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THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE COUPLE
RITUALS ON SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT,
AND DYADIC ADJUSTMENT

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Child Development

by
Timetra Marie Hampton

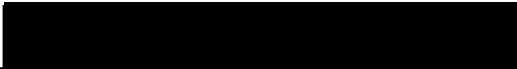
June 2012

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ABSTRACT

Rituals are influential in relational maintenance. Although previous research has explored the influence of rituals on couple satisfaction and commitment, direct associations have yet to be examined. The current study predicted that positive couple rituals would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment, whereas negative couple rituals were expected to exhibit a negative association with these outcome variables. The ethnically diverse sample included 760 participants involved in romantic relationships. A modified version of the Couples Rituals Scale was used to assess the use of positive and negative couple rituals. The Couple Satisfaction Index, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale, and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale were used to assess satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. Significant positive associations were found between positive couple rituals and relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment whereas a significant negative association was found between negative couple rituals and relationship satisfaction and dyadic adjustment. This study provided a first account of negative couple rituals, however, further refinement of the Negative Couple Rituals Scale is necessary before

strong conclusions can be drawn about their influence in romantic relationships. The results are discussed, including an identification of the strengths and limitations of the study. Implications for future research are provided in conclusion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many individuals desire a long lasting romantic relationship because in general, these relationships are rewarding. They provide benefits and satisfaction to the individuals involved. However, there are times that such relationships become strained or tested. During these times, partners either work through their troubles, or break up. Due to the detrimental effects associated with relationship dissolution (e.g., Reily & Weber), researchers are interested in factors that lead to satisfying, committed partnerships (Phillips, Bischoff, Abbott, & Xia, 2009).

One of the predominant models of commitment, which is based on the weighing of rewards and costs, is the Investment Model (Le & Agnew, 2003). According to this model, commitment can be predicted by considering the collective influence of satisfaction level, investment size, and quality of alternatives (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Satisfaction level refers to the happiness a person feels within a relationship. Investment size refers to the irretrievable resources a person puts into a relationship such as time, effort, money, and emotions, which would be

lost if the relationship were to end. Quality of alternatives refers to the desirability of options an individual might pursue upon dissolving a relationship, such as finding a new partner. Commitment is predicted to be high when individuals are satisfied and invested, and perceive of few good alternatives to their current relationship. Once couple members commit to the relationship, their bond strengthens and their behaviors change (Pearson, Child, & Carmon, 2010).

Committed individuals exhibit both positive and negative behaviors within their relationships, and each type of behavior is predictive of different outcomes. Individuals who are in satisfying and committed relationships tend to engage in more positive than negative behaviors (Phillips, Bischoff, Abbot, & Xia, 2009). Examples of positive behaviors include expressions of support, encouragement, affection, and having constructive conversations. The association between positive behaviors and commitment is reciprocal. In other words, committed individuals engage in more positive behaviors, and the enactment of positive behaviors leads to greater commitment. Conversely, negative behaviors, such as avoidance, deception, and infidelity, have the opposite effect, and can lead to more stress within the

relationship, which adversely impacts satisfaction and commitment (Goodboy & Myers, 2010). Relationships that consist of a high amount of positive interactions have less potential for conflict and more potential for stable outcomes. In contrast, negative behaviors can lead to dissatisfaction and eventually, dissolution (Reilly & Weber, 2005).

Couple rituals are one type of behavior that can be either positive or negative. Couple rituals are defined as repeated actions that partners engage in together, and they have been shown to affect the development and maintenance of relationships (Pearson et al., 2010). For example, partners who engage in positive rituals such as sharing mealtimes or celebrating milestones, tend to have greater intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and commitment. Whether they have a positive or negative effect depends on how they are used and the meaning that is ascribed to them. Although an abundance of research exists on positive rituals and their beneficial effects, little research exists regarding the impact of negative rituals on relationships.

The current study will fill this gap by examining the influence of both positive and negative rituals on satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is the most commonly used framework for explaining relationship processes, including satisfaction and commitment (White & Klein, 2008). The theory is based on the premise that individuals weigh the pros and cons associated with every decision and select the option with the most rewarding outcomes. In this section, the central assumptions and concepts of the theory are described.

Assumptions

There are four specific assumptions upon which social exchange theory is built. The first is that humans not only pursue rewards and avoid punishments, but they seek to maximize their profits while minimizing costs to themselves (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993). An individual will pursue the option that best suits his or her needs and involves the least amount of negative consequence. If all available options are negative, the individual will select the one with the least cost.

The second assumption states that humans are rational and weigh the rewards against the costs, as well as consider all alternatives before making decisions (Boss et al., 1993). When making a decision, individuals chose the option that contains more rewards than costs. However, the process of evaluation for weighing rewards and costs can change over time. For example, a person may change their perception of valued rewards as they age. A younger person may place high value on physical qualities, whereas an older individual may be more likely to value a partner who makes responsible choices.

The third assumption states that every person perceives of behaviors differently (Boss et al., 1993). In other words, two individuals may encounter the same situation or event, but associate different meanings with the experience. This premise can be elaborated upon with a fictional married couple, Lawrence and Joyce, who will be referred to throughout the review to illustrate points. If Lawrence cooks dinner for Joyce, he may perceive of this activity as costly because he doesn't enjoy cooking; however, Joyce may enjoy being pampered, which is rewarding for her. As a result, one partner may perceive an event as costly, whereas the other perceives it as rewarding.

The final assumption states that the value of a particular reward decreases over time to the extent that it exceeds a person's expectations (Boss et al., 1993). For example, if Lawrence enjoys back massages and Joyce gives him a back massage every day, the value of the back massage will dissipate over time. Correspondingly, when the value of a reward decreases, relationship satisfaction is negatively impacted and will continue to decline unless a partner can continue to provide novel, gratifying outcomes.

The social exchange framework contains an additional four assumptions that are specific to relationships. The first states that social exchanges are characterized by interdependence (Boss et al., 1993). This means that in a relationship, individuals are reliant on one another for rewarding outcomes. The second states that experiences within a relationship are based on meeting the needs of the two individuals, and as such, will dictate the exchanges that occur (Boss et al., 1993). In other words, partners create experiences to fulfill each other's needs and the meaning associated with those experiences will be particular to those individuals.

The third relationship-specific assumption states that social exchanges are regulated by reciprocity and

fairness (Boss et al., 1993). For example, if a wife provides respect and love toward her spouse, she will likely expect him to reciprocate those rewards. The fourth assumption states that relationship interactions and stability are determined by the opposing forces of attraction and dependence (Boss et al., 1993). Partners require attraction in order to be motivated to meet each other's needs, and when each person's needs are met, interdependence is attained.

Understanding individuals' motivation and desires allows researchers to examine how social exchange assumptions affect interpersonal relationships. According to social exchange theory, individuals are motivated by self interest and seek to maximize their rewards. Therefore, they generally make decisions that are beneficial to themselves, and because most individuals are rational, they calculate the ratio of rewards to costs before acting.

Concepts

Rewards and Costs. The concepts of rewards and costs are central to social exchange theory. Rewards are defined as the benefits a person experiences as a result of being in a relationship (Boss et al., 1993). They are subjectively defined and vary according to an individual's

particular needs. Examples of rewards received from a partner include stability, love, affection, and companionship. Costs are defined as punishments or rewards that are foregone as a result of being in a partnership (White & Klein, 2008). They include the exertion of mental and physical effort (e.g., arguing, sacrifice) and feelings such as embarrassment or anxiety. Costs may also include more concrete factors such as having to spend money on a partner rather than oneself. Generally, individuals are not satisfied when relationship costs exceed the rewards.

Partners must be willing to provide rewards for each other if a relationship is going to survive (Thibaut & Kelley, 1986). In addition to rewards, partners are also valued for their ability to reduce each other's costs. A person may be rejected as a romantic partner because they provide too few rewards or raise an individual's costs. Individuals will enter and stay in a relationship as long as they are satisfied with the ratio of rewards and costs.

