/she** expresses his/her feelings in words to me, while **I** do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. **We both** offer possible solutions or compromises.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

During an argument or discussion of some relationship problem...

	Very Unlikely								**Very Likely**
14. **I** offer possible solutions or compromises, while **he/she** does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15. **He/she** offers possible solutions or compromises, while **I** do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. **I** repeatedly complain and demand while **he/she** withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
17. **He/she** repeatedly complains and demands while **I** withdraw, become silent, or refuse to discuss the matter further.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
18. We **both** threaten each other with something negative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
19. **I** threaten something negative while **he/she** gives in or backs down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
20. **He/she** threatens something negative while **I** give in or back down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
21. **I** pressure him/her to do something or stop doing something while **he/she** resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
22. **He/she** pressures me to do something or stop doing something while **I** resist.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
23. **I** mostly talk about feelings while **he/she** mostly talks about ideas or solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24. **He/she** mostly talks about feelings while **I** mostly talk about ideas or solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
25. We **both** call each other names, ridicule each other, swear at each other, or attack each other's character, competence, or appearance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

During an argument of discussion of some relationship problem...

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
26. **I** call him/her names, ridicule him/her swear at him/her, or attack his/her character, competence, or appearance while **he/she** does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
27. **He/she** calls me names, ridicules me, swears at me, or attacks my character, competence, or appearance, while **I** do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

After and argument or discussion of some relationship problem...

28. We **both** feel that we have understood each others' point of view or position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
29. **I** feel that I have understood his/her point of view or position while **he/she** has not understood mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
30. **He/she** feels that he/she has understood my point of view or position, while **I** have not understood his/hers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
31. We **both** act distant and withdrawn from each other after the discussion or fight.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
32. We **both** feel like we are getting along again and things are back to normal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
33. **I** act as if things are back to normal and try to get along again, while **he/she** acts distant and withdrawn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
34. **He/she** acts as if things are back to normal and tries to get along again, while **I** act distant and withdrawn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
35. We **both** feel like the problem has been solved to our mutual liking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
36. **I** feel like the problem has been solved to my liking, while **he/she** feels like it hasn't really been solved to his/her liking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

After an argument or discussion of some relationship problem...

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
37. **He/she** feels like the problem has been solved to his/her liking, while **I** feel like it hasn't really been solved to my liking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
38. We **both** withhold support, warmth, attention, sex, etc. from each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
39. **I** withhold support, warmth, attention, sex, etc. from him/her, while **he/she** does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
40. **He/she** withholds support, warmth, attention, sex, etc. from me, while **I** do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
41. We **both** feel like we each had as much say in how the problem was solved as we wanted to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
42. **I** feel like I had as much say in how the problem was solved as I wanted to, while **he/she** does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
43. **He/she** feels like he/she had as much say in how the problem was solved as he/she wanted to, while **I** do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
44. **I** feel guilty for what I said or did, while **he/she** feels hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
45. **He/she** feels guilty for what he/she said or did, while **I** feel hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
46. **I** pressure him/her to apologize, admit he/she was wrong, or promise not to do it again, while **he/she** resists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
47. **He/she** pressures me to apologize, admit I was wrong, or promise not to do it again, while **I** resist.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
48. We **both** feel hopeless and discouraged about the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

After an argument or discussion about some relationship problem...

	Very Unlikely								Very Likely
49. I feel hopeless and discouraged about the problem, while he/she feels hopeful and encouraged about the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
50. He/she feels hopeless and discouraged about the problem, while I feel hopeful and encouraged about the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
51. We **both** seek support from other people like parents, friends, etc. after the fight or discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
52. I seek support from other people like parents, friends, etc., while he/she does not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
53. He/she seeks support from other people like parents, friends, etc., while I do not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Instructions: please read each of the statements below and rate each one according to its corresponding scale. Circle the appropriate number that best answers the statement for you. If you are no longer involved in the relationship you are reporting on for this study, please answer all statements in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person.

