Commitment, Rituals, and Initiator Tendency in Married Couples

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COMMITMENT, RITUALS, AND INITIATOR TENDENCY
IN MARRIED COUPLES
by
April Bakker
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE in Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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2010
ABSTRACT

Commitment, Rituals, and Initiator Tendency in Married Couples

by

April Bakker, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2010

Major Professor: Dr. Scot M. Allgood
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The purpose of this study was to examine and make explicit the relationships between commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency. Past research and theory suggests that these ideas are related. Two research questions guided the study: (1) How are initiator tendency and the number of rituals a couple participates in related to the commitment style?, and (2) How are initiator tendency and the meaningfulness of rituals related to commitment style?

Data were obtained from 55 couples who completed a questionnaire to measure participation and meaningfulness of rituals, initiator tendency, and commitment. Final analyses were performed with only 39 of these couples as 16 newlywed couples were removed from the sample. Results suggested a significant relationship for meaningfulness of connection rituals with both personal commitment and moral commitment for the husbands in the study. A relationship was also found between initiator tendency and personal commitment for both husbands and wives, while only the
wives showed a negative relationship between initiator tendency and constraint commitment. Implications for marriage and family therapy were presented and the limitations of the study were also discussed.

(95 pages)
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April Bakker
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Commitment, Rituals, and Initiator Tendency

"Marriage works!" "Married couples make more money!" These are examples of slogans intended to promote the practice of marriage. Scott Stanley (personal communication, November 11, 2009) has explained that this attention to and promotion of marriage shows that marriage is still an area of high interest and desire in the United States. This interest in marriage may be an explanation for the research attention that various marriage-related concepts have received over time. As research has continued to map out important constructs to marriage and relationships, commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency have gained attention.

Commitment, as a concept of importance, has been the subject of intense study (Adams & Jones, 1997). This has led to the conclusion that a lack of commitment is related to divorce (Johnson et al., 2002), that greater commitment leads to better communication and problem solving (Brewer, 1993; Robinson & Blanton, 1993), and that higher commitment increases general contentment with life (Roberts, 1979). These studies refer to a global idea of commitment, but Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) have argued that commitment is actually composed of three separate and distinct parts (personal commitment, moral commitment, and constraint commitment), and that what is typically referred to as commitment only encompasses one of these parts. While commitment has been studied independently, there is a gap in the research that fails to
connect commitment to other constructs, including rituals. The gap in the research that fails to connect rituals with the global idea of commitment also fails to address these three types of commitment.

The repeated interactions of the family received little attention until the 1950s (Bossard & Boll, 1950). Since that time researchers have studied and labeled these interactions, determining their significance for families. Rituals are now shown to aid in the creation of connection, feelings of belonging, family identity, and stability during crisis and transition (Crespo, Davide, Costa, & Fletcher, 2008; Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler, 1993; Laird, 1984; Viere, 2001; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). These benefits have been identified for families, but less research exists to identify the importance of or benefits from rituals for couples.

The research specifically linking rituals to married and couple relationships suggests that rituals may play a part in long-term marital success and in marital satisfaction (Berg-Cross, Daniels, & Carr, 1992; Davis, 2006). Doherty (2001) suggested that rituals can be used to improve or enhance a marital relationship and that rituals are unique to the couple and can be as simple or extravagant as the couple deems necessary.

Another area of interest within the realm of marriage involves identifying and labeling couples' interaction within the context of conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1999; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). Various patterns have been identified by researchers that specify each partner's role within the conflict. This idea has been revisited and developed further by Denton and Burleson (2007). Initiator tendency, the tendency of an individual to initiate or avoid conversations about relationship problems, is the newly developed term by these authors. At present, this is an idea that research has
failed to link to other marriage concepts. An understanding of the relationships between commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency may have implications for further research as well as for marriage and family therapy.

**Conceptual Definitions**

The primary terms for this study are defined in this section for greater clarity. For the purposes of this study, three main terms are described: commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency. Commitment can be generally defined as “tendency to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically ‘attached’ to it” (Rusbult, 1983, p. 102). For the present study, commitment was broken into three types as described by Johnson and colleagues (1999). These types included personal commitment, moral commitment, and constraint commitment. For this study, rituals are defined as “social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant” (Doherty, 2001, p. 125). Doherty’s categories of rituals, including connection, love, and special occasion rituals were used for the present study. Initiator tendency (Denton & Burleson, 2007) describes an individual’s tendency to either approach or avoid conversations with a partner about relationship concerns. For this study, a person high in initiator tendency was a person who approached these conversations. These three concepts are explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

**Theoretical Framework**

Though the concepts as described previously could be explained using various family theories, the theories that fit best for this study are systems theory and social exchange theory as parts of these theories have ideas or parts that are similar or
comparable to the ideas of rituals, commitment, and initiator tendency. Together these theories provide the best understanding and exploration of the concepts of interest for this study.

Systems theory emphasizes the importance of context and interaction, strongly supporting the idea that no individual acts in isolation (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). This theory would then promote the observation of multiple parties including each spouse, children, in-laws, neighbors, and others in interaction in order to understand one particular individual or a relationship. The same could be argued for concepts, meaning that concepts are best understood in relation to other concepts. This also leads to the argument that marriage would be best understood by looking at the many involved concepts including the ones of interest for this study.

Systems theory also helps to understand rituals and initiator tendency as these ideas involve interactions among family members or spouses. Boundaries, a concept from systems theory, refer to the rules and limit that individuals and couples create for themselves and their relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). Boundaries are similar to rituals in that they help set the couple apart from other relationships and the outside world. Rituals, to some extent, also govern the connection of a couple defining the nature of the interaction much as a boundary would. As initiator tendency refers to a pattern of approach or avoidance in couples, the concept of feedback loops would be the most useful comparison. Feedback loops maintain what is considered normal or appropriate for a couple or family (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). In much the same way, an individual’s tendency to either discuss or avoid relationship problems maintains the relationship in the way the individual views as normal or appropriate.
Social exchange theory is especially helpful for understanding the area of commitment and specifically the three types. Social exchange theory posits that individuals weigh the costs and benefits associated with particular actions or behaviors then choose the action that will yield the greatest ratio of benefit to cost (White & Klein, 2008). The three types of commitment, commitment to spouse, commitment to marriage, and constraint commitment can be conceived of in terms of their recognition of either benefits or costs. Personal commitment for example highlights mostly benefits associated with the maintenance of a relationship while constraint commitment represents the costs associated with ending a relationship.

Though each theory highlights and best explains different concepts, the theories are also connected in their interactional view. The systems theory is explicit in its view of the interrelatedness of people as explained earlier in this section. Though more subtle, social exchange theory also includes this interactional view. Without interaction, exchange is impossible, and within the area of commitment, costs and benefits are likely to be relational in nature.

The previously mentioned theories provide theoretical grounding for the concepts used in the study, but fail to provide guidance for how the ideas of commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency may be related. For this purpose, Gottman’s theory and ideas can be applied (1999). Gottman’s theory, based on his research, suggests that there are specific traits and behaviors that distinguish couples in successful relationships from those in unsuccessful relationships. He has created “The Sound Marital House” to explain what traits and behaviors lead to successful marriages (p. 105). The Sound Marital House includes behaviors that are similar to the concepts of rituals and initiator
tendency and that can explain potential relationships between these concepts and commitment which may be likened to Gottman’s idea of a successful marriage. These ideas are explored in more detail throughout Chapter II.

**Purpose of the Study**

Currently there exists a gap in the research that fails to connect the concepts of commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency within marriage. The purpose of this study was to identify and make explicit the relationships between commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency. This study aimed to demonstrate the relationship of initiator tendency and the number of rituals a couple participates in on the type of commitment. In addition, the study also looked at how initiator tendency and the meaningfulness of rituals are related to the type of commitment.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter the applicable and recent literature in the areas of commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency in couples is reviewed. The three types of commitment, types and function of rituals, and types and significance of initiator tendency are defined and explained. The literature will then be looked to for connections between these ideas, including any influence on commitment from rituals and initiator tendency. Finally, the research questions and purpose of the study are introduced.

Marital Commitment

Commitment has often been used to explain relationship longevity and stability (Adams & Jones, 1997). In fact, 85% of divorced respondents in the Oklahoma marriage study indicated a lack of commitment as the primary contributing factor to their divorce (Johnson et al., 2002). Other studies have demonstrated that commitment is likened to greater accommodation to one’s partner (Rusbult & Verette, 1991; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), better communication and problemsolving (Brewer, 1993; Robinson & Blanton, 1993), and greater contentment with life in general (Roberts, 1979). The importance attributed to marital commitment has fueled research on the idea, leading to greater understanding of what commitment is and how it operates in relationships (Adams & Jones, 1997).
Researchers indicate that commitment has different meanings and is experienced and communicated differently by various individuals according to the gender of the individual, and the relationship context (Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2006; Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2006). Despite these differences, commitment can be described in simple terms as an individual’s “tendency to maintain a relationship and to feel psychologically ‘attached’ to it” (Rusbult, 1983, p. 102), or a desire to remain in a relationship indefinitely (Canary & Stafford, 1992).

Several researchers have suggested that commitment is composed of separate parts that combine to give a complete view of commitment (e.g., Johnson, 1991; Rusbult, 1980, 1983). In an attempt to empirically show the existence of these parts, Adams and Jones (1997) created a study to identify common constructs of commitment and test these constructs. The authors’ evaluation included six studies involving a total of 1,787 participants and utilizing various empirical methods. First the authors searched the literature and identified 135 items related to commitment. A factor analysis was performed that identified six factors as hanging together. Further analysis, however, showed that only three of these factors were usable. From these three factors, items that correlated with more than one were eliminated, resulting in the elimination of 56 items. After a test of reliability, the 15 most reliable items for each factor were kept, leading to the creation of a 45-item measure.

