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AN EXAMINATION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT AND SATISFACTION ACROSS YEARS MARRIED

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jason S. Gunter
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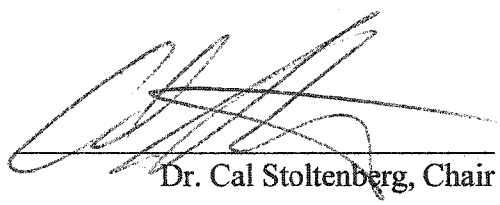
AN EXAMINATION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT AND SATISFACTION ACROSS YEARS MARRIED

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY



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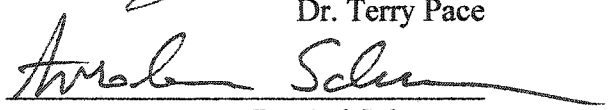

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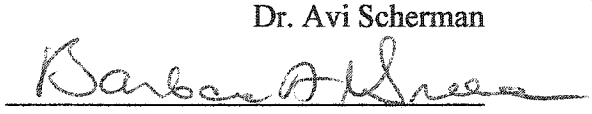

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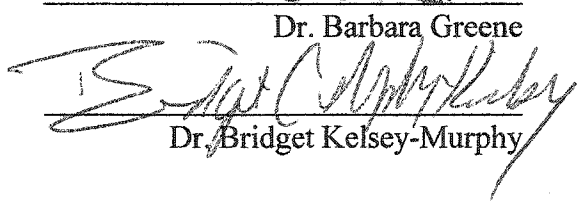

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Abstract

This study built upon Adams and Jones' (1997) conceptualization of martial commitment by cross-sectionally investigating differences within and among the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction across years married. Commitment has proven to be a meaningful construct in the study of marriage. Adams and Jones found that the various models of commitment could each be classified based on the extent to which they emphasize three distinct dimensions of commitment: attraction, morality, and constraint, respectively labeled Commitment to Spouse (CS), Commitment to Marriage (CM), and Feelings of Entrapment (FE). Previous research had not taken into account the dynamic properties of these dimensions throughout the course of marriage. This study proposed to provide greater insight into the experience of marital commitment and satisfaction in relation to years married.

The study used a descriptive correlational design. Married individuals completed the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS), and a demographics questionnaire. Participants were recruited from churches and from university classes. This sample of 123 individuals was currently in their first marriage and married less than 31 years. Participants were primarily middle class Caucasians.

The hypothesized trends and interactions did not emerge. CM was the only variable that exhibited a significant trend across years married, suggesting less stability than assumed. These unexpected findings were likely influenced by the elevated commitment and satisfaction scores encountered in this sample. FE scores were particularly elevated, highlighting the ability of constraining forces to co-exist with, and

possibly strengthen, positive relationship forces. Significant mean differences in commitment and satisfaction were found according to education level, gender, and the presence of children. Relationship stage variables seemed to better account for changes in commitment than the progression of years married. However, trends and interactions may only emerge in longitudinal studies.

This study affirmed the conceptual uniqueness of the dimensions of commitment and illustrated how commitment is experienced in response to changes in marriage. Future research on the DCI should further explore the possible interactions between the dimensions, examining their respective causes and consequences.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The significance of marriage in this country cannot be ignored. A majority of adults in the United States choose to enter into this institution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), which is associated with greater life satisfaction (Stack & Eschleman, 1998) and general societal well being (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Social science has recognized the importance of understanding marriage as evidenced by the vast number of studies conducted on this topic (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). However, martial researchers have primarily chosen to focus their attention on satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). While satisfaction and stability are certainly significant outcomes in marriage, other variables deserve increased consideration. One variable particularly worthy of greater attention is commitment.

Commitment has been defined as an individual's intention to persist in marriage regardless of fluctuations in satisfaction (Jones, Adams, Monroe, & Berry, 1995). Commitment involves a long-term orientation, feelings of attachment, and the ability to adapt (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This construct has proven to be meaningful in the study of marriage, providing greater insight into the process of how romantic relationships are formed, sustained, and/or terminated (Adams, 1997; Adams & Jones, 1997). Some researchers have argued that commitment is a primary motive in enduring relationships, highlighting this variable's strength as a single indicator of overall couple functioning (Rusbult et al., 1998; Van Lange et al., 1997) and as a driving force behind relationship enhancing behavior (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999). Le and Agnew (2003) even suggested that "commitment may be the most important construct in investigating relational processes" (p. 52). The concept of

commitment also appears to be meaningful to couples. Robinson and Blanton (1993) found that spouses commonly ascribe notable importance to commitment in enabling them to successfully persist in marriage.

Evidence suggests that commitment provides substantially more information concerning the process of marriage than satisfaction. While a significant relationship has consistently been found between these two variables (Acker & Davis, 1992), satisfaction is not the only ingredient influencing a spouse's intention to persist in a marriage (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997). Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) demonstrated that satisfaction had no effect on relationship duration above and beyond that which was accounted for by commitment. Commitment also appears to have greater stability than satisfaction (Jones et al., 1995). Thus, the concept of commitment provides some answers as to why people persevere in marriage despite fluctuations in satisfaction.

However, commitment is believed to be a dynamic construct that develops throughout a relationship, changing in quality as intimacy waxes and wanes (Adams, 1997). This change is not unitary in nature. Rather, commitment is believed to be composed of different dimensions/components (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992). These various components seem to interact with each other over time, increasing or decreasing in saliency as marriages evolve (Stanley & Markman). Research on commitment has not adequately taken into account these dynamic properties. More information is needed concerning what commitment looks like at different stages of marriage.

Problem Statement

The problem this study will address is to describe the various dimensions of commitment and how they differ over the course of marriage in relation to each other as well as to satisfaction. This will provide greater understanding as to how commitment is experienced and how it impacts relationships.

Rationale for the Study

Commitment is a consequential component of marriage as demonstrated by the behaviors and qualities with which it is related. For example, high levels of commitment are associated with greater expressions of love (Clements & Swensen, 2000), fewer marital problems (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985), and greater use of positive conflict tactics (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggested that commitment guides interpersonal reactions and forges steady tendencies to behave in relationship enhancing ways. Commitment levels are also valuable predictors of whether or not an individual will remain in a relationship (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001-02; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998). In fact, commitment is often reported to be a primary reason for marital stability (Lauer & Lauer, 1987). This does not mean that uncommitted individuals invariably terminate their relationships. However, individuals who do leave their marriages have lower levels of commitment earlier in their relationships (Impett et al.). Some of these characteristics are likely the product of commitment whereas others serve to strengthen commitment. While direct causal relationships have not been determined, the relationship between these variables is likely reciprocal.

Despite a growing literature base, studies on interpersonal commitment appear to be expanding haphazardly (Adams, 1997). Researchers rarely agree on how to define the

features and functions of commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997). This is particularly evident in the measures used to assess commitment level. This review found at least 14 different ways in which researchers have attempted to measure commitment, with many designed to fit the needs of the particular study. Adams found that the majority of empirical studies on commitment only utilized one-item measures. While this approach may have some utility, single items are unable to capture conceptual depth (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In addition, few studies provide data supporting the reliability or the validity of these measures (Adams). This assortment of approaches hinders the development of a coherent theory of commitment, preventing studies from building upon each other. Researchers have recognized the importance of commitment but few are seeking to build an interconnected knowledge base.

Four conceptualizations of commitment have been offered in an attempt to remedy this problem. One of the earliest theories on commitment was Rusbult's (1983) investment model. According to Rusbult, commitment to a relationship is dependent upon three interconnected factors (Cox et al., 1997). These factors work together in that a person's commitment to persist in a relationship should increase when one is satisfied with one's partner, there are no adequate alternatives, and substantial investments have been made into the relationship (Rusbult). While this model has been effective in measuring commitment, others have claimed that it only captures one component of commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992).

In response, Stanley and Markman (1992) theorized that commitment consists of two distinct components – personal dedication and constraint. Their model recognized that unitary measures were not adequately describing the process of commitment.

However, other models identified more than two components and seemed to capture the dynamic of commitment more effectively. In particular, Johnson et al. (1999) offered three types of commitment that are characterized as "distinguishable experiences." They claimed that attention should be on personal, moral, and structural commitment if this construct is going to be fully understood. Johnson et al. rightly identified that global commitment is not capturing all that is involved in commitment. However, the empirical support for their conceptualization was inadequate.

In an attempt to find commonalties among the different approaches for measuring commitment, Adams (1997) empirically compared the various theoretical models of commitment and found that they could each be classified based on the extent to which they emphasize three distinct dimensions of commitment: attraction, morality, and constraint. Adams and Jones (1997) claimed that these three dimensions best capture the general features of interpersonal commitment and labeled them Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment. Commitment to Spouse is described as commitment to one's spouse based on devotion and satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage involves commitment due to one's belief that marriage is sacred as well as one's sense of obligation to honor the marriage vows. Feelings of Entrapment entail wanting to avoid financial hardship or social disapproval that might result from leaving a marriage. This model is similar to the one described by Johnson et al. (1999). However, Adams and Jones provide better empirical support for each dimension and for their overall conceptualization.

Adams and Jones (1997) developed and substantiated a measure of commitment, the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), using a sample of 1417 married

individuals and 370 unmarried persons across six separate studies. Their results strongly supported the notion that these three dimensions capture, to varying degrees, the essential components of interpersonal commitment described in most theoretical writings. In addition, these dimensions provide valuable insight into the processes that may promote relationship stability in various ways at different stages in a relationship. However, their research only presented a snapshot of commitment and did not take into account the dynamic properties. Recognizing this limitation, Adams and Jones recommended that future research investigate the dynamic interaction of Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment throughout the course of marriage. The importance of each of these dimensions fluctuates over the course of a lifetime as couples encounter the inevitable changes that occur within relationships, changing in character as spouses develop greater intimacy or distance (Adams, 1997).

Research Questions

How do the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction differ in relation to how long couples have been married? Are there significant differences within and among the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction across years married? What are the trends that emerge for each variable throughout a marriage?

By investigating these questions, I hope to gain greater insight into the dynamic interplay of the dimensions of commitment throughout marital relationships. In addition, discovering differences among these dimensions across time will provide support for the idea that each dimension is distinct. Future studies can then explore the specific causes and consequences of each dimension.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are offered concerning how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction will differ in relation to how long a couple has been married. First, Commitment to Spouse is expected to follow a trend somewhat similar to marital satisfaction (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993) in that there will be an initially accelerated decline that becomes more gradual the longer a couple is married. This decline, however, will not be as pronounced as the decline in marital satisfaction due to commitment having more stability than satisfaction. Next, Commitment to Marriage is expected to maintain a more stable course than the other two dimensions or satisfaction. There will not be any significant increases or decreases in Commitment to Marriage over time. This is assumed due to this variable having a greater foundation in a sense of morality as opposed to marital quality (Adams & Jones, 1997). Third, Feelings of Entrapment is expected to increase over time and will have an inverse relationship with Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction (Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2000; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). As Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction deteriorate, an individual's awareness of barriers expands and Feelings of Entrapment will increase. Finally, following the pattern mentioned above, marital satisfaction will initially be at a high level, decrease significantly for the first decade, and then gradually decline throughout the remainder of a marriage, reaching lower levels than any of dimensions of commitment.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The institution of marriage is of great importance in this country. A majority of the North American population chooses to enter into a marital relationship at some point in their lives (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Those who are married tend to find greater enjoyment in life than those who are not married (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). The institution of marriage also contributes to societal well being (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Marriage has a profound impact on both an individual and a national level. The significance of marriage has not been ignored by researchers. A tremendous number of studies have been published on numerous topics associated with marriage (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Over 100 longitudinal studies on this subject were published as of 1995 (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), highlighting the respect researchers have for the process of marriage. These studies have mainly focused on the topics of satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury). While satisfaction and stability are certainly significant components of marriage, other variables deserve careful consideration regarding their contribution to relationships. One variable in particular that is worthy of greater attention is commitment.

Commitment

Theoretical writings and research concerning commitment began to emerge approximately 40 years ago. Becker (1960) was one of the first to specify some of the characteristics of commitment. He encouraged others to analyze the mechanisms that are presumed to comprise commitment. A few researchers answered this call by exploring the role of commitment in romantic relationships. Levinger (1965) responded by describing marital cohesiveness as the function of attractions, barriers, and alternatives.

Johnson (1973) theorized that commitment is important in stabilizing romantic relationships and consists of personal and behavioral components. From these early studies, the work on commitment began to evolve, with much of the emphasis on reasons why individuals persist in or terminate relationships (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002).

Commitment has proven to be a meaningful component in the study of marital relationships, providing greater insight into the process of how romantic relationships are formed, sustained, and/or terminated (Adams, 1997; Adams & Jones, 1997). Many researchers have argued that commitment is a primary motive in enduring relationships (Van Lange et. al, 1997), highlighting the strength of this variable as a single indicator of overall couple functioning (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Le and Agnew (2003) suggested that "commitment may be the most important construct in investigating relational processes" (p. 52). In examining both dating and marital relationships, Drigotas, Rusbult, and Verette (1999) found that commitment and the perception of mutual commitment were associated with both healthy relationship adjustment and couple well being. They described commitment as the driving force behind relationship enhancing behavior, suggesting that the ideal relationship pattern involves both partners making themselves fully and equally committed to one another. The concept of commitment also appears to be purposefully meaningful to couples. Robinson and Blanton (1993) found that couples commonly ascribe notable importance to commitment in enabling them to successfully persist in marriage.

Defining Commitment

Commitment has been defined in both theoretical and practical ways with various authors focusing differentially on outcomes, processes, and related qualities. One word

that is commonly used when defining commitment is intention. Focusing on a general definition, Adams and Jones (1997) described commitment as an individual's "intention to maintain indefinitely a particular course of action" (p. 1193). Applying this to marriage, commitment can be viewed as the intent to persevere (Rusbult et al., 1998) and remain in a relationship in spite of fluctuations in satisfaction (Jones, Adams, Monroe, & Berry, 1995). Intent, as used in these definitions, has a strong cognitive element and decisional quality to it. Thus, commitment can be viewed as a decision over which individuals have substantial control (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg (1986) utilized this idea of control to describe the interconnectedness between decision and commitment. In the short term, an individual decides if he or she loves a specific partner. In the long term, the individual chooses whether or not to commit to maintain that relationship. Commitment can also become a reciprocal process that serves to strengthen itself. When a person behaves in ways so as to invest in the marital relationship, the intention to remain in that relationship is usually strengthened. In turn, the strengthening of the relationship often results in increased behaviors that enhance the marriage (Adams & Jones, 1997). Thus, there is a stabilizing quality to commitment.

Commitment has also been described as an outlook of permanence. When couples who had been married for an average of forty years were asked about significant factors contributing to their enduring relationships, commitment was frequently identified (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Speaking about their commitment, these couples cited their expectation that they would persist in their marriage and not consider divorce as an option. Their commitment represents a long-term orientation, which is believed to

include feelings of attachment and a desire stay together for better or worse (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). In addition, there is an implied recognition that each spouse "needs" the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). Commitment can thus be seen as the intention to permanently preserve a marriage. These definitions and descriptions have a significant cognitive component. Yet, other aspects must be considered in developing a holistic view of commitment.

The above definitions seem to suggest that commitment propels an individual toward a greater desire for the relationship. This is just a portion of the picture. Commitment also involves restraining forces that both inhibit individuals from exiting a relationship and confine spouses to one another (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). These restraining forces are not necessarily negative, particularly when in harmony with the propelling forces. In fact, the strength of these restraining forces is of little consequence when a couple is experiencing high attraction to one another (Levinger, 1965). However, when attractions are low, barriers such as children and social pressure may be all that hold a marriage together.

Regardless of how these two forces are manifested in a relationship, there is significant risk involved in commitment. The greater the discrepancies between each spouse's commitment level, the greater the risk for disappointment and hurt (Drigotas et al., 1999), especially for the more committed spouse. Stated another way, the dependency involved in commitment entails risk. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggested that commitment level summarizes the characteristics of dependency in a marriage. Therefore, while the dependency inherent in commitment has the potential for favorable outcomes, it also involves significant risk.

From a layman's perspective, commitment is thought to be made up of a variety of components. Fehr (1988) found that university students believed characteristics like loyalty, responsibility, integrity, and faithfulness were most central to commitment. Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, and Reeder (1998) claimed that commitment was best illustrated through a 5-factor solution of supportiveness, expressions of love, fidelity, expressions of commitment, and consideration and devotion. The components that are accentuated in each of these studies portray commitment to be a type of affectionate allegiance.

