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The Investment Model of Commitment Processes

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Author Note: With the exception of the section on origins of the theory, this chapter was prepared following the death of the first author, Caryl Rusbult, our mentor and dear friend.

Abstract

The investment model of commitment processes is rooted in interdependence theory and emerged from the broader scientific zeitgeist of the 1960s and 1970s that sought to understand seemingly irrational persistence in social behavior. The investment model was developed originally to move social psychology beyond focusing only on positive affect in predicting persistence in a close interpersonal relationship. As originally tested, the investment model holds that commitment to a target is influenced by three independent factors: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. Commitment, in turn, is posited to mediate the effects of these three bases of dependence on behavior, including persistence. Commitment is presumed to bring about persistence by influencing a host of relationship maintenance phenomena. The investment model has proven to be remarkably generalizable across a range of commitment targets, including commitment toward both interpersonal (e.g., abusive relationships, friendships) and non-interpersonal (e.g., job, sports participation, support for public policies) targets. Empirical support for the investment model is presented as well as a review of recent applications of the model and a proposed extension of it.

Introduction

The investment model (Rusbult, 1980; 1983) provides a useful framework for predicting the state of being committed to someone or something, and for understanding the underlying causes of commitment. It was developed to move beyond focusing only on positive affect in predicting persistence in an interpersonal relationship. A major premise of the investment model is that relationships persist not only because of the positive qualities that attract partners to one another (their satisfaction), but also because of the ties that bind partners to each other (their investments) and the absence of a better option beyond the relationship with the current partner (lack of alternatives); all of these factors matter in understanding commitment. Beyond explaining the antecedents of commitment, the investment model has generated a large body of research to account for what differentiates lasting relationships from those that end and on specific cognitive and behavioral maintenance mechanisms that are fueled by commitment. The model also has been applied to predicting commitment to all sorts of other targets, revealing its generalizability beyond close relationships.

Origins of the Investment Model

In the summer of 1976, I (first author) took a cross-country road trip from Chapel Hill to Los Angeles. I had just completed my first year of graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), and was keen to visit friends and family in L.A. On the return leg of the trip my traveling companion brought up an interesting topic: “Tell me why people stick with their partners.” I spent the better part of Arizona and New Mexico describing work that seemed relevant – work regarding attitudinal similarity, physical appearance, the gain-loss phenomenon, pratfall effects, and the like. I gave a good review of the relationships literature as it existed in the mid-1970s. As we crossed the Texas border, however, my traveling companion

somewhat sheepishly asked: “Okay, but can you tell me why people stick with their partners?” My companion was correct in his implied assessment of this literature. Although work regarding interpersonal attraction answers some interesting questions – for example, what makes us feel attracted to a partner, what makes us feel satisfied with a relationship? – it does not explain why people sometimes persist in relationships. The issue in this literature was positive affect, not perseverance.

As it turns out, several months earlier I had participated in a seminar on interdependence processes led by John Thibaut at UNC. Interdependence theory, which John developed with Hal Kelley (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), argues that dependence is a central structural property of relationships and particularly relevant to understanding persistence. We describe dependence in more detail below, but the point here is that there was a compelling theory suggesting that dependence, not satisfaction, drives people to seek further interaction with each other. In the context of ongoing romantic involvements, this meant that relationships persist not only as a function of the positive or negative qualities that derive from a particular partner, but also because being with the partner on the whole is more desirable than not being with the partner.