The remaining studies by the researchers (Adams & Jones, 1997) demonstrated various forms of validity and reliability. Study two showed construct validity when the researchers found that participants responded differently to the three types of
commitment depending on their relationship status (casually dating, seriously dating, engaged, married, and divorced). Construct validity was also established in the comparison of the scores of the created measure to other common measures of commitment, including a commitment scale by Rusbult (1983), and the Commitment Inventory by Stanley and Markman (1992).

From this, the researchers (Adams & Jones, 1997) found additional support for the existence of distinct components of commitment while also identifying what these distinct components are. The authors identify an attraction component as being included in most models. This component includes a commitment to one's spouse based on “personal dedication, devotion, attachment, and love” (p. 1,178). The second component identified in the models was commitment as a constraining force, meaning the recognized costs associated with any potential dissolution of the relationship. The third and final identified commonality was commitment as a moral obligation, or the values a person has about what he or she feels should be done or is right. These three identified types of commitment can be found in the works of previous researchers as well as current researchers and have been given more concise labels: personal commitment, moral commitment, and constraint commitment (Johnson et al., 1999; Levinger, 1976; Rhoades et al., 2006; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Each of these types is reviewed in greater detail below.

**Personal Commitment**

The idea of personal commitment appears in the work of several authors who use various names to refer to the same concept. Johnson et al. (1999) referred to this type of
commitment as personal commitment. Levinger (1976) titled it attraction forces. Others have titled it satisfaction (Rusbult, 1980, 1983) and dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1992) commitment. In spite of the differences in names, this type of commitment is characterized by personal dedication, devotion, attachment, and love of one’s partner (Adams & Jones, 1997). This type of commitment assumes that there are desirable or valuable features of the relationship or of the partner that encourages the continuation of the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997).

Johnson et al. (1999) and Kapinus and Johnson (2003) identified three aspects of this type of commitment. The first is an attraction to the partner. This can mean a physical attraction, emotional attraction, or simply an overall appreciation of the characteristics of the partner. The second aspect is an attraction to the relationship. This aspect is often related to the actions of both partners. Relationship maintenance behaviors are often associated with this type of commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997). This aspect of commitment can be identified through the actions of an individual to “not only continue in the relationship, but also to improve it, to sacrifice for it, to invest in it, to link personal goals to it, and to seek the partner’s welfare, not simply one’s own” (Stanley & Markman, 1992, p. 595). The third aspect is couple identity. Participation in a social relationship can become an important part of one’s identity and self-concept (Johnson et al., 1999). A desire to be acknowledged by others as a couple and to retain one’s identity as a part of a couple contributes to commitment from this aspect.
Moral Commitment

This type of commitment, with the use of the word “moral”, is generally understood as carrying a feeling of obligation about what one should do (Johnson et al., 1999). It can be described as the feeling that one ought to continue a relationship (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). It involves a valuing of the institution of marriage, or a belief in its sanctity (Adams & Jones, 1997). Some research has also tied greater commitment to marriage with morality associated with religiosity (Allgood, Harris, Skogrand, & Lee, 2009; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008; Larson & Goltz, 1989).

This type of commitment can be understood as stemming from three major sources (Johnson et al., 1999; Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). The first source, relationship-type obligation, represents an individual’s values and beliefs regarding the morality of maintaining or ending particular types of relationships. For example, an individual that believes marriage is a lifelong decision is likely to have higher commitment in this area than an individual who believes that a commitment to marriage only applies as long as both partners are in love and feel satisfied with the relationship (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). A second source of this type of commitment is the value of consistency. This source is based on the idea that one should finish what he or she starts and the need for values to align with behaviors or actions (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). The third and final source for this type of commitment is person-specific obligation. This source involves concerns about the effects of one’s behavior on his or her partner (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). It also includes maintaining the promises that are made to one’s partner or considering the needs and welfare of the partner.
Constraint Commitment

Unlike personal commitment and moral commitment, constraint commitment is not a commitment to stay in the relationship because of a value of the institution of marriage or of the partner, but a commitment based on the possible costs associated with ending the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997). The sources for this type of commitment are called constraints (Levinger, 1976), barriers (Johnson et al., 1999), and costs (Rusbult, 1983), all of which refer to external forces that can keep an individual in a relationship. The term “structural commitment” is also used to refer to this type of commitment by Stanley and Markman (1992), Johnson et al. (1999), and Kapinus and Johnson (2003).

This type of commitment suggests that external forces prevent the dissolution of a relationship even if an individual is highly motivated to leave the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997). This type of commitment is unlikely to be salient when the other types of commitment, commitment to spouse and commitment to marriage, are visible, but is more common in situations of dissatisfaction (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999). The external forces contributing to this type of commitment can be placed into four categories and include irretrievable investments, termination procedures, social reaction, and lack of attractive alternatives (Johnson et al., 1999).

The idea of irretrievable investments refers to the time, energy, and resources an individual invests in the relationship over time. These things are often invested into a relationship with the expectation of a long-term payoff. If the relationship ends, one
might feel as if these resources have been wasted and are irretrievable. Leaving the relationship would then be viewed as an intolerable loss (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003).

The termination procedures required to end a marriage involve specific legal actions. For a newer marriage or a marriage without children, this process may not be especially difficult, but in most relationships where various property and assets are accumulated over time, the division of these items can be a difficult process (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). In marriages or relationships involving children, the fear of a custody battle can create a barrier to ending the relationship (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). The more difficult and burdensome an individual views the termination procedures, the greater the likelihood he or she will feel constrained to the relationship (Johnson et al., 1999).

Social reaction barriers refer to an individual’s concern about the reactions of friends and family, or other social networks, to the dissolution of a relationship. Social pressure to remain in the relationship can come from those friends and family members who disapprove of ending the relationship for either moral or pragmatic reasons (Johnson et al., 1999). This disapproval need not be explicitly stated; anticipation of a negative reaction from people whose opinions matter to the individual can create this type of commitment. In addition to the disapproval, couples that share a close social network may become concerned about losing friends and forcing friends to choose sides (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). This concern creates further constraint, increasing commitment to the relationship.

The final constraining force is a lack of attractive alternatives. Alternatives refer not only to the possible opportunities an individual would have of replacing the
relationship, but other consequences of the dissolution of the relationship. These consequences include a loss of and unavailable alternative source of income, housing, employment, and time with children. The availability of alternatives would be very different for a 20-year-old college woman than for a 50-year-old mother of three who dropped out of the labor market to raise her children (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003).

These three identified types of commitment combine to create a more comprehensive view of commitment. While these ideas of commitment and the three types were developed in the 1990, little research has been done since with this idea. This is likely due to the money dedicated to promoting healthy marriages that switched basic research such as this to a more applied focus. Despite this lack of continued research, this conception of commitment remains and has been demonstrated to be important to marriage success or failure (Johnson et al., 2002). This study aims to build upon this concept by connecting it with other concepts important to marriage and relationships. One of these concepts is rituals.

Rituals

In an attempt to understand the complexities of family life, researchers have focused attention on the patterned interactions of the family (Bossard & Boll, 1950). This focus has lead to greater understanding of the role or function that rituals play in family and married life (e.g., Wolin & Bennett, 1984) as well as the types of rituals (e.g., Doherty, 2001; Wolin & Bennett, 1984).
**Definition of Rituals**

The concept of rituals has been defined in various ways by researchers, authors, and therapists studying this idea. The first definition came as a result of a landmark review and theoretical proposal by Bossard and Boll in 1950. This new look at rituals changed the meaning of the word ritual from a general association with formal guidelines for religion, magic, worship, or initiation to a less organized pattern of social interaction. A ritual, then, is “a prescribed procedure, arising out of family interaction, involving a pattern of defined behavior, which is directed toward some specific end or purpose, and acquires rigidity and a sense of rightness as a result of its continuing history” (Bossard & Boll, 1950, p. 29). By this definition, a ritual has three basic characteristics. First, it is prescribed, meaning that there is an exact procedure to the way it is to be done. Second, it includes an element of rigidity, and finally it brings a sense of rightness as it continues to be repeated.

Doherty (2001) ascribed to what he identified as the anthropological definition of rituals. From this view, rituals are “social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant” (p. 125). This means that repeated interactions are agreed upon by the participants, and that they have a specific emotional significance to the participants in order to qualify as rituals. This is the definition that will be used for this study as it builds on the definition of Bossard and Boll (1950) and best represents the use of rituals in couples.

The idea of a structured and repeated action may lead to confusion between family rituals and family routines. While many studies have used these terms interchangeably, others have identified specific differences between the two. Feise et al.
explained the differences between routines and rituals along the dimensions of communication, commitment, and continuity. Routines are characterized by communication that is instrumental in nature ("this is what needs to be done"), short commitment with little thought given to the actions after its completion, and continuity over time. Rituals, in contrast, involve symbolic communication of group identity, emotional commitment that may continue through memories, and continuity across generations. An example from Feise et al. (2002) explains that supper can be both a ritual and a routine. The routine part includes determining who will go to the grocery store to get the necessary supplies. A conversation such as this is likely repeated several times a week, but usually after leaving the grocery store involves no further thought or commitment. The act of a family sitting down for supper, however, may include inside jokes with symbolic meaning, special conversations or ways of conducting passed down from previous generations, or other actions meaningful to the family.

Doherty (2001) also distinguished between rituals and routines, explaining these differences primarily in terms of the emotional significance of the event. Rituals evoke positive emotional meaning for those involved, while routines lack this emotional meaning. Though rituals and routines differ, the overlap makes it possible for a routine to become a ritual if it gains emotional significance (Doherty, 2001; Feise et al., 2002).

