

Fighting for a Cause: How Conflict Can Produce Interdependence

By

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Abstract

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) illustrates the impact of partners' behaviors as relational outcomes are dependent on such behavior. This thesis project aimed to contribute to interdependence theory by considering the influence conflict could have on its development in romantic relationships. Using a longitudinal design, the goal was to examine the change of interdependence factors (i.e., commitment, satisfaction, CL_{alt}, power mutuality) by specific conflict variables like intensity and management responses (i.e., exit-voice-loyalty-neglect model). Time 1 ($N = 135$) indicated that satisfaction and the CL_{alt} are significant predictors of commitment, which supports past research (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Time 2 ($N = 52$) analyses demonstrated that exit behaviors and conflict intensity can produce significant changes in interdependence factors. Significant findings offer further implications for how the transformation of motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) can influence interdependence in established romantic relationships. Null findings offer interesting areas of future work on conflict in romantic relationships and theoretical development for interdependence theory.

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Dedications

Dedicated to all the couples and people who have inspired my perspective of conflict, love, and relationships.

Dedicated to all the women of color who challenge what it means to be a woman and what it means to be person of color. Your courage inspires hope.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Change is constant. It is a critical constant which affects multiple aspects of interpersonal relationships. Change is how relationships process through development and termination and all the moments in between. With change comes movement, and in some perspectives, movement creates conflict (Alinksy, 1971). Certain conflicts call for more attention from partners than others, like those which partners perceived had a greater effect on their relationship. These substantial conflicts can be moments that place the relationship in jeopardy and its persistence in question. These are the conflicts that go beyond annoyance or frustration, and instead create the mindset for partners to consider seriously the continuation of the relationship. For some, the process of conflict management leads to a decision of termination, while for others, the relationship sustains and continues by the effort of both partners. Within the management process comes an opportunity for substantial change guiding partners to sustain their relationship. Those who can sustain their relationships place a particularly high value with their partner and relationship (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002). Perhaps these partners discover more than high value. A critical goal of this thesis is to argue that these partners may not only acknowledge the value of their partner and/or their relationship but also recognize an opportunity to become interdependent.

A concept which influences both functional and dysfunctional relationships is interdependence. Interdependence can be understood as two people in a relationship being dependent on the actions of their partners for outcomes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Over the last 70 years, the concept of interdependence has expanded from its original ties with the social exchange theories to its role within interpersonal communication. Interdependence theory examines rewards and costs of social exchanges from a narrower perspective, specifically

focusing on factors like dependence, satisfaction, commitment, and power (Carpenter, 2016; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Regarding ongoing relationships, studies using interdependence theory have determined that commitment is indicative of relationship persistence due to the partners' desire to sustain the relationship (Carpenter, 2016; Drigotas et al., 1999). There has also been research to demonstrate that levels of satisfaction and dependence contribute to the presence of interdependence (Rusbult & Buunk, 1983).

Kelley and Thibaut (1978) elaborated on satisfaction and dependence levels in terms of the comparison level and the comparison level of alternatives, respectively. The comparison level (CL) represents the outcomes an individual believes they ought to receive from a relationship. Whereas the comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}) is what an individual perceives the potential outcomes of other possible relationships to be. The present investigation will explore how attributes of a dyad like the CL, the CL_{alt} , power mutuality, and commitment can change from conflict and what these changes signal about the future of a relationship. These critical attributes of commitment, stability, and power will be further elaborated.

In a meta-analysis of the investment model, which is theoretically grounded within interdependence theory, Le and Agnew (2003) determined that the model and its components including satisfaction, investments, quality of alternatives, and commitment were robust predictors of relationship termination. However, a substantial portion of variance in commitment was unaccounted for. More so, stay-leave behavior in romantic relationships could not completely be explained by commitment, suggesting that perhaps the continuation of a relationship could also be explained by other factors. Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) indicated in their review of interdependence theory that its perspective offers a thorough insight for

analyzing, predicting, and explaining interaction and relationships. By taking a directed approach from interdependence theory, a contribution to relationship sustainability can be offered with this current investigation. There is a strong indication that using interdependence theory can provide reasoning for what change can do to relationships when considering factors like the CL, the CL_{alt}, power mutuality, in addition to commitment and more specifically how conflict can also affect these factors.

This project will be focused on contributing to the research of interdependence theory by determining the potential change in interdependence from a conflict management process. Effectively navigating conflicts in a relationship can be significant to the interdependence of a relationship in forms like the CL, the CL_{alt}, commitment, and certain aspects of power like mutuality. The present investigation will explore conflicts characterized as being specifically intense and major compared to other conflicts. Being with a partner whom you know you can have healthy and constructive conflict with can have substantial implications for the value of the relationship and the partner (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Siegert & Stamp, 1994). As the value or outcomes of the relationship and partner increase, so can interdependence, and with such increases, the relationship can be reformulated with a level of endurance that indicates sustainability.

Chapter 2: Interdependence Theory

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) first brought light to interdependence, and their work was later integrated with other similar perspectives in the development of the social exchange theories. Social exchange theories refer to the rewards and costs considered when individuals make decisions and take actions in their interpersonal interactions (Stafford, 2015). After two decades of continuous exploration into the phenomena of interdependence, Kelley and Thibaut (1978) officially formed interdependence theory. Therein, interdependence is explored as patterns of interdependence demonstrated by a model of 2×2 outcome matrices. The interdependence outcome matrix of a couple demonstrates the control each partner has over another's outcomes throughout their interaction. Within these matrices are the intersections of partners *A* & *B*'s behaviors and the outcomes one partner can potentially attain because of the behavior of the other partner.

Kelley and Thibaut (1978) elaborate how dependence corresponds to power in an interdependent relationship: "A basic fact of interdependence is that one person's dependence provides a basis for the other's power" (p. 102). For dependent relationships where partner *A* exhibits more dependence on partner *B*, then *B* has power over *A*, and conversely for relationships of interdependence where there is mutual dependence there is also mutual power. How frequently and to what extent *B* may exercise their control over *A* is determined by their reflexive control; an evaluation of their actions as those actions affect their outcomes. Power is a factor that has been associated with the research of interdependence and the degree of its impact on a relationship has varied from an interdependence lens (Carpenter, 2016; Drigotas et al., 1993).

Kelley and Thibaut (1978) describe another two key concepts of interdependence theory by the ways in which individuals evaluate the outcomes of their relationships; the comparison level (CL) and the comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}). The CL is the standard for evaluating how satisfactory a relationship is by comparing outcomes of a relationship to the outcomes the individual believes they deserve. Whereas the CL_{alt} is the lowest level of outcomes an individual will accept based on the available alternatives present in other possible relationships. These factors are also pertinent to an individual's perception of their relationship and its future. Since the interdependence of a relationship is defined as each partner's outcomes being dependent on their partner's efforts (Stafford, 2015), when circumstances change, it is possible for the CL or the CL_{alt} to shift to a negative status relative to outcomes and place the relationship in jeopardy. This project will utilize these primary interdependence factors of the CL and the CL_{alt} with the contemporary constructs power mutuality and commitment, and will follow a similar structure used by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) for the investment model (see Figure 1).

Roloff (1981) discusses major attributes of the social exchange theories and in his review of interdependence theory he examines the decision-making consequences, associating such a process with interdependence. He suggests that decision-making is determined by need fulfillment, so behavior should reflect the outcomes with maximized rewards. Roloff (1981) then conceptualizes interdependence to be where partners can provide mutual resources to fulfill each other's needs, which produce relational outcomes. With the CL and CL_{alt}, Roloff (1981) demonstrates how these two factors and outcomes influence the satisfaction and stability of a relationship.

There are six possibilities provided to illustrate how the CL, CL_{alt}, and outcomes are seen in different types of relationships. Whenever outcomes surpass the CL and the CL_{alt}, the

relationship will be both satisfactory and stable. When the CL is greater than outcomes, the relationship is not satisfactory and when the CL_{alt} is more than the outcomes, then the relationship is unstable. In situations where the outcomes are still above the CL_{alt} but below the CL, the relationship can be stable just not satisfying. Similarly, if the CL is less than outcomes but the CL_{alt} is above outcomes, the relationship may be satisfying but unstable. If both the CL and CL_{alt} are greater than outcomes, the relationship is both unsatisfying and unstable. From these depictions, interdependence not only affects satisfaction but also decisions to remain, demonstrating an influence on the potential for the relationship to persist (Rolloff, 1981).

In interdependent relationships, because partners are somewhat dependent on each other for need fulfillment, there also comes the concern of influence or power the individual can have over their partner (Rolloff, 1981). This concern is not dissimilar from the notion of reflexive control that Kelley and Thibaut (1978) discuss. Rolloff (1981) indicates people will create power strategies to grapple with power inequities or unilateral power, which can also be like unilateral dependence as explained in Kelley and Thibaut (1978). These power strategies are basically how individuals attempt to reduce their dependence on their partner for need fulfillment by seeking alternatives or by improving their own capabilities for self-fulfillment of needs (Rolloff, 1981). To enact such power strategies, individuals may vary their CL_{alt} as well as alter the CL of the relationship to reflect a change in their current outcomes. Such implications of the change that the CL and the CL_{alt} encounter is paramount to this thesis. With these variations, an individual determines the amount of power they wish to place in their partner's hands. As these are perception based, they are also subject to change should and when conditions of the relationship fluctuate. The extent to which they are dependent on their partner for need fulfillment reflects the extent to which their partner has power over them, again summarizing what Kelley and Thibaut

(1978) have indicated. This current investigation will also consider how power mutuality may contribute to interdependence building relative to conflict management. A conceptualization of power developed by Drigotas et al. (1999) provides an interesting perspective on power in interdependent relationships worthy of examination in relation to this thesis.

To understand commitment in close relationships, Rusbult and Buunk (1993) used interdependence theory to explain how some relationships can persevere through difficult times while others fail. Using the four elements of the interdependence matrix (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), they suggested that interdependence exists by partners influencing each other's experiences and then needing each other for valued outcomes in the relationships through instrumental support, affection, sexual fulfillment, and emotional closeness (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). They conceptualize the satisfaction level to be tied to the CL as the degree of favorably evaluating all positive and negative feelings with the relationship and believing that their partner does fulfill their important needs. The dependence level can be associated with the CL_{alt} as the degree to which the individual views their relationship and partner as the primary source for good outcomes and fulfillment of important needs.

From these conceptualizations, Rusbult and Buunk (1993) also establish the transformation of motivation; a process where individuals decide against choices of self-interest for acting on behavior that attributes to larger interaction goals. For example, *A* may want to go on a hike rather than see a movie, but will choose to go see a movie because that is what *B* wants. Or *B* becoming excited for *A*'s achievements, despite not having a direct connection with the matter. With the transformation of motivation, partners are deferring their own outcomes without expectation of immediate self-benefits to demonstrate that when their partner is satisfied, they too are satisfied, which Rusbult and Buunk (1993) argue is influential to commitment.

Rusbult and Buunk (1993) determined an association between commitment and dependence as this connection is what leads couples to engage in pro-relationship behaviors despite such behaviors being contrary to those of self-interest. They proposed that, “[Subjective] commitment is what summarizes the nature of dependence in a given relationship” on the basis that the desire to maintain a healthy relationship encourages pro-relationship behavior (p. 190). With this association also comes the consideration that early pro-relationship behaviors will generate later benefits, an individual’s feelings are reflected by diminishing self-interested behaviors, and that feelings of commitment can have significant effects on relational behavior (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). All these are suggested to contribute to commitment, interdependence, and ultimate persistence in a relationship. The study concluded that interdependence theory provides a constructive base for comprehending the maintenance of close relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Drigotas et al. (1999) offered a noteworthy contribution to interdependence theory with proposing established commitment as a more viable understanding of interdependence than dependence alone. Drigotas et al. (1999) suggest that commitment, mutuality of commitment, and power are what encapsulate the interdependence of a relationship and the couple’s well-being. Commitment is conceptualized as the allegiance tied to the source of one’s dependence or their partner, and mutuality of commitment as the degree that partners are similarly committed to the relationship. Regarding power, Drigotas et al. (1999) make an assertion that one’s power exists to the extent that one’s partner has the same power over them; *A* cannot exercise power if *A* needs *B* just as *B* needs *A* -- thus illustrating interdependence. Drigotas et al. (1999) differentiate commitment from dependence by explaining that dependence is a need for the relationship whereas commitment is a subjective state derived from dependence and is then

experienced in daily life. Commitment is an emergent property of dependence which individuals can recognize readily. By contrast individuals may not be aware of their dependence. This serves as a crucial piece of their argument in that commitment can serve as tangible proof for people to recognize the direct consequences of dependence, and as this current investigation will argue, interdependence.

