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Diverse types of intimate committed relationships, namely cohabiting same-sex
and opposite-sex partnerships, are increasingly prevalent in the United States (Bumpass
& Lu, 2000; Garber, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Given the rise in the number of
individuals participating in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital
context, researchers exploring relationship constructs, such as commitment, in intimate
partnerships need to build upon the current literature base by investigating such concepts
in samples of cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Currently, the psychosocial
literature regarding the experience of commitment in intimate committed relationships
outside of the marital context is scarce, and researchers have been inconsistent in how
they conceptualize relationship commitment (Adams & Jones, 1999; Johnson, 1999;
Rusbult, 1991).

Johnson's (1991, 1999; Johnson, Caughlin & Huston, 1999) Tripartite Model of
Commitment is one of the most prominent theories of relationship commitment in the
psychosocial literature. Johnson (1991, 1999) proposed that commitment, the intention or
desire to continue and maintain one's intimate relationship, is a multidimensional
construct that is a result of two dichotomous experiences: (a) attractions and constraints
forces, and (b) internal and external processes. From these distinctions, Johnson
operationalized commitment as three dimensions: (a) personal commitment, (b) moral

commitment, and (c) structural commitment. Moreover, Johnson asserted that the Tripartite Model is applicable to various types of intimate committed relationships.

The dimension of moral commitment, which is the extent that one feels *obligated* to stay in a relationship (Johnson, 1991, 1999), has been the least developed empirically, particularly in relation to partners in intimate relationships outside of the marital context. Moral commitment is a constraining force that operates via internal processes. Researchers examining the Tripartite Model in samples of non-marital partners have left moral commitment out completely or defined it outside of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization (e.g. Johnson, 1985; Kurdek, 2000, 2007; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008). Thus, researchers need to operationalize moral commitment with cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners in a way that is consistent with Johnson's (1991, 1999) conception to test his assertion that the Tripartite Model is applicable to all types of intimate committed relationships.

The aim of this study, then, was to conceptualize the dimension of moral commitment within the framework of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment for non-marital intimate relationships, namely same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partnerships. An additional goal of this study was to inform counselors' knowledge of how commitment operates in diverse types of intimate partnerships. The researcher used a mixed-methods approach called concept mapping with a sample of cohabiting same-sex partners and opposite-sex partners, collecting data through a three round process. The researcher used an open-ended Internet survey, mailing out data collection packets, and focus groups to collect data for the concept mapping process. The

intent of the concept mapping methodology was to develop a better understanding of moral commitment for those in diverse types of intimate committed relationships.

Several interesting results were obtained from this study. First, participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups conceptualized the dimension of moral commitment as distinct from that of personal and structural commitment based on their responses to the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task. Moreover, participants rated the clusters of personal commitment as most descriptive of their experience in their relationship with their partner, with moral commitment being moderately descriptive and structural commitment the least descriptive. These results support Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory that commitment is a multidimensional experience, and his claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to diverse types of intimate relationships.

The results provided mixed results in terms of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of the three components of moral commitment: general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values. Cohabiting same-sex partners typed clusters of moral commitment with items that perceptibly fit with two of the three components, person specific obligation and relationship-type values. Participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group identified one cluster of moral commitment that was discernibly related to the person specific obligation component. Neither group had clusters that were overall indicative of the general valuing of consistency component. Both groups also had clusters typed as moral commitment that were not perceptibly fitting with Johnson's components. Thus, Johnson's (1991a, 1999)

theory of the components of moral commitment was partially supported by the results of this study.

Finally, the findings of this study indicated several similarities and differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment based on the interpretation of the final cluster solutions from each focus group. Intimate relationships seem to share a comparable basis in that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners engage in and maintain these relationships because they have feelings of attraction and commitment towards their partner and the relationship. Differing social discourses, however, surround same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Cohabiting opposite-sex may be less validated in U.S. society than marital partnerships, yet opposite-sex partners do not have to contend with the social discrimination and stigma against their relationships that is faced by same-sex partners. Although the findings of this study suggest that the Tripartite Model may be applicable to diverse types of intimate relationships, unique factors impact same-sex and opposite-sex relationships in light of the differing contexts in which these relationships are situated.

This study highlighted the importance of examining relationship commitment in diverse types of intimate committed relationships. The findings provide direction for future research and useful implications for counselors working with cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners

MORAL COMMITMENT IN INTIMATE COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS:

A CONCEPTUALIZATION FROM COHABITING SAME-SEX

AND OPPOSITE-SEX PARTNERS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

In loving memory of my father, Gray Pope.

For being my model of graceful and dignified perseverance.

To all those who have committed and persisted to reach their goals.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relationship quality and stability have been major concepts of interest in the

interpersonal relationships literature for over half a century (Adams & Jones, 1999). For a

time, relationship quality was thought to be the most significant predictor of relationship

stability, or persisting in a relationship over time, for partners in intimate committed

partnerships (Adams & Jones, 1999). As the research on interpersonal relationships has

progressed, however, investigators are finding a third factor to be significantly related to

relationship stability in intimate committed partnerships. Relationship commitment, the

intention to remain in one's relationship, has emerged as the most salient predictor of

relationship stability, independent of the level of relationship quality (Adams & Jones,

1997, 1999; Kurdek, 2008).

After the U. S. divorce rate rose in the 1960s, researchers began to focus more

intently on commitment in hopes of increasing the stability of marital relationships

(Adams & Jones, 1999). Currently, researchers remain interested in the construct of

commitment as it explains, at least in part, why and how individuals make decisions and

engage in behaviors in their daily lives to maintain their relationships (Rusbult, Martz, &

Agnew, 1998). Commitment is determined by a myriad of dynamic factors (Kurdek,

1995; 2000). As such, commitment is difficult to operationalize and differentiate from

other influencing concepts. Even after 50 years of research, investigators have yet to

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reach a consensus on the definition, dimensionality, or determinants of relationship commitment.

The majority of the researchers exploring relationship commitment have focused on partners in intimate committed relationships within the marital context. Diverse types of intimate committed relationships, however, are increasing in prevalence in the U.S. Two types of intimate committed relationships, in particular, are becoming more widespread: (a) cohabiting same-sex partnerships, and (b) cohabiting opposite-sex relationships. Researchers estimate that the number of same-sex couple households is increasing (Smith and Gates, 2001), and that the number of children in these households is between 2 and 14 million (Lambert, 2005; Negy & McKinney, 2006). Similarly, the rate of cohabiting opposite-sex couples is rising, as is the number of such couples who have children (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Seltzer, 2004). As such, marriage is declining as the only relationship afforded family status, meaning that family boundaries are becoming more and more ambiguous (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Accordingly, it is necessary to define and test models of relationship constructs with a diverse array of intimate partnerships.

Moreover, there is still a climate of hostility towards those who cohabit and have children together outside of the marital context, particularly towards same-sex partners (Green & Mitchell, 2002; Kurdek, 2004; Pope, Murray, & Mobley, 2010). Relationship researchers are in a position to contest heteronormativity, which is an organizing set of norms as well as a production of a way of being and interacting in the world that is based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm (Allen, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2009). This implicitly locates anything non-heterosexual as deviant and inferior (Blackburn & Smith,

2010; Rosenfeld, 2009). Heteronormativity also promotes the idea that individuals fall into distinct and binary gender roles (i.e., male and female) with natural inclinations towards relationships with the opposite sex (Allen, 2010). The societal discourse of heteronormativity, along with the history of family values activism in the U.S. over the past several decades, promotes marriage between a man and a woman as a lifelong commitment that forms the basic unit of a productive society (Lassiter, 2008). In order to complicate and challenge the dominant organizing principles and the production of heteronormativity as a structure to organize our identities (Allen, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2009), the researcher incorporated a queer theoretical perspective as an overarching secondary framework to guide the development and execution of this study.

As the primary theoretical basis for this study, the researcher used one of the three dominant commitment frameworks in the psychosocial literature, the Tripartite Model of Commitment (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). The Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness (Levinger, 1965, 1979a, 1979b) and the Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1983, 1991a; Rusbult et al., 1998) also are widely recognized theories of relationship commitment. Johnson's Tripartite Model, however, has received attention by researchers over the past few decades because his conceptualization of commitment fundamentally differs from Levinger's and Rusbult's theories. Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model will be introduced in detail below, and the secondary framework for this study, queer theory, will be discussed further in Chapter II.

Johnson's Tripartite Model of Commitment

Ongoing debate abounds in the scholarly literature about which theories of relationship commitment best explain the processes of commitment in interpersonal relationships (Ramirez, 2008). One of the most prominent theories of commitment that is gathering increasing empirical support is Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. Johnson (1991a, 1999) developed a commitment framework in which he contends that there are three distinct types of commitment: *personal*, *moral*, and *structural*. According to Johnson's framework, each type of commitment is experienced in a unique manner, with each having distinct causes and different behavioral, cognitive, and emotional consequences (Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999).

In addition to the three *types* of commitment, Johnson (1991a, 1999) further theorized commitment as including two dichotomous dimensions of the commitment experience: (a) the components of *attractions* and *constraint*s, and (b) the *internal* and *external* processes that influence one's decision and behaviors to maintain a relationship. Johnson (1999) developed his tripartite model of commitment after noting that social scientists were writing about commitment in reference to two separate phenomena: *attractions* and *constraints*. The *attractions* force of commitment captures the idea that partners want to maintain their relationships based on personal dedication and love. The *constraints* force of commitment refers to the extent that partners remain in their relationships to avoid the consequences of relationship dissolution (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1999). From this distinction between attractions and constraints, Johnson

(1991a, 1999) created a model that conceptualized commitment as multidimensional rather than a unidimensional global construct.

Johnson's (1991a, 1999) tripartite model also captures the *internal* and *external* processes that affect partners' intentions to remain in their relationships. The *internal* processes that influence relationship commitment refer to occurrences within an individual, such as attitudes, identity, and values. Processes *external* to the relationship that impact one's decisions and behaviors to maintain a relationship refer to those forces that exist outside of an individual. These include social pressures, difficulty of terminating the relationship, availability and quality of relationship alternatives, and irretrievable investments into the relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

The three types of commitment identified by Johnson (1991a, 1999) are personal, moral, and structural. *Personal commitment* refers to the extent to which a partner *wants* to maintain their relationship, and encompasses the attractions dimension of commitment. *Moral commitment* is the feeling that one *ought to* or *should* remain in their relationship, and is a part of the constraints dimension. Johnson (1999) defines the components of moral commitment as relationship-type values, person specific obligation, and general valuing of consistency. Both personal and moral commitment are internal experiences, and a result of one's general and relationship-specific attitudes and values (Johnson, 1999). Lastly, *structural commitment* is part of the constraints dimension, and refers to the degree that a partner feels they *must* or *have to* stay in their relationship. Structural commitment is a result of external experiences that makes one perceive the dissolution of

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the relationship as costly (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999; Ramirez, 2008).

Uniqueness of Johnson's Model

The most distinctive characteristic of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model is that he conceptualizes commitment as a multidimensional construct. Prior to the development of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model, a fundamental assumption of commitment researchers was that commitment was a unidimensional construct based on the extent that partners desired to stay in their relationships (Ramirez, 2008). Therefore, Johnson's framework is unique in the way it describes the multidimensionality of the commitment construct (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991a).

Another way in which Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model diverges from other theories of commitment is that he conceptualizes moral commitment as a distinct dimension separate from personal and structural commitment. Like Johnson (1991a, 1999), other researchers have conceptualized commitment as having an attractions force similar to personal commitment, which is predicated on an individual wanting to stay in a relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Ramirez, 1999). Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model also includes a constraining force, which includes the dimensions of moral and structural commitment. The majority of other theories, however, only capture the *having* or *needing to* components of commitment (i.e., structural commitment) in defining their constraints force, and omit the idea that one may feel he or she ought to stay in a relationship (i.e., moral commitment) (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Ramirez, 1999).

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Most investigators agree that the wanting to (i.e., attractions force) and needing and having to (i.e., constraints force) components of commitment are distinct constructs (Adams & Jones, 1997; Ramirez, 2008; Rusbult, 1991). Although researchers conceptualize and label attractions and constraints differently in various models of commitment, there are significant commonalities in defining these forces across models (Adams & Jones, 1997; Rusbult, 1991). Further, researchers consistently have found the attractions and constraints components of commitment to be conceptually discrete, no matter what label is attached to these constructs (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Rusbult, 1991).

Overall research findings on commitment are similar in that they include discrete attraction and constraints components, yet two ongoing issues exist in this body of research: (a) researchers typically include the attraction force as part of their conceptualization of commitment itself, but conceive of the constraints force as a determinant of commitment, and (b) the majority of researchers have omitted moral commitment as part of the constraints component. As a result, only Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of structural commitment is portrayed as a distinct factor across studies, while moral commitment has been omitted from most studies. Although most researchers agree that the attractions and constraints components of commitment are distinct factors, there still exists differing opinions on how to conceptualize these components in relation to commitment (i.e., Are they part of the commitment construct or a determinant of commitment?), which in turn impacts conclusions about the dimensionality of commitment.

Johnson's (1991a, 1999) dimension of moral commitment has been less well developed in the literature than have the ideas of personal and structural commitment. At the same time, it is a concept that may provide clearer answers to questions that still exist in the commitment literature about the multidimensionality of commitment. Although Johnson conceptualized moral commitment as a part of the constraints force, he distinguished it from structural commitment in that moral commitment is a result of internal processes rather than external factors (Adams & Jones, 1999; Johnson, 1991a, 1999). That is, moral commitment is influenced by one's values, which are internal constructions, whereas social and institutional barriers, which are outside of an individual, form the dimension of structural commitment. Both may compel a person to continue in a relationship whether or not they *want* (i.e., personal commitment) to stay.

Some researchers argue that the internal and external dynamics that shape moral and structural commitment are not discrete enough to make moral commitment a stand-alone factor (Rusbult, 1991). Few researchers, however, have developed measures of moral commitment that fully capture the construct as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Other researchers have claimed to test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model, but do not include measures to assess all three dimensions of commitment (e.g., Kurdek, 2000, 2007; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997). Therefore, the evidence remains inconclusive as to whether moral commitment is truly a distinct construct that significantly influences relationship stability in committed intimate relationships (Johnson, 1999; Ramirez, 2008; Rusbult, 1991).

Further, Johnson (1991a, 1999) maintained that the three components effecting individual's moral commitment are moral obligation to continuing particular types of relationships, moral obligation to other people affected by one's relationship, and maintaining a general valuing of consistency. Although religious beliefs about the sanctity of marriage and American cultural conceptions of the family as the basic unit of society (Adams & Jones, 1997) may influence the conceptualization of this dimension, Johnson (1999) asserted that his theory of commitment applies to all relationship contexts. While researchers have created measures to assess personal and structural commitment that may be generalizable to diverse types of relationships (e.g., Dimensions of Commitment Inventory; Adams & Jones, 1997), the dimension of moral commitment, as conceived by Johnson (1991a, 1999), remains to be defined and measured outside of marital contexts. In order to adequately test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) assertion that the Tripartite Model is applicable to all types of relationships, moral commitment needs to be conceptualized in intimate committed relationships both inside and outside of the marital context.

Moral Commitment in Marital Intimate Committed Relationships

In multiple studies intended to develop reliable measures of commitment with samples of married partners, researchers have found commitment to be a multidimensional phenomenon (Johnson, 1999). These researchers have discovered the factor structures of commitment in their studies to parallel Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model although in many instances their models were only partially, if at all, constructed off Johnson's (1991a, 1999) commitment framework (Adams & Jones, 1997,

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Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Components of the factor that coincides with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment dimension in these studies include: attitudes about the morality of divorce, commitment to marriage vows, satisfaction with sacrifice, obligation to children, and willingness to separate (Adams & Jones, 1997, Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Other researchers have directly tested Johnson's Tripartite Model with married partners, and also have found the dimension of moral commitment to be distinct from personal and structural commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Kapinus & Johnson, 2002; Ramirez, 2008).

Moral Commitment in Intimate Committed Relationships Outside of the Marital Context

Although Johnson (1999) purports that his model of commitment is generalizable to all relationship contexts, his model has only been thoroughly examined in marital relationships. Those researchers who have claimed to test Johnson's model with samples of partners in dating relationships (e.g., Johnson, 1985; Lydon et al., 1997; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) and same-sex partners (e.g., Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008) have not used an operationalization of moral commitment that thoroughly captured the construct as proposed in Johnson's model. For instance, Johnson (1985) and Rusbult et al. (1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) defined moral commitment as subjective norms, or the extent to which an individual's parents, friends, and religion supported the continuation of the relationship (Rusbult, 1991). Although these subjective norms may influence the dimension of moral commitment, this definition seems descriptive of social pressure to continue the relationship. As social pressure is

external to the individual, the conceptualization of moral commitment as subjective norms is more consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) definition of structural commitment than his description of moral commitment. Rusbult's (1991) argument that moral commitment provides little information as to whether partners remain in their relationships is flawed in that her operationalization does not capture Johnson's (1991a, 1999) characterization of moral commitment as an internal process.

In a study about dating partners transitioning to long-distance relationship status, Lydon et al. (1997) measured the obligation to relationship component of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment factor. They found moral commitment to be conceptually distinct from personal commitment in this sample, with moral commitment predicting higher levels of distress upon relationship dissolution (Lydon et al., 1997). Limitations of this study, however, include that Lydon et al. (1997) did not measure structural commitment, nor did they measure the other components of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment construct. Thus, few conclusions can be reached about the applicability of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model with dating partners from this study.

In two studies, researchers have explored Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory with same-sex couples. First, Oswald et al. (2008) examined moral and structural commitment in a sample of same-sex partners. Moral commitment was operationalized as engaging in the ritualization of the relationship, such as having a commitment ceremony, and found that religiosity and parental status positively correlated with ritualization. Although ritualization may be a cause and/or consequence of moral commitment, this definition is

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flawed in that it fails to capture Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of moral commitment as an internal process based on one's beliefs and values. Thus, Oswald et al.'s (2008) results infer that same-sex partners' religiosity and parental status correlate with an action (i.e., ritualization) that may be influenced by, or a result of, moral commitment rather than demonstrating direction relationships between factors and moral commitment. Therefore, only indirect conclusions can be drawn about the operation of moral commitment in same-sex partners from Oswald et al.'s (2008) study based on their operationalization of the construct.

Kurdek (2000, 2007) also studied Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model, along with Rusbult's (1983) investment model, to test the determinants of relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex and dating opposite-sex partners. Kurdek's (2000, 2007) findings did not support Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory that commitment is a multidimensional construct. A major limitation of Kurdek's (2000, 2007) work, however, is that he did not include the dimension of moral commitment in his study, which he acknowledged might be conceived differently by non-married and same-sex partners. This differs from the assertion of Johnson (1991a, 1999) who asserted that the Tripartite Model, including the occurrence of moral commitment, was applicable for all intimate partnerships. It seems clear, then, that researchers and theorists differ in their conclusions about moral commitment among non-married partnerships. From this, a clearer conceptualization of the construct of moral commitment among couples outside of a marital context seems a vital step in the research process.

Purpose of the Study

These researchers demonstrate a clear need to define moral commitment outside of married relationships to further test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. As it stands, findings are inconclusive as to whether commitment is a unitary or multidimensional construct. Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory has been supported by findings in samples of married partners, but the research with the Tripartite Model in samples of a diverse range of intimate committed relationships is erratic at best, particularly when it comes to the definition and measurement of moral commitment.

Rather than leaving moral commitment out completely or defining it outside of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization, researchers need to work to create a measure of moral commitment that is consistent with Johnson's conceptualization and generalizable to those in diverse types of intimate committed relationships, such as cohabiting same-sex or opposite-sex partners. Until this happens, those in the social science fields cannot reach any decisive conclusions about the dimensionality of relationship commitment among diverse types of couples. That is, at this point it is not possible to substantiate Johnson's (1991a, 1999) assertion that the Tripartite Model is applicable to various types of committed relationships. The researcher used a mixed-methods approach called concept mapping with two groups of participants, cohabiting same-sex partners and cohabiting opposite-sex partners. The intent of this methodology was to operationalize the dimension of moral commitment in accordance with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment for those in diverse types of intimate committed partnerships.

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This study further informs an operationalization of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) concept of moral commitment to include partners in a variety of intimate committed relationships. The concept maps formulated by the participants in this study can later be used to develop measures of commitment based on Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of relationship commitment (e.g., Dimensions of Commitment Inventory; Adams & Jones, 1997) to more accurately test his model with partners in a variety of committed intimate relationships. In this way, researchers can further test the Tripartite Model of Commitment, and find if it is indeed generalizable to other relationship contexts. Whether or not Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model will be substantiated in studies with diverse samples remains to be seen, but a vital first step is to create a way for his concept of moral commitment to be measured in samples of partners in a variety of intimate committed relationships. The aim of this study was to begin the process of creating a measurement that can add to the empirical testing of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. This study operationalizes moral commitment with two samples of partners who are in relationships outside of the marital context, namely cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, in order to continue the clarification of the dynamic processes of relationship commitment in diverse types of intimate partnerships.

Statement of the Problem

Johnson's Tripartite Model of Commitment has been operationalized and empirically supported with samples of opposite-sex married partners (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999; Ramirez, 2008). Further, researchers testing other operational

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definitions of commitment with married partners have found their components to fall into a three-factor structure similar to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Although Johnson (1999) claims that his commitment framework is applicable to all relationship contexts, some researchers testing his model outside of a marital context (i.e., with dating or cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners) have not found the dimension of moral commitment to be a separate factor (Rusbult, 1991). In these studies, however, moral commitment was defined differently from Johnson's conceptualization (Johnson, 1985; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) or not included at all (Kurdek, 2000, 2007). Lydon et al. (1997) did capture parts of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) definition of moral commitment in their study with opposite-sex dating partners, and found it to be distinct from the personal dimension. In this study, however, the researchers failed to include a measure of the structural dimension, so no conclusions can be drawn from their findings about the distinction between moral and structural commitment. Thus, to date no researchers have operationalized and empirically tested moral commitment in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context while fully using Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization and operational definitions of the three dimensions of commitment.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. Do cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceive of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment?

2. How do cohabiting same-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?

   a. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   b. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the person specific obligation component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   c. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the relationship-type values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   d. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive of other components of moral commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment?

3. How do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?

a. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

b. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the person specific obligation component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

c. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the relationship-type values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

d. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive of other components of moral commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment?

4. What are the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

5. What are the differences between cohabiting same-sex and cohabiting opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

Need for the Study

When Johnson (1991a, 1999) developed his Tripartite Model of Commitment, he asserted that the model was applicable to all types of intimate committed partnerships. Moral commitment, as defined by Johnson (1991a, 1999), however, is a relationship construct that has not been concretely defined outside of marital relationships. There is a need to operationalize moral commitment in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context, particularly with cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, in order to fully test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that the Tripartite Model is a well-founded framework for conceptualizing relationship commitment in a variety of partnerships.

Since moral commitment, as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999), shares internal processes with personal commitment and the constraints force with structural commitment, it may be less distinct in some types of relationships and more prominent in others (Adams & Jones, 1999; Lydon et al., 1997). This study contributes to the literature on relationship commitment by refining the distinctions between the dimensions of commitment, and the relationship types to which they apply. Currently, the predominant models of relationship commitment in the psychosocial literature conflict in their definitions and dimensionality of commitment, and thus counselors may not be considering the moral-normative dimensions of commitment in conceptualizing their clients' relationships, particularly for those in intimate committed partnerships outside of the marital context. There is a need to explore whether moral commitment is viewed as a distinct dimension of commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships

so that counselors can include the moral commitment component in their

conceptualization and assessment with their clients if warranted.

There are several reasons why further clarifying the concept of relationship

commitment, particularly the moral-normative component, is needed in the social science

fields. First, commitment is viewed as the subjective experience of relationship stability,

and is a critical predictor of whether a relationship will last (Kurdek, 2008). Knowledge

of the factors that help relationships persevere helps to explain how some relationships

last despite fluctuations in relationship satisfaction or conflict while others dissolve

(Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2007). Not only are researchers finding cohabiting

same-sex and opposite-sex relationships to be increasing in prevalence, but also that these

partnerships may lack structural barriers to relationship dissolution, which factors into the

instability of these relationships (Kurdek, 1998, 2006; Seltzer, 2000, 2004). Hence, the

dimension of moral commitment may be especially relevant in contributing to

relationship stability in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. Furthering the

research on relationship commitment in a variety of intimate committed relationships can

provide information for counselors to enhance the relationship stability for those in

diverse partnerships, such as cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.

Moreover, the moral dimension of commitment has been found to be positively

associated with marital satisfaction (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999) and relationship

maintenance behaviors (Ramirez, 2008), yet more indicative of distress upon relationship

dissolution than personal commitment (Lydon et al., 1997). These findings suggest that

moral commitment could be influential in helping partners remain more positive about

their relationships, even in times of conflict (Adams & Jones, 1999), in order to maintain relationship continuity. Thus, this study contributes to counselors' information that can help them to increase their clients' relationship quality and satisfaction through expanding the knowledge of how moral commitment operates in a variety of intimate committed relationships.

Definition of Terms

Relationship - when two people are interdependent on one another in that a change in one person has an impact on or causes a change in the other, and vice versa (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

Intimate committed relationship - a relationship in which two individuals share an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual connection, have an influence and mutual reliance on each other (i.e., interdependence), and both intend to share a long-term relationship with one another (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991a; Pope et al. 2010).

Intimate committed partners outside of the marital context - partners who self-identify as being in committed intimate relationships but who are not currently married nor engaged to get married, or those in relationships in which marriage is not an option (i.e., same-sex relationships in states where same-sex marriage remains illegal). As no agreed upon terminology exists in the literature for partners in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context, perhaps due to the lack of institutionalization of their relationships (Manning & Smock, 2005), this definition was created by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

Commitment - the intention or desire to continue and maintain one's intimate partnership (Adams & Jones, 1997; Ramirez, 2008). Being *committed* to the continuation and maintenance of a relationship also means that one is *committed* to lines of action that will uphold the interdependence between partners (Johnson, 1991a).

Attractions force - the extent that one maintains a relationship because of personal dedication and love towards her or his partner and/or relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1999).

Constraints force- the extent that one maintains a relationship in order to avoid the consequences of relationship dissolution (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1999). *Internal processes* - the way in which one's decisions and behaviors to maintain a relationship are influenced by inner forces, such as attitudes, identity, beliefs, and values (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

External processes – the way in which one's decisions and behaviors to maintain a relationship are influenced by forces outside of the individual, such as social pressures, difficulty of terminating the relationship, availability and quality of alternatives, and irretrievable investments into the relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

Moral commitment - the sense that one *ought* to continue a relationship, whether or not they want to remain in that relationship, based on moral obligation. This dimension of commitment functions as a part of the *constraints* force and is affected by *internal* processes. Moral commitment includes three components: a sense of moral obligation towards the relationship, a feeling of moral obligation towards one's partner, and a desire for consistency among one's personally held values (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). The

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components of moral commitment have only been conceptualized in relation to the belief that marriage is a sacred institution and that one is morally obligated to uphold the marital vows they made to their spouse (Adams & Jones, 1997).

Personal commitment - the extent that a partner *wants* to remain in their relationship with their partner. This dimension captures the *attractions* force of commitment and is influenced by *internal* processes. Components of personal commitment include attraction to one's relationship, attraction to one's partner, and the degree to which the relationship is integral to one's identity (Johnson, 1999; Ramirez, 2008).

Structural commitment - the belief that one *has to or must* stay in their relationship with their partner. This dimension is also part of the *constraints* force, but differs from the moral commitment dimension in that the origins of structural commitment are *external* rather than *internal* (Johnson, 1991a, Rusbult, 1991). Availability of acceptable alternatives to one's relationship, social pressures, difficulty of termination procedures, and irretrievable investments are the major components of structural commitment (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters

This research study is presented in five chapters. The purpose of this first chapter is to introduce the concept of relationship commitment, particularly the dimension of moral commitment, and to give a brief overview of the current literature and debates surrounding the construct of commitment. The researcher delves further into relevant

literature on moral commitment in the second chapter to contextualize the current study. The third chapter explains the methodology, including the use of concept mapping, and the fourth chapter presents the results of this study. The fifth and final chapter includes a discussion of the results, implications for the field of counseling, limitations to the current study, and future directions for research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rationale for operationalizing moral commitment in diverse types of intimate committed partnerships, namely cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, was presented in Chapter I. In this chapter, the existing literature on relationship commitment is reviewed. To further contextualize the current study, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) tripartite model and two other dominant models of commitment are reviewed to establish the distinctiveness of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model. The dimension of moral commitment is discussed in depth, and general findings on commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex findings are presented.

Increasing Diversity of Intimate Committed Relationships

Understanding moral commitment in diverse types of intimate committed relationships is essential, in part, because of the increasing prevalence of these relationships. A diverse range of intimate committed relationships, including cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships, are becoming increasingly common in the U.S. Estimates of the prevalence of same-sex couples, including those not cohabiting, are difficult to obtain, but survey data indicates that 40% to 60% of lesbians and gay men report being partnered at any given time (Garber, 2005; Kurdek, 2004). The incidence of

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same-sex partners living together quadrupled, from approximately 145,000 in 1990 to almost 600,000 at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census (Smith and Gates, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Further, estimates are that between 2 and 14 million children live with same-sex parents in the U.S. (Lambert, 2005; Negy & McKinney, 2006).

Correspondingly, the rate of unmarried opposite-sex partners who are cohabiting is on the rise, nearly doubling among the younger population (i.e., ages 25 to 39) from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Presently, cohabiting opposite-sex partners are estimated to occupy 4.8 million U.S. households (Seltzer, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Given the increasing prevalence of intimate committed partnerships outside of the marital context, researchers investigating relationship constructs, such as commitment, need to build upon the current literature by investigating such concepts among samples of non-married partners.

Further, researchers studying partners in diverse types of intimate relationships can incorporate theoretical perspectives that aim to confront the social norms, such as heteronormativity, which perpetuate discrimination against those who choose to engage in various configurations of non-married same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. In the U.S., marriage between a man and a woman still is widely promoted as the ideal relationship, and the most "statistically optimal" (Perry v. Schwarzenegger, 2010, p. 8) environment in which to raise a child. The media response to the recent ruling of a U.S. District Court against Proposition 8 in California demonstrates that disputes about whether same-sex couples should or should not be granted the legal right to marry remains a highly charged issue. For example, as of August 13, 2010, searching for

"Proposition 8" on Google returns almost 10 million results, with over 11,000 being news related in the last 24 hours.

Although the landscape of intimate committed relationships in America is changing as shown by the increase in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex couples over the past decades and the current visible debate over marriage legislation, the recent discourse over Proposition 8 demonstrates how deeply imbedded the presence of heteronormativity is in the U.S. Through the use of a queer theoretical perspective as a secondary framework to guide the construction and implementation of this study, the researcher attempted to deconstruct and question the heteronormative discourse that effects societal and individual views on intimate committed relationships.

A Queer Theoretical Perspective

Queer theory arose in the 1990's as body of academic work based in post modern and social constructionist perspectives to challenge the positivist notion that identity, particularly sexual identity, is essential, fixed, and stable (Hall, 2003). Queer theory postulates that identity is a social construction, related to one's social location and interests at a certain place and time (Sawicki, 1991). There is not an "I" that precedes performative processes and actions; rather, the "I" is constituted through one's actions (Butler, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, queer theory aggressively challenges the way sexual identities are classified (i.e., whether by desires, actualized behaviors, or self-identification), as sexuality is seen as a fluid and complex construct with no clear way of demarcating one sexual identity from another (Hall, 2003).

From this theoretical perspective, identities are fictions that are created through historical context and discourses. Queer theorists and activists work to undercut hegemonic ideologies, or what Michael Warner termed "regimes of the normal" (1993, as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 15). Hegemonic ideologies are pervasive beliefs about what is normal, proper, and right which are reflective of the dominant group's stance (Weber, 1998). Queer theory works to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies, such as heteronormativity, by focusing on the ways in which our understandings of who we are, and of sameness and difference, are socially constructed and regulated by our discourses to maintain positions of power and authority (Hodges, 2008). Thus, queer theory thrusts us into a realm of ambiguity and uncertainty of the self, but also invites us into a world in which the realm of possible spaces one can occupy is seemingly infinite.

Finally, queer theory is based in Michael Foucault's ideas of power as relational rather than a possession, meaning that no one can operate outside of power and thus achieve freedom from power (Butler & Byrne, 2008; Minton, 1997). As such, everyone has access to power although some have the means and resources to exercise it more influentially than others. Power relations are constituted on the construction of the "other" (i.e., the one over whom power is exercised), and so those in lower positions of power can use discrete acts of agency to resist heteronormativity and expose heterosexuality as a social construction (Butler, 1996). Queer theorists view political, legal, and social struggles as relations of power in which freedoms can potentially emerge through resistance to dominant discourses and establishments (Minton, 1997).

A Queer Critique

Throughout the construction, implementation, and interpretation of this research study, queer theory was used as a guiding framework that influenced the researcher's decisions in how she executed her exploration of relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Quantitative or mixed-methods research in many ways seems antithetical to queer theory as the techniques used to conduct such research often rely on essentialism and reductionism to describe and measure otherwise indefinable characteristics.

Although quantitative or mixed-method researchers must use definitions of identity that queer theory resists, their research can be queered through (a) acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality, (b) the use of language to review the literature and describe the methods and results in opposition to normativity, (c) the operationalization of terms in a way that broaden versus diminish the multiple ways that one can enact their sexual identity, (d) the choice to use a methodology that incorporates testimonial validity so that research subjects are the primary interpreters of the results, and (e) through the deconstruction of their results in order to acknowledge the dominant norms and powers that may have influenced their findings (Butler & Byrne, 2008; Hegarty, 2008).

The researcher implemented a queer critique of this study by beginning with an examination of her positionality in relation to this research in the section below. The researcher also attended to her use of language throughout this document in order to subvert heteronormativity and to deconstruct the homosexual/heterosexual binary to

allow for a range of sexual identity expression. For instance, the researcher chose to use "opposite-sex" partners rather than describing partners who engage in a relationship with a person of a different sex as "heterosexual." Using the term "heterosexual" in conjunction with "same-sex" is a means of privileging heterosexuality over other sexual identities as the object choice of heterosexual partners is presumed rather than made explicit. Further, this language challenges the homosexual/heterosexual binary to allow for bisexual identities outside of same-sex relationships by describing couples' relationships based on the current of their object choice.

The researcher acknowledges that the terminology of "same-sex" and "opposite-sex" has its limitations insofar as this language may exclude those who identify as intersex. Moreover, using this language to describe participants does not capture the possible nuances between their sex and gender presentation. Despite these limitations, the researcher chose these terms to define her participants' identities as "same-sex" and "opposite-sex" are descriptors that have been widely used in the psychosocial literature on couple relationships, and therefore are likely to be familiar to the reader. Additionally, with quantitative or mixed-methods research, identity constructs must be operationalized so that studies can be replicated. The researcher recognizes that these definitions of identity are contrary to the aims of queer theory; classifications, however, cannot be escaped entirely for the purposes of this study if the knowledge generated by this research is to be disseminated, understood, and possibly replicated by others in counseling or other social science fields.

Further, the researcher was intentional in how she operationalized terms such as "intimate committed relationship" to expand rather than diminish the range of sexual identity expression of the participants in this study. The researcher intended this definition to be broad in order to be inclusive of the multiple and varied ways that people define and can participate in "intimate committed relationships." Additionally, the researcher left the demographics questions relating to sex and sexual orientation open-ended to allow for a multiplicity of responses rather than prescribing the participants into categories defined by the researcher. As the data for sex and sexual orientation was only used for description of the sample, this approach allowed for nuances of participants' sexual identity to present in order to complicate heteronormativity.

Although the researcher worked to queer this study through her use of language and the way she chose to operationalize her terms, the English language remains restrictive in its use of terms in relation to sexuality. Therefore, the researcher had to make decisions about clarity of language to enhance the reader's understanding and in order to maintain consistency of terms across research studies. The researcher, however, worked within the limitations to create a study and a document that will add to the discourses working to challenge heteronormativity and queer sexuality.

Moreover, the researcher chose the mixed-methods approach of concept mapping to explore her research questions, which is a methodology that incorporates testimonial validity. The ways in which the methodology incorporates a queer perspective will be elaborated on in Chapter III. Finally, the researcher uses queer theory as a framework to

deconstruct her research findings and acknowledge how the dominant norms may have influenced the execution and results of this study in Chapter V.

The Researcher's Positionality

Based in Michael Foucault's ideas on power, queer theory postulates that power is relational rather than a possession (Butler & Byrne, 2008; Minton, 1997). Therefore, the goal of political and social struggles is not freedom or liberation from power, but resistance to dominant and oppressive power relations (Minton, 1997). One can confront heteronormativity by operating from an empowering and marginal positionality such as a queer theoretical perspective. Thus, a brief consideration of the researcher's positionality is necessary. As a straight woman who chooses to engage in the institution of marriage with her partner, the researcher simultaneously engages in heteronormative practices and institutions, along with the privileges they entail, while seeking to change these structures that she feels limits and oppresses the multiple possibilities of sexuality and gender expression.

There has been some dispute among queer theorists about whether someone who identifies as straight can occupy a queer space, and what contributions they can make to the field of queer scholarship in research and practice (Allen, 2010). Based on Halperin's (1995) work, Sullivan (2003) suggests that "queer is a positionality rather than an identity in the humanist sense, it is not restricted to gays and lesbians, but can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalized as a result of their sexual practices" (p. 44). Halperin (1995) goes on to state that queer could include, "some married couples without children… or even (who knows?) some married couples *with* children – perhaps, *very*

naughty children" (p. 44). These descriptions of queer propose that someone can occupy

a queer positionality even if they do identify as straight. On the other hand, some queer

theorists are concerned that straight people who engage in queer spaces:

> … assume a queer straight identity… this assumption implies that a queer
> heterosexual is a teleogical identity, one that is 'reached,' as opposed to one that
> represents an ongoing site of struggle of critical self-(de)formation situation
> within relations of power. (Rodriguez, 2007, p. 298)

The researcher agrees with Rodriguez (2007) that assuming an identity as a

straight queer seems highly unqueer, as the basis of queer theory is that identity

categories are incoherent and unstable constructs (Hall, 2003). The researcher believes,

however, that there are queer spaces in which individuals who describe themselves as

straight can occupy because everyone has the potential to produce as well as to contest

heteronormative knowledge regardless of their positionality. Queer theory postulates that

a) identity is an unstable construct which is constantly shifting based on one's place in a

social environment at any given point and time (Hall, 2003; Sawicki, 1991), b)

heteronormativity is a dominant discourse that survives through its relation to the "other"

homosexual orientation (Allen, 2010; Butler, 1996), and c) power is relational, subjecting

everyone to operate within current power relations, including heteronormativity (Allen,

2010; Butler & Byrne, 2008; Minton, 1997).

Thus, those who ascribe to gay identities are not subject to a different set of power

relations than those in the heterosexual majority, and also can perpetuate

heteronormativity through their actions or non-actions (e.g., a gay teacher omitting to

acknowledge the possibility of gay sexual relations when discussing sex in a health class

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at school; Allen, 2010). If those who ascribe to gay identities can produce heteronormative knowledge, then it also follows that those who are straight may have the ability to contest heteronormative knowledge. As Allen (2010) argues, "The relationship between sexual identity and anti-normative knowledge appears more complex than a lineal certainty that heterosexuals cannot (despite an expressed desire by some of them) stop thinking straight" (p. 161). Further, the main premise of queer theory suggests that identities are unstable, fragmented, and contingent on one's environment, so the production of knowledge by any individual, no matter what their identity, also should be viewed as dynamic, messy, and open to contestation. It is on the arguments above by other gay and straight researchers that I base my belief that queer spaces can be occupied by anyone despite their identity and positionality, and that straight researchers can contribute anti-normative knowledge to queer theory and their perspective fields.

Therefore, the researcher does not try to establish my positionality by purporting an identity as a "queer straight," which suggests a stable space that she has achieved. Due to the way queer complicates, and even defies, identity constructs, it is necessary that anyone utilizing a queer perspective be engaged in an *ongoing* site of contestation with oneself and the social structures that surround us. Rodriguez (2007) provides this suggestion of a way for someone who is straight to embody the "ongoing site of struggle," which is to practice "queer critical care." Queer critical care is:

The practice by which the straight self begins to understand and respond to the complex processes of heterosexual subjection and the ontological and epistemological limitations which subjection creates for living an ethical and more free life, both in relation to itself and in relations with the GLBTQ "Other." (p. 282)

As a straight and married researcher exploring diverse types of intimate relationships, one of which she had engaged in previously as a cohabiting opposite-sex partner outside of the marital context, the researcher must practice queer critical care in order to ethically serve those whom she is researching. The researcher constantly questioned herself as she made decisions and constructed this study, even through analyzing the writing of each sentence, to assess for her heteronormative biases. The researcher has tried to keep an open mind to others' input and critiques, including that of her dissertation committee and participants, letting their views inform her efforts to incorporate a queer theoretical perspective into this study. Additionally, this has been a process of self-reflection, in which the researcher turned a critical eye to herself and her embodiment of heteronormative practices, allowing herself to sit in places of discomfort while she struggled with the contradictions and ambiguity of being a straight married researcher with an interest in studying partners in other types of relationships.