As described in Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, and Clarke (2006), the investment model was also shaped by the broader scientific zeitgeist in the 1960s and 1970s that sought to explain unjustified persistence. During this period, social scientists from diverse fields sought to understand “irrational persistence” in nonromantic domains. Social science research repeatedly documented commitment-relevant phenomena, such as dedicating more time or effort than desired to a particular activity; increasing commitment to a losing enterprise (i.e., the irrational escalation of commitment; Staw, 1976); being trapped in an escalating conflict (such as in the

dollar auction, a bidding game in which a dollar goes to the highest bidder but the second-highest bidder must also pay the highest amount that he or she bid; Shubik, 1971); and the manner in which investments, side bets, and sunk costs may induce perseverance in a line of action (Becker, 1960; Blau, 1967; Brockner, Shaw, & Rubin, 1979; Kiesler, 1971; Schelling, 1956; Teger, 1980; Tropper, 1972; see Rusbult, 1980). Increased scholarly interest in irrational persistence during that time was on par with the broader sociopolitical events, such as the Cold War arms race and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. This is not to say that the investment model, or other models cited here, was directly inspired by such events, but rather that during this era, a fascination with unjustified persistence was “in the air” from a scientific point of view (Rusbult et al., 2006).

Initial Tests of the Investment Model

With important personal and scholarly influences as a backdrop, Rusbult completed her dissertation in 1978, in which she developed the investment model. Initial tests of the investment model were published in the early 1980s (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, 1983). These early papers included: (1) an experiment in which participants read one vignette of a hypothetical couple, varying in a between-subjects design the costs, alternatives, and investment size to assess the effect of these variables on satisfaction and commitment (Rusbult, 1980, Study 1); (2) a cross-sectional study in which participants completed a survey with respect to their own relationship, assessing the association of costs, rewards, quality of alternatives, and investments with satisfaction and commitment (Rusbult, 1980, Study 2); and (3) a multi-wave longitudinal study (12 measurement occasions) in which participants completed a survey about their own relationship, assessing whether changes in satisfaction (costs and rewards), alternatives, and investments predicted subsequent commitment and relationship longevity (Rusbult, 1983).

Together these studies provided strong empirical evidence of several claims that were novel at the time and that launched a shift in relationships research from focusing exclusively on satisfaction to studying commitment processes more generally. The major claim was that satisfaction and commitment are not interchangeable, nor are they equally important in predicting relationship outcomes. Commitment was more strongly related to whether relationships endured than was level of satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983). Understanding why some relationships persisted and others ended required understanding commitment, which increased with more rewards or higher satisfaction, with weakening alternatives, and with increasing investments. Whereas having more rewards consistently increased satisfaction, having greater costs associated with a relationship did not necessarily decrease satisfaction. Indeed, costs were not consistently related to commitment and even increased over time among those whose relationships endured (cf. Clark & Grote, 1998).

These initial tests of the investment model were major contributions to the study of relationships. In addition to providing a more complete and predictive account of enduring relationships, these initial tests accounted for findings that previously could not be explained. One such finding was that individuals left by their partner were very different than those who left their partner: Both decreased in their level of satisfaction, but those “abandoned” continued to invest heavily and had alternatives that declined in quality (Rusbult, 1983). That is, level of satisfaction could not differentiate the distinct processes that characterize “leavers” and the abandoned.

A second finding uniquely explained by the investment model was that rational individuals may persist in a relationship with an abusive partner. Victims of partner abuse experience low satisfaction, which might lead to the prediction that they would leave their partner. Prior to the

investment model, it was widely believed that victims experiencing such negative events, and yet remaining with their partner, exhibit irrational, even pathological personal dispositions. In contrast, the investment model underscores structural features of the relationship that account for a victim remaining with an abusive partner: The victim may lack alternatives to the relationship and may have too much invested with that partner, making dissolution too costly. Indeed, Rusbult and Martz (1995) revealed that alternatives and investments were strongly related to whether battered women at a shelter remained committed and returned to their partner, whereas the association of satisfaction was weak or not significant depending on the measure of satisfaction.

More generally, these initial tests of the investment model launched a paradigm shift in the study of relationship processes (see Rusbult et al., 2006, and Agnew, 2009, for descriptions of other commitment models). The shift was from asking why people like each other, to asking how and why people stay together. Research following the development of the investment model identified specific processes by which committed individuals keep their relationship intact. It would be too easy and misguided to say, “They just want to stay together.” The model launched an entire area of research on various relationship maintenance phenomena that led to identifying thoughts and behaviors of committed individuals, and explaining the underlying processes that characterize these thoughts and behaviors. At the center of Rusbult’s theoretical account of relationship maintenance are the concepts of commitment and dependence, which we describe next.