Many of these concepts discussed above have expanded the definition of commitment to include an affective dimension. Indeed, Adams (1997) described commitment as a "cognitive-affective process." Supporting this idea, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) stated that "although the process of committing to a relationship, or remaining committed to it, clearly has a cognitive dimension, it is not purely cognitive" (p. 421).

These descriptions of commitment suggest a significant potential for this concept to be meaningful in providing insight into marital relationships. However, these basic definitions of commitment appear to be as far as most researchers go in agreeing with one another about what is involved in commitment. Views concerning the components and processes of commitment are quite diverse.

Measuring Commitment

A great deal of discrepancy exists in how researchers view commitment, particularly in the way that it has been measured. Researchers do not seem to agree about the components of commitment or how it functions to create stability in romantic

relationships (Adams & Jones, 1997). Even with increased interest in understanding interpersonal commitment and a growing literature base, studies on commitment appear to be expanding in a haphazard fashion (Adams, 1997). The assortment of approaches hinders the development of a coherent theory of commitment, preventing studies from building upon each other. This lack of consistency is common in the study of marriage due to researchers rarely agreeing on how to measure relationship outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The variation in the type and quality of measures used to assess commitment provides evidence for this lack of coherence among researchers. A majority of the empirical studies on commitment only utilize one-item measures, asking individuals to rate how committed they are to their relationship (Adams, 1997). While this approach may have some utility, single items are unable to capture conceptual depth (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In addition, most empirical work on commitment involves one time assessments, ignoring the fact that commitment is a multidimensional and dynamic construct (Kurdek, 2000). Thus, with studies using different single-item measures to assess this complex construct at only one point in a marital relationship, the ability to compare and link findings is significantly hindered (Adams).

Brief measures to assess commitment are just one of the issues plaguing the research. Another limitation has been the psychometric quality of these measures (Adams, 1997). Researchers commonly design instruments and develop assessments out of a necessity to conform to the unique requirements or assumptions of their specific studies (Jones et al., 1995). This review alone found at least 14 different ways in which researchers have attempted to measure commitment. In examining the various measures,

few provide data supporting their reliability and even fewer provide evidence to support validity (Adams). Adams goes on to point out three significant problems that this creates. First, there is a lack of certainty regarding what is being assessed with these measures. Second, directly comparing research on commitment is questionable. Finally, studies examining the comparative utility of differing models of commitment are missing from the literature. Research on commitment has been growing in width but not in depth. Researchers recognize the importance of commitment but few are seeking to build an interconnected knowledge base. With these limitations in mind, what characteristics and qualities are believed to be related to commitment?

Correlates of Commitment

As noted earlier, commitment has both cognitive and affective components. Due to the strong cognitive component, some aspects of commitment can be described as premeditated. This being the case, it is possible to separate commitment from both its determinants and outcomes (Adams & Jones, 1997). Specifically, what behaviors are associated with being committed to a romantic relationship? While direct causal relationships have not been determined, some behaviors are seen as strengthening commitment whereas others are seen as the product of increased commitment, though the relationship between these variables is likely reciprocal.

Commitment appears to be involved in fortifying romantic interconnectedness in numerous ways. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) proposed that commitment guides interpersonal reactions and forges steady tendencies to behave in relationship enhancing ways. When couples report high levels of commitment, they indicate that they express more "love" to their spouses and report greater levels of marital adjustment (Clements &

Swensen, 2000). Looking specifically at how couples communicate their commitment to one another, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) found that behaviors labeled as "providing affection" (e.g., saying, "I love you", giving gifts, and physical affection) were the most frequently reported indicators of commitment. Behaviors that create a positive relationship atmosphere, such as "speaking well of one's partner to others", "accepting differences", and "being honest", were seen as indirect ways of communicating commitment.

The high level of commitment described here can be costly to the individuals involved (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Indeed, the magnitude of commitment seems to be pivotal in prompting individuals to sacrifice their immediate self-interest for the sake of the relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999). Sacrifice becomes one concrete way in which commitment is expressed. However, as important as sacrifice may be to relationship success, the effects of commitment are even greater on variables such as relationship adjustment and stability (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Level of commitment is also strongly related to relationship stability, and marital stability has received a significant amount of attention in the literature. From a self-report standpoint, one of the key reasons given for marital stability regardless of an individual's happiness with marriage is commitment to one's spouse and to the institution of marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1987). Research supports this assertion. Measuring commitment during dating relationships and following couples up to fifteen years later, Bui, Paplau, & Hill (1996) found that commitment accounted for a significant amount of variance in relationship duration. In comparison to variables such as relationship rewards, costs, satisfaction, investments, and alternatives, commitment has proven to be a superior

predictor of stay/leave behaviors (Rusbult, 1983). Commitment even appears to be a stronger predictor of breakup status than dyadic adjustment, with high levels of commitment encouraging relationship perseverance (Rusbult et al., 1998). Commitment to marriage influences long-term relationship stability for both husbands and wives. However, their combined commitment is an even greater predictor than their individual levels (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001-02). These results do not indicate that individuals with low levels of commitment invariably terminate their relationships. However, individuals who do leave their marriages have lower levels of commitment earlier in the relationship (Impett et al.). The amount of variance in relationship stability accounted for by commitment commonly ranges from 10-20% (Impett et al., Bui et al.), which is not incredibly strong. Yet, commitment demonstrates greater utility than many other variables used to predict relationship stability.

On the other side of this reciprocal relationship, certain behaviors appear to strengthen commitment. For example, when spouses express high levels of care for one another and utilize positive conflict tactics, their commitment to remain in the marriage increases (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Other factors such as relationship length and church attendance demonstrate a positive relationship to commitment, whereas the number of times a person has been married is inversely related (Jones et al., 1995).

Relationship commitment is also associated with many personal qualities and attitudes. Just as high levels of commitment are correlated with positive relationship characteristics, low levels are associated with relationship difficulties. For example, the lower the level of personal commitment for both husbands and wives, the greater the negativity within the relationship (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). Individuals with

lower levels of commitment also report that they experience more problems in marriage (Clements & Swensen, 2000). Interestingly, when one's commitment is primarily to the spouse as a person, individuals report fewer problems than those whose commitment is primarily to being married (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985). Thus, marriage becomes a more problematic endeavor when commitment is low.

Commitment is significantly related to factors that support long-term orientation, a concept that is affiliated with relationship stability. Highly committed individuals feel a greater sense of connection to their spouse and hold a longer-term outlook concerning their relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). As an individual's commitment to his or her spouse grows over time, considerably fewer marriage problems are encountered and expressions of love increase between the couple (Swenson & Trahaug, 1985), creating an environment more conducive to persistence. The expansion of commitment increases the attractiveness of investing in the relationship. In fact, commitment to one's spouse was the most potent and consistent predictor of relationship quality in older couples' marriages (Clements & Swensen, 2000).

Religiosity is another factor related to commitment levels. As religious devoutness increases in both husbands and wives, so too does their commitment to marriage (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). A positive correlation also exists between the strength of religious beliefs and perceived barriers to ending a relationship, suggesting an association between strong religious convictions and higher levels of commitment (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Marital commitment has been found to be positively related to church attendance and relationship length, both of which were unrelated to satisfaction (Jones et al., 1995). This connection presumably exists because the ideas

inherent within many religious belief systems promote the idea of commitment and strongly discourage divorce.

Various other qualities such as locus of control, attachment, and gender demonstrate a connection with commitment. The belief that fate controls one's marriage is directly and negatively related to marital commitment (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). The helplessness involved in attributing outcomes to fate seems to exclude the idea of a purposeful decision. An individual's level of marital commitment is also predicted by attachment style. Those who are securely or anxiously attached report stronger commitment to their current partner than those with an avoidant style (Adams, 1997). Finally, beliefs about gender directly impact commitment. Husbands and wives with less-conventional notions about gender roles indicate lower levels of commitment (Scanzoni & Arnett). On the other hand, when both spouses perceive that they are each equally contributing to and participating in the marriage, commitment is strengthened (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985).

Gender differences are also manifested within the process of commitment, particularly for females. Women have been found to be more personally committed to marriage than men (Le & Agnew, 2003; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Females may also have more variance in their commitment levels. Kurdek (2000) found that wives' commitment declined linearly over a five-year period while husbands maintained a consistent level. When it comes to seeking help for a distressed relationship, the pretherapy commitment level of the wife accounts for significant changes in marital satisfaction that result from therapy (Beach & Broderick, 1983). A similar relationship was not found for husbands. One variable that appears to strengthen a husband's

commitment is children. The presence and number of children is a more significant factor for preventing the termination of a marriage for husbands compared to wives (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo). Despite these differences, each gender's commitment to maintaining a marriage is equally predictive of relationship stability (Impett et al., 2001-2002).

Commitment and Satisfaction

In addition to these various qualities listed above, commitment demonstrates a strong and consistent relationship with a construct that receives a great deal of attention in marital research - satisfaction. The relationship between these two appears to be strong and consistent. For example, of the three components in Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, commitment was the variable most consistently associated with satisfaction for both genders (Acker & Davis, 1992). Much of the evidence suggests that increases in satisfaction lead to subsequent increases in commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Sabetelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). However, there is evidence that this relationship is bi-directional. Swensen and Trahaug (1985) found that as personal commitment between a couple increases, their relationship becomes more satisfying. Also, commitment levels prior to the start of therapy have been shown to account for variance in marital satisfaction that is not explained by communication skills (Beach & Broderick, 1983). Thus, while some studies suggest causal directionality from satisfaction to commitment, other indications propose interdependence between these two variables. Determining the extent of this relationship is dependent on how these variables are measured.

Due to the strong relationship between satisfaction and commitment, one may wonder if these variables are truly different. Jones et al. (1995) suggested that the

distinction between satisfaction and commitment might not be as marked as some believe, particularly in satisfied relationships. "It is possible that for such spouses, both satisfaction and commitment may blend into an overall experience of marital well being that cannot be partitioned psychometrically" (p. 931). If the overlap is so great, does commitment truly provide researchers with unique information for understanding marital relationships?

The answer is an emphatic "Yes!" Overwhelming evidence points to the fact that commitment is distinct from relationship satisfaction (Le & Agnew, 2003; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Specifically, commitment is a better predictor of stay/leave behavior in couples. Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) found that commitment completely mediated the influence of satisfaction on relationship duration for both men and women. Similarly, Jones et al. (1995) found commitment, but not satisfaction, to be positively related to relationship length and negatively related to the number of times married. Understanding why spouses feel satisfied with their marriages is not sufficient to explain how and why relationships persist through better or worse (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Even in the most fulfilling relationships, satisfaction plummets to seriously low levels, highlighting the fact that it cannot be the most important variable influencing an individual's commitment to persist (Cox et al., 1997). Indeed, commitment shows greater stability over time in comparison to satisfaction. This is why Jones et al. (1995) defined commitment as a spouse's intention to remain married regardless of fluctuation in satisfaction. Thus, commitment is a relatively stable variable that provides researchers with vital insight into what makes marriages last.

Conceptualizing Commitment

The value of commitment in the study of marriage is clear. The evidence presented above adequately justifies the use of commitment for this current study. The focus of this paper now turns to defining how to best measure this construct. Researchers who utilize commitment in studies on marriage often do so without providing a theoretical foundation for this variable. Very few researchers have put a concentrated effort into defining the characteristics of commitment. Four of the most prominent conceptualizations of commitment are presented here.

Stanley and Markman (1992) believed that commitment consists of two different components. The first component is called personal dedication. This refers to a spouse's desire to preserve or enrich the quality of the marriage for the shared benefit of the couple. Dedication rises above the level of only maintaining the relationship to focus on improvement, sacrifice, personal investment, and the betterment of one's partner. Dedication is believed to reflect the following variables: relationship agenda, primacy of relationship, couple identity, satisfaction with sacrifice, alternative monitoring, and meta-commitment. The second component is called constraint commitment. This refers to forces that bind a couple together despite their current level of dedication to each other. Variables believed to compose constraint include structural investments, social pressure, unattractiveness of alternatives, availability of partners, and morality of divorce. Stanley and Markman asserted that when spouses describe their level of commitment to their marriage, they are actually referring to personal dedication as opposed to constraint commitment. By identifying this key distinction and developing a measure that takes both components into account, these researchers provided a more comprehensive portrait of

commitment within marriage. Though separated by definition, these two components are intimately intertwined in the process of commitment. Their relationship is believed to be somewhat unidirectional - "Today's dedication is tomorrow's constraint" (p. 597). However, in testing their model, they discovered that some of their subscales did not receive sufficient validation. In addition, they identified a possible third component that was not accounted for in their model. While Stanley and Markman's conceptualization moves us beyond the idea that commitment is a unitary phenomenon, other researchers have described this process more effectively.

Johnson et al. (1999) suggested that there are three distinct types of commitment, which are not adequately captured in the commonly used measures of global commitment. They asserted that researchers need to stop conceptualizing commitment as a single phenomenon. Instead, the attention should be on personal, moral, and structural commitment if this construct is going to be fully understood. Personal commitment is seen in a person's desire to maintain a relationship. Personal commitment is believed to be influenced by attraction to one's partner, attraction to the relationship, and couple identity. Moral commitment, simply put, speaks to feeling morally responsible to remain in a relationship. An individual's general consistency values and a sense of moral obligation to one's partner affect this type. Structural commitment refers to feeling compelled to continue in a marriage regardless of the level of the previous two types of commitment. Structural commitment appears somewhat hidden when either personal or moral commitment is high. However, when the others are low, the components that make up structural commitment increase in prominence and create a sense of entrapment. These components include alternatives, social pressure, termination procedures, and

unrecoverable investments. In comparing these three types, the first two are internal experiences resulting from a person's attitude and values. The third type involves external constraints that make it costly to terminate the relationship. Due to this tripartite nature of commitment, researchers are urged to understand how each type develops and how these three are experienced based on the various possible combinations.

Johnson et al. (1999) provided some support for their model. First of all, while significant correlations exist between these three proposed types of commitment, the correlations are small enough to conclude that personal, moral, and structural commitment are distinct from each other. Next, of the three types, their conceptualization of personal commitment received the most support. Johnson et al. found that personal commitment could be described as a function of love, martial satisfaction, and couple identity. In addition, personal commitment was the only type inversely related to negative marital interaction and the primary type associated with life satisfaction. In fact, global commitment, as measured in most studies, is primarily a function of personal commitment. Finally, a modest amount of support was found for moral commitment. Religiosity was associated with moral commitment and each of its proposed components.

Johnson et al. (1999) rightly identified that global commitment does not capture all that is involved in commitment. By describing the various types, they have recognized other factors that might be involved in the process of commitment, particularly when satisfaction is low. However, they provided inadequate support for their conceptualizations and for the measurement of moral and structural support. They recognized this shortcoming, stating that single-item questions were not sufficient to

reasonably distinguish among the three types of commitment experience. Their model enhances our understanding of commitment but their design was somewhat flawed.

In examining the various conceptualizations and definitions of commitment, it is difficult to find a model that has been more thoroughly examined than Caryl Rusbult's (1983) Investment Model. According to Rusbult, commitment to a relationship is dependent upon three interconnected factors that can enhance commitment and motivate persistence (Cox et al., 1997). The first variable is satisfaction, which has a positive relationship with commitment. This model reasons that greater satisfaction with a relationship will be experienced as the relationship provides high rewards and low costs and surpasses an individual's expectations. The second variable involves alternatives. Commitment is enhanced when there are poor or unappealing alternatives compared to the current relationship. The third variable is investment. Commitment is believed to increase when a person invests numerous resources into a relationship. Investing in a relationship is believed to magnify the cost involved in ending a relationship, which can be a powerful incentive to persist (Rusbult et al., 1998).

These three factors work together in that a person's commitment to persist in a relationship should increase when one is satisfied with one's partner, there are no adequate alternatives, and substantial investments have been made into the relationship (Rusbult, 1983). Each of these three variables plays an important role. If commitment were solely a function of satisfaction and alternatives, encountering an attractive alternative when satisfaction is low would result in commitment disappearing and the termination of the current relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). This does not account for the relationships that undergo unsatisfying periods but continue to survive. An

individual can be discontented with a relationship yet continue to be committed to it. Conversely, an individual may abandon a satisfying relationship due to available and enticing alternatives paired with few investments in the current involvement (Rusbult).