Comparison Levels (CL). Individuals generally rely upon their comparison level (CL) to make conscious and rational decisions. The CL is a subjective measure that influences satisfaction. According to this concept, individuals have expectations about the outcomes they

should receive from a relationship (White & Klein, 2008). These expectations are based on past experiences as well as what other people receive in their relationships. For example, Joyce may compare what she receives in her marriage to what she believes other wives receive in their marriages. She is using her CL to rate her relationship with Lawrence against outside standards. Satisfaction is contingent upon comparison levels; if outcomes or rewards exceed expectations, then a person is satisfied. Dissatisfaction occurs when outcomes fall short of expectations (Le & Agnew, 2003). Although CL and satisfaction are generally assessed using self-report measures, researchers have demonstrated high correlations between these measures and observational assessments which enhances the validity of measures based on the CL principle (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Comparison Level of Alternatives (CL-ALT). CL-alt involves weighing present relational outcomes against those available from alternative sources. This evaluation helps an individual decide whether better options are available. If outcomes are falling short of expectations (CL) and an individual believes more profitable alternatives are available from another source, he or she will likely be dissatisfied and want to dissolve the

relationship. If however, the relational outcomes exceed expectations, and few good alternatives exist, a person will likely be satisfied and committed to their relationship. Individuals with high levels of satisfaction may also have high quality alternatives. However, the CL-alt evaluation involves ambiguity because it is impossible to know whether an alternative can offer more profitable outcomes until the relationship is established. Therefore, the risks associated with dissolution often deter new partnerships from forming, particularly when satisfaction is high. An additional consideration is that individuals who are satisfied and committed to their relationships tend to derogate alternatives so as to maintain stability within their current partnership.

The Investment Model

The investment model builds on concepts from social exchange theory to specifically explain relationship commitment. According to the model, commitment is predicted by the collective influence of satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size (Le & Agnew, 2003). Satisfaction levels are high when relationship rewards outweigh the costs. Quality of alternatives refers to the desirability of perceived relationship alternatives, including whether they may

yield better outcomes. If a person's quality of alternatives are low, they are likely to remain committed to their relationship. Investments are defined as resources that would be lost if the relationship were to dissolve (Le & Agnew, 2003). These could include time, effort, and emotional expenditures, as well as extrinsic factors such as money and social status (Le & Agnew, 2003). When individuals invest resources into their relationships, commitment is generally augmented.

Summary

This section outlined the social exchange framework and the investment model of commitment. The central idea of social exchange is that individuals pursue rewards and avoid costs within relationships. The investment model expands upon social exchange theory by describing specific factors that predict commitment, including satisfaction level, the quality of alternatives, and investment size. In the following section, literature will be presented pertaining to the behaviors committed partners use to maintain their relationships, including couple rituals.

Relationship Maintenance

Relational maintenance behaviors are broadly defined as practices used by partners to sustain their

relationships. There are four specific functions of relational maintenance behaviors (Canary & Dainton, 2003). The first is to keep a relationship in existence. The second is to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition. The third is to keep a relationship in a satisfactory condition, and the fourth is to prevent and repair relationship problems (Canary & Dainton, 2003). The fourth function is most relevant to the current review and will be discussed in terms of its relation to satisfaction and commitment.

Stafford and Canary (1991; 2003) identified five types of maintenance behaviors that are used to sustain romantic relationships: remaining positive, being open to communication, assuring partners, social networking, and sharing tasks (Canary & Dainton, 2003). Remaining positive refers to an optimistic tone that accompanies couple interactions. Being open to communication involves sharing thoughts and feelings openly with one another. Assuring partners means that each person provides encouragement about the relationship's stability and longevity. Social networking involves sharing common friends and activities. Sharing tasks refers to partners' splitting household responsibilities equally.

Relational maintenance behaviors typically increase as the relationship develops. For example, casually dating couples use significantly fewer maintenance behaviors compared to seriously dating couples (Canary & Dainton, 2003). In addition to frequency, maintenance behaviors also vary by relationship type in terms of breadth. Individuals in more serious partnerships employ a wider range of these behaviors compared to individuals who are in less committed partnerships.

Positive and Negative Couple Behaviors

Positive behaviors are defined as actions that contribute favorably towards others. Such behaviors have been reported to occur regularly in happy relationships (Phillips, Bischoff, Abbott, & Xia, 2009). Henry, Berg, Smith and Florsheim (2007) found that the positive behaviors of being warm, supportive, and affectionate toward a spouse were associated with high quality marital relationships. In contrast, negative behaviors such as being hostile, critical, and complaining were associated with lower marital satisfaction.

Negative behaviors are defined as actions towards others involving the removal or absence of positive affect. They are associated with high stress and are typically exhibited in unrewarding relationships. Gottman

(1994) found that partners in distressed relationships typically exhibit the following negative behaviors: hostility, criticism, withdrawal, and defensiveness. Hostility involves insulting a partner or using language that is contemptuous. Criticism refers to personal attacks towards one's character. Withdrawal is used to create physical and mental distance between partners and defensiveness is used to deny responsibility, which often serves to heighten disagreements (Gottman, 1994). Gottman demonstrated that couples are significantly less likely to divorce if they exhibit a 1:5 ratio of negative to positive behaviors.

Although negative behaviors are typically associated with adverse outcomes, they are sometimes used to maintain relationships. For example, behaviors such as jealousy, avoidance, and destructive conflict may be used in an attempt to retain mates, increase satisfaction, and achieve personal and relationship goals (Goodboy et al., 2010). However, high quality romantic relationships are not well maintained by negative behaviors because such behaviors typically lead to dissatisfaction and dysfunction. In other words, they may help maintain relationships in the short term but do not contribute to long-term satisfaction and commitment.

Rituals

Rituals are a common type of maintenance behavior and can be defined as voluntary, recurring, patterned interactions (Pearson et al., 2010). Bruess and Pearson (1997) examined rituals in romantic relationships and noted that rituals must be shared by relational members in order to qualify as a ritual. In other words, if only one partner participates in the activity or behavior, it would not constitute a ritual. Another defining feature is the meaning attached to ritual enactment. Although rituals may resemble routines in terms of their repetitive quality, partners do not attach strong meaning to the enactment of routines.

Most research regarding rituals focuses on their positive functions within interpersonal relationships. In addition, a majority of researchers have examined family rituals, whereas only a few have focused on couple rituals. In order to provide the most comprehensive review, the following sections will focus on both family and couple rituals because both pertain to intimate relationships. Although research on positive and negative behaviors will be presented, the literature on negative rituals is limited. Therefore, the broader research on

negative behavior patterns will be included to enhance the review.

Dimensions

Family researchers found that rituals vary according to eight dimensions: occurrence, roles, routines, attendance, affect, symbolic significance, continuation, and deliberateness (Fiese & Kline, 1993). Occurrence refers to how often the ritual occurs. For example, some rituals such as showing affection may occur several times a day, whereas others, such as celebrating Christmas occur only once per year. The second dimension is roles, which refers to the responsibility of each individual during ritual enactment (Fiese & Kline, 1993). For example, a couple may enact a nightly meal ritual that involves the husband taking charge of ambiance while the wife prepares the meal.

The third and fourth dimensions are routine and attendance, which refer to how regularly the ritual is conducted and whether attendance of the relationship members is mandatory or optional (Fiese & Kline, 1993). For example, a couple may have a weekly date night, which can only be conducted if both partners are present therefore, attendance is mandatory. The fifth and sixth dimensions are affect and symbolic significance, which

pertain to the emotional investment involved in a ritual and the meaning of the ritual for its participants (Fiese & Kline, 1993). For example, a couple's weekly date night may symbolically represent their first date and as such, be emotionally significant for both partners. The seventh and eighth dimensions are continuation and deliberateness, which involve the perseverance of the ritual over time and the preparation that is associated with ritual performance (Fiese & Kline, 1993).