54. How well does your partner meet your needs?	1 Poorly	2	3 Average	4	5 Extremely well
55. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	1 Unsatisfied	2	3 Average	4	5 Extremely satisfied
56. How good is your relationship compared to most?	1 Poor	2	3 Average	4	5 Excellent
57. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?	1 Never	2	3 Average	4	5 Very often
58. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	1 Hardly at all	2	3 Average	4	5 Completely

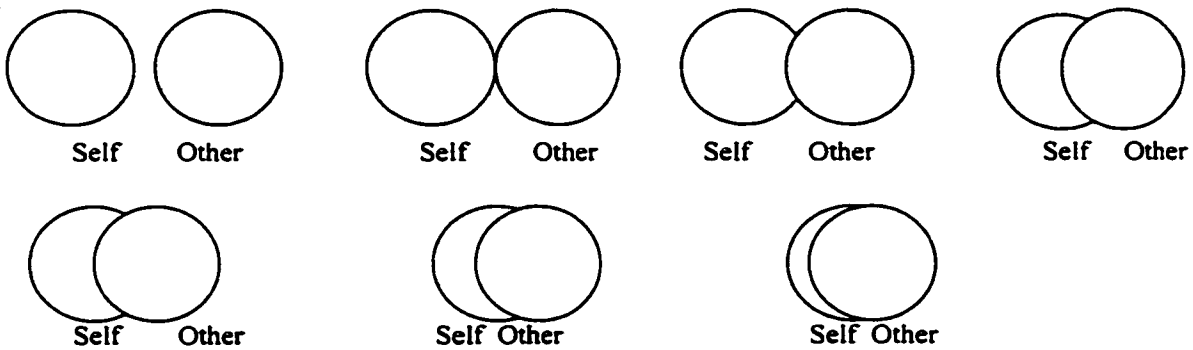
59. How much do you love your partner?	1 Not much	2	3 Average	4	5 Very much
60. How many problems are there in your relationship?	1 Very few	2	3 Average	4	5 Very many

Instructions: please read each of the statements below and rate each one according to its corresponding scale. Circle the appropriate number that best describes how you feel (or felt) about your partner. If you are no longer involved in the relationship you are reporting on for this study, please answer all statements in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person.

	Do Not Agree At All		**Agree Somewhat**		**Agree Completely**
61. My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare.	1	2	3	4	5
62. There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.	1	2	3	4	5
63. My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.	1	2	3	4	5
64. I feel that I can trust my partner completely.	1	2	3	4	5
65. My partner is truly sincere in his/her promises.	1	2	3	4	5
66. I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration.	1	2	3	4	5
67. My partner treats me fairly and justly.	1	2	3	4	5
68. I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: please circle the picture below which best describes your relationship. If you are no longer involved in the relationship you are reporting on for this study, please answer in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person.

69.



Instructions: please read each of the statements below and rate each one according to its corresponding scale. Circle the appropriate number that best describes how you feel (or felt) about your relationship. If you are no longer involved in the relationship you are reporting on for this study, please answer all statements in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person.

	Do Not Agree At All				**Agree Somewhat**				**Agree Completely**
70. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
71. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
72. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
73. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
74. I feel very attached to our relationship- very strongly linked to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
75. I want our relationship to last forever.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
76. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Instructions: please read each of the statements below and rate each one according to its corresponding scale. Circle the appropriate number that best describes how you feel (or felt) about your relationship. If you are no longer involved in the relationship you are reporting on for this study, please answer all statements in terms of the way things were during the time you were in a relationship with that person.

	Strongly Agree						**Strongly Disagree**
77. Except when a spouse dies, marriage should be a once-in-a-lifetime commitment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
78. People should feel free to end a marriage as long as the children are not going to be hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
79. Divorce is wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
80. If a couple works hard at making their marriage work but find themselves incompatible, divorce is the best thing they can do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
81. It is all right for a couple to get a divorce if their marriage is not working out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
82. A marriage is a sacred bond between two people which should not be broken.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
83. It would be very difficult to find a new partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
84. I would have trouble finding a suitable partner if this relationship ended.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
85. If for any reason my relationship ended, I could find another partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
86. I believe there are many people who would be happy with me as their spouse or partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
87. Though it may take a while, I could find another desirable partner if I wanted or needed to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
88. I am not very attractive to the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
89. My friends would not mind if my partner and I broke up (or divorced).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
90. My family would not care either way if this relationship ended.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
91. It would be difficult for my friends to accept it if I ended the relationship with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
92. My friends want to see my relationship with my partner continue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
93. My family really wants this relationship to work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
94. My family would not care if I ended this relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
95. This relationship has cost me very little in terms of physical, tangible resources.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
96. I have not spent much money on my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
97. I would lose money, or feel like money had been wasted, if my partner and I broke up (divorced).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
98. I would lose valuable possessions if I left my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
99. I have put a number of tangible, valuable resources into this relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
100. I have put very little money into this relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