Through the explanation of her positionality and how the researcher used queer theory to inform this research study, the researcher hopes that she provided the reader with a glimpse into her thought processes that drove the conceptualization, methodology, and presentation of the results. The researcher also hopes that this brief query into queer theory encourages the reader to respond to her with their thoughts about this study, as it is

this ongoing discourse that promotes the practice of queer critical care and the production of anti-normative knowledge.

Commitment as a Determinant of Relationship Stability

One relationship construct that has been given heavy consideration in the psychosocial literature is relationship commitment, the intention or desire to maintain one's intimate partnership (Adams & Jones, 1997; Ramirez, 2008). Researchers have long been interested in the factors that contribute to relationship stability (Adams & Jones, 1999), or the maintenance of a relationship over time (Kurdek, 2004; Rusbult et al., 1998). Relationship stability is an objective measurement (i.e., the relationship did or did not dissolve; Kurdek, 2004; Rusbult et al., 1998) and thus can be reliably assessed in one or two questions. Stability, however, can be difficult for researchers to measure as it has to be assessed by following partners longitudinally to observe whether the relationship remains intact or dissolves (Kurdek, 2004; Rusbult et al., 1998). Therefore, researchers have looked for ways to gauge relationship stability at one point in time. Commitment is viewed as the subjective experience of stability (Kurdek, 2008) that can be assessed at a single point in time with partners. Further, researchers have found commitment to be a critical predictor of relationship maintenance over time (Kurdek, 2007, 2008; Rusbult et al., 1998). Thus, commitment has come to be regarded as a salient determinant of relationship stability.

Commitment in Cohabiting Same-sex and Opposite-sex Partnerships

Marriage is currently the most institutionalized intimate partnership in U.S. society, governed by a proscriptive set of social norms and formal legislation (Nock, 1995; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). Although the divorce rate in the U.S. remains close to 50%, with 16.9 per 1000 married women becoming divorced in 2008 (Wilcox, 2009), marriage remains the only relationship status that is regarded by most as a life-long, permanent commitment (Jamieson, Anderson, McCrone, Bechhofer, Stewart, & Li, 2002; Yabiku & Gager, 2009).

Committed intimate relationships outside of marriage, including cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships, are regarded by some researchers as incomplete institutions, which are more subject to dissolution because such relationships often involve less long-term social and legal commitment (Hall & Kitson, 2000; Nock, 1995; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). Indeed, researchers have found that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships dissolve at higher rates than marital relationships (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Kurdek, 1998, 2006; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). What is as yet incomplete, however, is a clear picture of why this is true. As various types of intimate committed relationships are increasing in prevalence in the U.S., research is needed to identify the factors that affect relationship commitment in such partnerships to inform mental health practices to enhance relationship satisfaction and stability of cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

Research on Cohabiting Same-sex and Opposite-sex Partners

Researchers only began to explore same-sex relationships during the past few decades, as before the 1970's same-sex partnerships remained largely invisible due to the social stigma attached to sexual minority orientations (Kurdek, 2004). Similarly, the rates of cohabitation for opposite-sex couples have doubled since the 1970's (Bumpass & Lu, 2000), in part due to the rising number of younger couples choosing to delay marriage (Seltzer, 2000). Thus, cohabitation is a more recent phenomenon in the U.S., and has only garnered focused attention in the psychosocial literature over the past 30 years. The limited history of research on cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, coupled with the limited number of researchers focusing on these sub-groups, has resulted in a dearth of empirical literature on intimate committed partnerships outside of the marital context.

Relationship variables influencing relationship commitment have been more extensively studied in cohabiting same-sex partnerships than cohabiting opposite-sex partnerships. Variables found to be positively associated with commitment in cohabiting same-sex partners include relationship quality and satisfaction, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship monitoring, the ongoing awareness of how well things are going in the relationship (Kurdek, 2009), and investment size, which is the amount of emotional, mental, and financial resources one has invested in a relationship (Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008). Other factors that appear to positively influence commitment in same-sex couples are cohabitation, social disclosure of the relationship, constructive communication, and shared values, beliefs, and goals (Rostosky, Riggle, Dudley, and

Wright, 2006). Researchers also have determined factors that appear to be inversely related to commitment in cohabiting same-sex partners, including high levels of neuroticism (Kurdek, 2004, 2009), avoidance motivation (i.e., the desire to avoid the negative consequences of ending a relationship), and quality of alternatives (i.e., how many positive alternative partners and/or scenarios one perceives to exist outside of one's relationship) (Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008).

Conclusions drawn from the literature examining relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex partners should be considered with caution, however, as there are significant limitations to this body of research. First, the measures of commitment used in studies with same-sex partners tend to only look at commitment as a unitary global factor, which taps into the attractions force of a relationship. In addition to the attractions force, researchers regard another distinct aspect, the constraints force, as being an influential part of the commitment experience (Adams & Jones, 1999; Kurdek, 2000). In studies where the constraints force has been considered (e.g., Kurdek, 2000, 2009), constraints were conceptualized as determinants of commitment rather than as a part of the commitment experience itself. Thus, global measures of commitment that primarily tap into the attractions force may not fully capture the commitment experience of same-sex partners.

Despite this limitation of the research exploring commitment in cohabiting same-sex relationships, the consistent findings that relationship quality and satisfaction are the strongest predictors of commitment in same-sex partners is noteworthy (Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009). These results are consistent with findings from dating and cohabiting

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opposite-sex couples (Kurdek, 2000, 2007; Rusbult et al., 1998) and may help explain the ways that commitment operates in cohabiting same-sex partners. For instance, cohabiting same-sex partners with high levels of relationship quality report being more positively committed to (i.e., wanting to stay in) the relationship. As relationship quality declines, same-sex partners tend to persist in a relationship due to barriers (e.g., social pressure or compiled resources) that constrain them from leaving that relationship (Johnson, 1999; Kurdek, 2000, 2006a, 2003). Cohabiting same-sex partners, however, may perceive fewer barriers to leaving a relationship (Kurdek, 1998, 2004), which could influence the higher dissolution rates for same-sex relationships. Due to the lack of external constraining forces in preventing the dissolution of same-sex partnerships, focusing on relationship quality and the internal experiences of commitment may be essential to increasing stability of same-sex relationships.

As for opposite-sex partners, the majority of researchers focus on the rates and factors contributing to relationship dissolution of cohabiting partners prior to or after marriage (e.g., Brines & Joyner, 1999; DeMaris & McDonald, 1993; Teachman, 2003; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). As researchers have found that cohabiting opposite-sex partners report higher rates of relationship dissolution, even if they later marry (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Nock, 1995; Yabiku & Gager, 2009), and given that commitment is regarded as a significant predictor of stability, it is surprising that so little attention has been dedicated to commitment in cohabiting opposite-sex partners. Thus, researchers may have disregarded a vital variable that influences relationship stability among cohabiting opposite-sex partners.

The few findings on relationship commitment in cohabiting opposite-sex partnerships have been contradictory. Nock (1995) found that cohabiting partners reported being less committed to their relationships than married partners. Yet, in a qualitative study, Jamieson et al. (2002), ascertained that the majority of cohabiting partners (72%) chose "I wanted to commit myself to our relationship" as the main reason for moving in together, versus 63% of married after cohabiting partners and 54% of married before cohabiting partners. Further, 48% of cohabiting couples viewed their relationship as permanent, whereas 13% saw cohabitation as a trial run before furthering their commitment (39% of the partners had different answers) (Jamieson et al., 2002). Although quantitative data has suggested that cohabiting opposite-sex partners are less committed than married partners (Nock, 1995), the stories from cohabiting partners in qualitative research indicates that a long-term commitment may be a key component of deciding to cohabitate for many individuals (Jamieson et al., 2002).

Researchers have mostly used a cost/benefits framework, which is grounded in social exchange theory, when considering the factors impacting relationship stability in cohabiting opposite-sex partners (e.g., Brines & Joyner, 1999; Nock 1995; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). This type of analysis has become problematic as the cost/benefits of being in a relationship were typically established for cohabiting partners based on the costs/benefits associated with relational factors in a marital partnership. Thus, marital relationships have been set as the standard of comparison for those in cohabiting opposite-sex partnerships. This is problematic in two ways: (a) such logic assumes that cohabiting partnerships are fundamentally similar to marital ones, disregarding the

uniqueness of such relationships, and (b) this comparison does nothing to challenge marriage as the institutionalized standard of relationships, attributing to the view of all relationships outside of marriage as incomplete or deficient in some regard.

These issues concerning the research on relationship stability in cohabiting opposite-sex partners, coupled with the deficit of studies looking specifically at commitment, leaves a lot to be explained about the unique ways commitment operates in cohabiting opposite-sex relationships. Researchers exploring relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex partners also have compared same-sex relationships to marriages. A number of researchers, however, have examined commitment in same-sex partnerships without contrasting them to opposite-sex relationships (e.g., Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008). Further, researchers have studied commitment in cohabiting same-sex partners more in-depth than with cohabiting opposite-sex partners. Nevertheless, there is much research yet to be done with both populations to come to a better understanding of the processes of commitment in diverse types of intimate committed relationships. To do so, researchers need to fully define commitment in a way that captures the attractions force and internal and external processes of the constraints force in terms of the experience of partners in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. To this end, the primary models of commitment are reviewed next.

Models of Commitment

Three models of commitment have dominated the sociopsychological literature over the past 50 years: the Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness (Levinger, 1965,

1979a, 1979b), the Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1983, 1991a; Rusbult et al., 1998), and the Tripartite Model of Commitment (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). Although the Tripartite Model of Commitment is the model used in the current study, it is important to understand the Tripartite Model within the context of the three major theories.

Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness

Levinger (1965, 1976) was one of the first psychological researchers to create a comprehensive conceptual framework to explain marital cohesiveness and dissolution. Levinger based his model on Lewinian field theory (Lewin, 1951) and Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory to explain the dynamics that keep a marital relationship intact. He conceived of commitment in terms of marital cohesiveness; that is, continuation of a marital relationship depends on the social and psychological field forces that act on individuals to remain in the partnership (Levinger, 1965). Levinger (1999) proposed four field forces that affect relationship cohesiveness: (a) attractions, or the forces that influence one towards a relationship, (b) barriers, the forces that restrain one from leaving a relationship, (c) alternative attractions, or the force that drives one towards alternate relationships, and (d), alternative barriers, the force that restrains one from leaving other relationships.

Attractions forces are associated with one's attraction to a relationship based on perceived rewards and costs (Levinger, 1965, 1976). To organize the existing literature on relationship dissolution, Levinger (1976) identified components of the attractions force as material rewards (i.e., family income and home ownership), symbolic rewards

(i.e., social similarity and social status based on education or occupation), and affectional rewards (i.e., companionship, esteem, and sexual enjoyment).

Further, Levinger (1965, 1976) incorporated the *barriers* force to explain the restraints that act to continue a relationship when attraction is low. The barriers force includes components of material costs (i.e., financial expenses of dissolving a relationship), symbolic costs (i.e., obligation towards marital bond, religious constraints, and social pressure), and affectional costs (i.e., feelings about the impact of relationship dissolution on children).

Levinger (1965, 1976) also conceptualized an *alternative attractions* force to explain how the availability of acceptable alternatives, or the perceived opportunities for a pleasurable existence outside of one's current relationship, influences one's decision to remain in a relationship. The alternative attractions force also involves factors at a material (i.e., ability to be socially and economically independent), symbolic (i.e., independence and self-actualization), and affectional (i.e., preferred alternate sex partner and disconcordant kin relations) rewards level (Levinger, 1976).

Lastly, Levinger (1999) added the force of *alternative barriers* to his social exchange model of commitment to recognize the restraints that keep one from leaving other relevant relationships, such as ties to one's career or one's biological family. For example, if one is highly committed to a career and view an intimate partnership as imposing on the ability to advance in the workplace, then this alternative barrier may reduce one's commitment to the intimate partnership. Therefore, relationships outside the

intimate partnership with one's partner can affect one's level of commitment (Levinger, 1999).

The Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness provides one explanation of relationship stability. Levinger (1965, 1976) conceived of commitment in terms of marital cohesiveness, which he argued was a direct function of attraction, barrier, and alternative attractions forces. Essentially, marital cohesiveness increases to the extent that attraction forces are high within the relationship (i.e., driving one towards a relationship) and alternate attractions are low outside of the relationship (i.e., not influencing one away from a relationship). Additionally, marital cohesiveness further increases as a function of high barrier forces inside the relationship (i.e., constraining one to remain in a relationship). Thus, individuals continue in relationships as they are attracted to and restrained from leaving them, although individuals are always in the process (consciously or unconsciously) of comparing their current relationship with alternate possibilities (Levinger, 1976). Therefore, according to the Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness, relationship dissolution occurs when attraction and barrier forces become weaker than alternate attractions (Levinger, 1965, 1976).

Empirical support for the Social Exchange Model. Among the three major models, the Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness (Levinger, 1965, 1976) has the least empirical support. Despite the prolific amount of literature recognizing the Social Exchange Model (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Johnson, 1991a; Rusbult, 1999) as a valuable theory of relationship commitment, little has been done in regards to constructing instrumentation to test the key concepts of Levinger's model. Only one

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study (Collins, 1998) was identified which tested Levinger's conceptualization of the social exchange theory of commitment.

Collins (1998) tested factors associated with the attractions, barriers, and alternative attractions forces of commitment in influencing relationship stability. The alternative barriers force was not considered by Collins as this force was not added until later by Levinger (Levinger, 1999). In a sample of marital partners, some singular aspects of the attractions (i.e., relationship satisfaction) and barriers force (i.e., religiosity) were significantly related to later marital status, although none of the alternative attractions factors were significantly associated (Collins, 1998). The full Social Exchange Model did not predict relationship stability above and beyond any singular factors, and none of the interactions between attractions, barriers, and alternative attractions were significant. Religiosity emerged as the most significant predictor of relationship stability, and Collins concluded that her findings suggested that moral commitments were a considerable influence on stability, lending support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. Despite these findings, she did not demonstrate that moral commitment is distinct from structural constraints and, therefore, her conclusion that her study endorsed Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model over Levinger's (1965, 1976) is not compelling. In fact, the study by Collins (1998) did not appear to demonstrate substantial support for either model of commitment.

Therefore, Levinger's (1965, 1976) model remains largely theoretical. Nonetheless, Levinger's work on the conceptualization of commitment over the past several decades has been ground-breaking. The current utility of the Social Exchange

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Model of Cohesiveness may lie in providing a basis for researchers and practitioners to understand the process of relationship commitment, and recognizing commitment as more than just a function of attraction to one's relationship. The value of Levinger's theory, however, should not be overestimated in terms of being an empirically sound explanation of relationship commitment across various types of relationships. Other models of commitment provide a more thorough experimental basis.

Investment Model of Commitment

The Investment Model of Commitment has been extensively supported by empirical research (Rusbult, 1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998). Within this model, commitment is the intent to persist in a relationship, which includes feelings of psychological attachment and a long-term orientation towards the partnership (Rusbult 1991, Rusbult et al., 1998). The investment model of commitment is based on Interdependence Theory. That is, dependence on a relationship increases as a function of a person wanting to persist with a given partner (i.e., relationship satisfaction is high or one draws rewards from the relationship), and as a function of a person having no choice except to persist with one's partner (i.e., many perceived barriers to leaving the relationship or poor quality of alternative partners and/or relationships) (Kurdek, 2007; Rusbult, 1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998).

Within the Investment Model, commitment is viewed as a unidimensional global construct (Rusbult et al., 1998). Further, this model provides a description of how determinants of commitment influence commitment level. The determinants of commitment as conceptualized by Rusbult are relationship satisfaction, quality of

alternatives, and investment size (Kurdek, 2007; Rusbult et al., 1998). *Relationship satisfaction* refers to the positivity of affect and attraction to one's partner and relationship. *Quality of alternatives* is defined as the perceived availability and desirability of alternatives to the relationship. This includes the extent to which an individual's needs could be met outside of one's relationship with her or his partner by other potential partners, family, friends, or by one's self (Rusbult et al., 1998). Finally, *investment size* refers to the depth and importance of resources invested in a relationship. These investments, which include both tangible (e.g., social supports or recreational activities) and abstract resources (e.g., identity, memories, energy, time, etc.), may lose value or be irretrievable should the relationship end (Kurdek, 2007; Rusbult, 1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998). Additionally, Kurdek (2007) tested *avoidance motivation* as another determinant of commitment. Avoidance motivation was described by Kurdek as the extent to which one stays in a relationship to avoid the consequences of ending that relationship.

The Investment Model provides an explanation of both relationship commitment and stability. Factor analyses of the Investment Model have demonstrated commitment and its four determinants to be moderately associated but discrete constructs (Kurdek, 2007; Rusbult et al., 1998). Further, researchers have found relationship satisfaction and investment size to be positively correlated with commitment (Kurdek 2007; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998), and quality of alternatives and avoidance motivation to be negatively related to commitment (Kurdek, 2007). Further, each of the four determinants has been found to contribute unique variance to commitment level (Kurdek, 2007;

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Rusbult et al., 1998) although Kurdek (2007) found relationship satisfaction to moderate the effect of the other determinants on commitment level. Finally, in longitudinal studies of the Investment Model, researchers have found commitment level, rather than any of the determinants of commitment, to be the most salient predictor of relationship stability over time (Kurdek, 2007; Rusbult et al., 1998).

Empirical support for the Investment Model. Presently, the Investment Model of Commitment has the most robust empirical support of the three theories due to the large body of research examining Rusbult's theory and the development of an instrument that measures the key constructs of the Investment Model. Rusbult is the only theorist to develop instrumentation to test her model. The Investment Model Scale was created to promote empirical testing on commitment and interdependence in intimate partnerships, specifically to provide added substantiation to earlier research (e.g., Rusbult, 1983) that upheld Rusbult's theory (Rusbult et al., 1998). Although the literature on the Investment Model spans decades, the research prior to the development of the Investment Model Scale was conducted in a "somewhat haphazard manner" (Rusbult et al., 1998, p. 358) as no instrumentation had been established for Rusbult's theory. Therefore, the most recent body of research, in which investigators used the published Investment Model Scale, will be the focus of the empirical review.

Rusbult et al. (1998) created the Investment Model Scale, with items based on measures used in previous research with the Investment Model, to test the basic assumptions of the Investment Model. They found the four scales to reliably assess the intended constructs, and the inter-factor correlations showed the factors to be related but

discrete (Rusbult et al., 1998). Further, the Investment Model Scale demonstrated convergent validity with measures of other features of ongoing relationships, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), and predictive validity of relationship stability. Commitment Level, however, mediated the effect of the other three determinants in predicting relationship stability (Rusbult et al., 1998). Finally, the Investment Model Scale discriminated between voluntary stayers, voluntary leavers, and abandoned partners in personal relationships (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Rusbult et al.'s (1998) research in developing the Investment Model Scale was experimentally sound and the good internal structure of the measures substantiates Rusbult's theory as a whole. The Investment Model may provide particularly salient information in terms of predicting relationship persistence or dissolution in samples of dating opposite-sex partners. Further, the Investment Model may be useful in distinguishing where partners are in terms of choosing to stay or leave the relationship, as voluntary stayers, voluntary leavers, and abandoned partners all showed different patterns of commitment and its determinants at the initial assessment. This study, along with additional research using the Investment Model Scale, demonstrates empirical support for the theoretical underpinnings of the Investment Model of Commitment.

Le and Agnew (2003) conducted a meta-analytic study of the Investment Model. They also tested the degree to which Rusbult's Commitment Level construct predicted relationship stability across studies, as well as checking for any moderation of demographic or relational factors (Le & Agnew, 2003). The researchers found that satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size were all highly and

significantly correlated with commitment (r_+ = .68, -.48, .46, respectively), yet the correlations were low enough to consider the constructs unique factors. Moreover, satisfaction, alternatives, and investment collectively accounted for 61% of the variance in commitment, and commitment explained 47% of the variance in stay/leave behaviors across studies (Le & Agnew, 2003).

These findings across 39 studies show the robustness of the Investment Model in predicting commitment and stability in interpersonal relationships (Le & Agnew, 2003). Through their meta-analysis, however, Le and Agnew identified some limitations of the Investment Model. First, the correlations between satisfaction, alternatives, and investments were weaker for engaged, cohabiting, and married partners than for dating partners. The investment-commitment relationship was significantly stronger for relationships of a shorter duration (Le & Agnew, 2003). Engaged/cohabiting/married partners accounted for less than 15% of the total number of participants across studies. That is, the majority of participants from the sampled studies were in dating relationships. Thus, any differences between groups should be carefully considered due to the small sample size of the engaged/cohabiting/married group compared to the overall sample. The applicability of Rusbult's Investment Model to those in more established relationships of longer duration remains questionable due to the lack of empirical testing of the model with this population.

Another potential limitation of the Investment Model is that although the factors accounted for a significant portion of the variance (i.e., 61%) in commitment, a large amount of variance remains unexplained (Le & Agnew, 2003). Therefore, factors

unaccounted for by the Investment Model, such as dispositional aspects, may be important to examine in terms of their contribution to relationship commitment. This limitation parallels other researchers' critiques of how commitment is conceptualized in the Investment Model as an economic decision making process based on rewards and costs, without accounting for dispositional characteristics that may affect the decision making process (J. Adams, personal communication, April 1, 2010). Although Rusbult et al. (1998) found few significant correlations between personal disposition measures and the Investment Model constructs, they assessed characteristics such as self-esteem, perceived control, and cognitive style. Perhaps these dispositional characteristics are more open to fluctuations over the course of one's life than personality traits, which show more consistency and stability in individuals over time (Kurdek, 2008). Conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and expressiveness have all been shown to be indirectly related to commitment (Kurdek, 2008; Le & Agnew, 2003), and thus further consideration of how dispositional and personality traits impact commitment is warranted.

Only one study was identified in which a personality trait, narcissism, was tested for moderation of the links between satisfaction, alternatives, and investment with commitment (Johnson, 2008). Johnson (2008) found that narcissism did not change the validity of the Investment Model; however, narcissism moderated the links between each determinant and commitment, particularly when the determinants were weak (i.e., low satisfaction, high alternatives, low investments). These results lend additional support to

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the argument that the Investment Model omits potentially important factors such as dispositional or personality traits that contribute to commitment.

Kurdek (2007) also critiqued the Investment Model in that it does not adequately capture the constraints force of relationship commitment. Although Rusbult (1991) maintained that the constraints force was sufficiently captured in her quality of alternatives and investment size constructs, she does not directly account for the effect of perceived negative consequences (e.g., financial difficulties, social pressures) to relationship dissolution on commitment (Kurdek, 2007). Kurdek added the construct of avoidance motivation to the other three determinants of commitment in Rusbult's model to address this limitation of the Investment Model. He found avoidance motivation to be a reliable factor discrete from the other determinants of commitment that contributed unique variance to commitment across three samples of partners, one with cohabiting same-sex partners and the other two with opposite-sex dating partners (Kurdek, 2007).

In the three samples, the four-predictor determinants accounted for 61%, 47%, and 70%, respectively, of the variance in commitment. These results are not substantially different from the variance in commitment accounted for (61%) by Rusbult's original three factors across 39 studies in Le and Agnew's (2003) meta-analysis. Although avoidance motivation is another distinct factor that contributes unique variance to commitment in the Investment Model, it remains questionable as to whether avoidance motivation adds enough supplementary information to commitment to warrant inclusion as an additional determinant in Rusbult's model.

Overall, a large body of research demonstrates empirical support for Rusbult's (1983) Investment Model of Commitment. Researchers critique the comprehensiveness of the model, however, as a substantial amount of variance in commitment is unexplained by her determinants of satisfaction, alternatives, and investment (Le & Agnew, 2003). Despite this limitation, the Investment Model has been proven to provide important and statistically significant explanations of how commitment operates in interpersonal relationships.

Tripartite Model of Commitment

The third model of relationship commitment that has garnered empirical support in the psychosocial literature is Michael Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. In Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model, commitment refers to the continuation of a social relationship, a relationship in which two individuals have an influence and mutual reliance on one another so that a change in one person brings about a change in the other (Johnson, 1991a). The assumptions of Symbolic Interaction theory are the basis for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model, which presupposes that notions of the future are constructed through interactions between a close personal environment and larger social relations. Individuals' actions are embedded in this notion of the future, which influences how individuals perceive specific situations and thus choose to act (Johnson, 1991a). Therefore, Johnson's model is subjective in that individuals act based on how a situation is perceived, and voluntaristic in that it presumes that individuals choose their actions. Lastly, Johnson's model (1991a, 1999) also is structural, in that it recognizes that individuals' choices are constrained by the environment in which one exists, and the

consequences of individuals' actions are not entirely under one's control (Johnson, 1991a).

Johnson (1991a, 1991b, 1999) developed his Tripartite Model of Commitment to address what he viewed as an error in the basic structure of Levinger's and Rusbult's commitment models: the conceptualization of commitment as a unidimensional construct. Accordingly, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model is based on the assumption that commitment is not a unitary concept, but rather that there are three fundamentally distinct experiences of commitment. Johnson (1991a, 1999) proposed three phenomenologically discrete experiences of commitment: (a) personal commitment, the sense of wanting to continue the relationship, (b) moral commitment, the sense that one ought to continue the relationship, and (c) structural commitment, the sense of having to continue the relationship.

Each experience of commitment reflects a different experience along two dimensions: (a) attractions vs. constraints forces, and (b) internal vs. external processes. As for the first dimension, the attractions force of commitment refers the idea that partners choose to continue their relationships based on personal dedication and love while the constraints force captures the extent that partners maintain their relationships to avoid the consequences of relationship dissolution (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991a, 1999). For the second dimension, internal processes refer to experiences that originate within oneself, such as one's values, beliefs, attitudes, and self-concept, while external processes are those that are external to an individual, such as social pressure or financial constraints (Johnson, 1991a).

Personal commitment. Within the Tripartite Model**,** *personal commitment*, or the

feeling that one wants to stay in their relationship, is part of the attractions force and

involves internal processes (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). Personal commitment is a function of

internal processes in that it arises from one's self-concept and attitudes towards one's

partner and one's relationship. Attitudes include attraction, love, and personal dedication.

Thus, personal commitment is a part of the attractions force as the positivity of one's

attitudes influences the desire to stay in a relationship with one's partner. In this way, a

person chooses to maintain a relationship because he or she wants to, as opposed to

feeling compelled to continue one's relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

Personal commitment is comprised of three components: (a) attitude towards

one's partner, (b) attitude towards one's relationship with one's partner, and (c)

relationship identity (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999). Although attitudes

towards one's partner and one's relationship are typically highly correlated (Johnson,

1991a), there remains a distinction between the two. One can experience a positive

attraction towards an individual although this individual behaves in ways that are

unattractive in the context of one's relationship (e.g., abusive partners). Similarly, one's

partner may behave satisfactorily in the context of one's relationship, yet one may not be

strongly attracted in an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual way towards her or his

partner. The third component of personal commitment is relationship identity, which is

the centrality of one's relationship to her or his self-concept. Social relationships inform

how individuals view themselves, and thus an intimate partnership with one's partner can

quickly become an essential component of individuals' identities (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

Moral commitment. *Moral commitment*, the sense that one ought to continue a relationship, also is a function of internal processes in that it stems from one's values and belief systems (Johnson, 1991a). Moral commitment is experienced, however, as a constraining force as one's sense of right and wrong compels one to continue a relationship. Therefore, moral commitment can be thought of as a sense of self-constraint, in that the forces keeping one in a relationship arises from within the individual (Johnson, 1991a).

Moral commitment involves three components: (a) person specific obligation, (b) obligation towards one's relationship, and (c) general valuing of consistency (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999). First, an individual may feel morally obligated to the people affected by a relationship. In particular, this includes one partner and one's children (Johnson, 1999), although a person could feel morally obligated to continue a relationship because of other people as well. For example, individuals from certain cultural backgrounds may feel a sense of duty to maintain a relationship because the dissolution of their relationship may bring dishonor to their entire family. Although social pressure (a component of structural commitment) may influence an individual's person specific obligation to continuing a relationship, this component is distinguishable as it stems from an internal feeling of obligation rather than external enforcement by others. Thus, this component of moral commitment stems from a sense of a personal contract

between two individuals (i.e., partner and partner, parent and child, etc.), regardless of social or institutional pressure to maintain (or dissolve) the relationship (Johnson, 1991a).

Second, one's values about the type of relationship with their partner may compel her or him to stay in the relationship. This component of moral commitment may be tied to religious beliefs or social norms about certain types of relationships (particularly marital relationships). Again, external factors may influence one's relationship type values, yet this component is distinguishable from external constraints (i.e., structural commitment) as social or institutional relationship type values are only relevant to the extent that one has internalized these values as one's own (Johnson, 1991a).

Lastly, the general valuing of consistency is a component of moral commitment. People tend to desire a consistency in how they think, feel, and behave over time (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). Johnson (1991a) stated that "the nature of social life requires people to build their plans of action around predictions regarding the behavior of others" (p. 121), and so most individuals are inclined to want dependability in how they and others behave. Therefore, one may feel obligated to stay in a relationship to maintain consistency in thoughts, feelings, and actions over time (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

Structural commitment. *Structural commitment*, the feeling that one has to continue a relationship, is a function of the constraints force and external processes (Johnson, 1991a). Despite one's internal feelings about her or his partner or relationship, which may or may not be positive, factors outside of the individual also may induce an individual to maintain a relationship. Environmental or institutional factors such as social

pressure or relationship dissolution procedures may make leaving one's relationship

difficult and/or costly. Thus, structural commitment functions as a constraining force in

that one may feel compelled to stay in a relationship due to external influences,

regardless of their feelings towards or level of satisfaction with the relationship and/or

partner (Johnson, 1991a, 1999).

Structural commitment consists of four components: (a) availability of acceptable

alternatives, (b) social pressure, (c), irretrievable investments, and (d) difficulty of

termination procedures (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999). Availability of

acceptable alternatives includes the accessibility and quality of other potential partners, as

well as environmental circumstances. Environmental circumstances include finances,

housing, employment, and custodial issues with children. Further, the dissolution of a

partnership can cause strain on other important relationships in one's life or even

exclusion from certain social networks. For many, then, the status quo may be the more

acceptable alternative as opposed to risking upheaval of one's social supports (Johnson,

1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

Next, the component of social pressure refers to the subtle or obvious demands of

others to continue one's relationship. Often, social pressure stems from how others in

one's social network view the morality of ending a relationship. One may personally

disagree with these demands, thus not internalizing others' views about their obligation to

their partner or relationship, which is characteristic of the internal processes of moral

commitment. One may choose to remain in a relationship, however, to avoid the possible

reactions from other individuals, social supports, or institutional groups (i.e., an external

process) to the termination of one's relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

Another component of structural commitment is the complexity and effort involved in procedures to terminate the relationship, particularly if couples are married, cohabitating, or have children together. Splitting possessions or undergoing bureaucratic procedures may be costly in terms of money, time, and energy, and so one may decide to stay in a relationship to put off such efforts.

Irretrievable investments are the final component of structural commitment. An individual may stay in a relationship because they view their investments, including time, energy, and finances, in that the relationship as unrecoverable. For example, a person who has been with the same partner for 25 years may decide to stay in a less than satisfying relationship because of the time and energy invested with that particular person, rather than to exert their resources finding another relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

The Tripartite Model provides a sound explanation of relationship stability. Johnson (1991a, 1999) suggested that personal, moral and structural commitment operate simultaneously within a relationship, contributing to an individual's motivation to maintain or end the relationship. Further, Johnson (1999) speculated that relationship stability is primarily a function of high personal commitment independent of the levels of moral and structural commitment. That is, high personal commitment is influenced by one's attraction to a partner and a relationship, and identification with a relationship, which will lead to relationship maintenance behaviors on behalf of the individual

(Johnson, 1999). In one study, however, Ramirez (2008) found that moral commitment contributed more strongly to relationship maintenance behaviors in a sample of married couples than did personal or structural commitment. Hence, greater levels of personal and moral commitment may contribute to maintenance behaviors, increasing the likelihood of relationship stability (Johnson, 1999; Ramirez, 2008).

Low levels of personal and moral commitment, along with high levels of structural commitment, invoke motivation to end the relationship and lead to thoughts and actions towards relationship dissolution (Johnson, 1999). If structural commitments are high enough to keep one in a relationship, an individual still can undertake actions that will eventually decrease the level of structural commitment and allow one to leave a relationship (e.g., one may pursue a higher education or alternate job opportunities to lessen the economic impact of relationship dissolution). Additionally, high personal and moral commitment may mitigate the influence of structural commitment, as both components are positively associated with relationship satisfaction and maintenance behaviors (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Ramirez, 2008). Researchers have found higher levels of individual relationship satisfaction and positive affect between partners to be negatively associated with the constraints force, particularly structural commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2007) Thus, greater levels of personal and moral commitment may, in some cases, contribute to increased relationship positivity and satisfaction, in turn reducing structural commitment and one's motivation to leave a relationship (Johnson, 1999; Ramirez, 2008).

Empirical support for the Tripartite Model. Researchers have conducted only

one study in which the intention was to directly empirically test the Tripartite Model of

Commitment (Johnson et al., 1999). Johnson et al. intended to assess the dimensions of

commitment (i.e., personal, moral, and structural), the components of each dimension

(e.g., Moral Commitment is comprised of three components, which include person-

specific obligation, relationship type values, and general valuing of consistency.), and an

assortment of variables associated with the causes and consequences of each dimension

of commitment to test the soundness of the Tripartite Model. The methodology used by

these researchers was problematic, and so the study provides questionable support for the

dimensionality of the Tripartite Model. First, the measures used to assess each *dimension*

of commitment were a single item (Johnson et al., 1999), and therefore were unreliable

measures as commitment is a subjective experience. Few statistically significant

correlations were found between the three dimensions of commitment, with the only

significant relationships occurring between moral and structural commitment for both

partners (r = .34 and .33, respectively) and between personal and structural commitment

(r = -.34) for wives (Johnson et al., 1999). Although Johnson et al. concluded that the

small correlations between the dimensions of commitment support the idea that

commitment is a three-dimensional experience, this conclusion is debatable as the

majority of the correlations were not statistically significant and the measures used to

assess the dimensions of commitment were problematic.

The scales developed to assess the *components* of personal and moral

commitment had multiple items and demonstrated adequate internal consistency values

(above .70). Internal consistency values were not calculated for the items measuring the components of the structural dimension because these items were assumed to reflect casual indicators rather than an underlying state of an individual (Johnson et al., 1999). Correlations between the components and the dimensions of commitment, however, were found to be weak (Johnson et al., 1999), possibly due to the statistically unreliable measures of the dimensions themselves. Therefore, these findings lend little credence to the idea that commitment is multi-dimensional and Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory of the corresponding components of commitment.

Johnson et al. (1999) also compared the Tripartite Model to global measures of commitment, such as the Commitment Level scale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998). Their hypothesis was that global measures of commitment tend to only assess personal commitment, thereby missing other relevant aspects of the commitment experience. Instead of using Rusbult et al.'s (1998) scale or another similar measure, however, the researchers created two items to parallel the Commitment Level scale, concluding that their two items were an adequate measure because they showed a high correlation to Rusbult's total scale (r = .79) in a separate study (Johnson et al., 1999).

Johnson et al. (1999) found that the global measure of commitment correlated most highly with their item assessing personal commitment and two of the three measures of the components of personal commitment (i.e., love and marital satisfaction). These results, however, give minimal support to their argument that global measures of commitment are inclined to only tap into the personal dimension of commitment due to

the empirical shortcomings of their global measure of commitment (Johnson et al., 1999).

Again, a two-item measure of a subjective construct such as global commitment does not

contain enough items to be considered a statistically reliable measure, nor does

comparing a measure once to an existing instrument mean that the measure is adequate.

Using the actual Commitment Level scale would have given more empirical

substantiation to Johnson et al.'s findings as the Commitment Level scale contains six

items pertaining to global commitment that have been subjected to empirical testing and

found to be a reliable and valid measure of commitment (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Lastly, Johnson et al. (1999) explored the correlations between other variables,

such as negative marital interaction, life satisfaction, and religiosity, and the dimensions

of commitment to show that the three dimensions of commitment have differential causes

and consequences. With the exception of life satisfaction, the measures used to assess the

other variables were problematic. For instance, negative marital interaction was

calculated based on participants' reports of spousal behavior over follow-up calls over 6

days after the other assessments took place (Johnson et al., 1999). Therefore, the

correlations between the dimension and components measures were less meaningful as

the time lapse between the original assessments and the measure of negative marital

interactions may have caused unexplained variability. Moreover, religiosity was assessed

using one item along a four-point Likert scale (Johnson et al., 1999), which again is an

unreliable way to assess a subjective construct.

Johnson et al. (1999) found that the correlations between the other variables and

the dimensions and components of commitment mostly followed their hypothesized

pattern, showing that the dimensions of commitment are each related to unique causes and consequences. For example, religiosity was only significantly correlated with moral commitment and its component measures in both partners. The findings also showed some unexpected significant correlations, such as a negative relationship between life satisfaction and structural commitment for wives (Johnson et al., 1999). The resulting correlations, however, are debatable based on the instrumentation problems noted above. Overall, the empirical reliability of Johnson et al.'s (1999) study is dubious, and their findings cannot be interpreted with certainty and any of their conclusions about the Tripartite Model of Commitment should be considered with extra prudence.

Although no assessments have been created to directly test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment, several factor analyses of various measures intended to assess the components of commitment show a factor structure consistent with this multidimensional commitment framework (Johnson, 1999). One of the studies (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982) was not associated with Johnson's model of commitment. In the other two studies (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Stanley & Markman, 1992), the researchers included the Tripartite Model in their review of the literature upon which they created their measurements, although their instrumentation was not developed to directly investigate Johnson's theory. The results of the factor analyses of these three studies do lend empirical support to the Tripartite Model of Commitment.

First, Bagarozzi and Atilano (1982) sought to create an instrument that explained how a spouse chose to behave in terms of relationship dissolution based on the social exchange process. Their work was similar to Levinger's (1965, 1976) ideas about social

exchange theory and marital cohesiveness, although they do not claim to base their research on the Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982). In creating their instrument, the Spousal Inventory of Desired Changes and Relationship Barriers (SIDCARB), they developed items for four components of the marital exchange process: (a) fairness and equity of exchange, (b) commitment, (c) perceived alternative sources of satisfaction, and (d) perceived barriers to relationship termination. Exploratory factor analyses of their instrument revealed that their items best grouped into a three-factor structure: (a) Factor I: Change, Dissatisfaction, and Commitment, which includes items on satisfaction with one's partner and relationship, and thoughts of separation and divorce, (b) Factor II: Willingness to Separate/Divorce and Internal-Psychological Barriers, which includes items on religion, obligation to children, and commitment to marriage vows, and (c) Factor III: External Circumstantial Barriers, which included items assessing social pressure, legal costs, and financial considerations (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982).

These three factors parallel the three dimensions of commitment in the Tripartite Model. The strength of the instrumentation used by Bagarozzi and Atilano should be considered, however, when drawing conclusions about the dimensionality of commitment. The internal consistency values were adequate although somewhat low, at .86, .74, and .80 for factors I, II, and III respectively (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982). Further, the three factors accounted for 53% of the variance in participants' responses, meaning that close to half of the variance in participants' responses was due to unexplained variables outside of the three dimensions. Additionally, the correlations

between the factors were minimal, with none showing a correlation higher than .25 (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982). With personal and moral commitment overlapping in the internal processes dimension, and moral and structural commitment sharing the constraints component, one would expect a somewhat higher correlation (between .40 and .60) at least between these factors showing that they are related yet distinct. Although Bagarozzi and Atilano's study lends support to the Tripartite Model based on the three-factor structure that resulted from their SIDCARB assessment, there are significant empirical limitations to the strength of their assessment and thus any inferences should be considered with caution. A final limitation of their study was that the sample was limited to married couples (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982), so researchers are unable to generalize conclusions to other types of committed intimate relationships.

In another study, researchers developed an instrument to assess relationship commitment that yielded a factor structure similar to the Tripartite Model of Commitment (Stanley and Markman, 1992). Stanley and Markman (1992) developed the Commitment Inventory (CI) based on a review of the literature in which they identified twelve relevant areas of commitment. They found that their ten subscales of the CI, along with two scales created by Johnson (1978; as cited in Stanley & Markman, 1992), were best explained with a three-factor structure. Most of the subscales measuring personal dedication, which is similar to the attractions force, loaded onto the first factor, while the subscales assessing constraints loaded onto the second factor. A third factor was dominated by the Morality of Divorce subscale, although the Satisfaction with Sacrifice subscale also substantially loaded onto this factor (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Thus,

their results show a three-factor structure similar to the three dimensions of commitment described in the Tripartite Model.