**Function of Rituals**

Rituals serve several important functions in couples and families. Rituals in families create a sense of identity and belonging, and define membership for the members (Fiese et al., 1993; Viere, 2001; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). They help a couple or family to
feel a special connection or closeness to each other (Crespo et al., 2008). In addition, rituals within the family transmit beliefs and values (Bossard & Boll, 1950; Viere, 2001; Wolin & Bennett, 1984) and provide for stability during times of crisis or transition (Laird, 1984; Viere, 2001). They can also be used to convey family rules, member roles, and myths about its history, signify the family’s developmental phase, aid in problem-solving or decisionmaking, and organize daily life (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Though the function of rituals has been almost exclusively studied in the context of family, several of these functions may be applicable to couples. According to Doherty, rituals in couples are often recognized as the events that bring the couple together, and that define them as a couple (Doherty, 2001). Lobsenz has suggested that rituals provide a partnership with a unique identity. "A feeling of rootedness is realized as the security of rituals encourages a sense of belonging. When rituals have been consistently observed by a couple, then the rituals and their positive memories help to provide a linkage between the moments" (Lobsenz, 1981, p. 271, as cited in Berg-Cross et al., 1992). These ideas are similar to the ideas of family identity and membership and also family stability as described by other authors.

Types of Rituals

Under the identified definitions of rituals also exist several types or categories of rituals. Wolin and Bennett (1984) identified three categories of rituals: family celebrations, family traditions, and patterned family interactions. Family celebrations consist of such celebrations as holidays, rites of passage, or religious celebrations. Family traditions incorporate family-specific events such as vacations, reunions,
participation in community events, and birthday or anniversary traditions. Wolin and Bennett describe family interactions as the most frequent but least consciously planned type of ritual. These interactions can include mealtimes, greetings and goodbyes, bedtime routines, or even weekend leisure activities.

Following the ideas and events included in Wolin and Bennett’s (1984) categories, Imber-Black and Roberts (1992) modified the categories of rituals to include a fourth category, family life cycle. These four categories then include family celebrations and family traditions as the previous theory had, and also family life cycle and what was renamed as day-to-day life. This made the categories slightly more specific, but did not change the family-specific context of these categories.

The previous categories of rituals are helpful in breaking down and examining aspects of family life that can contribute to the health of the family. A third way of categorizing rituals comes from Doherty (2001). The types of rituals identified by Doherty are specific to couples. This is important as family rituals are often intended to include children or other family members and focus less on the important interactions of the couple. Doherty’s book, *Take Back Your Marriage*, identifies three types of rituals for couples. These types include love rituals, special occasion rituals, and connection rituals.

Love rituals include rituals intended to express love and the special connection between partners. This may involve rituals of spoken love, sex, dating, or intimacy. As with other types of rituals, these rituals are unique to the couple and are often not intended to be seen or heard by people outside of the relationship. What represents or communicates love to one couple may seem silly or ineffective to another couple.
According to Doherty, it is the love rituals that help to maintain the heat and passion of a relationship over time.

Rituals of special occasion incorporate the less frequent celebrations such as yearly holidays or anniversaries. Doherty notes wedding anniversaries, Valentine’s Day, and birthday celebrations as those most specific to the couple, but also acknowledges the uniqueness of couples and also cultural differences that place couple emphasis on other holidays or celebrations. Rituals of special occasion provide a special moment to say and do things that either cannot be done every day or would become meaningless if done every day.

Connection rituals are the everyday activities that couples participate in. Daily greetings or goodbyes, talk time (not logistical or involving problemsolving), meal times, and morning and evening activities can all be rituals of connection. Such rituals could include daily phone calls to check in, shared bedtime activities, or even a shared television show. Similar to the other ritual types, rituals of connection are often unique to the couple and can involve a variety of activities as long as the definition of a ritual as described previously is met.

Doherty’s (2001) rituals of special occasion are similar to the family celebrations and family traditions described by Wolin and Bennett (1984). The ideas of connection rituals and family interactions are also similar. While these ideas overlap in many ways, it is Doherty’s ritual categories that will be used for the present study, as these categories are more specific to couples and couple interactions instead of family interactions.
Rituals and Commitment

Little research exists that directly links rituals with marital commitment, and no research specifically links rituals of married couples with the types of commitment as described by Johnson et al. (1999). The concept of feedback (Becvar & Becvar, 2006) provides a theoretical link. Rituals generally have a positive connotation and as they are implemented, commitment may go up thereby reinforcing more rituals and this loop works to promote highly committed marriages. Below is a review of the studies that indirectly relate these ideas.

Berg-Cross et al. (1992) reported that a couple’s participation in rituals is associated with long-term marital success. These researchers recruited a sample of 77 African American women who were married three years or less ($n = 20$), ten years or more ($n = 22$), divorced after three years or less of marriage ($n = 20$), and divorced after ten or more years of marriage ($n = 15$).

The results from this study showed that couples that had been married for ten years or greater reported higher participation in rituals, while couples divorced after ten or more years of marriage reported significantly less ritual participation. This study suggests that rituals may play a part in long-term marital commitment, but fails to address this idea of commitment directly.

Another study, by Campbell and Ponzetti (2007), used a sample of 100 couples in exclusive dating relationships. The researchers surveyed the participants for participation in rituals and commitment levels, defined as relationship satisfaction, level of investment, and perceived quality of alternatives. The results showed that a couple’s participation in
rituals assisted in the prediction of their commitment levels. An increase in ritual participation predicted greater commitment, while less ritual participation predicted lower commitment. This study succeeds in demonstrating a relationship between rituals and commitment, but did so using a limited sample of unmarried, college students. The present study aims to look for a more direct connection between participation in rituals and the identified commitment types in married couples.

The lack of literature to connect the ideas of rituals and commitment leaves theory to explain the possible connections between these concepts. As mentioned in Chapter I, Gottman’s Sound Marital House includes behaviors that he connects with successful relationships (1999). One of the behaviors Gottman identifies is actually connection rituals. Gottman uses this idea identified by Doherty as a part of the Sound Marital House and an action that is part of creating a successful relationship. As connection rituals are suggested to aid in successful relationships, it can be hypothesized that they are related to higher commitment. Another of these behaviors is what Gottman calls a successful bid for attention. Similar to a connection ritual, a bid for attention is simply an attempt by one partner to connect with the other. While not exactly the same idea, these concepts overlap and the argument could be made that connection rituals are a type of bid for connection. If this were the case, and successful bids for attention contribute to successful marriages, then it could be hypothesized that based on this theory connection rituals would be positively related to commitment.

Other ideas identified by this theory include the need for love maps, fondness and admiration, and general positive sentiment (Gottman, 1999). Simply put, these ideas refer to the couple’s intimacy in knowing each other, expressions of fondness, and
general positive feelings toward each other. Because love rituals share the same concepts of intimacy and expressed fondness, it is possible to relate love rituals with Gottman’s theory. This then leads to the hypothesis that love rituals, like the ideas identified by Gottman, lead to successful relationships, perhaps even greater commitment.

Rituals of special occasion can also be related to Gottman’s theory in that he identified creating shared meaning as a part of successful relationships. Part of creating shared meaning involves identifying the ways in which particular holidays or occasions are celebrated and the meanings behind such rituals (1999, p. 261). Rituals of special occasion are focused on these holidays and special celebrations and can, therefore, be hypothesized to be related to relationships success and further, to commitment.

The hypothesized relationships between the types of rituals and commitment based on Gottman’s theory likely only apply to a general sense of commitment or personal commitment. The acts of connecting, expressing fondness, and celebrating holidays seem more likely, according to this theory, to be related to the personal dedication, devotion, attachment, and love of one’s partner that characterizes personal commitment. Even this theory leaves a gap in explaining how rituals may be related to moral and constraint commitment. This study aims to begin to fill this current gap left by the literature and theory.

**Initiator Tendency**

In addition to types of commitment and the use of rituals, the ways in which a couple views and handles conflict is another significant topic of interest for researchers in the area of marriage and relationships. There are several theories to describe the patterns
and interactions of involving conflict and conflict resolution (see Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1999; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). Initiator tendency is another way to describe these patterns that focuses on the initiation of relationship problem discussion (Denton & Burleson, 2007).

According to Christensen and Heavey (1990), “marital conflict typically begins when one partner behaves in a way that is unpleasant for the other” (p. 73). Once conflict is initiated, the couple then faces the decision to either engage in or avoid a conversation about this relationship issue, which often becomes a pattern in the relationship. This may include one partner seeking to engage in relationship discussion while the other avoids it, both engaging, or both avoiding. This pattern of couple interaction and communication has received attention and has been identified by several authors.

Gottman (1999) has looked at these patterned interactions in terms of gender differences, and from his research has identified women as typically pursuing relationship problem discussions, and men as typically avoiding such discussions. He also distinguished between relationship types in terms of the couple’s typical conflict patterns. Validating couples are couples who conduct relationship problem discussions with a focus on openness while trying to maintain a calm and reasonable demeanor; conflict-avoiding couples are those who do not discuss relationship problems, tend to minimize or focus on the positives, and independently cope; and volatile couples are couples who tend to fight passionately and often loudly but remain passionate about their relationship also (Gottman, 1999).

Other researchers and theorists have identified and labeled the pattern of one partner wanting to discuss and the other not wanting to discuss the problem without
specific gender observations, including “engager-distancer” (Fogarty, 1976), “demand-withdraw” (Wile, 1981), and “pursue-distance” (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). Though named differently, each of these represents a pattern in which one partner seeks to approach the other about relationship concerns or problems while the other partner attempts to avoid and distance him or herself from these types of conversations.

Following these ideas, Denton and Burleson (2007) proposed a new model, labeling an individual’s tendency to express discontent and explore a relationship issue, or to keep his or her feelings private and not discuss the issue as his or her initiator tendency. Individuals who tend to initiate discussion of relationship problems are theorized to have a high initiator tendency and are termed initiators, while those that do not initiate such discussions are proposed to have low initiator tendency and are called avoiders (Denton, Burleson, Hobbs, Von Stein, & Rodriguez, 2001).

