COMMITMENT IN LONG TERM COHABITING COUPLES

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTERS OF SCIENCE

in
Family and Child Development

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April, 1994
Blacksburg, Virginia
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(ABSTRACT)

Researchers on close relationships presupposed marriage as a central measure of successful commitment and identified a mix of structural and personal motives underlying commitment. Debate on how to measure and predict commitment has been prompted by its conceptual complexity and the importance of its role in relationship maintenance.

This study focused on five couples together for at least 13 years outside the institutional grooves and prescribed roles of marriage. Johnson's (1991a) social-psychological model of commitment types embedded within a social structure guided the research. The couples defined commitment, discussed a challenging time in the maintenance of their relationship, and responded to specific questions.

Data analysis resulted in development of a three-dimensional model of commitment phenomenology. Dimensions include types of commitment from Johnson's model (1991a); commitment contexts of time and society expanded from Johnson's model; and the expression of commitment (awareness, salience, plans, or behavior) implied in Johnson's model but made explicit in this model.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, Rosemary Blieszner, for being an advisor, a principle mentor, an intellectual guide, a critical editor, and an inspiration. Your probing questions and precision of thought, your kindness, and your example have enabled me to participate in the universe of scholarship these last three years as a researcher and student of families and older adults. Thank you mostly for being you.

Thank you, Katherine Allen, for your example of scholarship and in living life, your enthusiasm, your intellectual challenges, and your smile. Thank you also for the label "institutional grooves"!

Thank you, Shirley Travis, for your kindness, industry, and patience. Your suggestions were invaluable and helped me enlarge my perspective of my topic. Your calm and steadfast example through a challenging transition was an inspiration to me.

To my peers, my friends, and companions on the trail of knowledge – Mala Mkandawire, Arleen Dodd, Will Hubbard, Phyllis Greenberg, Sheila Lamb Peterson, Jami Pond, Chuck West, Debra Madden-Derdich, T. J. Stone, Mary-Eve Zangari, Dorothy Sluss, and Marsha Carolan, thank you.

Thank you, John and Frankie Galway, Jackson Galway, and Cindy and T. K. Fudge for your support and love through this and many other endeavors over a lifetime. And thank you, Pop,
my first mentor and guide, letter-writer, artist, and poet, for your presence in my life.

And last, but certainly not least, thank you, Art Buikema, for your inspiration, challenge and comfort, laughter and tears, for being there. You were worth waiting for and I look forward to the next 60 years!
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Introduction

Commitment is expressed with multiple meanings across different contexts. It is generally agreed by family researchers that the presence of commitment in a relationship engenders language and behavior that foster interdependence between the relationship partners (Johnson, 1991a; Kelley, 1983; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Rusbult, 1991). In this paper interdependence exists when a change in one partner effects a change in the other (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). Commitment indicates continuation of "lines of action that will prevent the elimination of interdependence" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 120).

This study focuses on the nature of the commitment experience of five couples in long-term intimate relationships outside the institutional grooves of marriage. A socio-psychological model of commitment in the American courtship system (Johnson, 1991a) and a life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993) provided a conceptual basis for the data collection and analysis.

Research Question

Commitment in intimate relationships research in the past focused on marriage as the central measure of commitment. In marriage, duration of relationship reflected commitment. In dating or engagement relationships, proximity to marriage reflected commitment. By asking long-term cohabiting couples about significant relationship
transitions, I looked for patterns and process of commitment outside the institutional grooves and markers of the American courtship system. In-depth qualitative interviews with couples who have lived in committed relationships and created their own relationship structure and expectations over time may be able to reveal a process of commitment unobscured by the institutional structure and expectations of marriage.

In the narration of a specific turning point, transition, or crisis in the relationship, I invited the respondent to consider a situation in which commitment to continuing their relationship was challenged and relate what happened in their own words. By then asking about the influence of components of personal, moral, and structural commitments (Johnson, 1991a), I invited the respondent to reflect on motivating forces operating within or under the surface of their original narration. And last, by asking for the influence of life course factors, such as maturity, current events, and family background, I invited the respondent to reflect on the forces operating around and in their lives at the time of the turning point.
In recognition of its critical function in intimate relationships, commitment has received increased scholarly interest in recent years (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Johnson, 1991a; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Rusbult, 1991; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Surra, 1987). Long-term marriage partners have reported high commitment to the institution of marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Robinson & Blanton, 1993). In addition, attention has focused on the effects of commitment in relationship development (Johnson, 1991a; Surra, 1987) and relationship maintenance (Rusbult et al., 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992) in the context of dating, engaged, and married couples. However, little research has appeared on the development and maintenance of relationships outside the institutional grooves of marriage, particularly long-term relationships of both same-sex and heterosexual couples (Baber & Allen, 1992).

The model of commitment developed by Johnson (1991a) provides a conceptual model in which to examine American populations of disparate relationship type and duration (see Figure 1). Types of personal, moral, and structural commitment are defined by components such as attitude toward partner, general consistency values, and availability of acceptable alternatives, respectively. They are further defined by their position along dialectical continua of
Figure 1. Model of the American Courtship System

choice/constraint and internal/external. Personal commitment is a choice, whereas moral and structural commitments are constraints restricting one's options. Personal and moral commitments are internally motivated by preference or belief, whereas structural commitment is externally imposed by socio-economic realities. Symbolic interaction theory provides sensitivity to the social network and cultural system in which the respondent's psychological awareness is embedded. The "structural commitments often develop quite independently of the individual's perceptions of them" and they are considered by the individual only after a shift in the awareness context brings them into focus within individual phenomenology (Johnson, 1991a, p. 124). It is important when discussing commitment to focus on a time when the awareness context is expanded or heightened to include structural commitment.

A life course perspective contributes concepts of time and process to the analysis of individual, family, and social-cultural contexts (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). Operationalization of life course processes occurs in concepts of trajectory (direction and shape of a person's life course through time), turning point (a point of transition when a trajectory changes course), intersections of individual trajectories with others' or with events of history, and the importance of personal agency and increasing diversity as people make choices and mature. Temporal
contexts of development in a life course conceptualization include multiple levels of action: the individual's "unfolding biography," family transitions, and social-cultural history (Bengtson & Allen, 1993, p. 471).

Although Americans ascribe to values of high commitment and life-long marital careers, their conduct does not reflect this culture of marital stability (Bellah et al., 1985; Demo & Acock, 1991; Hoffman, 1990; Mintz & Kellogg, 1988; Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, & Thompson, 1989; Schumm & Bugaighis, 1985; Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984; Uhlenberg, Cooney & Boyd, 1990; White, 1991). An ideology, or cultural expectation, may differ significantly from the practice, or conduct, of daily life (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993b). The search for intimacy increasingly involves commitment patterns that do not culminate in the cultural ideal of life-long marriages, but do lead to more pluralistic family structures. Furthermore, couples who are not legally married do not have the social, legal, and economic supports of marriage (Baber & Allen, 1992; Bennet, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Landale & Fennelly, 1992; Plummer, 1983; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Waite, Goldscheider, & Witsberger, 1986).

The success of intimate relationships has often been measured by duration, or stability, combined with quality, or satisfaction (Glenn, 1991; Sabatelli, 1988; Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984). Long-term marriage partners often attribute
their success to the cultural expectation that the marriage would endure and to the social support provided by family and community through difficult times (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984). Long-term cohabiting couples stand outside the mainstream cultural system of support. The types of commitment that support couples participating in the American courtship system of dating, engagement, and marriage may not apply neatly to these couples (Baber & Allen, 1992).

It is important to seek out the perspectives and phenomenological experiences of culturally diverse groups and not rely on assumptions connected to a benchmark of normality and uniformity (Cheal, 1991; Collins, 1990; Fine, 1993; Kaufman, 1990; Scanzoni et al., 1989; Sprey, 1990). Unmarried couples together for 13 years or more can reveal shifts in language and ways of relating from a standpoint outside the assumptions and institutional grooves of marriage (Collins, 1990; Daly, 1992; Fine, 1993; Fravel & Boss, 1992; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993a). The challenge is to elicit the phenomenological experience of the individual and not simply a surface statement of general attitudes, or to enable the description of actual conduct, and not simply ascribed values. Focusing on a highly salient time of relationship re-evaluation is a way to elicit an in-depth revelation of experience and conduct.
A turning point in the life of an individual is a specific time of awareness heightened to the extent of creating a transition in identity or life trajectory. A commitment turning point is a specific time of awareness heightened to the extent of creating a transition in relationship. Narration of turning point events enables respondents to focus on and consider their thinking about commitment at that time. The current awareness context may generate generalized descriptions of commitment during an interview, however, a focus on a turning point critical to relationship survival tends to elicit a wider range of specific commitment type and component manifestations of interdependence at the time of the turning point.
Methods

Overview

The commitment experience of long-term cohabiting couples was investigated in four in-depth interviews. The first interview was conjoint, established rapport, and solicited a definition of commitment and timeline of major events in the couple's relationship life. The second and third interviews were with individual couple members. Each respondent was asked to select a time that they would consider a turning point in their commitment to continuing the relationship. Each was asked to relate the story of the turning point. Once the narrative was completed, each was asked to consider the turning point time frame and answer specific questions based on Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model of commitment, followed by more specific questions on aspects of the life course. The final interview was again conjoint and gave the couple the opportunity to discuss the research, the interview experience, and their feelings on recalling and recounting their commitment history.

The conjoint and individual interviews were designed to elicit couple member interaction as well as private in-depth consideration of relationship challenges. The respondent's own experience was elicited by narrative, reconsidered through the commitment model by Johnson (1991a), and again through the context of a life course perspective.
Sample Recruitment and Description

A sample was recruited by word-of-mouth and distribution of a Letter of Description and Solicitation (Appendix B). Diversity of class, race, ethnicity, and age was preferred, but it was difficult to locate people whose status is hidden. Five couples were located who met all the criteria of 13 or more years in the same relationship and participation in all four interviews. Another couple was interviewed as a pilot interview and is not included in these results. Two individuals were also interviewed as they each provided a unique perspective. One individual respondent's partner had died and one individual respondent's partner refused to be interviewed beyond a brief statement. The unique perspectives provided by these interviews are reported and discussed separately.

Respondents ranged in relationship longevity from 13 to 27 years and in age from 40 to 80 years. Each couple owned their own home and was financially secure. All respondents were at least high school educated and most were educated beyond high school. Occupations included entertainment, government, law, data processing, higher education, and farming. The couples lived in scattered locations in the Southeastern United States and did not know each other. One gay male couple and one lesbian couple participated; the rest were female-male partnerships. One couple had children of
their own plus one child from the mother's previous marriage; the others did not have children. (See Table 1.)

Sample Rationale

The couples had in common their relationship's location outside the institution of marriage. These couples either chose to not marry or were legally constrained from marriage (as are gay or lesbian couples). Some considered themselves married in all but the legal sense.

In research on marital relationships, much of the discussion about commitment involves social tradition, legal expectations, parental obligations, and other institutional grooves. Probing for structural, personal, or moral commitments in marital relationships is problematic in the sense that constraints may be invisible to the participants (Johnson, 1973, 1991a). Additional issues of power, gender roles, and inequity may be outside the awareness of the participants (Komter, 1989).

Couples living on the margin, that is, outside the marital legal structure, are likely to be more aware than the legally married couple of the "essentially artificial and socially constructed nature of social life" (Plummer, 1983). Their standpoint, as cohabiting heterosexual couples and gay or lesbian couples, allows a clearer view of the constraints and supports of the legal, societal, and economic security accorded the white, middle-class, heterosexual, married mainstream (Baber & Allen, 1992; Collins, 1990).
### Table 1.

#### Characteristics of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple ID</th>
<th>Years Together</th>
<th>Turning Point Event</th>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Children Together</th>
</tr>
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<td>Separate</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Merged</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Merged</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Merged</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person ID</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Children from Prior Relationship</th>
<th>External Reason to not Marry</th>
<th>Turning Point Salience (in months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>46</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02b</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06a</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06b</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07a</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07b</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>08b</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pilot Study

A pilot set of interviews was completed with a couple meeting the sample description. The purposes of the pilot study were several:

1. Practice tape recording, asking the questions, and probing.
2. Obtain feedback from the couple on the question wording, delivery, and effectiveness.
3. Obtain feedback from the couple on interviewer sensitivity and probing effectiveness.
4. Get a sense of how long the interviews will take and of any practical problems, for example, tape, paper, or pencil requirements.
5. Practice for the interviewer in dress, demeanor, body language.

Data Collection

In opening conjoint interviews respondents defined commitment and described a timeline of major events, such as their meeting, establishing a household, and important moves or career changes. In individual interviews respondents described the events of a turning point and then answered specific questions derived from Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model of types of commitment and questions about life course influences, such as family background and current social,
historical, or economic events. In a final conjoint interview, couples were debriefed and asked for feedback.

Conjoint interviews allowed rapport building and debriefing, whereas, individual interviews allowed privacy and in-depth discussion of turning point events without undue influence by the partner (Kimmel & Moody, 1990; Ridley, 1991; Strain & Chappell, 1982). Interviews took place in the homes of the couples. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 3 hours in length, the majority around 60 minutes. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by the interviewer.

Commitment turning points represent recurrent patterns (Conville, 1991; Huston & Robins, 1982), yet within-person measures of a subjective condition such as commitment fluctuate over time depending on the awareness context (Johnson, 1991a). This fluctuation may color the narration of a series of past events (Huston & Robins, 1982). Potential limitations in recalling and reporting subjective material (Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991) were countered in this study by asking each respondent to think of a specific time and situation (turning point), in which relationship commitment was significantly re-evaluated, and then to describe the specific events and feelings of that point in time. The active recall of a particular time alters the subjective condition and improves accuracy of recall (Duck & Pond, 1989; Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981).
Explicitly asking respondents to consult their memories, providing contextual clues to prompt recall, allowing sufficient time for information retrieval, and using specific, but not leading, probes are techniques that facilitate a person's recovering information from LTM [long-term memory]. (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981, p. 13)

No significant correlation has been found between past turning point components and the current social-psychological dimensions when respondents are asked to focus on the awareness context at the time of the turning point (Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986). Furthermore, the researcher may reserve the possibility of noticing societal influences beyond the situation described by the participant or influences inferred from the partner's narrative (Surra, 1987).

**Instrumentation**

The interviewer used open-ended questions to ask respondents to define commitment and draw a timeline of relationship events. In the individual interview, each respondent was asked to tell the story of a commitment turning point. For example, the opening question was:

Let's begin with the question - what does commitment mean to you personally?

This discussion was followed by an explanation of the concept of turning point:
We realize that once people meet, the relationship can go up, go down, or stay at the same level. It may even seem like a different relationship. There may be more than one turning point in a relationship, so let’s focus on one time when it seemed really critical to you to think about the relationship and if it would continue.
Place yourself in that time and place just before everything started to change. How was your life then? What happened?
These open-ended questions were designed to elicit the vocabulary and meaning that was organizing the respondent's experience.

Specific questions derived from Johnson's (1991a) model of types of commitment and from a life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993) followed the respondent's narration of the turning point. The questions were designed to elicit the fit or non-fit of the research constructs to the respondent's lived experience. A degree of non-fit was expected as the sample in this study stands outside the relationship system organized around marriage. Examples of specific questions are:

Some people value a relationship in part because of the type of relationship it is. Marriage is often valued in that way in our society. At that point in time, how did your personal beliefs about the
value of the type of relationship you had with name influence your sense that you ought to continue in the relationship? (*Probe for actions, feelings, and thoughts.*) 

At that point in time, it would have probably meant a lot of effort or hassle to separate your lives. How did thoughts of hassle affect your sense of having to continue the relationship? (*Probe for actions, feelings, and thoughts.*) 

Was there anything about your age or level of maturity that seemed particularly important in your continuing the relationship then? 

Was there anything about current events that seemed particularly important in your continuing the relationship then? 

Qualitative in-depth interviews provided participant, peer, and observer perspectives (Surra & Ridley, 1991). Participants presented their own perceptions in their own words. The partners, or peers, presented not only their own perspectives, but also their perceptions of the other's perspective. As observer/interviewer, I witnessed interactions between participants during the first and last interview, and discrepancies between the individual presentations. The list of questions and probes in Appendix B is a minimum range of questions that were asked. Any
emergent issues relevant to the commitment process were probed further.

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Observer notes were inserted in the transcribed narratives and labeled as observer notes. Care was taken to protect the anonymity of the participants and any identifying details were removed from the transcripts and tape labels. Code labels were used to identify couple data. All identifying references, such as person and place names, were removed from the coded transcripts. In the following discussion, the respondent is referred to as "R" and the partner as "P". Other people named by respondents are referenced by an initial or by relationship to respondent, for example, [child]. Quotes are referenced by line numbers preceded by the couple and interview identification number/letter, for example, [82B:1222-1234] or [31:25-48].

Analysis


The taped interviews were transcribed onto computer disk by the interviewer and the transcripts were compared to the tapes to assure transcription accuracy. Notes about patterns and ideas of interest were made during this process.
Multiple perspectives, subjective experience, and a process of accounting for events and outcomes are revealed during the interviews, initial transcription, secondary listening or editing, and coding passes (Surra & Ridley, 1991).

Pattern matching, or starting with a model and then gathering data before revising the model (Gilgun, 1992), was used to analyze and code transcripts. The Ethnograph® software was used to facilitate coding and searching. This software requires the user to print the data files, hand-code the paper transcripts, enter the codes on the computer, print the coded transcripts, review the coded transcripts and refine the coding, enter the code corrections and additions, reprint the coded data files, and continue this process until coding changes are exhausted. Transcripts were read and coding refined three times for constructs derived from Johnson's (1991a) model and any life course or emergent themes, such as perceptions of marriage and the context of time.

Limitations of Reminiscence

The focus of discussion was not current relationship issues, but the time of the turning point, and, therefore, involved reminiscence. Because commitment itself is subjective, it lends itself to self-report more than to objective task analysis (Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991). Limitations of reminiscence and self-report as methods of eliciting data has been a controversy in social science.
Burnett (1991) reviewed the ways credibility, competence, biases, meaning, skills, performance, and revised histories can confound an investigation. Undue influence of one partner's taking the lead and getting simple confirmation from the other partner is an example of a conjoint interview problem and could have been a problem in this study. Use of separate individual accounts for information about commitment process offset the leader influence in perception of process. Additionally, the possible imposition of one perspective was offset by the knowledge during the conjoint narration that individual interviews would occur.

Huston and Robins (1982) examined the difference between reporting events, relationship properties, and subjective conditions. Respondents in this study reported a set of events in narration of their commitment turning point. Commitment experience during a turning point could also be considered a relationship property, which was defined as "recurrent patterns of interpersonal or subjective events" (p. 904). Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model of commitment described personal, moral, and structural commitments as recurrent patterns in this way. Personal, moral, and structural commitments could, therefore, be considered relationship properties. In addition, commitment could be considered a subjective condition, defined by Huston and Robins as "a single attitude, belief, or relatively stable orientation held by one person" (p. 906).
Johnson (1991a), however, maintained that within-person measures of attitudes such as commitment can fluctuate over time, as the relationship context changes and the respondent's awareness context shifts perspective. The respondent's experience of commitment to the relationship is necessarily different now than it was at the time of the turning point, when commitment was strained or renewed. These couples continued to be committed to each other. If they had separated, they would give a different interpretation now of the turning point events (Duck, 1992). It was important, therefore, to maintain the respondent's focus on the turning point awareness context and not to shift focus onto the current relationship.
Results

Overview

As predicted by Johnson (1991a) respondents reported their commitment experience "in terms of the particular features of the interdependence" (p. 120) or different combinations of personal, moral, and structural types of commitment and their components. Each commitment component was addressed as a specific question and coded for degree of influence in the outcome of the turning point, as determining, influential, present, or of zero influence.

Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model presented awareness of the commitment types and their components affecting motivation to maintain or dissolve, these in turn influencing development of plans of action and the action itself. This interaction of awareness, motivation, planning, and action are made explicit as four manners of expression. Expression both reflects the focus of the actor's thinking and shapes the direction of the actor's perception and interpretation of past and present events, and future possibilities. Four expressions of the phenomenological experience of commitment emerged as awareness, salience, plans, and behavior. These expressions reflected how the respondents talked about their experiences: as simply being aware of an aspect of the experience, as investing importance in the aspect due to belief or emotion, as cognitively projecting or considering alternatives, or as describing concrete actions.
Commitment types and expressions of commitment occurred in context. Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model describes the individual's awareness context, dyadic interactions, and cultural vocabulary and expectations. Social contexts in this analysis included individual, or internal psychological awareness; dyad, or the relationship interaction; and social network culture, or the community and culture in which the relationship is embedded. Time is added explicitly here as an additional context in which relationships develop. Time as aging, as generational succession, and as historical period also shaped the experience of commitment, perhaps without the respondent's conscious knowledge.

The three dimensions of type, expression, and context are conceptually organized by a three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena generated from the study results. In addition, themes of gender, dependence and interdependence, perceptions of marriage, and maturity emerged as topics of interest to respondents and the interviewer.

**Definitions of Commitment and Relationship**

Respondents described commitment in their own words, varying in focus and in amount of detail. Their definitions arose from their current perception of commitment and their relationship. Descriptions of support, loyalty, partnership, pulling together, and encouragement reflected primarily personal and moral types of commitment. Structural types of
commitment were less frequently mentioned than personal and moral types.

Most couples had not thought much about commitment:
We never sat down and said to each other really
"We're going to stay together for the rest of our lives." [31:82-86]

The gay and lesbian couples were constrained from marriage by legislative injunctions against same-sex marriage. The lesbian couple had discussed a commitment ceremony, but one partner felt it was unnecessary:
I'm much more open-ended about this relationship than P is. She wants it defined. She has asked if, she has wanted some kind of a union, a formal kind of union. The Unitarian Church will do it. And I, I can't go along with that. Even though I know she would like it very much, but she's only asked me once, she doesn't pressure on that. [72A:1138-1149]

One heterosexual couple reported that they might have gotten married early in their relationship, but were constrained by considerations outside their control, in that their employer maintained a corporate policy against married partners working in the same department. Even though the external constraints eventually lifted, enough time had passed that marriage had become a remote and unnecessary possibility:
Maybe because I was married before, I don’t feel the need... It doesn’t seem important to me.

I suppose maintaining our relationship as it currently is, right now, is probably just easier than trying to get married.

The concept of ups and downs, or good and bad times in the relationship, was common and five respondents used the actual term. Only one couple reported a lack of ups and downs:

We just don’t have a lot of ups and downs, I don’t think. I guess some people do. We’re both fairly quiet individuals and I think we’re old enough to be, to know what we want, and what we expect out of each other and life.