The statistical outcomes of Stanley and Markman's (1992) study are more empirically sound than Bagarozzi and Atilano's (1982), and thus lend more credible support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) assertion that commitment is a three dimensional construct. The alpha coefficients for their subscales were more acceptable, ranging from .79 to .94 in their first and .70 to .91 in their second study, with most demonstrating an internal consistency over .80. Additionally, their factors account for 63% of the variance in participants' responses (Stanley & Markman, 1992), meaning that extraneous variables could have influenced their results as a significant amount of variance is left unexplained by participants answered the items. Although the CI, which lends itself to a three-factor structure similar to the Tripartite Model, is empirically reliable, there are several limitations to Stanley and Markman's study that calls into question their conclusions about the dimensionality of commitment.

First, Stanley and Markman (1992) demonstrated the validity of the CI by showing convergent validity with other existing measures of commitment and variables associated with commitment, and construct validity in the CI's ability to distinguish between groups of dating, engaged, married without children, and married with children partners. In assessing the validity of the CI, however, the researchers group the items into only two dimensions, dedication and constraints, rather than into the three-factor structure that resulted from their factor analyses. Thus, no conclusions can be drawn about the validity of the three dimensional structure of commitment. Additionally, the

Morality of Divorce subscale was the only factor that significantly loaded solely onto a third factor, parallel to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) idea of moral commitment. The Satisfaction with Sacrifice subscale loaded onto this third factor, but loaded equally strongly on factor one (i.e., personal commitment). Moreover, the third factor only accounted for 8% of the variance. Therefore, Stanley and Markman's factor structure is questionable as to whether it represents two or three dimensions of commitment.

Adams and Jones (1997) were the third pair of researchers to evaluate and integrate the literature on marital commitment to create an assessment, the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI), designed to measure the common dimensions of commitment. They also examined existing measures of commitment, including Rusbult's (Rusbult et al., 1998) Commitment Level scale, to observe if the items from extant measures of commitment grouped into three groups that reflected the three dimensions of commitment similar to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory. Over the course of six studies, it was determined that commitment was best described in terms of three dimensions that parallel Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment: (a) Commitment to Spouse (i.e., personal commitment), (b) Commitment to Marriage (i.e., moral commitment), and (c) Feelings of Entrapment (i.e., structural commitment) (Adams & Jones, 1997).

The six studies conducted by Adams and Jones (1997) thoroughly assessed the notion that commitment can be conceptualized along three dimensions. Their first study tested 135 items developed to assess 11 aspects of commitment that had previous empirical support. Factor analyses demonstrated that a three-factor solution that

paralleled Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model was the best fit for their reduced set of items (79 items), with the resulting factors explaining 46% of the variance in participants' responses (Adams & Jones, 1997). Further, correlations between the dimensions identified by Adams and Jones provide support to Johnson's theory in that the correlation between the Commitment to Spouse and Feelings of Entrapment dimensions was minimal ($r = .14$), although the Commitment to Marriage dimension was significantly correlated to both the Commitment to Spouse ($r = .53$) and Feelings of Entrapment ($r = .60$) dimensions. The proportion of shared variance of the Commitment to Marriage dimension with the Commitment to Spouse and Feelings of Entrapment dimensions was low enough ($r^2 = .28$ and .36, respectively) to consider the Commitment to Marriage a distinct, yet related, concept (Adams & Jones, 1997).

These findings are akin to the Tripartite Model in which moral commitment is theorized to share the component of internal processes with personal commitment and the constraints force with structural commitment. Yet, the correlations between the three dimensions were all in the positive direction, which does not fit with the expected associations as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a; 1999). Based on the Tripartite Model, personal and structural commitment are opposed to each other, and therefore the Commitment to Spouse and Feelings of Entrapment dimensions should have shown a negative relationship in Adams and Jones's study (Johnson et al., 1999). The factor analyses and correlations between the dimensions lend credence to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model in that a three-factor structure was demonstrated with moral

commitment presenting as a distinct construct, although the expected relationships between the three dimensions were not entirely supported.

Adams and Jones (1997) conducted three additional studies to test the validity of the DCI. They found that the DCI demonstrated construct validity between partners who were casually dating and divorced versus those seriously dating, engaged, or married, and distinguished between partners who reported being satisfied and those who were unsatisfied in their relationships. Further, the researchers showed convergent validity in the conceptual distinction of the three dimensions of commitment by testing the DCI with existing measures of personality variables. The personality variables correlated significantly and discretely with each dimension of commitment. Additionally, convergent validity was demonstrated through high correlations between the self-report of individuals taking the DCI and ratings from their spouses and relative, showing that observers also consistently distinguished between the three dimensions of commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997). These studies subjected the DCI to in-depth empirical testing, and the results provide added support the argument that commitment is a multidimensional rather than a unitary factor.

In their fifth study, Adams and Jones (1997) went one step further and tested existing measures of commitment to see if the items fall into categories representative of the three dimensions of commitment. First, they assessed whether the three dimensions of commitment underlie the extant measures as a whole (Adams & Jones, 1997). The examination of the whole measures showed that Commitment to Spouse was highly correlated to measures intended to assess attractiveness of or rewards derived from a

relationship. The extant measures hypothesized to correlate with Commitment to

Marriage and Feelings of Entrapment, however, largely showed higher correlations to the

Commitment to Spouse dimension than either of the two dimensions with which they

were intended to relate (Adams & Jones, 1997). The Morality of Divorce subscale,

derived from the Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992), did relate highly to

the Commitment to Marriage dimension ($r = .74$). Thus, the idea that commitment is best

conceptualized as three distinct dimensions was not supported by this study, although

Adams and Jones concluded that the multidimensionality was supported by hypothesizing

that the high relationship satisfaction of their sample may have impacted the discreteness

of the constraining components of commitment. Based on the higher correlations of the

extant measures to the Commitment to Spouse dimension than the other two dimensions

(Adams & Jones, 1997), these results lend more credence to the idea that commitment is

a unitary global construct.

One finding of note, however, from the fifth study by Adams and Jones (1997) is

that Rusbult's (1983) global items of commitment, which are similar to the ones

developed for the Commitment Level scale of Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al.,

1998), were most highly related to the Commitment to Spouse dimension ($r = .57$).

Rusbult's global items showed very low correlations with the Commitment to Marriage (r

$= .21$) and Feelings of Entrapment ($r = .04$) dimensions. This result offers some support

to Johnson's (1999) assertion that Rusbult's definition of commitment only encapsulates

the attractions force of commitment, and thereby may fail to capture a significant

experience of commitment, that of the constraints force.

Finally, in a sixth study, Adams and Jones (1997) integrated the items on existing measures to test if the items grouped into clusters representative of the three dimensions to test the dimensionality of commitment. The results showed that the items grouped into a three-factor solution, accounting for 34.9% of the variance in participants' responses. Of importance to the current study, the items consistent with the dimension of moral commitment, Commitment to Marriage, only accounted for 5.3% of the variance. Moreover, some the items that clustered in the third factor did not clearly reflect the Feelings of Entrapment dimension (Adams & Jones, 1997). Therefore, the findings of their sixth study reflect a three-dimensional structure of commitment; however, these results should be considered carefully due to the low variance explained by the three factors and the ambiguity of the factors loading on the dimension paralleling structural commitment.

Although Adams and Jones's (1997) research provides the most extensive support to date for the multidimensionality of commitment, particularly as a three-factor model that parallels Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory, there are several limitations to their findings. First, a clear drawback of their research is that in their sample, participants were almost all married (89%), Caucasian (92%), and reported an income of less than $50,000 (83%). Thus, their conclusions about relationship commitment from this research cannot be generalized to various types of relationships, meaning that Johnson's (1991a, 1999) argument that commitment is multidimensional and consistent across a variety of relationships still lacks firm empirical support. Additionally, the amount of variance explained by the three factors of the DCI was 46%, and the variance explained by the

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three factors derived from integrating existing measures was 34.9%. Consequently, a large amount of the variance was left unexplained in these studies. Although Adams and Jones's study provides the most extensive empirical support for the multidimensionality of commitment corresponding to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model, their results should be carefully considered due to the homogeneity of their sample and the amount of variance left unexplained by their three factors.

A study by Ramirez (2008) provided empirical support for the Tripartite Model of Commitment, specifically for the premise that commitment stems from the interdependence of a personal relationship as opposed to intrapsychic factors. According to Johnson (1991a), internal processes are a major influence in the level of one's commitment. One's individual psychological processes, however, are inevitably impacted by the behavior of a partner (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b). Ramirez (2008) measured the actor-partner effects of relational maintenance behaviors on the three dimensions of commitment. His results indicate partner-level effects for each dimension of commitment, with partner effects being particularly strong for the dimension of moral commitment (Ramirez, 2008). These findings provide support for the Tripartite Model as a theory of commitment grounded in the interdependence of an intimate partnership.

Ramirez's (2008) research offers additional support for the three-dimensional model of commitment purported by Johnson (1991a, 1999). The DCI was used to assess commitment in this study, and the factor analyses supported the three-factor solution and internal consistency for each scale was between .87 and .92 for women and men (Ramirez, 2008). Thus, the DCI seems to be a reliable assessment of the Tripartite Model

of Commitment. Further, the results of this study demonstrated unique associations between five relational maintenance behaviors (i.e., assurance, positivity, openness, social networks, and shared tasks) and each dimension of commitment. This lends credence to the theory that commitment is experienced as three distinct dimensions (Johnson, 1991a, 1999), each with different causes (in this case, relational maintenance behaviors) and consequences.

Overall, however, the research regarding the Tripartite Model has proceeded in a chaotic manner with little overlap in the way researchers have measured the attractions, constraints, and/or moral-normative dimensions of commitment. In spite of this, researchers developing instrumentation to measure interpersonal relationship commitment have found that their measures group into three factors that parallel the three dimensions of commitment in the Tripartite Model even when they initially intended their factor structure to be different. These findings, along with other studies demonstrating the influence of moral obligation on interpersonal relationship commitment, show the potential of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory of commitment. Although the empirical support for the Tripartite Model is less empirically sound than the research substantiating the Investment Model, the research demonstrates enough experimental evidence in support of the three-dimensional model that it deserves further testing before reaching more certain conclusions about its theoretical soundness.

Comparison of the Models

Levinger's (1965, 1976) Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness, Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) Investment Model of Commitment, and Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment are similar in two ways: (a) all of the models capture the attractions and constraints forces of commitment, and (b) all three in some way conceptualize commitment as a result of internal and external processes. Johnson's (1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment, however, is conceptually distinct from Levinger's (1965, 1976) and Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) models in two key ways: (a) Johnson (1991a, 1999) conceptualized commitment as a multidimensional construct rather than a unitary concept, and (b) Johnson put forth moral commitment as a discrete component of the constraints force of commitment. It is these two distinctions that led the researcher to select the Tripartite Model of Commitment as the theoretical framework for the current study.

Attractions and Constraints Components of Commitment

Most investigators agree that the *wanting* to (i.e., *attractions* force) and needing and *having* to (i.e., *constraints* force) components of commitment are distinct constructs (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1999; Levinger, 1976; Ramirez, 2008; Rusbult, 1991). Although researchers have conceptualized and labeled attractions and constraints differently in various models of commitment, there are significant commonalities in defining these forces across models (Adams & Jones, 1997; Rusbult, 1991). Further, researchers have consistently found the attractions and constraints components of commitment to be conceptually discrete, no matter what label is attached to these

constructs (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1999; Rusbult, 1991). The models put forward by Levinger (1965, 1976), Rusbult (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998), and Johnson (1991a, 1999) all included distinct aspects of attractions and constraints.

First, Levinger's (1965, 1976) Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness clearly identified attractions and constraints components of commitment. In creating his theory through a review of the literature on marital dissolution, Levinger (1965, 1976) distinguished an attraction aspect, which he labeled attraction forces, and constraining aspects, which he labeled as barriers and alternative attractions forces, that influence cohesiveness. Similarly, Rusbult (1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998) recognized the attractions and constraints aspects in her Investment Model. She identified relationship satisfaction as an attractive force, and investment size and quality of alternatives as a constraining force in terms of commitment (Rusbult, 1991). In his reviews of the Investment Model, Johnson (1991a, 1999) determined that Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) commitment level construct also detected the positive pull of the attractions force of commitment. Finally, Johnson (1991a, 1999) based his dimensions of commitment on the distinctions between attractions and constraints. Johnson (1991a, 1999) captured the attractions force in the component of personal commitment, and encapsulated the constraints force in the moral and structural commitment dimensions.

Although these three models of commitment agree that attractions and constraints forces are discrete aspects of the commitment experience, the researchers differed in their conceptualization of the attractions and constraints components as either dimensions or determinants of commitment. In Levinger's (1965, 1976) model, both the attractions (i.e.,

attractions force) and constraints (i.e., barriers and alternative attractions forces) components are conceptualized as determinants of commitment. Rusbult (1983, 1991) also visualized the attractions (i.e., satisfaction level) and constraints forces (i.e., investment size, quality of alternatives) as influencing but distinct from the unidimensional factor of commitment. Johnson (1991a, 1991b, 1999) also conceived of Rusbult's (1983, 1991) commitment level construct, which is perceived as a unitary dimension of commitment, as primarily tapping into the attractions force. Lastly, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model contrasts to Levinger's (1965, 1976) and Rusbult's (1983, 1991) theories in that he purported the attractions and constraints aspects to be a part of the dimensions of commitment itself, rather than determinants. Therefore, the attractions and constraints forces are perceived differently in each model in terms of acting as a dimension or determinant of commitment.

Internal and External Process of Commitment

Levinger's (1965, 1976), Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998), and Johnson's (1991a, 1999) models of commitment also are similar in that all acknowledge commitment as a result of internal and external processes. *Internal processes* are the way in which one's decisions and behaviors to stay in a relationship are influenced by inner forces, such as attitudes, identity, beliefs, and values (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). *External processes* are forces outside of the individual, such as social pressures, availability and quality of alternatives, and irretrievable investments into the relationship, that affect one's decisions and behaviors to maintain a relationship (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). All three models recognize these processes in constructing individuals' commitment to a

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relationship, although each researcher varies in how she or he conceives these processes influencing commitment and its determinants.

To begin, Levinger (1965, 1976) did not distinguish between internal and external processes in conceptualizing cohesiveness or its determinants. The effects of internal and external processes, however, can be found in his description of cohesiveness and in all three of his determinants of commitment. Cohesiveness is defined as "the total field of forces" (Levinger, 1976, p. 23) that influence individuals to stay in a relationship, and these include one's attraction (i.e., internal process) to the relationship, external attractive features of the relationship, and internal and external constraints against leaving it. This definition of cohesiveness captures both the internal and external processes contributing to relationship maintenance.

Moreover, Levinger recognized the internal and external processes within each determinant in defining the determinants that affect cohesiveness (i.e., the attractions, barriers, and alternative attractions forces). In the attractions force, affectional rewards such as companionship and esteem are factors influencing commitment that stem from within an individual. Similarly, experiences such as obligation toward the marital bond within the barriers force or independence and self-actualization within the alternative attractions force (Levinger, 1976) are a result of internal processes. External processes are also noted within each determinant. Examples include family income and home ownership in the attractions force, financial expenses and social pressures in the barriers force, and preferred alternative sex partner in the alternative attractions force (Levinger, 1976). Therefore, Levinger did not explicitly recognize the impact of internal and

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external process on commitment in his Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness, yet such processes can be distinguished in his conceptualization of cohesiveness and its determinants.

Levinger (1999) also addressed the distinction between the internal and external processes of commitment in regards to his barriers force. He argued that internality is a concept on a continuum and, therefore, one cannot effectively distinguish between internal and external processes (Levinger, 1999). That is, external barriers must be interpreted by an individual as personally meaningful in order for such barriers to influence a person's choices and actions. Although Levinger agrees with Johnson (1991a, 1999) that there is a distinction between moral and structural commitment, he asserted that the distinction between moral and structural commitment is not discrete enough to consider them separate concepts as one must internalize the importance of external constraints for such constraints to effect commitment (Levinger, 1999). Thus, Levinger recognized the internal and external forces that impact commitment, but conceived of them as continual rather than discrete forces.

Similarly, Rusbult (1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998) did not use the distinction between internal and external processes to build her Investment Model of Commitment. The internal and external processes are noted, however, in Rusbult's descriptions of the determinants of commitment, which include relationship satisfaction, investment size, and quality of alternatives (Rusbult et al., 1998). In her model, relationship satisfaction is described as attraction towards a relationship and affect experienced in the association (Rusbult, 1991, Rusbult et al., 1998), which is a process based on attitudes and emotions

that occur within an individual. Investment size refers to the resources that are attached to a relationship, including time, effort, identity, personal disclosure, mutual family and friends, and material possessions (Rusbult et al., 1998). Therefore, internal and external processes are a part of investment size. Internal processes include how much of one's identity is tied to a relationship or emotional involvement, while the amount of irretrievable time, effort, and material possessions that have been invested into a relationship are a result of external factors (Rusbult, 1991). Lastly, quality of alternatives would be considered a result of external processes as it is based on the availability and desirability of external alternate involvements to the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Although the internal and external process of commitment are recognized by Rusbult (1991; Rusbult et al., 1998) in the determinants of commitment in her model, commitment level as defined in the Investment Model only captures internal processes. Commitment level is the intent to maintain a relationship, which includes feelings of psychological attachment and a long-term orientation towards the relationship (Rusbult, 1983, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998). Therefore, commitment level results from one's attitudes and attraction towards the relationship, which are internal processes. According to Rusbult's model, external processes may impact commitment as a part of the determinants of commitment; commitment itself, however, is only a product of internal processes (Rusbult, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1998). In this way, the Investment Model differs from Levinger's (1965, 1976) theory (in which internal and external processes were conceptualized as a part of cohesiveness and every determinant) in that commitment level

is influenced solely by internal factors, and the only determinant of commitment to include both internal and external factors is investment size.

Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model is unique in that he used the distinction between internal and external processes as a basis for his conceptualization of commitment. Johnson proposed that there are three phenomenologically discrete experiences of commitment: personal, moral, and structural commitment (Johnson, 1991b). Johnson identified two outcomes of internal processes, an attractions force and a constraining force. Personal commitment arises from the positive pull force of internal processes, such as attraction towards one's partner and relationship. The internal processes of commitment also involve a constraining force, which Johnson defined as moral commitment (Johnson, 1991a). Moral commitment is the idea that one's values and beliefs about a partner and relationship may act a restraining force, keeping one in a relationship due to a sense of obligation versus personal desire (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). Finally, Johnson identified structural commitment as a constraining force that results from external factors, such as social pressure or difficulty of relationship dissolution procedures (Johnson 1991a, 1999). The difference in the operation of internal and external processes in constructing commitment is a fundamental basis for Johnson's assertion that commitment is multidimensional, rather than a unitary concept as described in Levinger's (1965, 1976) and Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) theories.

Commitment as a Multidimensional Construct

An important distinction between the three models is that Johnson (1991a, 1991b, 1999) conceptualized commitment as a multidimensional construct, whereas commitment

is operationalized as unidimensional in Levinger's (1965, 1976) and Rusbult's (1983, 1991) models. First, Levinger (1965, 1976) conceived of commitment in terms of relationship cohesiveness, which is signified by the extent of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interdependence on the interpersonal involvement in a particular relationship. The Social Exchange Model of Cohesiveness, then, described the influence of the determinants of commitment, in the form of attractions, barriers, and alternate attractions forces, on relationship cohesiveness (Levinger, 1965, 1976). In this way, Levinger (1965, 1976) conceptualized commitment as a unitary construct in terms of relationship cohesiveness, and the attractions and constraints forces described in his model were seen as determinants of commitment, or factors discrete from his operationalization of commitment.

Similarly, Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) Investment Model defined commitment as a unidimensional concept, being the intention of one to persist in a relationship. The Investment Model also involves attractions (i.e., high satisfaction level) and constraints (i.e., high investment size or poor alternatives) forces as factors influencing commitment (1983; Rusbult et al., 1998). Like Levinger (1965, 1976), Rusbult conceptualized the attractions and constraints forces as determinants of commitment rather being a part of the construct of commitment. Both the Social Exchange and Investment Models portray commitment as independent from influencing factors, namely attractions and constraints forces, therefore operationalizing commitment as a unitary concept (Levinger, 1965, 1976; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998).

On the other hand, Johnson (1991a, 1999) purported that the factors influencing commitment lie within the concept of commitment itself, and thus formulated commitment as a multidimensional construct to explain this dynamic. In this way, Johnson (1991a, 1999) regarded factors such as the attraction and constraints forces, along with the internal and external processes, as not being independent of commitment. His argument was that unitary, global conceptualizations of commitment (including Rusbult's definition) typically capture only the attractive influence of commitment, thereby failing to capture the multi-faceted nature of the construct (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b, 1999). To Johnson (1991a, 1991b, 1999), commitment is more than just an attractions force as evidenced by the high correlation level of constraining determinants with measurements of global commitment. Thus, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment is unique in the operationalization of commitment as a multidimensional construct.

Moral Commitment

As Johnson (1991a, 1999) conceptualized commitment as a multi-dimensional construct, he made distinctions between the attractions and constraints forces, and internal and external processes, within the concept of commitment. Therefore, another major divergence in these theoretical models of commitment is that Johnson (1991a, 1999) described moral commitment as a distinct dimension of commitment apart from the internal attractions force (i.e., personal commitment) and the external constraints force (i.e., structural commitment). Levinger (1965, 1976), on the other hand, regarded personal feelings of obligation as part of the barriers component, along with external

sources of pressure (i.e., structural commitment), thereby not distinguishing between the internal and external processes of the constraints force. Similarly, Rusbult (1991) argued that what Johnson defines as moral commitment is part of the investment size factor in that moral obligations are a resource that binds one to a relationship. Therefore, feelings of obligation towards a relationship was not included in Rusbult's operationalization of commitment level, but rather was considered as part of a determinant of commitment (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998).

The dimensions of personal and structural commitment have been more fully developed in the literature than Johnson's (1991a, 1999) component of moral commitment. Moral commitment is a concept, however that may provide a clearer picture of whether relationship commitment is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Both moral and structural commitment are part of the constraints force as each may compel a person to continue in a relationship whether or not they want (i.e., personal commitment) to stay. Moral commitment is discernable from structural commitment in that moral commitment is a result of internal processes rather than external factors (Adams & Jones, 1999; Johnson, 1991a, 1999). That is, moral commitment is influenced by internal constructions, such as one's values or beliefs, whereas social and institutional barriers, those things external to an individual, shape the dimension of structural commitment (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999).

Some researchers argue that the internal and external processes are not distinct enough to conceive of moral and structural commitment as separate factors (Rusbult, 1991). Yet, few developed measures of moral commitment fully capture the construct as

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an internal constraining force as visualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Some researchers

(e.g., Kurdek, 2000, 2007) have claimed to test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) tripartite model,

yet they do not include measures to assess moral commitment. Therefore, the findings

remain inconclusive as to whether moral commitment is truly a distinct construct that

significantly influences relationship stability in committed intimate relationships

(Johnson, 1999; Ramirez, 2008; Rusbult, 1991). Despite the inconclusive evidence on the

distinctiveness of moral commitment as a factor separate from structural commitment,

Johnson's (1991a, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment remains

unique in attempting to capture the internal as well as the external processes of the

constraints force.

Moral Commitment in Marital Intimate Committed Relationships

Researchers exploring marital commitment have identified the moral obligation to

one's marriage and one's spouse as being integral in one's decision to remain in a

relationship with their partner (Adams & Jones, 1999). This moral obligation in marital

partnerships is founded in societal and institutional views of marriage in the United

States, and is strongly linked to religiosity (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999).

Historically, societal discourse promotes marriage between a man and a woman as a

lifelong commitment that forms the basic unit of a productive society (Lassiter, 2008).

Further, the significance accorded to marriage vows influence one's sense of obligation

to their spouse and their marriage, reinforcing the idea of marriage as a permanent union.

Although there is within-group differences, those of particular religious backgrounds may

view the marital bond as sacred and divorce as immoral, thus heightening their sense of moral commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997). Due to the sense of morality and duty associated with marriage in the United States, it is no surprise that researchers have identified the moral-normative experience of commitment as a unique and discrete factor.

The dimension of moral commitment has emerged as a factor in three studies in which researchers have developed instruments to assess relationship commitment or behaviors contributing to relationship dissolution (Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Factor analyses of their instruments used in these studies demonstrated a three-factor solution, with one factor showing similarities to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of moral commitment. Bagarozzi and Atilano (1982) created an assessment to measure the influence of the social exchange process in determining marital dissolution, and intended for their items to load onto four factors. Instead, their items fell into a three-factor solution with the second factor, Willingness to Separate/Divorce and Internal-Psychological Barriers, showing attributes of the internal constraints process of moral commitment (Johnson, 1999). The subscales that fell into this factor included Willingness to Separate, Willingness to Divorce, Obligations to Children, Marriage Vows, and Religious Beliefs. These subscales correspond to two components of moral commitment: person specific obligation and relationship type values. The Obligation to Children subscale also supports Johnson's (1999) view of person specific obligation as encompassing more than a duty to one's partner, but also an obligation to others who would be effected by the dissolution of a relationship. Further, four subscales significantly loaded onto a third factor, entitled External Circumstantial

Barriers, which endorses Johnson's (1991a, 1999) idea that, at least in marital

relationships, the constraints force of commitment separates into two dimensions based

on internal and external processes (Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982).

Researchers in another study found a three-factor solution to their instrument

intended to measure relationship commitment in marital partners (Stanley & Markman,

1992). They created subscales for their measures along two components of commitment:

personal dedication (i.e., the attractions force) and constraint commitment. Factor

analyses of their instrument, however, showed a three-factor solution with one factor

reflecting a moral dimension of commitment (Johnson, 1999; Stanley & Markman,

1992). Their Morality of Divorce subscale substantially loaded onto a third factor with a

weight of .83, and their Satisfaction with Sacrifice subscale loaded equally (.51) onto the

first factor of personal dedication and the third factor.

The Morality of Divorce subscale included items assessing the moral acceptability

of divorce, corresponding to the relationship type values component of moral

commitment. The Satisfaction with Sacrifice subscale tapped into the degree with which

individuals find satisfaction in doing things for the benefit of their partners, which could

be related to the person specific obligation component. Again, this moral dimension

separated from the other constraints dimension, which included subscales related to

external aspects, such as termination procedures and unattractiveness of alternatives

(Stanley & Markman, 1992). The third dimension, however, only accounted for 8% of

the variance, and the researchers combined the second and third factors into an overall

constraints dimension in testing the validity of their instrument (Stanley & Markman,

1992). Although a moral dimension showed up as distinct in their factor analyses, this factor lacked the statistical robustness to be considered a unique dimension separate from the constraints component of commitment.

Adams and Jones (1997) were the third pair of researchers to create an instrument measuring relationship commitment that yielded a three-factor solution. Based on an extensive review of the marital commitment literature, they identified commitment as a three-dimensional construct: (a) an attractions force, (b) a moral obligation, and (c) a constraint (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999). From their literature review, Adams and Jones (1997) created items along 11 domains of the commitment experience, and the resulting factor analyses revealed three domains that paralleled the dimensions identified in their literature review. One of the dimensions was entitled Commitment to Marriage, which included items regarding one's sense of moral obligation to their marriage. Although Adams and Jones's factor analyses and subsequent studies examining the validity of the DCI lend support to Commitment to Marriage as a discrete dimension, the majority of their items only tap into one component of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of moral commitment: relationship type values (Adams & Jones, 1997).

The validity studies of the DCI conducted by Adams and Jones (1997) provide additional information about the relationship type values component of moral commitment. They found that their Commitment to Marriage dimension was significantly related to moral standards, religiosity, and church attendance, which corroborate the moral obligation that is associated with marriage in the United States, particularly in more conservative religious communities. Further, the Commitment to Marriage scale

was negatively related to number of times married, suggesting that individuals who have been divorced previously are less likely to stay in their relationships due to moral commitment. Despite the limitations of excluding two components of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment dimension, the study by Adam and Jones lends credence to the argument that moral commitment is a distinct experience in marital relationships and provides explanatory information about correlates of this dimension in marital partners.

Ramirez (2008) also used the DCI to test actor and partner effects of relational maintenance behaviors across the three experiences of commitment in the Tripartite Model. Ramirez's (2008) methodology was empirically sound, and his conclusions about moral commitment were legitimate based on his results. Relational maintenance behaviors related differently to the three experiences of commitment, providing support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that each dimension results from distinct causes (Ramirez, 2008). Thus, the relational maintenance behaviors correlated uniquely with moral commitment, supplying evidence that the moral dimensions is a discrete experience of marital commitment.

The way in which relational maintenance behaviors and actor-partner effects interacted with moral commitment provided some additional information to how moral commitment operates in marital relationships. For moral and structural commitment, partner effects were higher than actor effects, suggesting that the constraints forces of commitment are potentially more connected to a partner's behaviors than one's own actions (Ramirez, 2008). Further, the associations between relational maintenance behaviors and moral commitment were the strongest of the three dimensions of

commitment. (Ramirez, 2008). Individuals' own engagement in assurances, or expressing attraction to one's partner, and social networks were positively related to moral commitment, and openness, or engaging in candid discussions about the relationship, was negatively related to moral commitment. All five of the partners' relational maintenance behaviors, including positivity and shared tasks, emerged as a significant predictor of an individual's level of moral commitment, suggesting that the relational maintenance strategies of one's partner may strongly increase one's level of obligation to the partner and the relationship (Ramirez, 2008).

Also, it is noteworthy that assurances were negatively correlated with structural commitment although assurances bolstered moral commitment (Ramirez, 2008). Assurances may increase one's feeling of obligation to a partner and relationship, although being positively associated with moral commitment conveys a sense of personal choice (i.e., internal processes) to remain in the relationship. Communicating affection for one's partner, however, may mitigate the partner's sense of structural constraint (Ramirez, 2008). These findings provide more information in interpreting Adams and Jones's (1997) results that moral commitment is positively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas structural commitment is negatively correlated. At least in marital relationships, one may see their obligation to stay as an individual choice versus being externally restrained, and so may choose to make the best of their situation, which in turn bolsters relationship satisfaction.

In one additional study, researchers explored the characteristics of enduring marriages and demonstrated support for moral commitment as a unique and influential

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dimension of the commitment experience (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Using a qualitative design, Robinson and Blanton found that commitment emerged as a significant characteristic of keeping marital relationships intact. Within their participants' descriptions of commitment, they identified a personal type of commitment and a commitment related to societal norms. Participants referred to the notion that marriage is for a lifetime and divorce is not an option, and to their obligation to their children. In this way, participants conceptualized marriage as a person-specific obligation and a duty to the institution of marriage (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). The results of these interviews show that married individuals conceive of a moral commitment to marriage, separate from that of a personal attractions commitment, which serves to strengthen Johnson's (1991a, 1999) assertion that the moral dimension is a distinct part of the commitment experience.

To date, however, Johnson et al. (1999) are the only researchers who have attempted to directly validate the Tripartite Model of Commitment with marital partners, and thus are the sole researchers to test the three components of moral commitment as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Relationship-type values were conceptualized as divorce attitudes, person-specific obligation as partner contract, and a general valuing of consistency as consistency values (Johnson et al., 1999). In a factor analysis of the components of personal and moral commitment, Johnson et al. found the three measures of the components of moral commitment to significantly load onto the moral commitment factor. Although personal and moral commitment share the internal processes dimension

of commitment, this finding demonstrates support for the distinctiveness between the two dimensions in marital partners based on attractions versus constraints.

There are limitations to Johnson et al.'s (1999) results in that the measures used to assess personal and moral commitment contained a single item, and so they could not demonstrate reliability for this instrumentation. Moreover, they perceived the components of structural commitment as being a function of 'casual indicators' rather than an underlying internal state, and thus did not subject the structural commitment components measures to reliability or factor analysis (Johnson et al., 1999). Although moral commitment was found to be discrete from personal commitment, the main dispute between researchers (Adams & Jones, 1999) is regarding the distinction between moral and structural commitment as part of the constraints force. With these significant limitations, their results provide limited support for the uniqueness of moral commitment in marital relationships.

Another result of Johnson et al.'s (1999) study regarding moral commitment was the significant correlation between religiosity and the dimension of moral commitment. This finding should be cautiously considered because both constructs were measured with a single-item instrument, calling into question the reliability of both measures. Even with this limitation, the association between religiosity and moral commitment was significant and in the expected direction, and upholds the idea that an individual's level of moral commitment is considerably influenced by one's religious beliefs.

Consistently, researchers have found obligation to one's partner, part of the person specific obligation component, and to one's relationship to form a discrete

experience of marital commitment. To date, the third component of moral commitment as identified by Johnson (1991a, 1999), a general valuing of consistency, has only been directly researched in one study (Johnson et al., 1999), and it has not emerged as a component of moral commitment in marital relationships. Some researchers, however, suggest that one's tendencies towards morality and obligation in general could be an influential component of moral commitment (Adams, Couch, Kelly, & Jones, 1999; Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999). For instance, individuals who report higher levels of moral commitment tend to have moralistic personality traits such as conscientiousness and generosity, and may be ideologically and religiously conservative, conforming, and conventional (Adams et al., 1999; Adams & Jones, 1997).

The findings that personality characteristics factor into moral commitment is similar to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) general valuing of consistency component in that personality traits contribute to individuals' consistency in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. The small body of research linking personal tendencies to moral commitment may suggest that the third component of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of moral commitment is an integral part of this dimension. Johnson's (1991a, 1999) view of the third component, however, may need to be expanded to capture the multiple dynamics in one's personality that affect one's levels of moral commitment in a marital relationship.

Moral Commitment in Intimate Committed Relationships Outside of the Marital Context

Researchers have demonstrated empirical support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment in marital relationships, lending credence to the idea that moral commitment is a distinct dimension of the commitment experience for partners. Although Johnson (1999) asserted that his model of commitment is generalizable to all relationship contexts, only a handful of researchers have explored his model in samples of partners in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context. Those researchers who have tested the Tripartite Model in samples of same-sex (Kurdek, 2000, 2007) or dating opposite-sex partners (e.g., Johnson, 1985; Lydon et al., 1997; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) have either not fully operationalized moral commitment in terms of Johnson's conceptualization, or omitted the dimension entirely when investigating Johnson's model. Thus, few conclusions about the dimension of moral commitment in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context can be drawn from this small body of literature.

Some researchers have claimed to test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model, particularly the component of moral commitment, with samples of partners in dating opposite-sex relationships, yet they have not defined moral commitment in a way that thoroughly captured the construct as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999). In two studies, researchers (Johnson, 1985; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1999) tested Rusbult's (1983) Investment Model along with the idea of moral commitment conceptualized as subjective norms, or the extent to which an individual's parents,

friends, and religion supported the continuation of the relationship (Rusbult, 1991).

Johnson (1985) and Rusbult et al., (1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) found subjective

norms to only weakly correlate with commitment level, and along with the three factor

investment model, strengthened the ability to predict commitment by less than one

percent (respective R-squares = .70/.70 and .70/.71).

Johnson's (1985) and Rusbult et al.'s (1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) definition

of subjective norms, however, seems more consistent with social pressure to continue the

relationship rather than an individual's internalization of social values. As social pressure

is external to the individual, the conceptualization of subjective norms is more consistent

with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) description of structural commitment than his definition of

moral commitment. Rusbult (1991) acknowledged that the difficulty in distinguishing

between subjective norms and personal values, although assessing the degree to which

others encourage continuation of the relationship does not seem to tap into how this

encouragement affects one's internal processes of obligation to a relationship. Therefore,

Johnson's (1985) and Rusbult et al.'s (1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) conclusions that

moral commitment provides little information as to whether partners remain in their

relationships is flawed in that their conclusions are based on their assessment of

subjective norms, an operationalization that is inconsistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999)

conceptualization of moral commitment as an internal process.

In another study with dating opposite-sex partners, Lydon et al. (1997) measured

the obligation to relationship component of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment

factor. Lydon et al., (1997) examined the impact of moral commitment on dating

partners' transition to a long-distance relationship status, defining moral commitment as obligation to the relationship. They found moral commitment to be conceptually distinct from personal commitment, defined as the extent of enthusiasm and enjoyment in one's relationship, with moral commitment predicting higher levels of distress than personal commitment upon relationship dissolution (Lydon et al., 1997).

Limitations of this study, however, include that moral commitment was assessed with only two items, both referencing obligation to the relationship, and the other components of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) moral commitment construct (i.e., person specific obligation and general valuing of consistency) were not considered. A two-item measure cannot be considered empirically reliable when assessing a subjective construct such as moral commitment. Moreover, Lydon et al. (1997) did not include a measure for structural commitment. As moral and structural commitment share similar qualities in being a constraining factor, Lydon et al.'s (1997) findings supporting the discreteness of moral commitment did not assess the distinctions between the internal and external process of the constraints force. Therefore, few conclusions about the conceptual distinctiveness of moral commitment in opposite-sex dating partners can be drawn from this study as the measurement of moral commitment was not statistically reliable and the assessment of structural commitment was omitted.

Only one study was identified in which researchers claimed to explore moral commitment in a sample of same-sex partners (Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008). In this study, however, Oswald et al. (2008) operationalized moral commitment as engaging in a commitment ceremony, or the ritualization of a same-sex

partnership. Although such ritualization may influence and/or be a result of moral commitment, this definition of moral commitment does not tap into the internal beliefs and values that encapsulate the construct according to Johnson (1991a, 1999). Oswald et al. (2008) found religiosity and parental status to significantly predict ritualization of a relationship in same-sex partners. These results parallel the findings that religiosity is positively correlated with moral commitment in opposite-sex married partners (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al, 1999) and Johnson's (1999) assertion that parental status influences moral commitment. Direct conclusions cannot be made about moral commitment in same-sex partners based on Oswald et al.'s (2008) definition of the construct; their findings, however, suggest that religiosity and parental status are in some way related to a possible cause and/or consequence of moral commitment, or the ritualization of one's same-sex relationship.

Finally, Kurdek (2000, 2007) tested the determinants of relationship commitment in dating opposite-sex and cohabiting same-sex partners by integrating Johnson's (1991a, 1999) tripartite theory and Rusbult's (1983) investment model. In each of these studies, however, Kurdek did not include the dimension of moral commitment in his assessment of Johnson's (1991, 1999) model. Kurdek (2000, 2007) acknowledged that the moral commitment dimension as conceptualized in previous studies (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997) may be conceived differently by cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, and thus the current operationalization may not be applicable to diverse types of intimate committed unions. Although Kurdek (2000, 2007) concluded that his results did not support Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory of commitment as a multidimensional construct,

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any conclusions about the dimensionality of commitment based on these studies should be considered with caution as Kurdek's (2000, 2007) methodology omits a potentially important and distinct component (i.e., moral obligation) of commitment.

Conclusions

In this chapter, a review of the literature on commitment in close personal relationships was provided. The psychosocial literature on relationship commitment spans decades, yet few definite conclusions about how commitment operates in a variety of intimate committed relationships can be made from the research as it stands. Presently, two major issues exist with the commitment literature are: (a) the lack of consensus among researchers about the dimensionality of commitment, and (b) disagreement in terms of conceptualizing the constraints component as either a dimension or determinant of commitment. Researchers have slowly built empirical support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment, which currently stands as one of the dominant theories in the psychosocial literature. The Tripartite Model is unique in conceptualizing moral commitment, a constraining force resulting from internal processes, as a discrete dimension of commitment apart from the attractions and constraints components (Johnson, 1991a, 1999; Ramirez, 2008).

Johnson (1991a, 1999) asserted that the Tripartite Model, including the dimension of moral commitment, is applicable to various types of intimate committed relationships. Moral commitment, however, rarely has been examined outside of marital relationships. The lack of focus on moral commitment in a diverse range of intimate committed

relationships may be due to the ties between this dimension and the legitimization of the marriage bond above and beyond all other types of intimate committed relationships in the United States. Currently, no researchers have clearly defined moral commitment in a way that is generalizable to the experiences of those in a variety of intimate committed relationships. The aim of this study, then, is to operationalize moral commitment in diverse types of intimate committed relationships, namely cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. The results of this study can contribute to the development of measures to improve the empirical research on the Tripartite Model, which may help to resolve in the future to resolve the existing issues in the psychosocial literature regarding relationship commitment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A study toward operationalizing moral commitment was introduced and a

rationale for the study was outlined in Chapter I. A review of the literature was provided

in Chapter II to provide a foundation and support for further investigation into the

dimension of moral commitment in diverse types of intimate committed relationships.

The methodology that was used to operationalize moral commitment is outlined in this

chapter, including a description of the participants, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Questions

The aim of this study was to operationalize moral commitment in diverse types of

intimate committed partnerships, specifically for those in cohabiting same-sex and

opposite-sex partnerships. Throughout the procedures, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite

Model of Commitment guided conceptualization of moral commitment within the data

collection process. Johnson (1991a, 1999) proposed that the moral commitment

dimension is comprised of three components: (a) general valuing of consistency, (b)

person specific obligation, and (c) relationship-type values. The over-arching goal of this

study was to assess whether Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of moral

commitment corresponded with the experiences of participants who are in intimate

committed relationships outside of the marital context. Therefore, the research questions

were as follows: Do cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceive of moral

commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment?

1. How do cohabiting same-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?

    a. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the general valuing of

       consistency component of moral commitment to be consistent with

       Johnson's (1991, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their

       relationships?

    b. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the person specific obligation

       of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999)

       model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

    c. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive the relationship-type values

       component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a,

       1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

    d. Do cohabiting same-sex partners conceive of other components of moral

       commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of

       commitment?