101. Which category best represents the status of your relationship reported on in this study? Please check one of the following:

_____ Dating
_____ Engaged or planning to be married
_____ Married
_____ Broken up from a dating relationship

102. If you are still involved with this person, how long has it been since you first started dating your partner (i.e., how long have you been together)? Please indicate the number of years and/or months (for example, __3__ years, __8__ months).

_____ Year(s) _____ Month(s)

103. If you are married to this person, how long have you been married for? Please indicate the number of years and/or months (for example, __3__ years, __8__ months).

_____ Year(s) _____ Month(s)

104. If you are no longer involved with this person, how long did your relationship with your partner last (i.e., how long were you together)? Please indicate the number of years and/or months (for example, __3__ years, __8__ months).

_____ Year(s) _____ Month(s)

105. If you are no longer involved with this person, how long has it been since the relationship ended (i.e., since you broke up)? Please indicate the number of years and/or months (for example, __3__ years, __8__ months).

_____ Year(s) _____ Month(s)

106. What is your age?

_____ Years

107. What is your sex?

_____ Male _____ Female

108. What is your race or ethnic background?

_____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
_____ Asian or Pacific Islander
_____ Black
_____ Hispanic
_____ White
_____ Other or Unknown

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING THE COMMITMENT GRAPH AND SAMPLE GRAPH

Instructions for Constructing the Commitment Graph

1. We're interested in finding out how relationships develop and change over time.
   - We recognize that there is great variability in how relationships develop, and that there is no such thing as a typical relationship.
   - We also recognize that each relationship is unique in the experiences that come to characterize it over time.

2. First, please tell me how long you have been with your partner?
   - In other words, when did the relationship start?
   - Make note of the date on the graph.

3. Next, we'd like to get a better idea of exactly how your relationship developed since you first got together.
   - We'd like you to picture your relationship with your partner on this graph.
   - Show interviewee blank graph.

4. The bottom of the graph is divided into months or years, depending on the length of your relationship, that represent each month or year of your relationship from when it started until the present.