Extensive research has been conducted on Rusbult's (1983) model, producing results that support its claims. Satisfaction and investment size have consistently been shown to be positively related to commitment, while alternatives are negatively related (Cox et al., 1997; Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, 1983). In fact, repeated analyses demonstrate that all three factors together successfully predict commitment level and are affiliated with superior relationship functioning (Rusbult et al., 1998). These three factors equally predict commitment for both husbands and wives (Impett et al., 2001-02), with the combination of high satisfaction, numerous investments, and inferior alternatives accounting for 48% of the variance in commitment for women and 43% for men (Bui et al., 1996).

While this model has been effective in measuring commitment as operationalized by Rusbult (1983), others have suggested that this conceptualization is limited in its ability to completely capture the essence of commitment. Johnson et al. (1999) claimed that Rusbult's model only speaks to issues of personal commitment, as opposed to measuring "global commitment", providing information limited to a respondents desire to continue a relationship. Stanley and Markman (1992) provided a similar argument. Comparing Rusbult's model to theirs, they viewed the Investment Model as measuring personal dedication more than constraint. Coming from a slightly different vantagepoint, Adams (1997) believed that spouses are not invariably as calculated and rational as the Investment Model suggests. He pointed out that the cognitive processes described in this

model do not take into account the impact of emotional states. Adams suggested that committed behavior is additionally driven by internal standards and dispositional tendencies.

In recent years, Rusbult and her colleagues recognized a missing component in their study of commitment – prescriptive support. Cox et al. (1997) described prescriptive support as a sense of obligation to remain in a relationship fueled by either personal or social reasons. A personal reason, termed "personal prescription", refers to internalized beliefs that advocate remaining in a relationship. "Social prescription" refers to believing that significant members from one's social network support persisting in a relationship, for either moral or pragmatic reasons. Their research found support for social prescription but not for personal prescription.

> Social prescription accounts for additional independent variance in commitment, suggesting that the belief that one "ought to persist" influences feelings of commitment in ways extending beyond "wanting to persist", "feeling bound to persist", or "having no choice but to persist." (p. 87)

Cox et al. (1997) concluded that many of the previous studies on commitment have been shortsighted due to neglecting the role of prescriptive support. While this study only provides support for social prescription, they acknowledged that the one item used to measure personal prescription prevents this variable from being entirely dismissed. Thus, Rusbult's Investment Model provides a more complete understanding of commitment but fails to account for some of the crucial reasons people persevere in a marriage. We turn our attention to a model that seems to better account for these various factors.

The Dimensions of Commitment

In an attempt to find commonalties among the different approaches for measuring commitment, Adams (1997) empirically compared the various theoretical models of commitment and found that they could each be classified based on the extent to which they emphasize three distinct dimensions of commitment: attraction, morality, and constraint. Adams and Jones (1997) claimed that these three dimensions best capture the general features of interpersonal commitment and labeled them Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment. Commitment to Spouse is described as commitment to one's spouse based on devotion and satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage involves commitment due to one's belief that marriage is sacred as well as one's sense of obligation to honor the marriage vows. Feelings of Entrapment entails wanting to avoid financial hardship or social disapproval that might result from leaving a marriage. This model is similar to the one described by Johnson et al. (1999). However, Adams and Jones provide better empirical support for each dimension and for their overall conceptualization.

Using a sample of 1417 married individuals and 370 unmarried persons, Adams and Jones (1997) developed and substantiated a measure of commitment, the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), utilizing six separate studies. Their results strongly support the notion that the three dimensions reflect conceptually distinct components of marital commitment. Commitment to Spouse correlated with measures intended to assess positive, goal oriented, and loving attitudes toward one's spouse. Commitment to Marriage correlated with measures that reflect attitudes concerning moral conduct and personal integrity. Feelings of Entrapment generally correlated with measures that

gauged barriers to ending a relationship. These three dimensions are useful in describing commitment and are able to successfully discriminate based on relationship stage and quality.

Adams and Jones (1997) used casually dating, seriously dating, engaged, married, and divorced individuals to evaluate the effectiveness of the DCI in distinguishing these groups. Divorced individuals had significantly lower mean scores compared to the other groups on Commitment to Spouse/Partner and Commitment to Marriage/Relationship. On Commitment to Spouse/Partner, the casually dating group had significantly higher mean scores than divorced individuals but significantly lower means scores than the other three groups. When the married individuals were separated into two groups based on their satisfaction level, the high satisfaction group indicated having significantly greater Commitment to Spouse and Marriage and significantly less Feelings of Entrapment. Therefore, while Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage seem to be able to distinguish based on either relationship status or quality, Feelings of Entrapment discriminates more effectively on the basis of relationship quality.

In conclusion, Adams and Jones (1997) state that these three dimensions seem to capture, to varying degrees, the essential components of interpersonal commitment described in most theoretical writings. In addition, these dimensions provide valuable insight into the processes that may promote relationship stability in various ways at different stages in a relationship. However, their research only presented a snapshot of commitment and did not take into account the dynamic properties of commitment. Recognizing this limitation, Adams and Jones recommended that future research investigate the dynamic interaction of Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage,

and Feelings of Entrapment throughout the course of marriage. The importance of each of these dimensions fluctuates over the course of a lifetime as couples encounter the inevitable changes that occur within relationships, changing in character as spouses develop greater intimacy or distance (Adams, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how these three dimensions of commitment, as well as satisfaction, differ in relation to how long couples have been married. Are there trends that emerge for each of these variables throughout a marriage?

Johnson et al. (1999) highlighted the value of conducting this type of research, calling for greater understanding of how different combinations of the three dimensions are experienced and how they impact a relationship. Previous research offers some insight into how commitment may differ over time. From a unidimensional perspective, Jones et al. (1995) found that commitment tends to increase the longer a couple has been married. Sternberg (1986) provided a more dynamic description of this process. He proposed that commitment in long-term relationships starts by increasing gradually, then accelerates, and eventually levels off, producing a flattened S-shaped curve. Yet, these do not account for the variation within commitment.

In looking at how each dimension might fluctuate over time, those characteristics closely related to Feelings of Entrapment have received the most attention. Barriers to abandoning a marriage appear to become more potent the longer an individual is married (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). While attractions may be the driving force in commitment early on in a relationship, the de-idealization that occurs over time results in spouses shifting their awareness from reasons to maintaining a marriage to the constraints that keep them from leaving (Kurdek, 2000). This increase in constraints over time may not

simply be the product of years together. Stanley and Markman (1992) proposed that increases in barriers have more to do with changes in relationship stage. For example, considerable increases were found in relationship constraint when couples went from married without children to married with children. Robinson and Blanton (1993) reinforced this idea, noting that couples point to the presence of children as an important variable restraining them from terminating their marriage. Decisions that are made during times of high satisfaction and attraction today (i.e., buying a home together, having children) become those that make one feel trapped in a relationship tomorrow (Stanley & Markman). Therefore, as a marriage progresses through the various developmental stages, barriers to ending the relationship seem to increase.

However, change in the prominence of these barriers is rarely a function of quantity. Feelings of Entrapment only become salient in a relationship when satisfaction is low and the sense of devotion to one's spouse has tapered (Adams, 1997). When both Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage decrease, Feelings of Entrapment may be all that are left to support one's commitment. This change has to do with an individual's awareness context. When a marriage is relatively less satisfying, spouses look to other justifications for staying together (Adams & Jones, 1997). It is not as if constraints only emerge during trying times. Barriers such as children, social pressures, and financial penalties are just as present during satisfying periods of a marriage as they are during trying times. Any supposed change involves attributing greater importance to Feelings of Entrapment. However, increases in both the number and quality of barriers can compel a couple to stay together, as sometimes happens the longer a couple is married.

Looking at Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage, there have been few suggestions as to how they might vary over time. Any assumptions concerning this process need to be based on other variables that are related to these respective dimensions. For example, Commitment to Spouse has a strong connection to marital satisfaction and seems to reflect attitudes and feelings about one's spouse and the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997). Over time, Commitment to Spouse would supposedly follow a pattern similar to satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage, on the other hand, seems to be related to an individual's disposition with respect to obligations and morality in general as opposed to being greatly influenced by marital quality (Adams & Jones). With this being the case, one might assume that this dimension would possess greater stable over time, similar to a personality trait.

Recognizing the role that satisfaction plays in the process of Commitment to Spouse and commitment in general, there is value in understanding how satisfaction differs the longer a couple has been married. A popular assumption is that marital satisfaction follows a U-shaped pattern. According to Rollins and Feldman (1970), satisfaction initially declines, leveling off during the child rearing years and then rebounds through the "empty nest" and "retired" phases. Research since that time has not supported this assumption. Rather, average marital satisfaction is now understood to decline markedly over the first decade of marriage and then continue to decline at a more gradual rate (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). The evidence suggests that a mid-term upturn in marital satisfaction is unlikely, though the possibility for improvement in later life is not completely ruled out (Glenn).

Hypotheses of the Present Research

Based on the above information, the following hypotheses are offered concerning how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction will differ in relation to how long a couple has been married. First, Commitment to Spouse will follow a trend somewhat similar to marital satisfaction in that there will be an initially accelerated decline that becomes more gradual the longer a couple is married. This decline, however, will not be as pronounced as the decline in marital satisfaction due to commitment having more stability than satisfaction. Next, Commitment to Marriage will maintain a more stable course than the other two dimensions or satisfaction. There will not be any dramatic increases or decreases in Commitment to Marriage over time. Third, Feelings of Entrapment will increase over time and will have an inverse relationship with Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction. As Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction deteriorate, an individual's awareness of barriers expands and Feelings of Entrapment will increase. Finally, marital satisfaction will initially be at a high level, decrease significantly for the first decade, and then gradually decline throughout the remainder of a marriage, reaching lower levels than any of dimensions of commitment.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive correlational study. Individuals who have been married for different lengths of time were compared using a cross-sectional design to identify significant differences within and among the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction. The degree and the direction of the relationship among these variables are described in order to determine the extent of the relationships. Causality can not be determined from this study. Responses to the questionnaires were entered into SPSS for analysis. The level of statistical significance for the purposes of data analysis for this study was $p = .05$.

Participants

A convenience sample was used in this study. Participants were recruited from three Protestant churches in the Oklahoma City metro area and from six classes at the University of Oklahoma. The researcher contacted representatives from these selected groups to obtain permission to distribute the questionnaires to married individuals who attend the church or class. Participants were given a brief oral description (See Appendix A) of the study by either this researcher or a selected representative. Once an individual agreed to participate, he or she was given an envelope that contained the Survey Consent Form (See Appendix B) and the questionnaires. Participants were instructed to complete the three questionnaires (DCI, Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, and demographic) without consulting anyone else. Participants were asked to return the questionnaires in the envelope provided either that day or by mailing them at a later time. They were asked to keep the Consent Form.

Questionnaires were distributed to 224 willing participants. One hundred fifty-nine completed questionnaires were returned (71% return rate). The sample was composed of individuals whose current marriage ranged in length from one month to 40 years. This range captured the process of commitment within the first decade of marriage, where satisfaction is believed to decline significantly (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). After examining the distribution of the sample, the decision was made to limit this study to those who had been married for 30 years or less. A restricted number of participants fell above this range (n = 7).

Participants with a history of divorce were initially going to be included in this study. Researchers have found no consistent or meaningful differences in marital satisfaction between those in their first marriages compared to those with a history of divorce (Demaris, 1984; Vemer, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989). This assumption was tested using the present data. These two groups were compared using their mean scores on marital satisfaction (KMSS), Commitment to Spouse (CS), Commitment to Marriage (CM), and Feelings of Entrapment (FE). Missing data prohibited the scoring of all of the variables for a few participants, resulting in unequal n's across each group. While there were no differences in marital satisfaction, significant differences were found for two of the commitment variables (See Table 1). Those in their first marriages scored higher on both CM, $t(152) = -2.57$, $p < .02$, and FE, $t(157) = -3.07$, $p < .003$. The clear differences in commitment prevented these two groups from being combined. In addition, the number of participants with a history of divorce (n = 26) was too small to warrant separate comparisons on the study's hypotheses. Therefore, this group was excluded from

the study. The remaining sample consisted of 123 participants who were currently in their first marriage and married less than 31 years.

Table 1

Mean Comparisons Between Never Divorced and Divorced Participants

	Never Divorced			History of Divorce		
Variable	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
KMSS	133	18.47	3.36	25	19.68	1.75
CS	133	68.82	6.34	25	69.08	5.96
CM*	129	61.82	9.14	25	56.68	9.31
FE**	133	47.22	10.64	26	40.04	12.26

Note. *p < .05, **p<.01.

The demographics for this study's sample are summarized in Table 2. The mean age of participants was 36.5 years. There were slightly more females than males. Considerable homogeneity was found in the ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) of this sample, with a majority being Caucasian and classifying themselves at a "Middle" SES level. Greater diversity was found among the participants' level of education completed.

The average length of marriage was just under 12 years. The mean age at time of marriage was 24.7. Participants demonstrated a great deal of variability in the amount of time they were in a "committed dating relationship" prior to marriage, ranging from 4 to 115 months. A minority of the participants cohabited with their spouse prior to marriage. Most of the sample had at least one child. Of those with children, 92% currently had children living with them at home.

Table 2

Sample Demographics

Demographic	M	SD	Range
Age	36.51	7.64	20-59
Years Married	11.81	7.56	<1-30
Months Dated	28.39	21.29	4-115
Number of Children	1.66	1.19	0-5
Oldest Child's Age	11.44	6.52	<1-26
Youngest Child's Age	7.44	5.95	<1-21
	n	%	
Gender			
Female	72	58.5	
Male	51	41.5	
Ethnicity			
African American	2	1.6	
Asian	2	1.6	
Caucasian	110	89.4	
Hispanic	5	4.1	
Native American	2	1.6	
Other	2	1.6	
Education Completed			
High School/GED	3	2.4	
Some college/ Technical school	34	27.6	
Four-year college University	49	39.8	
Graduate/ Professional School	37	30.1	
Socioeconomic Status			
Lower	6	4.9	
Middle	110	89.4	
Upper	6	4.9	
Cohabited			
Yes	18	14.6	
No	105	85.4	

Protection of Human Participants

Several procedures were utilized to ensure that participants were protected. This study was submitted to the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire packet, participants were given an oral description of the purpose of this study, along with the associated risks and benefits of participating. Participants were provided with an informed consent form that again explained the purpose and potential risks and benefits of participating in this study. Return of the completed questionnaires was considered consent to participate. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The questionnaires were anonymous. Participants were instructed not to put their name on any of the materials. Individual results were kept confidential.

Measures

Dimensions of Commitment Inventory

The Dimensions of Commitment Inventory is a 45-item questionnaire that asks respondents to rate their level of agreement with statements concerning marriage using a 5-point likert scale (See Appendix C). This instrument was developed by Adams and Jones (1997) based on previous theoretical and empirical writing on commitment. One hundred, thirty-five items were constructed to capture the qualities of commitment as described in these writings. The items were subjected to a factor analysis, resulting in three interpretable factors. The fifteen items with the highest reliability from each factor were selected for the DCI.

This instrument has demonstrated good internal consistency, with coefficient alphas of .91, .89, and .86 for Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment, respectively. Correlations between the three dimensions indicated conceptual independence. The correlation between Commitment to Spouse and Feelings of Entrapment was not reliable (r = .14). Commitment to Marriage, however, had moderate correlations with Commitment to Spouse (r = .53) and Feelings of Entrapment (r = .60). Based on the proportion of shared variance, Commitment to Marriage is deemed to be a separate but related construct (Adams & Jones, 1997).

Adams and Jones (1997) used casually dating, seriously dating, engaged, married, and divorced individuals to evaluate the effectiveness of the DCI in distinguishing these groups. Divorced individuals had significantly lower mean scores compared to the other groups on Commitment to Spouse/Partner and Commitment to Marriage/Relationship. On Commitment to Spouse/Partner, the casually dating group had significantly higher mean scores than divorced individuals but significantly lower means scores than the other three groups. When the married individuals were separated into two groups based on their satisfaction level, the high satisfaction group indicated having significantly greater Commitment to Spouse and Marriage and significantly less Feelings of Entrapment. Therefore, while Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage seem to be able to distinguish based on either relationship status or quality, Feelings of Entrapment discriminates more effectively on the basis of relationship quality.