Categories

Researchers have developed three categories of rituals based on clinical work with families: patterned interactions, traditions, and celebrations. Although these categories have not explicitly been discussed in the couple literature, they are conceptual in nature and can therefore be applied to couple relationships. In the following section, each category is defined and described within the context of couple relationships.

Patterned Interactions

Patterned interactions refer to rituals that are enacted on a regular basis (Fiese & Kline 1993). Examples of patterned interactions include sharing daily meals together, participating in leisure time activities, and engaging in bedtime rituals. Although patterned

interactions may be confused with routines, the defining feature is that these behaviors are meaningful, whereas routines are simply repetitive (Crespo, Davide, Costa, & Fletcher, 2008).

An example of patterned interactions can be illustrated with the imaginary couple of Lawrence and Joyce. Each night before bed, Lawrence kisses Joyce, and says "I love you". Her response is always, "how much?" to which he states, "to the moon and back", and which she replies, "why?" Each night Lawrence provides a different reason why he loves her. In another relationship, partners may follow a similar pattern of saying "I love you" before bed, but not use specific verbiage or care if they deviate from the routine. However, Lawrence and Joyce would feel incomplete or upset if the ritual did not occur the same way each evening. Researchers would therefore categorize Lawrence and Joyce as having a bedtime ritual, whereas the alternate couple may simply have a routine.

Traditions

Traditions are a type of ritual, which tend to be enacted similarly over long periods of time (e.g., passed down from generation to generation). They include annual events such as birthdays, anniversaries, and summer vacations (Fiese & Kline, 1993). Traditions promote

inclusion and feelings of belonging for those involved. For example, a couple's anniversary is an event that typically happens once a year. With this tradition, partners may commemorate the day by visiting a designated location and participating in a specified activity that reinforces their love and support for each other.

Celebrations

Celebrations are the third ritual category. These rituals generally signify major life transitions for couples and family members (Howe, 2002). Examples of celebrations include weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, and religious holidays. Celebrations are more culturally motivated than traditions in that elements of the ritual (e.g., attire, objects) may be culturally ascribed. For example, a wedding symbolizes the union of two people, which is a life transition, as well as a bonding experience for the couple members and their families. This ceremony contains a number of culturally motivated factors such as a white dress and the exchange of wedding rings. Similar to traditions, celebrations provide family members with a sense of belonging.

Types

Several types of rituals have been identified in the literature. Bruess and Pearson (1997) identified three

major types of interpersonal rituals: couple-time rituals, idiosyncratic/symbolic rituals, and daily routines and tasks. Couple-Time rituals are frequently enacted and can be divided in three subtypes: Enjoyable Activities, Togetherness Rituals, and Escape episodes. Enjoyable activities involve recreational activities such as playing games, traveling, or socializing (Bruess & Pearson, 1997). An example of this ritual type would be "Thursday game night" in which a couple designates time to play board games together. With Togetherness rituals, the specific activity is irrelevant because the main point is for the couple to spend time together. For example, Lawrence and Joyce devote the first three hours of each Saturday morning toward spending time together, irrespective of the activity involved. Escape Episodes focus on a couple's need to be alone without outside distraction. An example would be taking regular weekend getaways to spend quality time together.

Idiosyncratic/Symbolic rituals are divided into four subcategories: Favorites, Private Codes, Play Rituals, and Celebration Rituals. Favorites refer to a couple's preferred activities such as frequenting specific restaurants or watching favorite television shows together. Private Codes encompass shared symbols or means

of communication such as using special nicknames, and/or jointly developed words and phrases (Bruess & Pearson, 1997). Play Rituals refer to intimate fun such as teasing and sharing humor (Bruess & Pearson, 1997). Celebration rituals refer to partaking in certain birthday or holiday traditions. For example, a couple might cook the same meal each year for their birthdays, and follow the meal with a specific dessert.

Daily Routines and Tasks are rituals that couples engage in daily. These rituals are further categorized into three subtypes: Intimacy Expressions, Communication Rituals, and Patterns/Habits/Mannerisms. Intimacy Expressions involve physical or verbal expressions of feelings such as hugging, kissing, or saying "I love you" (Bruess & Pearson, 1997). Communication rituals involve various types of communications that occur between partners, including how often they talk throughout the day, as well as aspects of their conversations. For example, partners may have a ritual of text messaging each other during their lunch breaks. Patterns/Habits/Mannerisms refer to couple specific habits and ways of doing things (Bruess & Pearson, 1997). For example, when Lawrence and Joyce eat dinner each night, they always use the same seating arrangements.

Functions of Couple Rituals

Positive Couple Rituals

Researchers have identified many beneficial outcomes associated with ritual enactment. In fact, a large majority of research has focused on the positive interpersonal effects of rituals, with very few scholars examining the negative aspects. The positive effects can be organized according to the themes of communication, satisfaction, and commitment. This section will expand on each of these positive outcomes.

Communication. Rituals involve communicative behaviors that can be used to maintain interpersonal relationships. Bruess and Pearson (1997) examined the rituals of 20 married couples and found that Couple Time and Idiosyncratic rituals included unique communication patterns. Many couples reported discussing daily events while cooking dinner together or preparing for bed. The manner in which couples discussed these events was unique to each partnership. For example, one couple reported that they sit down twice a week and have "heart to heart" conversations. Another couple reported communicating every morning on their way to work. These rituals provide a sense of predictability and order to individuals in the

relationship and promote feelings of support and stability (Leon & Jacobvitz, 2003).

Rituals stabilize interpersonal relationships by promoting closeness through shared experiences. These shared experiences strengthen relational bonds. Bruess and Pearson (1997) described a ritual that involved the wife preparing her husband's favorite cake, which was called the "wicky-wacky chocolate cake", any time she was really happy with him. If he received this cake, he knew he had made his wife happy. This ritual allowed for a shared positive experience, illustrated the couple's understanding of one another, and helped maintain feelings of closeness.

Communication behaviors can be either positive or negative, and strongly influence the relationship because they occur on a daily basis. They are unique to each relationship and help establish a micro-culture (culture of two) for the partners. Because these rituals are dependent on partner dynamics, they are not generally carried into subsequent relationships (Pearson et al., 2010). For example, in the Bruess and Pearson study, the couple referenced above were able to communicate their feelings through the symbolic cake, however if that

relationship were to dissolve, the cake would not carry the same meaning within a different partnership.

Satisfaction. Positive ritual use has been associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Henry et al. (2007) examined the association between marital interaction styles and satisfaction. They used questionnaires and interview data to examine 106 middle aged and 98 older couples' interactions. Positive interactions such as laughing together, exchanging ideas, and providing support promoted satisfaction and were associated with lower levels of conflict (Henry et al., 2007). Couples with more of these daily interactions were characterized by higher overall marital satisfaction.

Fiese and Tomcho (2001) explored the impact of religious rituals on marital satisfaction. They used a series of questionnaires and interviews and evaluated ritual use for 120 couples. They found that couples who participated in religious holiday rituals with symbolic meaning had higher marital satisfaction compared to those who did not participate in such rituals. The religious holiday rituals ranged from sharing Christmas dinner to cultural activities such as Juneteenth celebrations.

Rituals help build intimacy through shared and unique couple experiences (Pearson et al., 2010). For example,

the ritual of having a regular nightcap conversation provides partners with a predictable period of close interaction (Pearson et al., 2010). The degree of intimacy may vary depending on the couple but could include discussions, affectionate behaviors, and/or sexual intercourse.