2. How do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?

    a. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the general valuing of

       consistency component of moral commitment to be consistent with

       Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their

       relationships?

b. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the person specific obligation component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

c. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive the relationship-type values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

d. Do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceive of other components of moral commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment?

3. What are the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

4. What are the differences between cohabiting same-sex and cohabiting opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

Participants

Participants in this study were partners who self-identified as being in an intimate committed relationship outside of the marital context for at least one year. Specifically, participants were either in cohabiting same-sex partnerships or cohabiting opposite-sex partnerships. A *intimate committed relationship* was defined as a relationship in which two individuals share an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual connection, have an influence and mutual reliance on each other (i.e., interdependence), and both intend to

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share a long-term relationship with one another (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991a; Pope et al., 2010). Partners in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context are those who self-identify as being in committed intimate relationships but who are not currently married nor engaged to get married, or those in relationships in which marriage is not an option (i.e., same-sex relationships in states where same-sex marriages are illegal). For this study, participants were asked to self-identify as being in a cohabiting same-sex partnership or opposite-sex relationship for at least one year.

Because Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model is based on the definition of commitment as continuing lines of action that will uphold the interdependence between partners, participants in this study ideally had a sense of interdependence in their relationships. Although the idea of relationship interdependence was included in the definition of committed intimate relationship, the criteria for the length of the relationship (i.e., one year) also helped to ensure that partners had time for interdependence to develop within their relationships. The expectation was that partners with higher levels of interdependence in their relationships were more able to generate statements of their perceptions of moral commitment.

Procedures

The mixed-methods approach of concept mapping was employed with two samples of individuals in intimate committed relationships, one with cohabiting same-sex partners and the other with cohabiting opposite-sex partners, in order to develop a structured conceptualization of moral commitment in diverse types of intimate committed

relationships. The process of concept mapping involves six steps: (a) preparation, (b) generation of statements, (c) structuring of statements, (d) representation of statements, (e) interpretation of maps, and (f) utilization of maps (Grayson, 1992; Trochim, 1989). The procedures of this study entailed the first five steps of the concept mapping process. Utilizing the maps to create measures of moral commitment usable with partners in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context is beyond the scope of the current study.

The five steps of the concept mapping process used in this study were grouped into three rounds of data collection. The first round of data collection included the preparation and generation of statements steps. After the recruitment of participants, the statements were generated and collected via an online open-ended response survey created by the researcher through www.surveymonkey.com. The second round of data collection corresponded with the step of structuring the statements. Individuals who participated in round one of the data collection process were mailed packets that included a demographic questionnaire, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998), the rating task, and the sorting task. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires and the sorting task, and to mail the packets back to the researcher. The data were then analyzed to complete the representation of statements step before completing round three of the data collection process. In round three, the researcher held focus groups with a small sample of participants to conduct the interpretation of statements step. The procedures for each step of the concept mapping process are described in more detail below.

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Participants were recruited via email listservs at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and through posting flyers in restaurants and coffee shops in Greensboro, North Carolina (see Appendix A for recruitment materials). Additionally, snowball sampling was used as a recruitment method as participants were asked to forward the study information to potential candidates in their social circles. Those who participated only in rounds one and two of the data collection process were entered into drawings for two $50 Target gift cards, and those who completed all three rounds were offered $50 gift certificates to local restaurants in compensation for their time and participation.

Step One: Preparation

Preparation involves selecting the participants and developing the focus on the conceptualizations (Grayson, 1992; Trochim, 1989).

Selecting the participants. Participants were defined as those in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context, and two distinct samples will be used to represent this population. One sample consisted of cohabiting same-sex partners, and the other sample was comprised of cohabiting opposite-sex partners.

Developing the focus. Developing the focus included specifically defining the focus of the brainstorming process and establishing a focus for the rating task (Trochim, 1989). The focus of the brainstorming prompt was for the participants to generate ideas of moral commitment consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model. As moral commitment is not a widely understood construct, the researcher developed a description (see Appendix A) and depiction (see Appendix B) of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment that was used to briefly present his theory before asking

participants to brainstorm statements of moral commitment. Introducing Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model before the focus statement and brainstorming prompt hopefully familiarized participants with the idea of moral commitment and served to clarify the focus of the brainstorming process. Particularly, the researcher introduced Johnson's model to help participants distinguish moral commitment from personal and structural commitment by emphasizing the internal processes and constraints component of moral commitment. Examples of personal and structural commitment also were provided to clarify the unique aspects of moral commitment. No examples were given, however, for moral commitment to avoid inadvertently directing participants' brainstorming process (i.e., the process should be participant-driven).

The focus statement developed for the process of statement generation, which was conducted via an online open-ended response survey, read as follows: "Please attempt to form ideas that fit the INTERNAL PROCESSES and CONSTRAINTS COMPONENT of moral commitment. You may consider your experience of moral commitment in your current relationship, your past relationships, or how you would imagine moral commitment in relationships similar to your own." Also, participants were given a brainstorming prompt to help them generate statements to help them translate the abstract concept of moral commitment into concrete ideas. The prompt read as follows: "I *ought (or feel obligated)* to stay in my relationship with my partner because

_____."

The second step in developing the focus was to generate a rating scale for the brainstormed statements that was used during the structuring of the statements. The rating

focus assessed the relevance of each statement to participants' experiences in their relationships. This can help inform the development of an instrument to measure moral commitment in future studies by converting the statements rated as most relevant into items on an instrument. Thus, the rating focus for this study asked participants to rate the statements on a Likert scale of 1 ("Not at all true of myself.") to 5 ("True of myself.") based on how true each statement was to their experience in their relationship.

Step Two: Generation of Statements

The next step involved brainstorming by individual participants via an online open-ended response survey to generate statements that represent the conceptual domain of moral commitment for cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. The researcher chose the option of generating statements remotely (Kane & Trochim 2007) instead of through focus groups in order to expand the recruitment area for participants in rounds one and two of the data collection process to include recruitment options outside of the Greensboro, North Carolina area. The consent form (see Appendix B) was provided at the beginning of the online survey. The next step of the survey asked participants to read over a brief description of Johnson's Tripartite Model of Commitment and provided a depiction of his model (see Appendix C for the online survey instrumentation) to help facilitate participants understanding of the idea of moral commitment. Next, the focus statement and brainstorming prompts were presented, and participants were asked to fill in the response box with as many ideas as possible. Participants completed the survey by providing demographic and contact information so that they could be mailed the packets for round two of the data collection process.

Once the statements were generated, the open-ended responses were synthesized by the researcher and her dissertation chair following concept mapping guidelines for reducing and editing the statement set (Jackson & Trochim 2002; Kane & Trochim, 2007). The purpose of the synthesis was to produce the final set of statements that were used for the sorting and ratings tasks in the structuring of statements step (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

As the generation of statements was conducted via an open-ended response survey, the statements were first unitized so that each idea only contained one concept so that each idea could be considered distinct from others during the synthesis process (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). The majority of participants' responses were in a list format, and most of the ideas in each list were in short phrases that contained one concept. For the participants who responded in sentence format, the researcher unitized these responses by breaking the sentences into single-concept phrases (Jackson & Trochim, 2002) before conducting the synthesis process. During the synthesis process, the researcher's dissertation chair checked the units created by the researcher and provided feedback if he felt that a phrase still contained more than one idea. The researcher and dissertation chair then discussed that item, and decided if further unitizing was needed so that each statement decided upon during the synthesis task contained only one idea that was distinct from the other statements.

The number of statements was reduced to a set under one hundred for the practicality of the group sort and data input (Kane & Trochim, 2007; Trochim, 1989). Ideas that were overly redundant were eliminated to obtain a list with only one idea

represented in each statement. Lastly, the statements were edited for clarity before they were printed for the sorting and rating tasks (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Individual statements, however, were not edited to ensure that each idea was relevant to the focus statement, which asked participants to generate ideas relating to the internal processes and constraints forces of concept of moral commitment, as suggested in the synthesis guidelines (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Rather, all statements left after the synthesis were used for the data analyses, and the participants in the focus groups for the interpretation step were asked to select whether the resulting clusters were most fitting with personal, moral, or structural commitment in order to test research question one. For the complete list of synthesized statements, see the Rating Form in Appendix D.

Step Three: Structuring of Statements

For round two of the data collection process, participants were mailed data collection packets to complete step three of the concept mapping process. To complete the structuring of the statements step, participants were asked to sort and rate the synthesized statements in order to provide information about the interrelationships and importance of the statements that constitute the conceptual domain. Participants were provided with instructions on how to complete the data collection packets (see Appendix D for data collection packet materials and instrumentation). First, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. The synthesized statements were printed onto a rating form, and participants also were instructed to rate the each statement based on the rating focus scale developed during the preparation step of the concept mapping process.

The statements also were printed onto small cards. Participants were instructed to sort the statements into groups that make sense to them based on similarity of the statements (Trochim,1989; Kane & Trochim, 2007). The stipulations of the sorting task are that each statement can only belong to one stack although a statement can be in a stack by itself, and participants must create more than one stack of statements (Trochim, 1989; Kane & Trochim, 2007). Participants were provided with blank cards, and asked to create a label that describes each of their stacks once they finished the sorting process. The sorting and rating of the statements became the data used to develop an objective representation of the conceptual domain of moral commitment.

Relationship Assessment Scale. Lastly, participants were asked to fill out the RAS (see Appendix D; Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick et al., 1998). This scale was included to collect information about participants' perceived satisfaction, or positive affectivity and attraction to one's relationship (Rusbult, 1983) in their relationships. As researchers have found that individuals in diverse types of relationship report higher levels of global commitment when their relationship satisfaction is higher (Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009; Rusbult et al., 1998) assessing participants' relationship satisfaction may provide useful information to help explain the results.

The RAS (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick et al., 1998) is a brief instrument that measures respondents' general level of satisfaction with their intimate couple relationship (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000). The RAS contains 7 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale for participants to rate each item. The RAS was chosen for this study because its items are gender neutral. The RAS has items that measure one's general satisfaction with the

relationship, whether the relationship is exceeding one's expectations, whether one's partner is meeting one's needs, and frequency of problems in the relationship.

The RAS demonstrates good internal consistency across studies with a diverse range of opposite-sex couples (i.e., dating, married, parental, multicultural, etc.), with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .73 to .93 (Hendrick et al., 1998). Further, the RAS has demonstrated test-retest reliability (.85), convergent validity with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, and the ability to discriminate between couples who were still dating and those who were broken up in samples of opposite-sex couples (Hendrick et al., 1998). The RAS also had demonstrated adequate internal consistency in studies with same-sex partners, with reported alphas of .87 (Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006) to .90 (Pope et al., 2010). The researcher could identify no studies, however, that tested the convergent and discriminant validity of the RAS with samples of same-sex partners through searches of scholarly databases (i.e., ERIC, PsycINFO, and LGBT Life).

Step Four: Representation of Statements

The data from the rating task and sorting task was statistically analyzed in order to create four conceptual representations of moral commitment for each focus group: (a) the point map, (b) the cluster map, (c) the point rating map, and (d) the cluster rating map. Accordingly, eight total representations of moral commitment (four for cohabiting same-same partners and four for cohabiting opposite-sex partners) were generated. In turn, these representations were used to interpret the conceptualization of moral commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

Rating task. To analyze the data from the rating task, the mean of the ratings for each statement were calculated. The data from the rating task also was used to calculate the average for each cluster after the cluster analysis was conducted. The averages of each statement and each cluster were overlain graphically on the point map and cluster maps in order to demonstrate the inter-relationships between the statements as well as the importance of each statement and cluster to the conceptualization of moral commitment.

Sorting task. The results of the sorting task were subsequently entered into a group similarity matrix (GSM) that demonstrates the relational structure of moral commitment. The GSM was computed by aggregating the data from the sort task into a nonmetric binomial matrix using R Editor (Grayson, 1992). The GSM also had as many rows and columns as there are statements. The numbers in the GSM indicated how many people placed the pair of statements in that row and column into the same stack. The numbers of the GSM can range from '0' to the number of participants involved in the sorting. If most of the participants grouped a pair of statements together, then the numeric value for that pair in the GSM will be high, suggesting that those statements are conceptually similar to each other. Conversely, low numeric values in the GSM specify that participants rarely grouped that pair of statements together, implying that those statements are conceptually discrete (Trochim, 1989). The GSM will be the input for the multidimensional scaling analysis to create the point map of moral commitment for each group.

Data analysis. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis and hierarchical cluster analysis was used to create graphic representations of the sorting and rating tasks. The

resulting maps objectively illustrated how each focus group conceptualized moral commitment.

The point map. Inputting the GSM into a two-dimensional nonmetric MDS analysis through Systat generated the point map. The researcher used a two-dimensional solution as it is difficult to graph and interpret solutions that are higher than three-dimensional (Trochim, 1989). Although a number of solutions (e.g., one to five dimensional) could be fitted to decide which dimensional solution is most suitable, Kruskal and Wish (1978) and Trochim (1989) suggested that the two-dimensional solution is most useful when generating a point map. When MDS is used primarily to demonstrate clustering results, then the two-dimensional solution will typically suffice to create a two-dimensional plot of the sorting task (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Kruskal & Wish, 1978; Trochim, 1989).

To check the fit of the two-dimensional solution for the GSM, the stress value of the MDS analysis was calculated. The range of the stress value for the majority of concept mapping studies falls between 0.205 and 0.365 (Kane & Trochim, 2007). A stress value close to or higher than 0.365 may indicate that the two dimensional solution was not complex enough to adequately represent the data, or that there was sizable variability in how participants sorted the statements. The stress value did not indicate a poor fit, so no higher dimensional solutions for the GSM were generated.

The cluster map. The cluster map (or cluster tree) was generated through agglomerative hierarchical clustering analysis using Ward's minimum variance algorithm in Systat (Bedi, 2006; Kane & Trochim, 2007). To generate a cluster map that grouped

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the statements in a consistent manner with the point map generated through the MDS

analysis, the researcher used the X-Y MDS coordinate values as the input for the cluster

analysis (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Ward's algorithm was used as it "minimizes the sum

of the squares of the distances between all statements in two hypothetical clusters that

might be joined" (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p. 99), which makes it useful in interpreting

distance-based data.

To determine the number of clusters, the researcher began by examining the

cluster map to see if any particular number of clusters were evident. Typically, the range

of clusters in concept mapping is between 20 and 3 (Trochim, 1989). Additionally,

cluster solutions that were closest to the average number of sort piles generated by

participants, which was 6.5 piles with a range of 2 to 12, were given more consideration

when selecting a logical cluster solution (Bedi, 2006). Ten clusters were evident from the

cluster map, and so the researcher examined the statements that fell into each of these 10

cluster. The researcher determined that the statements were similar enough to keep 10

clusters going into the focus groups. A final cluster solution was not decided upon until

after the interpretation session, so that participants could determine the cluster solution

that most adequately represented their experience of relationship commitment.

Additionally, clusters were labeled by participants during the second focus group session.

The point rating map with designated clusters. Lastly, a point rating map was

generated, and the cluster solution was drawn on top of this map. The average rating for

each statement across participants was overlain on the point map to produce a graphical

representation of the rated importance of each statement. The cluster solution based on

the cluster map was drawn onto the point rating map to indicate the importance ratings of each cluster (Kane & Trochim, 2007; Trochim, 1989).

Step Five: Interpretation of Maps

The third round of data collection in this study corresponds with the final step of the concept mapping process, which is the interpretation of the maps. During the first round of the data collection process, participants were asked to indicate if they were interested in attending a focus group session as part of their participation in this study. Two focus groups took place: one for cohabiting same-sex partners and the other for cohabiting opposite-sex partners. Although all participants completed the same rating and sort tasks during round two of the data collection process, the participants were split into two samples for the interpretation of the resulting maps in order to test Research Questions 4 and 5.

The participants met for a two-hour focus group on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to discuss the three maps generated from the concept mapping analysis. The focus group sessions were audio-recorded so that the researcher could review the discussion as needed for interpretation of the results. The researcher also kept field notes after the focus group sessions to list general impressions of the interpretation process to further guide explanation of the results. The focus groups began by giving participants an agenda for the focus group (see Appendix E for materials and instrumentation used during the focus groups), and a brief overview of the interpretation process along with a copy of the synthesized set of statements. Then, the concept maps were presented in the following order: (a) point map, (b) cluster map, and (c) point rating

map with designated clusters. Each map was introduced and explained by the facilitator, and participants had an opportunity to respond to each map's meaning.

The point map was the first visual that each focus group had of the concept of moral commitment. The researcher guided the participants through the map, pointing out the spatial distance between brainstormed ideas. Participants were asked to respond to the reasonableness of the point groupings and to ask questions about any statements that seem oddly situated (Kane & Trochim, 2007). The process of determining the sensibility of the groupings continued into the introduction of the cluster maps.

An important part of the interpretation session is the labeling of the cluster maps by the participants. As participants went through the process of deciding the final cluster solution, the researcher helped the group negotiate to determine the most suitable labels for each cluster (Kane & Trochim, 2007). After examining each cluster, the researcher asked the participants to call out words or short phrases that described the statements in that cluster. The researcher wrote the labels that participants on a blackboard throughout the process so all participants could view the ideas. Once the final cluster solution was decided by participants, the researcher asked participants to again look over the final set of statements in each cluster. Then, participants were asked to select a label from those written on the board that was most descriptive of each cluster. If the participants disagreed on a label, the researcher had them vote by raising their hands to decide the concluding label for that cluster.

After all clusters were labeled, the participants were given a form (see Appendix L) and instructed to individually indicate the best fit for each cluster in terms of personal,

moral, and structural commitment in order to test Research Question 1. Based on the previous disagreement between researchers as to whether moral commitment is a construct distinguishable from personal and structural commitment, the identification of the clusters will serve to assess whether participants were able to differentiate moral commitment as a separate concept.

Finally, the researcher engaged participants in a brief discussion on their ideas of moral commitment based on their participation in the research process. Specifically, participants were asked to discuss if and how they could identify moral commitment in their own relationships with their partners, and how much moral commitment influenced their overall decision to stay in their relationships. The researcher also asked participants if they felt that "moral" was an acceptable label to describe this type of commitment.

Similarity between final cluster solutions. To address Research Questions 4 and 5, the researcher used the on the final cluster solutions from the focus groups for cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners as input for an analysis of inter-rater agreement. The research tested the agreement in final cluster solutions between groups by using the Crosstabulation and Kappa statistic in SPSS. The results of this analysis were used to inform the researcher's interpretation of the similarities and differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment.

Testimonial validity. The interpretation sessions, particularly the labeling of the cluster maps by participants, are a means of building testimonial validity into the research design (Bedi, 2006; Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Stiles, 1993). Testimonial validity is the idea that the researcher's interpretation of the data, including researcher bias, is

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checked through eliciting the participants' understanding of the concept maps. Therefore, the primary interpreters of the results (i.e., the concept maps) were the individuals whose experiences the results intend to represent (Bedi, 2006).

Concept Mapping and Queer Theory

The use of testimonial validity in the research design positions concept mapping methodologies as more compatible with a queer theoretical perspective than most other quantitative or mixed methods approaches. Testimonial validity encourages a positioning of the researcher as a "non-expert" on the lives of those she is studying. The social location of researchers and participants can impact how research is conducted and data is produced based on the location itself and the perception of the other's location in social structures (Allen, 2010). Thus, knowledge production is contingent on power relations between researchers and participants. Queer theory seeks to destabilize such power relations, and one way of doing so is for the researcher to position herself as the "non-expert," or "in a way that draws on the power [the participants] use to make life choices" (Butler & Byrne, 2008). Testimonial validity is a means of positioning the researcher as an expert on the experimental process and design while locating the participants as the experts on the constructs being studied based in their own lives, meanings, and experiences.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to field test the research procedures for clarity before conducting the full study. Refer to Appendix F for the full methodology and results of the pilot study. This section provides an overview of the feedback provided by pilot study participants and how their suggestions have informed the larger study as well as other procedural revisions based on pilot study implementation. Pilot study participants were asked for feedback on instructions and procedures in order to refine the process for the full study. A review of the integrated feedback and other procedural revisions is discussed below.

Integrated Feedback

Several suggestions were made with regard to the generating of the statements that were incorporated: The following changes were made in regards to the brainstorming process:

- Removal of the prompts about values and beliefs that kept participants in their relationships with their partner
- Changing the focus statement to prompt participants to think about past relationships or others in relationships similar to their own, as well as their current relationship, in brainstorming ideas of moral commitment

The pilot study participants also suggested that an agenda for the focus groups would have been helpful for them to follow along with the flow of the session. An agenda for the focus groups was incorporated into the full study.

Other Changes to the Full Study

The generation and structuring of the statements took place in a focus group for the pilot study, as did the interpretation of the statements. Participants were asked to attend both of the focus group sessions. The researcher recruited participants for the pilot study via email listservs, but had little response from individuals interested in attending two 2-hour focus groups. In order to expand the recruitment and to make data collection procedures more available to potential participants, the researcher changed the formats for data collection procedures for the generation and structuring of statements to remote methods.

Other changes to the full study were made to ensure more justifiable comparisons between samples to answer Research Questions 4 and 5. First, both samples of cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners rated and sorted the same set of synthesized statements for the full study. In the pilot study, each sample rated and sorted different sets of statements that were generated during their separate brainstorming processes. Additionally, the participant criteria for same-sex partners was changed so that they also were self-identifying as being in cohabiting relationships. In the pilot study, only opposite-sex couples were asked to self-identify as cohabiting, although both participants in the same-sex partners group in the pilot study were currently living with their partner.

Lastly, participants were asked to identify each cluster as most fitting with personal, moral, or structural commitment via group discussion in the focus groups during the pilot study. To eliminate avoid the possibility of "group-think" in which some

less vocal members may go along with the will of more vocal members, each participant identified the clusters individually in the full study.

Summary

In order to further the empirical testing of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment, the dimension of moral commitment needs to be operationalized with individuals in diverse types of intimate committed relationships. This study sought to operationalize moral commitment in intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context by creating conceptual representations of moral commitment with samples of individuals in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. The research questions, recruitment of participants, research procedures, and data analyses that will be used in this study were outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine and conceptualize relationship

commitment, particularly moral commitment, in a sample of individuals in diverse types

of intimate committed relationships, namely cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex

partners. In this chapter, the results of the data collection and analyses are presented.

First, a description of the sample is provided. Next, a brief overview of the research

procedures is given. Finally, each of the research questions are answered based on the

results of the research procedures.

Description of the Sample

The data for this study was gathered through three rounds of collection

procedures. Due to participant location and dropout rates, not all participants partook in

all three rounds of data collection. To maintain an acceptable level of participation, the

researcher continued recruitment procedures throughout the three rounds of data

collection, which occurred over a 2 ½ month period from May to July 2010. Therefore,

the sample is described below based on characteristics gathered at each round of the data

collection process.

Round 1

Thirty-six participants completed round one of the data collection process, which

was the generation of statements step via an online open-ended response survey. The only

demographic information collected during this round was the type of partnership the participants identified as being involved in (i.e., same-sex or opposite-sex) and place of residence. Of these 36 participants, two participants' open-ended responses revealed that they were in a marital relationship and their input was not included in the data analyses for this step. Out of the 34 remaining participants, 16 (47%) self-identified as being in a same-sex partnership, and 18 (53%) as being in an opposite-sex partnership. Twenty-nine (85%) of the participants presently lived in North Carolina, mostly in the Greensboro area. The other 15% were currently living in New York, Washington D.C., Iowa, Pennsylvania, and California.

Round 2

All thirty-four participants from Round 1 were mailed data collection packets. Out of these participants, 19 returned their packets by the start of the focus groups to the researcher, resulting in a 56% response rate. One packet did not contain the materials for the sort task, and therefore this data were not included in the rest of the data analyses procedures, leaving 18 participants' data that was analyzed to by the start of the focus groups to create the concept maps that were presented during these interpretation sessions.

Demographic data that was collected in Round 2 included age, sexual orientation, relationship length, cohabitation length, ethnic background, level of education, current occupation, income level, and parental status. Also, participants were asked to report the same demographics for their partner to get a more holistic view of their relationship

characteristics. All demographic information for Round 2 was computed and is summarized in Table 1.

Out of eighteen respondents for Round 2, 13 were female (72.2%) and five male (27.8%). Eight participants (44.4%) identified themselves as being in opposite-sex relationships, and ten (55.6%) as being in same-sex relationships. Out of the ten same-sex partners, five participants identified themselves as "lesbian," three as "gay," one as "queer," and one as "queer/bisexual." The average age of participants was 35.11 (SD = 12.03) and ages ranged from 19 to 61. Almost all (94.4%) participants were Caucasian, with one identifying as Caucasian/Hispanic. Overall, the participants were highly educated, with 11 (61.1%) having received a graduate degree. Two participants (11.1%) had some graduate school, three (16.7%) had a Bachelor's degree, and two (11.1%) had some college with no degree.

The average length of participants' relationships was 7 years, 9 months (SD = 5 years, 3 months) with a range of relationship length from 11 months to 22.5 years. Although the criterion for participation was a relationship length of at least one year, one participant indicated a relationship length of 11 months. The researcher made the decision to include this data as the participant had been in her relationship approximately 1 year. On average, participants had cohabited for 6 years, 8 months (SD = 7 years), with a range of cohabitation from 2 weeks to 22 years. Additionally, the majority of participants (77.8%) reported having no children together. Two participants (11.1%) had a child together with their partner, one (0.06%) had a child from a previous relationship, and one (0.06%) had a child from his or her partner's previous relationship.

Table 1. Round 2: Demographics for Structuring of Statements

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	n	%	
Sex:						
Male				5	27.8%	
Female				13	72.2%	
Sex of Partner:						
Male				9	50.0%	
Female				9	50.0%	
Sexual Orientation:						
Heterosexual				8	44.4%	
Lesbian				5	27.8%	
Gay				3	16.7%	
Queer				1	0.06%	
Queer/Bisexual				1	0.06%	
Partner's Sexual Orientation:						
Heterosexual				8	44.4%	
Lesbian				5	27.8%	
Gay				2	11.1%	
Queer				1	0.06%	
Queer/Lesbian				1	0.06%	
Homosexual				1	0.06%	
Age	35.11	12.03	19-61	18		
Age of Partner	35.33	12.26	19-60	18		
Length of Relationship	7 y 9 m					
(in months)	93.24	63.47	11-270	17		
Length of Cohabitation	6 y 8 m					
(in months)	80.26	84.12	0.5-264	17		
Ethnicity:						
Caucasian				17	94.4%	
Caucasian/Hispanic				1	0.06%	
Ethnicity of Partner:						
Caucasian				17	94.4%	

Caucasian/Hispanic	1	0.06%
Level of Education		
Some college, no degree	2	11.1%
Bachelor's degree	3	16.7%
Some graduate school	2	11.1%
Master's degree	8	44.4%
Doctoral degree	3	16.7%
Partner's Level of Education		
Associate's degree	1	0.06%
Bachelor's degree	9	50.0%
Some graduate school	1	0.06%
Master's degree	4	22.2%
Doctoral degree	3	16.7%
Income		
Below $15,000	1	0.06%
$15,001 to $25,000	4	22.2%
$25,001 to $35,000	2	11.1%
$35,001 to $45,000	3	16.7%
Above $45,000	8	44.4%
Partner's Income		
Below $15,000	3	16.7%
$15,001 to $25,000	3	16.7%
$25,001 to $35,000	3	16.7%
$35,001 to $45,000	3	16.7%
Above $45,000	6	33.3%
Number of Children:		
None	14	77.8%
One Together with Partner	2	11.1%
One from Previous Relationship	1	0.06%
One Adopted by Partner Prior to Start of Relationship	1	0.06%

Further, the majority of participants reported being highly satisfied with their relationships based on their responses to the RAS. The potential range of scores on the RAS is from 7 to 35, with 35 indicating high satisfaction with one's relationship and 7

indicating low satisfaction. The RAS mean for participants was 29.11 (SD = 5.25), with a range from 16 to 35. As the mean score was closer to the higher end of the scale, most of the participants in Round 2 indicated being satisfied with their relationships with their partners. See Table 2 for a comparison with means and standard deviations from previous studies.

Table 2. Relationship Assessment Scale Total Score Range, Mean, and Standard Deviation (n=20)

Possible Range	Sample Range	Previous Mean	Sample Mean	Previous SD	Sample SD
7-35	16-35	29.40[a] 28.16[b] 23.17[c]	29.11	5.0[a] 6.25[b] 7.0[c]	5.25

a. same-sex partners; Pope et al. (2010)
b. married opposite-sex partners; Kardatzke (2010)
b. opposite-sex partners in a clinical sample; Vaughn & Matyastik Baier (1999)

Finally, Round 2 participants rated the clusters of personal commitment as the most descriptive of their experience in their relationship with their partner based on the average ratings of items from the rating task. These items were in the categories typed as personal commitment in the concept maps' final cluster solution as determined by participants in Round 3 of the data collection process (see the average rating of items per cluster in Tables 4 and 5). For cohabiting same-sex partners, three out of four personal commitment clusters had average ratings above 3.5. Similarly, the three personal commitment clusters for cohabiting opposite-sex partners had mean item ratings above 4.0. The one cluster typed as personal and moral commitment by opposite-sex partners had items averaging 3.5.

The clusters typed as structural commitment were rated as the least indicative of

Round participants' experiences of their relationships with their partners, and the average

ratings of the moral commitment clusters fell in the middle of personal and structural. For

same-sex partners, the average rating of the structural commitment cluster was below 2.0,

and the ratings of the clusters indicative of moral and structural commitment fell below

2.5. The two clusters typed as moral commitment by same-sex partners in the focus

groups had mean item ratings of 3.87 and 2.39, respectively. Likewise, the clusters typed

as structural commitment by the opposite-sex partners focus group all had averages

below 2.4. The one cluster typed as moral and structural commitment held item ratings

that averaged 2.42, and the one moral commitment cluster had a mean item rating of

3.84. Thus, participants indicated personal commitment as the most descriptive, moral

commitment as moderately descriptive, and structural commitment as the least

descriptive of their experiences in their relationship with their partner.

Round 3

Seven participants attended the focus group for cohabiting same-sex partners, and

six for cohabiting opposite-sex partners. Due to the lack of interest in attending the focus

groups, particularly for cohabiting opposite-sex partners who participated in Round 1 and

2 of the data collection process, the researcher continued recruitment procedures between

Round 2 and 3 to enhance the number of participants in the focus groups. Therefore, four

out of the six participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' focus group did not

return their data collection packets in time to be included in the data used to create the

concept maps for the focus groups. The four participants, however, were asked to

complete their packets prior to the start of the focus group so that they could familiarize themselves with the process of the rating and sort tasks in order to enhance their understanding during the presentation of the maps.

The majority of the focus group participants were female, with one (14%) male attending the cohabiting same-sex partners' group and two (33%) attending the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group. All participants were Caucasian. The participants in the same-sex partners' group all had been in their current relationships longer than 3 years, with six (86%) of the participants having relationships lengths over 8 years, whereas most (83%) of the participants in the opposite-sex partners' group had been in their current partnerships for less than 3 years. Three of the participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners indicated a relationship length 8 months to 1 year. Although these participants did not directly meet the participation criteria of having a relationship length of at least one year, the researcher decided to allow their participation due to having been in their relationships approximately one year and the difficulty of finding participants for the opposite-sex partners' focus group.

Moreover, the participants from the same-sex partners' group generally were older, with the youngest being 29 years old, than the participants in the opposite-sex partners' group, who mostly (83%) were 29 years of age and younger. Finally, three (43%) of the same-sex partners' participants had children, two having one child together with their current partner and one having one child from her previous relationship with another partner. Only one (14%) participant in the opposite-sex partners' group had

children, reporting four children from her partner's previous relationship. For full

demographic information of focus group participants, see Table 3.

Table 3. Round 3: Demographics for Focus Groups

Variable	Cohabiting Same-sex Partners (N=7)		Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners (N= 6)	
	n	%	n	%
Sex:				
Male	1	14%	2	33%
Female	6	86%	4	67%
Sex of Partner:				
Male	1	14%	4	33%
Female	6	86%	2	67%
Age:				
21-25	-		3	50%
26-30	3	43%	2	33%
31-35	1	14%	-	
45-50	2	29%	1	17%
60 and above	1	14%	-	
Age of Partner:				
21-25	-		3	50%
26-30	3	43%	2	33%
31-35	1	14%	-	
36-40	-		1	17%
45-50	2	29%	-	
50 and above	1	14%	-	
Length of Relationship:				
8 months – 1 year	-		3	50%
1 – 3 years	-		2	33%
3-5 years	1	14%	1	17%
5-10 years	5	72%	-	
> 10 years	1	14%	-	
Length of Cohabitation:				
< 1 year	-		5	83%

1-2 years	1	14%	1	17%
5-10 years	5	72%	-	
> 10 years	1	14%	-	
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	7	100%	6	100%
Ethnicity of Partner:				
Caucasian	6	86%	6	100%
Caucasian/Hispanic	1	14%	-	
Level of Education				
Some college, no degree	1	14%	-	
Associate's degree	-		1	17%
Bachelor's degree	2	29%	2	33%
Some graduate school	-		1	17%
Master's degree	3	43%	2	33%
Doctoral degree	1	14%	-	
Partner's Level of Education:				
Associate's degree	-		1	17%
Bachelor's degree	4	57%	4	66%
Master's degree	3	43%	1	17%
Income				
$15,001 to $25,000	2	29%	3	50%
$25,001 to $35,000	1	14%	1	17%
$35,001 to $45,000	-		1	17%
Above $45,000	4	57%	1	17%
Partner's Income				
Below $15,000	2	29%	2	33%
$15,001 to $25,000	1	14%	-	
$25,001 to $35,000	-		3	50%
$35,001 to $45,000	1	14%	1	17%
Above $45,000	3	43%	-	

Results

To obtain the preliminary cluster maps, a final set of statements was developed from participants' responses to the open-ended online survey during Round 1 of the data collection process. Next, the researcher created the rating and sort tasks using the final set of statements. The rating and sort tasks were mailed out along with other data collection materials to participants for Round 2 of the data collection process, or structuring of the statements. A group similarity matrix (GSM), an aggregate of participants' sort task data, was generated using R editor. The researcher then used the GSM as the input for a two-dimensional solution multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) analysis to create the point map (see Figure 1.1.). To check the fit of the two-dimensional solution, the researcher calculated the stress value of the MDS analysis. The stress value was 0.250, which falls within the range recommended for concept mapping by Kane and Trochim (2007). Next, a hierarchical cluster analysis was run on the coordinates generated through the MDS to produce the cluster map (see Figure 1.2.). Based on the grouping of statements in the cluster map, the researcher identified 10 preliminary clusters. The ten clusters were drawn onto the point rating map with designated clusters (see Figure 1.3.), which was created by using the MDS X-Y coordinate values. Additionally, the means for participants' responses to the statements on the rating task were found using SPSS, and these were entered as a third set of coordinates to produce a graphical representation of the rated importance of each statement.

Figure 1.1. Point Map

Configuration
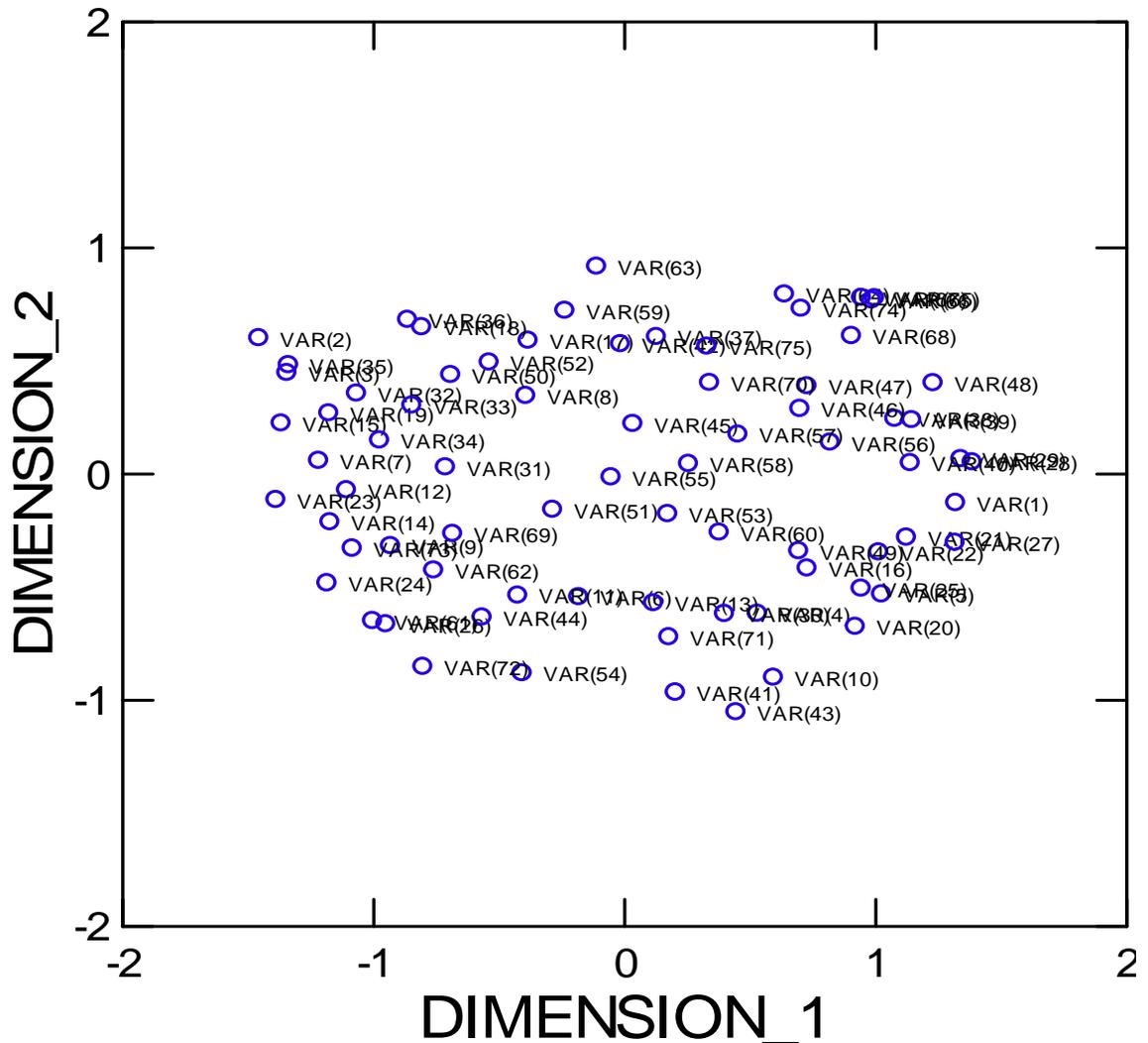
Figure 1.1. This map shows the distribution of each statement (labeled as VAR) based on similarity to the other statements. Dimension 1 and Dimension 2 represent the x- and y-axis, respectively, of a two-dimensional scatterplot. The similarity of the

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statements was determined by the way each participant grouped the statements into piles during the sort task. For example, the points for statement 5 (VAR5) and statement 25 (VAR25) are almost touching each other, meaning that the majority of participants sorted these statements into the same pile. Conversely, Statement 63 (VAR63) and Statement (43) are on opposite sides of the map, meaning that no one or very few people sorted these statements into the same pile with each other.