The three dimensions reflect conceptually distinct components of marital commitment. Commitment to Spouse correlated with measures intended to assess positive, goal oriented, and loving attitudes toward one's spouse. Commitment to

Marriage correlated with measures that reflected attitudes concerning moral conduct and personal integrity. Feelings of Entrapment generally correlated with measures that gauged barriers to ending a relationship. In conclusion, Adams and Jones (1997) provided strong evidence that these three dimensions reliably reflect conceptually distinct dimensions of marital commitment.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (See Appendix D) was designed to be a brief measure of marital satisfaction based on the initial theoretical observations of Spanier and Cole (1976), who highlighted the distinctiveness between questions assessing one's spouse, one's marriage, and the marital relationship (Schumm et al., 1986). This scale attempts to measure satisfaction as one dimension of marital quality (Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2000). The KMSS consists of three items: "How satisfied are you with your marriage?", "How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband/wife?", and "How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?". Each item is rated according to seven response categories ranging from "extremely dissatisfied" to "extremely satisfied."

Internal consistency reliabilities for the KMSS have ranged from .84 to .98 (Schumm, Scanlon, Crow, Green, & Buckler, 1983). In a review of 57 studies that used the KMSS, the mean Cronbach alpha was .94 (Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2000). Test-retest reliability has been good, ranging from .71 over a ten-week period (Mitchell, Newell, & Schumm, 1983) to .72 and .62 for husbands and wives, respectively, over a six-month period (Eggeman, Moxley & Schumm, 1985). The scale's items have shown conceptual distinctiveness, rejecting the notion that the high reliability is an artifact of

asking similar questions or of social desirability (Schumm et al., 1985; Schumm et al., 1996; White, Stahmann, & Furrow, 1994). This scale also has good criterion-related validity, differentiating distressed from nondistressed wives (Schumm et al., 1985). A limitation of this scale is that responses tend to be skewed and kurtotic. However, Norton (1983) suggested that the true distribution of marital satisfaction scores in the population is skewed, and thus, the validity of the scale is not threatened.

Evidence indicates the KMSS is as reliable as other scales (Schumm et al., 1983). Spanier (1976) reported the coefficient alpha of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to be .96. A recent evaluation of the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) provided internal consistency coefficients that varied from .81 to .89 for men and .63 to .87 for women (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997). Test-retest reliability for the Locke-Wallace was .82 and .84 for men and women, respectively, over a one-month interval. The DAS had a three-week test-retest reliability of .87 (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993).

The KMSS satisfies the requirements for concurrent validity, correlating with the Quality Marital Index (Norton, 1983), the Locke-Wallace, and the DAS (Schumm et al, 1986, White et al., 1994). In addition, the KMSS correlated more strongly with the satisfaction subscale of the DAS than with two of the other three subscales. The KMSS exhibited similar, if not better, discriminate validity than either the Quality Marital Index or the DAS (Schumm et al., 1986).

Other researchers have affirmed the value of the KMSS, highlighting the ample support for its validity (Sabatelli, 1987) and its usefulness in obtaining a general assessment of marital satisfaction (Burnett, 1987; White et al., 1994). In summary, the

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale seems to possess adequate reliability and validity to detect subtle differences in marital satisfaction.

Demographics Questionnaire

A brief demographics questionnaire was combined with the KMSS (See Appendix D) to obtain the necessary information to describe this sample in a meaningful way. Information obtained included age, gender, ethnicity, education level completed, years married, length of committed dating prior to marriage, cohabitation history, divorce history, and number of children.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Each of the continuous variables was examined to determine if it met the assumptions of normality. Marital satisfaction, Commitment to Spouse, and Commitment to Marriage were each skewed and kurtotic. Participants who scored greater than three standard deviations from the mean on any of these three variables were removed as outliers. Removal of the outliers produced more acceptable skew and kurtosis levels. The remaining sample of 115 was used in the following analyses. The descriptive statistics for each of these variables are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Marriage Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range
Commitment to Spouse	69.37	5.68	51-75
Commitment to Marriage	62.30	8.88	35-75
Feelings of Entrapment	47.73	10.87	21-70
Satisfaction (KMSS)	18.97	2.22	9-21

The hypotheses for this study can be classified into two general categories: how satisfaction and the three commitment variables differ over the course of a marriage and how these variables interact with each other over time. The first group of hypotheses was tested using simple regressions to identify trends across years married. Standardized residuals for each participant were examined. Cases with standardized residuals greater than three were removed as they had a disproportionate effect on the regression line. The removal of such influential outliers is an appropriate course of action (Pedhazur, 1997) to clarify the actual relationships in the population.

The first hypothesis stated that CS would initially be at a high level, followed by a significant decline, and then demonstrate a gradual decline the longer that an individual is married. Two participants were removed from this analysis due to having standardized residuals greater than three. No significant trend was found in CS across years married, $F(1, 111) = 2.64$, $p > .10$. Additionally, no significant curvilinear relationship was found, $F(2, 110) = 1.77$, $p > .17$. A mean score of 69.37 indicated that this group was highly committed to their spouses.

The second hypothesis stated that CM would remain relatively stable across years of marriage, with no dramatic increases or decreases over time. Four participants were removed for this analysis due to having standardized residuals greater than three. Years married demonstrated a significant negative relationship with CM, accounting for 7% of the variance, $\beta = -.267$, $F(1, 109) = 8.63$, $p < .01$. With a mean score of 62.3, this group was strongly committed to marriage.

The next hypothesis stated that FE would increase over time in relation to years married. No significant trend was found, $F(1,113) = 1.07$, $p > .30$. The mean FE score (47.73) reflected notably strong feelings of entrapment.

Finally, KMSS was hypothesized to follow a trend similar to CS, with satisfaction significantly decreasing from initially high levels across the first decade of marriage, followed by a gradual decline. Three participants were removed from this analysis due to having standardized residuals greater than three. No significant trend was found for KMSS across years married, $F(1,110) = .01$, $p > .90$. Additionally, no curvilinear relationship was detected, $F(2, 109) = 1.29$, $p > .28$. This sample was highly satisfied, having a mean KMSS score of 18.97. Due to CM demonstrating the only significant trend

across years married, the remaining hypotheses concerning interactions were not applicable.

Correlational analyses of the four dependent variables (See Table 4) revealed relationships similar to those found by Adams and Jones (1997). CM demonstrated strong positive relationships with both CS and FE, supporting the idea that CM shares features with these two constructs. The positive relationship found between CS and FE was stronger than expected. Constraints were not assumed to share this type of relationship with attractions. Finally, CS had a significant positive relationship with KMSS.

Table 4

Intercorrelations Between Satisfaction and Commitment Variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4
1	Commitment to Spouse	--	.47[a*]	.30[b*]	.58[b*]
2	Commitment to Marriage		--	.60[a*]	.09[a]
3	Feelings of Entrapment			--	.11[b]
4	Satisfaction (KMSS)				--

Note. *p < .01.

[a] N = 120. [b] N = 123.

A regression analysis was utilized to determine if the combined effects of the three commitment variables could predict years married. No significant relationship was found, $F(3, 111) = 1.05$, $p > .35$.

The effect of education level completed on the four marriage variables was examined using one-way analyses of variance. Due to only three subjects falling in the

"high school/GED" category, they were removed for this analysis. Level of education completed did not demonstrate a significant effect on KMSS, $F(2, 109) = 1.91$, $p > .15$, CS, $F(2, 109) = .07$, $p > .90$, or CM, $F(2, 109) = 2.18$, $p > .10$. Significant differences were found for FE based on education level, $F(2, 109) = 4.61$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .08$. An analysis of group means (using the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison) revealed that those who completed college had higher FE scores (M = 50.65, SD = 9.78) than those who completed some college or technical school (M = 43.07, SD = 12.64).

The marriage variables were tested for gender effects using *t* tests. No significant gender differences were found for KMSS, $t(113) = -.849$, $p > .35$, or for CS, $t(113) = 1.07$, $p > .25$. A significant gender effect was found (equal variances not assumed) for CM, $t(112) = 2.29$, $p < .03$, with males (M = 64.35, SD = 6.80) having higher scores than females (M = 60.77, SD = 9.92), indicating greater commitment to marriage. A significant gender effect was also found for FE, $t(113) = 2,15$, $p < .04$. Again, males (M = 50.22, SD = 9.89) had higher scores than females (M = 45.88, SD = 11.27), indicating stronger feelings of entrapment.

Whether or not a participant had children was examined to determine its impact on the marriage variables. Having children had no significant impact on CM, $t(113) = -.59$, $p > .55$, FE, $t(113) = .002$, $p > .95$, or KMSS, $t(113) = 1.09$, $p > .25$. The presence of children did have a significant impact on CS (equal variances not assumed), $t(75) = 2.69$, $p < .01$. Those without children had higher CS scores (M = 71.33, SD = 4.07) than those with children (M = 68.67, SD = 6.02), indicating that the presence of children is associated with lower levels of commitment to one's spouse. However, both means still reflect high levels of CS.

Beyond having a child, the affect of the number of children living at home was examined. The number of children at home at least fifty percent of the time had a significant effect on only one of the marriage variables, CM. Regression analysis revealed that as the number of children increased, so to did CM, $\beta = .286$, $F(1, 83) = 7.415$, $p < .01$, accounting for 8% of the variance.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction differ in relation to how long individuals have been married. By studying the hypothesized trends and the possible interactions among these marriage variables, I hoped to provide greater insight into how individuals experience commitment and its impact on marital relationships. However, the hypothesized trends and interactions did not emerge. No significant differences were found for CS, FE, or KMSS across years married. The only variable that demonstrated a significant trend, CM, was the one hypothesized to remain fairly stable. With only one variable showing significant differences over time, there were no interactions to investigate. Nevertheless, these unexpected findings serve to build upon previous assumptions concerning the dimensions of commitment.

CM was believed to be a somewhat stable variable that captures one's sense of obligation toward his/her spouse and one's disposition concerning morality in general (Adams & Jones, 1997). Based on the definition and its association with consistency values (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999), CM was not expected to differ in the manner demonstrated here. The finding that longer lengths of marriage were associated with lower CM scores was surprising, though no previous studies have examined how this variable might change over time. These results suggest that individuals experience a decline in obligation to their marriages and less aversion to the idea of divorce the longer that they have been married. Yet before the assumption is made that time erodes one's sense of obligation to the marriage, these results must be considered in context. The mean CM score in this study, 62.3, was notably higher than the mean obtained by Adams and

Jones, 50.5. In addition, the lowest predicted score on the regression line for CM was still greater than their mean. This sample was quite committed to the institution of marriage regardless of how long they had been married.

High CM scores may have been due to the constitution of this sample. Efforts were made to secure participants who were representative of the general population in this geographic area. However, a majority of those who chose to participate were from churches. Approximately 75% of the questionnaires were distributed in church settings. This conceivably resulted in a sample with higher levels of religiosity, which has been associated with a decreased probability of considering divorce (Booth & Johnson, 1995). The tendency to discount divorce is positively related to CM. Additionally, CM was the only one of the three commitment variables to demonstrate a significant positive correlation with religiosity (Adams & Jones, 1997). Therefore, the differences in CM across time are not likely reflective of a meaningful decline in one's sense of obligation. A more probable explanation is that highly religious participants enter marriage with elevated levels of CM, and through experience, develop a more realistic sense of their obligation to the relationship.

On the other hand, CM may decline over time regardless of initial levels. Adams and Jones (1997) portrayed CM as a trait reflecting beliefs about marriage and one's sense of obligation while CS was described as being susceptible to current feelings about the relationship. This comparison lead to the study's assumption of greater stability in CM. Perhaps CM gradually declines over time as one develops a more realistic picture of marriage but does not exhibit dramatic fluctuations in response to changes in satisfaction. Religiosity likely produces higher scores but diminution over time may be common to all

married individuals. Unfortunately, this could not be determined due to the high satisfaction levels found in this sample.

The strong connection between CS and KMSS necessitates these variables being discussed together. CS did not display a trend similar to that seen in previous research on marital satisfaction as was hypothesized. CS scores were high regardless of length of marriage. A mean score of 69.37 was obtained, which is particularly elevated for a scale that ranges from 15 to 75. This was a highly committed sample. This was also a highly satisfied sample with an average KMSS score of 18.97 (range of 3 to 21). Both CS and KMSS were negatively skewed, which is presumably reflective of the actual population (Norton, 1983). However, the lack of differences across years married for both of these variables indicates that this group was more satisfied with and committed to their spouses than is commonly found. Knowing that satisfaction typically declines over time, it is unclear how CS would look across years married with a less satisfied sample.

The reason for these high satisfaction scores is unclear. While church attendance likely has an influence on commitment, its influence on satisfaction is questionable (Booth & Johnson, 1995; Jones et al., 1995). Elevated satisfaction scores may have been the product of high levels of CS and CM, though causality cannot be determined. The interaction between satisfaction and the dimensions of commitment remains unclear.

FE did not manifest a positive trend across years married. This hypothesis was based on the assumption that barriers to abandoning a marriage would become more relevant when satisfaction and personal commitment decreased. If this type of relationship does commonly exist, the absence of a significant trend for FE was likely

due to the lack of variability in KMSS and CS. Significant increases in FE would not be expected in a highly satisfied and committed sample.

Adams and Jones (1997) found that couples with greater satisfaction levels had lower FE scores than those who were less satisfied. Thus, one might expect to find low levels of FE in this sample considering the high KMSS scores. This was not the case. This sample had higher FE scores (M = 47.73, SD = 10.87) than the Adam and Jones sample (M = 38.0, SD = 9.1). Furthermore, a stronger correlation was found between CS and FE in this study (r = .30) than was found in theirs (r = .14). These results show that high levels of constraint are able to coexist with positive relationship forces such as CS and KMSS. When individuals are satisfied with their spouses, they can view Feelings of Entrapment as a positive component of the relationship due to its ability to help them maintain a long-term outlook (Stanley & Markman, 1992).

Regardless of one's FE score, the relevancy of barriers clearly increases when satisfaction and personal commitment are low (Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2000; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). In the absence of attractions to stay in a marriage, the barriers to leaving become more influential. While constraints are present when the relationship is going well, they exert the greatest consequence on relationship stability when couples are least satisfied (Levinger's, 1965). Longitudinal studies using FE are needed to clarify its relationship with satisfaction and to understand its impact on marital stability.

The men in this study had significantly higher mean levels of CM and FE compared to the women. These high scores suggest that males experience a stronger sense of obligation to the marriage and place a greater emphasis on the barriers to ending

the relationship. Yet, the means were notably high for both sexes. Previous studies found that women had higher levels of commitment than men (Le & Agnew, 2003; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). However, such studies utilized unidimensional measures of commitment. This study did not find differences in CS, the variable most closely associated with single commitment measures. Due to Adams and Jones (1997) not making gender comparisons, no determination can be made whether or not this finding is an artifact of a highly committed sample or a reflection of true gender differences. Regardless, men in this study placed more of an emphasis on reasons not to leave their marriages.

Children exerted a significant impact on commitment. Those without children expressed higher levels of CS, presumably due to having more time and energy to focus on the marital relationship. Those without children also typically have been married for fewer years, a quality commonly associated with stronger attractions to one's spouse. A significant relationship was found between CM and the number of children in the home, with CM increasing when more children were present, at least up to 4 children. Thus, those with children had lower levels of CS, but when the number of children in the home increased, CM levels increased. Other studies have suggested that children serve as a considerable constraining force in marriage (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992). However, no relationship was found between FE and the presence or number of children. The effect of children in the home appears to be better accounted for by CM, a variable with a strong correlation to FE (r = .60). Raising a greater number of children conceivably increases one's sense of responsibility to the family, which includes

the marital relationship. Furthermore, when couples are satisfied, they may focus on how children stabilize their marriages as opposed to seeing the children as barriers to leaving.

Individuals who graduated from college reported higher levels of FE than those who completed some college or technical school. This relationship between FE and level of education completed was similar to the one found by Adams and Jones (1997). Higher educational attainment, particularly the completion of college, seems to strengthen barriers to terminating a marriage. Educational attainment has also been shown to enhance marital stability (Heaton, 2002). Post-high school education clearly influences marriage. These findings offer a possible link between FE and marital stability, which is consistent with how FE is characterized. However, the process by which education strengthens either FE or stability is not known. Education's effect may be the result of changes in income (another factor Adams and Jones found to be associated with FE) and/or social status. Future studies can determine the direct or indirect effect of education on marriage.