Commitment. Positive couple rituals enhance relationship commitment. Pearson, Child, and Carmon (2010) used a sample of 199 cohabiting and married individuals and found that couple rituals enhanced relational quality and commitment. The rituals used within these couple relationships included idiosyncratic rituals, daily routines and tasks, intimacy rituals and couple-time rituals. Partners reported that couple-time rituals such as engaging in recreational activities or taking time away from everyday routines, strengthened their commitment. Every day talk rituals such as having a language that is only understood by the partners (i.e., an invented or code language) also contributed to increased commitment.

Couple rituals strengthen commitment within different types of romantic relationships. Campbell and Ponzetti (2007) examined pre-marital rituals using a dating sample of 100 undergraduate students. Participants completed survey items including the Premarital Rituals Scale.

Results indicated that rituals such as enjoyable activities, togetherness rituals, and communication rituals were positively and significantly associated with premarital commitment. Frame (2004) examined the challenges associated with intercultural marriages, including the beneficial effects of rituals for such partnerships. She reported on a couple, with Mexican and European American partners, who sought counseling regarding their marital conflict. The therapist recommended that this couple invent new rituals for the relationship. This practice helped reduce conflict and served to enhance commitment.

Couple rituals may also be used to defuse negative experiences by helping partners focus on their positive interactions (Pearson et al., 2010). The stress associated with negative events is reduced when interactions characterized by love, intimacy, and trust are plentiful. Barnett and Youngberg (2004) explored forgiveness as a ritual used in couple's therapy to help defuse conflict. They defined forgiveness as giving up the right to hurt another in return for being hurt. The researchers presented study to demonstrate how this ritual facilitated couple communication and functioned to build intimacy within the relationship.

Negative Rituals

Although a fair amount of research exists on positive rituals, much less is known about negative rituals. Many researchers have examined negative behaviors more generally (e.g., Gottman, 1994) and found that such behaviors adversely impact relational satisfaction and stability. Due to the lack of research on negative rituals, this section will address negative family rituals and then review the literature regarding negative couple interaction patterns and behaviors. This section will be organized according to the themes of exclusion, relationship maintenance, and relational uncertainty.

Exclusion. Research on negative rituals, within a family context, has focused on the exclusion of family members from ritual practices. Historical evidence exists regarding rejection rituals such as shunning or disinheriting of family members (Howe, 2002). Families may shun a member by not allowing him or her to participate in gatherings or celebrations. When families choose to practice their rituals and purposely exclude a member, the targeted individual tends to suffer negative effects including stress and insecure attachment issues. This type of exclusion can lead to increased distress and further isolate the member from their family. Disinheriting occurs

when a family decides that an individual is no longer considered a part of the group. Disinheriting has similar negative effects on the targeted individual.

Relationship Maintenance. Despite their harmful impact, negative maintenance behaviors have been used to sustain romantic relationships (Goodboy & Myers, 2010). Jealousy induced characteristics such as spite and envy are used as mate retention techniques. Some partners think that jealousy demonstrates love because it helps limit unwanted attention from alternative partners. However, jealousy includes feelings of resentment, which are not positive. Jealousy also has the ability to incite negative outcomes such as distress and in extreme cases, spousal homicide.

Negative maintenance behaviors tend to be associated with relationship dissatisfaction. McNulty and Russell (2010) sought to clarify the role negative problem solving behaviors such as blaming or rejecting had on relationship satisfaction. They conducted 2 longitudinal studies, with 72 couples in the first study and 135 couples in the second study. Problem solving behaviors were monitored for each couple and marital satisfaction was assessed every 6-8 months. They found that direct negative behaviors such as commanding a partner (e.g., "you better not do that

again") caused satisfaction to decline. Negative communications were associated with lower levels of satisfaction regardless of problem severity.

Relational Uncertainty. The act of spying has been used for coping with relational uncertainty (Goodboy et al., 2010). An individual who is unsure of their mate's fidelity may use this strategy to feel assured. However, spying illustrates distrust in a partnership, which detracts from satisfaction and commitment. Other behaviors such as partner avoidance and infidelity may be used for temporary satisfaction and fulfillment of emotional needs (Goodboy et al., 2010). Infidelity can occur when a mate seeks alternative partners to satisfy needs that are unmet in the primary relationship. However, infidelity generally causes friction instead of stabilization in the main partnership. A study by Goodboy and Myers (2010) found that high quality romantic relationships were not maintained using negative behaviors. Instead, such behaviors contributed to relationship dissatisfaction and breakup.

Summary

Positive and negative couple behaviors influence interpersonal relationship functioning. Positive rituals are associated with effective communication, satisfaction

and commitment. Conversely, negative behaviors have been associated with relationship exclusion, poor relationship maintenance, and relational uncertainty. Research on the association between negative rituals and relationship outcomes such as satisfaction and commitment is scarce. Researchers have also failed to explore whether ritual types (i.e., positive versus negative) differ for couples who are in satisfying versus distressed relationships. The present study will seek to fill these gaps by exploring the following specific hypotheses.

Hypotheses

1. Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction.
2. Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.
3. Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with relationship commitment.
4. Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with relationship commitment.
5. Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with dyadic adjustment.
6. Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with dyadic adjustment.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Participant Requirements

Data for this study were collected online in 2009. Participants included undergraduate students from California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB), the University of Georgia (UGA), and the University of Connecticut (UCONN). A community sample was also obtained from therapy clinics in each of the above states (i.e., CA, GA, and CT), and web sites such as Craigslist.org. In order to participate in the study, individuals had to be 18 years of age or older and involved in a romantic relationship.

Data Collection

As noted, participants were recruited through university participant pools, therapy clinics, and websites. Two surveys were completed online and each one took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. After completing the initial survey, participants were contacted three months later to complete a second survey. Upon completion of the second survey, they were given the option to enter a drawing for a \$50 gift card to Wal-Mart, Shell, or Amazon.com. There were 20 drawings in total.

CSUSB students were also given the option of receiving 2 extra credit points for completing the study (1 point for each survey). Only data from the first survey were used for the present study. The questionnaire data were collected via SurveyMonkey, which is an internet-based survey website.

Measures

Three dependent variables and two independent variables were used in this study. The independent variables were positive and negative rituals. The dependent variables were satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. A modified version of the Couple Rituals Scale (Campbell, 2010) was used to assess rituals. The Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007) was used to assess relationship satisfaction and the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) was used to assess commitment. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS, Busby, Crane, & Larson, 1995) was used to assess relationship distress.

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)

The Couples Satisfaction Index was created to assess relationship satisfaction. Funk and Rogge (2007) reviewed eight validated measures of relationship satisfaction and

demonstrated that scales such as the Marital Adjustment Test were not as precise in measuring relationship satisfaction. They used a sample of 5,315 participants and administered online assessments that included over 75 items to create a more precise measure of relationship satisfaction. Tests of precision and power were used to evaluate the validity of the scales. The final measure consisted of 32 items and this was used in the present study. Items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = Always disagree/Never/Not true at all; 6 = Always agree/All the time/Completely true).

Investment Model Scale (IMS)

The Investment Model Scale was originally created to measure commitment and the three determinants of commitment including satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size (Rusbult et al., 1998). The scale consists of facet and global items. The facet items are included to help participants comprehend the global items (i.e., to increase the scale's reliability); however, data analyses are conducted using only the global items. Participants use a 9-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement (0 = not agree at all; 9 = agree completely) with each item. The commitment subscale contains 7 items and all are used for analyses, whereas

each of the predictor subscales (satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size) contain 10 items, 5 of which are global items and are included in the analyses. In the present study, only the commitment subscale was used.

Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) conducted three studies to evaluate the psychometric properties of the IMS. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the global items ranged from .91 to .95 for commitment, .92 to .95 for satisfaction, .82 to .88 for quality of alternatives, and .82 to .84 for investment size. Factor analyses across the three studies produced four factors with Eigen values over 1.00, which accounted for 98% to 100% of variance in scale items. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the commitment scale was .87.