Dependence, Commitment, and Relationship Maintenance

Dependence refers to the extent to which an individual “needs” a given relationship, or relies uniquely on that particular relationship for attaining desired outcomes. There are several

processes through which individuals become dependent (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). First, partners become dependent to the extent that they enjoy high satisfaction. Satisfaction level describes the degree to which an individual experiences positive versus negative affect as a result of involvement. Satisfaction level increases to the extent that a relationship gratifies the individual's most important needs, including needs for companionship, security, intimacy, sexuality, and belonging (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Dependence also increases when a person perceives that, on average, the best available alternative to a relationship is less desirable than the current relationship. Conversely, when a person's most important needs could be fulfilled outside of the current relationship – in a specific alternative relationship, by a combination of other involvements (by friends and family members, or on one's own) – a person's dependence on the current relationship diminishes.

Interdependence theory argued that relationships would be more likely to endure when partners want to persist in a given relationship (i.e., satisfaction is high) and perceive they have no choice but to persist because they lack viable options to the relationship (i.e., alternatives are poor).

The investment model extended these claims in several respects. First, satisfaction and alternatives do not fully account for enduring relationships (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult et al., 1998). If the decision to remain with or leave a partner were based solely on how positive one feels or on how one might anticipate feeling elsewhere, few relationships would endure – a relationship would collapse when positive feelings wane or when an attractive alternative becomes the target of one's attention. Relationships are not static; partners' affections ebb and flow, and many relationships persist in the face of tempting alternatives.

Second, dependence is influenced by high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and a third factor: investment size. Investment size refers to the magnitude and importance of the resources that

become attached to a relationship that would be lost or decline in value if the relationship were to end. Partners form deep ties that bind themselves to each other by linking parts of themselves directly to the relationship – for example, investing their time and energy, disclosing personal information that ties their sense of dignity to the partner, sharing their own friends with the partner, and taking on shared possessions or giving things of value to the partner. Partners make such investments in the hope that doing so will create a strong foundation for a lasting future together. Investments increase dependence because the act of investment increases connections to the partner that would be costly to break, in the same way that giving up a part of one's self is costly. As such, investments create a powerful psychological inducement to persist.

Third, the investment model extends prior theory by suggesting that commitment emerges as a consequence of increasing dependence (Rusbult et al., 1998). Dependence is a structural property that describes the additive effects of satisfaction, investments, and (lack of) alternatives. When individuals want to persist (are satisfied), feel “tied into” the relationship or obliged to persist (have high investments), and have no choice but to persist (possess poor alternatives), they find themselves in circumstances objectively characterized as dependence.

As people become increasingly dependent they tend to develop strong commitment. Commitment level is defined as intent to persist in a relationship, including long-term orientation toward the involvement as well as feelings of psychological attachment to it (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). When partners are satisfied, lack alternatives, and have invested heavily in their relationship, they form a strong intention to stay together, they see themselves as being connected (i.e., developing a strong relational identify and a sense of “we-ness”; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), and adopt an orientation that reflects taking into account how things affect the long-term future of the relationship. As such, the psychological experience

of commitment reflects more than the bases of dependence out of which it arises (i.e., high satisfaction, low alternatives, high investment). Commitment is the psychological state that directly influences everyday behavior in relationships and that mediates the effects of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments on behavior.

Having established that strong commitment – not high satisfaction – is the psychological state that characterizes partners in an enduring relationship, Rusbult, her colleagues, and many others have identified a multitude of commitment processes – that is, the many ways in which commitment promotes thoughts, feelings, and actions that, in turn, cause relationships to persist. Relationship maintenance is the upshot of responding to interpersonal situations by acting in the interest of the relationship. Past research has identified several relationship maintenance mechanisms through which highly committed people maintain their relationship.