Even though participants with a history of divorce were not the focus of this study, there were noteworthy differences between this group and those in their first marriages on FE and CM. Divorced individuals expressed lower levels of obligation to their marital relationships and were not as concerned with the penalties of divorce. The experience of divorce may lessen the sanctity of marriage and wear away at the stigma associated with leaving a spouse. On the other hand, those who were divorced may have entered into their marriages with lower levels of FE and CM. Regardless of marital history, both groups reported similar levels of CS and KMSS. This lends additional

support to the finding that meaningful differences in marital satisfaction do not exist between these two groups (Demaris, 1984; Vemer, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989).

These discoveries concerning divorce highlight important issues for future marital research. First, marital satisfaction-type measures do not adequately capture the dynamics of a relationship, particularly when comparing individuals with differing divorce histories. Satisfaction provides an incomplete picture of the marriage experience if considered in isolation. Next, researchers should consider separating divorced individuals from those in their first marriages due to their distinct attitudes concerning commitment. Divorce appears to affect the degree of importance that individuals place on reasons for remaining in a marriage. Learning how FE and CM impact long-term marital quality and stability may further demonstrate the importance of making this distinction. Finally, commitment is more adequately assessed when measured in a multidimensional fashion. This study, in conjunction with previous studies, supports the existence of an attraction, a moral, and a constraining component in commitment. Unidimensional measures that only assess an individual's expressed commitment to his/her partner are not sufficiently accounting for the experience of commitment.

The three dimensions of commitment clearly provide more information concerning the process of marriage than satisfaction. The idea that commitment is distinct from satisfaction (Le & Agnew, 2003; Stanley & Markman, 1992) is supported, though their respective influence on each other can not be determined from this study. The previous finding that commitment demonstrates greater stability than satisfaction (Jones et al., 1995) was not necessarily defended here, presumably for three reasons. First, this was a highly satisfied group with little variability. Second, the DCI measures three

dimensions of commitment, not just one as was commonly used in prior research. This study does not assume that commitment can be described as a unitary phenomenon. Thus, caution should be used when using previous findings on commitment to describe how these three dimensions will change over time. Finally, actual variability over time is unknown due to this being a cross-sectional study.

Adams and Jones (1997) made a strong case for the notion that CS, CM, and FE are discrete constructs. The current study supports that contention. Each variable accounted for unique aspects of commitment as evidenced by their ability to differentiate based on children, divorce history, and education level. Additionally, the correlations found here were similar to those found by Adams and Jones. CM and FE demonstrated the strongest relationship, though the proportion of shared variance ($r^2 = .36$) justifies keeping these two distinct. I had claimed that uncovering differences among these dimensions across time would provide support for their respective uniqueness. While this would have provided further support, only finding differences in CM does not negate the claim. These dimensions have proven themselves to be conceptually distinct.

The importance of each of these dimensions was expected to fluctuate over time, interacting with each other as individuals experienced greater intimacy or distance in their marriages (Adams, 1997; Markman & Stanley, 1992). This dynamic was not found cross-sectionally. CM decreased over time regardless of CS or FE levels. The lack of interaction does not preclude the possibility that these variables change in response to each other. Rather, interactions may only be exposed in longitudinal studies. Furthermore, the progression of years married may not best account for the changes that are believed to occur in commitment, particularly for CS and FE. Shifts in commitment

levels may be better accounted for by overall relationship quality and relationship stage, such as having children (Adams & Jones, 1997). Alone, the experience of marriage may neither erode nor strengthen commitment. Changes that occur mainly in response to major life events would further illustrate the stability of the dimensions of commitment compared to satisfaction.

Limitations

This study endeavored to build upon the conceptualization of martial commitment as described by Adams and Jones (1997) by analyzing the dimensions of commitment cross-sectionally. The lack of support for most of the hypotheses points to the need for more work in understanding these dimensions. The unexpected findings also draw attention to the study's limitations. As acknowledged before, cross-sectional studies are only able to compare differences between groups as opposed to measuring actual change. While trends may emerge, as seen in CM, time weeds out those who get divorced in the early years of marriage. Thus, those who have been married for more years likely had a different trajectory than those who had been married for fewer years. However, cross-sectional research is advisable before determining if costly longitudinal studies are warranted.

Even though efforts were made to obtain a sample that generally reflected the local married population, a majority of those who volunteered to participate were from churches. Church attendance is not necessarily a limitation as a majority of the population claim religious affiliation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). However, this sample may have been more devout due to being recruited from Sunday school groups. These voluntary groups typically meet at earlier times than traditional religious services, suggesting

greater devotion in this group. High religiosity and church attendance may have inflated CM and CS scores in this study. Consequently, the influence of these two dimensions on KMSS and FE is unknown.

Additionally, a response demand may have existed for those who received the questionnaires at church. Individuals in religious settings are possibly primed to focus on the positive aspects of their relationship. Church is an environment that generally reinforces marriages. However, this would not completely account for the lack of low commitment and satisfaction scores. Twenty-five percent of the questionnaires were handed out in academic classes, a setting where this kind of demand is not assumed to exist. A response demand may have inflated some of the scores but not all of them.

The design of this study did not allow for participants to be identified according to where they received the questionnaires (church vs. academic setting). While I have an approximate estimate for the number of questionnaires handed out in each setting, there was no way to make such a distinction for those that were returned. If this information had been obtained, these groups could have been compared to determine if there were critical differences.

The level of marital satisfaction reported by this sample was another limitation. The significant number of individuals with high satisfaction scores was not necessarily the issue. Marital satisfaction is believed to be negatively skewed (Norton, 1983). The problem was the shortage of individuals with low scores. Increased variability in satisfaction would have provided more support for the generalization of the commitment results to the population. As it stands, the effect of high satisfaction on the dimensions of

commitment is unclear, though Adams and Jones (1997) questioned if satisfied individuals could accurately evaluate barriers to terminating their marriages (FE).

The use of self-report measures may have been a limitation. While there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of participants' responses, this sample may have been influenced by a positive response set. Numerous factors could have produced this response set, such as spousal awareness of study participation or social desirability. In particular, when both spouses participated in this study, the potential of them sharing their answers with each other could have affected how some participants responded to the questions. Individuals possibly rated themselves more positively than their current marital experience warranted out of a desire to please their spouse. These biases may have existed even with the protection of anonymity. Subsequent research should examine if individuals respond differently to questions when their spouses are not participants in the study.

A final limitation was the lack of diversity. This study would have benefited from a sample that more closely reflected the racial makeup of the general population. Likewise, these results cannot be assumed to generalize to a lower or upper SES population.

Recommendations

Longitudinal studies will be needed to determine the progression and interaction of the dimensions of commitment throughout the course of a marriage. This type of study is warranted due to findings such as differences in CM over time and the impact of relationship stages on each of the dimensions. Of particular interest is the role of FE. The high scores unexpectedly discovered in this study suggest a more complex relationship

among the dimensions. Additionally, research should consider the specific causes and consequences of each dimension. Without longitudinal studies, the development of commitment in marriage will never be fully understood.

A better awareness of how relationship stages affect each dimension is needed. For example, what kinds of shifts in commitment are produced by events such as purchasing a house, children leaving home, and retirement? Related to significant life changes, the effects of divorce ought to be accounted for in future studies on commitment. Subsequent marriages were shown to be qualitatively different. Without categorizing individuals according to their divorce history, the assumption is made that their marital experiences are quite similar to those who have never divorced. This separation is not meant to marginalize those who have been divorced. Instead, it will allow researchers to more effectively learn what factors contribute to the stability and satisfaction of these marriages.

Studies using the DCI are strongly encouraged to locate samples with greater variability in marital satisfaction. Both this study and Adams and Jones (1997) were plagued by happy couples, a wonderful social phenomenon but a hindrance when explaining the dynamics of commitment. With lower levels of satisfaction, questions such as "How do the dimensions of commitment perform when satisfaction is low?" and "What is the nature of the relationship between the dimensions of commitment and satisfaction?" can be answered.

The positive relationship between constraints and attractions in this study suggests that Adams and Jones (1997) may have mislabeled Feelings of Entrapment. The word "entrapment" implies a negative experience, such as an animal being caught in a snare.

An individual with positive feelings of commitment towards his/her spouse would doubtfully at the same time report feeling trapped in the relationship. Certainly many spouses experience feelings of entrapment when satisfaction is low. However, to account for the "positive" feelings of entrapment that were indicated in this study, a label such as "Feelings of Constraint" would better describe how barriers are experienced.

Due to CS and CM's significant relationship with religious variables, factors such as religiosity and church attendance need to be controlled in future studies on commitment, particularly when the sample is notably religious. Likewise, the influence of religious practices on the dimensions of commitment deserves more attention. Although most social organizations have inherent values that influence their members, few groups have as much to say about marriage as do organized religion.

Conclusion

This study offered meaningful advancements in the research on marital commitment by building upon previous discoveries concerning the dimensions of commitment. The results support the assertion that Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment offer a depth to marital research that satisfaction and unitary commitment measures lack. These variables demonstrated conceptual uniqueness and illustrated how commitment is experienced in response to changes in a relationship. The DCI is recommended for future studies on marital commitment. Changes in the dimensions of commitment, while different than expected, highlight the dynamic nature of these constructs. Learning how they effect each other is an essential next step.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Oral Description of Study
(Recruitment Script)

Recruitment Script

My name is Jason Gunter and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at the University of Oklahoma. I am here to ask if you would be willing to participate in my dissertation research, the goal of which is to understand how marital commitment and satisfaction are experienced by individuals who have been married for different lengths of time. I am hoping to get a number of individuals from various churches and from the University of Oklahoma to participate in an effort to make this study representative of the general population.

If you choose to participate, I will give you an envelope that contains a sheet explaining this study and two brief questionnaires. It should only take you 10 to 15 minutes to fill out both questionnaires. The questionnaires are anonymous. Please DO NOT put your name on them. All information that you provide will remain strictly confidential. I am only interested in studying the responses collectively, not individually.

To participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age and must be currently married.

The findings from this project will provide researchers with information on the process of commitment in marriage, which could help psychologists better understand how to strengthen marriages.

Please read the informed consent form before completing the questionnaires. Do not consult with your spouse about your answers until you have returned the questionnaires. Please respond to all of the questions and answer them honestly.

Return your completed questionnaires to me in the envelope provided either today before you leave or by mail. The envelope is already addressed and the postage is paid.

On the informed consent form, you will find a way to contact me. Please keep that sheet for your information.

Are there any questions?

Thank you for your time.

Jason Gunter, M.Ed.

APPENDIX B

Survey Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

December 9, 2003

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a doctoral graduate student under the direction of Professor Dr. Cal Stoltenberg in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. I invite you to participate in a research study being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus, entitled "An Examination of the Dimensions of Commitment and Satisfaction Across Years Married" (IRB #). The purpose of this study is to understand how marital commitment and satisfaction are experienced by individuals in relationships of various lengths.

To participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age and must be currently married.

Your participation will involve completing two brief questionnaires and should only take about 10 minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. The questionnaires are anonymous. The results of my study may be published, but your name will not be linked to responses in publications that are released from the project. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. All information you provide will remain strictly confidential.

The findings from this project will provide information on the process of commitment in marriage with no cost to you other than the time it takes to complete the survey.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me, Jason Gunter, at (405) 840-2616 or e-mail at jgunter@ou.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant or concerns about the project should be directed to the Institutional Review Board at The University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu

By returning this questionnaire in the envelope provided, you will be agreeing to participate in the above described project.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Jason Gunter, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX C

Dimensions of Commitment Inventory

Questionnaire #2

Instructions: Please respond to the items below using the following scale:

5 = Strongly Agree
4 = Agree
3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly Disagree

_____ 1. I'm dedicated to making my marriage as fulfilling as it can be.

_____ 2. A divorce would ruin my reputation.

_____ 3. It is morally wrong to divorce your spouse.

_____ 4. No matter what, my spouse knows that I'll always be there for him/her.

_____ 5. I have to stay married to my spouse or else my family will think badly of me.

_____ 6. I was raised to believe that once one gets married, one doesn't get divorced, no matter how unsatisfying the marriage may be.

_____ 7. It would be humiliating if my spouse and I divorced.

_____ 8. I am completely devoted to my spouse.

_____ 9. Marriages are supposed to last forever.

_____ 10. Even if I wanted to, it would be impossible for me to leave my spouse.

_____ 11. When things go wrong in my marriage, I consider getting a divorce.

_____ 12. I would not be embarrassed to get a divorce.

_____ 13. I truly believe that spouses should remain devoted to one another "for better or for worse".

_____ 14. There is nothing that I wouldn't sacrifice for my spouse.

_____ 15. My family would strongly disapprove if I divorced my spouse.

_____ 16. I don't feel obligated to remain married to my spouse.

_____ 17. I've spent so much money on my relationship with my spouse that I could never divorce him/her.

_____ 18. I want to grow old with my spouse.

_____ 19. I would be shattered if my spouse and I divorced.

_____ 20. My friends would disapprove if I ended my marriage.

_____ 21. I could never leave my spouse because it would go against everything I believe in.

_____ 22. I believe in the sanctity of marriage.

_____ 23. A marriage should be protected at all costs.

_____ 24. If there are too many problems in a marriage, it's O.K. to get a divorce.

_____ 25. I like knowing that my spouse and I form an inseparable unit.

_____ 26. When I imagine what my life will be like in the future, I always see my spouse standing next to me.

_____ 27. Under no circumstances should the marriage bond be broken.

_____ 28. I frequently daydream about what it would be like to be married to someone other than my spouse.

_____ 29. I'm not very devoted to my spouse.

_____ 30. I feel free to divorce my spouse if I so desire.

_____ 31. I can imagine several situations in which the marriage bond should be broken.

_____ 32. When my spouse and I promised "to have and to hold," we knew that it meant forever.

_____ 33. I often think that my spouse and I have too many irreconcilable differences.

_____ 34. I don't think I could handle the shame of being divorced.

_____ 35. I don't think it's morally wrong to divorce your spouse.

_____ 36. I don't believe that marriages should last forever.

_____ 37. I am not confident that my marriage will last forever.

_____ 38. My spouse and I remain married because we value the institution of marriage.

_____ 39. I often think about what it would be like to be romantically involved with someone other than my spouse.

_____ 40. It would be shameful if my spouse and I divorced or separated.

_____ 41. I could never leave my spouse; I have too much invested in him/her.

_____ 42. I believe that marriage is for life regardless of what happens.

_____ 43. I'm afraid that if I were to leave my spouse, God would punish me.

_____ 44. It would be particularly hard on my family and friends if my spouse and I divorced.

_____ 45. My future plans do not include my spouse.

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APPENDIX D

Demographics Questionnaire
and
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Questionnaire #1

Instructions: Please answer every question honestly. Circle or fill-in the answer that best fits you.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your gender?
   A. Male
   B. Female

3. What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

   A. African American
   B. Asian
   C. Caucasian
   D. Hispanic/Latino
   E. Native American
   F. Other: _____

4. How much education have you completed?
   A. Some high school
   B. Completed high school/GED
   C. Some college/technical school
   D. Four-year college/university
   E. Graduate/professional

5. How would you classify your socioeconomic status?
   A. Lower
   B. Middle
   C. Upper

6. How long have you been married to your current spouse?
   _____ Years, _____ Months

7. Before you were married to your current spouse, how long were you in a committed dating relationship with him/her?
   _____ Years, _____ Months

8. Did you and your current spouse live together prior to getting married?
   A. Yes
   B. No

   If yes, how long did you live together before getting married?
   _____ Years, _____ Months

9. Are you currently separated?
   A. Yes
   B. No

10. Have you ever been divorced?
   A. Yes
   B. No

   If no, go on to question #11
   If **yes**, how many times have you been married previously? _____

   How long did each of your previous marriages last (in years)?
   1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____
   _____

   Referring to your 1st marriage, how old were you on your wedding day?
   _____

11. Between you and your spouse, how many children do you have? _____

   List the ages of all your children: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

12. How many of your children currently live in your home at least 50% of the time?
   _____

= =

Circle the number on the scale that best fits you:

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Mixed/ Uncertain	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
13. How satisfied are you with your marriage?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband/ wife?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX E

Prospectus

An Examination of the Dimensions of Commitment and Satisfaction Across Years Married

A PROSPECTUS

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the College of Education of the

University of Oklahoma

by

Jason Gunter, M.Ed.