Like Rusbult and Buunk (1993), Drigotas et al. (1999) argue that commitment level will be associated with pro-relationship maintenance acts. The study predicted that the association of mutuality of commitment would be positive to couple well-being with factors like mutuality of power, trust development, and emotional experiences. Further findings of the study included that both dating and marital couples' level of commitment and mutuality of commitment associated with healthy functioning relationships. Drigotas et al. (1999) suggest partners be fully dependent and committed to each other, but it is vital to be equal in commitment and dependence to avoid exploitation of either partners' vulnerability. Additionally, mutuality of power was found to be positively associated with mutuality of commitment, negative affect or emotional experiences were negatively associated with mutuality of commitment, and trust development was positively associated with mutuality of commitment (Drigotas et al., 1999).

As the research of interdependence theory has continued, there have been studies to examine dyadic situations that can have stabilizing effects on a relationship. Sidelinger, Frisby, and McMullen (2009) have used interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) for research on forgiveness and how individuals come to make decisions to forgive. In the frame of social exchange and interdependence, forgiveness is a means to reestablish equity and seen as a cancellation of debt attributed to the relationship because of a transgression. Sidelinger et al. (2009) conceptualize the interaction of forgiveness as assessing of the outcomes and inputs as

well as the extent to which the structure of situations may impact individuals and their choices. Briefly, the decision to forgive is further illustrated in terms of the outcomes and the CL with the decision to forgive being the possible outcome. Should the outcome of forgiving be more than the CL then the individual is likely to be satisfied with their relationship, however, should the outcome be below the CL then the individual may become dissatisfied with their relationship (Sidelinger et al., 2009). Sidelinger et al. (2009) indicate that the decision to forgive in less committed relationships demonstrates an outcome that falls below the CL. This study demonstrated an example of how partners may evaluate certain decisions in the social exchange terms of interdependence theory.

There has been recent work using the expanded version of interdependence theory produced by Drigotas et al. (1999) to explore power in romantic relationships. Carpenter (2016) examined interdependence by the terms of commitment and power as conceptualized by Drigotas et al. (1999). Additionally, Carpenter (2016) suggested a deeper analysis by conceptualizing power with self-perceived power (SPP) as the degree to which one partner feels they generally and consistently have more influence over their partner's behavior as opposed to vice versa. There are two key words to this conceptualization; general and consistently. General is key to the understanding of SPP because power can be difficult to measure in specific domains. Consistently is the other because the influence of SPP must be a constant aspect of the relationship and not likely to change in the immediate future (Carpenter, 2016). Like Drigotas et al. (1999), Carpenter (2016) establishes relative commitment to be a precursor to SPP in that higher commitment translates to less power and lower commitment leads to more power. The study proposed that interdependence would exist in romantic relationships when relative commitment was associated with SPP following the conceptualizations from Drigotas et al.

(1999). Findings concluded that interdependence theory aptly demonstrated SPP, decision making, and dominant behavior with relative commitment to a relationship.

Carpenter (2016) offers an alternative perspective to considering power with commitment. The conceptualized power of this study, SPP, was grounded in aspects of Drigotas et al. (1999) where it was power mutuality that was associated with commitment. Power mutuality and SPP, while distinct in their approaches, both offer valid perspectives to understand how power plays a role with commitment in romantic relationships. This current investigation is focused on determining how power mutuality is associated with commitment. Past research suggests that power not only has implications for commitment, but a mutual or stabilizing approach to power can also signal vital information regarding interdependence in a romantic relationship (Carpenter, 2016; Drigotas et al., 1999; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

From the research on interdependence theory, there is an implicit association between interdependence and relationship persistence. In the way that Rusbult and Buunk (1993) examined how relationships can survive difficult times, this present study aims to understand interdependence in relationships after difficult periods like conflict. Commitment is associated with interdependence (Carpenter, 2016; Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and research has found it to serve as an indicator of interdependence, so will commitment be the illuminating factor of higher interdependence in relationships that have successfully managed conflict? Other elements of interdependence theory like the CL, the CL_{alt} and power may also be significant identifiers of conflicts' effect on interdependence as well. As mentioned earlier, while commitment is a prevalent indicator of relationship persistence, there is also room for other plausible arguments (Le & Agnew, 2003). In recent reviews of interdependence theory and its most notable constructs, there has been little attention given to how conflict specifically can

affect interdependence or how change from conflict could impact relationship sustainability from an interdependent lens (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) report while interdependence theory is robust in predicting and explaining relationships, it is open to advancements. The following section will discuss how interdependence is associated with conflict.

Chapter 3: Interdependence and Conflict

This thesis argues for the significance of conflict in understanding interdependence in romantic relationships. The concepts of conflict and interdependence also share an underlying association with change in perceptions of the relationship. As discussed previously, the transformation of motivation was developed to demonstrate the change individuals experience in their thought processes (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). As a relationship changes and grows closer to being interdependent, individuals begin to make decisions with the consideration of the partner's outcomes and the well-being of the relationship itself (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Whitton et al., 2002). Another factor to consider which Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggest is that the transformation of motivation provides a moment of recognition for the individual to acknowledge how valuable the partner is. As the interdependence develops to an established level, it is possible to have the value of the partner and or the relationship also increase, and a conflict experience may be the catalyzing moment in a relationship for this process to occur. Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) indicate that a certain willingness to sacrifice or a departure from immediate self-interests in place of interests of the partner must be accounted for in interdependent relationships. Whitton et al. (2002) elaborate on how critical moments of sacrifice, like those typical in conflict management, affect interdependence as it allows partners to begin to form an evolving perspective of their relationship. The relationship between interdependence theory and change is more often presumed but research has not yet given a full account of this phenomenon (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

Conflict has a certain paradoxical relationship with change as Marcus (2000) elaborates; change stimulates conflict and conflict stimulates change as well. There are multiple viewpoints to observe the influence of change or that of conflict. However, both seem to intersect for this

present investigation of developing interdependence in romantic relationships. Although it may or may not seem this way, change is not bound to the result of a singular conflict process; meaning, change is possible from either a constructive or destructive conflict processes (Marcus, 2000). However, certain factors might be more common with a constructive or destructive conflict management process. Marcus (2000) describes the idea of restraining forces and driving forces; forces fighting against change and forces fighting for change, respectively. Tensions emerge when the restraining forces are stronger than the driving forces thus establishing grounds for conflict (Marcus, 2000). How the partners choose to engage this tension can have consequences for developing an interdependent relationship. Loveless, Powers, and Jordan (2008) found that for the couples who did not engage in a productive conflict management process, termination was more likely. Perhaps, for these partners, a stabilizing change in commitment did not seem feasible thus preventing any progress towards interdependence.

As Roloff (1981) demonstrated in his examples, maintaining stability in a relationship is crucial to interdependence. Drigotas et al. (1999) and Rusbult and Buunk (1993) also discuss the association stability and interdependence may share with the balancing or mutuality of commitment and dependence. To some extent, a certain level of stability must either be attained or returned to the relationship for interdependence to succeed. Change that emerges from conflict can disrupt the stability of a relationship which was already built or in the process of building. For this reason, it is the more severe conflicts that pose a challenge to interdependence. DiPaola, Roloff, and Peters (2010) examined how college students grapple with the stability of their romantic relationships relative to the intensity of a conflict. Individuals were at risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy when they anticipated a conflict to be of high intensity, and even more so when they initiated the conflict themselves.

DiPaola et al. (2010) also took into consideration the factor of impulse control and how during conflict when individuals use their impulse control, they are resisting the urge to respond with “knee-jerk” or immediately gratifying reactions and more likely to participate in constructive conflict management. Individuals enacted their impulse control when a desire to sustain the relationship outweighed those immediate reactions (DiPaola et al., 2010). Drigotas et al. (1999) discussed that as means to achieving an interdependent relationship, there should be a willingness to sacrifice actions desirable to the self when those of the partner are not parallel. For example, even though *A* is yelling and escalating the intensity of the conflict, *B* will have to decide between implementing impulse control or indulging in an immediately gratifying reaction of returning fire. Granted this decision may be hard to make in an escalated conflict where tensions are building, this decision can be revisited during a management situation. Whitton et al. (2002) suggest that when partners choose to take a constructive route and identify the decision to benefit the partner and the relationship’s future, there is progress towards healthy functioning and progress towards interdependence.

Using impulse control during conflict management resembles promoting driving forces for change and these concepts connect to actions which can build interdependence. This use of impulse control and decisions to act against perhaps selfish behaviors can be interpreted from what Rusbult and Buunk (1993) and Kelley and Thibaut (1978) proposed as the transformation of motivation. As mentioned earlier, a change in the partners’ thought processes occur and this change of gears may become especially noticeable during conflict and conflict management experiences. High intensity conflicts which suggest strong change for the partners are what perhaps offer the most fruitful opportunities to become interdependent. Whitton et al. (2002) suggests that for an interdependent relationship, making decisions for the good of the

relationship is not difficult; “[Since] the couple’s outcome is so important to the individual, giving personally for the good of the relationship or partner is, in effect, serving to benefit what that individual values” (p. 174). At its core, this is what an interdependent relationship is.

After the initial transgression, a management process follows, and conflict management can be approached from various angles which could then also produce various results. Krauss and Morsella (2000) address the importance of the communication used within these management situations. A critical takeaway from their work is for partners to consider their genuine desire to address the issues of the conflict as that alone can determine partial outcomes. They further elaborate by stating some conflicts can be managed with communication. However, there are also conflicts where no level of communication could assist with management, which is a legitimate difference that can be crucial to partners’ understanding their conflicts (Krauss & Morsella, 2000). Partners may encounter this when one is willing to manage the conflict and sustain the relationship, but the other partner finds no interest in continuing. From an interdependent perspective, this can be interpreted as the CL or the CL_{alt} becoming greater than the relational outcomes thus providing no reason to advance the relationship towards interdependence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

A specific perspective on conflict management that can offer significant insight for this current argument is the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect (EVLN) model proposed by Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982). From their research, four preliminary behavior patterns in conflict emerge as responses between partners; exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect behaviors. Rusbult et al. (1982) additionally distinguish these behaviors by two dimensions and those being a valence dimension, constructive or destructive, and activity, active or passive. Further research indicated that these four behaviors are properly delineated within these dimensions by the patterns of the

behaviors associated with the responses (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983). Exit behaviors include those that are actively destructive to the future of the relationship; voice behaviors are active constructive attempts to improve conditions of the relationship; loyalty behaviors are passively constructive reactions where individuals wait for change; and neglect behaviors are those passive destructive responses which allow the relationship to deteriorate (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

Rusbult et al. (1994) recommended that partners retain constructive tactics even or especially during dissatisfying incidents. The responses demonstrated by the EVLN model offer key insight into the management of conflicts as these behaviors suggest an influence on the relationship. Research has demonstrated that voice behaviors tend to produce the most positive outcomes indicating that these specific behaviors promote satisfaction and sustainability (Overall, Sibley, & Travaglia, 2010). An implication can be drawn from the association between relationship sustainability and the conflict management processes. As sustainability tends to be associated with a relationship's interdependence (Roloff, 1981; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Whitton et al., 2002), this model could have strong implications for interdependence fortified by conflict. Specifically, for this current investigation, how partners engage in these conflict responses could have significant implications for developing an interdependent relationship.