The importance of taking responsibility and working hard also appeared in a theme of persistence, usually with a recognition of the circular nature of commitment intentions and outcomes:

If you have commitment, I think, to something, you will work harder at it, to keep the commitment, than if you’re just going in a relationship for some reason other than real commitment. [.55-73]

..a lot of give and take... [.20-21] like a partnership ..Partners don’t ever agree on
everything all the time and you just have to work things out. [81:160-165]

At least one respondent resisted the permanence implied by the term commitment, emphasizing independence, individuality, or timelessness instead:

.. sometimes in real life there are periods of time when you don't want to define commitment .. it depends on how each person performs individually, as a person, their own pace, their own way of looking at things.[71:205-225] ... you have to come back to it periodically.. If I have the definition of commitment in front of me 24 hours a day, that's pretty scary. [71:239-251]

The other respondents reported comfort with a mix of permanence and independence:

I'm the kind who really likes to see the end of a project and know that it's gotten finished? (Laughter) So I don't know how I got myself into this one that's such a never-ending project when I really think of it. It'll probably never be ended like I would like to see it ended in my mind anyway. So I think that did, yes, have a bearing on it. I wanted to see what we had agreed to start on finished, or carried through with to whatever finish might be. [82A:1055-1070]
I don't want to look at my relationship as an obligation to another person. I want to look at it because I want to be there. I don't want to feel obliged to somebody, so that's one of the reasons I've chosen not to get legally married is because - I want to be here because I want to be here. Not because a church has told me it's OK, not because a piece of paper has told me it's OK, not because all the community says "That's what you should be doing." But because this is where I want to be. [82A:1112-1129]

The state of commitment in one relationship was reported as partially built on the realization of relationship longevity, a longevity that was unintentional at the start. This is very different from discussions involving marriage, which tend to include an expectation of duration from the start (Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Robinson & Blanton, 1993):

My reason initially for not wanting to get married was because I thought we were too young to know whether we were going to stay together... But by [the time of the turning point] we had celebrated our 10th anniversary... And I was sort of proud of that. [32B:1074-1113]

The couple with children assumed a long, even life-time commitment. Their emphasis was on past decisions creating a situation that required continuing, rather than simply
finding themselves in a de facto committed relationship after a few years:

That was a choice I made in getting involved in this relationship in the first place. And I made the choice to experience what it was like to have a family and ... but it's not done. And it won't be done. Because the grandchildren who are coming along are going to make it so it can't be that simplistic, to raise a family ...I knew it in the beginning that raising a family was something that once you commit to you can't stop with until you're dead. [82B:3248-3425]

Finally, the decision and contractual nature of commitment expectations appeared frequently:

I guess, sort of a loyalty. I think of commitment and loyalty as being sort of an agreement between parties to work toward a common goal. [61:50-57] I guess I feel like it's some type of responsibility, emotionally and probably economically .. you make a promise. [62B:18-21,52]

The thing that makes the difference is the ability or the willingness to commit to doing something that another person wants to do also... The only way it works smooth, harmonious, is if everybody is pulling together and working, doing their job. [82B:1991-1999]
One couple disagreed on the definition and a lively discussion occurred. They did indicate progress in a working definition had been made over time:

R07A: Commitment to me is, is being there for the other person. It's easier for me not to break it down and to define it too closely. [71:67-70, 77-79] ... It is a total feeling. [71:256-266]

R07B: I think you have to be committed to something... it's got to have an object.... You can't just say "I'll do." You have to say "I'll do something." [71:137-144]

R07B: Well, it has to be a motion towards something for me. I mean, I have to know what I'm being committed to.

R07A: And to me it's just like a way of life. That doesn't always move forward, it's just there.

[71:170-182]

The definitions of commitment offered by these respondents tended to follow the pattern found in other research efforts (Johnson, 1991a). That is, when simply asked about commitment, people offer definitions concerning their connection to the person or the relationship, but rarely report structural constraints or moral obligations at the first round of questioning. It was expected that the couples in this sample particularly tended in the direction of personal choice explanations of commitment, as the
structural constraints and institutional grooves of marriage did not apply. Once specifically asked about the specific types of commitment and their components, however, institutional forces motivating commitment emerged.

**Turning Points**

**Types of turning points.** Respondents reported a wide range of turning points. Initial conditions included sudden external events and a slow awareness of dissatisfaction. Examples include a unilateral decision to move, infidelity, mid-life crisis, purchase of a house, desire for personal freedom, offer of a job, and illness.

The densest detail emerged when respondents were able to relate this kind of a story of a specific event containing a beginning, middle, and end, and with definite implications for relationship survival. It was easier for respondents to associate affectively with these stories and talk about the who, what, where, and when of their situation. Turning point focus helped respondents locate a particular and salient reference in time and experience for commitment thinking. Three couples related specific turning points and in each case all partners were very clear that the turning point had been a challenge to the existence of the relationship. It happened that in each of these couples, both partners identified the same event as a critical turning point.

Relationship development stories, on the other hand, related a less explicit set of events over a more generalized
period of time. The stories did not have a beginning, middle, and end, and lacked detail. They related gradual shifts in thinking, behavior, or mood. The respondents related present awareness about commitment, despite interviewer reminders to locate their thinking in the selected time period. Two couples related relationship development stories, each of which, while important to the continuation of the relationship in a developmental sense, were not specific challenges to relationship existence. It was unclear whether the partner knew of the respondent's thinking. One of these respondents did not identify a turning point at all (06B) and the three others (06A, 02A, 02B) identified general time periods of three months to three years during which the relationship did not seem secure. These personal development stories involved a mid-life crisis, a chronic mildly debilitating illness, and a delayed commitment early in the relationship. These stories were harder to locate in time and were resolved somewhat magically, in that the crises gradually went away without clear respondent action:

I guess it was a gradual growing change - us growing together, us really getting to know each other a little better. Us getting over those early stages where people, and especially me in this instance, of being very jealous. [22b:381-389]
Timing of turning points. Turning points (including relationship development stories) ranged over a wide spectrum of occurrence from early in the relationship to relatively recently. No respondents identified a turning point as a current or ongoing issue. In the two low-duration couples (13 and 15 years), each respondent reported different turning points as developmental periods or no turning point at all. The three high-duration couples (21, 24, and 25 years) reported the same intra-couple turning point, indicating that this turning point seriously challenged the existence of the relationship. The turning points occurred at years 16, 10, and 18 years into the relationships, respectively. It is possible that the respondents reporting relationship development stories simply had not been together long enough to experience a crisis of commitment. It is also possible that not everyone must have a definitive crisis or that gradual relationship development awareness can be a substitute for crisis.

Most of the turning points involved internal issues of dyad intimacy:

I brought so much baggage to the relationship. And it was baggage I couldn't get rid of and she couldn't help me get rid of. And I realize that now. You see, this was therapy time, too [laughter]. So I understand a lot. I was very
angry at P for most of our relationship. And, as I say, a lot of it goes back to what I expected the relationship to be, what I expected her to be, feelings of abandonment, you know, when I didn't get everything I thought I needed. [72A:304-320]

Alternatives. Only two respondents reported involvement with available alternative partners as a part of the turning point. One respondent's delayed commitment development resulted in several early relationship affairs:

These were all based, again, on insecurity. And me feeling that I wasn't getting a total commitment from P. Me feeling that there was someone better suited to me elsewhere. [22B:340-346]

Another respondent took the opportunity to have a year-long affair and seriously considered relationship termination due to general dissatisfaction with the partner late in the relationship. A third respondent had an opportunity for an alternative relationship during a temporary separation, but did not act on the opportunity and the primary relationship eventually healed. Several other respondents reported having less explicit opportunities:

There was one man in particular who, you know, sort of hinted that he wouldn't have minded, you know, having more of a relationship, but I was never really seriously tempted. And I liked going out with [the group], having fun. [32B:418-425]
Johnson's Types of Commitment

A primary feature of Johnson's (1991a) model is the division of commitment phenomena into three different motivating types of commitment: personal, moral, and structural. As he predicted, idiosyncratic combinations of personal ("want to"), moral ("ought to"), and structural ("have to") commitment were important to each respondent's experience. According to Johnson, each type of commitment consists of specific components. Thus, the interviewer described each component and asked for its influence on the turning point outcome. Answers were coded in decreasing extent of influence in terms of determining, influential, present, or zero influence. Determining or influential components significantly affected the respondent's decision-making on a commitment outcome. Components which were merely present or of zero influence did not affect the outcome. If the commitment components appeared in the definition or turning point narrative, they were coded as components and for influence. This example of attraction to partner, a component of personal commitment, emerged in the discussion leading up to identification of a turning point:

I wanted to live together. I was really crazy about L. And, you know, the young, being in lust and all sorts of things and... I already knew who he was, you know, from his appearances on
television and everything, so I knew who he was. I was very attracted to him. [22B:204-213]

Personal Commitment

Personal commitment was described by Johnson (1991a) as "wanting to" stay in a relationship, as a choice by the individual and motivated by internal preference. The three components of personal commitment involve attitude toward the partner, attitude toward the relationship, and relational identity. Sometimes the three were intertwined in the interview data. The symbol is followed by the component:

My wanting to stay in a relationship was | person attached to P, but not solely to P. Because if P and I had broken up, I think I would have sought another relationship with a woman.... All of my life, a relationship with a woman has been very important. And I certainly would not say that I would be content with a relationship with just any woman, but I would not like at all not to have a relationship. I love women. And I just, it's been one of the major facets of my life. And so, it's very important. But it is attached and certainly at that moment was attached to P. [72B:455-485] | person
In addition, respondents provided discrete examples of each component, as indicated below.

**Attitude toward partner.** All but one respondent initially rated this component as determining or influential among the reasons for maintaining the relationship during the turning point. And even the respondent who did not mention attitude toward partner early on pointed out later in the interview that affection for her partner was a major part of her decision to stay in the relationship:

-[In response to direct question on the influence of attitude toward partner] I would say that there were a lot of extenuating circumstances that helped a good deal in keeping me here. The decision was not based solely on P. [82A:504-523]

-[In response to direct question on the influence of partner specific obligation] And you can know, P can know, that if I'm here, it's because I want to be here and not because of any other extenuating circumstances are holding me here...[I have] a genuine love for P, because I really did love, he finds this hard to believe, but I did love him through all of this upheaval, and through everything that was going on, I still did love him. And I know I was aware of that love at some deeper level. Although it was quite tumultuous up here and there was all this negative feelings towards P,
but down here at some base level I knew that there was also, I did truly did love him as a person.

For another respondent, attitude toward partner was the only component that mattered. All the specific questions elicited a version of the same response:

[In response to specific question on attitude toward relationship] In my mind I never gave a thought to anybody else. [32A:750-751]

[In response to specific question on general consistency values] I knew I loved P and I didn't want to be apart from her. [32A:940-942]

[In response to specific question on partner specific obligation] It was how strongly I felt towards her and just wanting us to continue in the relationship, what we had. [32A:985-990]

All other respondents ranked attitude toward partner as determining or influential, but with other components involved as well, such as other commitments or interests connected to the person, or a hint of the lack of acceptable alternative relationships:

I always wanted to stay with P. Even when it's not, say, "on". I don't ever want to leave. But I would let myself get pushed away, I 'spose. ... I'm not willing to throw all this away that I've put into this. [82B:2208-2216, 2268-2275]
Attitude toward partner was consistently influential in the outcome of the turning point, that is, maintenance of the interdependence within the relationship. This was the only commitment component consistently reported as influential in or determining the outcome.

**Attitude toward relationship.** This component was often mixed with attitude toward partner, but had a distinction about which these couples were usually precise. The following respondent was committed to the relationship, and the person of the partner made that commitment more enjoyable:

Wanting to be in a relationship at all affected me, but wanting to be in a relationship with P made it that much easier to stay in this relationship. It was the only one I'd really ever had that was, you might say, committable. [82B:2374-2395]

Most respondents indicated that they liked being in a relationship and would be in one anyway:

I'm sure that would have a lot to do with it. Because I'm, I believe I'm a person who would like to be in a relationship. [82A:537-541]

... if P and I had broken up, I think I would have sought another relationship with a woman. [72B:458-461]

I have lived alone and don't ever intend to live alone again if I can help it. [72B:1466-1469]
One respondent reported that being in a relationship was a determining factor in her efforts to maintain this relationship. It was important to this respondent, however, to differentiate the emotional attachment from simple physical togetherness in her description of the importance of the intimate relationship:

INT: How did wanting to be in this kind of relationship with someone at all affect your continuing in the relationship?
R072A: Ohh. (pause) Yeah, it was up there. Probably pretty close, you know, like a good 90% at least. Yeah... It was the fear of being alone.
[72A:763-774]

She later added that:

By nature, I get along very well by myself. I'm not the kind that needs somebody to be with me all the time. As a matter of fact we relish, I relished our time apart during all these years. But there were months when we would be apart. And that was great with me. [72A:793-802]

Attitude toward relationship was, therefore, highly dependent on attitude toward partner and quality of the relationship for most of these respondents. The relationship was not considered a separate entity, an institution or set of roles separate from the people in the relationship.
Relational identity. The identity provided by the relationship, as a couple or as described in studies of widows (Lopata, 1973), was not reported by these couples as an important component in self-concept. One respondent carefully separated role from identity:

I don't really see that my identity is defined by being in this relationship with P. I feel like I have my own identity and he has his own. And we are also defined as a couple ... and with a lot of different roles. But I didn't decide to stay in the relationship after this problem time because if I didn't have a relationship I wouldn't be anybody. Not from that standpoint at all. [82A:560-582]

I'm going to be me no matter whether I have a relationship or not. I'll be a lonely me, but I'll still be me. [72B:498-501]

Another respondent separated feelings of belonging from identity:

I'm going to be me no matter whether I have a relationship or not. I'll be a lonely me, but I'll still be me. [72B:498-501]

Identity provided by the relationship was not influential in maintaining the study respondents' relationships through the turning points. Identity was, however, repeatedly described as important in the sense that the relationship and the
partner let the respondent be himself or herself or, at the least, did not interfere with self-identity by trying to impose roles or control behavior:

You see, that's who I am. I have got to maintain that sense of me no matter what kind of condition I'm in. [82B:2452-2456]

The relationship has always been that we can still be great friends, or we can still be lovers, but we can also be individuals. That does not in any way threaten the relationship, that we're individuals. [22A:783-789]

One man commented on understanding that many women report losing their identity in marriage due to changing their name, but he did not see that as a problem for himself.

[It seems more important] for women than men because of the name change and stuff... I just don't think that I would ever lose my personal identity. In other words, I don't think that it would affect me at all, but I guess it does affect other people. I have heard other married couples say that they don't like to be introduced as "Joe's wife" or something like that, you know. "I want to be introduced as Bill Jones" type of a situation. So I guess some people do have problems with that. I don't think I would have any problems. [62B:465-490]
Identity issues, therefore, seemed to play a neutral role in these relationships. Self-identity was not derived from the relationship. Indeed, an opposite action seemed to occur. Respondents were concerned primarily that their relationship and partner not interfere with their individual identity.

Moral Commitment

Moral commitment, or "ought to" stay in a relationship, is a constraint on pursuing alternative choices, but is also internally derived and not imposed from the outside socio-economic world (Johnson, 1991a). Three components of moral commitment involve general consistency values, relationship type values (such as stability), and a partner-specific obligation.

General consistency values. Inconsistency presented a source of dissonance or discomfort in terms of the nature of community life and the expectations people create when making plans that depend on predicting the actions of others (Johnson, 1991a). Most of the respondents did not agree that this was important in their relationship's continuity:

The older I get the less importance I see in that, especially looking at relationships between my parents' friends. I think a lot of them would be better off if they hadn't "stuck with it" just because it was the thing to do. [62A:553-563]
Four respondents, however, did value consistency of relationship for reasons involving the value of promises or contractual agreements:

One of my tendencies is that I'll do what I say I'll do. It's very difficult to get me to say what I'll do, but once I say it, I'll do it come hell or high water... That is very meaningful to me. It seems it has something to do with responsibility. Not pressure from the outside, but responsible [sic] to yourself if you take on the responsibility of a person or a commitment, then you have to follow through insofar as you can. But not because other people say so. [72B:619-640]

Two of the four were men who cited career-based motivations:

That was all of it. I told P "I'm not finished yet. I've not done what I intended and I can't leave until I'm done with that." And that's nebulous, what I want to do, but being a bricklayer... from that point of view. It's not over 'til it's over... If you're going to make a chair or if you're going to make a relationship, or if you're going to make a family and you don't carry it through to the end, you haven't made anything, by one set of standards only just started... If you don't live up to your expectations, I mean, you don't live up to society's expectations, but you
live up to your expectations. See, my expectations were to see this thing through to the end no matter what happens. [82B:3248-3425]

I feel pretty strongly about that... [With] long-term commitments I feel like you have to make an effort to follow through with your commitment... because there's going to be some dependence in some way and you're going to be affecting the other people's lives and livelihoods and how they go about doing their daily routines and stuff... I saw people make the same type of commitments to the military and then decided they didn't want to be in the military. I understand, but I don't think it's right.[62B:801-879]

In summary, consistency got mixed reviews among these couples, with most negatively reacting and four others valuing it highly. The respondents who valued consistency did so across contexts.

**Relationship type values.** All but three of the 10 respondents thought that the type of relationship had value in and of itself. The relationship was likened to marriage or family of origin traditions, even setting an example for longevity within gay and lesbian communities:

And, me, I just decided to commit forever, 'til it's over. I presume that would mean until you die. Because of the way the marriage vows are.
You know, it's in your psyche, it's in the back of your subconscious, it's like "'til death do you part."[82B:2374-2395]
The fact that I value lesbian relationships had a good bit to do with it... It would be the same thing as people valuing their marriage vows, really, in a way. The lesbian relationship, to me, is philosophically beautiful. Because it is the only relationship I know where there is the equality of power from the beginning. The only relationship I know where women can support and love each other without the interference of the patriarchal society. [72B:688-691]
The couple with children associated relationship type with the family unit of parents and children, rather than limiting it to the couple relationship:

Having seen my daughter go through the separation and how, the effect it had on her that her father wasn't around much and so on, I did not really want to do that to [other children]. [82A:783-794]

One respondent remarked that the simple passage of time had created a relationship that was long term and that the longevity itself increased the value of the relationship:

My reason initially for not wanting to get married was because I thought we were too young to know whether we were going to stay together... But by
[the time of the turning point] we had celebrated our 10th anniversary... And I was sort of proud of that. [32B:1074-1113]

The type of relationship for most respondents, therefore, gained value both with time and because of its uniqueness as a long-term cohabiting relationship in the larger culture. The study respondents did not describe the relationship as having been particularly special at the beginning. The couple with children seemed an exception to this pattern because they consistently described the relationship as a family, and included the children.

**Partner-specific obligation.** A sense of personal obligation can exist separate from any external contract or enforceable obligation. Most respondents reacted negatively to the idea of obligation and discussed their aversion to it as a commitment motive:

I think you should never do things out of obligation. You should do things because you want to do them. And that includes family things, you know, anything. [22B:960-965]

One respondent realized how deeply attached the partner was to the relationship and that realization had a strong impact on the respondent's decision to remain in the relationship at the turning point:

I think that was probably a factor in that when I saw that P was really very unhappy about the
I thought that I would leave, and ... I had never seen P cry before, so that was [very strong], yeah. [32B:1136-1144]

Male respondents commented on the partner's self-care ability. A gendered expectation of male self-sufficiency and female dependence emerged in the three accounts of female partner's economic self-sufficiency by men:

I realize that she needs to be happy with what she's doing. And I learned that I have to accommodate her. And especially since she makes more money than I do, which doesn't bother me at all. And ... and this is what she wants to do, so. And where the job's involved, I don't care exactly what I do. I mean, if I don't like a job, I'll just leave it and go somewhere else. [32A:578-590]

I don't feel like P would suffer economically or something like that if we were to split up. In other words I don't think there's that kind of dependence... But there's certainly some emotional dependency... [If I left suddenly] I wouldn't be giving very much thought to her, as a person, and to her feelings towards me and stuff like that. So, I mean, you have to think of, you have to take all of that into account. [62B:1078-1110]

I don't know if I look at it as an obligation to P, because she can take care of herself. And I don't
feel obliged. I feel like I have an obligation to P from another sense, in a business partner sense of it... I feel like I've got my obligation not to leave her high and dry from this business that we started. And so I also feel now I have an obligation to the family that we started, not leave them high and dry. [82B:3512-3527]

The above statements reflect both economic and emotional considerations and are not recognizable as gendered until compared to the women's comments. The women mentioned emotional self-care and did not explain whether their male partners were economically self-sufficient, even in the situation in which the male partner actually was financially dependent:

I think [personal obligation] was probably a factor in that when I saw that he was really very unhappy about the thought that I would leave... [32B:1136-1139]

A sense of positive obligation to person existed for most respondents. The obligation was usually in a contractual spirit, rather than a suffered obligation or sacrifice.

**Structural Commitment**

Structural commitment, or "having to" stay in a relationship, is a constraint on the individual's range of choices and externally derived from the socio-economic world
in which the relationship is embedded (Johnson, 1991a). Four components of structural commitment involve irretrievable investments, social reaction, availability of acceptable alternatives, and difficulty of termination procedures.

**Irretrievable investments.** As individuals invest "time, energy, and other resources" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 122) in a relationship, they may perceive this expenditure as invested for future reward or, once gone, not replaceable. Aspects of future outcome and the irretrievable nature of the investment were important to five of the respondents:

This whole project that we initially committed ourselves to, had not [been] finished. And the children..., and actual monetary investments... but I think overall, it was just basically I wanted what we initially set out to do... Because all of those things as a package were important. That's one of the major reasons why I decided to stay...

This [was] just one little crook in the road. [82A:607-671]

Most respondents, including those to whom the investment was important, tended to view the investment of resources as effort that would have been invested in something anyway:

I don't know that I ever got into this relationship for anything out of it other than a feeling of what it's like to be in a relationship. Because that's all I was looking for. [82B:2737-2741]
I don't think it would be wasted. Because I wouldn't want to change anything. I mean, if something happened to P, I wouldn't look back and think that the years we were together were a waste. So if something happened and the relationship didn't continue I don't see why that would be different. [62A:460-470]

Resources were valued differently and, although present, were not influential in the decisions made during the turning point:

Money meant nothing. Time, well, maybe time a little bit because I was getting older [and] that would have some effect... I wouldn't think effort would make any difference, because the effort of staying in a relationship has always been kind of enjoyable to me. I mean, the things that you do with and for, together, that's good. [72B:518-533]

Investment of irretrievable resources, therefore, was perceived as an investment in daily living that would have been made anyway, rather than a special investment in the relationship. When the investment was perceived as an accumulation of resources tied to the relationship, it became motivation to put more effort into maintaining the relationship, rather than being perceived as a constraint to leaving the relationship.
Social reaction. Other people around the couple may have had an opinion about the demise of the relationship. They may have constructed their own plans of action depending on the couple to continue their course of action. All respondents discounted the influence of their social network on maintaining the relationship at the time of the turning point:

That isn't to say that family and friends are not affected by it... there's some emotional tie there... But it isn't enough [to maintain the relationship]. [22A:879-926]

Didn't have any effect at all. No matter what they would have said, they didn't count. [32A:890-893]

Most respondents simply replied "no" or "not at all" when asked if the reaction of friends or family was a concern in their turning point outcome. One respondent reported that all his childhood friends were amazed that the relationship had continued so long.