Fall 2003

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The significance of marriage in this country cannot be ignored. A majority of adults in the United States choose to enter into this institution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), which is associated with greater life satisfaction (Stack & Eschleman, 1998) and general societal well being (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Social science has recognized the importance of understanding marriage as evidenced by the vast number of studies conducted on this topic (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). However, martial researchers have primarily chosen to focus their attention on satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). While satisfaction and stability are certainly significant outcomes in marriage, other variables deserve increased consideration. One variable particularly worthy of greater attention is commitment.

Commitment has been defined as an individual's intention to persist in marriage regardless of fluctuations in satisfaction (Jones, Adams, Monroe, & Berry, 1995). Commitment involves a long-term orientation, feelings of attachment, and the ability to adapt (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This construct has proven to be meaningful in the study of marriage, providing greater insight into the process of how romantic relationships are formed, sustained, and/or terminated (Adams, 1997; Adams & Jones, 1997). Some researchers have argued that commitment is a primary motive in enduring relationships, highlighting this variable's strength as a single indicator of overall couple functioning (Rusbult et al., 1998; Van Lange et al., 1997) and as a driving force behind relationship enhancing behavior (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999). Le and Agnew (2003) even suggested that "commitment may be the most important construct in investigating relational processes" (p. 52). The concept of

commitment also appears to be meaningful to couples. Robinson and Blanton (1993) found that spouses commonly ascribe notable importance to commitment in enabling them to successfully persist in marriage.

Evidence suggests that commitment provides substantially more information concerning the process of marriage than satisfaction. While a significant relationship has consistently been found between these two variables (Acker & Davis, 1992), satisfaction is not the only ingredient influencing a spouse's intention to persist in a marriage (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997). Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) demonstrated that satisfaction had no effect on relationship duration above and beyond that which was accounted for by commitment. Commitment also appears to have greater stability than satisfaction (Jones et al., 1995). Thus, the concept of commitment provides some answers as to why people persevere in marriage despite fluctuations in satisfaction.

However, commitment is believed to be a dynamic construct that develops throughout a relationship, changing in quality as intimacy waxes and wanes (Adams, 1997). This change is not unitary in nature. Rather, commitment is believe to be composed of different dimensions/components (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992). These various components seem to interact with each other over time, increasing or decreasing in saliency as marriages evolve (Stanley & Markman). Research on commitment has not adequately taken into account these dynamic properties. More information is needed concerning what commitment looks like at different stages of marriage.

Problem Statement

The problem this study will address is to describe the various dimensions of commitment and how they differ over the course of marriage in relation to each other as well as to satisfaction. This will provide greater understanding as to how commitment is experienced and how it impacts relationships.

Rationale for the Study

Commitment is a consequential component of marriage as demonstrated by the behaviors and qualities with which it is related. For example, high levels of commitment are associated with greater expressions of love (Clements & Swensen, 2000), fewer marital problems (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985), and greater use of positive conflict tactics (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggested that commitment guides interpersonal reactions and forges steady tendencies to behave in relationship enhancing ways. Commitment levels are also valuable predictors of whether or not an individual will remain in a relationship (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001-02; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998). In fact, commitment is often reported to be a primary reason for marital stability (Lauer & Lauer, 1987). This does not mean that uncommitted individuals invariably terminate their relationships. However, individuals who do leave their marriages have lower levels of commitment earlier in their relationships (Impett et al.). Some of these characteristics are likely the product of commitment whereas others serve to strengthen commitment. While direct causal relationships have not been determined, the relationship between these variables is likely reciprocal.

Despite a growing literature base, studies on interpersonal commitment appear to be expanding haphazardly (Adams, 1997). Researchers rarely agree on how to define the

features and functions of commitment (Adams & Warren, 1997). This is particularly evident in the measures used to assess commitment level. This review found at least 14 different ways in which researchers have attempted to measure commitment, with many designed to fit the needs of the particular study. Adams found that the majority of empirical studies on commitment only utilized one-item measures. While this approach may have some utility, single items are unable to capture conceptual depth (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In addition, few studies provide data supporting the reliability or the validity of these measures (Adams). This assortment of approaches hinders the development of a coherent theory of commitment, preventing studies from building upon each other. Researchers have recognized the importance of commitment but few are seeking to build an interconnected knowledge base.

Four conceptualizations of commitment have been offered in an attempt to remedy this problem. One of the earliest theories on commitment was Rusbult's (1983) investment model. According to Rusbult, commitment to a relationship is dependent upon three interconnected factors (Cox et al., 1997). These factors work together in that a person's commitment to persist in a relationship should increase when one is satisfied with one's partner, there are no adequate alternatives, and substantial investments have been made into the relationship (Rusbult). While this model has been effective in measuring commitment, others have claimed that it only captures one component of commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992).

In response, Stanley and Markman (1992) theorized that commitment consists of two distinct components – personal dedication and constraint. Their model recognized that unitary measures were not adequately describing the process of commitment.

However, other models identified more than two components and seemed to capture the dynamic of commitment more effectively. In particular, Johnson et al. (1999) offered three types of commitment that are characterized as "distinguishable experiences." They claimed that attention should be on personal, moral, and structural commitment if this construct is going to be fully understood. Johnson et al. rightly identified that global commitment is not capturing all that is involved in commitment. However, the empirical support for their conceptualization was inadequate.

In an attempt to find commonalties among the different approaches for measuring commitment, Adams (1997) empirically compared the various theoretical models of commitment and found that they could each be classified based on the extent to which they emphasize three distinct dimensions of commitment: attraction, morality, and constraint. Adams and Jones (1997) claimed that these three dimensions best capture the general features of interpersonal commitment and labeled them Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment. Commitment to Spouse is described as commitment to one's spouse based on devotion and satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage involves commitment due to one's belief that marriage is sacred as well as one's sense of obligation to honor the marriage vows. Feelings of Entrapment entail wanting to avoid financial hardship or social disapproval that might result from leaving a marriage. This model is similar to the one described by Johnson et al. (1999). However, Adams and Jones provide better empirical support for each dimension and for their overall conceptualization.

Adams and Jones (1997) developed and substantiated a measure of commitment, the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), using a sample of 1417 married

individuals and 370 unmarried persons across six separate studies. Their results strongly supported the notion that these three dimensions capture, to varying degrees, the essential components of interpersonal commitment described in most theoretical writings. In addition, these dimensions provide valuable insight into the processes that may promote relationship stability in various ways at different stages in a relationship. However, their research only presented a snapshot of commitment and did not take into account the dynamic properties. Recognizing this limitation, Adams and Jones recommended that future research investigate the dynamic interaction of Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment throughout the course of marriage. The importance of each of these dimensions fluctuates over the course of a lifetime as couples encounter the inevitable changes that occur within relationships, changing in character as spouses develop greater intimacy or distance (Adams, 1997).

Research Questions

How do the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction differ in relation to how long couples have been married? Are there significant differences within and among the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction across years marred? What are the trends that emerge for each variable throughout a marriage?

By investigating these questions, I hope to gain greater insight into the dynamic interplay of the dimensions of commitment throughout marital relationships. In addition, discovering differences among these dimensions across time will provide support for the idea that each dimension is distinct. Future studies can then explore the specific causes and consequences of each dimension.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are offered concerning how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction will differ in relation to how long a couple has been married. First, Commitment to Spouse is expected to follow a trend somewhat similar to marital satisfaction (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993) in that there will be an initially accelerated decline that becomes more gradual the longer a couple is married. This decline, however, will not be as pronounced as the decline in marital satisfaction due to commitment having more stability than satisfaction. Next, Commitment to Marriage is expected to maintain a more stable course than the other two dimensions or satisfaction. There will not be any significant increases or decreases in Commitment to Marriage over time. This is assumed due to this variable having a greater foundation in a sense of morality as opposed to marital quality (Adams & Jones, 1997). Third, Feelings of Entrapment is expected to increase over time and will have an inverse relationship with Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction (Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2000; Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). As Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction deteriorate, an individual's awareness of barriers expands and Feelings of Entrapment will increase. Finally, following the pattern mentioned above, marital satisfaction will initially be at a high level, decrease significantly for the first decade, and then gradually decline throughout the remainder of a marriage, reaching lower levels than any of dimensions of commitment.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The institution of marriage is of great importance in this country. A majority of the North American population chooses to enter into a marital relationship at some point in their lives (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Those who are married tend to find greater enjoyment in life than those who are not married (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). The institution of marriage also contributes to societal well being (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Marriage has a profound impact on both an individual and a national level. The significance of marriage has not been ignored by researchers. A tremendous number of studies have been published on numerous topics associated with marriage (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Over 100 longitudinal studies on this subject were published as of 1995 (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), highlighting the respect researchers have for the process of marriage. These studies have mainly focused on the topics of satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury). While satisfaction and stability are certainly significant components of marriage, other variables deserve careful consideration regarding their contribution to relationships. One variable in particular that is worthy of greater attention is commitment.

Commitment

Theoretical writings and research concerning commitment began to emerge approximately 40 years ago. Becker (1960) was one of the first to specify some of the characteristics of commitment. He encouraged others to analyze the mechanisms that are presumed to comprise commitment. A few researchers answered this call by exploring the role of commitment in romantic relationships. Levinger (1965) responded by describing marital cohesiveness as the function of attractions, barriers, and alternatives.

Johnson (1973) theorized that commitment is important in stabilizing romantic relationships and consists of personal and behavioral components. From these early studies, the work on commitment began to evolve, with much of the emphasis on reasons why individuals persist in or terminate relationships (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002).

Commitment has proven to be a meaningful component in the study of marital relationships, providing greater insight into the process of how romantic relationships are formed, sustained, and/or terminated (Adams, 1997; Adams & Jones, 1997). Many researchers have argued that commitment is a primary motive in enduring relationships (Van Lange et. al, 1997), highlighting the strength of this variable as a single indicator of overall couple functioning (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Le and Agnew (2003) suggested that "commitment may be the most important construct in investigating relational processes" (p. 52). In examining both dating and marital relationships, Drigotas, Rusbult, and Verette (1999) found that commitment and the perception of mutual commitment were associated with both healthy relationship adjustment and couple well being. They described commitment as the driving force behind relationship enhancing behavior, suggesting that the ideal relationship pattern involves both partners making themselves fully and equally committed to one another. The concept of commitment also appears to be purposefully meaningful to couples. Robinson and Blanton (1993) found that couples commonly ascribe notable importance to commitment in enabling them to successfully persist in marriage.

Defining Commitment

Commitment has been defined in both theoretical and practical ways with various authors focusing differentially on outcomes, processes, and related qualities. One word

that is commonly used when defining commitment is intention. Focusing on a general definition, Adams and Jones (1997) described commitment as an individual's "intention to maintain indefinitely a particular course of action" (p. 1193). Applying this to marriage, commitment can be viewed as the intent to persevere (Rusbult et al., 1998) and remain in a relationship in spite of fluctuations in satisfaction (Jones, Adams, Monroe, & Berry, 1995). Intent, as used in these definitions, has a strong cognitive element and decisional quality to it. Thus, commitment can be viewed as a decision over which individuals have substantial control (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg (1986) utilized this idea of control to describe the interconnectedness between decision and commitment. In the short term, an individual decides if he or she loves a specific partner. In the long term, the individual chooses whether or not to commit to maintain that relationship. Commitment can also become a reciprocal process that serves to strengthen itself. When a person behaves in ways so as to invest in the marital relationship, the intention to remain in that relationship is usually strengthened. In turn, the strengthening of the relationship often results in increased behaviors that enhance the marriage (Adams & Jones, 1997). Thus, there is a stabilizing quality to commitment.

Commitment has also been described as an outlook of permanence. When couples who had been married for an average of forty years were asked about significant factors contributing to their enduring relationships, commitment was frequently identified (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Speaking about their commitment, these couples cited their expectation that they would persist in their marriage and not consider divorce as an option. Their commitment represents a long-term orientation, which is believed to

include feelings of attachment and a desire stay together for better or worse (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). In addition, there is an implied recognition that each spouse "needs" the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). Commitment can thus be seen as the intention to permanently preserve a marriage. These definitions and descriptions have a significant cognitive component. Yet, other aspects must be considered in developing a holistic view of commitment.

The above definitions seem to suggest that commitment propels an individual toward a greater desire for the relationship. This is just a portion of the picture. Commitment also involves restraining forces that both inhibit individuals from exiting a relationship and confine spouses to one another (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). These restraining forces are not necessarily negative, particularly when in harmony with the propelling forces. In fact, the strength of these restraining forces is of little consequence when a couple is experiencing high attraction to one another (Levinger, 1965). However, when attractions are low, barriers such as children and social pressure may be all that hold a marriage together.

Regardless of how these two forces are manifested in a relationship, there is significant risk involved in commitment. The greater the discrepancies between each spouse's commitment level, the greater the risk for disappointment and hurt (Drigotas et al., 1999), especially for the more committed spouse. Stated another way, the dependency involved in commitment entails risk. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggested that commitment level summarizes the characteristics of dependency in a marriage. Therefore, while the dependency inherent in commitment has the potential for favorable outcomes, it also involves significant risk.

From a layman's perspective, commitment is thought to be made up of a variety of components. Fehr (1988) found that university students believed characteristics like loyalty, responsibility, integrity, and faithfulness were most central to commitment. Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, and Reeder (1998) claimed that commitment was best illustrated through a 5-factor solution of supportiveness, expressions of love, fidelity, expressions of commitment, and consideration and devotion. The components that are accentuated in each of these studies portray commitment to be a type of affectionate allegiance.

Many of these concepts discussed above have expanded the definition of commitment to include an affective dimension. Indeed, Adams (1997) described commitment as a "cognitive-affective process." Supporting this idea, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) stated that "although the process of committing to a relationship, or remaining committed to it, clearly has a cognitive dimension, it is not purely cognitive" (p. 421).

These descriptions of commitment suggest a significant potential for this concept to be meaningful in providing insight into marital relationships. However, these basic definitions of commitment appear to be as far as most researchers go in agreeing with one another about what is involved in commitment. Views concerning the components and processes of commitment are quite diverse.

Measuring Commitment

A great deal of discrepancy exists in how researchers view commitment, particularly in the way that it has been measured. Researchers do not seem to agree about the components of commitment or how it functions to create stability in romantic

relationships (Adams & Jones, 1997). Even with increased interest in understanding interpersonal commitment and a growing literature base, studies on commitment appear to be expanding in a haphazard fashion (Adams, 1997). The assortment of approaches hinders the development of a coherent theory of commitment, preventing studies from building upon each other. This lack of consistency is common in the study of marriage due to researchers rarely agreeing on how to measure relationship outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

The variation in the type and quality of measures used to assess commitment provides evidence for this lack of coherence among researchers. A majority of the empirical studies on commitment only utilize one-item measures, asking individuals to rate how committed they are to their relationship (Adams, 1997). While this approach may have some utility, single items are unable to capture conceptual depth (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In addition, most empirical work on commitment involves one time assessments, ignoring the fact that commitment is a multidimensional and dynamic construct (Kurdek, 2000). Thus, with studies using different single-item measures to assess this complex construct at only one point in a marital relationship, the ability to compare and link findings is significantly hindered (Adams).

Brief measures to assess commitment are just one of the issues plaguing the research. Another limitation has been the psychometric quality of these measures (Adams, 1997). Researchers commonly design instruments and develop assessments out of a necessity to conform to the unique requirements or assumptions of their specific studies (Jones et al., 1995). This review alone found at least 14 different ways in which researchers have attempted to measure commitment. In examining the various measures,

few provide data supporting their reliability and even fewer provide evidence to support validity (Adams). Adams goes on to point out three significant problems that this creates. First, there is a lack of certainty regarding what is being assessed with these measures. Second, directly comparing research on commitment is questionable. Finally, studies examining the comparative utility of differing models of commitment are missing from the literature. Research on commitment has been growing in width but not in depth. Researchers recognize the importance of commitment but few are seeking to build an interconnected knowledge base. With these limitations in mind, what characteristics and qualities are believed to be related to commitment?

Correlates of Commitment

As noted earlier, commitment has both cognitive and affective components. Due to the strong cognitive component, some aspects of commitment can be described as premeditated. This being the case, it is possible to separate commitment from both its determinants and outcomes (Adams & Jones, 1997). Specifically, what behaviors are associated with being committed to a romantic relationship? While direct causal relationships have not been determined, some behaviors are seen as strengthening commitment whereas others are seen as the product of increased commitment, though the relationship between these variables is likely reciprocal.