The concept of initiator tendency, according to Denton and Burleson (2007) is conceived of as specific to one particular relationship with one particular person. This is a different, narrower definition compared to other constructs of social interaction such as “extroversion and introversion” (Freyd, 1924); “unwillingness to communicate” (Burgoon, 1976); and “blirtatiousness” (Swann & Rentfrow, 2001). Because of this narrow definition, initiator tendency is believed to only be observed or measured within the context of a serious, committed relationship, one where patterns of interactions have time to develop, and would not be applicable to more casual, dating relationships (Denton & Burleson, 2007). The reason for this is the contextual nature of this idea. According to the authors, an individual’s initiator tendency may change according to his or her partner
and the relationship, but is assumed to become stable with one partner, in a longer relationship.

As this idea of initiator tendency is based on the observations of couple patterns as mentioned previously, there is one critical difference to note. This difference pertains to the generally accepted negative connotations associated with the terms “demand” and “withdraw” (Christensen & Heavey, 1990).

In the demand/withdraw pattern, demand is often described as nagging or criticizing (Christensen & Heavey, 1990), creating a negative connotation for this position. According to Gottman, withdrawing is also a negative behavior and one of several behaviors that can lead to divorce (1999). This is strikingly different from the concept of initiator tendency. Denton and Burleson (2007) suggested that neither the position of initiator nor the position of avoider is inherently negative, nor is either position inherently better than the other. This assumption is the result of the belief that both initiating and avoiding relationship discussions can be accomplished through both negative behaviors and positive or even prosocial behaviors. In this way, the typical demand-withdraw pattern is one example of a behavioral pattern of couple conflict discussions, while initiator tendency is an internal process characteristic of individuals, “that can be executed through a variety of behavioral strategies, including those that may regularly have positive, neutral, or negative outcomes” (Denton & Burleson, 2007, p. 247).

Although the full concept of initiator tendency has only been proposed by Denton and Burleson (2007), aspects of this concept have been noted by other authors and found through research to be associated with important relationship-related ideas. Noller,
Feeney, Bonnell, and Callan (1994) conducted a study with couples in their first two years of marriage and found that couples high in satisfaction after two years were less likely to avoid dealing with conflict. Christensen (1987), and Sullaway and Christensen (1983) found similar associations between aspects of initiator tendency and satisfaction or relationship distress. Other authors have noted that aspects of this idea can be associated with domestic violence (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998). Both of these studies looked at couples experiencing domestic violence in terms of the demand/withdraw patterns similar to initiator tendency as described above and found that violent couples had higher instances of demanding and withdrawing than nonviolent couples. Researchers Caughlin and Malis (2004), and Uebelacker, Courtnage, and Whisman (2003), found associations with substance abuse and depression respectively. The researchers noted more frequent demand/withdraw patterns between parents and adolescents with increased drug and alcohol use (Caughlin & Malis, 2004). Uebelacker and colleagues (2003) found that depression symptoms were associated with wife-demand and husband-withdraw patterns.

This research suggests the significance of initiator tendency within relationships. However, as this is a newer idea, there is no known research to associate initiator tendency with rituals in marital relationships. In the absence of literature to connect initiator tendency with commitment, theory can be used to hypothesize a relationship. As previously discussed, Gottman’s Sound Marital House (1999) identifies ideas and behaviors related to a successful relationship. Within this theory is the idea that relationship problems will always exist and that some will be solvable while others will not be solvable. What makes a successful relationship, then, is the emotional context
associated with the discussion about relationship problems. This seems to assume that such discussions take place and are necessary for the relationship. With a large portion of Gottman’s theory and interventions for distressed couples focusing on communication about problems, this seems to be a safe assumption. It may then be hypothesized that a tendency to initiate conversations about relationship problems may be related to commitment, but as explained previously this likely only applies to personal commitment. Even with the theory, there is still a gap and a failure to relate the idea of initiator tendency to other types of commitment and to identify its significance within the marital relationship. The present study aims to begin to fill these gaps.

Summary

The idea of commitment has attracted the attention of numerous researchers. Several of these studies have been examined and three main commonalities identified. Other authors have continued to build upon these commonalities, calling them personal commitment, moral commitment, and constraint commitment.

Rituals are another topic that has attracted the attention of researchers. Rituals have been shown to have a purpose in maintaining family life and their importance for the couple has also been suggested. The types of rituals used in the present study include love rituals, special occasion rituals, and connection rituals.

The final area of interest for the present study is initiator tendency. This is a newer idea that has been built on the various patterns of conflict styles identified by researchers. The idea of initiator tendency focuses on the actual propensity of an individual to initiate or avoid discussions about relationship problems or concerns.
At the present time, there is no known literature to link rituals with the types of commitment as identified above. In addition, because the idea of initiator tendency is a newer idea, there is also no research to connect it to the other interests in this study. Theory, specifically Gottman's theory of marital relationships (1999), suggests that connections exist and this study aims to be a starting point in filling these recognized gaps in the literature.

**Research Questions**

Research questions were generated to look for relationships among the concepts of commitment and rituals and initiator tendency. The following questions were examined through the present study as current research has failed to address them.

1. How are initiator tendency and the number of rituals a couple participates in related to the commitment style?

2. How are initiator tendency and the meaningfulness of rituals related to commitment style?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify relationships between the use and meaningfulness of rituals, types of commitment, and initiator tendency in married couples. This section is intended to explain the design, sample, measures, and procedure used for the study.

Design

This purpose of this study was to assess the relationships between a number of variables and thus a correlational design will be used to test the research questions. As this study sought to identify and explore rituals, initiator tendency, and their possible relationships with the types of commitment, a design intended to identify such relationship was necessary. A correlation is intended to identify the level of relation between variables (Patten, 2004), making it appropriate for this study.

Sample

The sample for this study included 55 heterosexual couples from northern Utah. This number was needed to examine patterns and run appropriate statistical analyses. The husbands included in the sample were slightly older than the wives, but husbands and wives had similar levels of education (see Table 1). The length of marriage ranged from less than a year to 56 years with 58% of the sample being married for one year or less. The yearly income for the couples ranged from $1,600 to $125,000 with a median income of $25,000. Only 29.1% of the participating couples had children in the home.
As part of the inclusion criteria, all couples were married with both partners in their first marriages. In addition, the sample only included heterosexual couples as the research suggests that the experiences of homosexual couples may be different than the experiences of heterosexual couples (Rostosky, Riggle, Dudley, & Wright, 2006).

As noted in Table 2, the sample was predominately composed of Caucasian individuals who identified themselves as belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In addition, most self-identified as very religious and attended religious services frequently. This is important as this religion encourages participation in rituals (Ludlow, 1992). This will be discussed further in the chapters to follow.

During analysis, part of the sample was eliminated. Couples married less than a year, called newlyweds from this point, were removed from the analysis. The new sample consisted of 39 couples. The descriptive information for this sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

*Age and Education of Total Sample and Sample Without Newlyweds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total sample (n = 55)</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>31.53</td>
<td>14.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample without newlyweds (n = 39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>34.62</td>
<td>16.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14.56</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Ethnicity and Religion as Numbers and Percentages of Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample demographics</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th></th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon (LDS)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service attendance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never or almost never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to three times a month</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more times a week</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>72.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religiosity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all religious</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly religious</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately religious</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very religious</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Couples were recruited through two undergraduate general education courses that draw students from a variety of disciplines at Utah State University. Students in the Family, Consumer, and Human Development department taking course number 1500,
Human Development Across the Lifespan, and course number 3540, Adult Development and Aging, were asked to complete surveys or find a couple to complete a survey. This initiated an additional snowball method that was used to ensure enough participants were included in the study and also to add a greater range for age, length of marriage, education, and income. Only couples in which both partners were willing to participate were included. As an incentive to participate, each student that returned a completed survey had their name entered into a drawing for a $50 gift card.

**Measures**

This study included a measure for each main concept: commitment, rituals, and initiator tendency. A brief demographic component was also included. The complete measure can be found in Appendix B.

**Commitment**

To measure commitment and to distinguish between the three types of commitment (personal commitment, moral commitment, and constraint commitment), a measure from Johnson et al. (1999) was used. This measure consisted of 42 questions that were measured on a likert scale of 1 through 9 with the exception of two items measured on a scale of 1 through 7. For personal commitment this included a total of seven questions addressing love, marital satisfaction, and couple identity. For moral commitment, 13 questions addressed divorce attitudes, partner contract, and consistency values. The constraint commitment area included 22 questions assessing alternatives, social pressure, termination procedure, and investment.
In a study to determine the need for a tripartite measure of commitment, the results indicated that the types of commitment were not highly correlated with each other, signifying that they are distinct ideas (Johnson et al., 1999). The idea of global commitment was found to be only associated with personal commitment. The study also demonstrated internal reliability for the constructs of each type of marriage. The alpha levels for the constructs of personal commitment were $\alpha = .75$ for love, $\alpha = .74$ for marital satisfaction, and $\alpha = .73$ for couples identity. Appropriate alpha levels were also reported by the researchers for the constructs of moral commitment with $\alpha = .74$ for divorce attitudes, $\alpha = .76$ for partner contract, and $\alpha = .71$ for consistency values. No alpha levels were reported for constraint commitment as the researchers (Johnson et al., 1999) used a model of analysis for which alpha levels were inappropriate for constraint commitment. This study provides evidence demonstrating the importance of measuring all three types of commitment and also provides evidence of reliability for the measure.

Rituals

The measurement for rituals for this study was adapted from a questionnaire designed by Heather Brown (2007). This questionnaire originally included nine items regarding the types of connection rituals, and allowed participants to indicate the frequency of participation in these rituals, the meaningfulness of the rituals, and also to list specific rituals under each type. The frequency was indicated by the number of times per week the couple participated in the ritual and the meaningfulness was measured on a 5-point scale that rates from not meaningful to very meaningful.
The validity of the scale comes from its construction based on the ideas identified by Doherty (2001). Two family professionals with knowledge in the area of rituals also participated in the construction and revision process. The measure was then piloted with four couples before it was used for a study. In this way, Brown was able to check for validity and consistency.