Highly committed people are inclined to act in ways that promote relationship persistence. Their high commitment is particularly salient when they react to a challenging moment by doing what is best for the relationship. For example, when a partner makes a thoughtless remark or fails to follow through on a promise or acts in some other way that could damage the relationship, high commitment predicts accommodation, namely inhibiting the urge to retaliate and instead respond in ways that promote the relationship (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Kilpatrick, Bissonnette, & Rusbult, 2002; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Similarly, highly committed people are more inclined than their less committed counterparts to forego personal preferences for the sake of acting on behalf of the partner's interest (Powell & Van Vugt, 2003; Van Lange, Agnew et al. 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997); and respond to a partner betrayal by forgiving the partner (Cann & Baucom, 2004; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). These relationship maintenance phenomena stem from

strong commitment, not necessarily high satisfaction, a fact that would not be commonly accepted were it not for the investment model.

Highly committed people also think about things affecting the relationship differently than less committed people, and these thoughts make a difference in the well-being of a relationship. For example, committed people derogate tempting alternatives to shield against them, react to periods of doubt or uncertainty by denying negative qualities of the partner, develop unrealistically positive thoughts about their partner and/or the relationship, and cast others' relationships in a negative light (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001; Arriaga, 2002; Arriaga, Slaughterbeck, Capezza, & Hmurovic, 2007; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999; Miller, 1997; Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wilschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990). Committed individuals also mentally see themselves in more relational terms – for example, they spontaneously use more plural pronouns – than do less committed individuals (Agnew et al., 1998).

Why do committed individuals come to think and act in a pro-relationship manner? The interdependence theory distinction between the given situation and the effective situation provides some insight into this process (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). The *given situation* refers to each partner's immediate, self-centered personal preferences in a specific situation. Within the context of a close relationship, of course, it is clear that people do not always pursue their given preferences. Behavior is often shaped by broader concerns, including long-term goals to promote not only one's own but also one's partner's well-being. Movement away from given preferences results from *transformation of motivation*, a process which leads individuals to relinquish their immediate self-interest and act on the basis of broader considerations. The

effective situation refers to the preferences resulting from the transformation process; effective preferences directly guide behaviors among those who are highly committed to their relationship.

The investment model premise that commitment and dependence are more consequential than satisfaction is the same premise that has guided research on mutual influence in deepening commitment and trust, or “mutual cyclical growth” (Agnew et al., 1998). As one person becomes more committed and acts in ways that reveal responsiveness to the partner and pro-relationship tendencies, the partner becomes more comfortable being more dependent on and committed toward the person, which in turn makes the partner more likely to act in ways that reveal responsiveness and pro-relationship tendencies, and so the process continues as each individual’s commitment and trust in the other’s responsiveness grows (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Although research on mutual cyclical growth does not directly examine all investment model components, it rests squarely on the idea that commitment, not satisfaction, brings about actions that will cause a relationship to persist.

Research on mutual cyclical growth underscores the manner in which relationship maintenance phenomena act to increase the partner’s commitment. The partner essentially makes an attribution about the person acting in a pro-relationship manner, and this attribution (that the person cares) fuels increases in the partner’s investments, satisfaction, and commitment. Moreover, when a person acts in a pro-relationship manner, such acts make salient to the person that he or she is committed and cares about the relationship unit (Agnew et al., 1998; Wieselquist et al., 1999). As such, relationship maintenance perceptions and acts likely influence couple members’ satisfaction, alternatives, and investments and thus “effects” may become “causes.” For example, over time, couple members who have personally sacrificed a lot for the partner will likely come to view such sacrifices as increases in their investments).

In short, the investment model has been extraordinarily generative in stimulating an entire research area that explains specifically how and why enduring relationships are maintained, where others end. The investment model triggered a systematic analysis of much of what transpires in ongoing relationships. In the next section, we describe empirical tests assessing the generalizability of the investment model and review ways in which the model has stimulating research on a host of socially relevant topics.