Figure 1.2. Cluster Map
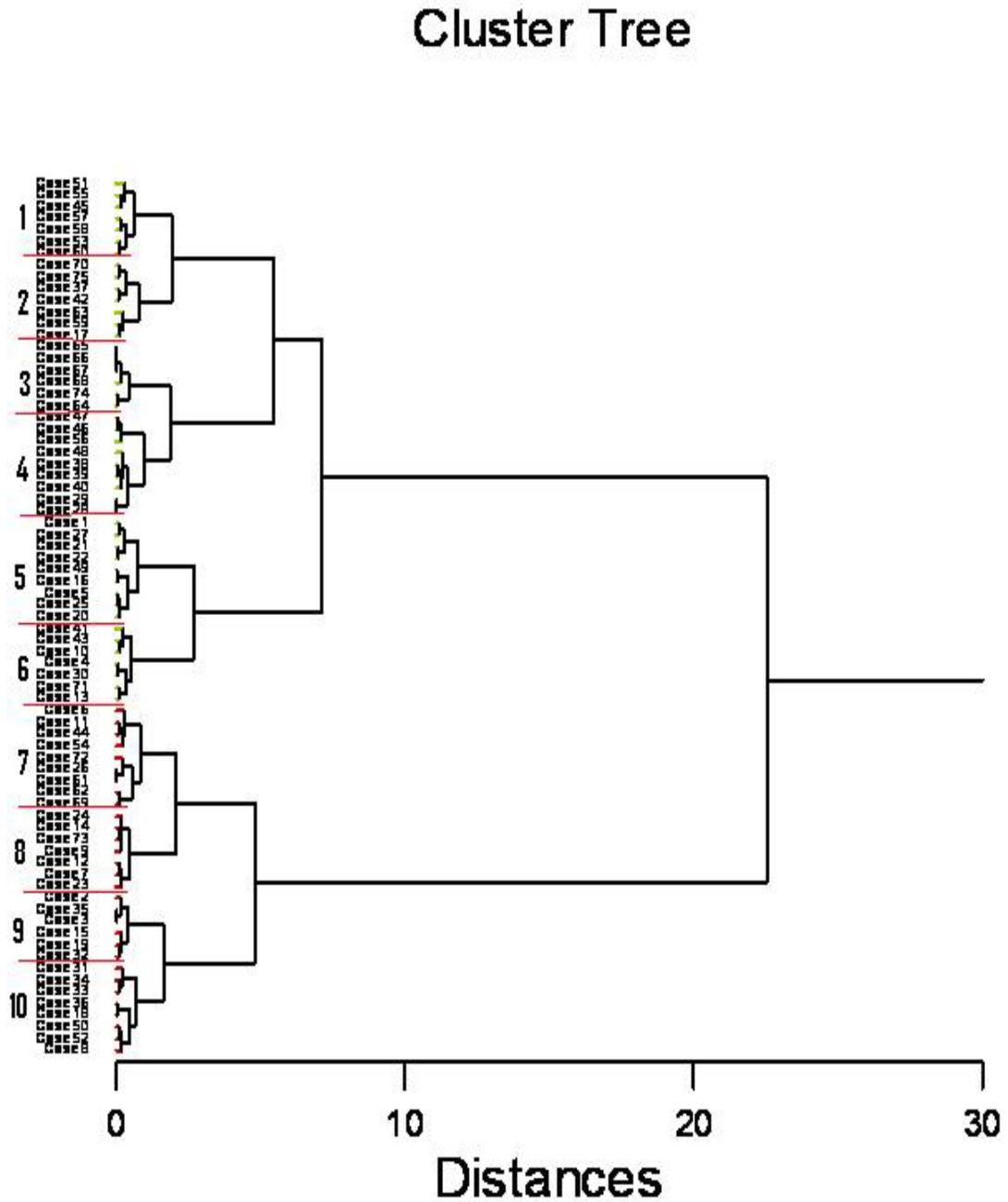
Figure 1.2. This map shows how the statements clustered together based on the similarity of the statements. The similarity of the statements was determined by the way

each participant grouped the statements into piles during the sort task. For example, the

statements in Cluster 3 tended to be grouped together by most participants. Some of the

statements in Cluster 3, however, may have been grouped by some participants with the

statements in Cluster 4, which is why those clusters are linked to each other.

Figure 1.3. Preliminary Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters
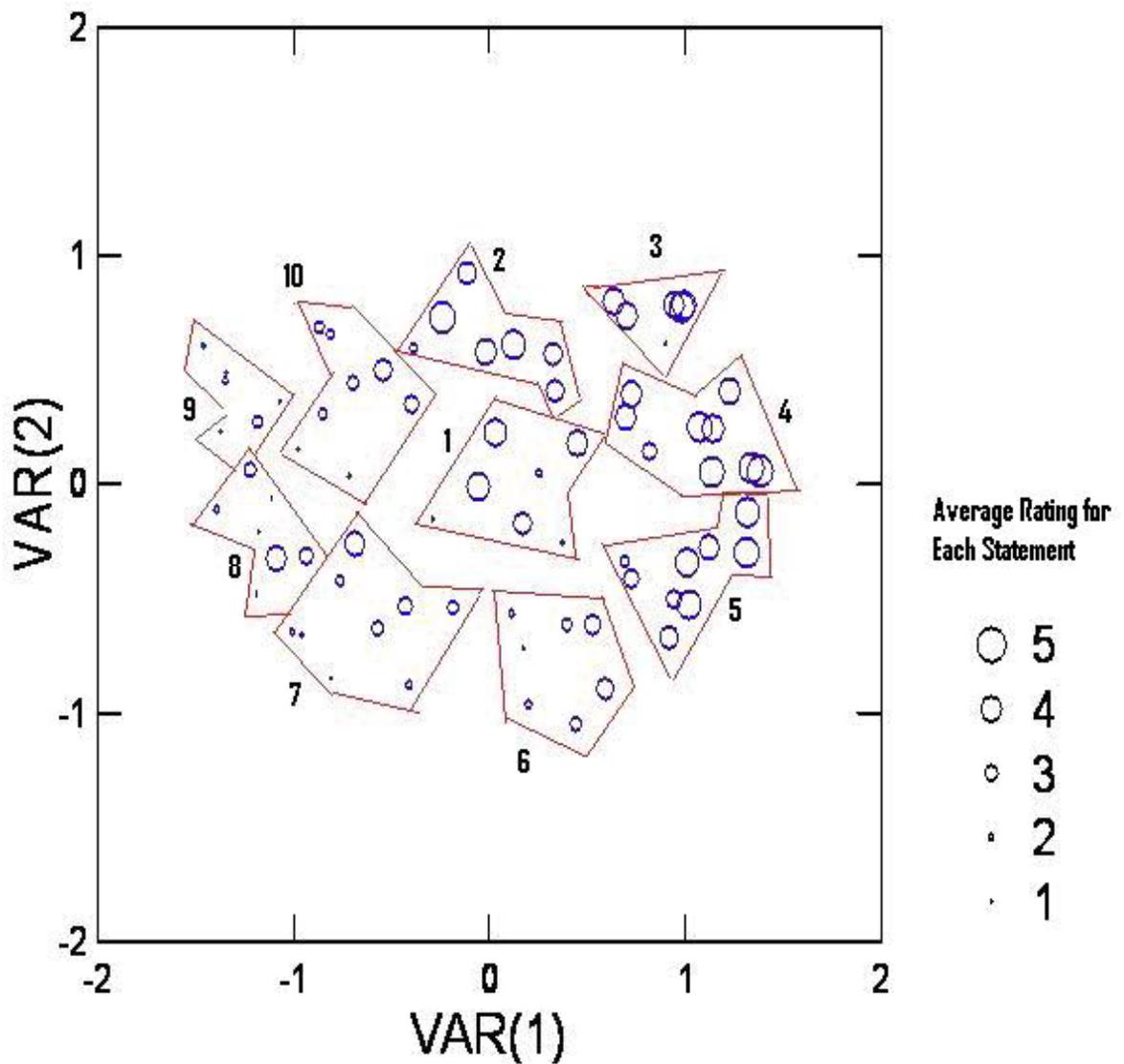
Figure 1.3. This map is a graphical representation of the clusters as they grouped together during the cluster map analysis. Each statement is represented by a circle. The size of each statement (i.e., circle) is based on the averages of participants' responses to the rating scale (see below) for each statement. For example, participants rated most of the statements in cluster 5 as being true to their experience in their relationship with their partner, which is represented by the larger circles.

Rate each statement according to how true it is yourself based on your experience in your relationship with your partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all	Slightly true of myself	Moderately true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Two focus groups were held, one with cohabiting same-sex partners and one with cohabiting opposite-sex partners, to decide the final cluster solution. The point map, cluster map, preliminary point rating map with designated clusters, and preliminary clusters broken down by statements (see Appendix H) were presented to the participants of the focus groups. The researcher guided the participants in examining each cluster, and deciding the fit of the statements together based on similarity. Statements were moved to other clusters based on participants' perceptions of similarity, and the proximity to other statements on the point map. Statements that were not similar to those in the other clusters surrounding them were identified as outliers. Once the participants came to an agreement on a final cluster solution, the participants labeled each cluster with a word or phrase that was descriptive of the statements within that cluster. Finally, the participants

individually filled out the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task (see Appendix E), in which they identified whether each cluster was most indicative of personal, moral, or structural commitment based on Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment.

The participants in both groups decided on a final solution of 9 clusters. The final cluster solutions, which were labeled and typed by participants, along with the discussion during the focus groups served as the data to answer the research questions for this study. The final point rating map with designated clusters and the breakdown of statements based on these cluster results for cohabiting same-sex partners can be found in Figure 2.1. and Table 4. For cohabiting opposite-sex partners, the final point rating map with designated clusters and the breakdown of statements based on these cluster results are presented in Figure 3.1. and Table 5.

Figure 2.1. Final Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters for Cohabiting Same-sex Partners
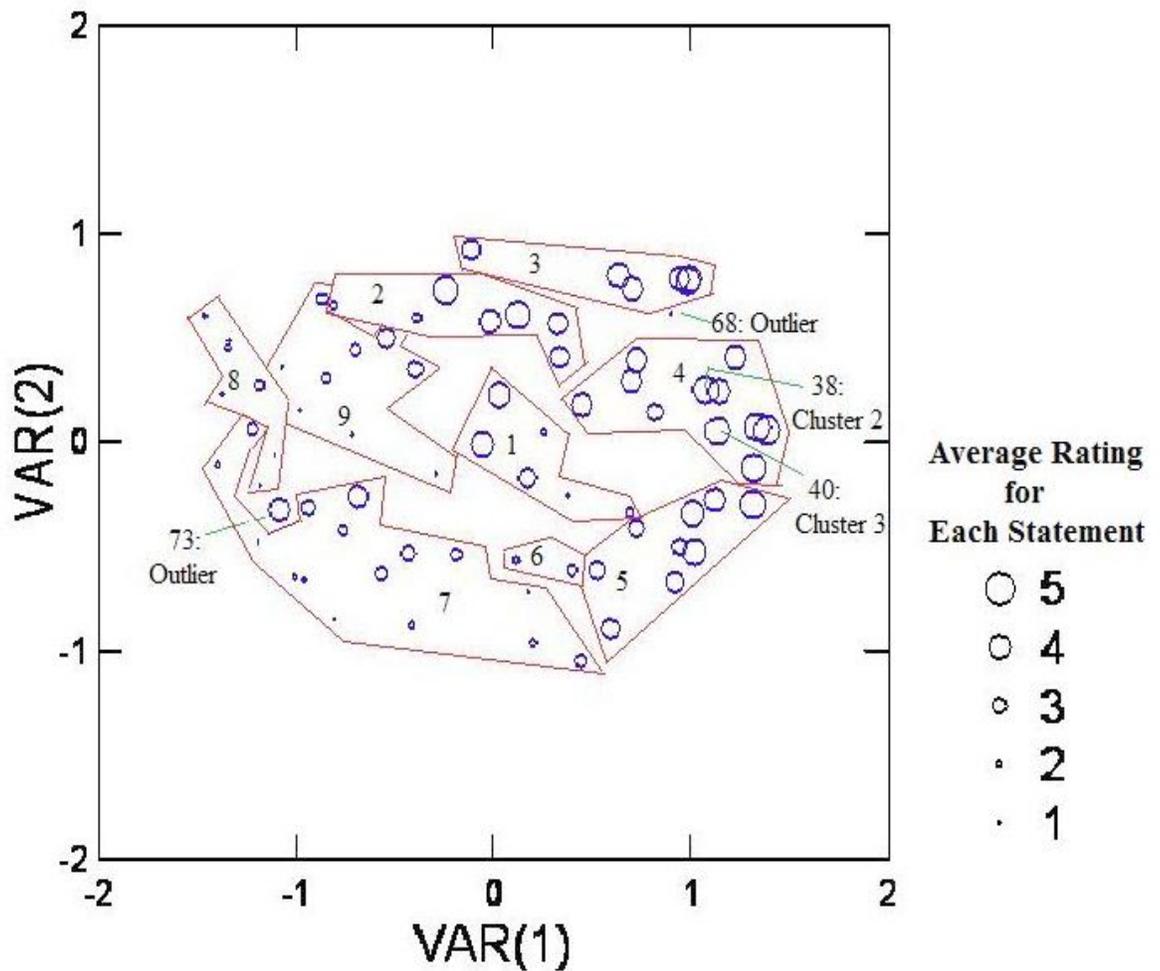
Figure 2.1. This map is a graphical representation of the clusters as decided on by participants during the focus group based on the preliminary cluster map analysis. VAR(1) and VAR(2) correspond to Dimension 1 and Dimension 2, respectively, in Figure 1.1, representing the x- and y-axis of a two-dimensional scatterplot. Each statement is represented by a circle. The size of each statement (i.e., circle) is based on the averages of participants' responses to the rating scale (see below) for each statement. For example, participants rated most of the statements in cluster 5 as being true to their

experience in their relationship with their partner, which is represented by the larger circles.

Rate each statement according to how true it is yourself based on your experience in your relationship with your partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all	Slightly true of myself	Moderately true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Table 4. Cohabiting Same-sex Partners Cluster Results

Dimension of Commitment as Identified by Participants	Average Rating of Items in Cluster

Personal Commitment

Cluster 1: "Habit/Routine"   3.08

45. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of how comfortable we are with each other. (4.2)
49. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be alone. (2.4)
53. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our lives are intertwined. (3.7)
55. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because even in difficult times, the benefits outweigh the hardships. (4.2)
58. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I like having someone depend on me. (2.2)
60. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the only thing I know. (1.8)

Cluster 2: "Best thing for me because I got a good one here"   3.66

17. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love his or her family.
     (2.3)
18. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves my family.
     (2.3)
37. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is a good person.
     (4.3)
38. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she has many good
     qualities. (4.4)
42. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual goals for
     the future. (4.0)
59. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves me. (4.6)
70. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is faithful to me.
     (3.7)
75. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel like this
     relationship is the best possible thing for me. (3.7)

Cluster 3: Mutual Fulfillment   4.17

40. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am happy in this
     relationship. (4.5)
63. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we find solace in our
     relationship. (3.7)
64. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we learn from each other.
     (4.1)
65. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value the companionship.
     (4.4)
66. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel our time together is
     valuable. (4.4)
67. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value our intimacy. (4.0)
74. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would be unhappy
     without him or her. (4.1)

Cluster 4: "Interdependence"   4.09

1. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love him or her. (4.4)
28. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to spend the rest of
     my life with him or her. (4.6)
29. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we support each other
     emotionally. (4.5)

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39. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share similar values. (4.2)
46. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I can't imagine myself with anyone else. (4.0)
47. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow as individuals. (4.0)
48. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow in our relationship. (4.0)
56. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner was supportive during a crisis. (3.1)
57. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we depend on each other. (4.0)

Moral Commitment

Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort"   3.81

4. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we made a commitment to staying in our relationship. (3.4)
5. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am committed to staying in our relationship. (4.3)
10. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've been through so much together. (3.6)
16. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of relationship difficulties. (3.3)
20. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've made a commitment to work through the hard stuff together. (3.7)
21. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out. (3.9)
22. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that we can work through the hard stuff. (4.3)
25. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of his or her limitations. (3.3)
27. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we make a good team. (4.5)

Cluster 7: "Breaking up is hard to do"   2.39

6. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have been together for so long. (2.7)

7. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because the process of breaking up would be horrible. (2.8)

9. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt him or her. (3.1)

11. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have put so much effort into the relationship. (3.2)

23. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for me if the relationship ended. (2.1)

24. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for him or her if the relationship ended. (1.5)

26. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our finances are shared. (1.8)

41. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel guilty if I left him or her. (2.2)

43. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would seem like wasted time if we ended the relationship now. (2.8)

44. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship seems like quitting. (2.8)

54. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she made sacrifices to be with me. (2.2)

61. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to feel responsible for ending the relationship. (1.9)

62. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel safe at night with him or her there. (2.4)

69. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she provides me with support. (3.9)

71. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel ungrateful if I ended the relationship. (1.7)

72. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because God will be mad if the relationship ended. (1.1)

Structural Commitment

Cluster 8: "Impact on Community, Friends, and Family"   1.76

2. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because family members would be upset. (1.9)

3. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is what people expect. (2.0)

12. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have a child or children to consider. (1.4)

14. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am his or her only family. (1.4)

15. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner is my only family. (1.3)
19. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual friends. (2.6)
35. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because other might reject me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)

Moral and Structural Commitment

Cluster 6: "Generativity"   2.40

13. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to have a child with him or her. (2.1)
30. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our relationship is a model for others in our social network. (2.7)

Cluster 9: "Fears"   2.38

8. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt me. (3.2)
31. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I may not be able to find another partner. (1.7)
32. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am older. (1.6)
33. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to start a new relationship. (2.4)
34. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of others' perceptions of me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)
36. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the right thing to do. (2.6)
50. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because being in this relationship is better than not being in it. (2.8)
51. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be the only single person I know. (1.7)
52. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have no reason to leave. (3.7)

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68. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she would have
 nowhere else to go. (1.3)
73. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share a bond. (3.9)

*Figure 3.1. Final Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters for Cohabiting Opposite-sex
Partners*

Figure 3.1. This map is a graphical representation of the clusters as decided on by

participants during the focus group based on the preliminary cluster map analysis.

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VAR(1) and VAR(2) correspond to Dimension 1 and Dimension 2, respectively, in

Figure 1.1, representing the x- and y-axis of a two-dimensional scatterplot. Each

statement is represented by a circle. The size of each statement (i.e., circle) is based on

the averages of participants' responses to the rating scale (see below) for each statement.

For example, participants rated most of the statements in cluster 5 as being true to their

experience in their relationship with their partner, which is represented by the larger

circles.

Rate each statement according to how true it is yourself based on your experience in your

relationship with your partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all	Slightly true of myself	Moderately true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Table 5. Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners Cluster Results

Dimension of Commitment as Identified by Participants	Average Rating of Items in Cluster
Personal Commitment	
Cluster 2: "A Good Match"	4.03

37. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is a good person. (4.3)
42. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual goals for the future. (4.0)
45. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of how comfortable we are with each other. (4.2)
59. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves me. (4.6)

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63. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we find solace in our relationship. (3.7)
70. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is faithful to me. (3.7)
75. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel like this relationship is the best possible thing for me. (3.7)

Cluster 3: "Companionship"   4.30

64. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we learn from each other. (4.1)
65. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value the companionship. (4.4)
66. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel our time together is valuable. (4.4)
67. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value our intimacy. (4.0)

Cluster 4: "Foundation"   4.17

1. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love him or her. (4.4)
28. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to spend the rest of my life with him or her. (4.6)
29. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we support each other emotionally. (4.5)
38. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she has many good qualities. (4.4)
39. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share similar values. (4.2)
40. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am happy in this relationship. (4.5)
46. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I can't imagine myself with anyone else. (4.0)
47. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow as individuals. (4.0)
48. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow in our relationship. (4.0)

56. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner was supportive during a crisis. (3.1)

<u>Personal and Moral Commitment</u>

Cluster 1: "Codependence"   3.50

49. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be alone. (2.4)
53. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our lives are intertwined. (3.7)
55. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because even in difficult times, the benefits outweigh the hardships. (4.2)
57. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we depend on each other. (4.0)
58. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I like having someone depend on me. (2.2)
69. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she provides me with support. (3.9)
74. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would be unhappy without him or her. (4.1)

<u>Moral Commitment</u>

Cluster 5: "Committed"   3.84

4. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we made a commitment to staying in our relationship. (3.4)
5. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am committed to staying in our relationship. (4.3)
16. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of relationship difficulties. (3.3)
20. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've made a commitment to work through the hard stuff together. (3.7)
21. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out. (3.9)
22. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that we can work through the hard stuff. (4.3)
25. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of his or her limitations. (3.3)
27. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we make a good team. (4.5)

<u>Moral and Structural Commitment</u>

Cluster 6: "Excuses"   2.42

6. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have been together for
     so long. (2.7)
10. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've been through so
     much together. (3.6)
11. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have put so much effort
     into the relationship. (3.2)
41. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel guilty if I left
     him or her. (2.2)
43. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would seem like wasted
     time if we ended the relationship now. (2.8)
44. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship
     seems like quitting. (2.8)
54. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she made sacrifices
     to be with me. (2.2)
61. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to feel
     responsible for ending the relationship. (1.9)
62. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel safe at night with
     him or her there. (2.4)
71. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel ungrateful if I
     ended the relationship. (1.7)
72. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because God will be mad if the
     relationship ended. (1.1)

<u>Structural Commitment</u>

Cluster 7: "Tangible Consequences"   2.01

7. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because the process of breaking up
     would be horrible. (2.8)
9. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship
     would hurt him or her. (3.1)
12. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have a child or children
     to consider. (1.4)
14. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am his or her only
     family. (1.4)
23. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial
     burden for me if the relationship ended. (2.1)

24. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for him or her if the relationship ended. (1.5)

26. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our finances are shared. (1.8)

Cluster 8: "Social Pressures"   1.87

2. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because family members would be upset. (1.9)

3. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is what people expect. (2.0)

15. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner is my only family. (1.3)

19. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual friends. (2.6)

34. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of others' perceptions of me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)

35. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because other might reject me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)

Cluster 9: "Fears of Having to Start a New Relationship"   2.39

8. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt me. (3.2)

31. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I may not be able to find another partner. (1.7)

32. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am older. (1.6)

33. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to start a new relationship. (2.4)

36. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the right thing to do. (2.6)

50. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because being in this relationship is better than not being in it. (2.8)

51. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be the only single person I know. (1.7)

52. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have no reason to leave. (3.7)

60. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the only thing I know. (1.8)

<u>Outliers</u>

13. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to have a child with him or her. (2.1)
17. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love his or her family. (2.3)
18. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves my family. (2.3)
30. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our relationship is a model for others in our social network. (2.7)
68. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she would have nowhere else to go. (1.3)
73. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share a bond. (3.9)

A summary of the results is presented in Table 6 for the reader's reference throughout the subsequent description of the findings in relation to each research question.

Table 6. Summary of Results

RQ 1	Do cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceive of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment?	
	Cohabiting Same-sex Partners	Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners
	2 out of 9 clusters as descriptive of moral commitment - Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort" and Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" 2 clusters equally typed as moral & structural commitment - Cluster 6: "Generativity" and Cluster 9: "Fears"	1 out of 9 clusters as descriptive of moral commitment - Cluster 5: "Committed" 1 cluster equally typed as personal & moral commitment - Cluster 1: "Codependence" 1 cluster equally typed as moral & structural commitment - Cluster 6: "Excuses"
RQ 2	How do cohabiting same-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?	
	Components	
	General valuing of consistency	None of the clusters identified as moral commitment were descriptive of this component
	Person-specific obligation	Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" contained items that described obligation to one's partner
	Relationship-type values	Cluster 6: "Generativity" contained items that described influential values for same-sex partners' relationships
	Other	Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort" contained items that described general values and beliefs about one's relationship that encourage relationship maintenance
RQ 3	How do cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?	
	Components	
	General valuing of consistency	None of the clusters identified as moral commitment were descriptive of this component
	Person-specific obligation	Cluster 1: "Codependence" and Cluster 6: "Excuses" contained items that described obligation to one's partner
	Relationship-type values	None of the clusters identified as moral commitment were descriptive of this component
	Other	Cluster 5: "Committed" contained items that described general values and beliefs about one's relationship that encourage relationship maintenance
RQ 4	What are the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?	
	Both cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceived of the person-	

	specific obligation component of moral commitment Both conceived of another component which described personal attitudes and beliefs that sustained them through relationship difficulties • Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort" and "Committed"
RQ 5	**What are the differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?**

	Items 13, "I ought to stay… because I want to have a child with him or her," and 30, "…because our relationship is a model for others in our social network."
	   • Cohabiting same-sex partners made these two items into Cluster 6: "Generativity, consistent with the relationship-type values component
	   • Cohabiting opposite-sex partners considered them outliers
	
	Several other clusters were similar in composition between groups but were typed as different dimensions of commitment by each group
	   • Cohabiting same-sex partners typed Cluster 9: "Fears" as moral and structural commitment, whereas cohabiting opposite sex-partners typed Cluster 9: "Fears of Having to Start a New Relationship" as structural commitment
	   • Cohabiting same-sex partners typed Cluster 1: "Habit/Routine" as personal commitment, whereas cohabiting opposite sex-partners typed Cluster 1: "Codependence" as personal and moral commitment

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was designed to assess whether participants conceived of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment. To answer this research question, focus group participants completed the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task (see Appendix E). Both cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners were able to conceive of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment. This was evidenced by the identification of certain clusters as being more descriptive of the internal processes and constraints forces of commitment rather than the external processes (i.e., indicative of structural commitment) or attractions forces (i.e., indicative of personal commitment).

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The majority of participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners group identified 2 out of 9 clusters as being most descriptive of moral commitment, while an equal amount of participants rated 2 other clusters as being indicative of moral and structural commitment. The clusters identified as being most descriptive of moral commitment were Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort" and Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do," and the clusters that were typed as overlapping moral and structural commitment were Cluster 6: "Generativity" and Cluster 9: "Fears." The results of the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task for cohabiting same-sex partners are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Clusters by Commitment Type for Same-sex Partners*

Cluster	Type of Commitment		
	Personal	Moral	Structural
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
1	**4 (58%)**	2 (28%)	1 (14%)
2	**6 (86%)**	1 (14%)	-
3	**7 (100%)**	-	-
4	**7 (100%)**	-	-
5	2 (28%)	**5 (72%)**	-
6	1 (14%)	**3 (43%)**	3 (43%)
7	-	**5 (72%)**	2 (28%)
8	-	2 (28%)	**5 (72%)**
9	1 (14%)	**3 (43%)**	3 (43%)

Out of nine clusters, only one cluster (i.e., Cluster 5: "Committed") was identified by most of the participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group as being descriptive of their conceptions of the internal processes and constraints forces of moral commitment. Additionally, participants were equal in rating one cluster, Cluster 1: "Codependence," as personal and moral commitment. Similarly, participants equally rated Cluster 6: "Excuses" as being descriptive of moral and structural commitment. The results of the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task for cohabiting opposite-sex partners are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Clusters by Commitment Type for Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners

Cluster	Type of Commitment		
	Personal	Moral	Structural
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
1	**3 (50%)**	**3 (50%)**	-
2	**4 (66.7%)**	2 (33.3%)	-
3	**6 (100%)**	-	-
4	**6 (100%)**	-	-
5	1 (16.7%)	**5 (83.3%)**	-
6	-	**3 (50%)**	**3 (50%)**
7	-	1 (16.7%)	**5 (83.3%)**
8	-	-	**6 (100%)**
9	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	**4 (66.7%)**

These results infer that participants in both the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups distinguished moral commitment as having distinct qualities separate from personal and structural commitment. The results of the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task, however, demonstrate that participants may have had some difficulty in distinguishing moral commitment from personal and structural commitment. As moral commitment shares the internal processes component with personal commitment, and the constraints force with structural commitment, then this overlap could make it difficult for cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners to fully separate out moral commitment processes from those of personal and structural commitment.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was designed to assess how cohabiting same-sex partners conceptualized moral commitment, particularly in relation to the three components of moral commitment as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Research Questions 2a through 2d assessed if participants conceived of the general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values components of moral commitment, and asked if participants perceived any other components not fitting with those identified in the Tripartite Model. To answer this question, the researcher led the participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners focus group through the concepts maps and used their feedback to devise a final cluster solution with labels descriptive of the statements in each cluster. From there, the researcher used the statements and discussion by participants during the focus groups, as well as examining the items in each cluster

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typed by participants as moral commitment, to determine the answers to Research Question 2.

Participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners group conceived of two of the three components of moral commitment, person specific obligation and relationship-type values, as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999). One cluster had items that related to the general valuing of consistency component proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999); in general, however, the grouping of statements in this cluster was not indicative of this component. Moreover, participants identified other clusters of moral commitment that were not related to the components included in the Tripartite Model.

Research question 2a. None of the clusters identified as descriptive of moral commitment seem to fit with Johnson's conception of the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment. There were several statements such as "I ought to stay… because ending the relationship seems like quitting" and "… because I don't want to feel responsible for ending the relationship" within Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do," that describe how partners may want to remain consistent in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. Although these statements were fitting with this component, overall the cluster was not indicative of a general valuing of consistency. Therefore, this component may be less influential on same-sex partners' perceptions of moral commitment.

Research question 2b. Overall, Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" contained statements that were descriptive of the person specific obligation component of moral commitment as outlined by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Cluster 7 included statements

such as "I ought to stay… because ending the relationship would hurt him or her," "… because I would feel ungrateful if I ended the relationship," and "… because he or she provides me with support." These items demonstrate feelings of obligation to one's partner, which is part of the person specific obligation component, and most of the participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners typed this cluster as descriptive of moral commitment.

Research question 2c. One cluster that participants identified as descriptive of moral and structural commitment contained only two statements, both which were fitting with the relationship-type values component of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Cluster 6: "Generativity" was composed of two statements: "I ought to stay… because I want to have a child with him or her," and "… because our relationship is a model for others in our social network." At first glance, these statements may not seem fitting with the relationship-type values component, which is influenced by social beliefs or norms about particular types of relationships (Johnson, 1991a, 1999). The participants in the same-sex partners' group, however, decided to leave these two items into a specific cluster rather than identifying them as outliers because they described perceiving these items, in the words of one participant, as "holding a different weight for partners in same-sex relationships"

Participants identified these items as having a different meaning for same-sex partners because of biological limits of having a child together and because of the social norms that influence their relationships. Participants stated that having a child together with their partner has to involve more planning and decision-making because there is no

chance for an accidental pregnancy to occur . Further, participants concurred that there were a lack of visible models for same-sex relationships in the media and in their families. As expressed by one participant, there is a feeling obligation to maintain the relationships because "we have to model our relationships off of others in the [LGBT] community." Based on the discussion in the focus group, the items in Cluster 6 seem to provide a description of the relationship-type values component of moral commitment for cohabiting same-sex partners.

Research question 2d. Lastly, participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners group identified other clusters of moral commitment that did not seem to fit with any of the three components of moral commitment as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999). First, the majority of participants identified Cluster 5: "Long-term Effort" as descriptive of moral commitment. Cluster 5 included several statements reflecting one's own dedication to the relationship and the commitment made with one's partner, such as "I ought to stay… because I am committed to staying in our relationship," and "… because we've made a commitment to staying in our relationship." This cluster also contained items relating to one's beliefs about perseverance and tolerance, which included statements like "I ought to stay… because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out," and "… because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of relationship difficulties."

Although some of the items in the cluster seem to relate to the person specific obligation (i.e., "I ought to stay… because we've been through so much together.") and the relationship-type values (i.e., "I ought to stay… because we made a commitment to

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work through the hard stuff together.") components of moral commitment described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), in general the statements do not perceptibly reflect either of these components. One participant described these items as "beliefs that get me through the tough times in a relationship by helping me to anticipate something positive." Therefore, these statements reflect internal processes that are constraining, as they may keep partners in their partnerships even when experiencing relationship difficulties. These items may reveal another component of moral commitment perceived by cohabiting same-sex partners related to attitudes that may boost relationship longevity and satisfaction during challenges and complications that may affect their relationships.

Cluster 9: "Fears" was equally typed as moral and structural commitment. This cluster included items such as "I ought to stay… because ending the relationship would hurt me," "… because it is the right thing to do," and "… because being in this relationship is better than not being in it." These statements do not seem to directly reflect the three components of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), nor do these statements overtly fit with the components of personal or structural commitment. These items, however, reflect internal processes and a sense of constraint, so were descriptive of a sense of moral commitment based on personal perceptions of oneself and the relationship. Cluster 9 also contained items that were fitting with the availability of acceptable alternatives component of structural commitment (Johnson, 1999), such as "I ought to stay… because I may not be able to find another partner," which may be why an equal number of participants typed this cluster as structural as well as moral commitment.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was designed to assess how cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceptualized moral commitment, particularly in relation to the three components of moral commitment as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Research Questions 3a through 3d assessed if participants conceived of the general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values components of moral commitment, and asked if participants perceived any other components not fitting with those identified in the Tripartite Model. To answer this question, the researcher led the participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners focus group through the concepts maps and used their feedback to devise a final cluster solution with labels descriptive of the statements in each cluster. From there, the researcher used the statements and discussion by participants during the focus groups, as well as examining the items in each cluster typed by participants as moral commitment, to determine the answers to Research Question 3.

Participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group noticeably conceived of the person specific obligation component of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), and identified another component of moral commitment that were not included in the Tripartite Model. Additionally, one cluster had items that related to the general valuing of consistency component proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999); the overall grouping of statements in this cluster, however, was not indicative of this component.

Research question 3a. None of the clusters identified as descriptive of moral commitment seem to fit with Johnson's conception of the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment. Similarly to same-sex partners, there were several statements within Cluster 6: "Excuses," a cluster typed as moral and structural commitment, that describe how partners may want to remain consistent in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. These statements included "I ought to stay… because ending the relationship seems like quitting," "… because we've been through so much together," and "… because I don't want to feel responsible for ending the relationship." Although these statements were fitting with this component, overall the items in the cluster were not indicative of a general valuing of consistency. Therefore, this component may be less influential on cohabiting opposite-sex partners' perceptions of moral commitment.

Research question 3b. Cluster 1: "Codependence," was identified by cohabiting opposite-sex partners as equally descriptive of personal and moral commitment. Cluster 1 contained statements that were descriptive of the person specific obligation component of moral commitment as outlined by Johnson (1991a, 1999), such as "I ought to stay… because we depend on each other," "… because our lives are intertwined," and "… because he or she provides me with support." These items demonstrate feelings of obligation to one's partner (i.e., person specific obligation) as well as to the relationship. Although these items reflect responsibility to one's relationship, these statements do not suggest an obligation to a particular type of partnership, which is why this cluster seems more fitting with the person specific obligation component than relationship-type values.

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Further, Cluster 6: "Excuses" was typed as moral and structural commitment by an equal amount of participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group. Cluster 6 includes items such as "I ought to stay… because we have been through so much together," "… because he or she made sacrifices to be with me," and "… because I would feel ungrateful if I ended the relationship." The majority of the items in this cluster also were reflective of the person specific obligation component of moral commitment.

Research question 3c. None of the clusters identified as descriptive of moral commitment seem to fit with Johnson's conception of the relationship-type values component of moral commitment.

Research question 3d. One cluster, Cluster 5: "Committed," did not clearly fit into any of the three components of moral commitment as defined by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Cluster 5, however, was the only cluster identified solely as moral commitment by the majority of cohabiting opposite-sex partners. This cluster included items relating to one's own dedication to the relationship and to the commitment made with one's partner, such as "I ought to stay… because I am committed to staying in our relationship," and "… because we've made a commitment to work through the hard stuff together." This cluster also contained items relating to one's beliefs about persevering and tolerance, which included statements like "I ought to stay… because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out," and "… because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of his or her limitations."

Although some of the items in the cluster seem to relate to the person specific obligation (i.e., "I ought to stay… because we've made a commitment to work through

the hard stuff together.") and the relationship-type values (i.e., "I ought to stay… because we made a commitment to staying in our relationship.") components of moral commitment as identified by Johnson (1991a, 1999), overall the items in the cluster do not perceptibly reflect either of these components. The participants described these items as the things that keep a person motivated to work out relationship difficulties. As one participant said, "Sometimes things are going bad and the only thing you have is a commitment to each other. It's this commitment that gets you to the next point." Another participant said that these items were more indicative of "being more committed to being in the relationship than being committed to the other person." Therefore, these items may reveal another component of moral commitment that is less reflective of obligation to a relationship based on the type of partnership (i.e., the relationship-type values component), but a general obligation to any relationship that one deems is important.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was designed to assess the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment. To answer this question, the researcher examined the final cluster solutions determined by the participants in each focus group and used the focus group discussion to guide her interpretation of the results. Using the Crosstabulation analysis in SPSS, the researcher determined the agreement between statements in the final cluster solutions for participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 9. The Kappa statistic for the

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Crosstabulation analysis was 0.615, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Kock, 1977) between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' final cluster solutions.

Table 9. Agreement between Statements in Cohabiting Same-sex and Opposite-sex Partners' Final Cluster Solutions

	Clusters	Opposite-sex Partners										Total
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*Out-liers*	
	1	**4**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	6
	2	-	**5**	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	8
	3	1	1	**4**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Same-sex Partners	*4*	1	-	-	**8**	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
	5	-	-	-	-	**8**	1	-	-	-	-	9
	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
	7	1	-	-	-	-	10	**5**	-	-	-	16
	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	**5**	-	-	7
	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	**8**	-	9
	Outliers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**2**	2
	Total	7	7	4	10	8	11	7	6	9	6	75

Note: The clusters typed as moral commitment by participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups are highlighted in gray.

There were several similarities in how the participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups conceived of moral commitment based on the final cluster solutions. First, one of the clusters typed as moral commitment by same-sex partners, and the only cluster identified as moral commitment by the majority of opposite-sex partners contained most of the same statements. This was Cluster 5 for both groups, labeled "Long-term Effort" and "Committed" respectively. As described above, Cluster 5 for both groups seemed descriptive of a component of moral commitment that was not included by Johnson (1991a, 1999) in his Tripartite Model. For participants in

both groups, these items reflected beliefs based in faith that the relationship would improve when experiencing difficult times with their partners. Thus, these clusters demonstrate attitudes that may keep cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners positive during trying times in their relationships.

Another similarity between the two groups' conceptions of moral commitment was in the likeness of the statements that participants grouped into Clusters 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" (moral commitment for same-sex partners) and 6: "Excuses" (moral and structural commitment for opposite-sex partners). Statements in these clusters included "I ought to stay… because I have put so much effort into the relationship," "I ought to stay… because I would feel guilty if I left him or her," and "… because he or she made sacrifices to be with me."

Both of these clusters contained items that one participant in the opposite-sex partners group described as the "last-straw" reasons to maintain one's relationship. Participants in the same-sex partners' focus group labeled the cluster "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" because they thought, as one participant indicated, that the items reflected the "personal consequences of ending a relationship." Similarly, the participants in the opposite-sex partners' group described this cluster as "Excuses," because, as one member of the opposite-sex partners group stated, these items were reasons to stay in a relationship because of one's "feelings of guilt and denial." The items in these clusters are indicative of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) person specific obligation component of moral commitment. Thus, both cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceived of the

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person specific obligation component, with items reflective of internal yet constraining reasons to stay in one's relationship.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was designed to assess the differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment. To answer this question, the researcher examined the final cluster solutions determined by the participants in each focus group and used the focus group discussion to guide her interpretation of the results. The most distinctive difference in conceptions of moral commitment between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was around statements 13, "I ought to stay because… I want to have a child with him or her," and 30, "I ought to stay… because our relationship is a model for others in our social network." The perceptions of these items diverged in that the participants in the same-sex partners' focus group decided these two items were important enough to their relationships to warrant a cluster of its own, whereas those participating in the opposite-sex partners' group labeled these statements as outliers. The cohabiting opposite-sex partners identified items 13 and 30 as outliers because they described these statements as being dissimilar to any of the themes of the clusters in close proximity to these items.

Based on the discussion in the same-sex partners' focus group, the participants' perceived items 13 and 30 as descriptive of the relationship-type values component of moral commitment as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999). The same-sex partners' focus group participants thought these items held a different meaning for same-sex partners than for opposite-sex partners because of same-sex partners' biological limits of

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conceiving a child together and due to the social norms that impact their relationships. Thus, participants labeled this cluster "Generativity" to describe their reasons for maintaining their relationships based on feelings of obligation towards guiding the next generations of those individuals engaging in same-sex partnerships.

Another difference in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners focus group participants' conceptions of moral commitment was that participants in the same-sex partners' group typed Cluster 9: "Fears" as being descriptive of moral and structural commitment. This cluster contained similar items to that of Cluster 9: "Fears of Having to Start a New Relationship," that was formed by participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group. The majority of opposite-sex partners' participants, however, felt that this cluster was descriptive of structural commitment, or more related to external reasons for maintaining a relationship.

Cluster 9 for both groups contained eight of the same items, including statements such as "I ought to stay… because I may not be able to find a new partner," and "… because I don't want to be the only single person I know." These statements were reflective of the availability of acceptable alternatives component of structural commitment as described by Johnson (1999), in which an individual may feel confined to their relationship because the alternative circumstances if the relationship were to end (i.e., availability and quality of new partners, being single, change in housing, economic, or social network status, etc.) are perceived as less desirable than the circumstances within one's current relationship.

A final difference in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was how the participants decided to construct Clusters 1: "Habit/Routine" and "Codependence," respectively. The cluster "Habit/Routine" was typed as personal commitment by same-sex participants, although opposite-sex participants identified "Codependence" as both personal and moral commitment. Four of the items in these clusters were the same for both groups. The like statements were "I ought to stay… because I don't want to be alone," "… because our lives are intertwined," "…because even in difficult times, the benefits outweigh the hardships," and "…because I like having someone depend on me." The additional statements that were left in/added to these clusters, however, seemed to shape the way participants viewed the overall themes, and thus may have affected the way participants typed these clusters as either personal or moral commitment.

The additional statements in Cluster 1 for the same-sex partners' focus group participants were "I ought to stay… because of how comfortable we are with each other," and "… because it is the only thing I know." Participants in the same-sex partners group seemed to take a positive view of this cluster, labeling it "Habit/Routine." One participant described the items as being descriptive of a "comfort in the day-to-day with [one's] partner."

For cohabiting opposite-sex partners' participants, the additional statements included in this cluster were "I ought to stay… because we depend on each other," "… because he or she provides me with support," and "… I would be unhappy without him or her." Although there was not much discussion about what the items in Cluster 1 represented for opposite-sex partners, the participants immediately labeled this cluster

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"Codependence" based on the statements it contained. The label stuck throughout the rest of the discussion of the clusters, and participants were unanimous in keeping "Codependence" as the label for this cluster. The term codependence has a negative connotation, and therefore it seems that the participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group may have viewed this cluster as less positive, and thus more constraining, than those participants in the same-sex partners' group. This reasoning may explain the split in the opposite-sex participants typing this cluster as both personal and moral commitment.