When social network was considered at all influential, the importance existed because of the type of relationship it was, such as gay or lesbian, and the positive example it set for relationship longevity:

P and I were known as a couple that was successful. We were known in the circle of friends that we had as a "good" couple, so it would have been some
embarrassment, and/or some discomfort, certainly, for us to have broken up... So I would just say it was uncomfortable, but not, it wouldn't have, the attitude of friends or family would have made no difference as far as breaking up is concerned.

[72B:545-563]

The couple with children, however, was highly sensitive to the effects of relationship demise on the children. When asked about reactions of friends and family, respondents generally replied in the context of adult peers. When probed about the reaction of children, they responded by describing the dependency of children, the far-reaching effects of separation on the children, and their own responsibility as parents. This respondent minimized the effect of the social network, but when asked about children, looked at it from a different angle and, in her discussion, arrived back at the importance of community effects:

INT: If we bring the children into the focus in that question...

ROSA: Oh, OK, children, too, are part of that?

INT: It's kind of a different thing?

ROSA: Yeah, because like what I said earlier, having seen [the effects of] the previous separation, I did not really want to do that to [this child]... unless something absolutely intolerable [happened], that I saw could never be
resolved, then I would do it. It would not be good for the children, in the long run, it would not be good for P and I. It would not be good for the community as a whole. [82A:783-815]

Although social reaction was a consideration for gay and lesbian respondents, all respondents were clear that the opinions of peers would not be enough to keep them in a relationship they did not wish to continue. The only exception was the presence of children and their dependence was clearly important to the parents in maintaining the relationship if at all possible and even seen as a help to commitment in the long run.

Availability of acceptable alternatives. Relationship and commitment researchers have usually thought of alternatives in terms of alternative romantic partners. In his model, however, Johnson (1991a) expanded the concept to include a wide range of alternatives, such as economic security, social network, and access to career options. Johnson reminds researchers that the sample population demographics of age, education, race, gender, and presence of dependents will influence the priorities given to these various alternatives. A sample of single college women will focus on different alternatives than a sample of married women with dependents and few job skills.

Most of the study respondents were financially independent to some degree. One respondent was unemployed
and seeking work, one was fully retired, and one was retired with a part-time business. All had job skills and had worked successfully in the past. Only one respondent explicitly admitted financial limitations:

[My part-time job] was a little pocket of security when thoughts of ... leaving ... It would have come down to just having been a working mother with children trying to keep it all going.[82A:967-977, 993-997]

Most of the respondents were happily aware of available alternatives and their choice to maintain the relationship:

We've been so independent, in so many ways in our relationship, that we've never allowed ourselves to become so intertwined that one can't move without the other. And I don't say that in a bad way. I say that in a good way. Married people should be so smart. [22A:1078-1090]

One respondent, who had actually separated from her partner for a period of time, stated:

I did have an option and I did take it. So, I was not affected by any of those pragmatic things.

[72B:598-602]

Only one couple had experienced disparate financial and social alternatives over most of the relationship duration because the woman was highly successful in a career and the man was much less so. In addition, the man did not maintain
friendships outside partner or family connections. Their finances were merged and, although they each were adamant that this arrangement was highly positive, their interdependence was socially and economically asymmetric, and it appeared to this observer that separation could be catastrophic for the dependent male partner.

Availability of acceptable alternatives was important to 9 of the 10 respondents as evidenced by their maintenance of access to alternatives. The tenth respondent was dependent on his partner for economic and social alternatives. All the respondents were capable of maintaining separate lives, if necessary. Although availability of acceptable alternatives was important enough to evoke planning, none of the respondents reported that a lack of available acceptable alternatives was an important influence in their decision to maintain the relationship, or a constraint to the demise of the relationship. Nine of the respondents were coded zero or present on this component. One respondent's discussion of alternatives was coded influential in the decision to maintain the relationship due to a strong desire to maintain the present way of life and a sense that the available alternatives, while present, were not desirable:

It would have meant giving up the whole idea of the life here in the first place, that we had both worked so hard for. So, no, I didn't have an
alternative, but I did at least a little already existing income.
INT: OK. So the alternatives weren't good, but they were there.
ROSA: Yeah. The alternatives were certainly not as, not what I wanted to do, either. [82A:-1012]
Difficulty of termination procedures. Most respondents were fully aware of the complications involved in separating their lives. Multiple commitments existed to businesses, property, community, and children, as well as to the relationship:
You start collecting things as soon as you make a commitment. So it's harder to get rid of them once you've gotten houses and books and cars and kids and deadlines and commitments and things you're going to do [next year]. Hard line stuff. [82B:2351-2358]
They were also clear, however, that divorce was not part of the process. Somehow, the material and emotional complications of divorce were present, but without the umbrella of the legal and community process of divorce:
Honestly, now, I just waited it out. Just made suggestions as best I could and reality sunk in. She went to a lawyer and the lawyer told her how to divest a partnership and it's not like a marriage where you can just make a claim, whether you're
right or wrong, and get a divorce. Partnerships are different and that's why I think we're not married. [82B:]

Perceived difficulty of termination depended on both the past experience of the respondent and the degree of structural interdependence of material possessions and financial arrangements:

Well, we did separate more or less. I think that, whatever the hassle was, it was something that had to be done. So we just did it... just the ordinary discomfort of having to pack up things and unpack them and so forth. So I wouldn't say that was important. [72B:573-586]

Emotional connections were strong and disruption of attachment was perceived as the primary difficulty in termination when material possessions were separate already:

I wouldn't say it was particularly all that big a deal or all that little a deal, maybe middle of the road deal. Because it would have been a big hassle... but, you know, you get through that.... It can be disheartening, and frustrating at the time, but [the material separation is] not what really counts. [72A:829-875]

The parents reported that their children would not understand the difference between divorce and termination of their relationship:
[My daughter] is always worried about us getting a divorce, too... She's worried about us separating and she's calling it a divorce and no matter what I say to her about it, not going away, there's still something about it, fearful... She knows it happens. It happened to [her sister]. [82B:3716-3747]

Difficulty of termination procedures, therefore, depended on past experience. It was easier to consider termination hassles if the respondent had already ended a cohabiting or marital relationship. Difficulty of termination procedures also depended on the degree of economic, social, and emotional independence of the partners within the relationship. Two couples were very pragmatic in creating an easily divisible structure that allowed for cooperation, while the partners maintained separate bank accounts, property ownership, and even social networks. Partners in the other three couples were highly interconnected with common bank accounts, property ownership, and social networks. All reported, however, that it was their choice that mattered and not the legal requirements or hassles of the divorce process.

Summary of Commitment Types

The varying constellations of types of commitment and their components map the different experiences respondents have with commitment. Across the three types of commitment,
a sense of internal moral partner-specific obligation, for example, is distinct from maintaining personal identity. Even within a single type of commitment, such as structural commitment, the prospect of losing irretrievable investments in future happiness or security is distinct from the hassle of termination procedures. The different constellations of commitment components reported by respondents are presented in Table 2. The different influence levels for a single respondent and component reflect shifts in priorities as the respondent reports different contexts of the component.

Table 3 provides a frequency distribution of commitment components. The appearance of each commitment component was counted if the component had exerted a determining or influential role in the respondent's awareness context of the turning point. Appearances deemed merely present or of zero influence were not included in the count. Appearance of the component was counted in any portion of the interview. The data in Table 3 show that personal commitment far outweighed moral and structural commitments in salience for this sample of long-term cohabiting couples. At 38% of total components reported as determining or influential, attitude toward partner was by far the most salient commitment component. Another personal commitment component, attitude toward the relationship, was second in frequency at 16%. Moral commitment components appeared to be uniformly strong with two respondents and not with others. Structural commitment
Table 2.

**Constellations of Commitment Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment Force Components</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>02A 02B 03A 03B 06A 06B 07A 07B 08A 08B</td>
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**Personal Commitment**

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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>I D/I D D I/D D I D/I D/I/P I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>Identity</td>
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**Moral Commitment**

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>I D I I D P Z D Z D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>P Z Z D Z P P D Z D</td>
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**Structural Commitment**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>I P Z I Z P I P D/I D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>P Z P/Z P D I Z P D/P/Z Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
<td>Z P Z Z Z P Z Z I P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>P P Z I Z m Z P I P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**
- **D** = Determining relationship maintenance
- **I** = Influential in relationship maintenance
- **P** = Present, but not influential in relationship maintenance
- **Z** = Zero influence in relationship maintenance
- **m** = Missing data
Table 3.

Instances of Couples Reporting Determining and Influential Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment Force Components</th>
<th>Number of Instances Reported</th>
<th>Proportion of Instances Reported</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Numbers represent both determining and influential instances. Instances coded as present or zero are not included.
components were present, but only irretrievable investments at 10% frequency is determining or influential in decision-making. See Tables 2 and 3 for details.

Introduction of Expressions of Commitment

Reports of the experience of commitment emerged in respondents' narratives and responses as expressions of awareness, salience, plans, and behavior. These expressions were implied in Johnson's (1991a) socio-psychological model in which he described types of commitment that influence motivation to maintain or dissolve a relationship, which in turn influence the development of plans of action and thereby action to maintain or dissolve a relationship. Commitment experience occurred in the "interplay of individual psychology and the social structure" (p. 124) as the individual perceived her own experience and external social variables (awareness), prioritized and organized these perceptions (salience), considered plans and strategies and fantasized outcomes (plans), and implemented action (behavior). These expressions are operationalized here and serve to not only reflect a particular perceptual stance by the respondent, but also function to direct the respondent's attention to particular aspects of the commitment experience and thereby shape the resulting choices and priorities.

Awareness

The most basic experience of commitment was simply awareness of something going on, whether perception of
ongoing or remembered experience, internal ideas and emotions or external events. Time orientation was past and present, and occasionally included implications for the future. Awareness was a slow dawning or a sudden realization. The awareness object was self, other, situation, or meaning:

So ... it was just something that, I denied anything, I could not, I knew she was upset about what was going on with her job and the house. I just thought if it would work out, everything would be fine, but... I mean there have been a number of times where we have been apart, that type of thing for like several months and ... and there was no, no thinking that this, because we were apart, we weren't together. There was always that thinking ... But at this point there was that thinking if we go apart now we this may be the point that this may be a breaking point, maybe. So I think .... Yeah. A lot more serious. [32A:460-499]

The following example of a shift in awareness revealed how the respondent came to attribute more importance to the relationship, and, as a consequence, how she planned to behave differently in the future:

I guess the only time I would ever have worried about it was when I got really sick a couple of years back... just a deepening awareness. We've talked about, you know, seeing the things with our
parents, what they go through. And both of us realize what it would be like for us. I guess, partly from that and just getting older, just age and maturity, I realized how much more important the relationship is than when you're younger. So you want to give more to the relationship. You want to work at it, too, you know, put more into it, make sure it's solid for the future. [62A:87-325]

Salience

Each individual has values or a belief system that is constructed out of past and present experience and shaped by expectations for the future. This system of values prioritizes and organizes perceptions to create a sense of order in the world. This is important. That is not. This is why I do what I do, because it makes sense to me in this way. When talking about their experience, respondents addressed salience by supplying belief statements as to how things should be and reasons for their experience being what it was:

I knew that I loved P and didn't want to be apart from her. [32A:940-942]

I had very, very romantic notions about living together, about having a relationship together, and I was just in love with the idea. [22B:242-247]

I would hope that you would always enter into a relationship with a... thinking there's a 100%
chance it's going to work. I think that we all go... I don't think anybody subconsciously ever says "Well, let's give this a go, it's probably 75%." (Laughter) Maybe I'm wrong. that's the way we felt about it, when we went in it! It's going to be 100% ! [22A:110-123]

In the following example, although she stated that awareness of common values had shifted over time, her focus was on what was important to her in the relationship:

I think I enjoy having the same values with P more. And I don't think that's something I realized when I first got in the relationship. I think that's something I've seen over the years, when we do sit and talk about things. Specifically, things that come up at work, or how we feel about decisions that are made there or things with our friends. I think that adds to the relationship, the fact that we do tend to think alike ...[62A:898-914]

Plans

Planning involved looking to the future and considering possible strategies to implement that which is important to the individual. Decision coordination involved the development of plans of action that include other people, institutions, and "the flow of ones' fantasy life" (Johnson, 1991a, p.127). Planning flowed out of awareness constructed of past experiences and expectations for the future. Plans
as nebulous as the assumption that plans are not necessary were reported:

Well, I think it constantly changes a little, but I don't really know how to describe the changes. Goals changed a little. I mean, I think there's more chance of staying together now than I would have thought 15 years ago. [62A:184-191]

Plans were also detailed and complex, involving children, property, and business arrangements. They were constructed out of needs from the past, impulses of the present, and/or expectations of the future:

And we sit down and we talk about it and we set aside time, like, every month, or every couple of months, and we go away for a long weekend. And just spend the time together. [32A:52-62]

I finally just made a decision that that was it. I told him that I was going to have a social life, I was going to go my own way, that if I couldn't rely on him to behave socially, then he simply shouldn't expect me to take him with me anywhere. And I was going to go to parties and things and he was going to stay home. [52A:216-229]

It was important, in the following example, to not have to look for another job, but important to convenience and in weighing alternatives, rather than important to a set of values:
Marriage would have been a problem at first for a couple of things. One is that we worked together and the company we work for doesn't allow married people within the same division. So, one of us would have had to have left and... neither of us really wanted to do that at the time. You know, it's hard to go into a different field and neither of us wanted to seek out other employment somewhere else. So, it was sort of a matter of convenience that we didn't get married. Plus, I was going through the process of divorce, so it would have had to be put off until that was finalized anyway, so we just decided to go ahead and live together and it's been that way ever since. [61:168-197]

**Behavior**

Behavior was specific action to maintain or dissolve the relationship. This expression is concrete and observable by the partner and others. Behavior is at the same time the outcome of awareness, salience, and plans, and the building block of future constructions of these:

And so the thing that brought us together again was Sunshine's death. The little dog that I was so fond of. ... I called P the next morning and I said "Sunshine's dead." I was crying, of course, she was a very dear little dog, so dear to me. And
P said "Get a ticket, buy an airline ticket and come on down here."[72B:269-285]

We're far more married than some people who've been married and get divorced or continue to have extramarital affairs or whatever. I mean, I just feel like we are married. We're doing everything married couples do, for heaven's sakes. We have our business together, our kids together, our, everything we own is in both persons' names. To me, that's married. I don't really, don't put a whole lot of stock in a piece of paper or a ceremony in a church. [82A:1381-1400]

In the following example, the respondent was bothered by depleted energy, but her focus was on the limitations on behavior imposed by the illness, the outcome of which was to be unable to participate in relationship activities:

Well, it was just so hard to get well again, that I guess I was sort of afraid that I wasn't going to get well... It didn't help any that I was in a position at work that I couldn't take any time off whatsoever. So when I came home, you know, I was in bed. And so, I think it just bothered me that I wasn't putting into the relationship what I wanted to ... [62A:121-144]
Direction of Influence

Operationalizing Johnson's (1991a) model of commitment included more than his presentation of the motivations for maintaining commitment that existed in the types of commitment. His psychological model included an implied sequence of motivation to plans for action to action. He also discussed the awareness context and the importance of shifts in awareness that allowed partners to notice structural motives. It seemed logical to me that awareness preceded prioritizing, which preceded developing plans of action, which preceded action. It also seemed logical to operationalize these steps as part of the data analysis.

While coding the transcripts I noticed that most segments could be classified as one or another expression, as awareness, salience, plans, or behavior. The expressions appeared to be organized in the respondents' statements in a particular direction, flowing from awareness through salience into planning and then behavior. This was not only a textual sequence, but a causal one. A shift in awareness described by a respondent effected changes in salience, plans, and behavior. For example, one respondent's realization (shift in awareness) of the importance his partner ascribed to her career, prompted him to reorganize his priorities on where he wanted to live: in the city with her, or in the country without her. He gave up the idea of living in a rural
setting and placed their country house on the market. He eventually moved to the city.

Other examples appeared in the interviews in which a change in salience effected changes in plans and behavior or a change in plans effected changes in behavior. A reverse or mixed sequence also occurred, but the primary direction was awareness → salience → plans → behavior.

Both of the following episodes were initiated by one partner's behavior in a direction away from the interdependence expected by the respondent. One narrative remained focused on a sudden awareness, a shift in priorities to match the partner's priorities, planning a course of action, and implementing the action:

This other job opening came up and she was going, considering to take it. ... a couple of hours ride, 3 hours I think. I don't know what would've happened to the relationship if that would've went through, if she would've went up there. And I think that, see, that was a turning point in which we sat down and we had some serious conversations and ... and I expressed I didn't want for her to go and that I'd be willing to
instead go to [City]. So that was a very sore point in the relationship, I guess. And I wondered what would've happened if she went to [job offer].

... Everything worked out OK.

We rented the house and we moved to [City].

A more complex presentation moved between levels of awareness, salience, plans, and behavior as the respondent played out a series of reactions to the commitment crisis:

And she bought this house. Without telling me. And she called me...

Now we were having problems, you know, and I knew all that, but to me, this was the real turning point. You don't just go and buy a house and not tell the other person...

And I was just distraught, completely. Because in my mind she was saying, "Well, I wanted to get away from you" or "I want to go back and live with my family." So, I was a wreck and she called ... and I really wanted to talk to her.

And she called and said she was bringing her aunt for a visit, while
I was under all this tension. And we couldn't talk at all with her aunt there, couldn't talk at all. | R's behavior

In the first example, awareness of the partner's need was new and sudden. The respondent's beliefs (salience) were challenged, but the importance of matching the partner's needs quickly became the priority. Planning and behavior became the manner of expression. The partner and the respondent resolved the issue once they planned and implemented a course of action to match her needs.

The turning point described in the second example, however, created a shift in the respondent's awareness of the partner's willingness to engage in unilateral action involving property. Salience was high and later in the interview it was made clear that purchase and occupation of a common residence was a marker of relationship quality, even existence, to this respondent. Aspects of planning and behavior were thrown into turmoil.

The duration of the second turning point was 18 months, whereas the first couple's crisis, though initially serious, lasted less than a month for the respondent, seven months for the partner. The potential for disruption to commitment, or continuation of "lines of action that will prevent the elimination of interdependence" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 120), are apparently more severe when awareness and salience are the
primary expression of the issue than when plans and behavior are.

**Summary of Expression of Commitment**

Awareness context, motivation, and plans of action are presented in Johnson's (1991a) conceptualization of commitment as phenomenological and within a cultural context. However, the results of this study operationalized the expressions of commitment experience as awareness, salience, plans, and behavior. Expression was furthermore constructed as a recursive operation. The language and behavior of the respondent affected the observer and the outcome of the situation, but also shaped the respondent's selection of past phenomena, attention to present details of the situation, and consideration of future possibilities.

Expressions of commitment are based in phenomenological reality and are experientially interwoven and inseparable. Experience expressed in one form is also experienced in the other forms. In other words, expression is an artifice imposed on a fluid reality. The respondent's manner of expression is an abstracted selection out of the wholeness of experience and reflects the speaker's perception and organization of the experience. Each expression code in the interview data reflects an additional abstraction by the researcher.

The manner of expression is not just how the respondent explains the event to the interviewer, but is also how the
respondent explains the experience of the event to the self. This expression-as-explanation is carried with the respondent to shape the awareness context, and affects how the respondent thinks, acts, and feels in future interactions. For example, if, in the first example in the previous section, the respondent had selected salience of the staff parties and separation of their social life as interconnected and an important implication for future security, the resolution might not have been as simple as going to a party and realizing that it was boring to an outsider. If, in the second example, the purchase of a separate house had been expressed as an inconvenience in planning seasonal moves, the crisis would have been markedly reduced in severity. The expression, therefore, does not merely report the event in an idiosyncratic manner that could change from interview to interview, but actually shapes the awareness context of the respondent in a particular direction and causes the respondent to notice, believe, plan, and act in ways consistent with the manner of expression.

**Expanded Contexts of Commitment**

Additional themes of time and levels of social context (individual, dyadic, and social) appeared in the data. Using symbolic interaction theory, Johnson (1991a) pointed out that commitment exists within the perceptions of individuals and from those emerge "the development and implementation of plans of action" (p. 125). Outside variables affect
commitment only as perceived by the individual and as reflected in the plans of action.

The interplay of objective social structure and subjective perception has been at the heart of the development of commitment theory throughout its history in the field of sociology. (p. 125)

In addition, the social structure has created and organized assumptions beyond the conscious awareness of the individual. Not only has a "lifetime of experience in particular social structures" (p. 125) shaped perceptions, but structural types lying outside the individual's intentions and immediate experience have constrained individual alternatives. Even when an individual has acted as an agent of change, potential outcomes have been considered only within the limits of perceived context.

Individuals act while embedded in contexts of individual psyche, partnership, society, and time. As variables motivating commitment move from the immediate context of the individual psyche and into increasingly abstract contexts such as culture and time, the individual's awareness of context diminishes.

Social Context of the Individual Psyche

The individual brings memories of past experience and personal preferences for the future to commitment.
P was raised by an aunt and uncle who totally loved each other, were totally devoted to each other. And I think that when he was looking for a relationship, well, he wanted it based on that, because he could see the happiness and joy that was involved in that total commitment. [22B:911-922] The other problem that P had to deal with is me and my background and my childhood. I brought so much baggage to the relationship. And it was baggage I couldn't get rid of and she couldn't help me get rid of. [72A:301-309] I guess the fact that I grew up and my father was around for me and then he left the scene when I was a little older and my brothers didn't have a father... And I was thinking about the kids and the family and being around for them as opposed to not being around like my father was... Looking back at how relationships around me were, I wouldn't want to repeat all those mistakes. [82B:3882-3906] Previous marital experience was reported as a salient memory in guiding commitment. In the following example, the respondent described the turning point as being distressing because she was unable to put effort into the relationship due to her illness. It makes sense that she ascribed the demise of her first marriage to a lack of effort:
I think when I got married I wasn't very mature. I wasn't ready emotionally to understand what working on a relationship meant... I had these ideas, that if we were compatible, that that was all it would take... but that really isn't enough to sustain a relationship. And after a few years I came to realize that it wasn't something I wanted to continue. [62A:676-695]

Another respondent more explicitly reported the previous marriage as highly salient to the turning point outcome:

I want to work at it because I've already been through one legal marriage and it didn't work. And so I don't really need to go through that experience again... So that helps me to work harder, not wanting to repeat that experience again. [81:222-240]

**Maturity.** Seven respondents reported that age and maturity enabled them to place more of a priority on the relationship.