Generalizability and Empirical Robustness of the Investment Model

In the years since its initial testing, the investment model has been employed in a range of studies applying the model to participants of diverse ethnicities (Davis & Strube, 1993; Lin & Rusbult, 1995), homosexual and heterosexual partnerships (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Kurdek, 1991, 1995), abusive relationships (Choice & Lamke, 1999; Rhatigan & Axsom, 2006; Rusbult & Martz, 1995), socially marginalized relationships (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007), and friendships (Hirofumi, 2003; Lin & Rusbult, 1995; Rusbult, 1980). In all of these studies, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size are posited to have additive, main effects on commitment (see Figure 1). The model does not suggest that any one of the three predictors will be particularly influential in driving commitment. Rather, it suggests that all three factors may contribute to the prediction of commitment in an additive fashion.

Multiple regression analyses have been used most often to test the model.

Although the majority of evidence supporting the investment model comes from studies of interpersonal relationships, the model also has been employed in other, non-relational contexts (see Le & Agnew, 2003) with non-relational targets of commitments. For instance, organizational and job commitment (cf. Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Oliver, 1990) have been predicted in studies based on investment model constructs. In addition, Ping (1993, 1997)

adapted the model to describe business interactions, and Lyons and Lowery (1989) have conceptualized commitment to one's residential community using a similar perspective. The investment model has been used successfully to predict patients' commitment to a medical regimen (Putnam, Finney, Barkley, & Bonner, 1994), college students' commitment to their schools (cf. Geyer, Brannon, & Shearon, 1987), and commitment to participating in musical activities (Koslowsky & Kluger, 1986). Finally, the sport commitment model has its roots firmly in the investment model (Raedeke, 1997; Schmidt & Stein, 1991) and has been used to predict commitment of soccer and cricket players to their sports (Carpenter & Coleman, 1998; Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998).

As suggested above, the utility and robustness of the investment model has been demonstrated in numerous studies. A meta-analysis by Le and Agnew (2003) summarizes quantitative data regarding the model's performance, compiling empirical tests conducted through 1999. The meta-analysis included data from 52 studies (including 60 independent samples and over 11,000 participants). Overall, the average correlations between investment model constructs were found to be quite strong. Satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size each were highly correlated with commitment ($r_+ = .68, -.48, .46$ respectively), with the correlation between satisfaction and commitment found to be significantly stronger than the alternatives-commitment and investments-commitment correlations. The absolute magnitudes of the alternatives-commitment and investments-commitment correlations were not significantly different from one another. Satisfaction, alternatives, and investments were also found to be significantly correlated with one another (satisfaction-alternatives $r_+ = -.44$; satisfaction-investments $r_+ = .42$; alternatives-investments $r_+ = -.25$).

Le and Agnew (2003) also examined the average standardized regression coefficients of

commitment regressed simultaneously onto satisfaction, alternatives, and investments, and thus they assessed the relative independent contribution of each variable in predicting commitment. Paralleling the correlational analyses, the meta-analysis revealed that satisfaction was the strongest predictor of commitment ($std \beta_+ = .510$), whereas alternatives and investments were of similar absolute magnitude ($std \beta_+ = -.217$ and $.240$ respectively). In addition, 61% of the variance in commitment (95% CI [.59, .63]) was accounted for by satisfaction, alternatives, and investments collectively. Moreover, moderator analyses suggested that the associations between commitment and its theorized bases vary minimally as a function of demographic (e.g., ethnicity) or relational (e.g., duration) factors.

Commitment is held to mediate the effects of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments on consequential behaviors. The meta-analysis also provided support for this supposition. Specifically, the correlation between commitment and later stay-leave behaviors reported by participants (e.g., whether the couple was still together or the worker was still at the job) across 12 studies was found to be $.47$ (95% CI [.43, .50], $N = 1720$).

Recent Applications of the Investment Model

Since 1999 (the inclusion year cut-off in the Le & Agnew meta-analysis), dozens of additional studies have been published that test the investment model or aspects of it. Some of these papers confirm the findings from earlier publications on the applicability of the investment model in understanding commitment in various types of relationships, beyond romantic involvements, such as instructors' commitment to student supervision (Peleg-Oren, Macgowan, & Even-Zahav, 2007), or parental commitment to their child's pediatrician (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2010).