Summary

The results of this study were presented in this chapter. Descriptions of the sample in each of the three rounds of data collection procedures were provided. A description of the results in relation to each research question was put forward. The results demonstrated that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceived of moral commitment as an idea discrete from that of personal and structural commitment. The qualities that distinguish moral commitment, being a part of the internal processes and constraints force, were ambiguous and imprecise to participants as evidenced by the splits in typing some clusters as personal and moral commitment or as moral and structural commitment.

Cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners conceived of some of the components of moral commitment conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999) in his Tripartite Model of Commitment. The person specific obligation component was evident

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in the clusters typed as moral commitment in both cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Although the general valuing of consistency component was visible in some statements, this component was not clearly manifested in any of the clusters identified as moral commitment in either group. The relationship-type values component was discernable in one of the resulting clusters for cohabiting same-sex partners, but was did not noticeably show up in any of the moral commitment clusters for opposite-sex partners. Finally, both cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners identified a cluster of moral commitment (Cluster 5 for both groups) that did not visibly fit with the components of moral commitment as proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999).

As for the similarities between participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups, both conceived of clusters relating to the person specific obligation of moral commitment. Additionally, both groups created clusters that were not noticeably fitting with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) components of moral commitment, with items that seemed to reflect attitudes based on faith that the relationship will improve during difficult times. The participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners group different from opposite-sex partners in that they envisaged one cluster which was indicative of the relationship-type values component of moral commitment whereas none of the clusters from the opposite-sex partners' group seemed descriptive of this component. Additionally, there were some disparities between groups in how the participants typed other clusters as personal, moral, or structural commitment.

In the next chapter, the researcher provides an interpretation of these results, describes the limitations of this study, discusses implications for counselors, and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of this study examining the conceptualization of moral commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners were described in Chapter IV. In this chapter, a discussion of the results is presented, noting the limitations of the study, the implications for counselors, and directions for future research.

Overview

Relationship commitment, the intent to persist in one's relationship, has emerged as a relevant predictor of relationship stability, independent of the level of one's relationship satisfaction, in previous research studies (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Kurdek, 2008). There remains debate among researchers, however, about which theories of relationship commitment best explain the process of commitment in intimate interpersonal relationships (Ramirez, 2008). One of the most prominent models of commitment in the sociopsychological literature is Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment. Researchers have demonstrated empirical support Johnson's framework in samples of married partners (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Johnson et al., 1999; Ramirez, 2008; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Despite Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to diverse types of interpersonal relationships, his theory has yet to be validated in other types of intimate committed relationships.

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Johnson (1991a, 1999) proposed that commitment is a multidimensional construct, composed of three types of commitment: personal, moral, and structural. The dimension of moral commitment, the idea that one *ought* or *feels obligated* to stay in one's relationship, has been less developed in the literature than Johnson's ideas of personal and structural commitment, particularly for intimate partners outside of the marital context. Researchers testing the Tripartite Model in samples of dating partners (e.g., Johnson, 1985; Lydon et al., 1997; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1989) and same-sex partners (e.g., Oswald et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2000, 2007) have either defined moral commitment in ways inconsistent with Johnson's description or completely omitted this dimension in their instrumentation. Therefore, to thoroughly test Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model and his claims to its applicability to various types of intimate relationships, a definition of moral commitment consistent with the Tripartite Model needs to be operationalized in samples of partners in intimate relationships outside of the marital context.

The purpose of this study, then, was to use the Tripartite Model as a basis for conceptualizing moral commitment in a sample of cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Intimate committed relationships outside of the marital context, particularly cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships, are increasingly prevalent in the U.S. (Seltzer, 2004; Smith & Gates, 2001, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships, however, are a recent phenomenon in the U.S. and only have gained attention by psychosocial researchers over the past 30 years. Therefore, relatively few studies exist where researchers have explored commitment in intimate

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relationships outside of the marital context compared to the abundance of research examining relationship commitment in samples of married partners. An aim of this study was to expand counselors' knowledge of how commitment operates in diverse types of intimate partnerships in addition to testing Johnson's (1991a, 1999) to advance the psychosocial debate around the dimensionality and determinants of relationship commitment.

Several interesting results were obtained from this study. First, participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups conceptualized the dimension of moral commitment as distinct from that of personal and structural commitment based on their responses to the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task. Moreover, participants rated the clusters of personal commitment as most descriptive of their experience in their relationship with their partner, with moral commitment being moderately descriptive and structural commitment the least descriptive. These results support Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory that commitment is a multidimensional experience, and his claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to diverse types of intimate relationships.

The results provided mixed results in terms of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of the three components of moral commitment: general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values. Cohabiting same-sex partners typed clusters of moral commitment with items that perceptibly fit with two of the three components, person specific obligation and relationship-type values. Participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group, however, only had one cluster

of moral commitment that was discernibly descriptive of one of Johnson's components, person specific obligation. Neither group had clusters that were overall indicative of the general valuing of consistency component. Both groups also had clusters typed as moral commitment that were not perceptibly fitting with Johnson's components. Thus, Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory of the components of moral commitment was partially supported by the results of this study.

Finally, the findings of this study indicated several similarities and differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment based on the interpretation of the final cluster solutions from each focus group. Intimate relationships seem to share a comparable basis in that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners engage in and maintain these relationships because they have feelings of attraction and commitment towards their partner and the relationship. Differing social discourses, however, surround same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Cohabiting opposite-sex partnerships may be less validated in U.S. society than marital partnerships (Hall & Kitson, 2000; Nock, 1995; Yabiku & Gager, 2009), but opposite-sex partners do not have to contend with the social discrimination and stigma against their relationships that is faced by same-sex partners (Green & Mitchell, 2002; Kurdek, 2004; Pope et al., 2010). The findings of this study are consistent with other researchers (e.g., Kurdek, 1998, 2004, 2006; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) who have noted the similar processes of all intimate committed relationships, while distinguishing the unique factors that impact same-sex and opposite-sex relationships in light of the differing social

contexts in which these relationships are situated (Otis, et al., 2006; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

A more detailed discussion of the results is provided below. The researcher uses queer theory as a framework throughout the discussion to contextualize and critique her results.

Discussion of Results

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was designed to assess whether participants conceived of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment. After determining a final cluster solution, participants in the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups were asked to identify each cluster as indicative of personal, moral, or structural commitment by completing the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task (see Appendix F). The majority of participants in each group indicated that they perceived the items in at least one cluster as most consistent with Johnson's concept of moral commitment. Thus, the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners in this study conceived of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment as evidenced by their responses to the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task. This result lends support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment, and his theory that commitment is a multi-dimensional versus a unidimensional construct.

The results of the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task are consistent with researchers who have directly tested Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model using Johnson's definition of the three types of commitment with marital partners. Johnson et al. (1999), Kapinus & Johnson (2002), and Ramirez (2008) demonstrated empirical support for the tripartite nature of commitment, including Johnson's hypothesis that moral commitment is a separate dimension from personal and structural commitment. The result for Research Question 1 also is consistent with other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992) who reported factor structures of commitment in their studies with marital partners that parallel Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model, although in many instances their studies were only partially, if at all, constructed off Johnson's commitment framework.

Although the finding for Research Question 1 is consistent with researchers studying the dimensionality of commitment with partners inside the marital context, this result is inconsistent with the conclusions of researchers who have claimed to examine Johnson's (1991a, 1999) framework with partners outside of the marital context. Researchers who have claimed to test Johnson's model with samples of partners in dating relationships (e.g., Johnson, 1985; Lydon et al., 1997; Rusbult et al., 1989, as cited in Rusbult, 1991) and same-sex partners (e.g., Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008) did not use a conceptualization of moral commitment, however, that thoroughly captured the construct as proposed in Johnson's model. Moreover, Kurdek (2000, 2007) did not include the dimension of moral commitment in his research testing Johnson's

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(1991a, 1999) and Rusbult's (1983) models of commitment in cohabiting same-sex and dating opposite-sex partners.

Therefore, this is the first published research study which included and used Johnson's Tripartite Model as the basis for operationalizing the construct of moral commitment when testing Johnson's framework in a sample of partners outside of the marital context. The results of the Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task demonstrated that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners were able to differentiate between the three dimensions of commitment in their current relationships, providing support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that Tripartite Model is applicable to diverse types of intimate relationships.

An additional finding supports Johnson's theory that commitment is a multidimensional experience. An examination of the results of the rating task as averaged by cluster coupled with Round 2 participants' responses to the RAS supports that relationship satisfaction correlates differently with the three dimensions of the commitment experience. Overall, Round 2 participants reported high satisfaction in their relationship with their partner, and rated personal commitment as most indicative of their experience in their relationship with their partners. Additionally, Round 2 cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners rated structural commitment as least descriptive of their experiences, with the ratings for the clusters of moral commitment falling between personal and structural commitment. This result parallels other researchers' (Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009; Rusbult et al., 1998) findings that

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relationship satisfaction tends to be positively correlated with the attractions force of commitment and negatively correlated with the constraints force.

Further, when examining participants' responses to Round 2 of the data collection process, the researcher noted that the participants who indicated the highest levels of relationship satisfaction on the RAS endorsed the items in the clusters of personal commitment as most indicative of their experience in their relationship with their partner. Conversely, the participants who reported the lowest satisfaction in their relationships tended to endorse the items that fell into the constraints dimension of moral and structural commitment as most indicative of their experience in their relationship. While the sample was too small to run reliable data analysis to test the correlations between relationship satisfaction and the rating task items, this pattern does follow past researchers' (Adams & Jones, 1997) findings that relationship satisfaction correlates differently with each dimension of commitment in the Tripartite Model.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was designed to assess how cohabiting same-sex partners conceptualized moral commitment, particularly in relation to the three components of moral commitment, which Johnson (1991a, 1999) described as a general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values. Participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners group conceived of two of the three components of moral commitment, person specific obligation and relationship-type values, as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999). One cluster had items that related to the general valuing of consistency component proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999); in general, however, the

grouping of statements in this cluster was not indicative of this component. Moreover, participants identified other clusters of moral commitment that were not related to the components included in the Tripartite Model.

Only one study exists (e.g., Johnson et al., 1999) in which researchers tested the Tripartite Model of Commitment along the basis of the individual components of each dimension of commitment. Johnson et al.'s (1999) study, however, had some major empirical limitations in the design of the instrumentation. Other researchers testing the Tripartite Model (e.g., Kapinus & Johnson, 2002; Ramirez, 2008), or whose factor structure of commitment paralleled Johnson's (1991a, 1999) framework (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997, Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992) in samples of marital partners did not directly examine the model to the level of the components that construct each dimension of commitment as theorized by Johnson. Thus, this study was one of the first to explore the components in addition to the overall dimension of moral commitment.

Cohabiting same-sex partners generated statements that fell into the clusters typed as moral commitment that were consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) description of the person specific obligation, particularly obligation to one's partner. This result is consistent with findings of other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atillano, 1982; Ramirez, 2008; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992) who have demonstrated in samples of marital partners that individual's feelings of obligation to their partner, children, and others impacted by their relationship and individual's perceptions of the morality of ending certain types of relationships load onto

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a separate factor consistent with Johnson's description of moral commitment. Cohabiting same-sex partners also noted these components of moral commitment in the final cluster solution, which lends further support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to partners in diverse types of intimate relationships.

To date, the third component of moral commitment as identified by Johnson (1991a, 1999), a general valuing of consistency, has only been directly researched in one study (Johnson et al., 1999), and it has not emerged as a component of moral commitment in marital relationships. Some researchers (e.g., Adams et al., 1999; Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999), however, have found that personality characteristics factor into moral commitment, which is similar to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) general valuing of consistency component in that personality traits contribute to individuals' consistency in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. In relation to the findings of past researchers, the results of this study suggest that the general valuing of consistency component may only have slight influence on cohabiting same-sex partners' conceptions of moral commitment. A few statements in one of the clusters of moral commitment were indicative of remaining consistent in one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time; overall, however, no cluster of moral commitment was entirely representative of this component. Thus, it remains debatable as to whether one's general valuing of consistency is influential enough on individual's perceptions of moral commitment to be considered a separate component.

Finally, cohabiting same-sex partners conceived of clusters typed as moral commitment that were not consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) components of moral

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commitment. First, cohabiting same-sex partners distinguished a cluster of moral commitment that was not perceptibly congruent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) descriptions of the three components of moral commitment. The participants in the same-sex partners' focus group expressed that the items in Cluster 5, "Long-Term Effort," indicated reasons that people remain in a relationship because of attitudes that boost relationship stability and satisfaction during challenges and complications that may affect their relationships. This cluster included items that expressed one's obligations towards their relationship as well as one's beliefs about perseverance and tolerance.

One participant described the items in Cluster 5 as "beliefs that get me through the tough times in a relationship by helping me to anticipate something positive." As Johnson (1991a, 1999) indicated, moral commitment is influenced by one's beliefs and values about certain types of relationships and being consistent in one's thoughts, feelings, and actions over time. Although this cluster does not perceptibly reflect either of these components, the discussion by participants in the same-sex partners' focus group demonstrates that their perceptions of moral commitment is grounded in their personal beliefs, values, and attitudes. These findings suggest that Johnson's component of relationship-type values may need to be expanded to include general values towards any important intimate relationship with a partner.

Additionally, instead of the need to be consistent in one's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors over time, as Johnson (1991a, 1999) proposed, these results suggest that the participants in the same-sex partners' focus group viewed moral commitment as being influenced by their personal beliefs and attitudes, which may cause them to behave in a

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steady and dependable manner over time. The findings for this research question indicate that Johnson's definition of the general valuing of consistency component may need to be extended to reflect one's desire to behave in a manner consistent with broad personal beliefs about perseverance and tolerance, and perhaps one's general tendency towards optimism.

Lastly, Cluster 9: "Fears" was equally typed as moral and structural commitment by participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners' focus group. The statements in this cluster did not discernibly reflect the three components of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), nor do these statements overtly fit with the components of personal or structural commitment. Some of the statements in Cluster 9 such as "I ought to stay… because it is the right thing to do," reflect internal processes and a sense of constraint so were descriptive of a sense of moral commitment based on personal perceptions of oneself and the relationship. Other statements, such as "I ought to stay… because I may not be able to find another partner," were fitting with the availability of acceptable alternatives component of structural commitment (Johnson, 1999), which may be why an equal number of participants typed this cluster as structural as well as moral commitment.

As moral and structural commitment share the constraints component, it may have been difficult for participants to distinguish whether the statements in certain clusters reflected their internal or external processes, which may have contributed to participants' typing of Cluster 9 as moral and structural commitment. The result that cohabiting same-sex focus group participants typed Clusters 6 and 9 as moral and structural commitment,

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along with the results in which the majority of participants indicated Clusters 5 and 7 to be descriptive of moral commitment, provide support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) theory that moral commitment is a distinct dimension of commitment, yet with features that overlap personal and structural commitment.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was designed to assess how cohabiting opposite-sex partners conceptualized moral commitment, particularly in relation to the three components of moral commitment, which Johnson (1991a, 1999) described as a general valuing of consistency, person specific obligation, and relationship-type values. Participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group conceived of two of the three components of moral commitment, person specific obligation and relationship-type values, as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999). One cluster had items that related to the general valuing of consistency component proposed by Johnson (1991a, 1999); in general, however, the grouping of statements in this cluster was not indicative of this component. Moreover, participants identified other clusters of moral commitment that were not related to the components included in the Tripartite Model.

Only one study exists (e.g., Johnson et al., 1999) in which researchers tested the Tripartite Model of Commitment along the basis of the individual components of each dimension of commitment; this study, however, had some major empirical limitations in the design of the instrumentation. Other researchers testing the Tripartite Model (e.g., Kapinus & Johnson, 2002; Ramirez, 2008), or whose factor structure of commitment paralleled Johnson's (1991a, 1999) framework (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997, Bagarozzi &

Atilano, 1982; Stanley & Markman, 1992) in samples of married partners did not directly examine the model to the level of the components that construct each dimension of commitment as theorized by Johnson. Thus, this study was one of the first to explore the components in addition to the overall dimension of moral commitment.

Cohabiting opposite-sex partners generated statements that fell into the clusters typed as moral commitment that were consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) description of the person specific obligation, namely obligation to one's partner. This result is consistent with findings of other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atillano, 1982; Ramirez, 2008; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992) who have demonstrated in samples of marital partners that individual's feelings of obligation to their partner, children, and others impacted by their relationship load onto a separate factor consistent with Johnson's description of moral commitment. Cohabiting opposite-sex partners identified this component in the items that comprised one of the clusters of moral commitment in their final cluster solution, providing support for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to partners in diverse types of intimate relationships.

Cohabiting opposite-sex partners, though, did not conceive of items descriptive of the relationship-type values component in their clusters typed as moral commitment. This result is inconsistent with researchers' (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atillano, 1982; Ramirez, 2008; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Stanley & Markman, 1992) findings that individual's perceptions of their obligation to their relationship based on its

status (i.e., dating, cohabiting, married, etc.) load onto a separate factor consistent with Johnson's description of moral commitment.

An explanation for this result may be considered in light of cohabiting opposite-sex participants' responses to the open-ended question on the demographic questionnaire, "Please provide a short statement describing how you see the future of your relationship with your partner." Ten of the twelve respondents indicated plans to get married to their partner in the future. Perhaps the cohabiting opposite-sex partners in this study did not conceive of a relationship-type values component because they perceived their relationships as moving towards the obligations and values associated with the commitment of marriage in U.S. society rather than distinguishing specific obligations associated with cohabitation itself.

Moreover, cohabiting opposite-sex partners distinguished a cluster of moral commitment that was not fitting with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) descriptions of the three components of moral commitment. The participants in the opposite-sex partners' focus group expressed that the items in Cluster 5, "Committed," indicated reasons that people remain in a relationship because of being committed to the relationship with that person. Thus, the participants distinguished between an obligation to one's partner and an obligation to one's relationship with one's partner. Some researchers (e.g., Lydon et al., 1997) have defined Johnson's (1991a, 1999) component of relationship-type values more broadly, in that individuals feel obligated to a relationship not only based on its status (e.g., dating, cohabiting, married, etc.) but that people feel a general sense of obligation to any relationship that one deems to be important. Therefore, Johnson's conception of

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the relationship-type values component of moral commitment is evidenced in the experience of cohabiting opposite-sex partners when the definition is broadened to describe one's feelings of obligation towards their relationship with a specific person, regardless of the relationship type.

Finally, the third component of moral commitment as identified by Johnson (1991a, 1999), a general valuing of consistency has not emerged as a component of moral commitment in samples of marital partners (Johnson et al., 1999). Some researchers (e.g., Adams et al., 1999; Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999), however, have found that personality characteristics factor into moral commitment, which is similar to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) general valuing of consistency component in that personality traits contribute to individuals' consistency in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. In relation to the findings of past researchers, the results of this study suggest that the general valuing of consistency component may only have slight influence on cohabiting opposite-sex partners' conceptions of moral commitment. A few statements in one of the clusters of moral commitment were indicative of remaining consistent in one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time; overall, however, no cluster of moral commitment for cohabiting opposite-sex partners was representative of this component. Thus, it remains debatable as to whether one's general valuing of consistency is influential enough on individual's perceptions of moral commitment to be considered a separate component.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was designed to assess the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment. The

results of the final cluster solutions demonstrated several similarities between cohabiting

same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment.

First, both the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups typed

one cluster as moral commitment that contained most of the same statements in both final

cluster solutions. Cluster 5, labeled "Long-term Effort" and "Committed" respectively,

reflected a component of moral commitment not described by Johnson (1991a, 1999) in

his Tripartite Model. For participants in both groups, the items in Cluster 5 demonstrated

attitudes that help individuals stay positive during difficult times in their relationships,

and to be hopeful that their relationship will improve in the future. This finding is

consistent with researchers who have found moral commitment to be positively

correlated with relationship satisfaction (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999) and relationship

maintenance behaviors (Ramirez, 2008) in samples of marital partners. The finding of

this study lends additional support to the theory that moral commitment may be

influential in helping partners remain more positive about their relationships, even in

times of conflict, in order to maintain relationship stability (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999;

Ramirez, 2008).

Moreover, the average rating of items in Cluster 5 was 3.81 and 3.84 for

cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, respectively. This indicates that these

statements were mostly true for participants' experiences of their relationships with their

partners. Some researchers have proposed that marital relationships are more stable than

cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships because cohabiting same-sex and

opposite-sex partners lack structural barriers to relationship dissolution (Kurdek, 1998,

2006; Seltzer, 2000, 2004). Consistent with these suggestions, the participants in this study rated the categories of structural commitment as least descriptive of their experience in their relationships with their partner.

Researchers have not demonstrated statistically significant differences in the rates of relationship dissolution between marital partnerships and cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Yet, the results of this study along with other researchers' work (e.g., Kurdek, 1998, 2006; Seltzer, 2000, 2004) supports the premise that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners perceive few structural barriers to dissolving their relationships. Participants in both groups of this study rated Cluster 5 as mostly descriptive of their experience in their relationships with their partner, which suggests that moral commitment functions as an internal barrier to dissolving one's relationship in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Again, this similarity in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex participants' conceptualization of moral commitment lends credence to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) proposition that moral commitment functions in a distinct manner to preserve the relationships of a diverse range of partners.

A second similarity between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was that both groups conceptualized a cluster of moral commitment which was perceptibly related to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) person specific obligation component of moral commitment. Cluster 7: "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" (moral commitment for same-sex partners) and Cluster 6: "Excuses" (moral and structural commitment for opposite-sex partners) included similar statements in the final cluster solutions. As one participant in the opposite-sex partners' group stated, these items were reasons to stay in one's

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relationship because of one's "feelings of guilt and denial," and thus were reflective of the internal processes dimension of moral commitment. Moreover, these items demonstrated the constraints dimension of moral commitment to same-sex participants as indicated in their discussion of the items reflecting "personal consequences of ending a relationship." Through the focus group discussion, and the subsequent typing of these clusters as moral commitment, cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex participants demonstrated the conceptualization of moral commitment as distinct from personal and structural commitment, lending support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) framework of commitment.

Finally, the similarities between the two groups in their conceptualization of moral commitment is in line with other researchers' (e.g., Kurdek, 1998, 2004, 2006; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) findings who have studied various relationship constructs, including relationship satisfaction and stability, in cohabiting same-sex and cohabiting and married opposite-sex partners. These researchers have demonstrated that same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships function similarly, and that opposite-sex partners report satisfaction rates comparable to those of same-sex couples. The similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners provide additional support to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) claim that the Tripartite Model is applicable to a wide range of intimate relationships. Despite several similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex participants' conceptualizations of moral commitment, there were some differences in their perceptions that demonstrate the unique social context in which each type of relationship is located.

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Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was designed to assess the similarities between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment. The results of the final cluster solutions demonstrated several differences between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment.

The most distinctive difference in conceptions of moral commitment between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was around statements 13, "I ought to stay… because I want to have a child with him or her," and 30, "I ought to stay… because our relationship is a model for others in our social network." The participants diverged in their perceptions of these items in that the same-sex partners' focus group decided these two items were important enough to warrant a cluster of its own, whereas the opposite-sex partners' group labeled these statements as outliers due to these items being dissimilar to any of the themes of the surrounding clusters. The same-sex partners' focus group labeled this cluster "Generativity" to describe their reasons for maintaining their relationships based on feelings of obligation towards guiding the next generations of those individuals engaging in same-sex partnerships. In the words of one participant in the same-sex partners' group, these items "hold a different weight for partners in same-sex relationships." Accordingly, this cluster was discernibly related to Johnson's (1991a, 1999) description of the relationship-type values component, in which partners maintain their relationships based on certain attitudes and values associated with the type of partnership one is in.

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Statements 13 and 30 demonstrates unique issues that cohabiting same-sex partnerships face which shapes their conceptualizations of moral commitment as different from the perceptions of opposite-sex partners. First, same-sex partners encounter biological limitations in bearing children. As participants stated, there is no chance for an accidental pregnancy to occur within their relationships, and thus being able to have a child together with their partner can involve a lot of planning, time, effort, and financial resources. Although many cohabiting opposite-sex couples may engage in family planning processes, there is still a chance for pregnancy to occur accidentally among sexually active couples unless they are experiencing fertility issues. Moreover, accidental pregnancy may be the reason that some opposite-sex partners choose to cohabitate (Jamieson et al., 2002). Thus, the participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners' focus group may have viewed wanting to have a child with their partner as a form of moral commitment due to the conscious decision making process that has to occur in order for them to have a biological child with their partner.

Cohabiting opposite-sex partners, on the other hand, reported that this item seemed related to social pressure, which would fall under the dimension of structural commitment. The participants decided that this item was an outlier since it was not near the "Social Pressures" cluster and did not seem to fit in with the clusters surrounding it. In a sense, the varying conceptualizations of item 13 between groups demonstrated the impact of heteronormative discourse on these relationships. For cohabiting opposite-sex partners to relate item 13 to social pressures indicates an unconscious assumption that

partners in cohabiting opposite-sex relationships will eventually have children together (probably after marriage occurs).

This assumption may negatively influence opposite-sex couples that do not wish to have children together because implicit in this supposition is that opposite-sex partners *should* have children. Hegemonic ideologies operate by polarizing, so another supposition couched in this assumption is that same-sex partners *should not* have children. The cohabiting same-sex partners' focus group discussion of child bearing as a conscious decision making process may not only be suggestive of same-sex partners' biological limitations to having children, but also may reflect a process in which same-sex partners have to consciously challenge societal norms that denigrate their abilities as parents.

The second statement in the "Generativity" cluster referred to maintaining one's relationship due to a desire to serve as a model for others in one's social network. Whereas the participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' focus group reported that this was an "odd" item that everyone agreed was an outlier, the cohabiting same-sex partners' participants concurred that this statement was impactful to their relationships due to the lack of visible models for same-sex relationships in the media and in their families. As expressed by one participant, there was a feeling of obligation to maintain their relationships because "we have to model our relationships off of others in the [LGBT] community." This statement distinguishes the different societal contexts in which cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships are located.

For one, cohabiting opposite-sex partners have multiple examples of their relationships visible in their communities and in the media, a modeling context that falls short for same-sex partners (Green & Mitchell, 2002). Further, same-sex partners consistently report that they lack general social support for themselves as individuals and social support for their relationships, particularly from their families-of-origin (Julien, Chartrand, & Bégin, 1999; Kurdek, 2004, 2006). Green and Mitchell (2002) discussed how LGBT individuals work to create "families of choice," or social support networks within the LGBT community to make up for a lack of societal support for their sexual identities and their relationships. Thus, the results of this study are consistent in which cohabiting same-sex partners emphasized the importance of being a model for others in their social network is consistent with these past findings that same-sex partners perceive a lack of social support, and as a result look to the LGBT community for relationship models and support. This finding demonstrates the impact of heteronormativity on same-sex partners, influencing their conceptualization of the "Generativity" items as carrying more weight for their relationships than for opposite-sex partnerships.

A second difference between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was that participants in the same-sex partners' group typed Cluster 9: "Fears" as being descriptive of moral and structural commitment. This cluster contained similar items to that of Cluster 9: "Fears of Having to Start a New Relationship," that was formed by participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group. The majority of opposite-sex partners' participants, however, felt that this cluster was descriptive of structural commitment, or more related to external reasons for maintaining a relationship. Eight of

the items in these clusters were the same for both groups. A final difference in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners was how the participants decided to construct Clusters 1: "Habit/Routine" and "Codependence," respectively. The cluster "Habit/Routine" was typed as personal commitment by same-sex participants, although opposite-sex participants identified "Codependence" as both personal and moral commitment. Four of the items in these clusters were the same for both groups.

Rather than indicating unique qualities of cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, the above differences seem to reflect the difficulty of participants in distinguishing between personal, moral, and structural commitment. Moral commitment overlaps personal commitment on the internal processes dimension, and structural commitment on the constraints dimension (Johnson, 1991a, 1999), which may have complicated participants' ability to distinguish between the three types of commitment. Two other factors may have influenced the above results: a) the clusters contained slightly different items for each group, and b) participants may have varied in which items they focused on when typing the clusters. Finally, although the researcher provided definitions and explained the differences in attractions versus constraints and internal versus external processes, participants may have interpreted these concepts in their own way, leading to the differences in the conceptualization of moral commitment between cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study provide valuable information regarding the conceptualization of relationship commitment, particularly moral commitment, among samples of partners in diverse types of intimate committed relationships. As with all research, however, the results must be considered within the context of the limitations of the study.

First, the generalizability of the findings is limited to the demographics of the participants in this study, most of whom were white, female, college-educated, working to middle class, and residing in North Carolina. Ideas of relationship commitment, particularly moral commitment, could vary across populations, including ethnicity, gender, relationship status, socioeconomic status, and religious/spiritual affiliations, among other factors. Therefore, generalizations beyond the demographics of this sample should be made cautiously.

One more characteristic of this sample that is noteworthy in considering the generalizability of these findings was that participants in this study reported high levels of relationship satisfaction. According to findings from other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009; Rusbult et al, 1998), relationship satisfaction is associated with perceived levels of relationship commitment. Thus, individuals who report high levels of relationship satisfaction may view commitment to their partner in a manner that differs from those individuals with lower relationship satisfaction. The conceptualization of commitment that resulted from this study should be

considered carefully in relation to this study's sample as this conceptualization may vary dependent on one's perceived relationship satisfaction.

Another limitation of this study that impacts the generalizability of the findings was the difficulty in obtaining enough participants for an adequate sample over the three rounds of the data collection process, particularly with the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group. First, the attrition rate for participants throughout the data collection process was moderate. Out of the 34 respondents to Round 1 of the data collection process, only 18 (53%) participants returned completed data collection packets for Round 2. It is unknown how those who chose not to participate in Round 2 differed from those who chose to complete and submit the data collection packets. As such, the data used to create the preliminary point map with designated clusters was not entirely representative of the sample that generated the statements.

Further, only two participants from the opposite-sex partners' sample who completed Rounds 1 and 2 indicated a willingness to attend the focus group. Therefore, the researcher had to continue recruitment to obtain an adequate sample for the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' focus group, gathering participants whose did not complete Round 1 of the data collection process. Four of the six participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' focus group completed the Round 2 data collection task prior to the focus group so that they could familiarize themselves with the process of how the researcher created the concept maps; their data, however, was received too late to be included in the sorting and rating task data that the researcher analyzed to create the preliminary concept maps.

Thus, the majority of cohabiting opposite-sex partners who were involved with the generation of statements did not influence the final conceptualization of moral commitment. The difficulty in obtaining cohabiting opposite-sex partners who committed to all three rounds of data collection resulted in a variation of whose voices were represented at each step of the process. Concept mapping research, however, is designed to allow for flexibility in who participates throughout the different steps of the data collection process as the resulting conceptualization is intended to be used on an explorative basis to guide future research and hypothesis testing.

A final limitation is that important variables impacting relationship commitment may have been eliminated through combining participants' responses to the open-ended survey to decrease the repetitiveness of the statements and limiting the number of statements to 75 for the sorting and rating tasks increased the procedural validity of this study. As the researchers interpreted participants' responses in order to combine and reduce the set of statements, there was potential for meaning of participants' responses to the survey to be misrepresented in the final set of statements. Thus, there may be certain factors that impact moral commitment for individuals that were not represented in the concept maps for cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

Implications for Counseling

One purpose of this study was to examine the dimensionality of relationship commitment in order to contribute to the debate on which framework of commitment is the most applicable to those in diverse types of intimate relationships. As the literature

stands, neither Levinger's (1965, 1979a, 1979b), Rusbult's (1983, 1991a; Rusbult et al., 1998), nor Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of relationship commitment has emerged as the dominant framework that captures the experience of commitment for partners in diverse types of relationships. Thus, counselors are left to choose among three frameworks, which are fundamentally different from each other, to provide background for the conceptualization of commitment with their clients. The way counselors address their clients' experiences of relationship commitment may vary depending on the framework the counselor chooses to use for their conceptualization.

In particular, counselors may include or omit the dimension of moral commitment based on which framework they use for conceptualization of their clients' relationship experiences. The participants in this study were able to conceptualize moral commitment as a dimension distinct from personal and structural commitment, and indicated that the items in the clusters of moral commitment were moderately to mostly true of their experience in their relationship with their partner. The findings of this study, along with the results from other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Johnson et al., 1999; Ramirez, 1008; Stanley & Markman, 1992), provide support for a multidimensional structure of commitment in which moral commitment is a discrete component with distinct causes and consequences. Although researchers also have demonstrated empirical support for Levinger's (1965, 1979a, 1979b) and Rusbult's (1983, 1991a; Rusbult et al., 1998) models of commitment, the validity of these frameworks has not been tested in conjunction with an adequate measure of the moral commitment construct. Commitment frameworks, such as Levinger's and Rusbult's, that

only capture the internal attractions and external constraints components, thus omitting the internal constraints dimension of moral commitment, may cause counselors to overlook a potentially valuable and influential piece of commitment in their work with their clients.

Moreover, the results of this study seemed to support the positive association between moral commitment and relationship satisfaction demonstrated by other researchers (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997). Although the sample was too small to run statistical analyses to provide more significant information, participants reported high levels of satisfaction in their relationships, along with indicating that moral commitment was moderately to mostly descriptive of their experiences in their relationship with their partner. Although this finding needs to be tested further, one's experience of moral commitment may contribute to relationship satisfaction and maintenance behaviors (Adams & Jones, 1997; Ramirez, 2008). If counselors do not include moral commitment as part of their conceptualization of the commitment experience with their clients, then they may fail to address an aspect that can enhance their clients' relationship satisfaction, and thereby their relationship stability.

One of the most significant findings of this study that can inform counselors' practice with cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex couples is that both groups of participants conceived of clusters of moral commitment that described beliefs and attitudes that helped them to remain positive during trying times in their relationships. Moreover, both groups rated these clusters as mostly true to their experience in their relationship with their partner. It seems that cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex

partners perceive ideas of moral commitment that operate as internal barriers to prevent

dissolution of their relationship, but also increase hope and optimism for the future with

their partner during the difficult points of their relationship. It is possible that these

attitudes may help partners remain satisfied in their relationships throughout the highs

and lows, enhancing relationship stability over time.

As participants in both focus groups noted, this study brought the reasons that

they stay in their relationships to the forefront of their awareness, with several

participants stating that their involvement in the study helped them to feel more positive

about their relationships. Thus, counselors working with cohabiting same-sex and

opposite-sex partners can listen for statements that reveal attitudes of moral commitment

throughout the counseling process. Counselors can help increase clients' self-awareness

for their reasons for remaining committed to their relationships. In particular, explaining

the importance of moral commitment to relationship maintenance, and working with

clients to develop and augment each partners' sense of moral commitment may

strengthen both partners' relationship satisfaction and the partnership's stability over

time.

Moral Commitment as a Heteronormative Process

In particular, counselors should consider the ways in which heteronormativity

shapes and influences their clients' intimate relationships and commitment experience. At

the end of the focus groups, the researcher asked the participants about their thoughts on

the term moral commitment, and whether the term "moral" was fitting for this experience

of commitment in their relationships. Through these discussions, participants in both

groups noted that what we deem to be "moral" is influenced by external values and discourses. As one participant in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group stated, "Ought goes with pressure from yourself and outside sources." Thus, individuals' experiences of moral commitment seem to stem in part from their internalization of dominant values.

Participants in both groups acknowledged that although moral commitment is part of the constraints force, "it isn't always bad." Particularly, participants in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners group discussed how moral commitment could serve to sustain their relationships through difficult times. Participants in both groups, however, purported that ultimately, it should be an individual, personal choice as whether or not to remain in the relationship with one's partner. As a participant in the same-sex partners group stated, "You shouldn't stay if you aren't happy." Further, a participant in the opposite-sex partners group discussed, "But as you go through your relationship and the bumps that come with it, then you run into the reasons that you ought to stay. And maybe you should go to counseling or make changes, because you want to go back to want." It seems that participants conceptualized moral commitment as arising from personal beliefs and the internalization of external values, and viewed moral commitment as a positive force to maintain relationships while recognizing that moral commitment may operate in a negative manner by keeping one in an unsatisfying relationship.

Thus, counselors working with clients should work to deconstruct the basis of one's reasons for being morally committed. Do individuals feel morally committed because they have internalized hegemonic ideologies, which are keeping them in a

relationship that is unsatisfying? Or have they taken the time to analyze and question their beliefs, making personal decisions on whether or not to maintain their relationship? In this way, counselors can aid clients in confronting the contextual influences on their meaning making processes around moral commitment by examining which messages are helpful and constructing alternative messages to ones that are not supportive of their personal desires to remain in or leave their relationships.

One way for counselors to evaluate whether clients feel empowered to maintain their partnerships or constrained to an unsatisfying relationship based on their reasons of moral commitment would be to assess for clients' levels of guilt. One participant in the cohabiting opposite-sex partners' group stated, "[The word] moral implies guilt." The participant went on to discuss her religious upbringing and how this influenced her conceptualization of moral commitment. Thus, individuals who have internalized familial, religious, or cultural values about what is right and proper in terms relationship commitment may experience particularly high levels of guilt around their thoughts and actions in ending a relationship with their partner.

Counselors can work to alleviate clients' feelings of guilt and empower clients to make personal decisions about their reasons for being morally committed to maintaining their relationships by locating the problem in the dominant culture versus the individual. As the participants in the cohabiting same-sex partners' group noted, what "moral" means is interpreted at such an individual level that it is hard to come to a consensus about what this means for people as a group. Counselors can use therapy approaches, such as feminist therapy, that encourage clients to interpret their experiences of moral

commitment at an individual level, and to position values that do not serve to empower clients as a societal problem rather than an individual fault. In this manner, counselors can help clients make the best decisions possible about whether or not to maintain their relationships, and to locate these choices in what will personally benefit each client.

Finally, the results of this study demonstrate that commitment functions similarly in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, yet counselors need to remain aware of the unique social context in which these partnerships are located. Although cohabiting opposite-sex partners may have to contend with social pressure to get married, there is not a pervasive stigma influencing their relationships as there is for same-sex partners. The discussion around the lack of social role models and turning to support from within their communities in the same-sex partners' focus group demonstrates one way that heteronormativity impacts their conceptions of commitment. Counselors should consider clients' contexts, particularly their social systems, which include the therapeutic relationship, family, friendships, the community, and the larger culture, and the impact of these contexts on their clients' relationship and experiences of commitment.

Suggestions for Future Research

At the conclusion of this study, several questions remain unanswered that warrant attention in future research studies. First, as some of the focus group participants noted, an individual's definition of "moral commitment" may vary dependent on their position and location in society. This study examined moral commitment with partners in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships outside of a marital context; however,

many other diverse configurations of intimate relationships were not included in this study. For one, this sample was racially homogeneous, with almost all of the participants identifying as Caucasian and as being in a relationship with a Caucasian partner. Further research is needed to explore how racially and ethnically diverse individuals conceptualize moral commitment in their relationships, including partners in same race and mixed race relationships.

Another variable that may influence one's conceptualization of moral commitment that was not considered in this study was religion and spiritual identification. As noted in the literature review, one's feeling of obligation to stay in a relationship with one's partner has been found to be positively correlated with religiosity (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999), and religiosity also has been shown to be a significant predictor of relationship stability (Collins, 1998). Researchers exploring commitment in samples of marital partners have included divorce attitudes in their definition of their constructs that parallel moral commitment (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Bagarozzi & Atilano, 1982; Johnson et al., 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Although most researchers did not report the religious demographics of their samples, Bagarozzi and Atilano (1982) noted that 66% of their participants identified as Protestant Christians. The dominant religion in the U.S., Protestant Christianity, includes proscriptions about marriage and divorce that may influence individual practitioners' values, which may explain the correlation between religiosity and moral commitment. Therefore, future research is needed to explore the conceptualization of moral commitment among couples and partners with differing religious and spiritual backgrounds and identification, and

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among partners outside of the marital context to see if this correlation holds true for diverse types of intimate committed relationships.

Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model of Commitment needs further exploration with partners in diverse types of relationships before more definite conclusions can be made as to its validity and applicability as a theory of relationship commitment. The results of this study can be used to inform existing measures intended to measure the three commitment dimensions of Johnson's model, particularly for the dimension of moral commitment. Researchers who have created instrumentation to test Johnson's commitment framework have operationalized moral commitment in terms of marital relationships. The results of this study provide a basis for operationalizing the moral commitment construct in ways that can be examined with partners in diverse types of intimate relationships, which can inform instrumentation in future studies to test the reliability and validity of the Tripartite Model as it applies to those in partnerships outside of the marital context. In addition to quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, qualitative research can contribute to this body of literature by capturing the multiplicity and complexity of participants' identities and values, and how these factors influence the way moral commitment is constructed in diverse types of intimate relationships.