I think that you just get more mature and I think that you look at a relationship in a little different way. You think "Well, we're passed that." An we did. And we survived that. [22A:212-218]

When you're in your 20s, you have less reservations about taking chances and things, both economically
and physically... so you might want to go bungee jumping or something, you know. When you're 45 and you have mortgage payments to make.. you just look at things from a different angle, I guess, as you get older. [62B:1202-1220]

I think it's also a matter of time and a matter of growing older, too. Maybe there's something to do with age in there, too, where you get more mellowed out and .. things aren't so critical. [82A:340-348]

Personality attributions were reported regarding self and partner's ingrained characteristics and how these personality characteristics kept the relationship going. In this couple each partner attributed relationship quality to the other's personality:

And, she was a lot more emotional person, and I'm sort of, very shy and, and not that, not that open with other people or something. And she's sort of, and still does, you know, and I, I guess, most of it, too, is because she made, because of her emotion, she made this, just the mortar that really binds us together and really pulled, pulls together... [sic] [32A:139-152]

When you sit down and you talk to him you see his intelligence, but sometimes he's so shy that he doesn't show that to some people. But intellectually and emotionally, you know, we're a
very good fit and it's just gotten better over the years... [32B:1492-1501]

Generativity, or an ability to take an interest in future generations, was elicited as advice to young people just now starting out in a relationship. Much of this advice related to individual identity:

I think it's important to find someone that you have things in common with. But even more important than that just to find someone that you get along with. [23:156-160]

I guess I'd just have to tell them to follow their own feelings and try not to be influenced by what other people expect of them. Don't get married because your mother wants you to get married, you know, or your family does. Don't get married because your friends expect it. You know, get married because it's important to you. I think I would advise them to look, or think very closely about the future and the commitment and the length of time. [62B:1419-1434]

You have to be yourself. You just have to be! There's no way you can work around that. Now if there's some things about your self that would make you and other people happier, it's OK to change. If you can do that. And the other thing is
definitely a sense of humor. You can't live without it. [72A:1678-1688]

The individual person matters to these couples as well as the sense of getting along with the other and the responsibility of long-term commitment. A sense of identity or independence is considered a high priority and does not recede into a relational identity or sense of community obligation.

**Social Context of the Dyad**

Dyadic interactions occur within the relationship co-constructed by the couple. Communication, expectations of person and relationship, relational identity, gender expectations, and altruism are a few aspects of dyadic interaction reported by respondents.

**Communication.** Flexibility in communication and in sharing together were reported as high priorities by most respondents:

We realize that time and sometimes silence or sometimes just some space is much more important to the relationship as [sic] being together sometimes. [22A:633-637]

We've talked about, you know, seeing the things with our parents, what they go through. And I think both of us sort of realize, you know, we think what it would be like for us. [62A:217-222]
Failure of communication was reported as central to the crisis in these turning points:

I was very hurt... And then her, then by not being able to talk to her, I think I wrote to her, while she was in the same, you know, house, because we couldn't talk because of [visitor]. [72A:377-389]

I can't think but you should pay more attention to what you're doing before you commit to ... do something in a relationship. Because there are a lot of times the other person won't tell you everything. And they just won't be right up front about it. All the way through with what their motives are and their intentions are and you just learn after years and years how patterns develop and what comes next. [82B:466-479]

Communication skills varied. The only apparent commonality was that whatever couples did, it seemed to work for them. Although communication quality is highly regarded in studies of marriages (Robinson & Blanton, 1993), these couples seem to have reached highly pragmatic and idiosyncratic communication styles, occasionally emphasizing independence, rather than searching for a consistently intimate style that emphasizes closeness.

Expectations of person. A respondent's ability to build a positive set of expectations of the other was crucial to relationship maintenance. This couple reported that during
the turning point they found that each of them had very different needs. They were each able to adjust to meet the other's needs and thereby their own:

But I talked to P about it and he cried [quiver in voice] and told me that he really didn't want me to leave. [32B:211-216] ... I think it was more important to me that P said "I really want you to stay with me." [32B:762-766] .. she has to have a lot of job satisfaction... I realize that she needs to be happy with what she's doing. And I learned that I have to accommodate her... Where the job's involved, I don't care exactly what I do. [32A:568-582]

Whether highly interdependent or highly independent, partners expected consideration and respect from each other. None referred to role expectations. Most reported role expectations as an area in which they perceived they differed from married couples:

I don't think there's a lot of difference between our relationship and a lot of married couples... We were probably more aware of each other as individuals, rather than as a spouse. I don't think we took each other for granted as much as some couples. We didn't volunteer each other to do things. [62A:721-750]
Interdependence. Most couples reported some sort of cooperative stance in supporting the other's goals. Loyalty, emotional support, and working well together were all reported to enhance mutual interests:

That's something P and I have always done, I mean, when difficulties that she has had with her job and I've had with mine and we were always there for each other. [32A:16-23]

We're willing to share so much... for instance, we have always pooled our money together... We put everything together, we just shared, we discussed any purchases... even when it comes to household duties, there's no drawing lines. [32A:614-642]

Some couples emphasized cooperation as critical features in their relationship, even as they were extolling the degree of freedom they felt:

It was very important to me to own things together, invest in things together, work together for a common goal and that was really achieved, you know, when I invested in this house. And since that time, we've worked on the place a lot and this house, again, is a perfect part of this relationship, because I have my area, he has his area... It's just been a perfect solution. I think
every marriage, every relationship should have a
duplex. [22B:446-474]

Partners in one relationship described themselves as a
business entity:

The whole thing is kind of a package, because when
you take and you have your business so much
involved with where you live and your family, it's
so intertwined, that it's very difficult to get all
those things unentwined. [82A:678-686]

Now she was the partner, the business partner. We
did the same thing, it's just that she and I had a
sexual relationship and, as well as a business
relationship. [82B:622-626]

Another couple saw themselves as relatively isolated from any
network or outside social support and as highly dependent on
each other:

I don't manage to stay in touch with people. In a
way I think that's sort of in part because of my
relationship with P, that, you know, I depend on
him very much for being the constant in my life.
And, P has never, P has almost never had close
friends. And that seems to kind of pull the two of
us together more. [32B:594-605]

The balance between independence, or separateness, and
intimacy, or connectedness, was critical for most of these
couples. For most couples, a great deal of effort had gone
into establishing and maintaining that balance. Turning points frequently involved one partner's testing the limits of independent action. Examples are unilateral behaviors involving an affair, change in residence, or job change. The respondent without a major turning point reported a relatively smooth and sustained relationship and attributed that to similarities of personality and values.

**Gender.** Gender was not mentioned by the three heterosexual women in this sample and was mentioned by two of the heterosexual men. The comments of the pilot interview woman and the individual women interviewed without their partners (one partner was deceased and one refused to be interviewed) generally centered around role expectations that the women had escaped by virtue of not being married. A larger sample and more explicit questions are needed. One lesbian partner condemned the patriarchy and questioned the appropriateness of marriage for women at all:

> I think most women would rather get out of it than stay in it. I really do. Because, what does marriage have to offer?... You see so many couples that are apparently bored with each other or don't care for each other anymore. [72B:1216-1227]

One man commented on the ease with which he could go out and make deals and the effort that his partner had to expend to eke out a living in her line of the business. He was minimally aware of the differing opportunities available to
each them and even less aware of the cultural pressures and lifelong training that made her blind to his opportunities: Men have gotten credit for things they didn't do throughout history... And no matter how hard she tries, she can't create these situations... But it happens to me. It happened to me in my life a number of times, just like the opportunities just pop up. [82B:1135-1149]

Definitions of commitment in this study centered on choice rather than constraint in issues of gender and interdependence. Whether to bear children was an example of a choice of each of the five women interviewed. The lesbian couple did not have children. One woman had one child from a previous marriage as well as children within the current relationship. Two professional women chose to not have children and saw the absence of children as the greatest difference between their relationship lifestyle and that of married couples. These two respondents also said that they would probably have gotten married if they had had children.

Altruism. Part of Johnson's (1991a) thinking about moral commitment included the role of altruism, or motivation entirely for the benefit of the partner. Self-sacrifice is another theme described in commitment literature (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Rather than a theme of self-sacrifice, study couples reported the importance of realizing the consequences of relationship demise on their partner or the degree to
which the partner was committed to the relationship. Most of these reports emerged in response to the specific questions concerning moral commitment components of general consistency values, relationship type values, and partner specific obligation.

Realizing the consequences of relationship demise on their partner was reported as influential in these respondents' efforts to maintain the relationship:

And also the feeling that it would make P very unhappy and there was a lot to lose. [32B:956-959]

I think that was probably a factor in that when I saw that he was really very unhappy about the thought that I would leave, and I had never seen him cry before, so that was [very strong].

[32B:1136-1143]

[A family] is something that lasts forever and once you commit to starting that process you really can't stop. At least if you do stop, it's not fair to somebody else. [82B:3369-3374]

The degree to which the partner was committed to the relationship was reported as a turning point issue, in that respondents questioned their partner's commitment and then reached a satisfactory resolution:

I felt really for the first time P's total commitment for us. Owning things together, for me
that was real important to own things together, invest together, to work together for a common goal. [22B:438-451]

I think the idea came across to P eventually that I wasn't going to leave, that if we work this through, fine, we work it through, but if we didn't work it through, it would be too bad.. not only for the kids, but for the business and the things we do in the community. [82B:2174-2182]

I remember saying to him .. "Well, what would you say if we broke up tomorrow?" and he said "I would say it was the greatest 6 or 7 years of my life." And I said, "Well, don't patronize me, what would you really say?" And he said "No, I really feel that way." And that was the first time that we'd ever really talked about that. [22A:173-186]

I know that I reached a point where I realized that he had this tremendous commitment. [22A:1282-1285]

Without institutional grooves or marital roles to guide them, these couples were very active in co-constructing interdependent relationships. They rarely assumed their relationship would take care of itself and when it did they attributed the success to each other. Aspects of interdependence, intimacy, and gender are interesting with this sample as the women were particularly independent. All the women either owned their homes completely or were equal
financial partners in home ownership. The only financially asymmetric couple involved a successful woman professional and a craftsman male partner.

**Social Cultural Context**

Study couples are very aware of the American courtship system and its vocabulary for roles, norms, and events, as well as their place outside that culture.

I also involved myself in an extra-marital affair, although we're not married, still that's the term I use. [82A:83-87]

Not only the cultural expectations, but also the legal and economic consequences of remaining outside the rules of marriage were usually known to respondents.

In 1979 it was a challenge to register a baby when the father and mother weren't married and they didn't want my name on the birth certificate. [82B:419-424]

People in religions and people in that marriage institution have kind of a community that they're part of, not like outcasts. And people that aren't married, in a sense are, because every time they ask you. Our deed says "single" - on our deed. And who the hell cares to distinguish things like that? But that's just the way everything's set up, so you have to deal with it as without, not within, the system. [82B:4328-4340]
Lack of access to tax breaks, health insurance, and family discounts were mentioned as hardships in remaining unmarried. At least one couple was surprised to find that there is no common-law marriage in Virginia and a partner has no legal rights after death occurs.

Other commitments to career, children, local community networks, or more global causes also helped form the couple experience of commitment:

[Separating] would not be good for the children, in the long run, it would not be good for P and I. It would not be good for the community as a whole... Because there's just too much of that going on. So when you take it in the broader aspect, you know, it wouldn't be good really, for anybody. There's too much of family incohesiveness. [82A:783-815]

**Time Context**

Time as a context arranges the continuum of events that shape lives and is understood as having some level of influence on the relationship by all respondents. Whether experienced as one day at a time in a long, drawn-out present tense, a build-up of past experience, or a future full of possibilities, these respondents reported systems of time at work in their lives. Time was expressed variously as an awareness developing slowly, a system of permanence or consequences, a courtship sequence, or as thresholds of awareness. The perception of time as a context of
relationship actively shaped the respondent's commitment constellation of types and the manner of commitment expression.

A slowly developing awareness emphasized the passage of time, past actions, and the awareness of current meanings that are different from past meanings:

I think age has something to do with present and future, too. I know, I'm 80, as I have aged, I've become more centered on the present and maybe trying to live in the present because the future gets smaller and smaller, you see. [81:333-341]

A system of permanence or consequences emphasized the connection between present actions and future outcomes, and minimized the temporary crises:

See, the very fact that we know each others' backgrounds and .. communicate over the years about the hurts we've had and the feelings that we've had about what has happened to us. Those things make you care, you see. And you don't stop caring even though the person seemingly has changed, not changed, but just, you can't get at the person. There's a wall around them. But beyond the wall, you know that you still care for the person.

[72B:749-768]

The American cultural courtship sequences dating, engagement, and marriage decision stages. The courtship
stages of these cohabiting couples reflect a more nebulous or idiosyncratic sequence of relationship development.

I wanted to live together. I was really crazy about P... I knew who he was. I was very attracted to him. [22B:204-214] I had very romantic notions about living together, about having a relationship together... I think P had basically a little more realistic notions... he was so realistic and methodical about it.. [22B:242-268]

R06A: Well, we met at work a long, long time ago. And it was, what, probably like a couple of years after that before ...

R06B: 2 years or something like that?

R06A: I think so. before we started seeing each other and then it was right away that we more or less started living together. I had a roommate but didn't spend much time there. [61:240-252]

Mixed reactions of others to their choice outside the mainstream were reported:

R03B: I guess we told [my parents] that we wanted to live together the spring before we did that...

My father said "Congratulations!"

R03A: Her mother ran upstairs crying.

R03B: P's mother thought it was OK because she didn't want her son tied down! [31:518-534]
Anniversaries were difficult to pinpoint:

INT: And you've been together how many years now?
R08B: It depends on how you count.
R08A: I think it's close to 20 years.

[Lively debate ensued as timeline was drawn up.]
R08A: OK. So that was 1970 or 1 or 2 that we met.
R08B: That was 1971 because Watergate hadn't happened...
R08B: 1974.
R08A: What?
R08B: That's when we moved down here. '75.
R08A: We were on different sides of the country.
R08B: I guess you need to put down there also that we got deported from Mexico in that particular time...
R08A: Do you [INT] consider that an important thing? That actually occurred before we were technically considered partners.
R08B: That's when we met. [81:97-354]

The gay male and lesbian couples were more aware than the heterosexual couples of the difference between their courtships and the marriage-centered system norms. They reported the fact of difference early in the interview:

INT: You've [known each other] for 30 years?
R07B: Homosexual couples have a great deal of difficulty in finding a date, because we don't have
a marriage anniversary. I think P and I started living together in 1966. P, is that correct?
R07A: That sounds right. [71:347-351]
INT: How did you make your choice to live together as committed partners?
R02A: That always happens a little different in gay life than it does in regular life, I think. You can't just start 20 years ago and say "We're going to live together forever and ever" and call that commitment. I guess, it is in a way, you know, it is. But you haven't been through the rough spots at that time, so it's really much harder to be able to know exactly what you're going to be thinking... maybe [what] I'm saying is that you can only speak about commitment in retrospect. [72A:80-103]
That's why I think some definitions are much more easily described after a certain number of years. Because they mean something different, they really do. [72A:1744-1749]
Sometimes partners' memories differ on time context of the courtship, assigning different meanings to the remembered sequence of events:
R06A: ... it was right away that we more or less started living together. I had a roommate but I didn't spend much time there. [61:247-251]
R06B: She wasn't exactly sure what she wanted to do. She maintained a separate residence and all for quite awhile, so that she would have options and stuff... And eventually we just decided, well, I guess, she decided that she did want to stay with me. So we sort of merged all our household belongings and permanently moved in. [62B:213-226]

Thresholds of awareness of the meaning of events or connections varied as some emphasized sudden and significant shifts in awareness:

But at this point there was that thinking if we go apart now we, this may be the point that, this may be the breaking point, maybe. [32A:490-495]

Some emphasized a slow and gradual process:

Well, it was such a slow process... It was an acclimation process where I don't recall any, there might have been, but I don't recall them, graphic steps in it. It was slow accumulation of more and more people. [12B:489-506]

Some emphasized that a sudden event revealed a difference:

It turned out that someone happened to come on the scene right at the time when I was feeling this kind of, you know, "OK, this is enough. I've had it." [82A:151-156]

I think purchasing the first house was sort of a major step in, at least for me... Before that, you
know, we were right much younger and there really wasn't anything tying us down to anything. So to purchase a house, you make a major purchase and all of a sudden you have to have a job because you have to make the payment and all of a sudden things just sort of - change. [61:302-323]

How a respondent perceived time as a context shaped the nature of the respondent's commitment expression and the constellation of types of commitment. For example, one respondent reported being primarily focused on the importance of the partner and his love for her. His turning point description emphasized a sudden shift in awareness of her priorities, how important they were to her, and what he needed to do to maintain the relationship by attending to her priorities. A second respondent, who also reported attending to his partner's priorities did so in a different time context, that of a system of permanence or consistency important to him across a number of areas.

When I first met her, it [sic] was never any thought given to how long we would be together or how, what would evolve. It was like one day, just one day at a time. That's what it seems like. And especially at the beginning, the pieces just kept fitting together. [32A:1071-1081]

I had to spend a lot of time considering how valid is this request [to separate]... I thought, due to
the age of the relationship, it was worth more than that to me... So I was looking at the age of the relationship... Actually, if I thought it was worth it, I've never left anything that I felt was worth something. [82B:3824-3874]

Both of these respondents made special efforts to meet their partners' needs throughout their relationship and experienced periods of uncertainty during the turning point as to whether their relationship would continue or not. Both were determined that their relationship would continue, declared that intention to their partners, stated a willingness to change their priorities, and waited for their partners to resolve their own uncertainty. The difference between these respondents lay in their conceptualization of time. In the first example, the respondent focused on a present-oriented, if ongoing, connection to the partner. In the second example, the respondent focused on past and future and the importance of the relationship and partner as part of the larger picture of general consistency values.

If the context of time is ignored in the analysis of these two cases, the different motivating types of commitment seem explanatory, as one respondent focused on attitude toward partner and the other on general consistency values. Attention to the respondents' structure of time, however, offers more information as to process factors: the strengths of the relationship and probable outcomes in the event of
relationship stress. The respondents themselves offered hints at the possible outcomes. There was no future planning by the first respondent:

.. that was a very sore point in the relationship, I guess and ... one which ... I wondered what would've happened if she went to [distant job].

... Everything worked out OK. [32A:369-375]

There was a flurry of detailed available alternatives for future behavior offered by the second respondent in an attempt to maintain the valued continuity:

[She told me to] pack up and leave and get out of the relationship and everything, which I thought was totally ridiculous. [82A:1811-1814]

I'm thinking "Well, I've got a different solution. Look, the place is big enough that you take the valuable half and I'll take the other half that's in the flood plain and this will be my half that I can come back to and I'll park all my stuff in a garage and I'll just have that and you can maintain this house that you like and this yard and do whatever you want to do. You have enough, you have access to the highway and you can live here..." [82A:1848-1860]

Including the context of time adds a necessary dimension to any study of relationship. People do not create relationships in stasis, but develop them over time.
Different time periods in the relationship have altogether different meanings to the participants. Shifts in awareness context, external network conditions, and partner demands will happen in time and significance will be shaped by how the respondent conceptualizes time. Commitment is the mechanism that brings the concept of continuity through time (Johnson, 1991a) to the process of co-constructing the couple reality (Berger & Kellner, 1964).

Summary of Context Findings

Patterns of material and emotional interdependence were areas in which cohabiting couples attributed little traditional gender role compliance. This nontraditional stance was expressed as greater equality in intrapersonal behavior, opportunity for alternative social networks, and separate or defined financial arrangements.

Same-sex couples were aware of their membership in a subculture and how their relationship and choices stood outside the mainstream. They were aware of legal and economic arrangements they needed to make. Heterosexual couples, however, tended to view their status and choices as idiosyncratic and tended to see themselves as isolated among marriages, and not as members of a subculture. Only one heterosexual respondent referred to married people as a cohesive group with himself as an outsider:

People in religions and people in that marriage institution have kind of a community that they're
part of, not like outcasts. And people that aren't married, in a sense are. [82:4328-4332]

Only one heterosexual respondent referred to the experience of gays and lesbians:

I think it might be interesting to know if there are common threads, which I believe there are, that exist in gay and lesbian relationships and heterosexual, that there is a common thread that kind of runs through all of them no matter what their sexual orientation is. [83:284-291]

Gay and lesbian respondents rarely compared their relationships to those of unmarried heterosexual couples. All respondents continually referred to perceptions of marriage as the cultural centerpiece for comparing and contrasting their long-term relationship.

Three-Dimensional Model of Commitment Phenomena

Commitment as lived experience emerged in this study as a complex phenomenon that incorporates multiple dimensions, including the dynamics of the process as well as the interdependent components and contexts of commitment. I developed a three-dimensional model (see Figure 2) to display the dynamic relationships among the expression of commitment, the components of commitment, and the commitment contexts of time and social/cultural interaction. Although aspects of
Figure 2. 3-Dimensional Model of the Phenomenology of Commitment in Long Term Relationships

aJohnson, 1991a
the model are directly derived from Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model of commitment, this author added the dimensions of expression of commitment and the contexts of commitment to the model dynamic, particularly time as an explicit context of commitment. Social/cultural levels of an individual's experience, a couple's construction, and an aggregate pattern of a distinct population can be operationalized using the three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena.

**The Individual's Particular Experience of Commitment**

The individual's experience of commitment phenomena may emerge as an emphasis on a particular component, expression, or context of commitment. The emergent aspect or aspects serve as a filter to influence other aspects. For example, the commitment component general consistency values, an aspect of moral commitment (Johnson, 1991a), can be described without understanding the accompanying constellation of components, the social context in which it occurs, the time context through which it moves, or the manner of the protagonist's expression. This solitary description must be an abstraction that can only approximate lived experience and it must omit the diversity of assumptions and passions that comprise human experience. In contrast, by understanding the constellation of components, the contexts, and the manner expression, the researcher may understand something about
past influence on current experience and future implications for action.

The component, general consistency values, did not appear frequently in this study. It was, however, highly salient for the individuals who described it as one of the determinants of their commitment outcome. A question to identify this component simply and with validity would be difficult to construct. People who do value consistency in their lives would not necessarily understand how to answer such a question. It may not lie in their awareness context. Consistency might be something they expect from other people and services, but not be a valued norm for their own behavior. Valuing consistency might be misinterpreted as boredom or repetition.

The component, general consistency values, was coded as having zero influence or as merely present in the turning point resolution of the majority of respondents (6) in this sample of 10 respondents. The component was coded as influential for two respondents and as determinant for two others. Looking at these latter two respondents and their constellation of determining commitment components, their manner of expression of these components, and the contexts in which these all appear, reveals greater clarity about the experience of commitment in these two lives. The names in the following case examples are fictitious and are used only to simplify presentation.
Ruth and Bob, who are not partners and do not know each other, are the only respondents for whom the component, general consistency values, was coded a determining influence in the outcome of their turning point. What other components of their commitment were rated as determinant? How did they express their commitment and in what contexts was it important?

Types of commitment. Ruth and Bob both appeared to experience all three moral commitment components as determining the outcome of the turning point. Attitude toward partner, a personal commitment component, was also coded as a determinant influence for Ruth. Attitude toward relationship and relational identity, two personal commitment components, and irretrievable investments, a structural commitment component, were also coded as determinant influences for Bob.