Interdependence in its budding stages can be influenced by conflict as it demonstrates a consequential moment of change. For emergent romantic relationships, conflict may appear to be a wall or a breaking point, but conflict can also be the opportunity to establish interdependence. Following a management process which implements factors like those previously mentioned that encourage productive and constructive ideals can produce a strong chance for interdependence (DiPaola et al., 2010; Drigotas et al., 1999; Krauss & Morsella, 2000; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993;

Whitton et al., 2002). The change that conflict can offer is what this present investigation aims to examine by specifically locating a conflict experience and critical factors that can contribute to forming an interdependent relationship.

The First-Big-Fight (FBF). Conflict can be consequential to developing interdependence, and a narrowed focus for this present investigation will be on critical conflicts reflecting major importance to a romantic relationship. When couples first begin, conflict is typically not present and is infrequent (Loveless et al., 2008). However, as relationships progress there comes a critical point for growth known as the “first-big-fight” (FBF). Initial research on the FBF conceptualized it as an event in the relationship that can heavily impact it by either empowering the relational bond for continuance or leading the relationship towards termination (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). Research has continued to demonstrate the FBF as an integral piece of a relationships’ development and a turning point for the relationships’ trajectory (Loveless et al., 2008; Metts, Cupach, & Asbury, 2008). Previous research on the FBF has been from the lens of turning point theory and the relational turbulence model (Metts et al., 2008; Siegert & Stamp, 1994) where it is considered a critical juncture for couples to determine or reaffirm a sense of commitment.

Siegert and Stamp (1994) first considered FBF research to illustrate the event as a milestone to the relationship trajectory. Couples and individuals were separated into groups labeled as survivors, non-survivors, and not-yets to reference how the FBF affected their relationship. The primary focus of analysis were the survivor and non-survivor groups (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). The survivor group were the couples or individuals who had already experienced the FBF in their relationship and encountered positive consequences as the relationship was sustained. The non-survivor group were the couples or individuals who also had experienced the

FBF, but the relationship was terminated with the FBF as a likely cause (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). This research establishes that the FBF can heavily influence a relationships' sustainability, providing an implication of the significant impact major conflicts can have on forming interdependent relationships.

Further research on the FBF has also focused on its influence in a romantic relationship. Loveless et al. (2008) considered how the FBF could affect dating partner communication apprehension (DPCA) and self-disclosive patterns. With the use of retrospective data, DPCA and self-disclosive patterns were measured before and after the FBF to determine what change the FBF could bring to those relational factors (Loveless et al., 2008). Loveless et al. (2008) also used the classifications of survivors and non-survivors to compare how the different groups reported changes to DPCA and self-disclosive patterns. Interdependence may fail to formulate in relationships struggling with DPCA due to the uncertainty it may cause. The mutuality of commitment, which Drigotas et al. (1999) stated to be crucial for interdependence, may not be achieved or lost if partners are unsure of where each other stands or too apprehensive to engage in a dialogue towards conflict management.

Metts et al. (2008) used the FBF as a frame to measure change of emotions regarding the relationship before and after conflict. Along with specific emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, guilt), Relationship Romantic Beliefs were also examined for any change. These beliefs included Love Finds a Way, One and Only, Love at First Sight, and Idealization and the study aimed to identify how these emotions and beliefs could be altered due to the FBF (Metts et al., 2008). A negative change in these beliefs caused by the FBF could negatively impact the potential for interdependence. As mentioned previously, Drigotas et al. (1999) connect power mutuality with commitment therefore it could be suggested that the changes in Relationship Romantic Beliefs

can impact the sustainability of a relationship because of damaged interdependence. From the perspective of this thesis, critical aspects of interdependence like power mutuality, the CL, and the CL_{alt} could face significant consequences when a major conflict like the FBF is not approached from a constructive position.

Although this present investigation will not be explicitly focused on the causes of the FBF, it is relevant to mention the previously discussed transformation of motivation (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Again, this refers to the process of individuals deferring immediate self-interests for those which also benefit their partner suggesting what makes their partner satisfied will also provide individual satisfaction. However, the refusal to make this adjustment could create the tension of a conflict. This thesis will consider how concepts of the transformation of motivation may also affect the conflict management process by considering how partners decide to neglect a self-interested choice for a more pro-relationship route to sustain the relationship after a major conflict (Drigotas et al., 1999; Whitton et al., 2002). Such decisions could signal partners realizing the importance of managing the conflict as pertinent to sustaining the relationship, possibly due to a desire to create interdependence.

Given that the FBF can yield crucial consequences for a relationship, examination from the perspective of interdependence theory on critical conflicts like the FBF can offer fruitful insight to the effect of conflict on a relationship. An interdependent relationship could be marked by a level of commitment but also by the balance of power relevant to commitment, how alternative options compare to the current relationship, and the extent to which partners feel the relationship is meeting or surpassing a standard of satisfaction. Relational aspects like those could be crucially affected by a major conflict like the FBF, by the manner or process it is carried out in as well as the implications about the relationship it can produce. The conflict

process of severe or intense conflicts is worth observation as the FBF research suggests that major conflicts can be a benchmark for the way couples address future conflict if the relationship is sustained (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). Not only would this conflict serve as a reference for future conflict management, but it may also serve as the initial step towards becoming an interdependent relationship. Partners may use this experience to determine if this relationship is worth a change in critical thought processes (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), worth establishing a mutuality of commitment and power (Drigotas et al., 1999), and if the value of this relationship is worth the work of becoming interdependent. To probe the intricate dynamic between interdependence and conflict by discussing foundational concepts to interdependence.

The Comparison Level (CL) & The Comparison Level of Alternatives (CL_{alt}).

When interdependence theory was initially conceptualized, two critical constructs were the CL and CL_{alt}, as previously mentioned. The CL is the standard individuals hold as their expected outcomes from a relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981). Kelley and Thibaut (1978) continue their explanation of the CL as relative to how satisfying an individual finds their relationship. Similarly, in Roloff's (1981) review, he considers the association between the CL and outcomes of the relationship pertinent to the satisfaction of the relationship. The investment model proposed by Rusbult et al. (1998) was developed from key aspects of interdependence theory, including the CL and CL_{alt}. The satisfaction level is considered a function of the CL in a similar fashion to how Roloff (1981) depicted his scenarios; as outcomes progress higher than the CL, the person is satisfied with their relationship whereas when the outcomes cannot meet the CL the person is subsequently dissatisfied (Le & Agnew, 2003).

In a meta-analysis of the investment model research, Le and Agnew (2003) concluded that across research, internal factors like satisfaction are predictive of commitment and

maintaining the relationship, reaffirming that satisfaction is influential to relational outcomes. As the CL is an antecedent for satisfaction, it is likely to associate the CL to moments of greater dissatisfaction like conflict. Metts et al. (2008) indicated in their study that the Romantic Belief of Love at First Sight was associated with negative emotions after the FBF. They suggested that some people perhaps entered a relationship too soon or too naively, leaving them vulnerable to disappointment when the relationship did not sustain. In those circumstances, there could have been an alarming gap between the outcomes and the CL, like the depictions proposed by Roloff (1981), and an unsatisfying relationship could not produce a productive conflict management.

As Kelley and Thibaut (1978) and Roloff (1981) have explained, the CL_{alt} demonstrates how low an individual will set the bar of relational rewards from the available options outside their relationship. Roloff (1981) further explains the CL_{alt} to be a source of stability for the relationship. The more likely partners are to stay in their relationship and effectively deny alternatives by setting their lowest standards at a higher point, the more stable and valued their relationship will be. In the frame of significant conflicts, the subsequent effects would need to be considered to indicate an impact on the CL_{alt} . Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that survivors of the FBF had a renewed sense of success for the relationship as well as a greater level of understanding with their partner. The value of the relationship and partner increased from the FBF because it demonstrated that both partners are capable of constructive conflict. This would mean that alternative options would need to be able to provide a relational reward of healthy conflict which could increase the lowest level of acceptable relational rewards.

Flora and Segrin (2000) explored behaviors and events that could provide insight to relational development. There was specific focus on the appraisals of the development and how such appraisals could influence levels of relational satisfaction. One of the measurements Flora

and Segrin (2000) used for critical moments of development was the Oral History Interview (OHI), specifically the coding manual from Buehlman and Gottman (1996). Within this measurement is a dimension known as “glorifying the struggle” to which couples reflect on the difficult times they have experienced and consider those as having brought them closer together (Buehlman & Gottman, 1996; Flora & Segrin, 2000). If partners consider a conflict, specifically a substantial conflict, as a defining moment of positive development, this could signify the potential for interdependence to become established.

Another dimension of this measure labeled relational disappointment/disillusionment signifies how couples begin to feel defeated by the relationship and have a higher tendency to stop maintenance (Buehlman & Gottman, 1996; Flora & Segrin, 2000). If partners resonate with these perceptions, specifically as a result or precursor to a critical conflict, an individual’s CL could plummet leaving the relationship in a precarious state. Roloff (1981) suggested that the CL is also a reflection of the level of rewards from past relationships and an experience of disillusionment could occur by current relationships not being able to reach those previously established standards. Conversely, if previous relational rewards have set the CL to a standard which the current relationship can surpass, and with the effects of the conflict accounted for, the relationship could signify higher likelihood of interdependence development.

How couples appraise major developmental moments, chiefly the FBF and conflicts resembling it, could be a crucial distinction amongst survivors and non-survivors of those critical conflicts (Flora & Segrin, 2000; Siegert & Stamp, 1994). This appraisal perspective from Flora and Segrin (2000) is comparable to a CL_{alt} impact as couples begin to evaluate their relationship to available options. Partners may continue taking steps towards interdependence when they raise the CL_{alt} by appraising a great struggle they have endured together as positive. Partners may

also perceive their severe conflicts as relative to their CL and determining how those affect the degree to which the outcomes of the relationship meet that standard. Such actions demonstrate how commitment becomes an emergent property of dependence as Drigotas et al. (1999) discussed. Partners may reaffirm their commitment, or dependence, to each other by acknowledging that the conflict experience they shared could not have been as productive with a different partner.

Power Mutuality. Drigotas et al. (1999) suggested that commitment was not only connected to dependence, but also power and vulnerability. The mutuality of commitment would also mean an equal level of vulnerability and by default, an equal level of power. This power refers to the partners needing each other equally and the vulnerability refers to the risk each partner takes by that sense of need and the emotional despair that would follow relationship termination (Drigotas et al., 1999). The present investigation will examine how power mutuality can be demonstrated with the prominent conflict, specifically by how partners engage in conflict management. Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that non-survivors faced more difficulty in discussing the problems that arose with the FBF. Divergent relational expectations emerged as partners noticed their incompatibility in conflict strategies. Some survivor couples regarded the FBF as a couple rather than as individuals, explicitly understanding that they were not only together in the experience but also equal in control of how it would affect the relationship (Siegert & Stamp, 1994).

While Siegert and Stamp (1994) did not directly account for power in the divergent outcomes for the survivors and non-survivors, the descriptions that participants assigned to their FBF experience arguably fall along the lines power mutuality as described in Drigotas et al. (1999). As previously discussed, this shared sense of power is meant to assure mutual

vulnerability on an emotional level to exhibit stability and adjustment (Drigotas et al., 1999). The non-survivors failed to possess or develop a sense of mutual vulnerability by not discussing the core issues which emerged from the FBF (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). There is a great risk entailed in revealing and sharing a dialogue about emotions, particularly during conflict management. However, redefining the relationship and attempting to understand your partners' perspective during conflict can provide an opportunity to bring stability back into the relationship.

The level of understanding that Siegert and Stamp (1994) found in survivors can be critical to a developing relationship, especially during a transitional event like a significant conflict, which can cause a great impact on interdependence. As mentioned in Carpenter (2016), interdependence could be possible when a relationship demonstrates an association between commitment and SPP. Partners may find themselves realizing the power in the relationship is not equal and what they do with that information may be an antecedent for the relationships' trajectory. Solomon and Samp (1998) suggest that when power is not equal, conflict may not be approached effectively. This would indicate an effective or constructive conflict management could be blocked because of a disproportionate power balance in the relationship. The present study aims to establish that power mutuality can be achieved or increased by a constructive conflict management following significant conflicts. Consequently, by attaining power mutuality, the interdependence of the relationship may also be positively influenced.