One way of testing the distinctions between personal, moral, and structural commitment would be to explore the relationships between each dimension and relationship satisfaction and longevity. Previous researchers have demonstrated a correlation between relationship satisfaction and levels of relationship commitment (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1997; Kurdek, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009; Rusbult et al., 1998). Adams

and Jones (1997) found that relationship satisfaction correlated differently with each dimension in a sample of marital partners, and Ramirez (2008) suggested that differing levels of personal, moral, and structural commitment contribute to fluctuations in relationship satisfaction.

The findings of this study also demonstrated that participants who reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction tended to endorse items that fell into the clusters of personal commitment as most indicative of their experience in their relationships, while participants with lower relationship satisfaction indicated that the items in the moral and structural commitment items were most descriptive of their relationship experience. Thus, future researchers should continue to examine the correlation between relationship satisfaction and the dimensions of commitment within the Tripartite Model to with partners in relationships outside of the marital context to refine the distinct causes and consequences of personal, moral, and structural commitment.

Further, relationship commitment has been identified by other researchers as a salient predictor of relationship stability or longevity (Adams & Jones, 1997, 1999; Kurdek, 2008). Participants in both the cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' focus groups noted that the items in the clusters typed as moral commitment were reasons to stay in their relationships through the rough patches by anticipating positive things to come with their partner. Researchers need to explore the way that moral commitment contributes to relationship stability in longitudinal studies to further clarify the distinctions between the ways that personal, moral, and structural commitment operate in intimate relationships.

Additionally, a colleague of the researcher, in hearing her presentation of Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment, remarked upon the lack of attention to the possibility of a fourth facet of commitment which operates upon the external and attractions dimensions. Levinger (1965, 1976) identified components of his attractions force that operate externally to the individual, such as material awards like home ownership or improved financial resources, which may positively draw an individual to remaining in a relationship with one's partner. If one may stay in a relationship for fear of losing their financial stability, particular lifestyle, or social status, it follows that one also may be attracted to a partner and a relationship which can offer them certain resources that may be difficult to obtain on one's own. Future research needs to focus on developing the theory behind this fourth dimension, so that it can be included in empirical studies that are exploring the definition, dimensionality, and determinants of relationship commitment.

As the development of commitment theory continues to progress, researchers need to begin turning their attention towards how to implement commitment frameworks in counseling practice. Although researchers have created reliable measures of commitment for empirical purposes, none of these measures, particularly the one's for Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model such as the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (Adams & Jones, 1997) easily translate into counseling practice. Further, the researcher was unable to identify any studies that had explored or suggested counseling interventions for enhancing relationship commitment. The results of this study may inform counselors' cognitive frameworks of their clients' relationship commitment, yet

much work remains to be done to help counselors translate commitment theory into their practice.

Finally, this researcher believes that a call for activism and research that addresses power differentials and social discourses that regulate intimate committed relationships is in order following from the responses of some of the participants in this study who reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction. These participants indicated on the rating task that they remain in their relationship with their partner, despite low levels of satisfaction, in part due to financial burdens, fears of social rejection by family, friends, and/or peers, and fears of being single and/or alone. The U.S. is an individualistic culture, yet societal discourse attaches a sense of importance and worth to one's ability to find and maintain a long-term relationship with a partner, especially as people age. Moreover, the stratification of financial and social resources in the U.S. works to prevent individuals from leaving unsatisfying intimate relationships. Researchers need to acknowledge, challenge, and deconstruct the factors that operate on a community and societal level that constrain people to intimate relationships that are unsatisfying, freeing individuals to recognize the infinite number of relationship configurations possible for one to occupy.

Conclusions

This study highlighted the importance of examining moral commitment in diverse types of intimate partnerships. The results of this study indicate the need for more research on the various models of commitment, particularly Johnson's (1991a, 1999) Tripartite Model, to determine the definitions, dimensionality, and determinants of

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commitment that are most descriptive individuals' experiences in various types of intimate committed relationships. Given the nature of the commitment experience, qualitative or mixed methods approaches are needed to operationalize commitment, particularly moral commitment, in multiple types of intimate relationships in order to capture how commitment operates within the changing context and nature of intimate relationships of U.S. society. Further, researchers need to continue to use frameworks, such as queer theory, that serve to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies that constrict the multiple ways of being in intimate relationships. Although many questions remain unanswered, it appears that moral commitment is a salient factor in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners' experiences of commitment in their relationships, and that commitment is best described as a multidimensional rather than unidimensional construct.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS.

Email to Potential Participants

Subject: Invitation to participate in research about relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships

Dear Potential Participant,

We are sending you this e-mail to invite you to participate in an IRB approved research study that will help us learn more about relationship commitment, particularly the concept of moral commitment, in cohabiting same-sex or opposite-sex partnerships. Your participation in this study is voluntary; however, in order to take part in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age. You should be involved in *a same-sex or opposite-sex committed intimate relationship* for *at least one year*, and currently *cohabiting* with your partner. To be eligible for this study, you should *not be* married *nor* engaged to get married. Both you and your partner are eligible to participate. You may benefit by participating in this study by increasing your awareness of why you are committed to continuing your relationship with your partner

This study involves three parts: 1. Completion of an online survey (approximately 15 minutes), 2. Completion of a data collection packet that will be mailed to you (approximately 30 minutes), and 3. The possibility of attending a focus group session on the UNCG campus (approximately 2 hours) if you live in the Greensboro area. Participants who fully complete the online survey and mailed data collection packet will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards. Participants who live in the Greensboro area and are interested in attending the focus group session all will receive a $50 restaurant gift certificate upon completion of all three parts of this study.

If you are interested in participating, please follow the survey link below. Please read over the informed consent carefully and click "I Agree" if you choose to participate. You will have the option at the end of the survey to indicate your interest in attending the focus group session.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HT9GYWM

Additionally, please feel free to forward this email to anyone you know who would be eligible to and interested in participating. This will help us to get more participants, and therefore more meaningful results. Thanks for your consideration and assistance!

Amber Pope, MS, NCC
Doctoral Student

Craig Cashwell, PhD, LPC
Professor

Department of Counseling & Educational Development
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING & EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of this research study is to explore relationship commitment in same-sex and opposite-sex intimate partnerships.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are:

- At least 18 years of age
- Involved in *a same-sex or opposite- sex committed intimate relationship* for at least one year
- Currently *cohabiting* with your partner
- Not married *nor* engaged to get married

This study includes three parts:

1. Filling out an open-ended online survey (approximately 15 minutes to complete)
2. Completing and returning a data collection packet that will be mailed to you (approximately 30 minutes to complete)

Participants who fully complete parts 1 and 2 will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards.

3. Attending a 2-hour focus group session on the UNCG campus

Participants who fully complete all three parts will receive a $50 restaurant gift certificate.

TO PARTICIPATE, go to:
www.surveymonkey.com/s/HT9GYWM

If you have any questions about participating, please email Amber Pope at alpope@uncg.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
<u>CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM</u>

Project Title: <u>Moral Commitment in Intimate Relationships: A Conceptualization from Cohabiting Same-sex and Opposite-sex Partners</u>

Project Director: <u>Dr. Craig Cashwell and Amber Pope</u>

What is the study about?
This is a research project. The goal of this study is to create a representation of moral commitment in intimate committed partnerships through your completion of data collection forms and participation in a focus group. The intent of this study is to develop and interpret concept maps that will lead to a better understanding of how moral commitment operates for those in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.

Why are you asking me?
Participants in this study are at least 18 years of age, and self-identify as being in *a same-sex or opposite-sex committed intimate relationship* for *at least one year*, and who are currently *cohabiting* with their partner. Participants are those who self-identify as being in committed intimate relationships but who are *not currently married nor engaged to get married, or those in relationships in which marriage is not an option* (i.e., same-sex relationships in states where same-sex marriages are illegal). For the purposes of this study, a *committed intimate relationship* is defined as a relationship in which two individuals share an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual connection, have an influence and mutual reliance on each other (i.e., interdependence), and both intend to share a long-term relationship with one another.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be agreeing to fill out an online survey and complete a packet that will be mailed to you at the address of your choice. Completing the online survey will take approximately 15 minutes of your time, and completing the mailed data collection forms will take approximately 30 minutes. Participants who live in the Greensboro area have the option of participating in a 2-hour focus group for an additional incentive.

The online survey involves your response to one open-ended question. The data collection forms that will be mailed to you involve a demographic questionnaire, sorting task, and rating task, and will be mailed to the address of your choice. Instructions will be provided on how to complete each form or task. Please complete these forms individually

and privately. An envelope and postage will be provided for you to mail them back to the student researcher within one week of receiving the forms in the mail. The student researcher will contact you through your preferred contact method (email or phone) if your materials have not been received after a week from distribution. This contact will only serve as a reminder to return the materials, and you may opt out of the study at this point or any other point in the process. If you do not live in the Greensboro area and/or are not interested in attending the focus group, then your participation in this study will end at this point.

If you are interested in attending the 2-hour focus group session on the UNCG campus, you will indicate this at the end of the online survey and the student researcher will contact you with more information about the time and location of the focus group. Maps representing moral commitment will have been created from the data collected from the mailings. The focus group session will involve an introduction to a model of relationship commitment, a presentation of these maps, and the group facilitator will engage you in a discussion, along with other participants, about your reactions to the maps.

If you agree to participate in the focus group session, you also are consenting to respect the privacy of other group members. You are agreeing to not ask for other group members' names, and to keep identifying information and responses during the focus group session confidential, meaning that you will not discuss other participants or what is stated during the focus groups outside of this research study.

This study is asking you to reflect on your commitment to your relationship with your partner. By doing so, things may arise that cause you mental or emotional discomfort. You may withdraw from the study or leave the focus group session at any time if this occurs. Additionally, you may follow up with Amber Pope at alpope@uncg.edu should you want to discuss any discomfort that you experience during the focus groups. Referrals to counseling or other support services are available as desired by participants.

Are there any audio/video recording?
The focus group session will be audio-recorded so that the researchers can review the group's discussion when interpreting and writing up the results of this study. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will limit access to the tapes as described below.

What are the dangers to me?
There is minimal risk to participating in this study as your identity will be revealed to other focus group participants. The researchers are ethically and legally bound to protect participants' identities and responses in the focus groups; the researchers, however, cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will keep participants' identities and responses confidential. Further, there is potential for you to encounter other group members outside of the focus group sessions as the participants were recruited in the

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Greensboro area. Finally, the data collection forms will be mailed to you so there is a risk of others noting your participation in this study. Please choose an address for this mailing in which you are comfortable receiving the forms, and please fill out the forms individually and on your own, and seal the forms in the mailing envelope upon completion to protect the privacy and confidentiality of your responses.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Craig Cashwell, who may be contacted at 336-334-3427 or cscashwe@uncg.edu.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
Participants may increase their awareness of why they are committed to continuing their relationship with their partner by participating in this study.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
Cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships are increasing in prevalence in the US. This study will inform the existing research on relationship commitment by exploring how moral commitment is viewed by those in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Previous research suggests that moral commitment could be influential in helping partners remain more positive about their relationships, even in times of conflict, in order to maintain relationship continuity. Therefore, the findings of this study could help mental health professionals promote moral commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners, which in turn may help their relationships be more pleasurable.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
Those participants who complete *both* tasks of completing the online survey and returning the mailed data collection packet will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards. The participants who complete the online survey, data collection packet, *and* attend the focus group session for the *full allotted time* all will receive a $50 restaurant gift certificate. Gift cards or certificates will be mailed to you within a month after the completion of this study. There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You will be assigned an ID number at the beginning of the study, which will be used to identify your sorting task, rating task, and demographic questionnaires. Therefore, no identifying information will be directly linked to the data acquired in the focus group sessions or to the mailed packets you complete. Identifying information (that is, your name, email, phone, and address) collected for the purposes of contact and compensation will be kept in a password-protected database on a password-protected

account on the laptop of the student researcher. All audio recordings and paper documents will be kept in a locked safe at the home of the student researcher. The data collected through this study will be kept for five years following completion of this study. Data on computer files will be completely erased and destroyed. Paper documents will be shredded.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By checking the "I Agree" box below, you are indicating that you have read and understand the procedure described above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You are also indicating that you understand any risks and benefits that may be involved in this study. Before you proceed to the survey, please print a copy of this consent for your records. Once you have checked the "I Agree" box, click "Next" to be taken to the beginning of the survey. Thanks for your time and input!

I Agree ☐

APPENDIX C

ONLINE SURVEY INSTRUMENTATION
FOR GENERATION OF STATEMENTS

Description of Johnson's Model

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION OF MORAL COMMITMENT CAREFULLY. The image below shows a depiction of a model of relationship commitment to help you better understand the idea of moral commitment. Michael Johnson proposed a model of intimate relationship commitment based on three dimensions: personal, moral, and structural commitment. The purpose of this survey is for you to generate statements based on your personal ideas of moral Commitment. Moral commitment is the idea that one "ought" or "feels obligated" to stay in his/her relationship. Moral commitment is a result of internal processes in that it arises from processes within yourself such as your belief and value system. It also is conceived of as a constraining force, which means it is based in restrictive reasons for maintaining your relationship to avoid experiencing negative consequences of the relationship ending.   Moral commitment differs from personal commitment in that personal commitment is based on a desire to stay in a relationship because you are attracted to your partner and/or the relationship. Moral commitment differs from structural commitment in that structural commitment results from external processes rather than internal processes, such as the legal or financial difficulties of ending a relationship.

Depiction of Johnson's Model

Johnson's Tripartite Model of Relationship Commitment

ATTRACTIONS		CONSTRAINTS
Partners maintain their relationships based on: • Love • Personal dedication • The appeal and desirability of one's partner and relationship	VS.	Partners maintain their relationships based on: •Avoiding the consequences of the relationship ending

↙   ↙   ↘

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

I *want* to stay in my relationship.

MORAL COMMITMENT

I *ought* to stay in my relationship.

STRUCTURAL COMMITMENT

I *need* to stay in my relationship.

↖   ↗   ↗

INTERNAL PROCESSES		EXTERNAL PROCESSES
Within an individual	VS.	Outside of an individual
Attitudes, values, beliefs, identity, etc.		Social pressure, legal restrictions, financial difficulties, etc.

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Focus Statement and Brainstorming Prompt

Please attempt to form ideas that fit the INTERNAL PROCESSES and CONSTRAINTS COMPONENT of moral commitment as described and depicted above. You may consider your experience of moral commitment in your current relationship, your past relationships, or how you would imagine moral commitment in relationships similar to your own. It is better to state an idea, even if you are unsure if it fits with the above components, rather than to restrict your brainstorming.

<div align="center">

✱

</div>

In the box below, please fill in the blank of the following prompt with as MANY STATEMENTS AS POSSIBLE based on your personal ideas of moral commitment.   I ought (or feel obligated) to stay in my in my relationship with my partner because _____.

<table>
<tr><td>

</td></tr>
</table>

<div align="center">**Demographic and Contact Information**</div>

Please indicate below whether you are in a same-sex or opposite-sex relationship.

⭕ same-sex partnership

⭕ opposite-sex partnership

Please fill out the information below for the mailing of the other data collection forms, which you will receive within the month. You can choose to put your real name, or enter a code name if you do not wish to share this information. Your email address will only be used to contact you as a reminder to return the mailed packets if yours is not received within the indicated time frame.

Those that complete and return the mailed packets will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards.

Name:
Address:
Address 2:
City/Town:
State:
ZIP:
Email Address:

If you live in the Greensboro area, please re-enter your email address below if you are interested in and available to attend the 2-hour focus group session on the UNCG campus.

The focus group session for same-sex partners will be held on: July 26, 2010 from 6-8 pm

The focus group session for opposite-sex partners will be held on: July 27, 2010 from 6-8 pm

The results of the data collection and analyses will be presented to you in the focus group session, and participants will provide their interpretation and feedback about the results. All participants who fully complete this survey, the mailed data collection packet, and attend the focus group session for the full allotted time will receive a $50 restaurant gift certificate.

If you re-enter your email address below, you will be contacted by the student researcher with more information about the focus groups.

Email Address:

APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION PACKET INFORMATION
FOR STRUCTURING OF STATEMENTS

Letter to Participants Partaking in Rounds 1 and 2

July 2, 2010

Dear [insert first name],

  Thank you for your participation in Part 1 of my study on relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. This packet contains the data collection forms for you to complete for Part 2 of this study. The next page contains the instructions for completing the documents and materials in this packet.

  Please read the instructions carefully, fill out Documents 1 through 3, complete the sorting task, and return the materials in the envelope provided by:

<div align="center">

<u>Friday, July 16, 2010</u>

</div>

  You will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards upon receipt of your packet, and the winners will be notified by mid-August.

  Please email me at alpope@uncg.edu or call me at [insert phone number] if you have any questions about completing this packet.

Thank you for your involvement in parts one and two of this study!

Sincerely,

Amber Pope

Letter to Participants Partaking in Rounds 1, 2, and 3

July 2, 2010

Dear [insert first name],

Thank you for your participation in Part 1 of my study on relationship commitment in cohabiting same-sex and opposite-sex partners. This packet contains the data collection forms for you to complete for Part 2 of this study. The next page contains the instructions for completing the documents and materials in this packet.

Please read the instructions carefully, fill out documents 1 through 3, complete the sorting task, and return the materials the envelope provided by:

<u>Friday, July 16, 2010</u>

Please email me at <u>alpope@uncg.edu</u> or call me at [insert phone number] if you have any questions about completing this packet.

You will be entered into a drawing for two $50 Target gift cards upon receipt of your packet, and the winners will be notified by mid-August. Further, you indicated your interest in participating in Part 3 of this study, which is attending a two-hour focus group on the UNCG campus. The dates and times for the focus groups are:

Same-sex partners: July 26, 2010 from 6-8 pm
Opposite-sex partners: July 27, 2010 from 6-8 pm

If you fully participate in all 3 parts of this study, you will receive a $50 gift certificate to a restaurant in the Greensboro area in addition to being entered into the drawing for the two $50 Target gift cards. Since you indicated your interest in the focus groups during the online part of this study, I will be contacting you by email in about a week with more information and to confirm your continued interest and availability in participating in the groups.

Thank you for your involvement in this study!

Sincerely,

Amber Pope

Instructions for Completing and Returning the Packets

1. Fill out the demographic questionnaire (**Document 1**) by circling the appropriate responses or filling in the blanks.
2. Fill out the Relationship Assessment Scale (**Document 2**) by circling the letter that best answers each item for you.
3. Fill out the rating form (**Document 3**) by circling the appropriate response (on a scale of 1: "Not true at all of myself" to 5: "True of myself") based on how true each statement is to your experience in your relationship with your partner.
4. **Sorting Task:** Please read the following instructions for the stack of index cards with printed statements:
   - Sort the cards with statements into piles based on similarity of the statements.
   - Each statement must belong to *only* 1 pile. If a statement seems to fit several piles, then you must select the 1 pile into which the statement best fits.
   - A statement can be in a pile unto itself.
   - Once you have sorted all the statements into piles, use the blank cards provided to write a word or short phrase describing the statements in each pile.
   - Once you have provided a label for each pile, then place each label on top of each pile of statements and paper clip your piles to keep them separated.
5. Place all materials into the provided envelope and mail back to the student researcher by **Friday, July 16, 2010.**
6. Please contact the student researcher, Amber Pope, at alpope@uncg.edu or [insert phone number] if you have any questions about completing the materials in your packet.

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Fill in the blanks for each question or circle the appropriate responses.

Participant ID: _____

1. What is your sex? _____

2. What is the sex of your partner? _____

3. What is your sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.)?

_____

4. What is your partner's sexual orientation? _____

5. What is your age in years? _____

6. What is your partner's age in years? _____

7. How long have you and your partner been in your relationship?

_____ years _____ months

8. If applicable, how long have you and your partner lived in the same household?

_____ years _____ months

9. What is your ethnic background? (Circle all that apply)

     African American   Caucasian   Hispanic   Native American

Asian/Pacific Islander   Other (please specify) _____

10. What is your partner's ethnic background? (Circle all that apply)

     African American   Caucasian   Hispanic   Native American

Asian/Pacific Islander   Other (please specify) _____

11. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (Circle one)

Did not complete high school   High school diploma   Some college, no degree

Associate's degree   Bachelor's degree   Some graduate school

Master's degree   Doctoral degree

12. What is the highest level of education your partner has achieved? (Circle one)

Did not complete high school   High school diploma   Some college, no degree

Associate's degree   Bachelor's degree   Some graduate school

Master's degree   Doctoral degree

13. What is your current occupation? _____

14. What is your partner's current occupation? _____

15. What is your annual income level? (Circle one)

Below $15,000 $15,001 to $25,000 $25,001 to $35,000

$35,001 to $45,000   Above $45,000

16. What is your partner's annual income level? (Circle one)

Below $15,000 $15,001 to $25,000 $25,001 to $35,000

$35,001 to $45,000   Above $45,000

17. Please indicate how many children you have together, as well as how many you or your partner have from previous relationships:

Number of children you have together with your partner: _____

Number of children you have from previous relationships: _____

Number of children your partner has from previous relationships: _____

18. Please provide a short statement describing how you see the future of your relationship with your partner.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Relationship Assessment Scale

Please circle the letter for each item that best answers that item for you.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

A	B	C	D	E
Poorly		Average		Extremely well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

A	B	C	D	E
Poor		Average		Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Never		Average		Very often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations:

A	B	C	D	E
Hardly at all		Average		Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?

A	B	C	D	E
Not much		Average		Very much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

A	B	C	D	E
Very few		Average		Very many

NOTE: Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored. A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5. You add up the items and divide by 7 to get a mean score.

Rating Form

	DOCUMENT 3					
	Statements	**Rating**				
	Rate each statement according to how true it is to yourself based on your relationship with your partner.	*1 = Not true at all of myself; 2 = Slightly true of myself; 3 = Moderately true of myself; 4 = Mostly true of myself; 5 = True of myself*				
1	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because family members would be upset.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is what people expect.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we made a commitment to staying in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am committed to staying in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have been together for so long.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because the process of breaking up would be horrible.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've been through so much together.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have put so much effort into the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have a child or children to consider.	1	2	3	4	5

13	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to have a child with him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am his or her only family.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner is my only family.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of relationship difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love his or her family.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves my family.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual friends.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've made a commitment to work through the hard stuff together.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that we can work through the hard stuff.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for me if the relationship ended.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for him or her if the relationship ended.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of his or her limitations.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our finances are shared.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we make a good team.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to spend the rest of my life with him or her.	1	2	3	4	5

		1	2	3	4	5
29	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we support each other emotionally.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our relationship is a model for others in our social network.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I may not be able to find another partner.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am older.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to start a new relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of others' perceptions of me if we ended the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
35	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because others might reject me if we ended the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
36	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the right thing to do.	1	2	3	4	5
37	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is a good person.	1	2	3	4	5
38	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she has many good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share similar values.	1	2	3	4	5
40	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am happy in this relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
41	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel guilty if I left him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
42	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual goals for the future.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would seem like wasted time if we ended the relationship now.	1	2	3	4	5
44	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship seems like quitting.	1	2	3	4	5

		1	2	3	4	5
45	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of how comfortable we are with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
46	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I can't imagine myself with anyone else.	1	2	3	4	5
47	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow as individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
48	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
49	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be alone.	1	2	3	4	5
50	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because being in this relationship is better than not being in it.	1	2	3	4	5
51	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be the only single person I know.	1	2	3	4	5
52	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have no reason to leave.	1	2	3	4	5
53	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our lives are intertwined.	1	2	3	4	5
54	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she made sacrifices to be with me.	1	2	3	4	5
55	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because even in difficult times, the benefits outweigh the hardships.	1	2	3	4	5
56	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner was supportive during a crisis.	1	2	3	4	5
57	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we depend on each other.	1	2	3	4	5
58	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I like having someone depend on me.	1	2	3	4	5
59	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves me.	1	2	3	4	5
60	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the only thing I know.	1	2	3	4	5

		1	2	3	4	5
61	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to feel responsible for ending the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
62	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel safe at night with him or her there.	1	2	3	4	5
63	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we find solace in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
64	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we learn from each other.	1	2	3	4	5
65	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value the companionship.	1	2	3	4	5
66	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel our time together is valuable.	1	2	3	4	5
67	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value our intimacy.	1	2	3	4	5
68	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she would have nowhere else to go.	1	2	3	4	5
69	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she provides me with support.	1	2	3	4	5
70	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is faithful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
71	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel ungrateful if I ended the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
72	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because God will be mad if the relationship ended.	1	2	3	4	5
73	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share a bond.	1	2	3	4	5
74	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would be unhappy without him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
75	I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel like this relationship is the best possible thing for me.	1	2	3	4	5

Permission to Use the Relationship Assessment Scale

From: Amber Pope alpope@uncg.edu

To: Susan Hendrick s.hendrick@ttu.edu

Date: Wednesday, May 5, 2010 at 11:19 AM

Hi Dr. Hendrick,

My name is Amber Pope and I am a doctoral student in Counseling at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I will be conducting my dissertation study this summer, which is on moral commitment in intimate relationships, namely cohabiting same-sex and opposite sex partners. I would like to use your Relationship Assessment Scale as part of my instrumentation, as relationship satisfaction of participants may influence how they conceptualize commitment in intimate relationships. Your measure is brief and inclusive of a variety of intimate relationship types, and would be a good fit to provide further explanation of my results. I am writing to ask for permission to use the RAS in my dissertation research.

Please let me know if you have further questions about my study. Thank you for your consideration.

Amber Pope
--
Amber Pope, MS, NCC, NCBLPC Board Eligible
Doctoral Student
Department of Counseling & Educational Development
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

From: Susan Hendrick s.hendrick@ttu.edu

To: Amber Pope alpope@uncg.edu

Date: Wednesday, May 5, 2010 at 1:12 PM

Amber,

　　　You are welcome to use the RAS. A copy is attached for your use. Good luck in your work.

Susan Hendrick

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTATION
FOR INTEPRETATION OF STATEMENTS

Focus Group Agenda

1. Welcome

2. Introduction of Johnson's Tripartite Model of Commitment

3. Presentation of Maps

    a. Point Map

    b. Cluster Map

    c. Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters

4. Examination and Labeling of Clusters

5. Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task

6. Discussion and Sharing of Impressions about Moral Commitment

Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task Form

Relationship Commitment Type Identification Task			
Check the box for each cluster under type of commitment based on which type of commitment you think that most of the statements in that cluster represent.			
	Type of Commitment		
Cluster	**Personal**	**Moral**	**Structural**
Cluster 1			
Cluster 2			
Cluster 3			
Cluster 4			
Cluster 5			
Cluster 6			
Cluster 7			
Cluster 8			
Cluster 9			
Cluster 10			
Additional Clusters			
Cluster 11			
Cluster 12			
Cluster 14			
Cluster 15			
Cluster 16			
Cluster 17			
Cluster 18			
Cluster 19			
Cluster 20			

APPENDIX F

PILOT STUDY

Pilot Study

The intention of the pilot study was to field test the research procedures for clarity before conducting the full study. The research questions created for the full study were analyzed using data from the pilot study, although the sample size was too small to generate adequate conclusions from this data. Further, participants were asked for feedback on instructions and procedures in order to refine the process for the full study.

Research Questions

2. Do same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partners conceive of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment?

3. How do same-sex partners conceptualize moral commitment?

    e. Do same-sex partners conceive the general consistency of values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

    f. Do same-sex partners conceive the obligation to one's partner component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

    g. Do same-sex partners conceive the relationship-type values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

h. Do same-sex partners conceive of other components of moral commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment?

4. How do cohabiting heterosexual partners conceptualize moral commitment?

   a. Do cohabiting heterosexual partners conceive the general consistency of values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   b. Do cohabiting heterosexual partners conceive the obligation to one's partner component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   c. Do cohabiting heterosexual conceive the relationship-type values component of moral commitment to be consistent with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model? If so, how is this conceptualized in their relationships?

   d. Do cohabiting heterosexual partners conceive of other components of moral commitment not included in Johnson's (1991a, 1999) model of commitment?

5. What are the similarities between same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

6. What are the differences between same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual

partners' conceptualizations of moral commitment?

Participants

Participants identified as being in an intimate committed relationship for over one

year with the same partner. There were two participants in the same-sex partners focus

group, one male and one female, and two participants in the cohabiting heterosexual

partners focus group, both female. The participants in the same-sex partners group

indicated that they had been in their relationships for 5 to 15 years, and the participants in

the cohabiting heterosexual partners group indicated a relationship length of 1 to 3 years.

Additional demographic information is located in Table 10.

Procedures and Data Analyses

A request to complete the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board

at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Participants were recruited via

listservs at a university in the Southeast. Participants attended two focus group sessions,

one with same-sex partners and the other with cohabiting heterosexual partners.

First focus group sessions. The first focus group lasted for 2 hours. After

subjects provided consent to participate, they were introduced to Johnson's Tripartite

Model of Commitment. They were then given brainstorming guidelines and focus

statement. As a group, participants generated statements about their ideas of moral

commitment for approximately an hour. In the cohabiting heterosexual partners group,

the participants not only generated statements about moral commitment in their current

relationship, but also about their ideas of moral commitment from past relationships. This

occurred without prompting from the researcher, and did not happen in the same-sex partners group as they stuck to their ideas about moral commitment in their current relationship. Next, participants were provided dinner as the statements were printed for the sorting and rating tasks. Individually, Participants were asked to rate the statements based on the rating focus. Participants also individually sorted statements into piles based on similarity of the statements.

Data analyses. After the first focus group session for each group, the researcher analyzed the data from the sorting and rating tasks to create the maps that would be interpreted in the second focus group session. First, the data from the rating tasks was entered into SPSS and the means for each statement were calculated through descriptive statistics analyses (see Tables 11 and 12). Secondly, the researcher, with the help of a committee member, entered the data from the sort task into R editor to create the group similarity matrix (GSM). The GSM was then copied into Systat, and analyzed using a multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) analysis with a two-dimensional solution to create the point map for each group (see Figure 4.1. and 5.1.). From the MDS, coordinates for each of the statements were obtained. In Systat, a agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's minimum variance algorithm was ran on the coordinates obtained in the MDS to create the cluster map (see Figures 4.2. and 5.2.) for each group.

The coordinates from the MDS analysis also were entered as data for a scatter plot for the point rating map for each group (see Figures 4.3. and 5.3.) in which the means for each statement obtained from the rating task were used as the third variable to indicate how true each statement was to participants based on their experience in their relationship

with their partner. As the researcher did not have access to the software to create the cluster rating map, the designated clusters were drawn onto the point map to give an indication of how the statements were rated as they grouped into each cluster. Lastly, the researcher interpreted the three maps (i.e., point map, cluster map, and point rating map) for each group to estimate the most appropriate number of clusters for the generated statements. Based on the selected number of clusters, the research created tables (see Tables 11 and 12) that demonstrated which statements grouped in each cluster for the focus group interpretation session.

      Second focus group sessions. A week lapsed between the first and second focus group sessions for each group. The researcher gave participants copies of the point map, cluster map, point rating map with designated clusters, and tables with statements that were obtained from the data analyses. The researcher then gave a brief explanation of all the documents to participants, who asked questions to clarify their understanding of the documents. The researcher then used the point rating map with designated clusters (see Figures 4.3 and 5.3) and the table with statements (see Tables 11 and 12) to go through each cluster. Participants were asked if they thought the statements in each cluster were similar, to name the cluster, and to identify the cluster as most fitting with personal, moral, or structural commitment as conceptualized in the Tripartite Model. If participants did not think that the statements in each cluster grouped together well, then the statements were analyzed to determine if the cluster should be split or would be better grouped with another cluster. Lastly, participants were asked for their general feedback about the research process to help the researcher refine procedures for the full study.

Results

The results of the pilot study are used to address the research questions created for the full study below.

Research question 1. Both same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partners were able to conceive of moral commitment as a dimension separate from personal and structural commitment as evidenced by the identification of certain clusters as being more descriptive of the internal processes and constraints forces of commitment rather than the external processes (i.e., indicative of structural commitment) or attractions forces (i.e., indicative of personal commitment). Participants in same-sex partners group identified 4 out of 9 clusters, and participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners group identified 6 out of 8 clusters as being descriptive of their conceptions of the internal processes and constraints forces of moral commitment.

Research question 2. Participants in the same-sex partners group conceived of two of the three components of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), and identified another components of moral commitment that were not included in the Tripartite Model.

Research question 2a. None of the clusters identified as descriptive of moral commitment seem to fit with Johnson's conception of the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment.

Research question 2b. Participants identified Cluster 1 as being descriptive and gave this cluster the term "Couple Support" to describe the statements that grouped together within this cluster. Cluster 1 included statements such as "I ought to stay

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because we changed our lives to be together" or "I ought to stay because we may need to support each other as we may be facing deaths in the family in the future," which are indicative of the obligation to one's partner component of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991, 1999). Additionally, Cluster 5 ("Social Support") contained items such as "I ought to stay because we have lots of mutual friends" and "I ought to stay because he/she takes care of me when I am sick," which reflects an obligation to others who would be affected by the dissolution of the relationship, such as mutual friends, as well as one's partner.

Research question 2c. Same-sex partners conceived of two categories that were fitting with Johnson's (1991a, 1999) conceptualization of the relationship-type values component of moral commitment. First, Cluster 5 ("Social Support") contained items which seemed in line with the person-specific obligation as well as the relationship-type values component of moral commitment. Statments such as "I ought to stay because I don't want to lose his/her family/friends" and "I ought to stay because he/she is my family." These statements may demonstrate relationship-type values of same-sex partners as they described how same-sex partners create "families of choice" as a means of social support in response to possible negative reactions to their sexual identity by biological kin. Developing "families of choice" is a phenomenon that has been identified by other researchers in samples of same-sex partners (e.g., Green & Mitchell, 2002).

Cluster 7, "Acceptance," also seemed to describe relationship-type values of same-sex partners with items such as "We ought to stay together because we are accepted by our parents" along with other statements relating to acceptance as a couple by friends,

neighbors, and co-workers. The participants in the same-sex partners group conceived of a moral obligation to remain in their relationship due to the acceptance of their same-sex relationship by important others in their lives, which was a value associated with the type of relationship the participants were engaged in.

Research question 2d. Lastly, participants in the same-sex partners group identified another cluster of moral commitment that did not seem to fit with any of the three components of moral commitment as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999). Cluster 4, termed "Longevity," included statements such as "I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I've been in it so long" and "I ought to stay because the relationship is bigger than us." The participants had difficulty coming up with a term or phrase to describe this category but decided on "Longevity" to describe the thoughts that they often leave "unsaid" because they are less positive indicators of commitment, yet serve as perceptions that keep them in their relationship with their partner.

Research question 3. Participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners group conceived of two of the three components of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999), and identified other components of moral commitment that were not included in the Tripartite Model.

Research question 3a. None of the clusters identified as descriptive of moral commitment seem to fit with Johnson's conception of the general valuing of consistency component of moral commitment.

Research question 3b. Participants identified Cluster 8 as being descriptive and gave this cluster the term "Concern/Worry about Partner" to describe the statements that

grouped together within Cluster 8. This cluster included statements such as "I ought to stay because of my partner's reaction to our break-up" or "I ought to stay because he will be lonely," which are indicative to the person-specific obligation, which includes the obligation to one's partner component of moral commitment as described by Johnson (1991, 1999). Cluster 1, termed "External Internalized Influence" also was fitting with the person-specific obligation component of moral commitment in terms of obligation to others who would be affected by the dissolution of one's relationship. Items in this cluster included statements such as "I ought to stay in my relationship because his family likes me, "I ought to stay in my relationship because my family likes him" and "I feel like I ought to stay because of our mutual friends." Although family and friends were identified as external influences, the participants in the cohabiting heterosexual group felt that this cluster was more indicative of moral rather than structural commitment because they felt an internal obligation to continue their relationship for the benefit of their family members and friends.

Research question 3c. Participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners group conceived of two clusters similar to the relationship-type values component of moral commitment. Cluster 3, termed "History," included items such as "I ought to stay because we have so much history together. In this way, the participants perceived an obligation to staying in their relationship based on the length and established routines and traditions of their relationships with their partners. Additionally, Cluster 4 ("Future Goals and Optimistic Commitments") related to the relationship-type values component as described by Johnson (1991a, 1999) in that participants conceived of an obligation to

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their relationship based on future ideals of that relationship, which included marriage and raising a family with their partner. Examples of statements in this cluster were "I believe I will get engaged to him" and "I believe that my partner and I can build a life together."

Research question 3d. Finally, participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners group identified two clusters of moral commitment that did not seem to fit with the three components of moral commitment as conceptualized by Johnson (1991a, 1999). The researcher originally grouped these clusters together, but the participants indicated a difference between the groups in the interpretation session. Cluster 6 ("Fear/Self-Doubt") and Cluster 7 ("Unrealistic Optimism and Wishful Thinking") were identified as descriptive of moral commitment by the participants and were described as "negative" reasons to stay in one's relationship. Cluster 6 included items such as "I ought to stay because he is all I've ever known" and "I ought to stay because I'm scared to leave," and Cluster 7 contained statements such as "I ought to stay because I think he will change" and "I ought to stay because I used to be in love with him."

Research question 4. Participants in both groups envisioned the person-specific obligation and relationship-type values components of moral commitment when describing the reasons they ought to stay in their relationships, yet neither conceived of the general valuing of consistency component. Additionally, same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partners described a component relating to the history they had with their partner (e.g., Same-sex partners stated "I ought to stay because we have been through so much together," and cohabiting heterosexual partners similarly stated "I ought to stay because we have so much history together."), and the longevity of their relationships

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(e.g., Both groups came up with the statement "I ought to stay in my relationship because I've been in it so long.") that they labeled as moral commitment. This may suggest that the length of non-marital relationships influences partners' obligations to their partners and relationship.

Additionally, both groups conceived of clusters that contained statements that relayed less positive (and hence constraining) internal processes that may influence one to stay with their partner. The "Longevity" cluster described by same-sex partners and the "Fear/Self-Doubt" and "Unrealistic Optimism and Wishful Thinking" clusters conceived by cohabiting heterosexual partners included items that pertained to these more "negative" reasons to remain in their relationships.

Research question 5. Although both same-sex and cohabiting heterosexual partners conceived of a relationship type values component of moral commitment, the clusters in this component differed between groups. Although both groups conceived of the person-specific obligation component of moral commitment in terms of obligation to family and friends who support their relationships, same-sex partners specifically discussed being committed to their relationships due to an obligation to those who "accepted" their relationship. This may speak to the lack of societal acceptance that same-sex partners experience due to homonegative attitudes, so perhaps same-sex partners experience moral commitment to their partner because of a concern that another relationship with a different partner would not be accepted by their social support system.

The participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners group conceived of several clusters of moral commitment that were not similar to any thought up by those in

same-sex partners group, including clusters related to future goals, fear, and wishful thinking. The cluster "Future Goals and Optimistic Commitments" contained items relating to building a life together, raising a family, and getting engaged, which suggests that some cohabiting heterosexual partners may feel a moral commitment to their relationship because of the future possibility of marriage to their partner.

Participant Feedback

Participants in the cohabiting heterosexual group indicated that having an agenda for the group sessions would have been helpful. Additionally, participants in both groups did not find the prompts about beliefs and values as useful as the first prompt of "I *ought* (or *feel obligated*) to stay in my relationship with my partner because _____." Lastly, participants indicated that a prompt to think about past relationships or relationships of others in similar partnerships may have been effective to generate more statements during the brainstorming process.

Other Considerations

The participants in both groups seemed relatively satisfied with their relationships based on the high ratings of the items that clustered in groups identified as personal commitment. Thus, a measure of relationship satisfaction would have been useful to provide more information about the participants' ideas of moral commitment.