Couple Rituals Scale (CRS)

The Couple Rituals Scale was designed to assess rituals in couple relationships (Campbell, 2010). The scale was modified for the present study in order to create two shortened subscales; one to assess positive couple rituals and the other to assess negative couple rituals. Each subscale begins with a description of either positive or negative rituals that is based on prior research (Campbell, Silva, & Wright, 2011) (see Appendix A,

p. 38). Next, participants respond to 10 items for each subscale (total of 20 items across subscales) that represent distinct dimensions of couple rituals: occurrence, regularity, affect, meaning, deliberateness, roles, equal participation, continuation, idiosyncrasy, and relational identity. Each item consisted of two phrases and participants were asked to select the phrase that best described their relationship. After selecting the most representative phrase, participants indicated whether the phrase was either "really true" or "sort of true." Response options were scored on a 2-point scale (1 = low ritual functioning; 2 = high ritual functioning). Given that the rituals subscales assess 10 different dimensions of ritual functioning, Cronbach's alpha coefficients do not provide an accurate reflection of the measure's reliability. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .49 for the positive couple rituals subscale and .30 for the negative couple rituals subscale.

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby, et al., 1995) is an updated version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). It consists of fourteen items to assess relationship adjustment on three subscales:

consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. Each subscale is scored on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = Always disagree or Never; 6 = Always agree, every day, or More often). The subscales are summed to create a total score. A cutoff score of forty-eight is used to represent clinical distress, with higher scores indicating lower levels of distress (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). In this study, a total score was used to represent global relational distress. Evaluation of the RDAS has demonstrated adequate construct and criterion validity (Busby et al., 1995). Cronbach's alpha coefficients in prior studies ranged from .90 to .95 for the total scale (Busby et al., 1995). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for the RADS was .88.

Demographic Characteristics

In addition to completing the measures above, each participant also provided information about their demographic characteristics including their gender, age, ethnic background, and relationship status (i.e. casually dating, exclusively dating, cohabiting, common law, engaged, married, or other).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This study examined the effects of positive and negative rituals on satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment in romantic relationships. Participants completed measures to assess each construct. In this section, the participants' demographic characteristics are first described. Next, the procedures involved with data screening and measure evaluation are outlined. The section then includes a description of the analyses used to test each hypothesis.

Demographics

Although three universities and community organizations in different regions of the country were used for participant recruitment, the sample was volunteer-based and more female (83%) than male (17%) individuals volunteered to complete the study. However, the sample was diverse in terms of age and ethnic background. The average age of participants was 31 years old ($SD = 7.18$ years; Range = 19-71 years). A majority of participants were of European (57%) or Latino (23%) descent, as well as Asian (9%), African American (8%), Native American (2%), and Other (1%).

Table 1. Summary for Demographic Items

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Gender				
Female	622	83		
Male	130	17		
Age			31.39	7.18
Race				
European American	437	57		
Latino American	175	23		
Asian American	70	9		
African American	60	8		
Native American	13	2		
Other	5	1		
Relationship Type				
Married	240	32		
Engaged	70	10		
Common law	21	2		
Cohabiting	122	16		
Exclusively dating	235	30		
Casually dating	80	10		

All respondents were involved in romantic relationships at the time of study participation. Most self-identified as married (32%) or exclusively dating (30%). The other relationship classifications included cohabiting (16%), casually dating (10%), engaged (10%), and common law (2%). Table one provides a detailed

description of the demographic characteristics for participants in this study.

Data Screening

The data file for this study contained a total of 760 participants and was checked for accuracy before hypothesis testing. An evaluation of missing data, normality sampling, homoscedasticity, and linearity were completed for the independent and dependent variables to ensure that the assumptions for regression analysis were met.

The independent variables were first examined for skewness and kurtosis. The positive and negative couple rituals scales each consisted of 10 items and were coded using a 2-point scale (2 being the high score). The mean positive rituals score was 15.56 (Range = 10-20) with a standard deviation of 1.73. This distribution was negatively skewed (skewness = $-.521$; standard error of skewness = $.090$) and presented a normal distribution. The mean negative ritual score was 13.96 (Range = 10-20) with a standard deviation of 1.59. This distribution was positively skewed (skewness = $.227$; standard error of skewness = $.091$) and presented a normal distribution.

The dependent variables were also examined for skewness and kurtosis using frequency histograms for

satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. The mean satisfaction score was 130.02 (Range = 38-161) with a standard deviation of 27.32. The Couple Satisfaction Index was negatively skewed with a kurtosis of .588 (skewness = -1.125; standard error of skewness = .104) and did not present a normal distribution. The mean commitment score was 56.21 (Range = 9-63) with a standard deviation of 10.23. The commitment scale was negatively skewed with a kurtosis of 4.44 (skewness = -2.098; standard error of skewness = .094) and did not present a normal distribution. The mean dyadic adjustment score was 63.83 (Range = 19-84) with a standard deviation of 9.95. Dyadic adjustment was negatively skewed with a kurtosis of 1.472 (skewness = -.978; standard error of skewness = .097) and presented a normal distribution.

Reliability of Measures

The five scales used to assess the variables were examined for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients (see Table 2). The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) had the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .97$), followed by dyadic adjustment, as measured by the RDAS ($\alpha = .88$), followed by the commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale ($\alpha = .87$). The

least reliable scales were the Positive Rituals scale ($\alpha = .49$) and the Negative Ritual scale ($\alpha = .30$).

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained in the current study were compared with standards identified by Cohen (Cohen, 1992). Cohen states that coefficients are considered good if they are .80 or above and poor if they fall below .40. The current study used the CSI to assess satisfaction, and the authors who published the psychometric assessment of this measure did not report a Cronbach's alpha coefficient. However, in the present study, the alpha of .97 was considered very good. Researchers who have used Rusbult et al.'s (1998) Investment Model Scale and Busby et al.'s, (1995) Revised Dyadic Adjustment scales reported alpha values of .92 and .90, which are similar to the coefficients obtained in the current study. According to Cohen's standards, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the positive and negative couple rituals scales were poor. However, these two scales were created specifically for this study and had not been psychometrically evaluated in prior work. Their design was not necessarily conducive to a Cronbach's alpha evaluation of reliability because the items represented distinct ritual dimensions. Participants additionally completed the scale after reading about various ritual

types that could be enacted within a couple relationship, such as daily routines and tasks, communication rituals, and intimacy rituals. Therefore, individuals may have been responding to items with different ritual types in mind. Despite the low coefficients for positive and negative rituals, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with the hypothesis testing, and to note this limitation for the reader.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Main Variables in the Study

Measure	α
Couples Satisfaction Index	.97
Commitment (IMS subscale)	.87
Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale	.88
Positive Couple Rituals Scale	.49
Negative Couple Rituals Scale	.30

Given that the Cronbach's reliability coefficients for the rituals subscales were low, the reliability estimates were corrected for attenuation. This procedure enabled the researcher to evaluate the Pearson's correlation coefficients for the positive and negative

couple rituals with other variables, while correcting for the low reliability of each scale. The corrected correlations were calculated for positive couple rituals (x value) with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment (y value). Corrected correlations were also calculated for negative couple rituals (x value) and relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment (y value). These coefficients are reported in Table 3.

Hypothesis Testing

Pearson's correlation coefficients and multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. The correlations allowed for observation of any statistically significant associations between the main variables. The regression analyses allowed for an examination of the specific associations between each independent variable (i.e., positive and negative couple rituals) and the other dependent variables (i.e., satisfaction, commitment, dyadic adjustment). In other words, regression analyses were used to control for the shared variance between rituals that was demonstrated in the correlational analyses (see Table 3). Prior to hypothesis testing, regression analyses were also used to examine whether any

of the demographic variables were significantly associated with the dependent variables. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < .05$.