Adding to this scale, the researcher used the constructs first identified by Doherty (2001) to add two items addressing love rituals including verbal expressions of love (item 10) and emotional intimacy (item 11). One item was also added to address rituals of special occasion (item 12). The measure included a total of 12 items to address all three specified types of rituals.

**Initiator Tendency**

Initiator tendency was assessed through the use of a measure created by Denton and Burleson (2007). The Initiator Style Questionnaire consists of 20 statements about how the participant responded to relationship problems. Agreement with the statements was measured with a 9-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The measure was divided into two subscales. The first ten statements attended to the actions of the individual, with the second ten statements addressing the responses of the partner to relationship problems.

The scores from this scale have been shown to have high internal consistency with \( \alpha = .92 \) for scores from the first ten statements and \( \alpha = .96 \) for scores from the second ten statements. The test-retest reliability for both parts was found to be excellent with a correlation of \( r = .80 \) or greater for each part. The authors also found support for
construct and discriminant validity based on the associations or lack of associations of the results with other variables including gender, marital satisfaction, and other demographic variables. Construct validity is demonstrated through significant gender interactions with initiator tendency. The authors found that women rated themselves as more likely to initiate relationship discussions than men did and women also rated their partners as less likely to initiate these discussions than did the men. These findings were consistent with the hypothesized gender differences and were also replicated in a second study reported in the same article (Denton & Burleson, 2007).

**Procedures**

Packets containing an informed consent and the questionnaires were distributed to participants. The informed consent outlined the procedure for the study and what was asked of each participant. It stated that in returning the questionnaire, the couple had given consent to participate. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire individually and not converse with their spouse while completing the questionnaire. The gender of the participant was indicated on the demographic form, allowing the researcher to identify whether the questionnaire was completed by the husband or the wife. Of the 103 packets distributed, 55 were returned and used for analysis, for a return rate of 53%.

Identifying information needed for the drawing was collected from the students that returned completed questionnaires. A name and mailing address was used to send the certificate to the winning student. After the drawing, all identifying information was destroyed.
Packets were distributed in the specified classes and collected a week later in the same manner. Students were given the option to complete the questionnaire themselves or find a couple to complete it. Once collected, the packets were stored in a locked cabinet and only members of the research team opened the packets or analyzed the questionnaires.

Before recruitment of participants, the study was sent to the Institutional Review Board of Utah State University to ensure that the study was safe and would not inflict harm on participants (Appendix A). After approval from the IRB, data collection commenced.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from the likert scales in the measures were interpreted as interval data. Each research question was assessed using multiple regression. This type of analysis was intended to identify the “extent to which a combination of variables predicts an outcome variable” (Holcomb, 2004, p. 86). This model of analysis was appropriate as the author was seeking to determine the predictive relationship of initiator tendency and number of rituals on the types of commitment in question 1. A similar prediction was also of interest in question 2 with initiator tendency and the meaningfulness of rituals predicting commitment type. Initiator tendency was included in each regression as the researcher was interested in how the combination of the two variables (ritual frequency and initiator tendency or ritual meaningfulness and initiator tendency) would predict the third (commitment). This test provided coefficients of determination to indicate the proportion of variance in the outcome accounted for by the combination of the predictor
variables, which served to identify those relationships that are significant as well as those that are not. From this information, the level of support for the hypotheses was determined.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study focused on the relationships between ritual frequency and meaningfulness and initiator tendency with the types of commitment. This chapter addresses the preliminary analyses and results for each the research questions. Each question is addressed in the same order as presented in the previous chapters.

Reliability of the Measures

Before scores were calculated and further analyses performed, reliability analyses were conducted for the initiator tendency and commitment measures. The analyses for internal consistency produced a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for the husbands' scores on the initiator tendency scale and .91 for the wives' scores. When the reliability for the commitment measure for the husbands was calculated, it was discovered that the scores for question 4 were inconsistent with the other items for personal commitment, causing a low reliability score. This question asked “how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your marriage over the past two months, all things considered?” Because of the inconsistency, this question was dropped from all further analyses and the alpha calculated without this score was .82 for the husbands. The husbands also had alpha levels of .85 for moral commitment, and .87 for constraint commitment. For the wives it was .65 for personal commitment, .78 for moral commitment, and .79 for constraint commitment. Alpha scores range from 0 to 1.0 with higher scores indicating greater internal consistency. According to George and Mallery (2003), scores of .60 are
considered questionable, but above indicates acceptable consistency in a measure, indicating that both the initiator tendency and commitment measures showed an appropriate level of reliability.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 (How are the number of rituals a couple participates in and initiator tendency related to the commitment style?) was analyzed using a multiple regression of the reported frequency for each type of ritual (connection, love, and special occasion) and the initiator tendency score with the scores for each of the three types of commitment (personal, moral, constraint) as the dependent variable. Because multiple regression is intended to explore and more accurately predict relationships between multiple predictor variables and the dependent variable (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009), this type of analysis was used for this study. It was also appropriate as both predictor variables consisted of interval level data as did the dependent variable. The results of these regressions were analyzed for statistically significant relationships.

Initial descriptive data including frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the data and initial regressions were run for the entire sample. The regressions showed only one significant relationship for husbands and wives and a ceiling effect was discovered from the descriptive data (Appendix C, Table 6). This ceiling effect was found to be severe on the measure of ritual meaningfulness on which the highest possible score was 60 and the sample mean was 50.18 for the husbands ($SD = 8.66$) and 52.76 for the wives ($SD = .725$). The effect was also severe on the measure for personal commitment with the highest possible score of 52 and means of 47.97 ($SD = 4.57$) and
48.15 ($SD = 4.26$) for husbands and wives respectively. The measure for moral commitment showed a moderate ceiling effect with a high score of 117 and means of 97.30 ($SD = 15.07$) for the husbands and 94.07 ($SD = 12.44$) for the wives. The sample had included a large number of newlywed couples (married less than a year). This large sample of newlywed couples showed a tendency to indicate the maximum possible score for parts of the commitment measure as well as the ritual measure. The resulting kurtosis with a positive skew violated the assumptions to do most analyses. To reduce the skew and create a more normal distribution, the 16 couples married for less than one year were removed from the data and the analyses were re-run using the smaller sample. The table showing the results from the first regression can be found in Appendix C (Table 7). The results of the regression run using the smaller sample is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The results of the regression using the smaller sample (see Table 3) showed no significant relationships between the frequency of connection rituals and personal commitment or constraint commitment for either husbands or wives. There was a significant relationship ($p < .05$) between the frequency of connection rituals and moral commitment for the husbands indicating that as connection rituals increased, moral commitment also increased. This finding was not the same for the wives who showed no significant relationship between connection rituals and moral commitment. No other significant results were found for rituals (love or special occasion) on any of the types of commitment.
Table 3

**Summary of Regression Analysis for Question One Variables Predicting the Three Types of Commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Personal commitment</th>
<th>Morality commitment</th>
<th>Constraint commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husbands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of connection rituals</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of love rituals</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of special occasion rituals</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator tendency style</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.572*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of connection rituals</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of love rituals</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of special occasion rituals</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator tendency style</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.405*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Husbands' adjusted $R^2 = .327$ for personal, .158 for moral, -.078 for constraint; Wives adjusted $R^2 = .189$ for personal, .125 for moral, .311 for constraint.

*p < .05
Table 4

*Reported Frequencies of Specific Rituals for Husbands and Wives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Rituals</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily greetings</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.91</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12.08</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning routines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening routines</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular talk time</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.03</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>8.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking and eating</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time together</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical love</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal love</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48.44</td>
<td>170.31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16.38</td>
<td>14.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special occasion</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The frequency of participation in the individual rituals assessed through the measure appeared to be similar for both the husbands and the wives (see Table 4). While the husbands did differ on the reported frequency of verbal love rituals, the standard deviation for the ritual was also very high as there was one extreme outlier in the sample. All other reported frequencies were comparable, indicating no significant differences between husbands and wives in the amount of ritual participation.
The results indicated that initiator tendency appears to be positively related to personal commitment, with the relationship being significant for both the husbands and the wives. No significance was found between initiator tendency and moral commitment for either the husbands or the wives. A significant negative relationship was found for the wives between initiator tendency and constraint commitment, indicating that greater tendency to initiate conversations about relationship problems was related to lower constraint commitment. This finding was not the same for husbands who showed no significant relationship between initiator tendency and constraint commitment.

It is worth noting that while the independent variables were not statistically significant, some of the predictive models did account for a notable amount of variance. Cohen (1988) has identified criteria for evaluating the size of the effect represented by $R^2$. According to his criteria, an $R^2$ value of .09 indicates a medium effect and an $R^2$ value or .25 indicates a large effect. The analysis for this study yielded an adjusted $R^2$ value of .327 for the husbands on personal commitment, meaning that 32% of the variance for personal commitment was accounted for by the types of rituals and initiator tendency. For the wives, $R^2 = .189$, indicating that rituals and initiator tendency accounted for less of the variance for personal commitment for the wives. For moral commitment, $R^2 = .158$ for the husbands and $R^2 = .125$ for the wives. Finally, for constraint commitment, the analysis produced an adjusted $R^2$ value of -.078 for husbands and $R^2 = .311$ for the wives. For constraint commitment, the independent variables accounted for notably more variance for the wives than for the husbands. According to the criteria defined by Cohen (1988), many of these values represent a moderate to very large effect, indicating that the model has predictive value.
Research Question 2

Research question 2 (How are the meaningfulness of rituals and initiator tendency related to commitment style?) was analyzed in the same way as described for question one, as this question also used interval type data for both the predictor variables and the dependent variable. This question, like the previous, sought to better identify and predict the relationship, making this analysis appropriate. A multiple regression was run using the indicated meaningfulness for each type of ritual and the initiatory tendency score with the types of commitment as the dependent variable. Because of the ceiling effect found with the newlywed sample, the regression intended to answer this question used the smaller sample that did not include the newlywed couples (those married less than one year). The results of this regression are explained in the following paragraphs.