The question eliciting the component, general consistency values was:

Some people believe that once you have started something, you ought to continue if at all possible. At that point in time, how did your personal beliefs about 'sticking with it' influence your sense that you ought to continue in the relationship?
Ruth's reply to this question focused on her doing what she says she will do:

One of my tendencies is that I do what I say I'll do. It's very difficult to get me to say what I'll do, but once I say it, I'll do it come hell or high water, within certain parameters. You know, you're not going to jump off a cliff just because you said you would do it. But I think that that is very meaningful to me. It seems, it has something to do with responsibility. Not pressure from the outside, but responsible to yourself. If you take on the responsibility of a person or a commitment, then you have to follow through in so far as you can. [72B:616-637]

Bob's reply to this question focused on his identity as a mason and the idea that the craftsman does not leave a job unfinished:

That was all of it. I told her "I'm not finished yet. I've not done what I intended and I can't leave until I'm done with that." And that's nebulous what I want to do, but being a mason, not from the Masonic Order, [but] being a bricklayer and being in the trade of masonry... [82B:3248-3255] And so I look at masonry from this point of view. It's not over 'til it's over. You can't leave a pyramid half done... You can't stop
masonry. You've got to finish it, to the end, and then stop. And don't start again if you can't start, stop the next one. So I say, don't start if you can't stop. [82B:3286-3300]

Reflections of their particular experience of the component general consistency values appear in their statements describing their other determining components.

Ruth's doing what she says she is going to do appears in her value of the lesbian relationship as a type of relationship. Once she realized what her sexual orientation was, she was going to participate fully:

The lesbian relationship, to me, is philosophically beautiful. So I value the lesbian relationship and to that extent I would stay committed probably more than I would if it were, well, what could be a different kind of relationship, I don't know. [72B:668-699]

[Later, on personal history]

I have always been a lesbian and want to be a lesbian the rest of my life. And this is a certainly a way of expressing your lesbianism. Although for a while I did try to become heterosexual. I married, unfortunately. And, you know, the pressure in those years was terrible to become heterosexual. You didn't know what homosexuality was. [72B:1292-1304]
Her doing what she says she is going to do also appears in her sense of partner specific obligation, an obligation that builds and continues through times of trouble:

Well, you develop your obligations to this person over a period of time, and your concern for, your support for, all of these things that you feel for the person. [72B:724-729] Those things make you, they make you care, you see. And it doesn't, you don't stop caring even though the person seemingly has changed, not changed, but just, you can't get at the person. There's a wall around them. But beyond the wall, you know that you still care for the person. [72B:757-767]

Bob described his experience of general consistency values of completing the task in his attitude toward the relationship:

Wanting to be in a relationship at all affected me. And this was the first relationship I decided to commit something to. And .. me, I decided just to commit forever, 'til it's over. Because of the way the marriage vows are. You know, your psyche, it's in the back of your subconscious, it's like "'til death do you part". And if you're going to make the commitment at all, you might as well make it "do or die" and give it everything you've got and die trying. [82B:2374-2400]
General consistency values of continuity and completion also appeared in his description of relational identity:

Well, you see, that's who I am. I have got to be able to maintain that sense of me no matter what kind of condition I'm in. [82B:2453-2455]

The relationship and the business, it's crucial to me being here. If I weren't here it wouldn't be much of a relationship. And it wouldn't be much of a business relationship if I was gone somewhere else. [82B:2575-2581]

Finally, general consistency values appeared in Bob's description of irretrievable investments. Apparently, the investment is a compelling part of life and should be started early, but one should not waste any time if not really interested, because commitment demands consistency:

I learned a long time ago when I was young, don't get involved in a business that you're not really into. It's not worth wasting your time doing something that you're not really into. And so I was into getting a relationship, when we got involved in a relationship, because I knew that that had to be part of life. That had to be part of the balance and you had to learn it before you died. And the earlier you learned it, the better off it was, the easier it was going to be, the younger and the earlier you do it. It seems like,
it seemed like to me that at 28 I was going to pass it by. If I didn't get on real quick and get involved in something with someone, I was just going to end up free-wheeling all over the world. 

Expressions of commitment. Ruth expressed her general consistency values as salience, stating:

One of my tendencies is that I do what I say I'll do. It's very difficult to get me to say what I'll do, but once I say it, I'll do it come hell or high water.

Bob also expressed his general consistency values as salience:

That was all of it. I told her "I'm not finished yet. I've not done what I intended and I can't leave until I'm done with that."

Contexts of commitment. The contexts in which Ruth and Bob considered their values of consistency were different. Ruth expressed her consistency value as an internal sense of responsibility as a protagonist in life (context of individual psyche) and with an emphasis on following through with what you say you will do (context of future time):

But I think that that is very meaningful to me. It seems it has something to do with responsibility. Not pressure from the outside, but responsible to yourself if you take on the responsibility of a
person or a commitment, then you have to follow through in so far as you can. But not because other people say so. That's where the 'should' comes in, you see. The 'should' comes from me, not from the outside. [72B:624-643]

Bob's general consistency values experience was derived from an ethic of the masonry profession (context of culture) and a time context defined by the start and completion of a task:

And so I look at masonry from that point of view. It's not over 'til it's over. But you can't leave a pyramid half done. Look at the Washington Monument and you can see the different colorations in the different 2 stones. You can't stop masonry. You've got to finish it, to the end, and then stop. [82B:3286-3297]

So if you're going to do it, do it right. In masonry anyway. And make it look like something. Don't stop halfway through. It would be like if you're making a chair, don't just make it 3 legs. You can't stop 'til you're done. [82B:3335-3341]

Bob extends the general consistency values derived from the masonry profession to relationships (context of dyad) and being caught up in a larger and unstoppable process (context of ongoing time):

Once you've given birth you've got to murder, or maim, or kill to stop that progression, of 'til
[natural] death. It's something that lasts forever and once you commit to starting that process you really can't stop. At least if you do stop, it's not fair to somebody else. [82B:3367-3373]

Ruth and Bob were the only respondents to describe taking action against perceived political injustice. Most respondents were sensitive to injustice, however, Ruth and Bob were the ones who reported taking action during their lives to personally oppose what they considered politically unethical or unjust. The personal experience of commitment reflected in general consistency values crosses contexts for these respondents and compels them to apply their values to more public contexts than the relationship.

Ruth's action took place soon after she and her partner retired and reflected her experience of going all the way with values to which she had committed:

Well, at that time, Anita Bryant was doing her thing in Florida. And in fact that's one reason that I wanted to move down there. She established a counseling service in order to change homosexuals into heterosexuals through the love of God and Christ and all that hogwash. And I knew that I wanted to, after I retired, I wanted to have a private practice. And so I wanted to move down there and I wanted to have a private practice to help homosexuals stay homosexuals! But the general
flavor of gays being under fire down there and us trying to form some sort of liberating movement certainly had its affect on my commitment to a lesbian relationship. [72B:1415-1447]

Bob's action took place as a young man drafted to serve in Vietnam. He was in the Army, and he would finish the job he had started, but in his own way:

The people that are there in the Regular Army don't like draftees. Back in those '60s they drafted a bunch of us. [82B:2475-2477] And they couldn't dupe me into killing people. So I went along and did their program [by traveling with ARVN troops as an advisor] and never fired a weapon. I told them I'm not going to shoot people and not, there's no sense in doing this with me, because I don't believe in what you're doing. [82B:2491-2496] I was there in '68. I left just before the Tet offensive in '68. I left 10 days before it happened. [82B:3999-4022] Well, my basic personality is just my desire probably to .. finish something that I've started. Which is something that's been there all along. That's what kept me from stopping the military service in the middle and just telling them "Forget it" and just sit down and "Court-martial me. Do whatever you want to." [82B:4101-4109]
Although other respondents might be active in community projects or services (for example, the gay respondents were active in an AIDS buddy system project), Ruth and Bob were compelled by their general consistency values to weave their ideals into activities across different areas of their lives.

The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomenology operationalizes aspects of experience that do not limit themselves to a single construct or level of relationship. Not only will the constellations of an individual's commitment experience (type, expression, context) shape an intimate relationship, but will also shape an individual's relationships at other levels and in other contexts, such as community and national politics.

Relational Construction of Commitment

Couples' co-construction of relationship commitment forms interdependence and tensions of connection and differentiation. The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena helps sort how and what the couple emphasizes in their relationship. Sue and Scott had been together 24 years, since she was a junior in high school. Although they lived separately as a commuter relationship three different times during that 24 years, they considered themselves a couple the entire time. Co-construction of their relationship centered on the dyad as relatively isolated from the larger social network since the beginning of the relationship. Their turning point involved her temptation to
leave the relationship and strike out on her own to join a wider peer group.

Sue and Scott described the beginning of their relationship very differently:

Sue: I had hardly even dated much before. And I certainly didn't think I was ready for marriage. And in my family everybody goes to college and I would never have even have considered not going to college. And I didn't think that that was what I wanted, so I said "So, we'll live together!" Is that how you remember that, dear?

Scott: What I remember is we loved each other very much and we wanted to be together, and (pause) so ... and you didn't want to get married. So we just decided to live together. Didn't want to be apart. [31:403-421]

Sue later stated that her reason for not marrying initially was to make it easier when they eventually broke up, as she expected them to do.

The turning point crisis occurred as Sue considered leaving the boundaries of the relationship to strike out on her own. The crisis was resolved when each partner became aware of the existence and importance of the other's needs and each decided to give priority to the other's needs:

[Scott on their turning point]
I sort of gave her a little pressure in, to go apply, do the interview and she took it, not very willingly. And, so that, she just really hated the job. [32A:331-335]

And this other job opening came up [3 hours away] and she was considering to take it. [32A:342-344]
I don't know what would've happened to the relationship if that would've went through, if she would've went up there. And I think that, see, that was a turning point in which we sat down and we had some serious conversations and ... and I expressed I didn't want for her to go and that I'd be willing to instead go to [City] and she could try to get back to another firm in [City].

Everything worked out OK. [32A:352-374]
Something I realized [was] that she needs to be happy with what she's doing. And I learned that I have to accommodate her. [32A:578-581]

[Sue on their turning point]
Whether because I didn't like the fact that Scott had pressured me to move back to [home town] to this job that I was fairly certain I was not going to like or .. that was really the first time that we, when I was living down in [City], when I lived apart from him. And [I was] probably sort of restless at that point. [32B:129-144]
I think all of that led to a lot of frustration and I thought briefly about taking the job and just going there by myself for awhile and seeing how that was. [32B:152-158]

But I talked to Scott about it and he cried. [quiver in her voice] And told me that he really didn't want me to leave. [32B:211-214]

He doesn't like cities and, you know, he really didn't like the idea of living in [City]. [32B:446-449]

[A year or so later] we talked about the fact that I wanted to go to law school and I was going to go at night, because I didn't want to go into debt. I said "I'm going to have to live down here and not come home on the weekends." So if you want to be with me you're going to have to move down here. So he did. [32B:466-476]

The evolution of the dyad as the centerpiece of their lives is apparent in their description of their life today:

Scott: We're quite comfortable with each other, and like being around each other, and doing things together.

Sue: We don't have that many friends and there are times that I have minded that more than others. We're both sort of shy. We haven't made any friends in this neighborhood even though we've
lived here for 2, 3 years, and, I don't know, I just don't find it easy to go up and talk to the neighbors [laughter]. When we lived in [City] I had some very good friends that I worked with and we did a lot of things with those people. We haven't made the same kind of relationships here at work and I sort of miss that. We talked from time to time about maybe joining a hiking club or something like that and I think that might be good for us, because our main stress does probably come from Scott complaining that I spend too much time at work and we're not spending enough time together. [31:-334]

The expression of commitment with this couple appeared primarily in planning. Salience permeated discussions of dyad cohesion and a new awareness of each for the other's basic need was the crux of the turning point. The ongoing commitment experience, however, repeatedly centered on planning how to maintain their relationship quality and cohesion as they survive the pressures of their different careers, in other words, her professional career and his career of being with her. The ups and downs of awareness and salience expressions are not as evident as the steady focus on the pragmatic planning of how to stay together and enjoy it.
Aggregate Dimension Patterns of Commitment

An exercise in aggregate pattern analysis is to look at intersections of the manner of commitment expression with commitment components. Table 4 shows the results of counting coded segments in which a type of commitment and expression of commitment coincided.

The numbers are probably an artifact of the researcher's coding decisions, however, the method shows possibilities for discerning patterns not only of what people think about types of commitment, but also of how they shape that thinking by their expression of it. A rigorous coding method must be crafted to ensure consistency across multiple coders. For example, Table 4 shows no evidence of combinations of structural commitment components and behavior expressions. The following respondent report reveals that behavior was very important in a very structural way in this relationship:

I felt more secure and then I, about 7 or 8 years ago I bought out his business partner's half of this house. I think that was a good showing of commitment. [22B:428-433]

The segment was coded for behavior, but not for a commitment component for two reasons. First, the definition of commitment types emphasized maintenance of "lines of action that will prevent the elimination of interdependence" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 120). Although the behavior described in
the segment is a positive contribution to interdependence, as described by the respondent the behavior does not explicitly fit into any of the structural commitment components of irretrievable investments, social network, available acceptable alternatives, or termination difficulty. Owning half of the duplex could become a termination difficulty in the event of separation, but the researcher would be making this decision for the respondent. In this particular situation, the respondent, when questioned directly about termination difficulty, replied:

Well, I don't know, again, I don't think [hassle you might have to go through to break up] would be any reason to stay in a relationship. I don't think that would be any reason at all. Sure, we would have some legal things to go through if our relationship did end, but I don't know. Again, I think that's something, that's just extraneous and not an important factor in our staying together. [22B:795-807]

One could surmise that steps to change home ownership would markedly disrupt dyad relations and alter future time connection, despite current conviction that "a friendship would endure." A second reason for not coding the segment as contributing to termination difficulty, however, is that although it enhances commitment, both partners were financially independent and the financial interdependence in
Table 4.

Instances of Couples Reporting Commitment Components by Manner of Expression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment Force</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Salience</th>
<th>Plans</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Commitment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moral Commitment</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Structural Commitment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Numbers represent both determining and influential instances. Instances coded as present or of zero influence are not included.
these areas would not have the potential for constraint on dissolution that it might if one partner were financially dependent. This home ownership scenario actually did play out in another couple's experience and resolution occurred because of the emotional ties. Previously interdependent financial arrangements were never merged back to the extent they had been prior to the crisis [07].

This study involved a small sample of long-term cohabiting couples. Other interesting relationship samples to research might be couples who have reconciled after separation, couples who have divorced but maintained contact due to children, commuter marriage couples, and the like. The use of the three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena in such studies would permit complex analysis of different samples' patterns of commitment components, manner of expressing commitment, and perception of context. Methodological issues in applying the three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena will be the subject of future research.

Summary of the Model

The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena makes it possible to see how time is a context in which protagonists and their relationships are embedded and how the expression of commitment influences and shapes the experience. This is a refinement of Johnson's (1991a) model of the American courtship system. In Johnson's model time
was implied by courtship stage and actions of planning and implementing maintenance or dissolution of the relationship. He stated that past experience and future fantasies created the present awareness context and expectations for the future. It became clear in the present study that the passage of time helped shape the relationships even in the absence of cultural conventions such as courtship stage. Awareness developed slowly and suddenly. Awareness shifted even during the course of the interview in some instances. Turning points occurred frequently or rarely, developed and resolved quickly or slowly. How awareness, turning points, and other expressions of relationship played out through time gave each relationship a kind of personality of its own.

Motivation for maintenance or dissolution was derived in Johnson's (1991a) model primarily from the mix of the types of commitment along axes of choice/constraint and internal/external dimensions. A refinement to Johnson's model is the explicit addition of the concept of the expressions of commitment, of awareness, salience, planning, and behavior, not as outcomes of the type of commitment, but as shaping the respondent's emotional tone and thinking about interdependence. Respondents who emphasized expressions of planning had a different experience of commitment than couples who emphasized expressions of salience. Experience was different when expressions of awareness or of behavior were emphasized. As illustrated in Johnson's model (see
Figure 1), awareness and salience are combined in motivation types of commitment, which lead into developing plans of action and then into action. In the three-dimensional model the tendency of direction of expression is a similar path, but in terms of awareness → salience → planning → behavior. Mixing and reversal of sequence does occur, as the shaping function of expression of experience is a recursive process.
Discussion

Emergent Themes of Commitment Experience

Attraction to Person or Institutional Grooves

Attraction to person was reported most frequently at 35% of the those components coded as determining or influential in respondent decisions. Furthermore, 16% of the determining or influential components were attraction to person coded as the expression of salience. No other components approached these frequencies (see Table 3). Respondents told stories of attraction followed by working out together how to live that attraction. They accomplished this feat of duration without the institutional grooves and roles of marriage.

Marriage is not a monolithic strawman imposing roles and behaviors. Fitzpatrick's (1988) research into marital types sought to categorize marriages and revealed some consistencies within traditional, independent, and separate types of marriage. However, the research also revealed that 40% of the couples studied were mixed types, and, further, that individuals within these couples may hold diverse views on conflict, self-disclosure, and getting one's way.

Marriage as a cultural institution does, however, provides a standard against which our very vocabulary forces comparison. In explaining their relationship and their interdependence, study respondents continually used the language of marriage: infidelity, 'til death do us part, everything but the piece of paper. Study respondents
borrowed language and concepts from the culture of marriage. They also looked beneath the languaged assumptions and chose to live a life of interdependence, in the sense of mutual influence, and cooperation. Their priorities and methods to implement interdependence and cooperation were more diverse than similar, much in the way married couples as a group are more diverse than similar in the daily implementation of their relationships.

Time and Culture as Context

Contexts of time and culture, or individual, dyad, and social network, appeared as respondents described their experience in relation to the world in which their lives are embedded. Social context is generally accepted in the research community as shaping the lives and attitudes of members of a culture or network. Marks (1994) recently commented on the importance of "culture and subculture [as] powerful frameworks of meaning that provide contexts for personal constructions [that are] not a purely idiosyncratic, personal [pattern]" (p. 113). Relationships to others and community existed along with commitment to the partner:

I decided I wanted to work with AIDS patients... It was another one of those commitments that I wanted to make in my life. And I talked it over with him and he agreed that, you know, that this would be an OK thing. And over the years, I've worked with a number of AIDS patients... And I think from P's
seeing the amount of good that this brought to my life, he felt like he wanted to get more involved. And he has an AIDS buddy now ... maybe that's sort of taught P a little something about different sorts of commitments? [22B:1096-1153]

Johnson (1991a) described how the cultural vocabulary shapes members’ thinking as well as how the cultural limitations and assumptions impinge on a life without the individual's awareness. Respondents were usually aware of the assumption of marriage and one took a mischievous pleasure in standing outside the norm.

It's kind of fun once in a while, when people who maybe have known us for awhile, just assume we're married and then find out we aren't. Kind of interesting to see their reaction. Some people are just, you know, really surprised. [62A:707-715]

Time appeared to shape aspects of commitment as well as provide a context in which commitment could develop. Most of these couples had not thought much about their commitment or its implications for duration of relationship. This low level of conscious attention is consistent with the way in which these couples stand outside the cultural mainstream. The American courtship system usually provides decision points of dating, engagement, and marriage that these couples did not experience (Johnson, 1991a). Commitment decisions were not made on a conscious level at institutionally grooved
times, but were made incrementally, sometimes unconsciously, and the accrued decisions created a commitment that later operated to encourage relationship maintenance.

Several respondents reported a sense of stronger commitment due to the lack of external constraints:

I suppose that I value our relationship because I feel like we have, in some cases, more of a commitment to each other by not feeling a legal commitment. So I feel like, you know, we have a true commitment based on our feeling for each other and how we want to continue on with our lives and it's not this ... since there has been no marriage and there's no like legal document or anything like that, it's not like you feel committed because of something that was signed. [62B:947-965]

Comparison to marriage. A helpful distinction between culture and conduct was made by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993b) in their study of fatherhood. The distinction applies to the cultural expectation of life-long marital partnership and the conduct of increasing numbers of people who change partners. Living the institutional grooves and roles of marriage was not important to study respondents, although the parent couple respondents both stated that they had everything related to marriage but the piece of paper. All but one of these couples conducted their relationship to consciously maintain material independence or accountability. The gay
and lesbian respondents constructed their finances so that they were financially independent. Two heterosexual couples merged assets, one informally and one as a business partnership. The third heterosexual couple merged assets for day-to-day operations, but they hold all long-term investments separately or in legal partnership. The respondents do not feel obliged to remain together, although they report that they want to and probably will, primarily because of the combined attitude toward partner and valued longevity of the relationship.

Research on dissolution rate similarities between long-term cohabiting couples and married couples after 8 years (Bennet, Blanc & Bloom, 1988) indicates more similarity than difference. Future research can address the issue of commitment similarities between cohabiting and married couples of 13 to 25 years of relationship duration with and without children. Study respondents all perceived similarities in their relationships to marriages, including attitudes toward dependent children, emotional attachment, and investments of time, money, and other resources, which played a part in the construction of a committed relationship.

For the couple with children the perceived similarity between their partnership and legally married parents was
virtually complete. It was obvious that their commitment provided a protected environment for their children:

The thought would run through my head "Oh, just can this whole thing!" But then you think, "Well, there's children involved." And so I feel like they're a real binding substance that in many ways can help couples just from the simple fact that they do not want to have their children go through the trauma of a separation.... So they were a good gluing factor. [82A:273-285, 818-819]

Emotional attachment between partners was strong and every respondent made a point of stating the attraction to partner that kept them in the relationship over time. Mutual interdependence was consistently reported as emotionally supportive. Attraction to partner was at 38% the primary component of commitment reported as influential or determining in respondents' decision-making (see Table 3).

Five respondents reported the structural commitment component of irretrievable investment as influential or determining in respondent decision-making. The interview question was:

At that point in time, you had probably invested time, energy, and money in the relationship. How did thoughts of that investment affect your sense of having to continue the relationship in order to get an eventual reward or return?
One respondent expressed the investment as plans, three as salience, and one as both plans and salience. The investments occurred in contexts of time (continuing a current plan into the future) and society (legal arrangements or partnerships to carry the partner's decisions into public legitimacy). The component is complex and elicited various interpretations. One interpretation that was not apparent at all was the notion of "invest now, reward later." All respondents indicated that their current reward was enough.

I think that's very important! I really do. And I think that maybe that's what doesn't separate us from any other relationship in the world. I think that any couple that doesn't sit down and seriously consider all of that, either individually or together, would be crazy! [22A:852-860]

That's, that is one of the major reasons why I decided to stay. Because it was a project not completed, not seen through all the way to the end. All of those things were still valuable to me. I still wanted to do everything that I'd set out to say that we were going to do and there was just this one little crook here in the road that threw us for a while. [82A:635-647]

Because, see, I value my time. So what I did all these years was important to me and if I threw that all away, then I would be throwing away time and
energy and I can't buy that at all, no, no.

The cooperation of respondent partners in their perceptions of material and emotional equity is more apparent when approaching long-term intimate relationships as a dialectic of exchange and the search for intimacy (Thompson, 1989). Baber and Allen (1992) suggest a reconstruction of marriage "as a committed partnership based on economic cooperation, sexual expression, and emotional intimacy. In this conceptualization, diverse partnerships can be accommodated" (p. 58).

Implications for Research

Use of the Three-Dimensional Model

Critiques of research have focused in recent years on the difference between the abstractions of modernist thinking about families and the phenomenological diversity of lived experience. Useful models are often refined in the direction of complexity as their creators attempted to capture a more comprehensive picture of human experience (Conville, 1991; Johnson, 1991a). The dimensions of the three-dimensional model are designed to foster research into commitment that will address the complexities of the topic.