The demographic variables of gender, age, and race were examined in association with the dependent variables of satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. The variables of race and gender were dummy coded into 0 and 1's preceding any significance testing. The only significant association that emerged was between gender and commitment ($\beta = .086$; $p = .012$). None of the other demographic characteristics demonstrated a statistically significant association with the dependent variables. Therefore, gender was controlled for in the regression analysis that included commitment as a dependent variable.

Table 3. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for the Independent and Dependent Variables

	Satisfaction	Commitment	Dyadic Adjustment	Positive Rituals	Negative Rituals
Satisfaction	1.00	.692**	.798**	.432**	-.046
Commitment		1.00	.489**	.362**	-.022
Dyadic Adjustment			1.00	.385**	-.151**
Positive Rituals	.909*	.849*	.893*	1.00	.110**
Negative Rituals	-.158*	-.085*	-.572*		1.00

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

Note. Values above the diagonal represent Pearson's correlation coefficients and values below the diagonal reflect coefficients corrected for attenuation.

Hypothesis I: Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Two analyses were used to test this hypothesis. First, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between positive couple rituals and relationship satisfaction ($r = .432$, $r_{xy} = .909$; $p = .000$). Next, a regression analysis was used to test whether the independent variable of positive couple rituals would be significantly associated with the dependent variable of relationship satisfaction. In this analysis, negative couple rituals were also entered as an independent

variable (see Hypothesis II). The model was significant ($R^2 = .200$, adjusted $R^2 = .196$, $p = .000$). A positive association was identified between positive rituals and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .444$; $p = .000$), which is consistent with the hypothesis prediction. A summary of these results is provided in Table 4.

Hypothesis II: Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. As with Hypothesis I, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed and the same regression analysis was used to test whether the independent variable of negative couple rituals would be significantly associated with the dependent variable of relationship satisfaction. A significant correlation did not exist between negative couple rituals and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.046$, $r_{xy} = -.158$; $p = .280$). As noted above, the regression model was significant ($R^2 = .200$, adjusted $R^2 = .196$, $p = .000$). Results of the regression indicated a significant negative association between negative couple rituals and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.096$; $p = .017$). A summary of these results is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Positive and Negative Couple Rituals (IVs) and Satisfaction (DV)

Independent Variable	B	SE	β
Positive Couple Rituals	7.14	.630	.444**
Negative Couple Rituals	-1.69	.710	.094*

$p < .05$ * $p < .01$ ** $R^2 = .200$, Adjusted $R^2 = .196$; $p = .000$

Hypothesis III: Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with relationship commitment. Two analyses were used to test this hypothesis. First, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between positive couple rituals and relationship commitment ($r = .362$, $r_{xy} = .849$; $p = .000$). Next, a regression analysis was used to test whether the independent variable of positive couple rituals would be significantly associated with the dependent variable of relationship commitment. In this analysis, gender was entered as an independent variable in step 1 and positive and negative couple rituals were entered as independent variables in step 2 (see Hypothesis IV). The reason gender was used as an independent variable in this analysis is because it demonstrated a significant association with commitment in

the preliminary analyses ($r = .106$; $p = .006$). The model was significant ($R^2 = .140$, adjusted $R^2 = .136$; $p = .000$). The delta r^2 change from model one to model two was .009 to .131. A positive association existed between positive couple rituals and commitment ($\beta = .365$; $p = .000$), which is consistent with the hypothesis prediction. A summary of these results is provided in Table 5.

Hypothesis IV: Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with relationship commitment. As with Hypothesis III, this hypothesis was tested using a Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis. A significant association did not exist between negative couple rituals and relationship commitment ($r = -.022$, $r_{xy} = -.085$); $p = .572$). In the regression analysis, gender was entered as an independent variable in step 1 and positive and negative couple rituals were entered as independent variables in step 2. As previously noted, the regression model was significant ($R^2 = .140$, adjusted $R^2 = .136$; $p = .000$). The delta r^2 change from model one to model two was .009 to .131. Results indicated a negative association between negative couple rituals and relationship commitment ($\beta = -.057$; $p = .129$), but the association was not statistically significant. Therefore,

the hypothesis was not supported. A summary of these results is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Positive and Negative Couple Rituals (IV's) and Commitment (DV)

Independent Variable	B	SE	β
Step 1			
Gender	2.59	1.01	.094*
Step 2			
Positive Rituals	2.28	.235	.365**
Negative Rituals	-.376	.247	-.057
Step 1: $p < .05^*$ $R^2 = .009$, Adjusted $R^2 = .007$; $p = .000$			
Step 2: $p < .01^{**}$ $R^2 = .140$, Adjusted $R^2 = .136$; $p = .000$			

Hypothesis V: Positive couple rituals will be positively associated with dyadic adjustment. Two analyses were used to test this hypothesis. First, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between positive couple rituals and dyadic adjustment ($r = .385$, $r_{xy} = .893$; $p = .000$). Next, a regression analysis was used to test whether the independent variable of positive couple rituals would be significantly associated with the dependent variable of dyadic adjustment. In this analysis, negative couple rituals was also entered as an independent

variable (see Hypothesis VI). The model was significant ($R^2 = .179$, adjusted $R^2 = .177$; $p = .000$). A positive association was identified between positive rituals and dyadic adjustment ($\beta = .399$; $p = .000$), which is consistent with the hypothesis prediction. A summary of these results is provided in Table 6.

Hypothesis VI: Negative couple rituals will be negatively associated with dyadic adjustment. As with Hypothesis V, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed and the same regression analysis was used to test whether the independent variable of negative couple rituals would be significantly associated with the dependent variable of dyadic adjustment. A significant negative correlation was found between negative couple rituals and dyadic adjustment ($r = -.151$, $r_{xy} = -.572$; $p = .000$). The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .179$, adjusted $R^2 = .177$; $p = .000$). Results indicated a negative association between negative couple rituals and dyadic adjustment ($\beta = -.182$; $p = .000$), which supports the hypothesis prediction. A summary of these results is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Multiple Regression for Positive and Negative Rituals (IVs) and Dyadic Adjustment (DV)

Independent Variable	B	SE	β
Positive Rituals	2.34	.217	.399**
Negative Rituals	-1.13	.229	-.182**

$p < .01^{**}$ $R^2 = .179$, Adjusted $R^2 = .177$; $p = .000$

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the associations among positive and negative couple rituals, relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. We expected that positive couple rituals would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment, whereas negative rituals would be negatively associated with satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. Results of the study were both expected and unexpected.

As noted in the literature review, previous research has focused on the importance of positive rituals for couple relationships. Researchers have identified specific types of positive rituals (e.g., Couple-time, Idiosyncratic/Symbolic, Daily Routines and Tasks) as well as distinct dimensions (e.g., occurrence, roles, symbolic significance) (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Fiese & Kline, 1993). Positive rituals have additionally been found to enhance marital communication, satisfaction, and commitment (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Henry et al., 2007; Campbell & Ponzetti, 2007; Pearson et al., 2010) in prior work. The current study extended previous research by

collectively examining the associations among these variables. Few researchers have examined the nature and/or functions of negative couple rituals; therefore, this study contributed new knowledge on the topic.

The current study found a direct positive association between positive couple rituals and relationship satisfaction. Previous studies have reported positive correlations between ritual use and marital satisfaction (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Researchers have found that couple-time rituals, which include enjoyable activities, togetherness rituals, and escape episodes, promote positive couple interactions and increase relationship satisfaction (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Campbell & Ponzetti, 2007; Pearson et al., 2010). Therefore, our findings are consistent with previous research on this topic. Couple time rituals allow partners to share enjoyable activities together, such as watching a favorite television show or having a weekly date night, which enhances satisfaction and makes partners likely to continue these behaviors over time. The association between positive ritual enactment and satisfaction is likely bidirectional. In other words, engaging in shared activities on a regular basis enhances satisfaction, and satisfied partners are likely to engage in positive activities together. Researchers may seek to

build on these findings in future studies. For example, do the types of positive rituals enacted by partners change over time and differentially impact satisfaction? It is likely that rituals change throughout the course of a relationship (i.e., from dating to marriage), and that the rituals partners find satisfying early in their relationship shift with time. Future research could explore these associations further.