Table 10. Pilot Study Demographics

Variable	Cohabiting Heterosexual Partners (N=2)	Same-sex Partners (N= 2)
	n	n
Sex:		
Male	-	1
Female	2	1
Sex of Partner:		
Male	2	1
Female	-	1
Age:		
20-25	-	1
26-35	2	-
45-50	-	1
Age of Partner:		
21-25	-	1
26-35	2	-
45-50	-	1
Length of Relationship:		
1 – 3 years	2	-
3-5 years	-	1
> 10 years	-	1
Length of Cohabitation:		
Not Cohabiting	-	1
< 1 year	1	-
1-2 years	1	-
> 10 years	-	1
Ethnicity		
African American	1	1
Caucasian	1	1
Ethnicity of Partner:		
African American	1	-
Caucasian	1	2

Level of Education

Some college, no degree	-	2
Bachelor's degree	1	-
Master's degree	1	-

Partner's Level of Education:

Some college, no degree	-	2
Bachelor's degree	2	-

Income

Below $15,000	1	1
$35,001 to $45,000	1	1

Partner's Income

Below $15,000	-	1
$25,001 to $35,000	-	1
$35,001 to $45,000	1	-
Above $45,000	1	-

Number of Children:

Zero:	2	2

Table 11. Same-sex Partners Cluster Results

Dimension of Commitment as Identified by Participants	Average Rating of Items in Cluster

<u>Moral Commitment</u>

Cluster 1: "Couple Support"   4.50

5. I ought to stay because we changed our lives to be together. (4.0)
15. I ought to stay because we go see our families together. (4.0)
43. I ought to stay because I do want to get old with her/him. (4.5)
45. I ought to stay because we need each other. (5.0)
46. I ought to stay because we may need to support each other as we may be facing
        deaths in the family in the future. (5.0)

Cluster 4: "Longevity"   4.00

1. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I've been in it so long. (4.5)
3. I ought to stay in my relationship w/ my partner because in some ways, I feel like I'm
        the only family that he/she has. (3.0)
6. I ought to stay because we have a dog (pet) together. (2.5)
9. I ought to stay because there is no reason to leave. (4.5)
26. I ought to stay because breaking up is too complicated. (4.5)
27. I ought to stay because it is easier to stay. (4.5)
32. I ought to stay because the relationship is bigger than us. (4.0)
34. I ought to stay because we have been through so much together. (4.5)

Cluster 5: "Social Support"   4.17

16. I ought to stay because he/she is my family. (4.5)
17. I ought to stay because we have lots of mutual friends. (4.5)
18. I ought to stay because he/she takes care of me when I'm sick. (4.0)
31. I ought to stay because other people expect us to stay together. (4.0)
47. I ought to stay because I don't want to lose her/his family. (4.0)
48. I ought to stay because I don't want to lose her/his friends. (4.0)

Cluster 7: "Acceptance"   4.90

33. I ought to stay because our families would be really hurt if we broke up. (4.5)
39. We ought to stay together because we are accepted by our parents. (5.0)
40. We ought to stay together because we are accepted by our friends. (5.0)
41. We ought to stay together because we are accepted by our neighbors. (5.0)
42. We ought to stay together because we are accepted by our co-workers. (5.0)

Structural Commitment

Cluster 6: "Hardship Prevention"   3.80

51. If we broke up, it would be more of a hardship on myself than my partner. (3.5)
52. I ought to stay because my partner might not have a place to live if we broke up. (3.0)
53. I ought to stay with my partner because I get free haircuts. (2.5)
58. I believe I'm at my happiest when I'm in a good relationship. (5.0)
59. I believe I should be in a relationship because it is safer than casual dating. (5.0)

Personal Commitment

Cluster 2: "Financial Benefits"   3.25

7. I ought to stay because we buy each other gifts. (3.0)
10. I ought to stay because we share clothes. (2.5)
11. I ought to stay because we travel together. (3.5)
72. I ought to stay because he/she lets me buy expensive things w/o saying things
     about it. (4.0)

Cluster 3: "Compatibility"   4.81

12. I ought to stay because we mesh well together. (5.0)
14. I ought to stay because we fight nicely. (5.0)
22. I ought to stay because we don't have to be together 24 hours a day. (5.0)
30. I ought to stay because we never go to bed mad. (5.0)
61. I ought to stay because my relationship is drama-free. (5.0)
64. I ought to stay because we don't fight over the TV, computer, or remote control. (4.5)
68. I ought to stay because my partner inspires me. (4.0)
73. I ought to stay because my partner lets me have my schoolboy/schoolgirl
     crushes. (5.0)

Cluster 8: "Emotional Attractions"   4.38

21. I ought to stay because she/he is funny and makes me laugh. (4.0)
23. I ought to stay because she/he is a good cook. (4.0)
24. I ought to stay because he/she helps with house and yard work. (3.5)
35. I ought to stay because he/she doesn't mind me getting fat (or doesn't say anything about it). (5.0)
36. I ought to stay because she/he encourages me no matter what. (4.5)
37. I ought to stay because he/she doesn't mind me getting old. (5.0)
38. I ought to stay because he/she doesn't mind going out of his/her way for me. (4.0)
63. I ought to stay because my partner respects me. (5.0)
65. I ought to stay because my partner doesn't purposefully press my buttons. (4.5)
66. I ought to stay because he/she turns the lights out in bed and reads by book light. (4.0)
67. I ought to stay because my partner laughs at my jokes. (4.5)
69. I ought to stay because my partner understands when I cry. (4.0)
71. I ought to stay because my partners lets me goof off and have lazy days. (5.0)

Cluster 9: "Positive Partner Qualities"   4.36

2. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because they are very attractive. (4.5)
8. I ought to stay because the sex is good. (3.5)
13. I ought to stay because we get along. (4.5)
19. I ought to stay because he/she is kind and polite. (4.5)
20. I ought to stay because I don't get bored of her/him. (4.5)
44. I ought to stay with my partner because he/she is honest. (4.5)
49. I ought to stay because we have similar goals. (3.5)
54. I ought to stay because she likes to try new things. (4.5)
55. I ought to stay with my partner because she/he doesn't demand a lot of my time. (4.5)
56. I ought to stay with my partner because she/he doesn't take a lot of day to day maintenance. (4.5)
57. I ought to stay with my partner because he/she is goal-oriented. (4.0)
60. I ought to stay in a relationship with my partner because he/she is not crazy. (5.0)
62. I ought to stay with my partner because he/she doesn't lie. (4.5)
70. I ought to stay because my partner wants me to achieve my goals. (4.5)

<u>Outliers</u>

4. I ought to stay because we have a house together. (3.0)
25. I ought to stay because she/he gives me good constructive criticism. (4.0)
28. I ought to stay because it reminds me of why I should stay. (4.5)
29. I ought to stay because crushes on other people are not the same as love. (4.5)
50. If we broke up, it would be more of a hardship on my partner than me. (3.5)

Note. The averages of participants' responses to each item to the rating scale (see below) are in parentheses beside the items:

Rate each statement according to how true it is to yourself based on your experience in your relationship with your partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all	Slightly true of myself	Moderately true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Table 12. Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners Cluster Results

Dimension of Commitment as Identified by Participants	Average Rating of Items in Cluster

<u>Moral Commitment</u>

Cluster 1: "External Internalized Influences"   3.00

9. I feel like I ought to stay because of what my friends would say if I didn't. (2.5)
10. I feel like I ought to stay because of our mutual friends. (2.5)
16. I ought to stay in my relationship because his family likes me. (3.5)
17. I ought to stay in my relationship because having his family close to me makes
        me feel like this is more of a home. (2.0)
20. I ought to stay because I feel grateful to the way his family treats me. (3.5)
22. I ought to stay in my relationship because my family likes him. (3.5)
23. I ought to stay in my relationship because my friends like him. (3.5)
24. I ought to stay because our family and friends expect that we will get married.
        (4.0)
50. I ought to stay because his family feels like they are my family. (3.0)
51. I ought to stay because I want to prove to everyone that we can make this work.
        (2.0)

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Cluster 3: "History"   3.25

1. I ought to stay in my relationship because I've been in it so long. (3.0)
28. I ought to stay in my relationship because we have annual traditions. (3.0)
34. I ought to stay because we have a routine. (4.0)
54. I ought to stay because we have so much history together. (3.0)

Cluster 4: "Future Goals and Optimistic Commitments"   4.64

6. I believe that my partner and I can build a life together. (5.0)
7. I believe that my partner and I can raise a family.(5.0)
8. I believe that I'm going to have a future with him. (5.0)
13. I ought to stay in my relationship because leaving would dissolve the goals that
        we both made. (4.0)
14. I ought to stay in my relationship because leaving would dissolve the goals that
        we are making/working towards. (4.0)
18. I believe I will get engaged to him. (5.0)
29. I value being goal-oriented. (4.5)

Cluster 6: "Fear/Self-Doubt"   3.40

27. I ought to stay in my relationship because I don't know if I could meet someone
        that treats me as well as my partner. (3.0)
30. I ought to stay in my relationship because my partner has personality traits that
        I may not be able to find in another partner. (4.5)
46. I ought to stay because I will miss him. (4.0)
47. I ought to stay because he is all I have ever known. (3.0)
48. I ought to stay because I'm scared to leave. (2.5)

Cluster 7: "Unrealistic Optimism and Wishful Thinking"   2.75

42. I ought to stay because I know deep down he is a good person. (3.0)
43. I ought to stay because I think he will change. (3.0)
44. I ought to stay because I think things will get better. (2.5)
53. I ought to stay because I used to be in love with him. (2.5)

Cluster 8: "Concern/Worry about Partner"   1.06

35. I ought to stay because of my partner's reaction to our break-up. (1.5)
36. I ought to stay because I don't think he will find someone else as open to his
      quirks. (1.0)
37. I ought to stay because I didn't feel like he would be able to make good decisions
      or choices without me. (1.0)
38. I ought to stay because he doesn't have any other friends. (1.0)
39. I ought to stay because I know he will manipulate me and make me feel like it's
      my fault if I leave. (1.0)
40. I ought to stay because he thinks he has put a lot into the relationship. (1.0)
49. I ought to stay because I know he will be lonely. (1.0)
52. I ought to stay until he seeks mental help. (1.0)

Personal Commitment

Cluster 5: "Love/Emotional Commitment"   4.43

2. I value our friendship. (5.0)
3. I value being honest with my partner. (5.0)
4. I feel grateful to my partner. (4.0)
19. I ought to stay because I feel grateful to the way he treats me. (4.5)
31. I ought to stay because he is my best friend. (4.5)
41. I ought to stay because I know he really loves me. (3.5)
45. I ought to stay because he knows me better than anyone else. (4.5)

Structural Commitment

Cluster 2: "Financial Commitments"   2.91

11. I ought to stay in my relationship because we've made many investments
      together. (3.0)
12. I feel like I ought to stay in my relationship because of a waste of time and
      resources. (2.5)
15. I ought to stay because I'm paying half of the bills and he wouldn't be able to do
      that on his own. (2.0)
25. I ought to stay in my relationship because he manages money better than I do.
      (3.0)
32. I ought to stay because I don't want to move out of my house. (3.5)
33. I ought to stay because I gave up my fabulous apartment.(3.5)

<u>Outliers</u>

5. We both have supportive families. (4.5)
21. I ought to stay in my relationship because my puppy adores him. (3.0)
26. I ought to stay in my relationship because I'm on his parents' family share plan.
        (2.5)
55. I ought to stay because we have so many memories together. (3.0)

Note. The averages of participants' responses to each item to the rating scale (see below) are in parentheses beside the items:

Rate each statement according to how true it is to yourself based on your experience in your relationship with your partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all	Slightly true of myself	Moderately true of myself	Mostly true of myself	True of myself

Figure 4.1. Same-sex Partners Point Map

Configuration
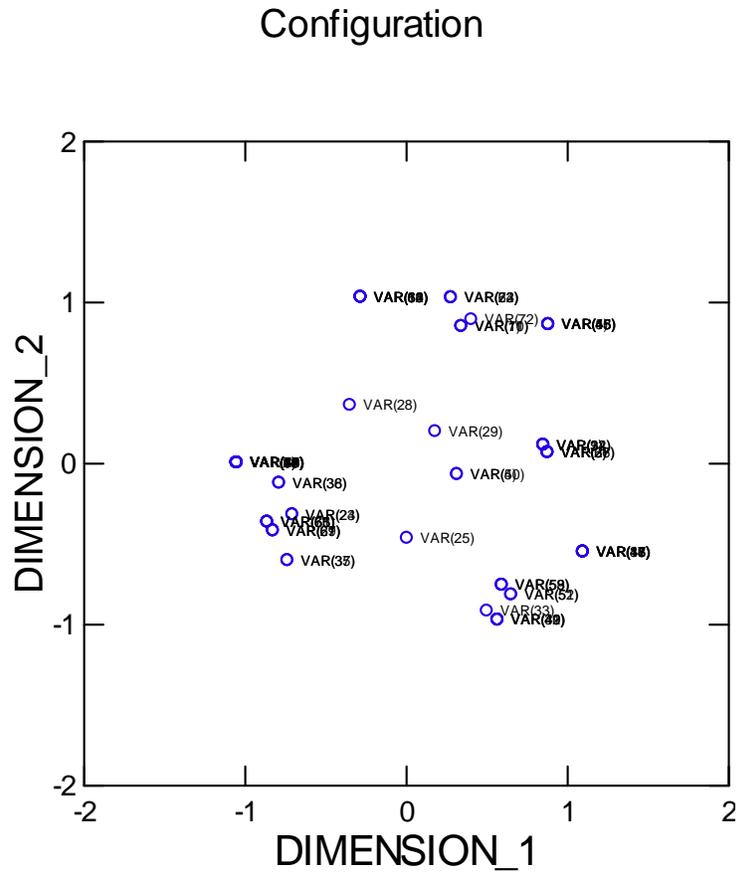
Figure 4.1. This point map was created from the statements generated by the participants in the same-sex partners focus group. The participants sorted the statements into piles based on similarity, which were combined to create a group similarity matrix (GSM). This point map resulted from running a multi-dimensional scaling analysis with a two-dimensional solution on the GSM.
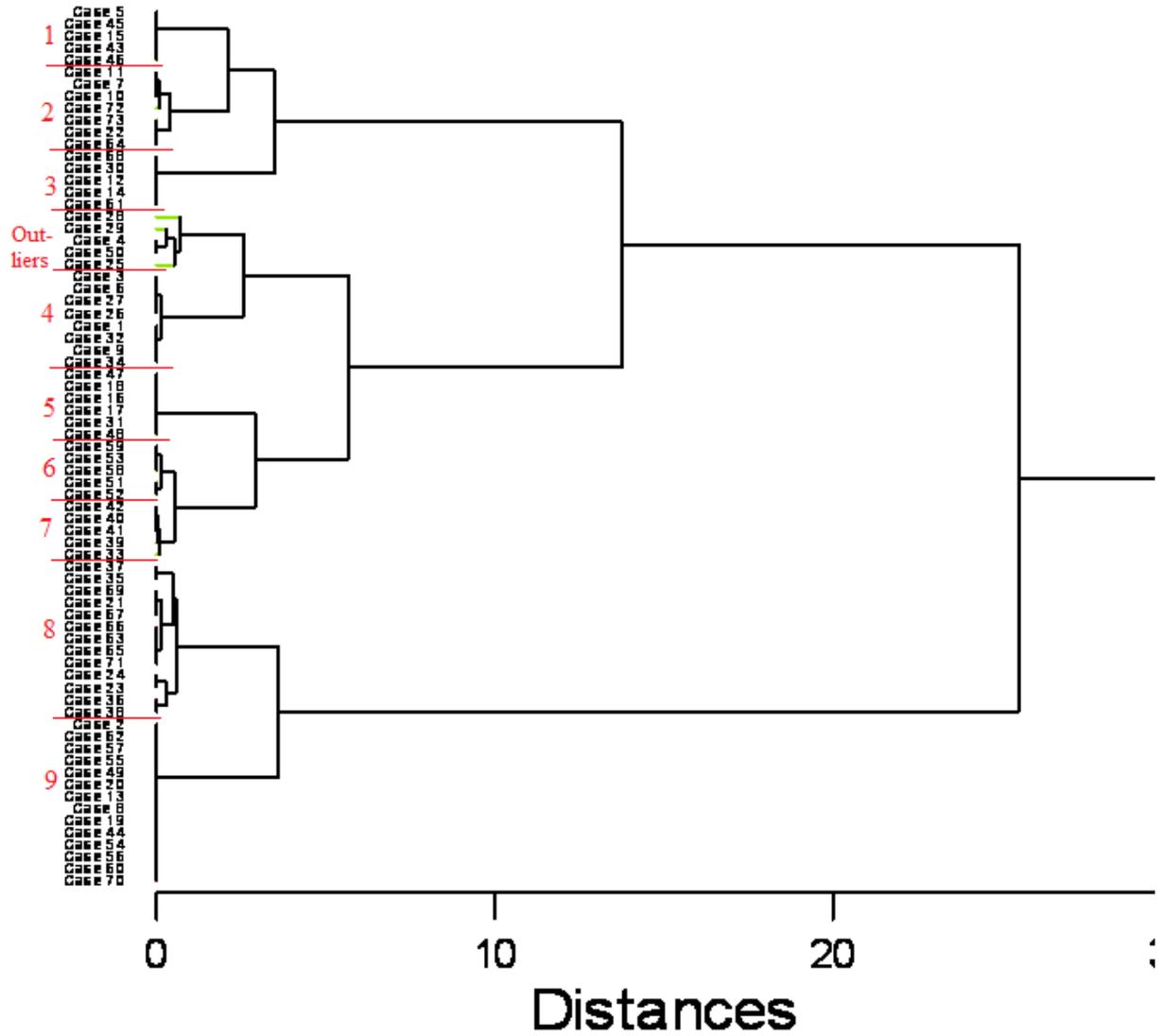
Figure 4.2. Same-sex Partners Cluster Map

Figure 4.2. The coordinates from the multi-dimensional scaling analysis on the GSM were used as the input for the agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's minimum variance algorithm to create the cluster map for the same-sex partners focus group.

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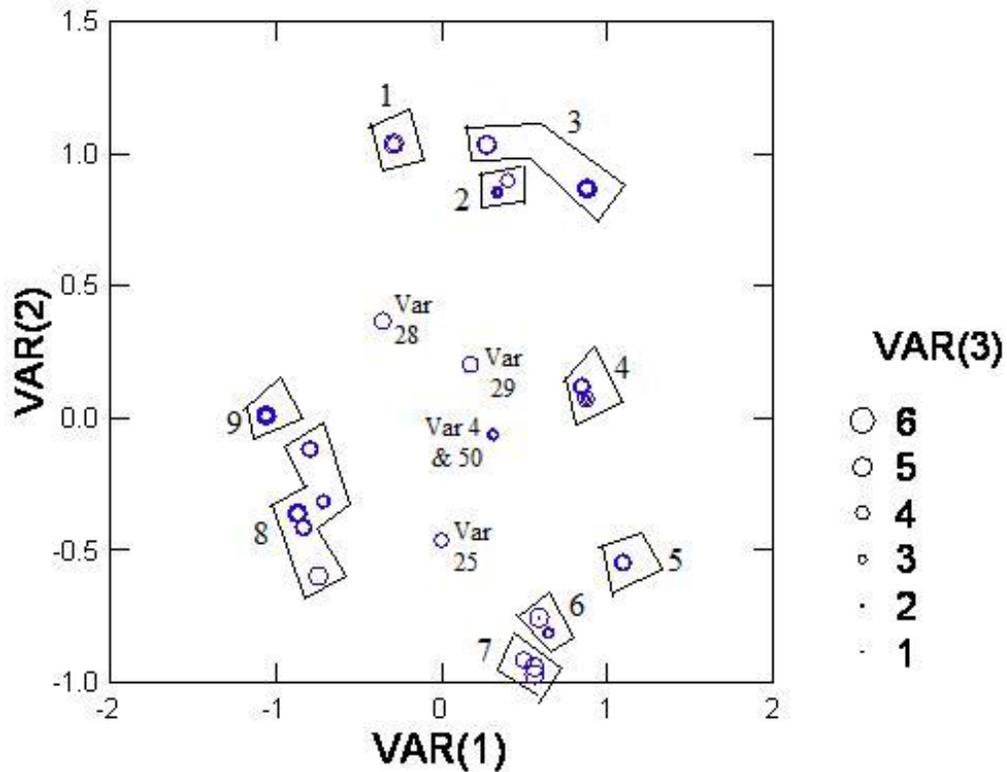*Figure 4.3. Same-sex Partners Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters*

Figure 4.3. The point rating map was created by entering the coordinates from the multi-dimensional scaling analysis into a scatter plot. The participant means for each variable (i.e., statement), which were calculated from participant responses on the rating task, were input as Var(3) to demonstrate how true each statement was to participants. That is, the larger the size of the circles, which are indicators of each statement or group of statements, the truer it was to participants' experience in their relationship with their partner. Conversely, the smaller the size of the circle, the less true that statement (or group of statements) was to participants' experience in their relationship with their partner.

Figure 5.1. Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners Point Map
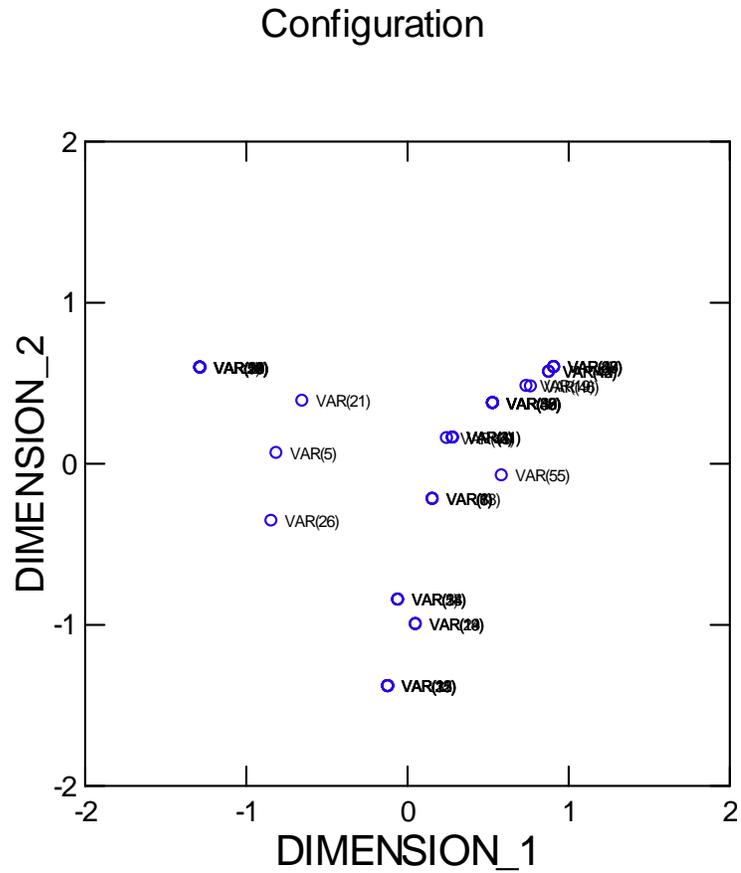
Configuration

Figure 5.1. This point map was created from the statements generated by the participants in the cohabiting heterosexual partners focus group. The participants sorted the statements into piles based on similarity, which were combined to create a group similarity matrix (GSM). This point map resulted from running a multi-dimensional scaling analysis with a two-dimensional solution on the GSM.

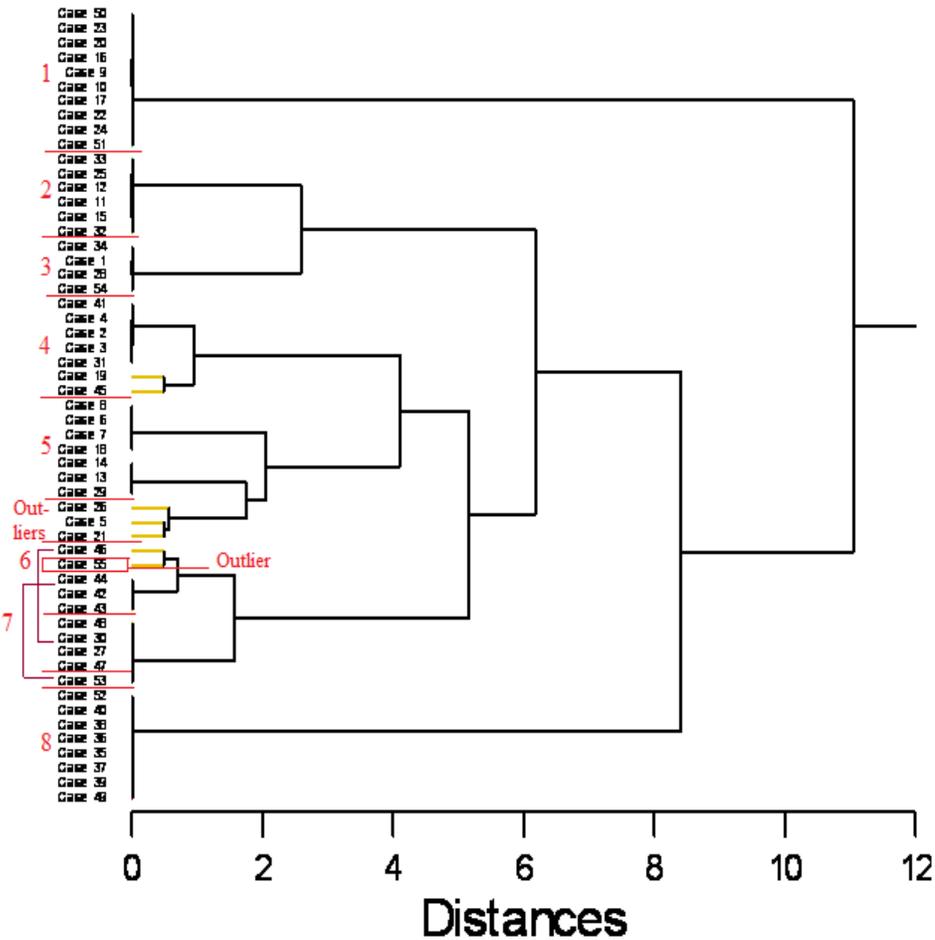*Figure 5.2. Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners Cluster Map*

Figure 5.2. The coordinates from the multi-dimensional scaling analysis on the GSM were used as the input for the agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's minimum variance algorithm to create the cluster map for the cohabiting heterosexual partners focus group.

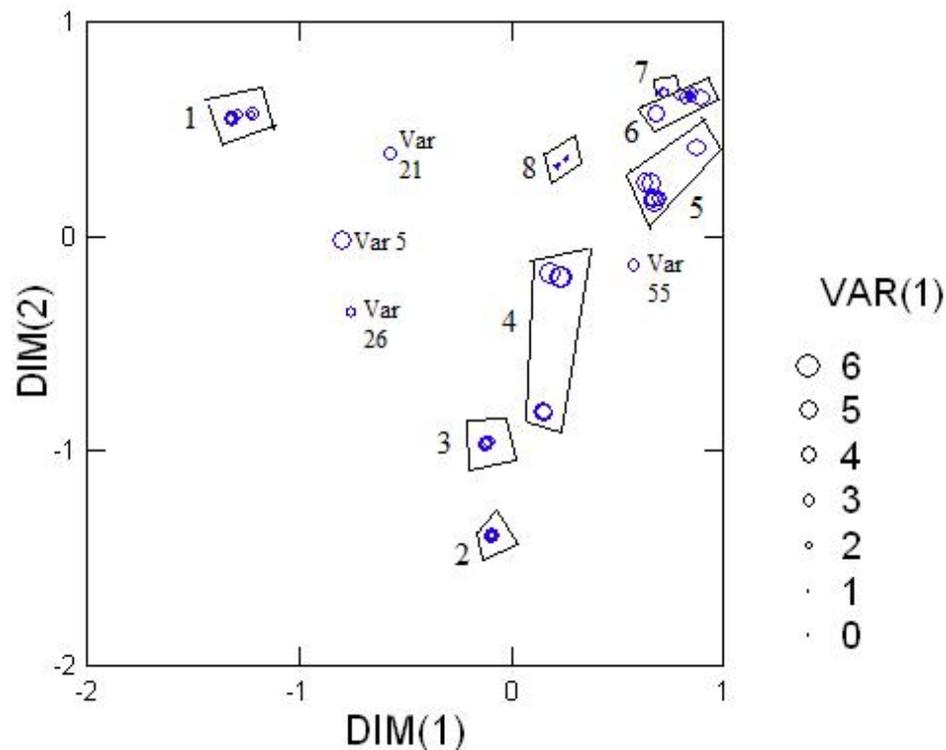*Figure 5.3. Cohabiting Opposite-sex Partners Point Rating Map with Designated Clusters*

Figure 5.3. The point rating map was created by entering the coordinates from the multi-dimensional scaling analysis into a scatter plot. The participant means for each variable (i.e., statement), which were calculated from participant responses on the rating task, were input as Var(1) to demonstrate how true each statement was to participants. That is, the larger the size of the circles, which are indicators of each statement or group of statements, the truer it was to participants' experience in their relationship with their partner. Conversely, the smaller the size of the circle, the less true that statement (or group of statements) was to participants' experience in their relationship with their partner.

PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED ONLINE
SURVEY FOR GENERATION OF STATEMENTS STEP

Table 13. Participants' Responses to Open-Ended Online Survey

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Brainstorming Prompt: In the box below, please fill in the blank of the following prompt with as MANY STATEMENTS AS POSSIBLE based on your personal ideas of moral commitment.   I ought (or feel obligated) to stay in my in my relationship with my partner because _____.

---

we love each other.
it would hurt her if i left.
it would hurt me if i left.

---

my partner contributes to my finances, contributes to my emotional stability,
provides me with comfort and love, and I feel safe at night and don't have to worry about anyone breaking in our home.

I have made a commitment to her. I am devoted because of my belief in working through difficulties. I desire to grow and enjoy the companionship. I don't want to lose her friendship. I hate feeling responsible for ending a relationship.

---

we have put so much time/effort into the relationship.
I am her only family.
We have a child to consider.
We make a good team/complement one another.
We have been through a lot to get to this point.
I can't imagine myself with anyone else.
I wouldn't know how to go about starting to date or having a new relationship.
I am very comfortable with how our relationship works.

-we have built a family together, and I can't imagine how life would be if this unit were divided.

-her biological family has become (and even replaced) mine.
-we are helping each other through school, work, and life together.
-I am a better person with her.
-we share so many things that cannot be easily divided.
-loving, trusting relationships are worthwhile.
-I would feel guilty if she couldn't pay the bills or finish school.
-I don't know if I could take care of the house and the animals on my own.
-I feel lost without her.

I love her. She would be devastated if I left. I can't hurt her. Our daughter.

I have expressed my commitment and accepted her expressions of commitment so there
is an inherent promise.
all relationships have good and bad periods, but you can grow the most through trying to
work through the hard stuff rather than breaking up/moving on.
We depend on each other in so many ways, big and small; life is very hard at times and
we need to see each other through.
Intimate soul connection is rare and extremely valuable, so it's best to avoid cutting it off.
It's like that Beatles song about making sure the love you give is equal to the love you
take.

..we have been together for almost 10 years and it would be horrible to break up.
Telling family and friends would be too hard. Untangling our lives would be too hard.
...we have a solid foundation that we work from and can count on. Even when times are
hard and we fight, we have always come back to that foundation. Every relationship ebbs
and flows and overall we are very happy.
...I am not going to give up on a relationship I have put so much blood, sweat, and tears
into.
...people in our community count on us to be together. We are a rock in the queer
community.

---

we have promised each other to try to work through hard stuff
even in hard times, the benefits outweigh the hardships or at least we have faith that they
will in the future again
we learn a lot from each other, and its better to try to work though hard things
To be honest, if I didn't WANT to and NEED to stay in the relationship for a long period
of time, I wouldn't think it was healthy for either of us to stay in ONLY because we felt
we OUGHT to. There are brief times in our relationship when it may feel for one of us
like we're staying in because we OUGHT to, but its because we know if we just hold on
and work though hard stuff, we will once again WANT and possibly NEED to stay in the

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relationship in the future. So the OUGHT commitment helps us bridge back into the WANT times. Sorry for departing form the prompt.

---

it's what people expect
folks will be rejecting if I don't
it's the "right" thing to do
It's the only thing "I" Know
God will be mad

I have been with him for 22 years (1), and I have grown to love his genuine and authentic nature. We share similar likes and dislikes, e.g., appreciate honesty, kindness, helping those less fortunate, etc.

I am committed to her and to committed relationships. She has been so good to me. I love her. It was love at first sight. She is the best person in the world. I could go on and on.

---

leaving would hurt my partner
leaving would change others' perceptions of me
staying is expected
I have no reason to leave
my partner is loving and loyal
it is the right thing to do
being a long-term couple is an important role model for our circle of friends

---

My entire life is intertwined with my girlfriend.
My mother would be devastated should anything happen.
I'm older and feel no need to date anyone else.
Our finances are shared.
We have a mutual life plan all worked out.
Her friends are my friends and vice versa.
We are both link minded and share the same values.

I love him. We share similiar likes and dislikes. I want to grow old with him. I like having someone dependant on me. I appreciate having someone there I can depend on.

---

we have been together for so long. of our comfort level with each other. we love and care for each other. we want the same things out of life. we both push each other to do better with our lives and as individuals.

---

we each made a personal commitment to our relationship.
I think that most problems in a relationship can be worked out.

---

my partner makes me happy.
my partner compliments me.
I love my partner.
we share a bond.
I would be unhappy without my partner.

---

of the amount of time we have been together.
my partner acts as my family support system (no relation with own family).
partner was my support system during a medical crisis.

I feel obligated to stay in my relationship because we are a team, we have been through a lot together, and I love his family just as he loves mine. However, if for some reason I felt I should end the relationship, this moral commitment I feel would not hinder me from leaving the relationship.

I have committed to the relationship and do not want to go back on my word.
he moved across the country to be with me and would have no where else to go.
we have put so much time and effort into the relationship, quitting would seem like wasted time.
I really love his family and the friends we have made as a couple.
of the financial burden being single would be for me.
my life is stressful enough and I could not handle to emotional stress of dealing with a break-up.

---

we have been together for a long time.
my family would be upset.
I don't want to be alone.
I am too old to find someone else.
I don't know anyone else to be with.
I don't want to be the only single person I know.

I want to have a baby.
I don't want to break a commitment.
we went through a lot to get to where we are now.

We're invested in each other's lives, social networks, families. I also feel responsible for supporting him emotionally (and financially) as we grow older.

She is the love of my life

---

1. I am emotionally attached to my partner, leaving would cause them distress, and in turn I would suffer emotional distress at the thought of ending the relationship; 2. I recognize intellectually that over the years I have benefitted in important and unexpected ways from my partner's efforts, talents and emotional support, so I feel a sense of obligation and would feel some moral guilt if I left and hurt them; (I would see myself as somewhat unfair and ungrateful for the unexpected gifts I've experienced from my partner as a unique individual); 3. I value the sense of comfortable familiarity and companionship the long-term relationship brings into my life, and fear I cannot replace it at my age which would leave my life diminished according to my values; 4. my partner depends on me financially, so I guess I feel obligated to some degree to provide for them, especially as we age and approach retirement and our options to begin over financially are increasingly limited, I feel some moral compunction about the effects on my partner's finances and quality of life were I to leave now; 5. I recognize that I am not perfect, I make demands and bring baggage into the relationship that my partner (so far) accepts and tolerates, so I feel morally obligated to do likewise by learning to tolerate and accept the relationship even though at times it is a disappointment to me--that seems fair and balanced; 6.members of my birth family have come to know my partner and develop relationships with them, and I feel morally obligated to consider the possible impact of a break up on those relationships and individuals.

I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I care for him and I want to spend my time with him. I feel that our time together is valuable and that we both gain knowledge and experiences with each other.

I want to be with him for the rest of my life -- I'd be devastated if we weren't together. I have committed a lot of my life to being his friend (five years -- we've only been dating for 14 months, living together for six of those) and losing him would be so very difficult. I've found the right person for me -- it's not perfect, obviously, but it works exceedingly well.

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We've decided to spend our lives together, which is a promise, and I want to keep it.
We share certain ethical values (liberalism, ecology-mindedness, value for life of all
kinds, and care for the world) which would be difficult if not impossible to find in
another person.
I am committed to finding a life partner, and he is the one I've chosen -- it's almost like
it's a promise to myself.
I am happy with him -- he makes me laugh and smile, which is what I think matters in a
relationship.
We are well matched.
I promised him I would.
He promised me he would.
The future I want with him is as wonderful as I can imagine, and the life we have
together now is part of that future -- it's all bound up. It's like I feel obligated to the future
we will have to stay.
That's all to say that I want to be here. I am obligated by my morality as much as by my
desire (psychologically and emotionally).

I love my partner. I am committed to being with him.

---

giving up on a relationship seems like quitting to me and I might not be able to find
someone new.

---

they are faithful to me
they care about and need me
i would feel guilty leaving my partner

---

we made a commitment to work the relationship out.

I love him and want to spend the rest of my life with him.

---

my "partner" (although we both dislike that term and continue to search for a better one)
provides me with a sense of family and support that I need to feel emotionally healthy
and balanced. I feel better, more stable, more satisfied, when I am working as a team with
him. Making plans and accomplishing our goals together brings me a tremendous sense
of possibility for what we can do together as a team; sharing a number of faults and
complimentary strengths I feel I can take on challenges with him that we may be too
unmotivated, unfocused, or unprepared to accomplish on our own. I do not (and he would

agree) feel that this connotes individual weakness as much as the cultivation of a greater capacity for trust, teamwork, and deep love for humanity.

On more practical terms, it is far easier and more pleasant to live with him than not to live with him. He is by far the most respectful, helpful, easy-going roommate I could imagine and he's a marvelous cook. Having a peaceful home and building a new kind of family is extremely important to both of us and working together to achieve that is immensely rewarding.

I stay in this relationship because it has, since its inception, felt like the best possible thing for me, although the reasons for staying have evolved. While I never imagined myself in a long-term relationship starting at 21 years old, I can now say that I wouldn't want to be without him, that I care far more for him and for our relationship than I ever have before, and that my definition of commitment has gone through numerous revisions and justifications in our 2 years together, leading me to the current working definition that life is hard and infinitely more pleasant as part of a team with him. We find solace from conflict and confusion in one another and that is invaluable for both of us. We also provide each other with a safe and loving challenger, as each encourages the other to do our best and be our best. This helps us as we grow up together, become adults together, as we remind each other to be fun, to laugh, and to never give up, on each other or ourselves.

---

he is a good person.

I really do not feel neither I just stay with him because I do love him with all my heart and would do anything for him

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APPENDIX H

PRELIMINARY POINT RATING MAP WITH DESIGNATED CLUSTERS:
BREAKDOWN BY STATEMENTS

<u>Cluster 1</u>

45. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of how comfortable we are with each other. (4.2)
51. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be the only single person I know. (1.7)
53. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our lives are intertwined. (3.7)
55. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because even in difficult times, the benefits outweigh the hardships. (4.2)
57. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we depend on each other. (4.0)
58. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I like having someone depend on me. (2.2)
60. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the only thing I know. (1.8)

<u>Cluster 2</u>

17. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love his or her family. (2.3)
37. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is a good person. (4.3)
42. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual goals for the future. (4.0)
59. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves me. (4.6)
63. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we find solace in our relationship. (3.7)
70. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she is faithful to me. (3.7)
75. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel like this relationship is the best possible thing for me. (3.7)

<u>Cluster 3</u>

64. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we learn from each other. (4.1)
65. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value the companionship.

(4.4)

66. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel our time together is valuable. (4.4)

67. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I value our intimacy. (4.0)

68. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she would have nowhere else to go. (1.3)

74. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would be unhappy without him or her. (4.1)

Cluster 4

28. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to spend the rest of my life with him or her. (4.6)

29. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we support each other emotionally. (4.5)

38. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she has many good qualities. (4.4)

39. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share similar values. (4.2)

40. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am happy in this relationship. (4.5)

46. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I can't imagine myself with anyone else. (4.0)

47. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow as individuals. (4.0)

48. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we challenge each other to grow in our relationship. (4.0)

56. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner was supportive during a crisis. (3.1)

Cluster 5

1. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I love him or her. (4.4)

5. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am committed to staying in our relationship. (4.3)

16. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of relationship difficulties. (3.3)

20. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've made a commitment to work through the hard stuff together. (3.7)

21. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that most relationship problems can be worked out. (3.9)

22. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I believe that we can work through the hard stuff. (4.3)
25. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I recognize that I am not perfect, and so should be more tolerant and accepting of his or her limitations. (3.3)
27. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we make a good team. (4.5)
49. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to be alone. (2.4)

Cluster 6

4. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we made a commitment to staying in our relationship. (3.4)
10. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we've been through so much together. (3.6)
13. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I want to have a child with him or her. (2.1)
30. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our relationship is a model for others in our social network. (2.7)
41. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel guilty if I left him or her. (2.2)
43. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would seem like wasted time if we ended the relationship now. (2.8)
71. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I would feel ungrateful if I ended the relationship. (1.7)

Cluster 7

6. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have been together for so long. (2.7)
11. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have put so much effort into the relationship. (3.2)
26. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because our finances are shared. (1.8)
44. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship seems like quitting. (2.8)
54. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she made sacrifices to be with me. (2.2)
61. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to feel responsible for ending the relationship. (1.9)
62. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I feel safe at night with him or her there. (2.4)

69. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she provides me with support. (3.9)
72. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because God will be mad if the relationship ended. (1.1)

Cluster 8

7. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because the process of breaking up would be horrible. (2.8)

9. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt him or her. (3.1)
12. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have a child or children to consider. (1.4)
14. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am his or her only family. (1.4)
23. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for me if the relationship ended. (2.1)
24. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it would be a financial burden for him or her if the relationship ended. (1.5)
73. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we share a bond. (3.9)

Cluster 9

2. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because family members would be upset. (1.9)
3. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is what people expect. (2.0)
15. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because my partner is my only family. (1.3)
19. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because we have mutual friends. (2.6)
32. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I am older. (1.6)
35. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because other might reject me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)

Cluster 10

8. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because ending the relationship would hurt me. (3.2)
18. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because he or she loves my family. (2.3)
31. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I may not be able to find another partner. (1.7)

33. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I don't want to start a new relationship. (2.4)
34. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because of others' perceptions of me if we ended the relationship. (1.7)
36. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because it is the right thing to do. (2.6)
50. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because being in this relationship is better than not being in it. (2.8)
52. I ought to stay in my relationship with my partner because I have no reason to leave. (3.7)