Commitment. Drigotas et al. (1999) initially explained that commitment is understood as an emergent feature of dependence within an interdependent relationship as it can further illustrate the subjective sensation of dependence partners experience on a day-to-day basis. As discussed previously, commitment diverges from dependence as a subjective state and as a concept more readily understood to individuals (Drigotas et al., 1999). They also concluded that

commitment, particularly perceived mutuality of commitment, can be associated with healthy functioning relationships (Drigotas et al., 1999). Constructive conflict can arguably function to promote healthy relationships. Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that in the behavior couples demonstrate during the FBF process reflects commitment to the relationship. Survivors noted the behavior of themselves and their partner served as a clarification of feelings, which may not be something partners explicitly understand during the early stages of a romantic relationship (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). The survivors explained the FBF as an enlightening experience demonstrating what they felt for the relationship and their partner. There seems to be an underlying desire to help push the relationship past the FBF for survivors as opposed to the non-survivors whose experience with the FBF process was not productive (Siegert & Stamp, 1994). A similar effect could be plausible for conflicts mirroring the severity of the FBF.

Rusbult and Buunk (1993) and Drigotas et al. (1999) both suggest commitment to be influential not only on interdependence but also on the persistence of a relationship. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) state that commitment serves as a predictor for situations where making the decision to stay or leave the relationship arise. Whereas in their study, Drigotas et al. (1999) elaborate that commitment is associated with couple well-being in relation to the tendencies to persist in the relationship. From a theoretical standpoint, establishing commitment levels between partners as survivors did in Siegert and Stamp's (1994) would have exposed a direct connection to the developing interdependence in those relationships.

Given what Siegert and Stamp (1994) concluded, survivors were indeed able to establish their level of commitment with their partner and when these levels were shared between partners, there was a stronger association with the continuation of the relationship. This process speaks to the mutuality of commitment Drigotas et al. (1999) also touched on and essentially

conceptualized as partners sharing the degree of need for the relationship. Loveless et al. (2008) also found that survivors with the perception that the FBF lead to growth in relational unity caused a decrease in DPCA. Like the previously discussed connection between DPCA and commitment, relational unity growth could also be connected to an increase in commitment from how partners regard a major conflict experience.

The commitment expressed during a pivotal conflict process has the potential to influence relationship sustainability. Over time, interdependence theory has been tied to commitment in similar but occasionally different fashions (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). For this investigation, commitment will follow the conceptualization from Drigotas et al. (1999) as it can validate the dependence partners generate toward each other and the persistence a relationship can produce. From the dependence and persistence resulting through commitment, there are grounds provided for interdependence to prosper (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

For this thesis, an initial evaluation of a romantic relationship will be considered prior to examining the effects of conflict on the relationship. Based on previous literature the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Higher comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}), and higher comparison level (CL)(satisfaction), and power mutuality will be associated with higher commitment in a romantic relationship.

Chapter 4: Predicted Change from Conflict

This present investigation has attempted to illuminate that change is possible from conflict, and that specifically, the change from conflict can build interdependence for romantic relationships. Results reported by Webb, Coleman, Rossignac-Milon, Tomasulo, and Higgins (2017) show that interpersonal conflict is an inescapable aspect of social life and has potential to be adverse. In their study, Webb et al., (2017) examined conflict resolution relative to motivations and change behind motivations. Regarding EVLN, Webb et al. (2017) argue that behaviors like voice and exit are aptly labeled active because the individual is attempting to change something about the conflict situation or relationship and such motivations do not compare in passive responses like neglect or loyalty. Kammrath and Dweck (2006) also indicated that how partners engage their feelings during conflicts can suggest critical outcomes for the relationship. Change from conflict is not necessarily solely dependent on the impact of the conflict but there is some plausibility that the management, the way a conflict is approached by the partners, also has an influence. A second hypothesis is suggested to posit how specific aspects of conflict management can affect the variable of commitment:

H2: A change in commitment will be (a) increased by voice and (b) loyalty behaviors and (c) the conflict's intensity will increase the change in commitment.

Rusbult et al. (1982) originally concluded that couples who had been more satisfied in their relationship prior to conflict had a higher tendency to engage in voice behaviors and less likely to respond with exit behaviors. As previously discussed with Overall et al. (2010), voice behaviors are more likely associated with greater relationship satisfaction. If partners had an initial CL which reflected favorable satisfaction with the relationship, then post-conflict should also demonstrate positive levels the CL and maintained or increased satisfaction if constructive

management tactics were used for the conflict. A third hypothesis is thus proposed to examine these possible effects:

H3: A change in the CL will be (a) increased by voice behaviors and (b) decreased by exit behaviors and (c) the conflict's intensity will increase the change in the CL (satisfaction).

For the CL_{alt} , research would indicate that as individuals view their relationship to have a certain level of security or perceive it as comparatively better than other available alternatives, those individuals are also more inclined to use constructive responses to conflict (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Rusbult et al., 1994; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Rusbult et al. (1982) also proposed from their findings that to some extent perceiving realistic better alternatives would encourage behaviors like exit and discourage loyalty behaviors. The fourth hypothesis will then focus on the change for the CL_{alt} relative to the conflict management experience:

H4: A change in the CL_{alt} will be (a) decreased by exit and (b) neglect behaviors, (c) increased by loyalty behaviors, and (d) the conflict's intensity will increase the change in the CL_{alt} .

Kammrath and Dweck (2006) proposed that the tendency to voice conflict in relationships could reflect an individual's motivations and commitment to the self and other. They explain that voice behaviors can be crucial for improvement for the individual, partner, and relationship. Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) found that when neglect and exit behaviors overlapped, partners struggled to stabilize the relationship post-conflict. There was difficulty in understanding or expressing how the partners could effectively reestablish their roles in the relationship, just as how Siegert and Stamp (1994) found that non-survivors could not discuss the

core issues of the FBF. The final and fifth hypothesis will then focus on the change in power mutuality resulting from conflict and specific management behaviors:

H5: A change in power mutuality will be (a) decreased by exit and (b) neglect behaviors, (c) increased by voice behaviors, and (d) the conflict's intensity will increase the change in power mutuality.

These predicted changes are expected to further guide the argument that the change possible from conflict can also have a significant impact on the development of interdependence for romantic relationships. By connecting specific conflict management tactics to essential aspects of interdependence, there can be a more substantial argument for when partners find themselves in pivotal conflicts, outcomes like sustaining a stable, interdependent relationship are possible.

Chapter 5: Methods

Procedures

This was a longitudinal study with two periods (Time 1 and Time 2) of data collection separated by approximately two months' time. Data was collected using the online survey platform Qualtrics. In the Time 1 call for participants, it was stated this project was a two-time data collection research study. For full participation in Time 1, participants received five extra credit points to a communication studies course. In the Time 1 call, participants were also informed that \$5 would be given to them for participating in Time 2. At the end of the Time 1 survey, participants were asked to provide a valid email address which they could be contacted with in approximately two months.

The message included with the email of the second data collection briefly reminded the participants of the Time 1 survey they had completed previously. Participants were also reminded that in exchange for full participation in the Time 2 survey, meaning a fully complete survey, they would receive monetary compensation of a \$5 Amazon gift card.

The Time 1 and Time 2 surveys are similar with the exception that in the Time 2 survey two additional instruments were added. The Time 1 survey included instruments measuring the CL_{alt} , satisfaction (CL), power mutuality, and commitment. These scores create initial levels of these constructs in the romantic relationship. The Time 2 survey included these instruments along with two more instruments measuring conflict intensity (DiPaola et al., 2010) and conflict management strategies with a modified EVLN model (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Webb et al., 2017).

Participants

For Time 1, a sample ($N = 179$) was recruited using a pool of undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university in the fall semester. Before analyzing the data for Time 1, portions of the original sample were cut due to incompleteness of the survey and/or failing attention checks ($n = 44$). These attention checks included failing to meet the average completion time for the survey, which was estimated at five minutes, and inconsistent responses to negatively worded items. Negatively worded items were matched with corresponding positively worded items of the commitment scale to determine if participants were genuinely reading the statements (e.g., I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future, It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year). Responses with the same non-midpoint response to negatively worded items and positively worded items were flagged. Participants whose responses demonstrated two or more flags were eliminated.

After removing participants with flagged responses, the Time 1 sample ($N = 135$) consisted of 87 females (64.4%), 47 males (34.8%), and one gender non-conforming (0.7%) with ages ranging from 18 to 26 ($M = 19.58$, $SD = 1.54$). The ethnic breakdown included 80% Caucasian ($n = 108$), 3.7% African-Americans ($n = 5$), 11.1% Asian ($n = 15$), 6.7% Hispanic/Latino ($n = 9$), 0.7% Native American ($n = 1$), and 3% Other ($n = 4$). Relationship status was identified as 63.7% dating ($n = 86$), 29.6% exclusive ($n = 40$), 5.2% cohabiting ($n = 7$), 0.7% engaged ($n = 1$), and 0.7% married ($n = 1$). The length of relationships in months ranged from 2 to 96 ($M = 18.88$, $SD = 17.76$). Frequency of conflict was reported as 53.3% Not Very Often ($n = 72$), 37.8% Somewhat Often ($n = 51$), 7.4% Often ($n = 10$), and 1.5% Very Often ($n = 2$). Participants also reported how recent their last conflict with their partner was in relation to time of data collection and responses indicated 20.7% within this week ($n = 28$),

30.4% last week ($n = 41$), 25.9% 2-3 weeks ago ($n = 35$), 4.4% 4 weeks ago ($n = 6$), 13.3% more than a month ago ($n = 18$), and 5.2% stated no conflict had occurred yet ($n = 7$).

For Time 2 sample ($N = 66$), incomplete responses and responses which failed the attention checks of average time completion, again estimated at five minutes, and negatively worded items were excluded from analysis ($n = 14$). Given the final Time 2 sample ($N = 52$), there was a 39% return rate from the Time 1 sample. Of the participants who returned for Time 2, 41 were females (78.8%) and 11 were males (21.2%) with ages ranging from 18 to 26 ($M = 19.86$, $SD = 1.65$). The ethnic breakdown included 73.1% Caucasian ($n = 38$), 3.8% African-Americans ($n = 2$), 17.3% Asian ($n = 9$), 7.7% Hispanic/Latino ($n = 4$), and 1.9% Other ($n = 1$).

The period between Time 1 and Time 2 was approximately two months, which included a semester break for the holiday season. To account for the changes possible from a semester break on college age romantic relationships, participants were asked to report if the relationship referred to for the Time 1 survey had been terminated. This did not disqualify any participant from completing the Time 2 survey. Relationship status was reported as 28.8% dating ($n = 15$), 28.8% exclusive ($n = 15$), 5.8% cohabiting ($n = 3$), 36.5% terminated ($n = 19$). The length of relationships in months, both for those sustained and those which had been terminated, ranged from 4 to 75 ($M = 20.38$, $SD = 17.95$). Frequency of conflict was reported as 55.8% Not Very Often ($n = 29$), 32.7% Somewhat Often ($n = 17$), 7.7% Often ($n = 4$), and 3.8% Very Often ($n = 2$). An open-ended question was used for participants to describe their most recent conflict with their partner. Common response topics included misinterpretations, becoming frustrated with certain habits, individual changes negatively affecting the dyad, and fundamental value disagreements, which most often also associated with termination.