The results of the analysis (see Table 5) showed significant relationships for the meaningfulness of connection rituals and personal commitment and also the meaningfulness of connection rituals and moral commitment for the husbands. This significant positive relationship was not found for the wives who showed no significance for either of these relationships. In addition, no significance was found for either the husbands or the wives between meaningfulness of connection rituals and constraint commitment. The analysis found no other significant results for the husband, with love rituals, rituals of special occasion, and initiator tendency having no significant relationships with any of the types of commitment.

The results for the wives were similar in that there were no significant findings between any of the types or rituals and the commitment types. There were, however,
different results for initiator tendency. The scores from the wives showed a significant positive relationship between initiator tendency and personal commitment. There was also a significant negative relationship identified between initiator tendency and constraint commitment. No significance was noted between initiator tendency and moral commitment for the wives.

As noted for question 1, while many of the results were not statistically significant, the independent variables did account for a notable amount of the variance for the types of commitment. For personal commitment, adjusted $R^2 = .354$ for the husbands and $R^2 = .314$ for the wives. For each of these, the types of rituals and initiator tendency accounted for over 30% of the variance. For moral commitment, $R^2 = .270$ for the husbands, but the predictor variables accounted for much less variance for the wives with $R^2 = .016$. Constraint commitment showed $R^2$ values of -.048 for the husbands and .168 for the wives. As mentioned for question one, most of these values indicate a moderate to very large effect according to the criteria established by Cohen (1988).

**Summary**

Both research questions were tested using a multiple regression. No significant relationships were found with either the frequency or meaningfulness of love rituals or rituals of special occasion and any of the commitment types for either the husbands or the wives. The only significant findings involving rituals were the meaningfulness of connection rituals with personal commitment, and both meaningfulness and frequency of connection rituals with moral commitment for the husbands. These relationships were not found for the wives who had no significance for any of the ritual types. Other
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Personal commitment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Moral commitment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Constraint commitment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE_B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE_B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE_B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of connection rituals</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.363*</td>
<td>1.286</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>.553*</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of love rituals</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>1.665</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>2.934</td>
<td>2.468</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of special occasion rituals</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>3.263</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-8.216</td>
<td>7.469</td>
<td>-.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator tendency style</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>-.255</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>-.348</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>-.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of love rituals</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>1.266</td>
<td>1.043</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>2.851</td>
<td>1.984</td>
<td>.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of special occasion rituals</td>
<td>-.260</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-1.401</td>
<td>3.005</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>7.245</td>
<td>5.716</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator tendency style</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.455*</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.512</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>-.484*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Husbands' adjusted $R^2 = .354$ for personal, .270 for moral, -.048 for constraint; Wives' adjusted $R^2 = .341$ for personal, .016 for moral, .168 for constraint.

* $p < .05$
significant findings were with the initiator tendency scale and personal commitment for both husbands and wives. A significant negative relationship was also found for initiator tendency and constraint commitment for the wives. This relationship was not found for the husbands.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The focus of this section is to explain the results of the study. Each research question will be addressed and connected to the literature review. The implications and limitations of this study will also be discussed.

Research Question 1

The first research question was aimed at identifying the frequency with which couples participate in the three types of rituals and each partner’s initiator tendency and how these are related to the types of commitment. Berg-Cross and colleagues (1992) suggested that a couple’s participation in rituals is associated with long-term marital success. Other research has suggested that a couple’s participation in rituals assists in the prediction of their commitment levels for monogamous unmarried couples (Campbell & Ponzetti, 2007). In addition to the literature, Gottman’s (1999) theory of marriage also suggested that participation in rituals would lead to greater relationship success, and assumed personal commitment. The results of this study, however, failed to find support for a relationship between the frequency of participation for the three types of rituals and the types of commitment with the exception of a significant relationship between the frequency of connection rituals and moral commitment for the husbands.

While the research and theory suggested that ritual participation may be related to commitment, neither the research, nor the theory addressed any type of commitment other than an idea of global commitment, which research has suggested is most similar to
personal commitment (Johnson et al., 1999). In this way, any possible relationship between the participation for the different types of rituals and moral or constraint commitment was unknown. One possible explanation for the significant relationship between the husbands' participation in connection rituals and moral commitment is the culture of most of the participants in the sample. As noted previously, the sample had a large portion of members of the LDS church. Members of this church often are ritualized in their daily living as they are encouraged by leaders of the church to eat meals together, pray and study scripture, and do other daily activities together (Ludlow, 1992). This faith also holds high family values and high values of marriage, including the sanctity of marriage and dedication to the institution of marriage. This high participation in daily or connection rituals and strong moral beliefs about marriage stemming from the culture create the argument that this relationship may be a factor of this sample variable.

Though research and theory suggested that a significant relationship would be found between ritual types and personal commitment, no such relationship was found. One possible explanation for this is the ceiling effect found in the data. As explained in the results section, both the measure for ritual meaningfulness and for personal commitment showed mean sample scores close to the highest possible score for the measure, indicating a high ceiling effect (Appendix C, Table 6). The couples married less than a year were eliminated from the analysis to lessen this effect, but it may not have been eliminated as those married less than two years showed similar but less extreme scores and were not eliminated. The ceiling effect created a lack of variability in the scores, possibly preventing the identification of any relationships. In addition,
eliminating 16 couples from the sample may have produced a sample too small to find significant relationships by decreasing the power of the analysis.

In addition, it is possible that specific rituals within each of the categories may be more related to commitment than others within the category or within other categories. For example, because of the emphasis that Gottman (1999) placed on communication and its significance in a successful relationship, it is possible that daily talk time may be more related to commitment than others such as morning routine.

The research suggested that initiator tendency plays a significant role in relationships, and Gottman’s theory (1999) suggested that a tendency to initiate conversations about relationship problems may be related to commitment as communication about problems seems to be critical for relationship success. This theory, as already explained, only predicts relationships with personal commitment as moral commitment and constraint commitment are less easily directly related to relationship success. The results of the study showed what was predicted with both husbands and wives showing significant relationships between initiator tendency and personal commitment, suggesting both husbands and wives who are more likely to discuss relationship problems are also more likely to have a high level of personal commitment to their spouse. A final significant finding was a significant negative relationship found between initiator tendency and constraint commitment for the wives. This means that an individual with a high initiator tendency score likely had a lower score for constraint commitment. This may be explained by certain personality traits that contribute to an individual’s initiator tendency that also make it less difficult to deal with potential
constraining factors for leaving a relationship, such as low fear or a strong outgoing personality.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question aimed to find a relationship for the reported meaningfulness for the types of rituals and initiator tendency style with the types of commitment. As noted previously, the literature suggested a possible connection with rituals and commitment though this involved participation in rituals and did not address the associated meaningfulness of the various rituals. Gottman’s theory of marriage (1999), however, has addressed the importance of creating and agreeing upon the meaningfulness of activities, holidays, and even rituals. In fact, within Gottman’s model, creating meaning is placed at a very high level, achieved by those couples that are functioning at a very high level. This high level of functioning likely also involves a high level of commitment to the relationship. From this identified importance of meaningfulness and understanding of functioning as related to commitment, it can be hypothesized that the meaningfulness that couples place on their rituals may be related to general commitment, or more specifically personal commitment. The results of this study did find that meaningfulness of connection rituals was significantly related to both personal and moral commitment, but these results were only found for the husbands and not for the wives. One possible explanation for the lack of significance in the wives is the ceiling effect and resulting smaller sample size as explained previously. Given the results, a larger, more representative sample may result in statistical significance for all of the models.
Significant relationships were not found for the meaningfulness of love rituals or rituals of special occasion with any of the types of commitment. Neither the literature nor the theory has explained how these ideas may be related. This is likely a result of only global commitment having been researched in connection with rituals, and the ideas of both global commitment as described in the literature and relationship success from the theory being best equated with personal commitment, but not with the other types of commitment. Further data collection with a different sample may yield different results for these variables as the religiosity and length of marriage of this sample may have affected the meaningfulness of the rituals and also the commitment types.

The results of question 2 did show a significant positive relationship for initiator tendency and personal commitment and a significant negative relationship between initiator tendency and constraint commitment. These results mirror those found for question 1 with the exception that these results were found only from the women. The relationships between initiator tendency and personal commitment was predicted by the theory as mentioned previously, and the relationship between initiator tendency and constraint commitment can be understood as a factor of specific personality traits that contribute to both, meaning that a specific personality trait such as low fear or a strong outgoing personality, as explained previously, may account for both high initiator tendency scores and low scores for constraint commitment. The lack of significance for the husbands may be a factor of the ceiling effect and resulting small sample size or may be due to possible differences in how men perceive commitment and initiating conversations about relationship problems. Though the theory suggested that dealing with relationships problems, including those identified as solvable problems and those
identified as perpetual problems, is important for relationships success (Gottman, 1999),
this may not mean that the individual’s initiator style is directly related to commitment. How the couple is matched in terms of initiator tendency may be more telling and more directly related to commitment. This means that individuals that have similar initiator tendency styles such as an avoider with an avoider, and an initiator with an initiator may have differences in commitment when compared against those individuals who are mismatched, an avoider with an initiator. This is possible as couples who share an initiator tendency style may have an easier time dealing with relationship problems than those with different initiator tendency styles. Further study in this area would be needed to determine such a relationship.

The findings on commitment as related to rituals and initiator tendency have implications for couples working toward enhancing their relationships as well as clinicians working with distressed couples. For example, the results indicated a relationship between the meaningfulness of connection rituals and personal and moral commitment for husbands. This means that couples struggling with commitment or general relationships distress may benefit from introducing meaningful connection rituals or giving greater meaning to current rituals. This may also provide clinicians with ideas in working with couple who wish to increase commitment.