Commitment appears to be involved in fortifying romantic interconnectedness in numerous ways. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) proposed that commitment guides interpersonal reactions and forges steady tendencies to behave in relationship enhancing ways. When couples report high levels of commitment, they indicate that they express more "love" to their spouses and report greater levels of marital adjustment (Clements &

Swensen, 2000). Looking specifically at how couples communicate their commitment to one another, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2002) found that behaviors labeled as "providing affection" (e.g., saying, "I love you", giving gifts, and physical affection) were the most frequently reported indicators of commitment. Behaviors that create a positive relationship atmosphere, such as "speaking well of one's partner to others", "accepting differences", and "being honest", were seen as indirect ways of communicating commitment.

The high level of commitment described here can be costly to the individuals involved (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Indeed, the magnitude of commitment seems to be pivotal in prompting individuals to sacrifice their immediate self-interest for the sake of the relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999). Sacrifice becomes one concrete way in which commitment is expressed. However, as important as sacrifice may be to relationship success, the effects of commitment are even greater on variables such as relationship adjustment and stability (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Level of commitment is also strongly related to relationship stability, and marital stability has received a significant amount of attention in the literature. From a self-report standpoint, one of the key reasons given for marital stability regardless of an individual's happiness with marriage is commitment to one's spouse and to the institution of marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1987). Research supports this assertion. Measuring commitment during dating relationships and following couples up to fifteen years later, Bui, Paplau, & Hill (1996) found that commitment accounted for a significant amount of variance in relationship duration. In comparison to variables such as relationship rewards, costs, satisfaction, investments, and alternatives, commitment has proven to be a superior

predictor of stay/leave behaviors (Rusbult, 1983). Commitment even appears to be a stronger predictor of breakup status than dyadic adjustment, with high levels of commitment encouraging relationship perseverance (Rusbult et al., 1998). Commitment to marriage influences long-term relationship stability for both husbands and wives. However, their combined commitment is an even greater predictor than their individual levels (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001-02). These results do not indicate that uncommitted individuals invariably terminate their relationships. However, individuals who do leave their marriages have lower levels of commitment earlier in the relationship (Impett et al.). The amount of variance in relationship stability accounted for by commitment commonly ranges from 10-20% (Impett et al., Bui et al.), which is not incredibly strong. Yet, commitment demonstrates greater utility than many other variables used to predict relationship stability.

On the other side of this reciprocal relationship, certain behaviors appear to strengthen commitment. For example, when spouses express high levels of care for one another and utilize positive conflict tactics, their commitment to remain in the marriage increases (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Other factors such as relationship length and church attendance demonstrate a positive relationship to commitment, whereas the number of times a person has been married is inversely related (Jones et al., 1995).

Relationship commitment is also associated with many personal qualities and attitudes. Just as high levels of commitment are correlated with positive relationship characteristics, low levels are associated with relationship difficulties. For example, the lower the level of personal commitment for both husbands and wives, the greater the negativity within the relationship (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). Individuals with

lower levels of commitment also report that they experience more problems in marriage (Clements & Swensen, 2000). Interestingly, when one's commitment is primarily to the spouse as a person, individuals report fewer problems than those whose commitment is primarily to being married (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985). Thus, marriage becomes a more problematic endeavor when commitment is low.

Commitment is significantly related to factors that support long-term orientation, a concept that is affiliated with relationship stability. Highly committed individuals feel a greater sense of connection to their spouse and hold a longer-term outlook concerning their relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). As an individual's commitment to his or her spouse grows over time, considerably fewer marriage problems are encountered and expressions of love increase between the couple (Swenson & Trahaug, 1985), creating an environment more conducive to persistence. The expansion of commitment increases the attractiveness of investing in the relationship. In fact, commitment to one's spouse was the most potent and consistent predictor of relationship quality in older couples' marriages (Clements & Swensen, 2000).

Religiosity is another factor related to commitment levels. As religious devoutness increases in both husbands and wives, so to does their commitment to marriage (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). A positive correlation also exists between the strength of religious beliefs and perceived barriers to ending a relationship, suggesting an association between strong religious convictions and higher levels of commitment (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Marital commitment has been found to be positively related to church attendance and relationship length, both of which were unrelated to satisfaction (Jones et al., 1995). This connection presumably exists because the ideas

inherent within many religious belief systems promote the idea of commitment and strongly discourage divorce.

Various other qualities such as locus of control, attachment, and gender demonstrate a connection with commitment. The belief that fate controls one's marriage is directly and negatively related to marital commitment (Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). The helplessness involved in attributing outcomes to fate seems to exclude the idea of a purposeful decision. An individual's level of marital commitment is also predicted by attachment style. Those who are securely or anxiously attached report stronger commitment to their current partner than those with an avoidant style (Adams, 1997). Finally, beliefs about gender directly impact commitment. Husbands and wives with less-conventional notions about gender roles indicate lower levels of commitment (Scanzoni & Arnett). On the other hand, when both spouses perceive that they are each equally contributing to and participating in the marriage, commitment is strengthened (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985).

Gender differences are also manifested within the process of commitment, particularly for females. Women have consistently been found to be more personally committed to marriage than men (Adams, 1997). Females may also have more variance in their commitment levels. Kurdek (2000) found that wives' commitment declined linearly over a five-year period while husbands maintained a consistent level. When it comes to seeking help for a distressed relationship, the pretherapy commitment level of the wife accounts for significant changes in marital satisfaction that result from therapy (Beach & Broderick, 1983). A similar relationship was not found for husbands. One variable that appears to strengthen a husband's commitment is children. The presence and

number of children is a more significant factor for preventing the termination of a marriage for husbands compared to wives (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Despite these differences, each gender's commitment to maintaining a marriage is equally predictive of relationship stability (Impett et al., 2001-2002).

Commitment and Satisfaction

In addition to these various qualities listed above, commitment demonstrates a strong and consistent relationship with a construct that receives a great deal of attention in marital research - satisfaction. The relationship between these two appears to be strong and consistent. For example, of the three components in Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, commitment was the variable most consistently associated with satisfaction for both genders (Acker & Davis, 1992). Much of the evidence suggests that increases in satisfaction lead to subsequent increases in commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Sabetelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). However, there is evidence that this relationship is bi-directional. Swensen and Trahaug (1985) found that as personal commitment between a couple increases, their relationship becomes more satisfying. Also, commitment levels prior to the start of therapy have been shown to account for variance in marital satisfaction that is not explained by communication skills (Beach & Broderick, 1983). Thus, while some studies suggest causal directionality from satisfaction to commitment, other indications propose interdependence between these two variables. Determining the extent of this relationship is dependent on how these variables are measured.

Due to the strong relationship between satisfaction and commitment, one may wonder if these variables are truly different. Jones et al. (1995) suggested that the

distinction between satisfaction and commitment might not be as marked as some believe, particularly in satisfied relationships. "It is possible that for such spouses, both satisfaction and commitment may blend into an overall experience of marital well being that cannot be partitioned psychometrically" (p. 931). If the overlap is so great, does commitment truly provide researchers with unique information for understanding marital relationships?

The answer is an emphatic "Yes!" Overwhelming evidence points to the fact that commitment is distinct from relationship satisfaction (Le & Agnew, 2003; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Specifically, commitment is a better predictor of stay/leave behavior in couples. Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) found that commitment completely mediated the influence of satisfaction on relationship duration for both men and women. Similarly, Jones et al. (1995) found commitment, but not satisfaction, to be positively related to relationship length and negatively related to the number of times married. Understanding why spouses feel satisfied with their marriages is not sufficient to explain how and why relationships persist through better or worse (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Even in the most fulfilling relationships, satisfaction plummets to seriously low levels, highlighting the fact that it cannot be the most important variable influencing an individual's commitment to persist (Cox et al., 1997). Indeed, commitment shows greater stability over time in comparison to satisfaction. This is why Jones et al. (1995) defined commitment as a spouse's intention to remain married regardless of fluctuation in satisfaction. Thus, commitment is a relatively stable variable that provides researchers with vital insight into what makes marriages last.

Conceptualizing Commitment

The value of commitment in the study of marriage is clear. The evidence presented above adequately justifies the use of commitment for this current study. The focus of this paper now turns to defining how to best measure this construct. Researchers who utilize commitment in studies on marriage often do so without providing a theoretical foundation for this variable. Very few researchers have put a concentrated effort into defining the characteristics of commitment. Four of the most prominent conceptualizations of commitment are presented here.

Stanley and Markman (1992) believed that commitment consists of two different components. The first component is called personal dedication. This refers to a spouse's desire to preserve or enrich the quality of the marriage for the shared benefit of the couple. Dedication rises above the level of only maintaining the relationship to focus on improvement, sacrifice, personal investment, and the betterment of one's partner. Dedication is believed to reflect the following variables: relationship agenda, primacy of relationship, couple identity, satisfaction with sacrifice, alternative monitoring, and meta-commitment. The second component is called constraint commitment. This refers to forces that bind a couple together despite their current level of dedication to each other. Variables believed to compose constraint include structural investments, social pressure, unattractiveness of alternatives, availability of partners, and morality of divorce. Stanley and Markman asserted that when spouses describe their level of commitment to their marriage, they are actually referring to personal dedication as opposed to constraint commitment. By identifying this key distinction and developing a measure that takes both components into account, these researchers provided a more comprehensive portrait of

commitment within marriage. Though separated by definition, these two components are intimately intertwined in the process of commitment. Their relationship is believed to be somewhat unidirectional - "Today's dedication is tomorrow's constraint" (p. 597). However, in testing their model, they discovered that some of their subscales did not receive sufficient validation. In addition, they identified a possible third component that was not accounted for in their model. While Stanley and Markman's conceptualization moves us beyond the idea that commitment is a unitary phenomenon, other researchers have described this process more effectively.

Johnson et al. (1999) suggested that there are three distinct types of commitment, which are not adequately captured in the commonly used measures of global commitment. They asserted that researchers need to stop conceptualizing commitment as a single phenomenon. Instead, the attention should be on personal, moral, and structural commitment if this construct is going to be fully understood. Personal commitment is seen in a person's desire to maintain a relationship. Personal commitment is believed to be influenced by attraction to one's partner, attraction to the relationship, and couple identity. Moral commitment, simply put, speaks to feeling morally responsible to remain in a relationship. An individual's general consistency values and a sense of moral obligation to one's partner affect this type. Structural commitment refers to feeling compelled to continue in a marriage regardless of the level of the previous two types of commitment. Structural commitment appears somewhat hidden when either personal or moral commitment is high. However, when the others are low, the components that make up structural commitment increase in prominence and create a sense of entrapment. These components include alternatives, social pressure, termination procedures, and

unrecoverable investments. In comparing these three types, the first two are internal experiences resulting from a person's attitude and values. The third type involves external constraints that make it costly to terminate the relationship. Due to this tripartite nature of commitment, researchers are urged to understand how each type develops and how these three are experienced based on the various possible combinations.

Johnson et al. (1999) provided some support for their model. First of all, while significant correlations exist between these three proposed types of commitment, the correlations are small enough conclude that personal, moral, and structural commitment are distinct from each other. Next, of the three types, their conceptualization of personal commitment received the most support. Johnson et al. found that personal commitment could be described as a function of love, martial satisfaction, and couple identity. In addition, personal commitment was the only type inversely related to negative marital interaction and the primary type associated with life satisfaction. In fact, global commitment, as measured in most studies, is primarily a function of personal commitment. Finally, a modest amount of support was found for moral commitment. Religiosity was associated with moral commitment and each of its proposed components.

Johnson et al. (1999) rightly identified that global commitment does not capture all that is involved in commitment. By describing the various types, they have recognized other factors that might be involved in the process of commitment, particularly when satisfaction is low. However, they provided inadequate support for their conceptualizations and for the measurement of moral and structural support. They recognized this shortcoming, stating that single-item questions were not sufficient to

reasonably distinguish among the three types of commitment experience. Their model enhances our understanding of commitment but their design was somewhat flawed.

In examining the various conceptualizations and definitions of commitment, it is difficult to find a model that has been more thoroughly examined than Caryl Rusbult's (1983) Investment Model. According to Rusbult, commitment to a relationship is dependent upon three interconnected factors that can enhance commitment and motivate persistence (Cox et al., 1997). The first variable is satisfaction, which has a positive relationship with commitment. This model reasons that greater satisfaction with a relationship will be experienced as the relationship provides high rewards and low costs and surpasses an individual's expectations. The second variable involves alternatives. Commitment is enhanced when there are poor or unappealing alternatives compared to the current relationship. The third variable is investment. Commitment is believed to increase when a person invests numerous resources into a relationship. Investing in a relationship is believed to magnify the cost involved in ending a relationship, which can be a powerful incentive to persist (Rusbult et al., 1998).

These three factors work together in that a person's commitment to persist in a relationship should increase when one is satisfied with one's partner, there are no adequate alternatives, and substantial investments have been made into the relationship (Rusbult, 1983). Each of these three variables plays an important role. If commitment were solely a function of satisfaction and alternatives, encountering an attractive alternative when satisfaction is low would result in commitment disappearing and the termination of the current relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). This does not account for the relationships that undergo unsatisfying periods but continue to survive. An

individual can be discontented with a relationship yet continue to be committed to it. Conversely, an individual may abandon a satisfying relationship due to available and enticing alternatives paired with few investments in the current involvement (Rusbult).

Extensive research has been conducted on Rusbult's (1983) model, producing results that support its claims. Satisfaction and investment size have consistently been shown to be positively related to commitment, while alternatives are negatively related (Cox et al., 1997; Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, 1983). In fact, repeated analyses demonstrate that all three factors together successfully predict commitment level and are affiliated with superior relationship functioning (Rusbult et al., 1998). These three factors equally predict commitment for both husbands and wives (Impett et al., 2001-02), with the combination of high satisfaction, numerous investments, and inferior alternatives accounting for 48% of the variance in commitment for women and 43% for men (Bui et al., 1996).

While this model has been effective in measuring commitment as operationalized by Rusbult (1983), others have suggested that this conceptualization is limited in its ability to completely capture the essence of commitment. Johnson et al. (1999) claimed that Rusbult's model only speaks to issues of personal commitment, as opposed to measuring "global commitment", providing information limited to a respondents desire to continue a relationship. Stanley and Markman (1992) provided a similar argument. Comparing Rusbult's model to theirs, they viewed the Investment Model as measuring personal dedication more than constraint. Coming from a slightly different vantagepoint, Adams (1997) believed that spouses are not invariably as calculated and rational as the Investment Model suggests. He pointed out that the cognitive processes described in this

model do not take into account the impact of emotional states. Adams suggested that committed behavior is additionally driven by internal standards and dispositional tendencies.

In recent years, Rusbult and her colleagues recognized a missing component in their study of commitment – prescriptive support. Cox et al. (1997) described prescriptive support as a sense of obligation to remain in a relationship fueled by either personal or social reasons. A personal reason, termed "personal prescription", refers to internalized beliefs that advocate remaining in a relationship. "Social prescription" refers to believing that significant members from one's social network support persisting in a relationship, for either moral or pragmatic reasons. Their research found support for social prescription but not for personal prescription.

> Social prescription accounts for additional independent variance in commitment, suggesting that the belief that one "ought to persist" influences feelings of commitment in ways extending beyond "wanting to persist", "feeling bound to persist", or "having no choice but to persist." (p. 87)

Cox et al. (1997) concluded that many of the previous studies on commitment have been shortsighted due to neglecting the role of prescriptive support. While this study only provides support for social prescription, they acknowledged that the one item used to measure personal prescription prevents this variable from being entirely dismissed. Thus, Rusbult's Investment Model provides a more complete understanding of commitment but fails to account for some of the crucial reasons people persevere in a marriage. We turn our attention to a model that seems to better account for these various factors.

The Dimensions of Commitment

In an attempt to find commonalties between the different approaches for measuring commitment, Adams (1997) empirically compared the various theoretical models of commitment and found that they could each be classified based on the extent to which they emphasize three distinct dimensions of commitment: attraction, morality, and constraint. Adams and Jones (1997) claimed that these three dimensions best capture the general features of interpersonal commitment and labeled them Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment. Commitment to Spouse is described as commitment to one's spouse based on devotion and satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage involves commitment due to one's belief that marriage is sacred as well as one's sense of obligation to honor the marriage vows. Feelings of Entrapment entail wanting to avoid financial hardship or social disapproval that might result from leaving a marriage. This model is similar to the one described by Johnson et al. (1999). However, Adams and Jones provide better empirical support for each dimension and for their overall conceptualization.