Analysis of Attrition

A MANOVA analysis was conducted with the four core interdependence variables (i.e., satisfaction, CL_{alt} , power mutuality, and commitment). These findings indicate that participants who completed Time 2 had some significant differences compared to participants who only participated in Time 1; Wilks's $\Lambda = .851$, $F(8, 320) = 3.371$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .078$. Pairwise comparisons demonstrate significant differences of the CL_{alt} at Time 1 between those who participated both in Time 1 and 2 ($M = 21.22$, $SD = 11.215$) and those who only participated in Time 1 ($M = 25.43$, $SD = 11.073$). The second major difference was in levels of commitment at Time 1. Those who participated in both Time 1 and 2 ($M = 57.58$, $SD = 15.289$) demonstrated higher levels of commitment than those only participating in Time 1 ($M = 52.06$, $SD = 14.871$) (see Table 1). Therefore, participants who returned for Time 2 reported higher levels of commitment and lower levels of the CL_{alt} compared to the participants who did not return.

Measurements

Time 1 and 2 Measures

The Comparison Level of Alternatives (CL_{alt}) was measured using the quality of alternatives dimension of the investment model (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This scale included five facet items and five global items on an 11-point Likert-type scale (*Do Not Agree at All* = 0, *Agree Completely* = 10). Facet items of the scale included “My needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships”. Global items of the scale included “The people other than my partner with whom I might become involved with are very appealing”. The Time 1 Cronbach's alpha for reliability of this measure was .85. For Time 2 the reliability score was .91. Following the note of Rusbult et al. (1998), the facet items were not included in formal analyses,

including reliability analyses, as they were merely developed to enhance comprehensibility and activate accurate thoughts for each construct.

The Comparison Level (CL) was measured using the satisfaction dimensions of the investment model (Rusbult et al., 1998). This scale included five facet items and five global items on an 11-point Likert-type scale (*Do Not Agree at All* = 0, *Agree Completely* = 10). This dimension used facet items for the same reasoning provided for the quality of alternatives dimensions, but also like the previous measure, these facet items are not included in analyses for formal hypotheses testing and reliability analyses (Rusbult et al., 1998). Facet items for this scale included “My partner fulfills my needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.)”. Global items of the scale included “Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.” The Time 1 Cronbach’s alpha for reliability of this measure was .92 and for Time 2 the reliability score was .98.

Commitment was measured using the commitment dimension of the investment model (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1998) following a similar direction that Drigotas et al. (1999) took to measure the level of commitment in their study. The scale included seven items on an 11-point Likert-type scale (*Do Not Agree at All* = 0, *Agree Completely* = 10). Items from this scale included “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner” and “I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner”. The Time 1 Cronbach’s alpha for reliability of this measure was .92 and for Time 2 the reliability score was .96.

Power mutuality was measured using the perception of power measurement from Neff and Harter (2002; 2003). The measurement included a visual representation with the items directly beneath. This scale included nine items to assess which partner “usually get their way,” which partner “has the most say,” and which partner “makes the final decision” when conflict or

disagreements occur. One of the items read as, “When you and your partner have a conflict, who usually gets their way?” These nine items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from one end being (2) “I am usually the one to get my way,” to (-2) “My partner is usually the one who gets their way,” on the other end and in the middle being (0) “My partner and I each get our way pretty equally or we compromise”. These answers were interpreted as, (2) *strong* to (1) *moderate domination of the other*, (0) *equality*, to (-1) *moderate* to (-2) *strong subordination to the other*. The balance of power in the relationship was denoted by positive scores indicated the individual has more power over partner, negative scores indicated the partner has more power over the individual, and zero scores indicated mutual power between partners. The Time 1 Cronbach’s alpha for reliability of this measure was .81 and for Time 2 the reliability score was .87.

Time 2 Measures

In addition to the following measures, the previous measures used in Time 1 were also used in Time 2 analyses.

Conflict intensity was measured using a scale developed by DiPaola et al. (2010) which accounted for two dimensions of conflict intensity: emotionally upsetting and hostility. The dimension of emotionally upsetting was employed for this study which consists of six items on an 8-point semantic differential scale (*Not at All* = 1, *Extremely* = 8). Items included in this dimension are intense, emotional, hurtful, disturbing, arousing, and involving. Cronbach’s alpha reliability for this measure was found to be .86.

Conflict management will be measured using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect (EVLN) model originally published by Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982) which focuses on two dimensions of responses to conflict: constructive versus destructive responses and active versus passive responses. A modified version of the EVLN model (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Webb et

al., 2017) was employed to measure how participants responded to the conflict. There are three items for voice, exit, and loyalty and four items for neglect, all of which are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (*Never* = 1, *A Great Deal* = 5). Items for *exit* include “I considered breaking up with my partner” ($\alpha = .70$); for *voice* “I openly discussed the situation with my partner” ($\alpha = .74$); for *loyalty* “I accepted his/her faults and didn’t try to change him/her” ($\alpha = .67$); and for *neglect* “I criticized him/her for things that were unrelated to the real problem” ($\alpha = .73$).

Chapter 6: Results

Including only the Time 1 data, a regression analysis was conducted to determine if commitment in a romantic relationship could be predicted by the CL_{alt} , satisfaction (CL), and power mutuality (H1). A multiple linear regression analysis of Time 1 data indicated partial support for H1, $R^2 = .664$, adjusted $R^2 = .656$, $F(3, 129) = 82.97$, $p = .000$. Two of the three proposed predictor variables significantly predicted commitment. Commitment, satisfaction, and alternatives were significantly correlated; however, power mutuality did not significantly correlate with any of the other variables (see Table 2). As predicted, the comparison level of alternatives had a significant negative relationship to commitment, $\beta = -.325$, $p = .000$. Satisfaction (CL) also had a significant relationship to commitment, $\beta = .644$, $p = .000$. Power mutuality, however, was not significantly associated with commitment in romantic relationships, $\beta = -.032$, $p = .542$. These initial predictors contributed to 66.4% of the variance in commitment levels (see Table 4).

Time 2 data were analyzed with hierarchical multiple regression to determine how much of the variability in the change of each core construct of the interdependence could be accounted for by including predictors like conflict intensity and the conflict management strategies from a modified EVLN model (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Webb et al., 2017). This analysis strategy was utilized for the remaining hypotheses as these proposed that conflict intensity and conflict management strategies would affect change in satisfaction, alternatives, power mutuality, and commitment. Sex was controlled for in these analyses and was never found to significantly predict any variance of change. The Time 1 scores of each dependent variable (i.e., commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, and power mutuality) were also controlled for in each analysis and included in the models. Thus, the dependent variable in each model represented the variance

unaccounted for, or the residuals. That is, the residuals represent the remaining variance unaccounted for when the Time 1 scores are controlled for. By explaining the residual variance, the other predicting independent variables can account for the change in these variables.

H2 was focused on commitment, stating that a change in commitment from Time 1 to Time 2 would be (a) positively influenced by voice and (b) loyalty conflict management behaviors and that (c) conflict intensity would enhance the change. H2 was partially supported, $R^2 = .747$, R^2 change = .083, $F(3, 43) = 4.698$, $p = .006$. H2a was not supported, $\beta = .16$, $p = .098$. H2b was not supported, $\beta = -.135$, $p = .099$. H2c was supported, $\beta = -.270$, $p = .002$. This indicated that conflict intensity can predict a negative change in commitment over time. However, engaging in conflict management behaviors like voice and loyalty seem to have no effect in how commitment in romantic relationships changes (see Table 5).

H3 was centered on satisfaction (CL) in that a change in these levels would be (a) positively affected by voice conflict management behaviors, (b) negatively influenced by exit behaviors, and that (c) conflict intensity would also enhance the change in satisfaction. H3 was partially supported, $R^2 = .696$, R^2 change = .101, $F(3, 43) = 4.736$, $p = .006$. H3a was not supported, $\beta = .085$, $p = .369$. H3b was approaching significance, $\beta = -.205$, $p = .06$. H3c was also approaching significance, $\beta = -.203$, $p = .06$. These results suggest that conflict intensity and exit conflict management strategies could affect changes in satisfaction. With that, the R^2 change from this model indicated an additional 10% of variance of Time 2 satisfaction predicted by the variance in those predicting variables (see Table 6).

H4 stated that a change in the CL_{alt} would be (a) negatively influenced by exit and (b) neglect conflict management behaviors but (c) positively influenced by loyalty behaviors, and that (d) conflict intensity would also enhance the change. H4 was also partially supported, $R^2 =$

.644, R^2 change = .146, $F(4, 42) = 4.305$, $p = .005$. For H4a, exit behaviors were found to be significant, $\beta = .468$, $p < .001$, but not in a negative direction that was predicted. H4b was not supported, $\beta = -.118$, $p = .291$. H4c was also not supported, $\beta = -.059$, $p = .533$. H4d was also not supported, $\beta = .007$, $p = .955$. Conflict intensity and management behaviors like neglect and loyalty appear to lack an influence in predicting changes of the CL_{alt} . These findings suggest that the use of exit conflict management behaviors predicts a *positive* change in the CL_{alt} (see Table 7).

Finally, H5 posited that change in power mutuality would be (a) negatively affected by exit and (b) neglect conflict management behaviors while (c) voice behaviors would positively influence a change and (d) conflict intensity would increase the change. This hypothesis was not supported, $R^2 = .260$, R^2 change = .087, $F(4, 42) = 1.173$, $p = .337$ (see Table 8).

Chapter 7: Discussion

This thesis project was focused on expanding interdependence theory by applying its core concepts to conflict in romantic relationships. A primary goal was to determine whether engaging in constructive, proactive conflict management could positively influence interdependence and encourage a sustainable partnership. Results indicated that factors like satisfaction and alternatives were significant in predicting commitment levels (H1). Further analyses on interdependence factors illustrated that exit behaviors and conflict intensity as significant influences of change in commitment, satisfaction, and alternatives. The following section will elaborate on the findings of each hypothesis, both significant and null.

The first hypothesis was focused on Time 1 data. The results provided partial support indicating satisfaction and alternatives were significant predictors of commitment. These findings are parallel to past literature regarding these factors (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), demonstrating further support for these variables as significant predictors of commitment. It is reasonable for an individual to be committed to their partner who provides an optimal level of relational rewards (i.e., satisfaction) and who perceives other possible alternative partners (i.e., CL_{alt}) as not quite meeting such a bar. Individuals create standards or levels of expectations for relationships which can illuminate feelings of satisfaction and stability regarding their relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981). If someone wants to determine their own or their partner's commitment to the relationship, it would be beneficial to consider how satisfying the relationship is generally and its stability by comparing it to alternative relationship options.

Despite research-driven assumptions (Drigotas et al., 1994; Siegert & Stamp, 1994), power mutuality was not associated with commitment in romantic relationships. Perhaps more

investigation focused on the concept of power mutuality in the realm of conflict in romantic relationships is needed for more empirical guidance in examining the theoretically proposed association. It is possible that alternative operationalizations could be pursued with power mutuality in a similar context and would find different results.

Change in interdependence over time

The most important objective of this project was to analyze the possibility of change due to the management of conflict. This potential change was examined using core constructs of interdependence theory (i.e., commitment, satisfaction, alternatives) along with the concept of power mutuality. The remaining hypotheses attempted to predict change by proposing relationships between these key variables and conflict variables like intensity and the dimensions of the EVLN model (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Webb et al., 2017). Results from Time 2 were partially supportive of the second, third, and fourth hypotheses.

H2 intended to determine if voice and loyalty behaviors could have a positive effect on change in commitment while conflict intensity would negatively impact any change. Commitment is a primary construct of interdependence theory (Drigotas et al., 1994) as it reflects the subjective nature of dependence as understood by partners. Voice and loyalty behaviors were expected to have a positive effect given that they represent the constructive responses of the EVLN model, which are also recommended in conflict scenarios (Rusbult et al., 1994). However, the results suggested that these behaviors did not predict change in commitment, which counters past research that formulated this hypothesis. Webb et al., (2017) considered voice as influential for relationships because these behaviors signal a desire for change, whether of the situation or in the relationship generally, by actively attempting to resolve

conflict. While it is possible for voice behaviors to demonstrate a desire for change, the current results could not yield an effect of change on commitment with voice behaviors.