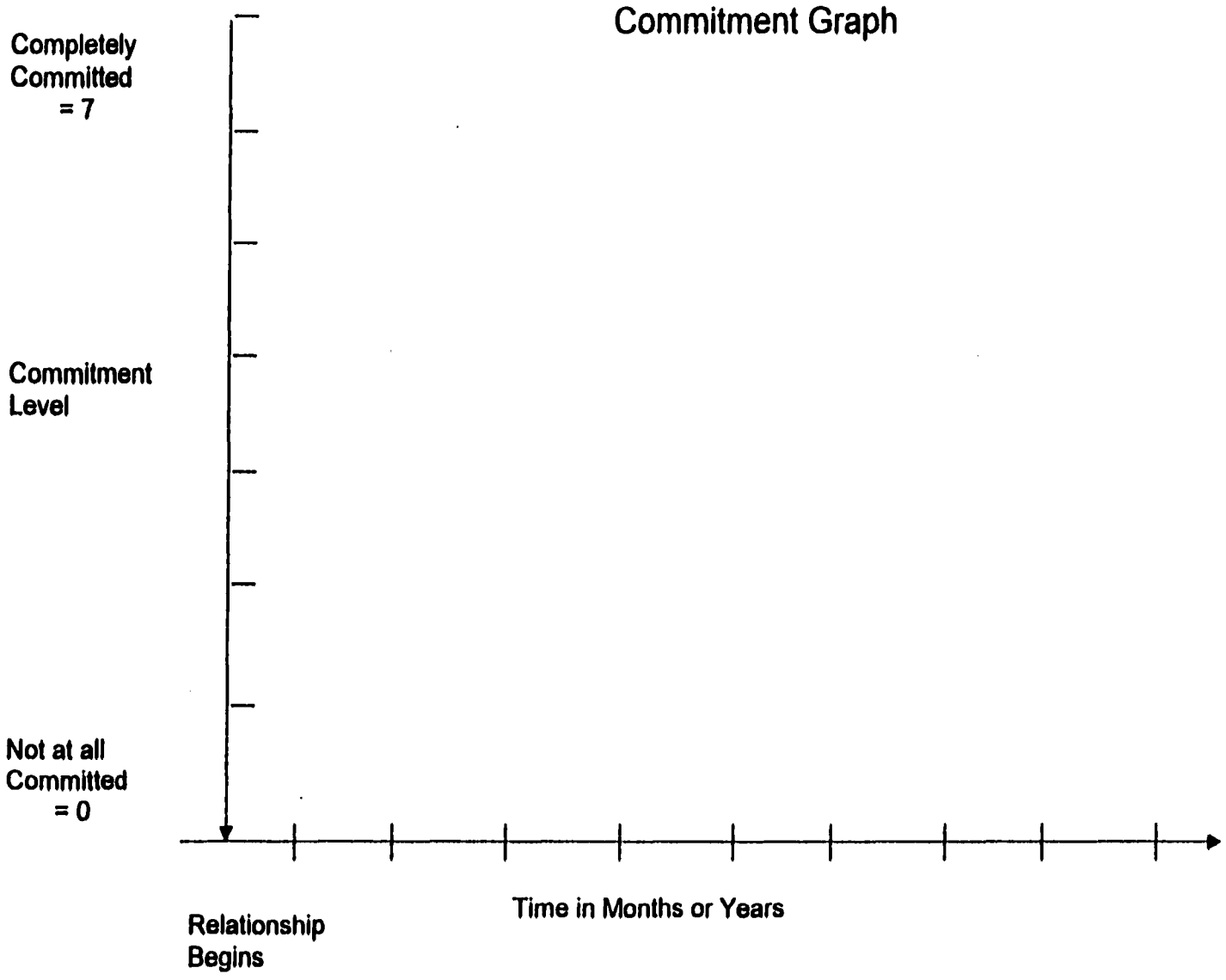
5. The side of the graph represents your commitment level, with 0 reflecting not at all committed and 7 reflecting completely committed.

6. With regard to your relationship, there must have been times when you thought, with differing degrees of certainty, that you were indeed committed to your partner.
   - These thoughts were likely based on both your own ideas about commitment and what you believed your partner's ideas were about being in a committed relationship.

7. In order to help you remember what was happening during the relationship, it might help if you mark certain months, holidays, special events, crisis periods, and so on along the bottom of the graph.

8. Would you now please graph how your commitment level to your relationship with your partner changed over the time in which you have known him/her.
   - Were the changes gradual, or were there things that caused your commitment level to change suddenly?

9. Now, take a minute or two to look over what you have drawn.
   - If you see changes that should be made in order to make the graph more accurate, please go ahead and make them now.


Commitment Graph
Completely Committed = 7
Commitment Level
Not at all Committed = 0
Relationship Begins
Time in Months or Years

APPENDIX D

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Human Subjects Committee

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ARIZONA.
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

1622 E. Mabel Street
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Tucson, AZ 85724-5137
(520) 626-6721

24 April 2001

Michelle Givertz, Doctoral Candidate
Advisor: Chris Segrin, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
Communication Building, Room 309
PO BOX 210025

RE: COMMUNICATING COMMITMENT IN ROMANTIC AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Dear Ms. Givertz:

We received documents concerning your above cited project. Regulations published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [45 CFR Part 46.101(b) (2)] exempt this type of research from review by our Institutional Review Board.

Thank you for informing us of your work. If you have any questions concerning the above, please contact this office.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Dahl, R.N., Ph.D.
Director
Human Subjects Protection Program

RD/js
cc: Departmental/College Review Committee

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