Recent research also has confirmed findings from earlier publications on the applicability

of the investment model in understanding commitment to non-person targets. For example, the investment model provides predictive value in understanding employees' attitudes toward different job changes (e.g., changing department or relocating to a different office; Van Dam, 2005), clients' commitment to their bank (Kastlunger et al., 2008), child-care providers' commitment to the child-care center that employs them (Gable & Hunting, 2001), and customer loyalty to specific brands (Li and Petrick, 2008).

A recent meta-analysis of predictors of non-marital romantic relationship dissolution also provides additional support for the claim that commitment is a key proximal predictor of stay-leave behavior. Using data collected from nearly 38,000 participants participating in 137 studies over a 33-year period, commitment was found to be a particularly powerful predictor of breakup (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, in press). Specifically, assuming random effects (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001), the weighted mean effect size (d) for commitment in predicting premarital breakup was found to be $-.832$ (95% CI $[-.934, -.729]$).

Recently, the investment model has also been applied to understanding public support for government actions regarding foreign policies. Existing public opinion research often focuses on factors such as partisanship to understand where people stand on foreign policy issues (e.g., Zaller, 1994). By contrast, the investment model would predict that people use specific policy performance criteria to determine the value of persisting with the same policy. Agnew and colleagues (Agnew, Hoffman, Lehmler, & Duncan, 2007) used the investment model to examine commitment to the "war on terror" waged by the United States under President George W. Bush. They conducted two experiments in which they simultaneously manipulated the three investment model constructs (a novel aspect of this research). As predicted by the investment model, participants were most strongly committed to the war on terror when satisfaction with

reported outcomes of the war (e.g., reducing threat to the citizens of the U.S.) and investments in the war (e.g., casualties) were described as high and alternatives (e.g., diplomatic solutions) were described as low. In contrast, participants were least committed to the war when satisfaction and investments were described as low and alternatives were described as high. Similarly, Hoffman, Agnew, Lehmiller, and Duncan (2009) found significant support for the investment model in predicting citizen commitment to their country being a part of both the United Nations and NATO.

Other researchers have used the investment model as a springboard for examining related issues pertinent to commitment. Such papers have not reported formal tests of the overall model; rather, they have used it as the basis for furthering understanding of variables or processes beyond those specified in the investment model. For example, in an analysis of how narcissism relates to commitment, Campbell and Foster (2002) found the association between narcissism and commitment is negative and largely mediated by perceptions of alternatives. Katz, Kuffel, and Brown (2006) found that women involved in sexually-coercive relationships reported greater investment in their relationship but did not differ from other women in satisfaction or commitment. Vaculík and Jedrzejczykova (2009) focused on describing differences between people involved in various types of unmarried cohabitation and used investment model variables to characterize such differences. Taking a social cognitive approach, Etcheverry and Le (2005) tested and found support for the notion that the cognitive accessibility of commitment moderates the association between self-reported commitment and relationship persistence, accommodative responses, and willingness to sacrifice. Finally, in their examination of safer-sex behavior among committed gay male partners, Davidovich, de Wit, and Stroebe (2006) found that low satisfaction with the relationship was associated with more risky unprotected anal intercourse,

whereas high commitment to the relationship was associated with greater efforts toward the practice of safer sex. All of these studies speak to the generalizability of the investment model beyond its originally envisioned use.

Extending the Investment Model

In this last section, we describe a recent extension to the investment model that attempts to account for additional variance in levels of commitment. We begin by focusing on investments. Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) have elaborated on the investment concept, suggesting that the notion of investments should include not only things that have already been invested, but also any *plans* that partners have made, either individually or with the partner, regarding the relationship. In ending a relationship, one loses not only those investments that have been sunken to date but also the possibility of achieving any future plans with the partner. Thus, the plans that one forms with a partner act to keep one's commitment to the partnership alive. One notable aspect of considering future plans as contributing to current commitment is that such plans do not require that relationship partners have much of a shared history together. That is, even partners who have known one another for a relatively short period of time may become quite committed to continuing their relationship, not because of considerable past sunken costs but because of a motivation to see cherished future plans come to fruition. Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) found that future plans were strongly predictive of romantic relationship commitment, above and beyond past investments.