Voice behaviors specifically were selected as Rusbult et al. (1994) stated that voice behaviors are active responses to improve relationship conditions. During conflict, partners who are open, proactive, and engaged in managing the issue indicate a strong sense of commitment (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006), but perhaps these behaviors do not lead to change in commitment. *A* may express their core concerns with *B* and demonstrate a willingness to discuss the root of the problem which could signal commitment. However, those actions do not appear to produce a change in commitment. It may also be possible that these behaviors are good for a relationship, and building interdependence, but more time is necessary for these behaviors to change commitment.

The two-month period between Time 1 and Time 2 was potentially not enough to develop a change, or at least a significant change, on commitment from voice behaviors. More time could negatively impact recall if partners experienced a serious conflict too distant from data collection, but there is also the possibility that more time could be beneficial. It is possible that a stronger relationship with constructive behaviors and commitment can happen with an increased interval between data collections. Voice behaviors should be able to improve commitment, but doing so could require effort and time, especially as these behaviors are used to address issues of conflict. The connection between time and constructive behaviors could differ from destructive behaviors as relationships can be fragile post-conflict leaving little resistance to destructive behaviors. This may be why destructive behaviors can have more prompt effects on relationships in conflict situations.

Loyalty behaviors are the other dimension of constructive responses but from a more passive perspective as they are indicative of a willingness to endure or patiently wait for partners to address their hurtful actions (Overall et al., 2010). These behaviors demonstrate an almost blind commitment to the relationship. For example, if *A* has been frustrated by *B*'s dismissive comments, and their approach to management is to keep faith that *B* will address these issues without direct intervention, then *A* appears to be blindly committed to *B* and their relationship. However, this does not demonstrate an appropriately interdependent relationship as it violates the assumption of mutual dependence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). This lack of effect from loyalty behaviors also corresponds with previous research from Overall et al. (2010) who stated, loyalty behaviors often go unnoticed by partners and are not reliably associated with positive daily outcomes.

This violation of mutual dependence could also disrupt the notion of reflexive control, which Kelley and Thibaut (1978) also denote as a key towards interdependence. Results not supporting loyalty behaviors as predicting change in commitment may align better with theoretical implications of the theory than what was originally proposed. A relationship could face many issues without resolution if those issues are constantly brushed aside with loyalty behaviors. It is possible for resentment to harbor in the partner displaying loyalty behaviors and while this might not directly influence commitment, it probably does not help to improve it, or interdependence on a larger scale. Partners should be cautious about using loyalty behaviors during conflict as despite its designation as a constructive approach, they might not actually offer any assistance and could instead disrupt interdependence.

Despite the lack of effect from the conflict response behaviors, conflict intensity did have a significant effect on change in commitment. A negative relationship indicated that as conflict

intensity grows, the commitment to the relationship declined. In other words, having intense conflicts lessens the commitment to a relationship. The building intensity can have partners questioning the future or persistence of the relationship, influencing those stay-or-leave decisions (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), and produce negative repercussions on couple well-being (Drigotas et al., 1994). As DiPaola et al. (2010) noted, fighting those “knee-jerk” reactions in conflict takes higher-level thinking including the consideration of sustaining the relationship. This higher-level thinking can be reflected in the transformation of motivation. The transformation of motivation, willingness to sacrifice self-interested actions, and choosing not to escalate a conflict for a more constructive approach signals a development towards a healthy, sustainable, interdependent relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Whitton et al., 2002).

Again, in the third hypothesis voice behaviors were unable to produce any significant change in satisfaction. Previous literature on the EVLN model (Overall et al., 2010; Rusbult et al., 1982) suggested that using the active and constructive dimensions with voice behaviors would be associated with greater satisfaction. Overall et al. (2010) also noted that voice behaviors reported high prediction scores of benefitting the relationship, which could arguably include satisfaction. As the CL has been associated with satisfaction of the entire relationship (Roloff, 1981; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), it is possible that these voice behaviors do not have much of an impact on how the relationship is holistically evaluated. The satisfaction with the relationship can be influenced by how favorably all positive and negative feelings of the relationship are viewed (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Voice behaviors could be positively related to a single aspect of the relationship such as managing conflict, but not have much influence when evaluating the whole relationship.

Exit behaviors (H3b) and conflict intensity (H3c) did influence change in satisfaction in a negative direction. Exit behaviors are active destructive responses to the relationship thus a negative association with change in satisfaction is reasonable. These behaviors included threatening to terminate the relationship or abusing your partner which are relational outcomes that would arguably fall below the CL causing dissatisfaction in a person (Le & Agnew, 2003; Roloff, 1981). If *A*'s response to conflict is toxic, aggressive behavior then *B* may heavily consider such experiences when evaluating the relationship against the relational rewards they desire. As Marcus (2000) noted, change from conflict is possible from both constructive or destructive responses and determining satisfaction from the CL includes accounting for all positive and negative feelings (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Outcomes like this which can fail to meet the CL, produce an unsatisfying relationship which is counterproductive to a sustainable, interdependent relationship (Roloff, 1981). Loveless et al. (2008) stated that not engaging in a constructive conflict management process is likely to lead to relationship termination. In regarding *A*'s use of destructive responses, *B* could presume that *A* does not have a sincere interest in managing the conflict or improving the relationship. When one partner is not genuinely interested in communicating management then satisfaction could be negatively affected (Krauss & Morsella, 2000).

Similar explanations can be drawn for why conflict intensity has a negative influence on satisfaction. Having to cope with emotionally intensive conflicts is likely unfulfilling. Conflict intensity was measured using emotional intensity (DiPaola et al., 2010) and having this increase can understandably make someone dissatisfied with their partner. *A* may find it difficult to be satisfied in their relationship with *B* if every conflict is increasingly intense, hurtful, and generally emotionally taxing. The transformation of motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978;

Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) is suitably associated with conflict intensity as it reflects a consideration of the benefits of the partner and relationship. Conceivably individuals are conscious of their dissatisfaction with the partner and or relationship and choose against the behaviors that would attribute to building interdependence. However, behavior incongruent with the transformation of motivation could potentially also occur without individuals being explicitly conscious of their discontent with the relationship. *A* may just not be willing to become interdependent, to consider what behaviors would be beneficial to *B* and their relationship, but rather allow conflicts to continuously escalate because the consideration for future develop is not of *A*'s concern. This demonstrates short-term consideration for the relationship as choosing to be hurtful and explosive in conflicts does not indicate a desire or plan to become interdependent (Whitton et al., 2000).

The partially supportive results for H3 are approaching significance, however, these results indicated a notable effect size given that sample size for Time 2 analysis ($N = 52$) was small and an additional 10% of the variance explained with these additional factors. These findings also give way to another interesting implication. The results of voice behaviors' effects on commitment (H2) and satisfaction (H3), two critical aspects of interdependence (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), did not yield significant results. This thesis was aimed to discover if constructive management of a conflict could produce interdependence. However, the genuine constructive approach to conflict management was unable to predict any influence.

Voice behaviors' null findings are interesting as the literature identifies constructive approaches (Rusbult et al., 1994), specifically voice behaviors (Overall et al., 2010), as likely to create the most positive outcomes. Correlation analysis do indicate that voice behaviors have a

significant relationship with commitment, satisfaction, and alternatives (see Table 3), but as the hypotheses were focused on predictive relationships, the lack of the effects presents an interesting situation. Null findings imply that conflicts might not be approached with constructive management, or not engaged properly, leaving the relationship vulnerable to termination or other negative relational outcomes. More importantly, if there is little impact from constructive conflict management, little growth can be possible towards interdependence.

The fourth hypothesis produced interesting findings as the significant results were opposite of the predicted direction. Rusbult et al. (1982) noted that perceiving better alternatives would come with increased exit behaviors. With H4a, it was assumed that if destructive behaviors like exit were engaged in, then the level of acceptable relational rewards would decrease. Given the relationship would compare unfavorably to the alternatives, an individual would be receptive to any alternative and the rewards they could offer. The positive findings of these results indicate the opposite: engaging in destructive conflict management behaviors increases the acceptable level of relational rewards from alternatives. While these results do not support the hypothesis, it does suggest that individuals are thinking more carefully about future partners and relationships after enduring a bad one. This experience seems to raise their standards for future romantic partners. It may be that due to the negative relational experience with *B* that included more exit behaviors in conflict and a lack of budding interdependence, *A* is more meticulous when finding a partner with whom to build interdependence. In this careful consideration of future partners, *A* may also increase what their lowest acceptable level of relational rewards is to prevent enduring another relationship akin to the one with *B*. Such actions and change in perspective regarding relational rewards could demonstrate the increase in an individual's relational standards for alternatives.

Neglect (H4b) and loyalty (H4c) behaviors had no effect on change in alternatives and neither did conflict intensity (H4d). It seemed plausible that neglect behaviors would affect alternatives as those behaviors include disregarding your romantic relationship with behaviors like ignoring your partner or avoiding issues thus crafting instability in the relationship and a lowered CL_{alt} (Rolloff, 1981). Another explanation for this null effect could stem from an individual not being interested in any type of intimate relationship. Even if a partner used neglectful behaviors, it might not have changed their CL_{alt} because they are not actively attempting to compare their current relationship to another alternative. It is possible that using these behaviors could signal that an individual simply wants to be alone, with no partner. Perhaps an individual's dating history spurs a desire to take a pause from romantic relationships if one relationship signals a pattern of poor, unfulfilling, or just bland relationships. An individual could then develop negative perceptions of themselves being in romantic relationships. These perceptions could then drive neglectful behaviors to conflict and allowing the relationship to wither under the assumption that it will not differ from prior relationships and having an opportunity to be alone would be better.

As explained earlier, loyalty behaviors demonstrate a positive outlook on the current romantic relationship and can generate a disregard for potential alternatives (Rusbult et al., 1982). The nonsignificant results in change to alternatives could be attributed to the trouble of identifying the importance of loyalty conflict response behaviors (Overall et al., 2010). Accepting faults or a bad situation without rebuttal might placate the problem or allow for an immediate rift in the relationship but might not genuinely impact the attractiveness of alternatives. Perhaps because alternatives are so critical to relational stability (Kelley & Thibaut,

1978; Roloff, 1981; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), and loyalty behaviors are more passive and discrete, these actions are not enough to create an influence on alternatives.

Conflict intensity was expected to be significant in predicting change to alternatives as detrimental effects of emotional intensity could plausibly make alternative options more appealing and cause a decrease in acceptable relational rewards from those alternatives. Marcus (2000) noted that the approach to conflict, constructive or destructive, has much influence on developing an interdependent relationship. However, it is possible that some partners become numb to the emotional distress of conflict as well as unbothered by alternatives that no effect is possible. Another thought is that individuals have built perceptions that romantic conflicts should have a certain level of intensity and with this norm status, conflict intensity does not impact the perception of alternatives.

Akin to the conclusions drawn from Time 1 results, the final hypothesis which tested for change in power mutuality, was not supported by the data. Like what was taken away from the nonsignificant findings with power mutuality in H1, it is possible that the concept of power mutuality needs to be further developed to better guide empirical testing. The data does demonstrate a possibility of neglect behaviors predicting a positive influence on change in power mutuality, $\beta = .305, p = .08$. A positive relationship would suggest that an increase in neglect behaviors would also be an increase in the power the individual has over their partner, which is not mutual. This would be aligned with past research (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983) which suggested neglect behaviors would indicate a struggle to stabilize relationships post conflict.

From this thesis, it appears that exit behaviors and conflict intensity have immediate effects (i.e., 2 months) on influencing several of the core factors for developing interdependence. Conflict intensity has a consistent negative relationship with commitment and satisfaction while

exit behaviors have divergent effects on satisfaction and alternatives. It is possible that these factors suggest not merely strong reactions but also more tangible consequences. The clearly negative outcomes seem to have influence on how interdependence can develop in romantic relationships. This project did not identify any constructive conflict responses that aid in producing interdependence; although voice or loyalty behaviors were predicted to increase interdependence, significant results were not found.