In this study, negative couple rituals were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Researchers have yet to examine negative couple rituals directly. However, they have addressed negative maintenance behaviors, which are similar to rituals, and found that such behaviors lead to dissatisfaction (Goodboy et al., 2010). The lack of statistical significance related to the Pearson's correlation coefficients in the present study may be explained by the negative couple rituals assessment. Although the scale measured the use of negative couple rituals, it did not distinguish between the specific types of rituals, or the emotions associated with their enactment. For example, one participant may have been reporting on an abusive ritual, whereas another could have been reporting on an enjoyable activity such as sharing nightly cocktails together. In the first case, the

negative ritual would be undesirable, whereas in the second case, the ritual may be a great source of enjoyment for the partners. Future research is needed to refine the negative couple rituals scale, distinguish between the distinct types, and examine whether positive emotions are associated with their usage. Until such work is conducted, it may be difficult to draw reliable conclusions about the association between negative rituals and satisfaction.

Individuals who reported more positive couple rituals indicated a stronger commitment to their relationships. This finding is consistent with previous work (Campbell & Ponzetti, 2007). Couple-time, idiosyncratic, and communication rituals have been shown to enhance relationship commitment by promoting togetherness and defusing negative situations (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Pearson et al., 2010). By defusing negative situations, rituals help partners maintain a more positive relational atmosphere, which enhances commitment. Additionally, positive couple rituals were associated with satisfaction, which also serves to enhance commitment. The Investment Model of commitment specifies that as relationship satisfaction increases, so too does partner commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003). Similar to the satisfaction findings, a

bidirectional association likely exists between positive rituals and commitment.

The association between negative couple rituals and relationship commitment was not statistically significant. Although no significant causal effect was found, the direction of the correlation was negative, which may suggest that increased use of negative rituals is associated with lower levels of relationship commitment. Previous work indicates that negative maintenance behaviors such as criticism and hostility cause partners to dissolve relationships (Gottman, 1994). However, the negative rituals measure was developed specifically for this study and has not been psychometrically evaluated. In the present study, it exhibited low reliability, which may partly explain why its association with commitment was not significant. Future work is needed to evaluate the negative rituals measure and ensure that it adequately captures the construct of negative rituals.

It was hypothesized that positive couple rituals would be positively associated with dyadic adjustment. A direct association between ritual use and dyadic adjustment has yet to be explored by other researchers. In the present study, positive couple rituals were positively correlated with dyadic adjustment. Given that dyadic

adjustment is highly correlated with satisfaction and commitment, we expected this association. Previous research states that positive interactions (e.g., laughing together) are frequently exhibited by non-distressed couples (Henry et al., 2007). As couples experience positive interactions through couple ritual enactment, behaviors that cause stress (i.e., anger, disagreements) tend to decline. These findings suggest that positive couple rituals, relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, and dyadic adjustment are intertwined. For example, if a couple is in a satisfied state, and highly committed, their stress level would be low indicating positive adjustment.

Negative rituals were expected to demonstrate a negative association with dyadic adjustment, and this prediction was supported. Individuals with negative rituals in their relationships were more likely to report lower dyadic adjustment (i.e., greater relational stress). This finding is consistent with Gottman's (1994) research indicating that negative behaviors, such as criticism and hostility lead to high stress, relationship dissatisfaction, and dissolution. The current study's findings are also consistent with the predictions of social exchange theory. According to the theory, humans

will not engage in relationships that are costly or unsatisfying (Boss et al., 1993). Such relationships, are more likely to consist of negative patterns such as negative rituals, and partners are therefore more likely to experience relational stress.

This study provided insight into how positive and negative couple rituals associate with satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment in romantic relationships. Longitudinal studies may help explain the correlations among these variables, particularly in terms of directionality. For example, to what extent do rituals, satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment influence each other? This type of research would help clarify the role of rituals in maintaining successful long-term relationships. Therapists may also suggest rituals as a means of enhancing satisfaction and commitment and decreasing relational stress.

In summary, the current study extended research regarding the associations between positive and negative couple rituals and relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment. We found that positive couple rituals were positively related to relationship satisfaction, commitment, and dyadic adjustment whereas negative couple rituals were negatively related to

relationship satisfaction and dyadic adjustment. Results of the study support previous research on the topic of positive couple rituals within romantic relationships. The study also extended prior work by investigating negative rituals and their association with relationship outcomes.

Conclusion

Study Strengths and Limitations

As with any study, there are some strengths and limitations that should be noted. A strength of the current study pertained to the diversity of participants' in terms of ethnicity and relationship status. A substantial number of participants self-identified as Latino or Asian American and in general, prior rituals research has focused largely on European American couples. Due to the representation of different ethnicities in our sample, the study findings are easily generalizable across cultural groups, particularly because our analyses revealed that ethnicity was not a significant predictor of rituals. The sample also included people from different relationship types including exclusively dating, cohabiting, and married partnerships. Prior research on couple rituals has focused almost exclusively on married individuals; therefore, this study adds to the existing

literature on the topic by including a variety of relationship types.

A limitation of this study was that the sample consisted of primarily female respondents. Given that the data were collected using self-report measures, the responses may be more representative of the female perspective. However, the preliminary analyses revealed that gender was significantly associated with only one of the dependent variables in that women reported higher commitment. This influence was controlled for in the hypothesis testing and the results consequently reflect patterns that were common to both sexes.

One of the most substantial limitations of the study pertained to the Couple Rituals Scale that was used to assess positive and negative rituals. The scale has not been used extensively in previous research and has yet to be psychometrically evaluated. Each subscale consisted of 10 items to assess distinct ritual dimensions (i.e., one item for each dimension), which made it difficult to compute a reliable alpha coefficient. Another problem with the scale is that participants read a general description of rituals before completing the items and the description listed numerous ritual types. Therefore, participants may have been responding to items with different rituals in

mind, which would decrease the scale's validity and reliability. In future studies, researchers should improve upon the scale and conduct a more comprehensive assessment of its psychometric properties.

Implications for Future Research

As noted, positive couple rituals were significantly associated with dyadic adjustment and negative couple rituals demonstrated a negative association with dyadic adjustment. These associations should be explored further to identify whether dyadic adjustment fluctuates based on the types of positive and negative couple rituals used. Results may differ in a longitudinal study because adjustment may change over extended versus short periods of time. Additionally, specific types of positive and negative couple rituals may help or hinder dyadic adjustment.

Future research may also explore whether specific couple rituals such as togetherness rituals are more or less effective than holiday rituals at promoting satisfaction and commitment. Understanding the types of rituals that improve couple relationships, as well as the types that cause distress would clarify which rituals to use for relationship maintenance. Therapists can employ this information by recommending the best rituals for

clients who are experiencing relationship problems.

Rituals can also be recommended as a strategy to prevent the emergence of relational problems. In sum, the current study added new information to the existing scholarship of rituals, and provided avenues for extended research on the topic.

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Questions for Participant Demographics

1. Are you: Male or Female
2. What is your age? _____
3. Please indicate your ethnic background (Circle one)
a) European/White American c) Hispanic or Latino e) Asian
b) African American d) Native American f) Other: _____
4. How would you describe the status of your relationship?
a) Casually dating c) Cohabiting e) Engaged g) Other
b) Exclusively dating d) Common law f) Married

APPENDIX B
COUPLE RITUALS SCALE

Couple Rituals Scale:

Couple rituals are repeated and meaningful behaviors that partners do together. Examples include watching favorite television shows together, having private jokes and phrases, cooking meals together, text messaging certain phrases, having special ways to signal 'I love you', and using certain traditions to celebrate events such as birthdays or anniversaries.