The types of commitment dimension developed by Johnson (1991a) offers a way to include the phenomenology of diverse experiences and to appreciate the richness of lived commitment. The contextual dimensions of time and society
offer connections to taken-for-granted realities that shape lives. The expression dimension reflects how the individual, as protagonist, is actively shaping and creating his or her reality. It is tempting to reduce the results of a study to the broadest aspects and the lowest common denominator. It is, however, more useful to study how the interplay of type, context, and expression create a lived and idiosyncratic commitment that works.

Context and relationship. Deconstruction of intimate relationships by Thompson (1989) presents the process of commitment as contextual and relational moralities. Contextual morality reflects the socio-historical context in which the relationship is embedded and through which the particular relationship is shaped by dimensions of age, race, ethnicity, location, sexual orientation, gender, and class. The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena includes consideration of history and relationship duration within a culture as contexts of time and society.

Relational morality reflects the interactive local context of "everyday construction, accomplished through words, actions, thoughts, and feelings" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 58). The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena includes the consideration of daily expressions of commitment as awareness, salience, planning, and behavior. The absence of reference to relationship role expectation by study respondents implies that emphasis on marriage as an
institution and context for long-term relationships obscures knowledge about commitment process.

Quantification of commitment. Inclusion of commitment in the "What is science?" debate is exemplified by the discussion among Michael P. Johnson, Caryl E. Rusbult, and George Levinger in 1991 (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b; Levinger, 1991; Rusbult, 1991). Johnson (1991b) criticized any attempts to quantify an experience as complex and multifaceted as commitment, pointing to the qualitative difference of commitment experience depending on the mix of personal, moral, and structural commitments present in the experience. He praised the early work to reduce the complexities of commitment to understandable components (Becker, 1960; Levinger, 1965; Thibault & Kelley, 1959). The challenge now is to broaden inquiry to the subtleties of different commitment experiences (Johnson, 1991b).

Levinger (1991) questioned the necessity for both attitude toward partner and attitude toward relationship as distinct elements of commitment, stating that they "seem highly correlated" (p. 148). When the results of the present study are observed (see Table 2), these two components do seem highly interconnected. Most respondents reported both components as determining or influential. Some respondents had difficulty mentioning one without the other. What is more interesting in understanding commitment experience of study couples, however, is the fact that all reported
attitude toward partner as highly influential, but 3 out of 10 respondents reported attitude toward relationship as either present or zero influence. None reported relationship for its own sake as more important than the partner.

Rusbult (1991) stated that there is little difference between her investment model and Johnson's model of commitment, except for the concept of moral commitment. She cited two dating relationship studies to support her opinion that moral commitment lacks significance. Johnson (1991a, 1991b) pointed out that correlation is not the issue, but that the qualitative differences in the experience of commitment among individuals and groups with different life experience are important and need to be conceptualized. The intervening variables represented in this study by the types of commitment, context, and manner of expression contribute to the experience researchers attempt to elucidate. The goal is elucidation, not statistical significance.

Quantitative measures and statistical significance can help elucidate, however, translation of commitment phenomena into equations may also lessen a useful connection to real life. A summed total incompletely represents the quality or complexity of challenges facing the living person, particularly when one total could result from completely different sets of choices and constraints (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b). Attempts to quantify dyadic commitment are even more likely to obscure the lived experience, as when the same
score can represent both a moderately committed dyad and a highly committed partner paired with a zero-committed partner (Levinger, 1991; Johnson, 1991a, 1991b).

**Contexts of situation and culture.** The awareness context in which an individual considers commitment tends to focus on personal commitment until the relationship is threatened and thoughts of dissolution occur. Subjective reality shifts to include a social reality of structural commitment "to produce a dramatic change in the awareness context. New information is sought out; old information moves from background to foreground" (Johnson, 1991a, p.128).

Survey questions on commitment have asked respondents how much they want a relationship to endure by asking what the individual's beliefs are about what is important. For example:

How attractive an alternative would you require before adopting it and ending your relationship? (Rusbult, 1983, p. 107).

Some more recent survey questionnaires go beyond awareness to ask for plans and specific behaviors, such as Stanley and Markman's Commitment Inventory (1992), which borrowed from Johnson's (1973, 1976, 1978, 1984) development of structural commitment measures, and Rusbult's accommodation studies (Rusbult et al., 1991):

Except when a spouse dies, marriage should be a once in a lifetime commitment. (True or False)
I would have trouble finding a suitable partner if this relationship ended. (True or False) (Stanley & Markman, 1992, p. 606).
Subjects answered 12 questions concerning their odds of engaging in each response: exit (e.g., "I'd tell X to go take a hike and quit being such a creep"), voice (e.g., "I'd ask if X might want to talk to me about what was going on"), loyalty (e.g., "I'd be a good sport, give X a smile, and just live with it even though it wasn't my fault"), and neglect (e.g., "I'd say something mildly unpleasant, and then ignore X")...
(Rusbult et al., 1992, p. 59).

These questions tap into the subjective reality of the respondent. That subjective reality consists of various combinations of personal, moral, or structural commitments, lived contexts, and manner of expression. "A reasonable theory of this decision-making process will have to attend to the complexities of the individual's reactions... One cannot simply add up 'scores' on each and make a straightforward prediction regarding dissolution" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 128).

Use of a model such as the three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena keeps the researcher's thinking open to dominant and alternative themes in respondents' replies. For example, if a respondent replies in a planning or behavior
manner of expression, it may be helpful for the next question to be "How is that important?" or "When did you become aware of this as a possibility?" If a respondent replies in an awareness or salience manner of expression, it may be helpful for the next question to be "How do you decide when to do this instead of that?" or "How does that translate into daily living?"

**Short-term and long-term time as context.** A debate between Marks (1994) and Greenberger and O'Neil (1994), in the context of research on role strain, addressed the ongoing issue in social science research of how and what to elicit in a survey form. Marks (1994) rejected treating different roles as if they were distinct additive and atomistic entities. He opted instead to look for patterns, including gendered priorities, by asking for respondents' own assessments of roles and relations among roles. O'Neil and Greenberger (1994) and Greenberger and O'Neil (1994) described objective demands and situational constraints and resources as important influences outside the individual on role enactment, but dismissed gender patterns as "abstract, unmeasured, cultural explanations" (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994, p. 117).

It appears that Greenberger and O'Neil (1994) have omitted the protagonist as actor-in-context in a way that the present study found important. They elevated external constraints and resources of the immediate context and
minimized internalized cultural patterns imposed over years of socialization. In other words, they left out time as context.

Time as a context interacting with culture as a context combines the phenomenologies of time continua (past outcomes through present pressures to future expectations) and the internalized (and gendered) vocabulary and norms of a culture. The underlying patterns produced by contexts of time and culture are powerful and can be invisible. The power of these patterns extends to researchers' thinking about topics such as role strain and intimate relationship commitment. It is by stepping outside the mainstream into roles and relationships viewed as unusual, or counter to gendered or culturally moral expectations, that the power of cultured socialization over generations and a lifetime becomes obvious.

Respondents did not simply juggle immediate demands of various importance, but operated out of a patterned and co-constructed value net that was strengthened or challenged by each new experience and the protagonist's active involvement in the experience (Marks, 1994). Marks illustrated this active involvement as parents' involvement with children in "reconstructing an underlying set of cultural meanings about the relationship between [roles as lived experience and] the construction of a style of patterning of commitments" (p. 113).
Study respondents had all to some extent challenged and departed from their traditional socialization. Respondents defined how commitment components were salient to their experience. They evaluated and reconstructed that salience throughout the interview. The initial narrative of a turning point elicited constraints and resources of an immediate situation. As the interviewer then probed for specific components defined by sociologists as important to commitment experience, idiosyncratic patterns of commitment emerged, were examined in the course of the discussion between respondent and interviewer, and were made more explicit by respondents in view of the turning point situations and their out-of-mainstream stances.

Both the immediate situation and socialized cultural contexts were important to understanding the respondents' lived experience of commitment. Accessing these situational and cultural contexts was made possible by including the context of time via turning point narrative in the structure of the interview. Locating a specific past time, reliving the experience to some degree, and relating the experience at the present time created an enlarged awareness which at least one respondent reported as helpful in understanding the relationship better:

That's a good, that, that's been very helpful to me. Your coming out and mentioning that we process things differently. I mean, I've known that we do
things differently, and feel things differently, and think things differently, but the word 'process' makes it all more understandable.

The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena in long-term relationships prompts the researcher to include contexts of time and society, the protagonist's manner of expression, as well as a sensitive and inclusive set of commitment components. Rather than summarize the experience of commitment, use of the model encourages the investigator to hold open the research question to cover a wide range of salience and to insure that elements of context and expression of commitment, as well as components of commitment, are addressed. Profound differences in lived commitment experience may be reflected in similar or "non-significant" quantified results. Differences in respondent populations may be insignificant statistically, yet reflect important differences in patterns of component priority, expression, or context.

Inclusion of different theoretical foundations. Clinical theorists are interested in how commitment occurs and what affects the maintenance and dissolution of intimate relationships. Some clinicians include the sociology of lived experience in their thinking about therapy and in their sessions with clients. White and Epston (1990) work to understand the cultural and temporal frames that clients use
to make sense of their lives and then help the clients alter their interactions with that perceptual world.

White (1992) presented to clinicians the notion that peoples' lives are "historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions" that specify "a particular strain of personhood and of relationship" (pp. 124-125). For example, marital norms specify fidelity and life-long commitment and this study respondent adopted that thinking:

And, me, I just decided to commit forever, 'til it's over. I presume that would mean until you die. Because of the way the marriage vows are. You know, it's in your psyche, it's in the back of your subconscious, it's like "'til death do you part."[82B:2374-2395]

White (1992) also stated that the "gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions" (p. 125) that must exist in any life are actively resolved by the protagonist. The protagonist's manner of expression shades and shapes meaning assigned to events and relationships and assists the protagonist in either participation in subjugation of self or in adopting an alternative meaning and a sense of personal agency. For example, one respondent transformed her experience from one of living on the margin to one of power:
The lesbian relationship, to me, is philosophically beautiful. Because it is the only relationship I know where there is the equality of power from the beginning. The only relationship I know where women can support and love each other without the interference of the patriarchal society. [72B:680-691]

Bruner (1986) described the logical-scientific paradigm as using formal and mathematical means to reach truth. He further described story-telling as a different kind of argument made to reach not an abstracted truth, but lifelikeness or the appearance of being real. The narrative approaches toward human meaning-making bring forth the importance of protagonist and context in understanding the components of experience. Development of meaning through time and culture is a constant selection of past salience applied to present perceptions and compared to calculations and fantasies of future outcomes. The richness of process described by White (1992) and Bruner (1986) cannot be addressed solely by quantified means. The three-dimensional phenomenological model of commitment brings commitment process and interaction alive for analysis in a way unattainable by summing quantified constructs.

Research in a postmodern era searches not for the unified essence, but is "a fragmented participant in various discourses" (Cheal, p. 148, 1991). As David Cheal (personal
communication, November 6, 1992) shared, disturbing discrepancies might be discovered; however, social science provides the opportunity to resolve these discrepancies as methodological and conceptual challenges.

Inclusion of different populations. Research into commitment has typically sampled populations of dating, recently married, and long-term married couples (Johnson, 1991a; Robinson & Blanton, 1993). It is important that commitment studies be explicit about the sample and the implications of results for that sample and not the general population. This group of long-term cohabiting couples report perceiving differences in their relationships from their idea of a marriage sample on gender outlook, interdependence patterns, and relationship time context. Dating couples, remarried couples, couples without children, same-sex couples, recovered alcoholic couples, and short term cohabiting couples are among those who may have important information for researchers if they are given the opportunity to present the full extent of their relationship experience unobscured by cultural norms.

By highlighting the interrelationships involved in commitment, rather than focusing exclusively on a restricted range of roles, pluralistic forms of intimate relationships can be included as relevant populations. Applying the results of research with college student samples to the general population completely ignores the impact on
commitment of relationship duration and the accumulation of material possessions and responsibilities to careers and children (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b). In addition, the college student population tends to be skewed toward privileged groups in the hierarchies of race and class.

Questions to orient respondent perceptions. Future questions should include more specificity regarding direction of the influence, such as, "How did your family background help you maintain your relationship in the face of ... ?" and "How did your family background help you dissolve the relationship?"

Comparisons to perceptions of marriage were elicited with this sensitivity to direction, such as, "How is the relationship like marriage?" and "How is the relationship unlike marriage?" The separation of perceived direction into two distinct questions helped respondents think more fully about the experience, and elicited more extensive answers than a single question would have. For example, one respondent [03B] answered "like-marriage" as:

Well, we're living together. (laughter) (pause)
We're committed to each other. And, share a lot of things. [32B:1004-1008]

and "unlike-marriage" as:

Because we don't have any kids. So that's the biggest difference of all, I think. And I also think that we're still very affectionate out in
public and I don't see that very much in married couples. I don't know anything else, but basically it's the same. [32B:1012-1031]

and "compared to other marriages you see around you" as:

I think that [the interview] made me realize that [commitment] is not something I think about but, you know, I don't know that you do all the time though. Well, you don't usually unless it's really challenged in some way... In a way, I think in some ways it has come to mind for us recently, maybe. My sister is going through thoughts about separation from her husband. She's got two children and the children are small and she'd like to go back to school, so that it would be very, very difficult for her... So after we see her, we just .. contrast our relationship with hers.

[31:39-96]
The richness of responses is enhanced by the active questioning and eliciting both the dominant and alternative meanings forming the respondent's commitment experience.

Use of the Turning Point

The turning point was used to help the respondent focus on a particular period of heightened awareness of commitment and relationship. By focusing on that issue, respondents were able to access more completely associations of thoughts,
feelings, sights, sounds, and sensations to provide as complete a recall of the full experience as is possible (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981). Most respondents in this study were able to locate a turning point and seemed able to shift into a different experiential state as they associated with that location in time and narrated their turning point story.

Panalp and Surra (1992) described three components of account-making emerging from their research on commitment pattern changes. These components are often sequential but may be spread out over time or be collapsed into a single, perceptually simultaneous point in time. First, a precipitating event, usually a behavior that is perceived by one or both partners or by a third party, occurs. Attribution and emotion then create an interpretation of the event. Finally, the participant's "relational schema" is altered as the interpretation makes room for new or revised "traits, beliefs, actions, and action sequences that are relevant to the partner and the relationship" (Panalp & Surra, 1992, p. 75).

Stages of attention to and reassessment of commitment in relationship are helpful in locating a respondent's progress along a time trajectory from challenge to resolution (Conville, 1991; Panalp & Surra, 1992). The process is active in the sense that the person is making attributions and reorganizing the relationship stance. Less explicit, however, is the role of the protagonist's socio-cultural
history and the priorities derived from that history in creating the attributions or in resynthesizing the stance in relationship.

In the present study, respondents' expression of experience flowed from awareness into salience into plans and, finally, into behavior. Johnson (1991a) explained this sequence as follows: type of commitment affected motivation to maintain or dissolve, which in turn shaped development of plans of action, which then prompted action to maintain or dissolve the relationship (see Figure 1). For example, awareness is not simply noticing a difference in relationship, as in the account-making and relational transition stages described above, but includes the protagonist's perceptual organization of that domain of knowledge. Awareness can be altered at any point along the trajectories of security, disintegration, alienation, and resynthesis, or of precipitation, attribution, and relational schema.

Interplay of Interview Structure and Responses

Different pieces of information or emphases emerged from one portion of the study interview to another, for example, between the narrative elicited by open-ended questions and the more specific questions concerning Johnson's (1991a) commitment components and the life course. Narrative or story-telling includes some details and sequences to highlight and omits others. The evolving story reflects
patterns of how the respondent organizes a current life script (White & Epston, 1990). Narrating a turning point with a self-perceived successful outcome can reveal as much about current strategies for commitment as it does the events of the past.

This respondent at first stated during the narrative that in the event of marriage their relationship to the outside world would change:

I guess there's always a change when you sign a document [laughter]. [62B:349-392]

Later, in response to the specific life course question about future considerations, he indicated that they had not talked about getting married since early in their relationship.

I haven't really ever talked to P about it. We never really sat down and said "How does it feel to you about us not being married? I mean, does it bother you? Or do you prefer us to be married?" Well, not in a long number of years, anyway. When we first got together, obviously, we talked about it. Oh, it's not something that we have revisited in a long, long time. And maybe we should. Just out of consideration for her thoughts and feelings and stuff, because I'm fine with things the way they are. I don't think there's any immediate need to change anything, that I can think of. [62B:1369-1391]
By the end of the interview, however, he seemed concerned that he and his partner should give more thought to how they spend their time and commitment:

I thought all of [the questions] sort of made me think, you know, sort of step back and think a little bit about things I should be thinking about more or something. I don't know. Spend less time at work and more time at home. [63:137-145]

Different emphases are possible when more than one question taps deeper levels of awareness in an area of concern. In another example, one respondent attached little importance to attitude toward partner when she was first asked the specific question.

Well, my wanting to stay in a relationship was attached to P, but not solely to P. [72B:455-457]

Later, when asked about availability of acceptable alternatives, she mentioned a potential relationship that had presented itself during the period of separation from her partner:

But I certainly was not interested in, this other [person] was very attractive, but I wasn't interested in, I just felt like I belonged to P. You know, it sounds odd and I haven't thought of it before. I must of cared more about P than I thought. [72B:966-991]
Obtaining different emphases in the narrative and question portions of the interview would be a natural consequence of first relating a dominant narrative, or Johnson's (1991a) subjective reality, and then being asked to focus on aspects of alternative narratives, those thoughts and values that may be present, but less organized or accessible than the dominant narrative. The different ways of eliciting respondent experience, therefore, do more than elicit a set of facts. The way a respondent currently thinks about a topic will shape what emerges in the narrative story, even with the turning point focus eliciting an approximation of the thoughts and feelings at the time. Additional questions help challenge assumptions, refresh memory of omitted details, or open up alternative ways of thinking about the events.
Conclusions

Analysis of the data resulted in development of a three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena. The three dimensions are types of commitment (personal, moral, and structural), contexts of commitment (time and society), and expressions of commitment (awareness, salience, plans, and behavior). Commitment patterns of these long-term cohabiting couples revealed strong preferences for personal over structural commitment. Moral commitment was important to four of the 10 respondents. Contexts of time as well as culture, dyad and psyche emerged. Respondents expressed their commitment in ways that shaped their thinking about past events, current priorities, and future possibilities. This study of turning points in relationship commitment facilitated a fresh perspective on the efforts of couples to maintain their relationships outside the institutional grooves of marriage. The method of eliciting open-ended narrative followed by questions directed at specific research constructs gave the respondents the opportunity to present, elaborate, and reconsider their subjective reality.

The three-dimensional model of commitment phenomena significantly expanded Johnson's (1991a) model of the American courtship system and the three types of commitment. Time was recognized as a specific context along with culture, dyad, and psyche. The expression of commitment emerged from the analysis of the data as more than an outcome of
commitment types, but a manner of shaping how the respondent will think about commitment — to be or become aware, to believe or feel strongly, to consider or plan alternative outcomes, or to act.

Moral commitment has been approached by other researchers as religiosity, aversion to divorce, and sacrifice (Stanley & Markman, 1992). This study supported the usefulness of moral commitment as derived from Johnson's (1991a) conceptual model and provided a base for future studies. The components general consistency values, importance of the stability of this type of relationship, and partner specific obligation were not as widely valued as the personal commitment components, nor as ubiquitous as the structural commitment components. When present in an individual's constellation of commitment types, however, moral commitment was particularly salient.

The present study revealed differences between these long-term cohabiting couples' opinions of their commitment and relationship quality and their perceptions of commitment in the general population of married couples. These perceived differences involved patterns of interdependence and gender roles. This sample of long-term cohabiting couples exhibited a high level of financial and emotional equity and were aware of traditional gender roles, but appeared to operate outside them in structuring their daily life.
lives. Generally, however, cohabiting couples perceived
themselves to be more like than unlike married couples.

Open-ended narrative of a turning point in a
respondent's long-term relationship commitment offered
insight into types of commitment, context of commitment, and
manner of expression. Respondents elaborated on these
reports in later answers to specific questions. Variations
in specific crisis or relationship development turning
points, variations in respondent awareness as the interview
progressed, and variations in constellations of commitment
components provided more questions for future research.
APPENDIX A
Extended Literature Review

Overview

Johnson (1991a) defined commitment in the context of a close relationship as "commitment to lines of action that will prevent the elimination of interdependence" (p. 120). Commitment is a precursor to and mediator of behaviors, such as accommodation, or the tendency, when a partner behaves badly, to react constructively rather than destructively (Rusbult et al., 1991). In this way accommodation facilitates continuation of relationships. Commitment has been described as a feeling (Johnson, 1991a; Rusbult et al., 1991) and as a "decision to enter a course of action" (Johnson, 1991a, p. 118).

Besides the emotional and cognitive elements of commitment, behavior can be described as committed or not. Behavior can be reflected as a categorical variable of relationship status, such as, on or off (Stanley & Markman, 1992), or as a more continuous variable of everyday life, when one incrementally and in concert with a partner moves toward or away from interdependence (Johnson, 1991a). Whether expressed as a feeling, a decision, or a behavior, the experience of commitment is closely linked with the individual's idiosyncratic life experience and values. Commitment behavior has changed in America over the past 50
years, as reflected in divorce, cohabitation, and serial marriage statistics.

Researchers describe commitment in various ways, reflecting aspects of emotion, decision-making, or behavior. Alwin (1991) described commitment as a dynamic interaction of opposing forces both within and among individuals along a continuum of autonomy to conformity. Brickman (1987) stated it is the factor that "stabilizes individual behavior under circumstances where the individual would otherwise be tempted to change that behavior" (p. 2). Traditionalists hold that the rise of individualism and decline in commitment to institutions underlie demographic changes over the past 40 years (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). However, Americans have gradually been divorcing in higher numbers and moving further away from family of origin for 150 years (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Shifts in commitment meaning follow the patterns of plurality occurring in American family living, as attitude follows behavior (Robinson & Giles, 1990; White, 1991), not the reverse.

Differences in cohort experience exemplify some changes in attitude about relationship commitment. The commitment experience of the generation born prior to 1930 and the language they use to describe their experience makes "their lives sound more arbitrary than ... they actually are" (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 21). People have words to describe traditional conceptions of commitment, but have difficulty
describing what commitment is becoming in a more pluralistic society. Cultural language is still insufficient to describe the new meanings and behavior associated with commitment.

**Manifestations of Commitment**

**Values.** As an issue of social science research, commitment is studied within the context of values held by the researcher. Commitment in personal relationships appears as the traditionally defined focus of Bellah and associates' (1985) anti-modernist survey of individualism and commitment in American life. The anti-modernist value sets up polarities of individualism and communal obligation, viewing changes toward plurality in commitment behavior as moving on a continuum from stable communal involvement to unstable atomistic individual freedom. In this view, plurality of family living styles, whether family structure or process, is alarming and deviant.