These findings can thus suggest that approaching conflict with the transformation of motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and decreasing the intensity of conflicts can yield lasting beneficial outcomes for the relationship. Building interdependence can be fortified in contemplating the behaviors of conflict and their repercussions. Acknowledging that behaviors and actions during conflict and conflict management influence the sustainability of the relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999; Krauss & Morsella, 2000; Marcus, 2000; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Whitton et al., 2000) is a powerful move in becoming interdependent.

Implications

Romantic relationships entail multiple experiences ranging from growth and love to hurt and destruction. Conflict in romantic relationships should not be perceived to reside in only one aspect of that spectrum as conflict can bring as much growth as it can destroy. Building interdependence can be influenced by the behaviors enacted during conflict and conflict management. As demonstrated by the findings of this project, it is perhaps the negative or destructive behaviors which can produce the most immediate effects on interdependence.

The transformation of motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) is critical to interdependence, but partners might not be entirely conscious of it. As Whitton et al. (2002) stated, the good of the relationship can become ingrained into the individual, making their

actions seamlessly pro-relational. Blending individual goals with relational goals can be powerful for stability and interdependence (Drigotas et al., 1999). However, as the transformation of motivation does not develop inherently, there are some aspects that can degenerate it. These can include aspects of conflict like emotional intensity and destructive responses to conflict like exit behaviors. Although understanding these behaviors can offer practical benefits.

The findings of this project suggest that commitment, satisfaction, and alternatives are on the line when conflict intensity and exit behaviors are involved. Enduring emotionally intensive conflicts can pick away at commitment and satisfaction, which may seem clearer in retrospect but not as much as in the moments of conflict. In conflict management, partners should not only focus on how to resolve or manage the issues at hand but also consider how they engage in conflict. It could be beneficial to learn that while slamming doors and raising voices can feel self-gratifying, those behaviors are not contributing to long-term outcomes (DiPaola et al., 2010).

There may be some couples who frequently engage in conflict without facing negative consequences to commitment or satisfaction. It is possible that while these partners argue often, they have also learned how to argue with each other in a constructive manner. The present findings indicate that the intensity of conflict can have detrimental effects, but possibly by learning how to argue more constructively, the intensity and subsequent effects can be lessened or avoided. Taking steps towards understanding their conflict process can be what helps steer partners towards the transformation of motivation and interdependence.

Exit behaviors are generally perceived as what can destroy a relationship as an individual reflects a want to change something in the conflict situation (Webb et al., 2017) and that something could be to end the relationship. These behaviors negatively affect satisfaction in the

relationship, and possibly within a short time span as demonstrated with the results of this project. It could be that these exit behaviors are “knee-jerk” reactions, where impulse control fails, preventing constructive conflict management (DiPaola et al., 2010). To prevent a decrease in satisfaction, partners may need to be more conscious about their usage of exit behaviors and be more cognizant of developing an impulse control for conflict. This exchange with exit behaviors for satisfaction can also be rooted back to establishing the transformation of motivation thought process as it illustrates a beneficial foundation for interdependence.

What is good for you may represent an independent mindset. Yelling, saying hurtful comments, taking an active step in diminishing your relationship may provide feelings of instant gratification for you as an individual during conflict, but these behaviors will not offer much to your relationship. If a person wants their relationship to be interdependent, that is sustainable and satisfying, then the person needs to understand that what is good for their partner will also be good for them. Voicing your own concerns is important in conflict but there must be a concern for how that behavior will impact your partner and your relationship.

Negative behavior in conflict can burn your relationship with a level of speed as the current findings have concluded. What should be kept in mind is that enacting constructive or positive behaviors can be helpful, but these effects may also not be as immediate. Partners would need to exert effort into managing conflicts with constructive behaviors to build an interdependent relationship which would need time. When it comes to managing conflicts and interdependence, fire with fire can create a path of destruction whereas working together on a higher ground can build something of substance.

Given the findings of the project and the implications suggested, an advantageous route for partners to take regarding conflict is learning to understand how they engage in conflict with

each other. Developing this understanding could be instrumental to the sustainability of their relationship as learning how to conflict can be productive towards building interdependence.

Limitations and Future Directions

A primary limitation for this project was the sample size used for the Time 2 analysis. The sample ($N = 52$) was smaller than the intended goal. Other major differences between Time 1 and Time 2 groups included levels of commitment, alternatives, and the number of participants who had terminated their relationships. These factors may have affected results. Given the size, only large effect sizes were detectable. Perhaps a larger sample would have produced different results for voice behaviors effect on change in commitment, satisfaction, and power mutuality. It is also possible that the results from exit behaviors and conflict intensity on satisfaction could have been more conclusive with a larger sample. Power mutuality could have had outcomes with a larger sample size for Time 2 and possibly in Time 1 as well.

Time 2 participants reported higher levels of commitment and lower levels of alternatives compared to the Time 1 only group. It is possible that the Time 1 only participants did not return because their relationships not only dissolved but were also not memorable or valuable enough to complete Time 2. More than half the Time 1 sample ($n = 83$) identified the relationship status as dating. Perhaps participants did not perceive these relationships as serious or likely long-term. This could also suggest that when Time 2 data collection occurred the relationship from Time 1 appeared too irrelevant to complete the study. As Time 2 participants indicated a more equal relationship status between dating ($n = 15$) and exclusive ($n = 15$), the increase in reported commitment levels and decrease in reported alternatives could be due to those demographics.

Of the Time 2 sample, nearly half ($n = 19$) had terminated their romantic relationships. This change in relationship status could be reflected in the results found for exit behaviors and

conflict intensity. As exit behaviors entail active, destructive behaviors to the relationship, terminated relationships may have engaged these behaviors more frequently in conflicts, which may or may not have contributed to the termination. Higher frequencies of these behaviors could have attributed to the significant change in satisfaction and alternatives. Conflict intensity impacted changes in commitment and satisfaction negatively which could also be associated with a terminated relationship. As discussed previously, conflict intensity is associated with the transformation of motivation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and failing to properly engage this behavior could negatively influence relationship sustainability (DiPaola et al, 2010; Whitton et al., 2002). Results could have been different if the sample was not as saturated with terminated relationships. More sustained relationships could possibly increase the likelihood of constructive conflict behaviors predicting change of interdependence. Future work will address this limitation by acquiring a larger sample and with more diversity in relation to relationship status. Addressing these limitations may provide more variance for analysis of change in the key variables.

College student samples pose an interesting paradox for relational research. The primary limitations are often that college relationships generally do not last long, and the partners are not well versed in relationship dynamics. However, these relationships are also important for research as during college individuals begin to experience serious relationships. These initial relational experiences are what expose individuals to serious conflicts and a deeper understanding of relationships. People may date very frequently during college, but that experience is how people learn about relationships and themselves as partners. Patterns of relational dynamics can be rooted in an individual's college love life. Patterns of conflict

approach and management can also be developed during college, which is why a sample of college students can be rich for this project and other relational research.

The time parameters of when the data was collected may have also imposed a limitation in two ways potentially affecting the sample for Time 2. The first thing to note is that Time 1 participants were recruited towards the end of the semester when the notion of extra credit is very appealing but having to return for completion of Time 2 may not be as appealing. Even with the compensation offered, perhaps these participants only wanted the extra credit but did not find a strong enough need or want for a \$5 Amazon gift card to return.

The second aspect is the length of time between Time 1 and Time 2. Two months might not be enough time for variables like commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, and power mutuality to change significantly. Or simply not enough time to see change from conflict specific variables like the dimensions of the EVLN model (Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Webb et al., 2017) and conflict intensity (DiPaola et al., 2010). Change was still evident with significant results and the fact that many relationships were terminated in the interval between Time 1 and Time 2. However, as time is influential to analyzing change, more time could be beneficial to the impact of these variables and conflict. In the open-ended question asking about a recent conflict, a few participants had either not had a noteworthy conflict or one at all between Time 1 and Time 2. Future work should consider more time between data collection periods, possibly three or four months, to see if more time demonstrates more change, if at all.

The increase in the interval between Time 1 and Time 2 does pose the risks of recall if a conflict occurred too distant from the data collection. Although, if the conflict was serious and posed a threat to the relationships' existence, perhaps partners would likely not have trouble recalling the key details of the conflict. More importantly, as briefly discussed previously, more

time could be crucial for constructive behaviors to reflect change in interdependence. Building a sturdy foundation between two people does not happen as easily as it does when things are deteriorating.

As mentioned briefly when discussing those results, power mutuality might need more conceptual development but primarily needs more operationalization development. The measure used (Neff & Harter, 2002; 2003) took time and effort to locate, but perhaps a more robust operationalization is required for this variable. Future research on conflict should consider examining how to improve the testing of this variable because power mutuality can offer insight to conflict and interdependence. The concept of power mutuality was meant to elaborate more on vulnerability related to commitment in relationships (Drigotas et al., 1994). Siegert and Stamp (1994) also provided theoretical direction by the first-big-fight research indicating that non-survivors failed to develop that mutual vulnerability and lacked shared understanding. Solomon and Samp (1998) also noted crucially that unequal power prevents an effective approach to conflict. Power mutuality is a concept that should be further investigated in conflict research.

A final consideration for future work of this project is to conduct a closer examination of the open-ended questions regarding a recent conflict. The common responses reported ranged from topics like misinterpretations to individual changes rippling into the dyad to ending the relationship from disagreements over rudimentary values. Inspecting these results more closely may reveal a dialogue on the roots of serial arguments. Given the responses, it may be possible to identify whether it is the emotionally intensive transgressions or the consistent frustrations that give way to serial arguments. Another aspect to consider is whether these open-ended responses were influenced, if at all, by participants' concerns of how representative these responses could be. It may be interesting to consider the impression management aspect of disclosing conflict.

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Tables

Table 1:

Means and standard deviations for the analysis of attrition from Time 1 to Time 2 (N = 135)

	Time 1 only	Time 1 & 2
Commitment	52.06 _a (14.871)	57.58 _b (15.289)
Satisfaction (CL)	39.51 _a (8.794)	39.42 _a (10.006)
CL _{alt}	25.43 _a (11.073)	21.22 _b (11.215)
Power Mutuality	-.26 _a (5.076)	.86 _a (3.918)

Note: Means with different subscripts across rows differ significantly ($p < .05$)

Table 2:

Correlations of Interdependence Variables for Time 1 Analysis (N = 135)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Commitment	54.18	15.215	1.000	.755**	-.551**	.045
2. Satisfaction	39.48	9.346	.755**	1.000	-.353**	.108
3. CL _{alt}	23.81	11.273	-.551**	-.353**	1.000	-.023
4. Power Mutuality	.17	4.681	.045	.108	-.023	1.000

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3:

Correlations of Interdependence Variables and Conflict Variables for Time 2 Analysis (N = 52)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Commitment	49.481	23.072	1.000	.888**	-.492**	.443**	.443**	-.547**	.012	-.068	-.459**
2. Satisfaction	33.25	16.483	.888**	1.000	-.536**	.425**	.319*	-.576**	.011	-.065	-.564**
3. CL _{alt}	22.077	14.035	-.492**	-.536**	1.000	-.202	-.321*	.568**	.054	.264	.463**
4. Power Mutuality	-.8269	4.87	-.443**	.425**	-.202	1.000	-.004	-.009	-.048	.144	-.205
5. Voice	12.00	2.744	.443**	.319*	-.321*	-.004	1.000	-.218	.269	-.022	-.055
6. Exit	5.846	3.274	-.547**	-.576**	.568**	-.009	-.218	1.000	.008	.427**	.561**
7. Loyalty	10.346	2.923	.012	.011	.054	-.048	.269	.008	1.000	.047	-.078
8. Neglect	7.808	3.23	-.068	-.065	.264	.144	-.022	.427**	.047	1.000	.461**
9. Conflict Intensity	22.204	10.091	-.459**	-.564**	.463**	-.205	-.055	.561**	.008	.461**	1.000

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4:

Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Commitment (N = 135)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Satisfaction	1.048	.090	.644**
CL _{alt}	-.439	.075	-.325**
Power Mutuality	-.103	.169	-.032
R^2			.664
<i>F</i>			82.967**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5:

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Change in Commitment (N = 52)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Sex	10.172	7.754	.188	2.814	4.695	.052	.373	4.461	.007
Time 1 score				1.071	.115	.804**	.895	.120	.673**
Voice							1.260	.746	.160
Loyalty							-1.010	.598	-.135
Conflict Intensity							-.589	.176	-.270**
R^2			.035			.664			.747
<i>F</i> for change in R^2			1.721			85.957**			4.698**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6:

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Change in Satisfaction (N = 52)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Sex	5.513	5.707	.140	3.924	3.713	.099	1.312	3.591	.003
Time 1 score				1.169	.145	.760**	.863	.154	.560**
Voice							.492	.542	.085
Exit							-1.007	.530	-.205†
Conflict Intensity							-.324	.168	-.203†
R^2			.019			.595			.696
<i>F</i> for change in R^2			.933			65.355**			4.736**

† $p \leq .06$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7:

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Change in the CLalt (N = 52)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Sex	-1.708	4.972	-.050	-1.721	3.568	-.050	.539	3.200	.016
Time 1 score				.878	.130	.704**	.661	.135	.530**
Exit							1.988	.524	.468**
Neglect							-.504	.471	-.118
Loyalty							-.279	.444	-.059
Conflict Intensity							.010	.168	.007
R^2			.003			.497			.644
<i>F</i> for change in R^2			.118			45.302**			.146**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 8:

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Change in Power Mutuality (N = 52)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Sex	1.762	1.515	.171	1.411	1.420	.137	1.545	1.531	.150
Time 1 score				.483	.174	.382**	.366	.196	.289
Exit							-.180	.237	-.136
Neglect							.403	.224	.305
Voice							-.099	.224	-.066
Conflict Intensity							-.092	.074	-.219
R^2			.029			.174			.260
<i>F</i> for change in R^2			1.352			7.691**			.087

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figures

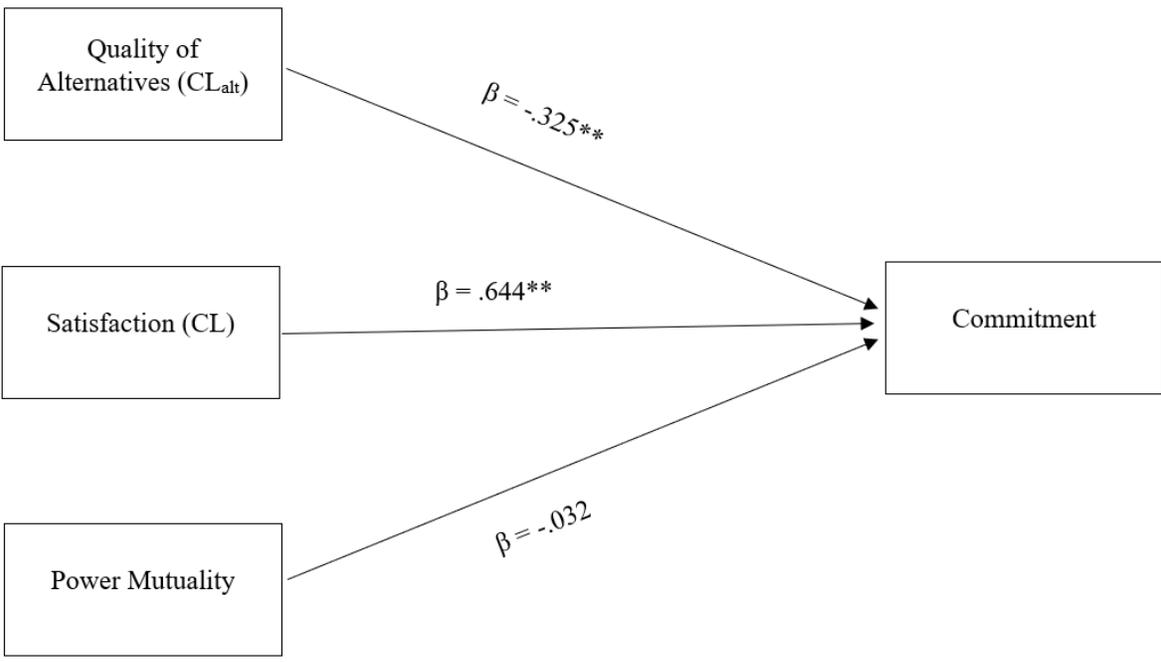


Figure 1: Model to demonstrate the effects from Time 1 data collection.

Appendix A

Satisfaction Level (CL) Facet and Global Items

1. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship (select an answer for each item).
 - a. My partner fulfills my needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, etc.)
 Don't Agree at All Agree Slightly Agree Moderately Agree Completely
 - b. My partner fulfills my needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.)
 Don't Agree at All Agree Slightly Agree Moderately Agree Completely
 - c. My partner fulfills my sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.)
 Don't Agree at All Agree Slightly Agree Moderately Agree Completely
 - d. My partner fulfills my needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.)
 Don't Agree at All Agree Slightly Agree Moderately Agree Completely
 - e. My partner fulfills my needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.)
 Don't Agree at All Agree Slightly Agree Moderately Agree Completely
2. I feel satisfied with our relationship (please select a number).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree at All				Agree Somewhat			Agree Completely	
3. My relationship is much better than others' relationships.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree at All				Agree Somewhat			Agree Completely	
4. My relationship is close to ideal.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree at All				Agree Somewhat			Agree Completely	
5. Our relationship makes me very happy.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree at All				Agree Somewhat			Agree Completely	
6. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree			Agree			Agree		
at All			Somewhat			Completely		

Quality of Alternatives (CL_{alt}) Facet and Global Items

- Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement regarding the fulfillment of each need in alternative relationships (e.g., by another dating partner, friends, family)
 - My needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships

Don't Agree at All	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Completely
--------------------	----------------	------------------	------------------
 - My needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships

Don't Agree at All	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Completely
--------------------	----------------	------------------	------------------
 - My sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships

Don't Agree at All	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Completely
--------------------	----------------	------------------	------------------
 - My needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships

Don't Agree at All	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Completely
--------------------	----------------	------------------	------------------
 - My needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships

Don't Agree at All	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Completely
--------------------	----------------	------------------	------------------
- The people other than my partner with whom I might become involved are very appealing (please select a number).

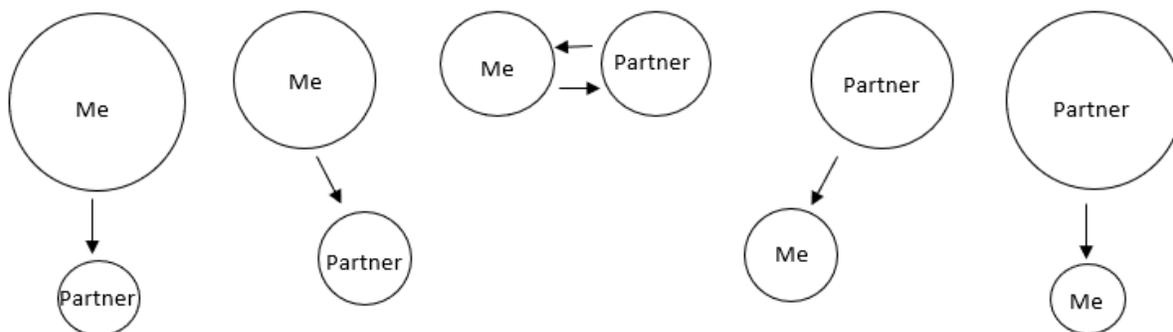
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree			Agree			Agree		
at All			Somewhat			Completely		
- My alternatives to our relationship are close to ideal (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree			Agree			Agree		
at All			Somewhat			Completely		
- If I weren't dating my partner, I would do fine—I would find another appealing person to date.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree			Agree			Agree		

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|------------|
| | at All | | | | Somewhat | | | | | Completely |
|--|--------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|------------|
5. My alternatives are attractive to me (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.).
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|----------------|---|---|---|------------------|--|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | |
| Do Not Agree at All | | | | Agree Somewhat | | | | Agree Completely | |
6. My needs for intimacy, companionship, etc., could easily be fulfilled in an alternative relationship.
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|----------------|---|---|---|------------------|--|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | |
| Do Not Agree at All | | | | Agree Somewhat | | | | Agree Completely | |

Power Mutuality Items



1. When you and your partner **have a conflict concerning an activity that you are going to be both involved in, who usually gets their way?** (please select one)

I am usually the one who gets my way

I am more often than not the one who gets my way

My partner and I get our way pretty equally or we compromise

My partner is more often than not the one who gets their way

My partner is usually the one who gets their way

2. When you and your partner **have a conflict concerning an activity that you are going to be both involved in, who has the most say?**

I am usually the one who has the most say

I am more often than not the one who has the most say

My partner and I have our say pretty equally or we compromise

My partner is more often than not the one who has the most say

My partner is usually the one who has the most say

3. When you and your partner **have a conflict concerning an activity that you are going to be both involved in, who makes the final decision?**

I am usually the one who makes the final decision

I am more often than not the one who makes the final decision

My partner and I make final decisions pretty equally or we compromise

My partner is more often than not the one who makes the final decision

My partner is usually the one who makes the final decision

4. When you and your partner **have a conflict, who usually gets their way?**

I am usually the one who gets my way	I am more often than not the one who gets my way	My partner and I get our way pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who gets their way	My partner is usually the one who gets their way
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------

5. When you and your partner **have a conflict, who has the most say?**

I am usually the one who has the most say	I am more often than not the one who has the most say	My partner and I have our say pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who has the most say	My partner is usually the one who has the most say
-------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------

6. When you and your partner **have a conflict, who makes the final decision?**

I am usually the one who makes the final decision	I am more often than not the one who makes the final decision	My partner and I make final decisions pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who makes the final decision	My partner is usually the one who makes the final decision
---------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------

7. When you and your partner **make an important decision together, who usually gets their way?**

I am usually the one who gets my way	I am more often than not the one who gets my way	My partner and I have our way pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who gets their way	My partner is usually the one who gets their way
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------

8. When you and your partner **make an important decision together, who has the most say?**

I am usually the one who has the most say	I am more often than not the one who has the most say	My partner and I have our say pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who has the most say	My partner is usually the one who has the most say
-------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------

9. When you and your partner **make an important decision together, who makes the final decision?**

I am usually the one who makes the final decision	I am more often than not the one who makes the final decision	My partner and I make final decisions pretty equally or we compromise	My partner is more often than not the one who makes the final decision	My partner is usually the one who makes the final decision
---------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------

Commitment Level Items

1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time (please select a number).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
4. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
5. I feel very attached to our relationship—very strongly linked to my partner.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
6. I want our relationship to last forever.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do Not Agree				Agree			Agree	
at All				Somewhat			Completely	

Conflict Intensity Items

Please rate your most recent and intense conflict with your partner (please select a number)

1. Not at all Intense Extremely Intense

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. Not at all Emotional									Extremely Emotional
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
3. Not at all Hurtful									Extremely Hurtful
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
4. Not at all Disturbing									Extremely Disturbing
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
5. Not at all Arousing (Provoke)									Extremely Arousing (Provoke)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
6. Not at all Involving									Extremely Involving
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

Conflict Management Items

Regarding your most recent and intense conflict with your partner, please rate the extent to which you engaged in these behaviors (please select a number).

- I openly discussed the situation with my partner

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal
- I accepted their faults and didn't try to change them

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal
- I sulked about the issue

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal
- I talked about ending the relationship with them

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal
- I treated them badly, for example, by ignoring them

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal
- I tried to work with my partner to find a solution to the problem

1	2	3	4	5
Never				A Great Deal

7. I tried to accept the situation and move on
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
8. I criticized them for things that were unrelated to the real problem
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
9. I considered breaking up with my partner
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
10. I tried to bring my concerns out into the open so that the issue could be resolved in the best possible way
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
11. I learned to live with it
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
12. I treated them badly, for example, by saying cruel things
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |
13. I used threats to pressure my partner into changing their thoughts and actions
- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | | | | A Great Deal |