Instructions: Think of couple rituals in your relationship and respond to the items with these rituals in mind. For each item, read the two statements and choose **one** that is most like your relationship. Then, decide if the statement is sort of true OR really true and select the appropriate bubble.

For each item, choose ONE option that best describes your relationship.

	Really True	Sort of True		OR		Sort of True	Really True
1.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	We regularly engage in couple rituals.	OR	We rarely engage in couple rituals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, rituals occur at set times.	OR	In our relationship, rituals are flexible; we take part in them whenever we can.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, we feel strongly about engaging in rituals together.	OR	In our relationship, rituals are not a source of great emotion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, rituals have special meaning and significance.	OR	In our relationship, rituals are no different than other things we do together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, there is little planning or decision making around rituals.	OR	In our relationship, rituals are planned for or decided about in advance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	For our rituals, each person has a specific role or job to do.	OR	For our rituals, we each do different jobs at different times depending on our needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, we both participate equally in our rituals.	OR	In our relationship, one person participates more than the other in our rituals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, the rituals have stayed pretty much the same across time.	OR	In our relationship, the rituals have changed across time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The rituals I do with my partner would be the same if done with someone else.	OR	The rituals I do with my partner would not be the same if done with someone else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	If my relationship were to end, I would miss our couple rituals.	OR	If our relationship were to end, I would not miss our couple rituals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Couple rituals also include unpleasant behaviors. Examples include always arguing about the same topics, having certain ways of arguing (e.g., one partner tries to discuss things while the other partner avoids discussion), doing the same mean things over and over again, repeating old patterns after agreeing to change, and doing unhealthy things together like smoking and drinking.

Instructions: Think of unpleasant rituals in your relationship and respond to the items with these rituals in mind. For each item, read the two statements and choose one that is most like your relationship. Then, decide if the statement is sort of true OR really true and select the appropriate bubble.

For each item, choose ONE option that best describes your relationship.

	Really True	Sort of True			Sort of True	Really True
1.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	We regularly engage in unpleasant couple rituals.	OR	We rarely engage in unpleasant couple rituals.	<input type="radio"/>
2.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals occur at set times.	OR	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals are unpredictable and happen at different times.	<input type="radio"/>
3.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals bring out strong emotions.	OR	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals are not a source of great emotion.	<input type="radio"/>
4.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals have a certain meaning and significance.	OR	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals are no different than other things we do together.	<input type="radio"/>
5.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, there is little planning or decision making around unpleasant rituals.	OR	In our relationship, unpleasant rituals are planned for or determined in advance.	<input type="radio"/>
6.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	When unpleasant rituals occur in our relationship, each person has a typical role or way of acting.	OR	When unpleasant rituals occur in our relationship, each person does not have a typical role or way of acting.	<input type="radio"/>
7.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, we both participate equally in our unpleasant rituals.	OR	In our relationship, one person participates more than the other in our unpleasant rituals.	<input type="radio"/>
8.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	In our relationship, the unpleasant rituals have stayed pretty much the same across time.	OR	In our relationship, the unpleasant rituals have changed across time.	<input type="radio"/>
9.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The unpleasant rituals I do with my partner would be the same if done with someone else.	OR	The unpleasant rituals I do with my partner would not be the same if done with someone else.	<input type="radio"/>
10.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	If my relationship were to end, I would miss our unpleasant rituals.	OR	If our relationship were to end, I would not miss our unpleasant rituals.	<input type="radio"/>

Campbell, K. (2010). Couple rituals scale. In J. E. Grable, K. L. Archuleta, & R. R. Nazarinia (Eds.), *Financial planning and counseling scales*. New York: Springer.

APPENDIX C
COUPLE SATISFACTION INDEX

Couple Satisfaction Index

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
4. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all True	A little True	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Almost Completely True	Completely True
6. I still feel a strong connection with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. If I had my life to live over, I would marry (or live with/date) the same person	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. Our relationship is strong	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. I sometimes wonder if there is someone else out there for me	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. My relationship with my partner makes me happy	0	1	2	3	4	5

11. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. I can't imagine ending my relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel that I can confide in my partner about virtually anything	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at All True	A little True	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Almost Completely True	Completely True
14. I have had second thoughts about this relationship recently	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. For me, my partner is the perfect romantic partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. I really feel like part of a team with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. I cannot imagine another person making me as happy as my partner does	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Not all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
18. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?		1	2	3	4	5
19. How well does your partner meet your needs?	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Worse than all others (Extremely bad)					Better than all others (Extremely good)
22. How good is your relationship compared to most?	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
23. Do you enjoy your partner's company?	0	1	2	3	4	5
24. How often do you and your partner have fun together?	0	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

25. INTERESTING	5	4	3	2	1	0	BORING
26. BAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	GOOD
27. FULL	5	4	3	2	1	0	EMPTY
28. LONELY	0	1	2	3	4	5	FRIENDLY
29. STURDY	5	4	3	2	1	0	FRAGILE
30. DISCOURAGING	0	1	2	3	4	5	HOPEFUL
31. ENJOYABLE	5	4	3	2	1	0	MISERABLE

Funk, J., Rogge, R. (2007). Testing the Ruler with Item Response Theory: Increasing Precision of Measurement for Relationship Satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(4), 572-583

APPENDIX D

INVESTMENT MODEL SCALE: COMMITMENT SUBSCALE

Investment Model Scale: Commitment Subscale

Please indicate the degree to which each of the following statements pertain to your current relationship.

	<u>Don't</u> <u>Agree at all</u>	<u>Agree</u> <u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Agree</u> <u>Completely</u>						
1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
5. I feel very attached to our relationship very strongly linked to my partner.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
6. I want our relationship to last forever.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Rusbult, C., Martz, J., Agnew, C. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 357-391.

APPENDIX E
REVISED DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Agree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Religious matters	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Demonstrations of affection	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Making major decisions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Sex relations	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Conventionality-correct/proper behavior	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Career decisions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa- sionally	Rarely	Never
7. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Do you ever regret that you married (or live together)?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occa- sionally	Rarely	Never
11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
12. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. Work together on a project	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. Calmly discuss something	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Busby, D., Christensen, C., Crane, R., Larson, J. (1995) A Revision of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale for use with Distressed and Non-distressed Couples: Construct Hierarchy and Multidimensional Scales. *Journal of Marriage & Family Therapy*, 21(3), 289-308

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

**Human Subjects Review Board
Department of Psychology
California State University, San Bernardino**

From: PI: Campbell, Kelly
Kristy K. Dean
Project Title: Relationship maintenance and satisfaction:
A comparison of distressed and non-distressed couples
Project ID: H09W109
Date: Tuesday, June 05, 2012

Disposition: Expedited Review

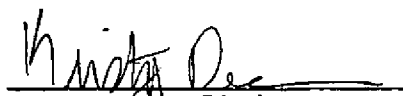
Your application to use human subjects has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Psychology Department Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, San Bernardino. IRB approval includes approval of the protocol and consent forms. This approval is valid for a year, until 3/5/2010.

IRB approval is granted with the understanding that the investigator will:

- Change neither the procedures nor the consent form without prior IRB review and approval
- Report serious adverse events to the Psychology Department IRB Chair
- Submit a Renewal Form to the Psychology Department IRB Chair prior to the expiration of this approval, if continued use of this protocol is desired.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Dr. Kristy Dean, Psychology Department IRB Sub-Committee Chair (909) 537-5583 or kdean@csusb.edu. Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Good luck with your research!



Kristy Dean, Chair
Psych IRB Sub-Committee



Luis Rivera
Psych IRB Sub-Committee

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