Cheal (1991) emphasized the postmodern view of the socially constructed nature of relationships and commitment. He was particularly influenced by challenges of feminist approaches to assumptions of traditional gender roles, as "the practical and symbolic values attached to women in the multiple contradictions of modernity are central to theories of change in contemporary family life" (p. 46).

**Research construct.** Commitment is more specifically defined as an independent variable distinguishing structural constraints and personal dedication in Johnson's (1991a,
1991b) and Stanley and Markman's (1992) models of motivating forces for relationship continuation. Commitment also appears as a mediating variable, as in Rusbult and associates' (1991) analysis, in which most other variables are mediated through commitment to affect accommodation behavior. Finally, commitment appears as a specific or implied outcome of constructs such as personality (Davis & Ross, 1991), attitude (Adams & Sprenkle, 1990), intention/investment (Koslowsky, Kluger, & Yinon, 1988), exchange (Michaels, Acock, & Edwards, 1986), life events (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Wright, 1991), or life event timing (Heaton, 1991). The varying definitions reflect cultural confusion over commitment meaning, as well as the multidimensional aspects of commitment.

Dialectics of Commitment

A dialectical tension appears in descriptions of the experience of commitment. Commitment can shut out distractions, and at the same time implies sacrifice of alternatives. But even as commitment creates connections to one community, it inhibits connections to other communities. It allows intense concentration of effort (sometimes to the extreme, as with an addiction), highly rewarding connections, and a sense of belonging (Brickman, Janoff-Bulman, & Rabinowitz, 1987). In the traditional view, even as commitment gives meaning to life, it subsumes individual
freedom (Bellah et al., 1985). Placing commitment on a polarity of present-absent can force a dialogue of scarcity, such that difference equates with absence.

The polarities of separateness-connectedness (Wilmot, 1987), separation-reconciliation (Conville, 1991), or autonomy-connection (Baxter, 1988) can be viewed instead as phenomenological, reflecting daily struggles to know oneself as part of community. The theoretical constructs based on continuum, rather than polarity, can create a dialogue of balance or creative tension. Creative tension more adequately reflects, than the present-absent polarity, the philosophical dialectical challenge to hold contradictory forces in awareness simultaneously as interpenetrations of "complementary dependencies" (Riegal, 1973, p. 351).

In dialectical thinking, persistence (external coercion or reward) and enthusiasm (internal emotion) coexist, creating a dialectical tension between the person and community that transforms suffering into reward (Brickman, 1987). In a recursive manner, persisting through suffering eventually transforms that suffering to an enjoyment or enthusiasm for having persisted and now being able to reap rewards of continuity and stability. Persistence itself becomes the enthusiasm. Robinson and Blanton's (1993) themes of enjoyment and commitment in long-term marriages are similar to these tensions of enthusiasm and persistence.
Lastly, Bellah and associates (1985) suggest that utilitarian and expressive forms of individualism emerged out of biblical and republican roots in United States history. The moral discussion common to those roots is currently inadequate to relate the living interdependence among people and a plural community. Modern marketplace and media messages interpenetrate with private domains of romantic love ideals and realities of family life. This interpenetration makes it difficult for people to determine the source of their own experience (Cheal, 1991). Research questions about commitment, therefore, can elicit confusing answers as people respond from different levels of experience and idealization, from public or private contexts, and varying expectations of their own future relationships.

**Historical Perspective on Commitment**

**Socio-historical Conceptualizations of Commitment**

The experience of commitment as reflected in marriage and divorce statistics seems to have changed drastically over the past 50 years. A closer look at the commitment behavior of individuals and families shows a broad shift over several hundred years (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

Until the industrial revolution, family, church and community controlled marriage and intimate behavior, influencing the individual's expectations for livelihood, residence, and daily life. Romantic love first emerged among the upper elite classes in the troubadour tradition of
chivalry in the Middle Ages of Europe and did not affect practical marriage arrangements (Campbell & Moyers, 1988). Transition from agrarian to factory economy, as well as the Protestant era religious purges, disrupted traditional economic and social habits in Europe. Early American settlers sought to escape the moral and economic chaos of the Old World and initially established a more stable tradition than they had left in Europe. As economic, demographic, and role changes occurred in the New World, conservative traditions of the settlers gradually relaxed into the companionate tradition, interested in the well-being as well as survival of family members (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

Biblical and republican American traditions encouraged freedom from the strictures of hierarchical European religious and political cultures. Individualism described by de Tocqueville in 1830 ennobled citizens and strengthened democracy, yet held the seeds of disconnection in its emphasis on freedom from rather than to and "bootstrap" individual rather than community success. Traditions of conformity gradually eroded through the 19th century, first in utilitarian economic arenas, then in the expressive and personal domain (Bellah et al., 1985).

By the 20th century, the democratic family's primary purpose was to nurture utilitarian and expressive freedom. In the 1960s and 1970s, the autonomy of the individual became the cultural paradigm, enabled by modern developments in
communication, media, economics, geographic mobility (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988), loosening of religious strictures, improved education opportunities (Alwin, 1991), and changed gender role expectations (Ehrenreich, 1983).

Current aspects of structural, personal, and moral commitments (Johnson, 1991a) emerged from this history. An example is the construct of couple identity. When women moved from a father's to a husband's control 200 years ago, the husband's identity was the couple's identity. When the father controlled the family property until his death, there was only family identity. There was no recognized individual identity, particularly for women, children, landless men, and racial or ethnic minorities. Even 50 years ago, economic and business decisions assumed a male prerogative (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). In contrast, a child divorced his parents just recently. The fact that researchers now ask if partners have assumed a couple identity indicates a shift toward recognition of plurality over traditional norms, "not a coherent, stable essence, but as a fragmented participant in various discourses" (Cheal, 1991, p. 148).

**Cohort and Life Course Contexts**

Cohorts reflect the broad socio-historical contexts in which people live and the resources and opportunities available to them in their particular places and times (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). Whereas individual factors, such as family of origin, military service, or education and work
status influence a person's life course, the institutional structures and broader socio-historical contexts in which people operate also significantly influence transitions of the life course, as Cooney and Hogan (1991) demonstrated in the downward trend in men's age at first marriage since 1900.

Cohort members coming of age prior to World War II have a very different attitude toward obedience (traditional commitment) and thinking for one's self (individualism) than those born since 1930. This century's social change may be partly due to gradual individual change processes, yet the process of cohort replacement better explains the changing views of some groups, like Catholics, whose cohort members show distinct differences in opinions and behavior. The historical events, education opportunities, and ethno-religious identity shifts around the time of World War II explain the differences resulting from replacement of the pre-World War II by the post-World War II cohort (Alwin, 1991).

These massive social changes brought by world-wide depression and war reverberated down from the macrosystem, altering the already fragile commitment process (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Microsystem changes then reverberated back up the chain to challenge national assumptions of racial and gender stratification, family and community responsibility, and political legitimacy. The "representative character" (Bellah et al., 1985) guiding the individual American grew
vague and fragmented as people found themselves living more diverse mores than offered by tradition. Shifts in women's roles were occasions of both applause and consternation as old values were demystified (Faludi, 1991).

Max Planck observed that new ideas do not succeed by changing the older generation, but by a new generation growing up familiar with the new ideas as the older generation dies off (Brickman, Perloff, & Seligman, 1987). Unlike the physical sciences, where people presume new ideas are worthwhile, the culturally valued ideals of permanence and tradition are considered worthwhile simply because their age accrued venerability. There is a separation now between Bellah and associates' (1985) representative character rooted in biblical and republican history and the real experience of Americans in today's pluralistic society. Permanence of marriage and the benchmark family is held as a cultural ideal in American minds, yet observation of actual behavior reveals most people conduct themselves on the basis of diverse and pragmatic gratification. Marriage and family are not necessarily permanent states of connection (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993b; Scanzoni et al., 1989).

Theoretical Perspectives on Commitment

Commitment as a Construct

Operationalization of the commitment construct has been problematic. With a wide cultural interpretation mixing concepts of want to and have to (Brickman, 1987; Scanzoni et
al., 1989), researchers must find ways to differentiate attitudes, behaviors, and projections over time that will more precisely describe the underlying components of commitment (Johnson, 1978). In his commitment model, Johnson (1991a) offers a process of awareness, decision-making, and behavior in maintenance or dissolution of relationship. He also describes the diverse motivations for commitment emerging from different combinations of desire for relationship and constraint from separation.

Lack of commitment is measured by behavior such as marital instability, divorce, or relationship termination. Measures have linked the degree of commitment to stages of relationship development in the marriage cycle, awareness and behavior during significant upticks in commitment level from dating to engagement status, and again between engagement and the presence of older children (Johnson, 1978).

In the research literature, commitment appears as an independent variable, a dependent variable, or a mediating variable. Commitment as an independent variable appears in marital satisfaction, marital stability, and, less obviously, in marital communication literature as an attitude guiding behavior. Sabatelli (1988) studied relational satisfaction dimensions emerging from commitment and commitment as a factor of marital stability predictions. Fitzpatrick's (1988) presentation of Traditional, Individual, and Separate marital types and their styles of habitation and
communication implied differing targets of commitment: self, relationship to other, and institution/community. Bellah and associates (1985) conceptualized polar and competing influences of commitment and individualism. Johnson (1991a) provided a well-defined socio-psychological framework in which to describe the forces driving commitment awareness and decisions.

Johnson (1991a) described commitment as a dependent variable, or behavior in marriage and other close relationships along the continuum of involvement in and disengagement from interdependence over time. Most researchers refer to two dimensions of commitment: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary commitment is described as personal dedication (Johnson, 1973, 1978; Rusbult, 1991; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Stanley & Markman, 1984, 1992) or enthusiasm (Brickman, 1987). The implication of voluntariness seems to be an emotion-based and internal construct of the individual, more conscious than not, and targeted to an object of commitment: other, self, or relationship (Quinn, 1982). Involuntary commitment is described as structural (Johnson, 1978, 1991a; Rusbult, 1991) and an external constraint (Johnson, 1991a; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Other researchers describe involuntary commitment as persistence (Brickman, 1987) or perseverance and human agency (Scanzoni et al., 1989) in the face of either obstacles or lack of personal dedication. Johnson
(1991a) included moral commitment as an internal motive, but a constraint on alternative relationships. The simple dialectic of voluntary-involuntary became more complex, when Johnson (1991a) offered a dual continua of internal-external and choice-constraint with which to describe commitment.

Rusbult et al (1991) used commitment as a mediating variable in their study of accommodation. They found that most independent variables were mediated by commitment in inspiring constructive accommodation behavior.

**Commitment in Social Exchange and Attribution Theories**

A social exchange framework has been helpful in investigating the structural and reciprocal aspects of commitment. Related concepts such as equity and attribution have also been used extensively in recent literature (Johnson, 1973, 1978; Levinger, 1991; Rusbult, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Johnson's (1991a) commitment model was developed with important elements such as extrinsic constraints derived from a social exchange framework.

The dyadic nature of commitment in close personal relationships is recognized in exchange theory as less competitive and reciprocal than in acquaintance and business relationships. Marriage, in particular, was recognized as occurring in a noncompetitive market and the goal was to maximize joint outcomes (Cook & Emerson, 1978).
Alternatives is a concept of social exchange and appears in several measures used in the present study. Stanley and Markman (1992) used monitoring of alternatives as an aspect of personal dedication measuring an individual's awareness of other possible intimate partners. Availability of partners is a constraint regarding the existence of other possible partners, irrespective of preference (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Unattractiveness of alternatives is related to a wide range of possible negative changes in life circumstances, for example, financial status changes, single parenthood, or limited job choices, as well as partner availability (Johnson, 1976, 1978, 1984, 1991a).

Barriers to change, such as low socioeconomic status, is another construct of social exchange theory and appears to contribute to stability of marriages (Heaton & Albrecht, 1990). Most constraint aspects of commitment operate as barriers to change. For example, Johnson's (1978, 1984, 1991a) 12 termination procedures and 27 unattractive alternatives are barriers to change.

Lewin (1965, in Johnson, 1976) proposed a dynamic in which the various constraints against commitment are transformed into reasons to maintain commitment once an investment is made. Although his example involved the purchase of food, the realignment of value attributions and the transformation of negative aspects of commitment into
positive aspects logically relate to the topic of intimate relationships, in which persistence through suffering can be transformed into its own reward (Brickman, 1987).

Leik, Van Cleave, Zimmerman, Kroening-Smith, and Geiger's (1978) study of attribution bases for commitment included cross comparisons of five objects of commitment in setting (or place), activity, and other person variables. They evaluated the mediating effects of multiple commitments. Action involving any one setting, activity, or person usually leads to peripheral actions dependent on the original course. These side bets constrain future action by either increased involvement and investment in one area of commitment or decreased competition from another area (Becker, 1960). Experience in an area, attribution of enjoyment or unhappiness, and side bets lead to strengthened commitment. Leik and his colleagues (1978) found that these investments in a setting or its activities tended to strengthen the investment in the other person connected to that setting or activity. Commitment strength was indicated by willingness or lack thereof to risk involvement in a setting, activity, or other person to pursue a different setting, activity, or person.

Scanzoni and associates' (1989) discussion of social exchange processes included time when balancing extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and alternatives, and thereby required a developmental perspective. Over time and with effective
decision-making the context of the relationship changes and initially extrinsic rewards alter that context. Scanzoni and associates found that equity was more salient with high extrinsic reward situations and less so with high intrinsic rewards. This differential in salience between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards is congruent with Johnson's (1973) finding that high personal commitment (intrinsic) masked a respondent's consideration of any cost constraints (extrinsic). The presence of a high intrinsic reward diffused the need for consideration, or even the perception, of equity.

Rusbult's (1983) study of her investment model showed that "commitment increases over time because of corresponding increases in rewards, declines in alternative quality, and increased investment. Variations in levels of costs over time did not significantly affect commitment" (p. 114). The variable time itself "leads to increases in both costs and commitment ... [and that] for men and stayers, ... greater costs actually increased levels of commitment" (p. 114). Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow (1986) replicated the 1983 and earlier findings with a larger sample and supported two explanations for the failure of higher costs to unilaterally reduce commitment: "a threshold effect ... whereby costs only exert negative effects at higher levels" and an interaction effect, "with high costs inducing reduced ... commitment only in the presence of low rewards" (p. 88). Rusbult (1991) also
included intention, a conception of future time, in the commitment construct and focused on personal dedication aspects when describing commitment, considering structural constraints to be separate constructs. Other researchers included structural constraints in the commitment construct (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b; Stanley & Markman, 1992).

Rusbult and associates (1991) measured commitment with a 5-item scale including Johnson's (1978) personal dedication item, "How long do you want this relationship to last?" (Johnson's measure had included an additional query as to how committed is the person to that time period.) Accommodation behavior was the dependent variable. Commitment was considered a single relationship level variable and a mediator incorporating or strengthening the effects of most of the other individual and relationship level variables. Variables such as perspective taking correlated with commitment, but also directly with accommodation. Commitment mediated variables such as satisfaction and quality of alternatives. The treatment of commitment itself, therefore, was not as detailed as that of Johnson (1973, 1976, 1978, 1984; 1991a; 1991b) and Stanley and Markman (1992), but the mediation role of commitment for other constructs emerged as valuable information.

Exchange theory conceptualizations of commitment are helpful in conceptualizing some processes of personal interaction. Exchange theory is less helpful in explaining
long-term relationship behavior, specifically in the
development of intrinsic reward of couple identity and the
roles of deferred gratification and altruism. An additional
problem in applying this research to long-term relationships
is that most large social exchange studies use samples of
college students in dating or early marriage relationships
(Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1991; Johnson, 1991a;
Michaels et al., 1986).

Social exchange also does not adequately address the
issues of gender in long-term relationships. The notion of a
noncompetitive market can mask significant power
differentials (Cook & Emerson, 1978). Thompson (1992)
discussed the importance of studying the "hidden, ambiguous,
and contradictory aspects of gender relationships in the
family" (p. 6). Feminist researchers have provided a rich
perspective for understanding some of the cultural pressures
to remain aware of the intrinsic rewards of relationship and
ignore the extrinsic costs. An example is Komter's (1989)
study of Dutch marriages, in which subtle power relationships
and interactions concealed costs of relationship maintenance
and barriers to change, even to the point of encouraging
self-delusion.

Symbolic Interaction

Johnson (1991a) presented a socio-psychological context
for commitment that is rooted in symbolic interaction theory.
In his model he emphasized commitment as voluntaristic, in
that decisions are made by the individual, and subjective, in that the bases for decisions are constructed by the individual. He presented time as an influence, that actors construct their own interpretations of past and current events, as well as conceptions of the future. Actors' definitions are further influenced "by the larger structure of social relations in which the individual's actions are embedded" (p. 118). Johnson further maintained that the larger structure places constraints not only on the individual's obvious choices in any situation, but also on the individual's construction of the future and perceived availability of choices.

Some basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1989) are that interacting individuals socially produce social reality; that individuals are capable of agency, thereby influencing both the process and outcome of these interactions; and that interaction emerges from internal symbol systems of a particular standpoint fitting to the external behavior of another and the social context in which they act.

The concept of situation in symbolic interaction theory is more than simply externally observed behaviors, but [as] "people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572, quoted in LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 140). The notion of his and her marriages and the potential for different meanings of
happiness (Bernard, 1972) is an example of the dynamic interplay of perspectives and cultural influences between partners in a committed co-constructed relationship (Berger & Kellner, 1964). The perception of the situation depends on the interrelated concepts of identity, roles, interactions, and contexts (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Most aspects of close relationship can be viewed within the frame of these concepts.

The context of time appears in commitment awareness both as past timeline fluctuations in relationship quality (Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986; Lauer & Lauer, 1986) and future projections of how the relationship ought to be (Watzlawick, 1984). Some developments in commitment seem to require the passage of time. Borden and Levinger (1991) developed a progression of motivation transformations over time in relationships that seem to reflect an increasing commitment to the relationship. Initial surface, or situational, accommodation occurs when people alter their own behavior to better suit the social situation. More complex, or relationship-identifying, accommodation occurs when people alter more deeply held habits or patterns to better suit the on-going relationship. Dispositional convergence of partners occurs when attitudes, values, or beliefs become more similar between partners as time passes.

Whereas people are generally aware of their motivational accommodations or their failures to
accommodate, dispositional convergence or divergence occurs with much less awareness. This makes it hard to document dispositional changes, except over long periods of time and sometimes only after there has been a dramatic reversal in interpersonal involvement. (p. 49)

Awareness of gradual dispositional changes occurs only at a crisis point, is usually out of consciousness, and involves partner identity evolving over time out of interactions and roles associated with close relationships.

Dimensions of psychic closeness and behavior norms also appear in discussions of inequity of commitment. Borden and Levinger (1991) pointed out the potential for inequity in interpersonal accommodation even in the presence of an egalitarian ethos:

Younger, weaker, or subordinate partners are likely to change more toward older, stronger, or dominant partners than vice versa. Interdependence is rarely equal, and the more dependent partner is usually more influenceable than the less dependent one. But such inequities are not necessarily permanent ... asymmetric accommodations or convergences are likely to be unstable in an unstable normative environment. (p. 51)

Although they did not explicitly study commitment, Borden and Levinger's description of convergent processes in
relationships is compatible with Johnson's (1991a) definition of commitment as "lines of action that will prevent the elimination of interdependence" (p. 120).

Shifting norms of love and caregiving emerge from the same contextual changes as shifting intimate relationship commitment norms. Cheal (1991) gave examples of interpersonal interpenetration, whereby individuals experiencing diminishing social code guidelines negotiate and create their own symbol systems.

Rosenblatt (1977) described commitment as a public process that is effortful and voluntary. The public audience of friends and family, especially offspring, encourage commitment. Effort is required to adjust to inevitable problems with accommodation to identity, interaction, role, and context of the relationship. The cultural norm in marriage is of high commitment, yet the experience is unknown until one is actually in the situation, at which point new commitment choices are continually made through ongoing interactions.

As Johnson (1984) pointed out, some constraints to change in a relationship arise simply out of initiating a particular line of action involving that relationship. The ability to commit to and maintain an intimate relationship over time despite temporary discouragement (Brickman, 1987) includes more than the measures of overt behavior and conscious motives of exchange or efficiency. Commitment to
marriage or a continuing intimate relationship is a surface result of deeper transformations of individual identity to a co-constructed couple identity.

Cheal (1991) described a shift in emphasis in symbolic interactionist thinking over the years since the 1920s. Merging viewpoints over time in close relationships such as marriage was emphasized in models stressing the creation of a family identity and the shaping of individual's identities through interaction with significant others within the family. Feminists criticized the concept of family identity as obscuring the "asymmetry in relations between women and men, ... encouraging a benign view of family life that ignores the capacity of men to impose their definitions of reality upon women" (Cheal, 1991, p.138). Recognition of more pluralistic models of intimate interactions has occurred through questioning unitary benchmark assumptions of symbol-making groups and people's co-constructions of their reality. The nuclear family model has been replaced by a more diversity-inclusive model of family setting. A range of intimate or identity influencing relationships is available for living and for consideration in research.

**Life Course Perspective**

Changes occur in an individual's life course that are caused or influenced by events in the environment. When the individual interacts with these environmental events, changes in awareness or behavior occur. Rather than trying to fit
the wide range of possibilities into a single family life cycle model, researchers use a life course perspective and concepts to look at the manner in which individuals "across time ... engage in family building and dissolving" (Cheal, 1991, p. 139). A trajectory, or set of situations, consists of transitions, or changes from one situation to another. A family is a set of interlocking trajectories that influence each other over time, between and within generations, and across dimensions of "time, duration, spacing, and order of transitions" (p. 140). Cheal reported that changes in women's life course patterns have affected changes in a broad social context as women changed from normative and family dependent transition patterns to more complex life course patterns balancing family and career institutional demands.

Alternative life styles and unusually sequenced transitions are more common now than 50 years ago. Bengtson and Allen (1993) described the life course as more inclusive than the microlevel analyses of individual psyche or family dynamics patterns. The inclusion of social structure and historical location provides a macrolevel analysis of families in context over time. The life course perspective is reflected in Johnson's (1991a) description of his model as based on an American courtship system, with a culturally based vocabulary for behavior and within a context beyond the participants' control, and even beyond their comprehension.
Phenomenology and standpoint perspectives offer ways to hold understandings of both exchange and symbolic interaction theories in the study of close relationship. Johnson's (1991a) model of commitment has origins in both theories. His constructs making up the personal, moral, and structural commitment forces combine elements of symbolic interaction theory's human agency and situation with the more mechanistic ideas of exchange theory's cost and reward.