Limitations

The small sample size of this study was a limitation and limited the generalizability of the result to a larger population. Because the sample was reduced further during analysis, the power and ability of the study to find statistical significance
was lower than would have existed in a larger sample, leading to a lack of statistical significance for some of the findings.

Another limitation involving the sample was its homogenous nature. As previously reported the sample participants were mostly Caucasian and belonging to the LDS church. This is a highly ritualized religion with strong beliefs in the family and against divorce (Ludlow, 1992). While these demographics are typical for Northern Utah, they likely do not well represent other areas or other groups of people. This highly religious sample prevents results from being applicable to other less religious populations. In addition, less religious populations or populations of other religions may place different value on rituals and commitment, changing the results of the study.

The removal of question four of the commitment measure from the analysis creates another limitation for this study. This question was intended to address overall satisfaction with the relationship over the previous two months. As many of the initial items on this measure were reverse scored, the scale of 1 to 7 alternated between low numbers indicating high commitment and high numbers indicating high commitment. This may have created confusion and led to participants indicating a high number for this question, which indicated low satisfaction, when they intended to indicate high satisfaction. The inconsistency of this item with the other items intended to measure personal commitment suggests that this is a possibility, and also suggests that other parts of the measure may have had similar confusion and been marked incorrectly by the participants.

A final possible limitation for the present study was the clarity of the measures used. The ritual measure asked for the weekly participation in each ritual, and may have
been unclear in how this number should be determined. In addition, the commitment measure included questions about children and how children impact commitment. Many of the couples included in the sample did not have children and it was likely unclear how they should answer these questions.

Implications for Marriage and Family Therapy

Couples enter therapy for many different reasons. Relationships distress may at times include the ideas of commitment, rituals, and initiation of conversations of relationship problems, or these ideas may be solutions to distress. For this reason, these ideas can be used by the marriage and family therapist.

Previous research and literature has supported the use of rituals in therapy to assist couples and families in making life transitions and generating better cohesion (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1992, Laird & Hartman, 1988). This research has also suggested that rituals may be useful in therapy for helping couple relationship. Though few significant findings were found, the amount of variance accounted for suggested that rituals and initiator tendency as areas of focus in therapy may help to increase commitment, specifically personal commitment.

In addition to the variance that the model accounts for, significant relationships also suggest that working to build meaningful rituals and more specifically meaningful connection rituals may be beneficial to a couple in helping to build personal commitment. Gottman’s research (1999) has reflected that positive interactions and rituals build fondness and admiration for a spouse, and it is reasonable to assume that fondness and admiration would contribute to devotion, attachment, and love of one’s partner which
Adams and Jones (1997) identify as the characteristics of personal commitment. This is one approach that could be taken with distressed couples or couples experiencing ambiguity about their relationship. This means that working to build greeting and goodbye rituals, mealtime rituals, and even morning or bedtime rituals may help a couple feel greater attachment and love for each other.

In addition to rituals as a way to build personal commitment, initiator tendency may also be used for this purpose. While the idea of initiator tendency is explained to be a generally consistent trait within the context of a stable relationship (Denton & Burleson, 2007), teaching skills or creating a safe place for problems to be discussed may change the context of the relationship and therefore affect an individual’s initiator tendency style. In therapy, this means that working with couples to improve communication about relationship problems (thus increasing initiator tendency) could potentially help with personal commitment as suggested by this study. Gottman’s research findings also support this idea to some degree in that learning communication skills is related to more successful dealings with relationship problems leading to more successful relationships. This theory doesn’t include the idea of initiator tendency but suggests the same strategies for treatment. Initiator tendency could then be used as an additional assessment tool to gauge the couple’s current interaction patterns.

This research can be incorporated into other models and approaches to marriage and family therapy. Gottman’s model has already been mentioned, but this research could also fit into behavioral marital therapy (BMT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and even emotionally focused therapy (EFT), or other approaches that stress the importance of couple communication and interaction. The connection with
communication skills and creating behavioral changes, such as implementing rituals, easily lends itself to work from the BMT and CBT models.

The connection to EFT is less clear. The idea of meaningfulness and how a couple may experience a ritual can be tied to the EFT model, where the primary focus is on the experience (Johnson, 2004). In addition, the negative relationship that was found between the wives for initiator tendency and constraint commitment that was not found for the husbands may also be of interest from and EFT perspective. This result suggests that wives who approach and talk about the relationship problems feel less trapped or constrained to the relationship. From an EFT perspective, this may be an indicator of attachment, specifically that the ability to address relationship problems may create greater attachment for the wives. The implication then is that working to create a safe space to talk about relationship problems and working with the couple to experience these types of conversations may help to decrease feeling of constraint and as suggested by EFT, increase attachment and satisfaction (Johnson, 2004).

Working with couples to create behaviors or experiences associated to rituals and initiator tendency can be accomplished from various models. By addressing communication, meaning, and creating a safe place with couples, it is hoped there will be a positive influence on commitment.

Conclusion

At the present time research has failed to directly connect either rituals or initiator tendency to the types of commitment. In spite of this gap, both literature and theory suggest that such a relationship is possible. This study found comparable results and
further research in this area will likely uncover more information that will continue to assist couples, clinicians, and others working with marital relationships.

The results found significant relationships between the meaningfulness of connection rituals and both personal and moral commitment for the husbands as well as initiator tendency and personal commitment for both spouses. Though participation in rituals failed to show significance in the area of commitment, the variance accounted for still suggests a connection and further research is needed to rule out any type of relationship.

Though not all significant, these findings can be used in therapy to increase awareness of or even participation in these ideas. At this time more research is needed to support the connections found here and to better define the relationships of rituals and initiator tendency on commitment types.
REFERENCES


University, Logan.


doi:10.1177/1077727X06289423


Appendix A

Informed Consent
Letter of Information
Marriage and Family Therapy Program

Introduction/Purpose: Dr. Scot Allgood and April Bakker are examining the possible relationships between initiator tendency, rituals, and the different types of commitment. This means that this study will look at whether a couple chooses to have discussions about relationships problems or avoids them, how this is related to the types of significant and repeated actions couples engage in, and how couples score in personal, moral, and constraint commitments. Currently no other research has looked for connections between these ideas, meaning that this is a unique and groundbreaking study. There will be approximately 50-100 participants in this study. You have been asked to participate because you are enrolled in an FCHD class (1500 or 3540).

Procedures: If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire dealing with relationship, psychological, and/or emotional issues, taking anywhere from twenty to forty five minutes to complete. There are two questionnaires, one for each spouse. Please fill these out separately from one another and without discussing while you complete them. No personal, identifiable information is being requested so please do not put your name or any identifying information on the forms. When you are done with the questionnaires please enclose each questionnaire in the separate enclosed envelopes and place these envelopes into the main envelope. The envelope with the questionnaires should then be returned to the researchers through the class.

Risks: Participating in this research is minimal risk; however, there may be potential risks involved that could be distressing to you. There is a risk that some of the items may cause distress. You may skip over any item that you do not wish to answer. The questionnaire is intended to be returned to the researchers without your spouse's seeing it. If your spouse does see it, there is some risk that your responses could be distressing.

Benefits: There may or may not be any benefits to you at this time. The researchers hope to learn about the relationship between who initiates relationship discussions, ritual participation, and marital commitment.

Explanation and Offer to Answer Questions: April Bakker has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Professor Allgood at 797-7433.

Compensation: To thank you for helping in this study all students who return two questionnaires (one from each partner) will be entered into a drawing for a $50 Visa gift card. A separate card for the student’s identifying information will be completed upon return of the questionnaires. Once a winner is drawn, the gift card will be mailed to the student and all identifying information will be destroyed.
Voluntary Nature of Participation and Right to Withdraw without Consequence: Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the material presented you may withdraw. Not completing the questionnaire will result in not being eligible for the drawing for the $50 Visa gift card.

Confidentiality: When completing the questionnaire please do not include any information that specifically identifies you (name, address, etc.) Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. We suggest that you place the completed questionnaire in the return envelope immediately after filling it out. Any information regarding the questionnaire will be kept confidential and seen only by Dr. Allgood and April Bakker. All questionnaires will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the Family Life Center. Identifying information cards for the students will be kept until the drawing is complete and then destroyed. If taking this questionnaire causes distress for you or in your marriage and you need assistance, we suggest you contact your clergy or a marital therapist for assistance. You may contact Dr. Scot Allgood (435-797-7433) for referrals.

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at USU has approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Dr. Scot Allgood, Principal Investigator
Telephone: (435-797-7433)
Email: Scot.allgood@usu.edu
april.m.bakker@aggiemail.usu.edu

April Bakker, Student Researcher
(435-890-8304)
Email:
Appendix B

Permission Emails
Measures
Initiator Tendency Scale

2 messages

April Bakker <april.m.bakker@aggiemail.usu.edu>  Thu, Oct 8, 2009 at 12:53 PM
To: wayne.denton@utsouthwestern.edu

Dear Dr. Denton,

My name is April Bakker and I am a master’s student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Utah State University. I am working on my master’s thesis with the guidance of Dr. Scot Allgood, looking at possible relationships between rituals, commitment styles, and initiator tendency. I would like to ask your permission to use the Initiator Style Questionnaire as my measure for initiator tendency in the data gathering phase of my project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
April Bakker

Wayne Denton <Wayne.Denton@utsouthwestern.edu>  Thu, Oct 8, 2009 at 1:28 PM
To: "Bakker, April" <april.m.bakker@aggiemail.usu.edu>

Hello April,

The ISQ is in the public domain so no permission needed actually - you probably have the article containing the scale but, in case you don't, I am attaching it. Thanks for your interest and best wishes!
Wayne Denton
Measurement of Components of Commitment

2 messages

April Bakker <april.m.bakker@aggiemail.usu.edu>  
Mon, Oct 26, 2009 at 12:43 PM

To: mpj@psu.edu

Dear Mr. Johnson,

My name is April Bakker and I am a master's student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Utah State University. I am working on my master's thesis with the guidance of Dr. Scot Allgood, looking at possible relationships between rituals, commitment styles, and initiator tendency. I would like to ask your permission to use the Measurement of Components of Commitment from the article "The Tripartite Nature of Marital Commitment: Personal, Moral, and Structural Reasons to Stay Married" (1999) to measure commitment in the data gathering phase of my project. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

April Bakker

Michael P. Johnson <mpj@psu.edu>  
Mon, Oct 26, 2009 at 1:11 PM

To: April Bakker <april.m.bakker@aggiemail.usu.edu>

April,

Of course you can use those measures. You might also want to look at Stanley and Markman's measures. Best of luck with your project. If I can be any help for you down the line, let me know.