Using a sample of 1417 married individuals and 370 unmarried persons, Adams and Jones (1997) developed and substantiated a measure of commitment, the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), utilizing six separate studies. Their results strongly support the notion that the three dimensions reflect conceptually distinct components of marital commitment. Commitment to Spouse correlated with measures intended to assess positive, goal oriented, and loving attitudes toward one's spouse. Commitment to Marriage correlated with measures that reflect attitudes concerning moral conduct and personal integrity. Feelings of Entrapment generally correlated with measures that

gauged barriers to ending a relationship. These three dimensions are useful in describing commitment and are able to successfully discriminate based on relationship stage and quality.

Adams and Jones (1997) used casually dating, seriously dating, engaged, married, and divorced individuals to evaluate the effectiveness of the DCI in distinguishing these groups. Divorced individuals had significantly lower mean scores compared to the other groups on Commitment to Spouse/Partner and Commitment to Marriage/Relationship. On Commitment to Spouse/Partner, the casually dating group had significantly higher mean scores than divorced individuals but significantly lower means scores than the other three groups. When the married individuals were separated into two groups based on their satisfaction level, the high satisfaction group indicated having significantly greater Commitment to Spouse and Marriage and significantly less Feelings of Entrapment. Therefore, while Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage seem to be able to distinguish based on either relationship status or quality, Feelings of Entrapment discriminates more effectively on the basis of relationship quality.

In conclusion, Adams and Jones (1997) state that these three dimensions seem to capture, to varying degrees, the essential components of interpersonal commitment described in most theoretical writings. In addition, these dimensions provide valuable insight into the processes that may promote relationship stability in various ways at different stages in a relationship. However, their research only presented a snapshot of commitment and did not take into account the dynamic properties of commitment. Recognizing this limitation, Adams and Jones recommended that future research investigate the dynamic interaction of Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage,

and Feelings of Entrapment throughout the course of marriage. The importance of each of these dimensions fluctuates over the course of a lifetime as couples encounter the inevitable changes that occur within relationships, changing in character as spouses develop greater intimacy or distance (Adams, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how these three dimensions of commitment, as well as satisfaction, differ in relation to how long couples have been married. Are there trends that emerge for each of these variables throughout a marriage?

Johnson et al. (1999) highlighted the value of conducting this type of research, calling for greater understanding of how different combinations of the three dimensions are experienced and how they impact a relationship. Previous research offers some insight into how commitment may differ over time. From a unidimensional perspective, Jones et al. (1995) found that commitment tends to increase the longer a couple has been married. Sternberg (1986) provided a more dynamic description of this process. He proposed that commitment in long-term relationships starts by increasing gradually, then accelerates, and eventually levels off, producing a flattened S-shaped curve. Yet, these do not account for the variation within commitment.

In looking at how each dimension might fluctuate over time, those characteristics closely related to Feelings of Entrapment have received the most attention. Barriers to abandoning a marriage appear to become more potent the longer an individual is married (Sabatelli & Cecil-Pigo, 1985). While attractions may be the driving force in commitment early on in a relationship, the de-idealization that occurs over time results in spouses shifting their awareness from reasons to maintaining a marriage to the constraints that keep them from leaving (Kurdek, 2000). This increase in constraints over time may not

simply be the product of years together. Stanley and Markman (1992) proposed that increases in barriers have more to do with changes in relationship stage. For example, considerable increases were found in relationship constraint when couples went from married without children to married with children. Robinson and Blanton (1993) reinforced this idea, noting that couples point to the presence of children as an important variable restraining them from terminating their marriage. Decisions that are made during times of high satisfaction and attraction today (i.e., buying a home together, having children) become that which makes one feel trapped in a relationship tomorrow (Stanley & Markman). Therefore, as a marriage progresses through the various developmental stages, barriers to ending the relationship seem to increase.

However, change in the prominence of these barriers is rarely a function of quantity. Feelings of Entrapment only become salient in a relationship when satisfaction is low and the sense of devotion to one's spouse has tapered (Adams, 1997). When both Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage decrease, Feelings of Entrapment may be all that are left to support one's commitment. This change has to do with an individual's awareness context. When a marriage is relatively less satisfying, spouses look to other justifications for staying together (Adams & Jones, 1997). It is not as if constraints only emerge during trying times. Barriers such as children, social pressures, and financial penalties are just as present during satisfying periods of a marriage as they are during trying times. Any supposed change involves attributing greater importance to Feelings of Entrapment. However, increases in both the number and quality of barriers can compel a couple to stay together, as sometimes happens the longer a couple is married.

Looking at Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage, there have been few suggestions as to how they might vary over time. Any assumptions concerning this process need to be based on other variables that are related to these respective dimensions. For example, Commitment to Spouse has a strong connection to marital satisfaction and seems to reflect attitudes and feelings about one's spouse and the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997). Over time, Commitment to Spouse would supposedly follow a pattern similar to satisfaction. Commitment to Marriage, on the other hand, seems to be related to an individual's disposition with respect to obligations and morality in general as opposed to being greatly influenced by marital quality (Adams & Jones). With this being the case, one might assume that this dimension would possess greater stable over time, similar to a personality trait.

Recognizing the role that satisfaction plays in the process of Commitment to Spouse and commitment in general, there is value in understanding how satisfaction differs the longer a couple has been married. A popular assumption is that marital satisfaction follows a U-shaped pattern. According to Rollins and Feldman (1970), satisfaction initially declines, leveling off during the child rearing years and then rebounds through the "empty nest" and "retired" phases. Research since that time has not supported this assumption. Rather, average marital satisfaction is now understood to decline markedly over the first decade of marriage and then continue to decline at a more gradual rate (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). The evidence suggests that a mid-term upturn in marital satisfaction is unlikely, though the possibility for improvement in later life is not completely ruled out (Glenn).

Hypotheses of the Present Research

Based on the above information, the following hypotheses are offered concerning how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction will differ in relation to how long a couple has been married. First, Commitment to Spouse will follow a trend somewhat similar to marital satisfaction in that there will be an initially accelerated decline that becomes more gradual the longer a couple is married. This decline, however, will not be as pronounced as the decline in marital satisfaction due to commitment having more stability than satisfaction. Next, Commitment to Marriage will maintain a more stable course than the other two dimensions or satisfaction. There will not be any dramatic increases or decreases in Commitment to Marriage over time. Third, Feelings of Entrapment will increase over time and will have an inverse relationship with Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction. As Commitment to Spouse and satisfaction deteriorate, an individual's awareness of barriers expands and Feelings of Entrapment will increase. Finally, marital satisfaction will initially be at a high level, decrease significantly for the first decade, and then gradually decline throughout the remainder of a marriage, reaching lower levels than any of dimensions of commitment.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This will be a descriptive correlational study. Individuals who have been married for different lengths of time will be compared using a cross-sectional design to identify significant differences within and between the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction. The degree and the direction of the relationship between these variables will be described in order to determine the extent of the relationships. Causality can not be determined from this study.

Participants

A convenience sample will be used in this study. The sample will be composed of individuals whose current marriage ranges in length from at least one month to at least 10 years. This range has been chosen to capture the process of commitment within at least the first decade of marriage, where satisfaction is believed to decline significantly (Glenn, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). A greater range of years married is hoped for but this will be determined by the size of the obtained sample. Participants can have a history of divorce but they must currently be in a marital relationship. Including both individuals in first marriages and those in remarriages is appropriate due to satisfaction levels likely being similar. Investigators have found no consistent or meaningful differences in marital satisfaction between these two groups (Demaris, 1984; Vemer, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989). A sample size of 120 is needed to obtain a power of .80 (Cohen, 1988).

This sample will be recruited from Protestant churches throughout the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. The researcher will contact representatives from selected churches to obtain permission to distribute the questionnaires to married individuals who

attend those churches. Participants will be given a brief oral description (See Appendix A) of the study by either this researcher or a selected representative. Once an individual agrees to participate, he or she will be given an envelope that contains an IRB Survey Consent Form (Appendix B) and the questionnaires. Participants will be instructed to complete the following questionnaires without consulting anyone else: The Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS), and a demographics questionnaire. Participants will be asked to return the questionnaires in the envelope provided either that day or by mailing them at a later time. They will be asked to keep the Consent Form.

Protection of Human Participants

Several procedures will be utilized to ensure that participants are protected. This study will be submitted to the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Upon approval, this study will then proceed. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire packet, participants will be given an oral description of the purpose of this study, along with the associated risks and benefits of participating. Once an individual chooses to participate, he or she will be provided with an informed consent form that again explains the purpose and potential risks and benefits of participating in this study. Return of the completed questionnaires will be considered consent to participate. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The questionnaires will be anonymous. Participants will be instructed not to put their name on any of the material. Individual results will remain confidential.

Measures

Dimensions of Commitment Inventory

The Dimensions of Commitment Inventory is a 45-item questionnaire that asks respondents to rate their level of agreement with statements concerning marriage using a 5-point likert scale (See Appendix C). This instrument was developed by Adams and Jones (1997) based on previous theoretical and empirical writing on commitment. One hundred, thirty-five items were constructed to capture the qualities of commitment as described in these writings. The items were subjected to a factor analysis, resulting in three interpretable factors. The fifteen items with the highest reliability from each factor were selected for the DCI.

This instrument has demonstrated good internal consistency, with coefficient alphas of .91, .89, and .86 for Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment, respectively. Correlations between the three dimensions indicated conceptual independence. The correlation between Commitment to Spouse and Feelings of Entrapment was not reliable ($r = .14$). Commitment to Marriage, however, had moderate correlations with Commitment to Spouse ($r = .53$) and Feelings of Entrapment ($r = .60$). Based on the proportion of shared variance, Commitment to Marriage is deemed to be a separate but related construct (Adams & Jones, 1997).

Adams and Jones (1997) used casually dating, seriously dating, engaged, married, and divorced individuals to evaluate the effectiveness of the DCI in distinguishing these groups. Divorced individuals had significantly lower mean scores compared to the other groups on Commitment to Spouse/Partner and Commitment to Marriage/Relationship. On Commitment to Spouse/Partner, the casually dating group had significantly higher

mean scores than divorced individuals but significantly lower means scores than the other three groups. When the married individuals were separated into two groups based on their satisfaction level, the high satisfaction group indicated having significantly greater Commitment to Spouse and Marriage and significantly less Feelings of Entrapment. Therefore, while Commitment to Spouse and Commitment to Marriage seem to be able to distinguish based on either relationship status or quality, Feelings of Entrapment discriminates more effectively on the basis of relationship quality.

The three dimensions reflect conceptually distinct components of marital commitment. Commitment to Spouse correlated with measures intended to assess positive, goal oriented, and loving attitudes toward one's spouse. Commitment to Marriage correlated with measures that reflected attitudes concerning moral conduct and personal integrity. Feelings of Entrapment generally correlated with measures that gauged barriers to ending a relationship. In conclusion, Adams and Jones (1997) provided strong evidence that these three dimensions reliably reflect conceptually distinct dimensions of marital commitment.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (See Appendix D) was designed to be a brief measure of marital satisfaction based on the initial theoretical observations of Spanier and Cole (1976), who highlighted the distinctiveness between questions assessing one's spouse, one's marriage, and the marital relationship (Schumm et al., 1986). This scale attempts to measure satisfaction as one dimension of marital quality (Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2000). The KMSS consists of three items: "How satisfied are you with your marriage?", "How satisfied are you with your relationship with your

husband/wife?", and "How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?". Each item is rated according to seven response categories ranging from "extremely dissatisfied" to "extremely satisfied."

Internal consistency reliabilities for the KMSS have ranged from .84 to .98 (Schumm, Scanlon, Crow, Green, & Buckler, 1983). In a review of 57 studies that used the KMSS, the mean Cronbach alpha was .94 (Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 2000). Test-retest reliability has been good, ranging from .71 over a ten-week period (Mitchell, Newell, & Schumm, 1983) to .72 and .62 for husbands and wives, respectively, over a six-month period (Eggeman, Moxley & Schumm, 1985). The scale's items have shown conceptual distinctiveness, rejecting the notion that the high reliability is an artifact of asking similar questions or of social desirability (Schumm et al., 1985; Schumm et al., 1996; White, Stahmann, & Furrow, 1994). This scale also has good criterion-related validity, differentiating distressed from nondistressed wives (Schumm et al., 1985). A limitation of this scale is that responses tend to be skewed and kurtotic. However, Norton (1983) suggested that the true distribution of marital satisfaction scores in the population is skewed, and thus, the validity of the scale is not threatened.

Evidence indicates the KMSS is as reliable as other scales (Schumm et al., 1983). Spanier (1976) reported the coefficient alpha of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to be .96. A recent evaluation of the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) provided internal consistency coefficients that varied from .81 to .89 for men and .63 to .87 for women (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997). Test-retest reliability for the Locke-Wallace was .82 and .84 for men and women, respectively, over a one-month

interval. The DAS had a three-week test-retest reliability of .87 (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993).

The KMSS satisfies the requirements for concurrent validity, correlating with the Quality Marital Index (Norton, 1983), the Locke-Wallace, and the DAS (Schumm et al, 1986, White et al., 1994). In addition, the KMSS correlated more strongly with the satisfaction subscale of the DAS than with two of the other three subscales. The KMSS exhibited similar, if not better, discriminate validity than either the Quality Marital Index or the DAS (Schumm et al., 1986).

Other researchers have affirmed the value of the KMSS, highlighting the ample support for its validity (Sabatelli, 1987) and its usefulness in obtaining a general assessment of marital satisfaction (Burnett, 1987; White et al., 1994). In summary, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale seems to possess adequate reliability and validity to detect subtle differences in marital satisfaction.

Demographics Questionnaire

A brief demographics questionnaire will be combined with the KMSS (See Appendix D) to obtain the necessary information to describe this sample in a meaningful way. Information obtained will include age, gender, ethnicity, education level completed, years married, length of committed dating prior to marriage, cohabitation history, divorce history, and number of children.

Proposed Procedures

Responses to the questionnaires will be entered into SPSS for analysis. The level of statistical significance for the purposes of data analysis for this study will be $p = .05$.

The demographic data for participants (excluding measures of length of relationship) will be analyzed using measures of central tendency.

To examine the nature of the hypothesized trends, curvilinear regression analyses will be conducted. Regression will allow this researcher to examine how the three dimensions of commitment and satisfaction differ as a function of years married. According to Pedhazur (1997) curvilinear regression analysis differs only from linear regression analysis in its use of a polynomial regression equation. This involves raising the independent variable by a certain power. "The highest power to which the independent variable is raised indicates the degree of the polynomial" (p. 520). The degree of the polynomial indicates the number of bends in the regression line. These analyses will be done hierarchically.

Continuous by continuous multiple regressions, as discussed by Aiken and Wes (1991), will be used to test for significant interactions between the hypothesized variables. Two possible interactions will be examined: (1) Feelings of Entrapment on time and Commitment to Spouse, and (2) Feelings of Entrapment on time and satisfaction. This will assist in determining if the regression of Feelings of Entrapment on time is dependent upon Commitment to Spouse or satisfaction. For ease of interpretation and presentation of the possible interaction effects, the predictor variables will be converted to centered scores (i.e., deviation score form where the means equal zero).

Limitations

Some inherent biases are likely to exist in this sample. Due to a religious affiliation, these participants may have stronger beliefs concerning the sanctity of marriage and the immorality of divorce than a non-religious sample. However, 68% of

Americans recently reported that they were members of a church or synagogue (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Thus, a religiously affiliated sample can be said to be reflective of a majority of the North American population.

Due to this being a cross-sectional study, any significant variation across years married can only be attributed to differences in commitment and satisfaction across individuals, not actual change. A notable percentage of the individuals in the early years of marriage will terminate their marriage within the first decade of their relationship. Thus, those individuals who have been married for ten years or more will likely be different than those who have been married for only a few years. In addition, those who have been married for longer periods of time will be from a different generation than many of those who have been married for shorter periods of time. The sample will not be identical in that regard. These types of limitations are inherent in cross-sectional studies. However, it is advisable to explore the type of questions asked in this study with cross-sectional analyses first to determine if a costly longitudinal study is warranted.

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