Johnson (1991a, 1991b) presented a phenomenological perspective honoring the complexity of lived experience in which changes in such aspects of experience as developmental stage, life experience, and awareness context can significantly affect individual attitude and behavior. In analyzing commitment research, Johnson's (1991a, 1991b) phenomenological preference is apparent in his critique of sample populations, questionnaire items, and researcher assumptions about motivating forces. Van Manen (1990) described phenomenological research as reflections on conscious lived experience, explicating internal meaning of being in the world as moral and human poets. Phenomenological approaches use qualitative methods to elicit empirical material rooted in concrete human experience in natural settings. The level of abstraction can range from none (verbatim data) to concepts derived out of the raw material by researchers. The approach attempts to remove presuppositions from the research and allow concepts to
emerge from human description of lived phenomena (Sprey, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Phenomenological research using the words and motivations of the respondents explored commitment in marriage and pre-marital relationships. Robinson and Blanton (1993) identified commitment as one of two themes in enduring marriages. Enjoyment encompassed the rewards of a long-term close relationship, and commitment the work of "endurance, tolerance and perseverance" (p. 38). Commitment seemed a way to shift the relationship focus, when difficulties occurred, from the spouse and current interactions to associated stable commitments (children, family) and a future reward. Communication was considered the means by which commitment was negotiated through time. Lauer and Lauer (1986) and Lauer, Lauer, and Kerr (1990) also investigated the perceptions and attributions of long-term married couples about their relationships. Commitment to marriage as an institution and a sense of humor were major themes in reported attributions.

Important motives and cultural forces may distort results if questions are too open-ended and do not probe for meaning or clarification. The awareness context of the respondent may be attuned only to surface manifestations of commitment and ignore other, less culturally approved or unconscious motivations. A simple query of "How committed are you?" tends to elicit attitudes correlated to personal
dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Factors of constraint or involuntariness can be submerged by conscious declarations of personal dedication (Johnson, 1978). Attributions of personal dedication or "commonsense" by the participant may even override constraints obvious to the observer (Brickman, 1987; Komter, 1989).

A focus on the unconscious, or background, influence is consistent with feminist critiques of hidden issues of identity and power in relationships. Lopata (1973) discussed the impact of widowhood on women, surmising that the impact will be great due to investment of identity and husband's priorities in marriage. She found that less educated women identified more with the role of mother and developed a life and identity parallel to the husband's. More educated women, however, identified more with the role of wife and experienced more loss of role identity with widowhood. Komter's (1989) exploration of power in marriage utilized Gramsci's notion of hidden power and found that marriages among lower class individuals involved more conscious use of overt or latent power than among upper class individuals. Marriages among members of the upper class, particularly in which the wife did not work outside the home, involved a hidden commonsense-based rationale of unequal marital power relationship.

Scanzoni and associates (1989) criticized researchers' tendencies to focus on lay persons' conceptualizations,
thereby remaining in low-level theorizing. They posited that rigorously defined terms are necessary to focus inquiry in abstract realities. Some researchers have combined lay conceptualizations as valid, if subjective, with rigorous observation in order to develop theoretical abstractions useful to the research effort. Surra (1987) differentiated between the reasons for commitment offered by respondents and the observed causes of behavior. Although the level of commitment is greatly affected by the subjective assessment of the participant, there is a tendency for the subjective reality to shift from personal choices to structural and moral constraints only during challenging periods (Johnson, 1991a). Therefore, because subjective reality and meanings may offer only a partial awareness of real constraints and influences, such as source of identity and hidden power, phenomenological approaches must be combined with a willingness to look beyond the subjective awareness of the respondent to the society within which the respondent lives and the meanings provided by that society. It is within these social assumptions, and outside the awareness of the individual, that commitment motives may exist and exert a powerful influence on individual behavior.

Recognizing an individual's standpoint of race, ethnicity, class, or gender is another way to honor the complexity of human experience. A standpoint outside the mainstream population provides a dual lens, as both
participant and stranger, with which to view experience. The problem of cultural assumptions masked as commonsense (Komter, 1989) is less apt to occur when the sample is not of the 'common' population. Collins (1990) differentiated between everyday knowledge and actions as a fundamental level of knowledge and researchers' expertise as a more specialized knowledge. She stressed the interdependence of the two types of knowledge, in that, standpoint scholarship clarifies and transforms everyday knowledge into an awakened and activist consciousness, and everyday knowledge is a powerful source of observed wisdom. A standpoint outside the mainstream culture provides a perspective informed by the outsider's everyday knowledge of both mainstream and alternative cultures, and offers an opportunity for scholarly observation separate from the assumptions and hidden rationales of the mainstream culture. Compared to a study of long-term marriages, an exploration of commitment phenomena from a standpoint outside marriage may more sharply define commitment as lived in today's close relationships.

Analysis of Research Related to Johnson's (1991a, 1991b)

Conceptual Model

Background

The socio-psychological commitment model developed by Johnson (1991a) offers a rich background for further research into influences on long-term commitment in adult intimate relationships. Johnson (1991a, 1991b) acknowledged the
embeddedness of commitment within larger contexts of time and society in his phenomenological model of personal, moral, and structural commitments. Time is incorporated in the stages of relationship development, such as, dating or long-term marriage, and society is incorporated as the life course framework. Dimensions of internal or external motivation and choice or constraint pressures are made explicit in the different commitment processes.


The awareness context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Johnson, 1991a) of the individual is the subjective reality outside of which may exist a host of taken-for-granted yet salient phenomena. Individuals may or may not relegate salient structural constraints to the background, outside the
awareness context. Johnson (1973) found that married couples were aware of no more cost commitment than were cohabiting couples, but that they had indeed engaged in some acts which would have made termination of the relationship somewhat more tedious for them than it would have been for the cohabiting couples. (p. 403)

Research Constructs

Johnson's (1991a, 1991b) commitment model outlines three types of commitment, a combination of which influence the individual's complex experience and plans of action to maintain or discontinue commitment. Personal commitment, or "want to", includes a person's attitude toward relationship, attitude toward partner, and relational identity. Moral commitment, or "ought to", includes a belief in the value of consistency for itself, an inherent sacredness of the relationship, and a sense of personal obligation to the other person. Structural commitment, or "have to", includes irretrievable investments, pressure or reaction from one's social network, difficulty of termination procedures, and perception of availability of acceptable alternatives.

Alternative Constructions

Several researchers have taken a more mechanistic or exchange theory approach to studying individual's or couple's commitment. An important part of Johnson's (1991a, 1991b)
model was the differentiation of commitment into personal, moral, and structural commitment motivation forces or experiences. He further differentiated the three experiences from intention, an outcome of the particular combination or balance among the three commitments. A mechanistic adding up of scores from the different commitment types and outcomes clouds rather than clarifies the nature of commitment. The experience of commitment generates decisions and behavior that can vary widely within the same summed quantitative measure of commitment.

Johnson (1991a) stated that the elements of Levinger's forces of attraction, barrier, and alternative can be teased out in ways more closely aligned with human experience. Johnson further stated that the addition of relational or couple identity and the internal constraints of moral commitment enrich the conceptualization of commitment. Although applauding Johnson's (1991a) conceptualization, Levinger (1991) pointed out that his unit of analysis was the dyad, not the individual. His cohesiveness theory addressed the marital couple, whereas Johnson's (1991a) model concentrated on the individual's experience and decision elements. Levinger (1991) acknowledged the difficulty of the dyadic approach:

A pair's cohesiveness is not, of course, a simple sum of its two members' net scores because, no matter how positive the pair's total score, either
individual member's negative score could sink the relationship. A still-unsolved problem in the cohesiveness literature is how to combine two or more group members' pro-membership scores in order to yield a total score for the pair or group as a whole. (p. 147)

Where Levinger's model did succeed was in organizing a topic of concern to society, enabling refinements in conceptualization (Johnson, 1991a, 1991b; Levinger, 1991; Rusbult, 1991) and development of sociological and policy implications (Levinger, 1991).

Rusbult (1991) developed the investment model that quantified commitment as a combination of three forces:

\[
COM = (SAT - ALT) + INV
\]

Satisfaction (SAT) was a feeling resulting from an experience of many rewards, few costs, and a low comparison level, and drew a person toward a more commitment. It was quantified as

\[
SAT = REW_i(L_{rii}) - CST_i(L_{Cii}) - CL
\]

Quality of Alternatives (ALT) was similar to satisfaction, but reflected the forces pulling the person away from the relationship, such as a high sense of independence or the availability of high quality alternatives:

\[
ALT = REW_j(L_{rjj}) - CST_j(L_{Cjj}) - CL
\]

The third component of the commitment equation was investment size (INV), or the direct and indirect investment of
resources, including time, well-being, identity, and social norms:

\[
\text{INV} = \text{DIR INV} \left( \sum [\text{DI}_k] \right) + \text{IND INV} \left( \sum [\text{II}_k] \right)
\]

Rusbult (1991) claimed empirical superiority of the investment model over Johnson's (1991a) in measuring commitment, stating that there were few substantive differences between the two. Johnson (1991a, 1991b) questioned having combined behavioral intent, a dependent variable, and psychological attachment, a type of commitment. He criticized Rusbult's attempt to quantify the qualitative commitment experience differences in the same manner among different types of relationships (i.e., dating partners, parents, and children). His two-tiered approach, in which the three commitment experiences flow into the development of plans of action, conceptually separated commitment motivation from the outcome experience.

A closer approximation of Johnson's (1992a, 1992b) commitment model was presented by Stanley and Markman (1992) in introducing their Commitment Inventory instrument. They combined most of Johnson's (1978, 1984) structural commitment constructs with their clinical experience in communication strategies for relationship enhancement. They differentiated irretrievable investments as intrinsic (of self) or extrinsic (material). They also expanded personal commitment in several ways, including some aspects similar to Johnson's (1991a) definition of moral commitment. Meta-commitment, or
the level of commitment as a value in itself, was close to
Johnson's general consistency values (moral commitment), but
seemed to emphasize the importance of agentic action, rather
than consistency of action. Developmental agenda emphasized
a future direction and goal implicit in Johnson's
conceptualization of commitment as continuing a line of
action in a relationship context over time. Stanley and
Markman's (1992) primacy of relationship over self or
partner, also reported in Lauer and Lauer's (1986) research
on long-term marriages, was reflected in Johnson's (1991a)
constructs as a combination of identity provided by the
relationship (personal commitment) and the sacredness of the
type of relationship (moral commitment). Willingness to have
a couple identity also reflected Johnson's (1991a) construct
of identity provided by the relationship. Alternative
monitoring was an attitude of scanning for possible partners,
compared to Johnson's (1991a) perception of the availability
of acceptable alternatives (structural commitment), which
included a wider range of life choices than partner.
Satisfaction with sacrifice, with its elements of altruism
and compromise, was similar to Lewin's (1965, in Johnson,
1976) transformation of suffering into reward, and reflected
Johnson's (1991a) moral obligation to person (moral
commitment).
APPENDIX B

Instruments

Letter of Introduction and Solicitation

COMMITMENT IN LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

When married couples are asked what is important to their staying together, many mention that they expected marriage to be a lifetime commitment and that this expectation helped them through the rough spots. Couples who are not married do not have that legal and cultural expectation. Those who have stayed together a long period of time, such as 15 years or more, have something special for the commitment to have continued without the social, legal, economic, and cultural support married couples get.

My research is on commitment. I am interested in what commitment means to people in their lives and what it provides in long-term relationships. I would like to interview couples who have lived with each other for 15 or more years and who are not married. Although there may be many reasons why couples do not marry, I am interested only in the ongoing experience of long-term commitment outside of marriage. Most research on commitment concentrates on married or dating couples, so this project and those who agree to share their special story are very important to our understanding of commitment in other long-term relationships.

Please write to the above address or call me at 703/552-3514 and let me know if you are interested in participating in this project. All names will be kept confidential. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Alison Galway,
Degree Candidate, Family Studies
Standard Question Script

Interview #1, Conjoint

Let's begin with the question - what does commitment mean to you personally?

How does your relationship with name reflect that meaning?

Thank you for that discussion. Now let's see how that fits with the work I'm doing here. In this study, we look at commitment as continuing a course of action over time. The action here is that of continuing your relationship, continuing to have an impact on each other in the sense that if one person changes, it causes some sort of change in the other and vice versa. (Use hand gestures to illustrate.)

Commitment, therefore, is acting in such a way that your relationship survives changes over time. The fact that you two have maintained a relationship over X years is evidence of commitment.

We are interested in finding out how commitment grows or develops over time in long-term relationships. We realize that relationships develop differently over time and that each relationship is special. We are not so much interested in how your relationship is like others, but in the ways in which it might be different and unique and how each of you has made it work.

What does commitment mean to you?
How does your relationship seem like or unlike those in the lives of others around you?
How did you make your choice to live life together as committed partners?
Was it a conscious decision, or did it just seem to happen?

After some general discussion, the couple is shown a blank timeline and they are asked to locate the beginning of their acquaintance and the present on either end of the horizontal line. They are then asked to locate, and date by year, important transitions in their life together, for example, moving, finishing school, buying a house, etc.

Thank you for helping me understand your relationship.
Let's confirm our arrangements for the next two interviews with each of you separately.

Interviews #2a and #2b, Individual

Let's review the question - what does commitment mean to you personally?
How does your relationship with name reflect that meaning?

Thank you for that discussion. Now let's see how that fits with the work I'm doing here. In this study, we look at commitment as continuing a course of action over time. The action here is that of continuing your relationship, continuing to have an impact on each other in the sense that if one person changes, it causes some sort of change in the other and vice versa. (Use hand gestures to illustrate.)
Commitment, therefore, is acting in such a way that your relationship survives changes over time. The fact that you two have maintained a relationship over X years is evidence of commitment.

Does it seem that we're talking about the same thing? (Probing for differences, changes, idiosyncratic definitions).

A copy of the timeline is given to the individual partner and he/she is asked if there are any additions to important events.

We are interested in finding out how commitment grows or develops over time in long-term relationships. We realize that relationships develop differently over time and that each relationship is special.

We are interested in your perception of the chance of you and (name) staying together. Of course, the day you decided to live together, you were close to 100% sure you would stay together. On your first meeting or date, the chance was close to zero. There have probably been times when you thought about whether you would indeed remain in a committed relationship with (name). These times, or turning points in your relationship, were based on both your ideas about staying with (name) and what you believed (name's) ideas were about staying with you. Taking both sets of ideas into consideration, please locate such a time on this timeline.
It is important to keep in mind that changes in the chance of staying together are based on changes in both your feelings about the relationship commitment and (name's) feelings. So this is not an indicator of how much you wanted to stay together or how much you were in love. It is an indicator of the chance that you and (name) would stay together. We realize that once people meet, the relationship can go up, go down, or stay at the same level. It may even seem like a different relationship. There may be more than one turning point in a relationship, so let's focus on one time when it seemed really critical to you to think about the relationship and if it would continue.

At what point were you first aware that the chance of staying together with name was different from this point? Point to first mark on graph. Was this a gradual change or were there things that caused it to change suddenly?

Place yourself in that time and place just before everything started to change. How was your life then? What happened? (Pause and let respondent tell the story. Use probes to help advance the story: What was an example of that? Can you be more specific? Could you explain that a little more? How did that (not) apply? How did that apply to your relationship? How did this affect your continuing in the relationship? How did the sense of staying together change? How did it seem different? How did you know it was different? How did the difference look, sound, feel?
What was important? What changed? What happened then? What was the new relationship like that was different from the old relationship? How did you know things had settled down into a new routine?

Thank you for sharing that with me. At this point, I'd like to ask you some more specific questions concerning your decision to continue in the relationship at that time. These ideas may or may not have applied to you situation then and may or may not still apply. Remember now how your situation was at that time.

At that point in time, how did wanting to stay with name him/herself affect your continuing in the relationship.

At that point in time, how did wanting to be in this kind of relationship with someone at all affect your continuing in the relationship.

At that point in time, how did wanting to keep your sense of who you were, or identity provided by the relationship, affect your continuing in the relationship.

At that point in time, you had probably invested time, energy, and money in the relationship. How did thoughts of that investment affect your sense of having to continue the relationship in order to get an eventual reward or return?

At that point in time, friends and family had probably gotten used to the relationship. How did thoughts of hurting
their feelings or of their opinions affect your sense of having to continue the relationship?

At that point in time, it would have probably meant a lot of effort or hassle to separate your lives. How did thoughts of hassle affect your sense of having to continue the relationship?

At that point in time, you might not have had a lot of other options. How did thoughts of options affect your sense of having to continue the relationship in order to keep a place to live, people you knew, things or activities you had?

Some people believe that once you have started something, you ought to continue if at all possible. At that point in time, how did your personal beliefs about 'sticking with it' influence your sense that you ought to continue in the relationship?

Some people value a relationship in part because of the type of relationship it is. Marriage is often valued in that way in our society. At that point in time, how did your personal beliefs about the value of the type of relationship you had with name influence your sense that you ought to continue in the relationship?

A special sense of personal obligation to name may have existed. At that point in time, how did your personal obligation to name influence your sense that you ought to continue in the relationship?
Have you been married before? If not, think about the long-term marriages you see around you.

How does this situation compare to marriage? *(Probe for difference and sameness.)* How does it seem like a marriage? How does it *not* seem like a marriage?

For heterosexual couples: Have you ever considered getting married to *name*? Do you think you might in the future?

Is there anything about your age or level of maturity that seemed particularly important about your continuing the relationship then?

Is there anything about your personal history that seemed particularly important about your continuing the relationship then?

Is there anything about your family background that seemed particularly important about your continuing the relationship then?

Is there anything about your personality that seemed particularly important about your continuing the relationship then?

Is there anything about current events that seemed particularly important about your continuing the relationship then?

Is there anything about the future that seemed particularly important to your continuing the relationship then?
How would you advise a young person just starting out in a committed relationship? What would you tell them is important?

Do you have anything you wish to add at this point that will help me understand you and your relationship?

Thank you very much for your time. Let's discuss the next interview time.

Interview #3, Conjoint

What did you think of this discussion of commitment?

How does this influence your thoughts on commitment in your relationship?

Do you feel pretty much the way you always have, or did some new feelings or thoughts come up?

How did the first part of the interview - about the turning point - compare with the second part when I asked you the more specific questions? Did these question help you think about commitment? Did they seem distracting to what you consider important about your relationship?

Thank you very much for your time and effort here. You've been a big help and your opinions on this are very important. Again, if you have questions, please call.

Would you like a summary of the results of this study once it is finished?
APPENDIX C
Constructs Used in Coding Transcripts

General Constructs

Definition of commitment was the respondents' own words describing their meaning of the term commitment.

Definition of relationship was the respondents' own words describing characteristics of their own relationship.

Constructs Derived from
Johnson's (1991a) Psycho-Social Model of Commitment

Expression of commitment:

Awareness - perceived or recalled experience;
Salience - emotion, values, beliefs;
Plans - decision coordination and development of plans of action; and
Behavior - specific actions to maintain or dissolve.

Forces of Commitment:

Personal - attitude toward partner, attitude toward being in a relationship, and self-concept or identity
Moral - value of consistency itself, value in stability of the type of relationship, and personal obligation.
Structural - irretrievable investments (including emphases on future reward or the irretrievable nature of the investment), social network reaction (including stability of future plans, jointness of network and kin involvement), termination procedure difficulty, and the availability of acceptable alternatives (including
alternative relationships, friend and activity network, financial security, and future goals or plans).

Awareness Context, or psychological model embedded in social structure, of reported elements of the phenomenology of commitment during the turning point:

Applicability of a variable along a continuum of determining, influential, present, and zero.

Causal relationships attributed by respondents:

- internal culturally based model of the nature of the experience or operative in constructing plans of action.

- external causal factors outside the respondent in the form of consequences, life stressors, and violation of social norms by co-habiting.

Vocabulary of the definition of appropriateness vis à vis paper documentation or community opinion of the relationship.

Dialectical tensions along continua of choice/constraint and internal/external.

Constructs Emerging from Data

Interdependence expressed as lines of action, context, focus of attention, or boundaries (or lack); the latter including individual, couple, and couple with children, others, or business.
Other commitments in general or to career, children, local community network, or a more global cause.

Time expressed as a force or awareness developing slowly over time; a system including future or permanence; specific future possibilities or consequences; courtship sequence; or threshold of emerging or sudden awareness.

Constructs Informed by a Life Course Perspective

Current Events at the time, e.g., Vietnam War.

Family Background influences from childhood or at the time.

Gender or awareness of difference in experience directly attributed to respondent's gender.

Generativity elicited as advice to young people just now starting out in a relationship.

Marriage comparisons of present to others' or previous experience and whether more similar or different.

Maturity level or age at the time.

Personal History as an adult.

Personality or unchanging characteristic of person.
APPENDIX D

References


Sourcebook of family theories and methods (pp. 135-163). New York: Plenum.


Duck (Eds.), Studying interpersonal interaction (pp. 162-178). New York: Guilford Press.


APPENDIX E

Permission to Reproduce

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Alison Galway
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U S A

8th March 1994

Dear Ms Galway,

Thank you for your letter concerning the use of the two diagrams of Michael P Johnson’s Commitment model, on pages 126 and 133 of ADVANCES IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS VOL 3.

We are happy to grant permission for the use of the diagrams in your thesis document without charge. If you do submit this for subsequent publication, you would need to be in touch with us again.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Jessica Kingsley
ALISON GALWAY

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VITA

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND
Ph.D. student, Marriage and Family Therapy, Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA (8/93-Present), Advisor: James F. Keller, Ph.D.
M.S., Department of Family and Child Development with emphasis in Family Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA (9/91-5/94), MS Candidate (10/92-6/94), research topic Commitment in Long-Term Cohabiting Couples, Advisor: Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., Thesis Defense 4/94, MS Degree and Certificate in Gerontology to be conferred 5/94.
BA, Sociology, Douglass College of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, (1969).

DISTINCTIONS
Nominated for the multicultural diversity award, Spring 1994.
Received Department of Family and Child Development's Certificate of Merit, Spring 1993, for contribution to research on friendship patterns in older adults.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS
Certified Master Practitioner, March 1987, NLP Comprehensive, Inc., Boulder, CO.
Certified Neuro-Linguistic Practitioner, August 1985, NLP Institute of Washington, Vienna, VA.

PUBLICATIONS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE
Assistant (10/93-12/93) to the Program Chair of the 7th International Conference in Personal Relationships to be held July 4-8, 1994 in Groningen, Netherlands
Housing coordinator, organizing committee for the Southeast Symposium on Child and Family Development April 2-4, 1992, Blacksburg, VA.
Research assistant for pilot interviews and questionnaire development for the AARP Andrus Foundation study on older adult friendship and well-being, February, 1992.

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EXPERIENCE SUMMARY

1991-Present  Department of Family and Child Development, VPI&SU, Blacksburg, VA
Practicum student at Center for Family Services, Marriage and Family Therapy (1/94-Present)
Practicum student intern at New River Valley Community Services Board Out-patient Mental Health Services, Christiansburg, VA (6/93-Present).
Adult Day Care Center Graduate Assistant (8/93-Present)
Adult Day Care Center Office Assistant (6-7/93)
Graduate Research Assistant (6/92-6/93)
1986  Medical office management systems sales and service manager, Medaphis Inc, Washington, DC.
1975-1976  Professional Relations Officer, Raleigh, NC.
1971-1975  Disability Determination Specialist, Raleigh, NC.
1969-1970  Social Worker, Child and family services, Somerville, NJ.

AFFILIATIONS

1991-Present, member, National Council of Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN.
1992-Present, member, International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, Austin, TX.
1992-Present, member, International Network on Personal Relationships, Iowa City, IA.
1993, member, American Society on Aging, San Francisco, CA.

1991-1992  Graduate Student Association of the Department of Family and Child Development

Mary Allen Galvin