Mike Johnson

Michael P. Johnson, Ph.D.
Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Women's Studies, and African and African American Studies, Penn State

1155 Oneida St.
State College, PA 16801
(814) 237-8061 www.personal.psu.edu/mpj
Demographics

Instructions: Please complete the following about you as a person.

1) Gender
   □ Male
   □ Female

2) Age __________ years

3) Length of marriage ________________ years

4) Number of marriages ____________________

5) Number of children in home ________________

6) What is the highest level of education you have completed? ________________ years
   (12 = high school)

7) List your income _______________________

8) How would you describe yourself?
   □ African American
   □ Asian/Pacific Islander
   □ Hispanic/Latino
   □ Native American/Eskimo/Aleut
   □ Caucasian/White
   □ Other (Please Specify) _______________________

9) What is your religious affiliation?
   □ Mormon
   □ Protestant
   □ Catholic
   □ None
   □ Other (Please Specify) _______________________

10) How often do you attend religious services?
    □ Never, or almost never
    □ Occasionally
    □ One to three times per month
    □ One or more times per week
    □ Don’t know
11) How religious would you say you are?
☐ Not at all religious
☐ Slightly religious
☐ Moderately religious
☐ Very religious
Commitment

Please read each question or statement and circle the number that best reflects your answer.

1. To what extent do you love [partner's name] at this stage?
   - Very Little
   - Very Much
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

2. How much do you need [partner's name] at this stage?
   - Very Little
   - Very Much
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3. Describe your marriage over the past 2 months
   - Miserable
   - Enjoyable
   - Hopeful
   - Discouraging
   - Empty
   - Full
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Using this scale, please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your marriage over the past two months, all things considered?
   - Completely Satisfied
   - Completely Dissatisfied
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. If you were no longer together, you would miss the sense of being a couple.  
   Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

6. Being married helps you feel good about yourself.  
   Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

7. You really like being a [husband/wife].  
   Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

8. If you were to get divorced, you would be disappointed in yourself because you had broken a sacred vow.  
   Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

9. Getting a divorce violates your religious beliefs.  
   Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

10. It's all right to get a divorce if things are not working out.  
    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

11. If a couple works hard at making their marriage succeed and still cannot get along, divorce is the best thing that they can do.  
    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

12. When you agree to get married, you are morally bound to stay married.  
    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

13. You would feel bad about getting a divorce because you promised [partner's name] you would stay with [him/her] forever.  
    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

15. It would be difficult to tell [partner's name] that you wanted a divorce.  
    Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree  
    1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  

16. You could never leave [partner's name] because you would feel guilty about letting [him/her]d own. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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17. Whenever you promise to do something, you should see it through. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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18. It's important to stand by what you believe in. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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19. You feel that you should always finish what you start. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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20. Even when things get hard, you should do the things you have promised to do. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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21. If you and [partner's name] were to break up, you would miss important income, insurance, or other property. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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22. You would miss just having somebody around. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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23. You would miss living in your house. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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24. You would miss the help you get around the house from having a partner. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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25. You would miss being able to see your [child/children] regularly. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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26. You would not have to work around the house so much. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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27. You would be upset because you would lose your place or standing in the community. | Strongly Disagree | Not Sure | Strongly Agree |
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>You would be upset because your family would be uncomfortable with your breaking up.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>You would be upset because your in-laws would be uncomfortable with your breaking up.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>You would be upset because you would lose some respect from friends.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>It would be difficult to face your friends and family after you broke up.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>You would lose some of your [child's/children's] love.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>It would be hard to work out who would get what property.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>It would be hard for you to find a new place to live.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Having to move your things would be a burden.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Dealing with the legal system would be difficult.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>It would be hard to work out who would get the kid(s).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>It would be awfully difficult to do the things necessary to get a divorce.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>You would lose all the time you had put into the marriage.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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</table>
40. You would feel like all the effort you had put into keeping the two of you together had been wasted.

41. You would lose money you'd put into the marriage.

42. You would feel like you'd wasted the best years of your life.
Rituals

Instructions

**Type of Rituals:** Please read each ritual category carefully, then list up to three rituals in each category.

**Frequency:** Please identify how many times per week you engage in each specific type of ritual.

**Meaningfulness of Rituals:** How meaningful are rituals to you? Next to where ritual type is listed (i.e. Daily Greetings, Morning Routines, etc.) please circle the number (1-5) that best reflects your response.

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<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not meaningful</td>
<td>Somewhat Meaningful</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Meaningful</td>
<td>Very Meaningful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type of Ritual**

**Meaningfulness**

1) *Daily greetings* — this ritual is defined by any activity that involves greeting your spouse in a special way (e.g. a special saying like “Hi honey, I’m home”, a high-five).
   1. __________________________________________
   2. __________________________________________
   3. __________________________________________

2) *Morning routines* — this ritual is defined by any activity your spouse and you participate in while getting ready for the day (e.g. discussing the daily schedule, embracing in bed before you get up for the day).
   1. __________________________________________
   2. __________________________________________
   3. __________________________________________

3) *Evening routines* — this ritual is defined by any activity your spouse and you participate in while preparing for evening (e.g. giving or getting a back rub, watching a favorite television program together).
   1. __________________________________________
   2. __________________________________________
   3. __________________________________________

4) *Regular talk time* — this ritual is defined by any activity that involves communicating with one another that could be described as reconnecting (e.g. checking-in phone calls, engaging in physical exercise or activity and talking).
   1. __________________________________________
   2. __________________________________________
   3. __________________________________________

**Frequency**

________ x per week  1  2  3
5) **Cooking and eating meals together** – this ritual is defined by time that is devoted to food and being together (e.g. cooking together, having a picnic).

1. 
2. 
3. 

Type of Ritual

**Meaningfulness**

6) **Spending time together** – this ritual is defined by any activity that involves together time not otherwise defined above (e.g. going for a drive, taking dance lessons together).

1. 
2. 
3. 

7) **Religious/Spiritual activities** – this ritual is defined by any activity that could be considered of a religious or spiritual nature (e.g. praying together, reading scriptures).

1. 
2. 
3. 

8) **Other** – this category is for other frequent rituals that do not neatly fit into other categories (e.g. leaving each other notes, reading to each other).

1. 
2. 
3. 

9) **Physical love rituals** – this ritual is defined by any activity that involves intimate physical contact (e.g. physical affection, making love).

1. 
2. 
3. 

10) **Verbal love rituals** – this ritual is defined by verbal expressions intended to communicate love (e.g. "I love you," specific complements).

1. 
2. 
3. 

11) **Intimacy rituals** – this ritual is defined by an expression of
4 5
ideas or thoughts that are very personal and shared only with a most trusted individual (e.g. hopes, dreams, fears).
1. 
2. 
3. 

**Frequency:** For this ritual, please identify how many times per year you engage in this type of ritual.

12) *Special occasion rituals* – this type of ritual includes __________ x per year  1  2  3
4 5
Significant celebrations and occasions (e.g. anniversaries, birthdays, holidays).
1. 
2. 
3. 

### Initiator Style Questionnaire

In this part of the questionnaire we are interested in how you typically respond to problems in your relationship (i.e., problems that are between you and your partner). Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree).

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>When discussing a relationship problem, I usually try to keep the discussion going until we settle the issue.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I usually express my feelings about our relationship to my partner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I usually keep my feelings about our relationship private and do not share them with my partner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I become aware of a problem in our relationship, I usually do not say anything about it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am the kind of person who generally feels comfortable discussing relationship problems.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>When my partner wants to talk about a relationship problem, I am usually ready to do so as well.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I usually become silent or refuse to discuss a relationship problem further if my partner pressures or demands that I do so.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>When my partner wants to talk about a relationship problem, I usually try to get out of the discussion.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>When I become aware of a problem in our relationship, I usually try to start a discussion of that problem.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I am the kind of person who generally does not feel comfortable discussing relationship problems.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In this part of the questionnaire we are interested in how your partner typically responds to problems in your relationship (i.e., problems that are between you and your partner). Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree).

11. When I want to talk about a relationship problem, my partner usually tries to get out of the discussion.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

12. My partner usually expresses any feelings about our relationship to me.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

13. My partner is the kind of person who generally feels comfortable discussing relationship problems.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

14. When my partner becomes aware of a problem in our relationship, my partner usually tries to start a discussion of that problem.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

15. When discussing a relationship problem, my partner usually tries to keep the discussion going until we settle the issue.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

16. If my partner and I are discussing an important relationship issue, my partner usually tries to keep discussing it even if it seems we are beginning to become emotional.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

17. My partner usually keeps feelings about our relationship private and does not share them with me.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

18. My partner is the kind of person who generally does not feel comfortable discussing relationship problems.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

19. When my partner becomes aware of a problem in our relationship, my partner usually does not say anything about it.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]  

20. When I want to talk about a relationship problem, my partner is usually ready to do so as well.  
   **Strongly Disagree**  
   ![Scale with options: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]
Appendix C

Additional Tables
Table 6

Scores from the Measures Demonstrating the Ceiling Effect

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<tr>
<th>Score descriptives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Wives</th>
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