Recent research has also examined how others outside of the dyad might influence a couple's motivation to continue a relationship. Research has examined the associations between perceptions of a social network's approval or disapproval for a romantic relationship and characteristics of that relationship (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001; Arriaga, Goodfriend, &

Lohmann, 2004; Bryant & Conger, 1999; Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007; Loving, 2006; Parks, Stan, & Eggert, 1983; Sprecher 1988; Sprecher & Feinlee, 1992). In general, past studies have shown that qualities, structure, and opinions of social network members are associated with the quality and functioning of dyadic relationships embedded in that network.

Research that integrates the investment model with research on social networks has examined the perceived role of social referents: A couple's commitment can be affected by their perceptions of what important others think of their relationship, as well as the couple members' motivation to follow what others think (i.e., the couple members' "subjective norms"; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Etcheverry and Agnew (2004) found that subjective norms provided additional prediction of relationship commitment, above and beyond the effects of satisfaction, alternatives, and past investments. Moreover, just as behavioral intention mediates the effect of subjective norms on behavior in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), longitudinal analyses indicated that commitment mediated the effect of subjective norms on remaining in a romance approximately 8 months later. Both theoretically and empirically, the subjective norms construct broadens the prediction of relationship commitment beyond the original three predictors of the investment model.

Combining these recent theoretical and empirical advances, Agnew, Arriaga, and Wilson (2008) proposed a new model to account not only for continuity in close relationships but also for possible changes in type of relationship with a given partner (e.g., shifts from romantic involvement to friendship, or vice versa). They proposed the Bases of Relational Commitment Model (BORC Model), which mirrors the investment model in specifying three predictors of commitment. One predictor combines satisfaction and alternatives by focusing on outcomes

relative to standards, harking back to some of the early interdependence writing on outcomes in dyadic interaction (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). A second predictor is an expanded conceptualization of investments – what they refer to as *valued linkages* – which incorporates recent work on future plans (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008). A third predictor, subjective norms, incorporates work by Etcheverry and Agnew (2004) showing that couple members’ commitment is affected by what important others think about their relationship. Initial tests of the BORC Model have yielded supportive findings, with each of the model’s specified variables accounting for unique variance in relationship type commitment and the overall model accounting for over three-quarters of the variance in commitment. Of course, the foundation of this model is “standing on the shoulder of giants,” benefitting from the decades of accumulated knowledge about commitment processes originally set into motion by the investment model.

Concluding Remarks

Most social psychologists are familiar with Kurt Lewin’s famous statement, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory” (1951, p. 169). Lewin would have loved the investment model. The model has provided an extremely practical theoretical framework for understanding and explaining the causes and consequences of commitment. It originated as a model to understand why people remain in romantic relationships. Subsequently, it has been used to examine commitment in all kinds of relationship and to all types of targets. It has also been utilized to examine the specific ways in which commitment brings about persistence, the specific thoughts and actions that differentiate people based on their level of commitment.

There are many ways in which the investment model has had an impact not just on the study of close relationships and the field of social psychology, but also more broadly. First, this model transformed the way scholars in various fields think about commitment. Without the

investment model, our understanding of various commitment processes would be diminished – relationship commitment, yes, but also organizational commitment, sports commitment, policy commitment, etc. Second, the investment model provided a critical new direction in the study of relationships. This new direction comprised a social psychological analysis, vis a vis a structural sociological analysis, and it focused on the *ongoing* course of intimate relationships, rather than focusing on their onset alone. Third, by explicitly modeling a psychological process, the investment model advanced a *scientific analysis* of relationships. As we move into the future, we hope and expect that the investment model will continue to advance theory and applications in social psychology and beyond.

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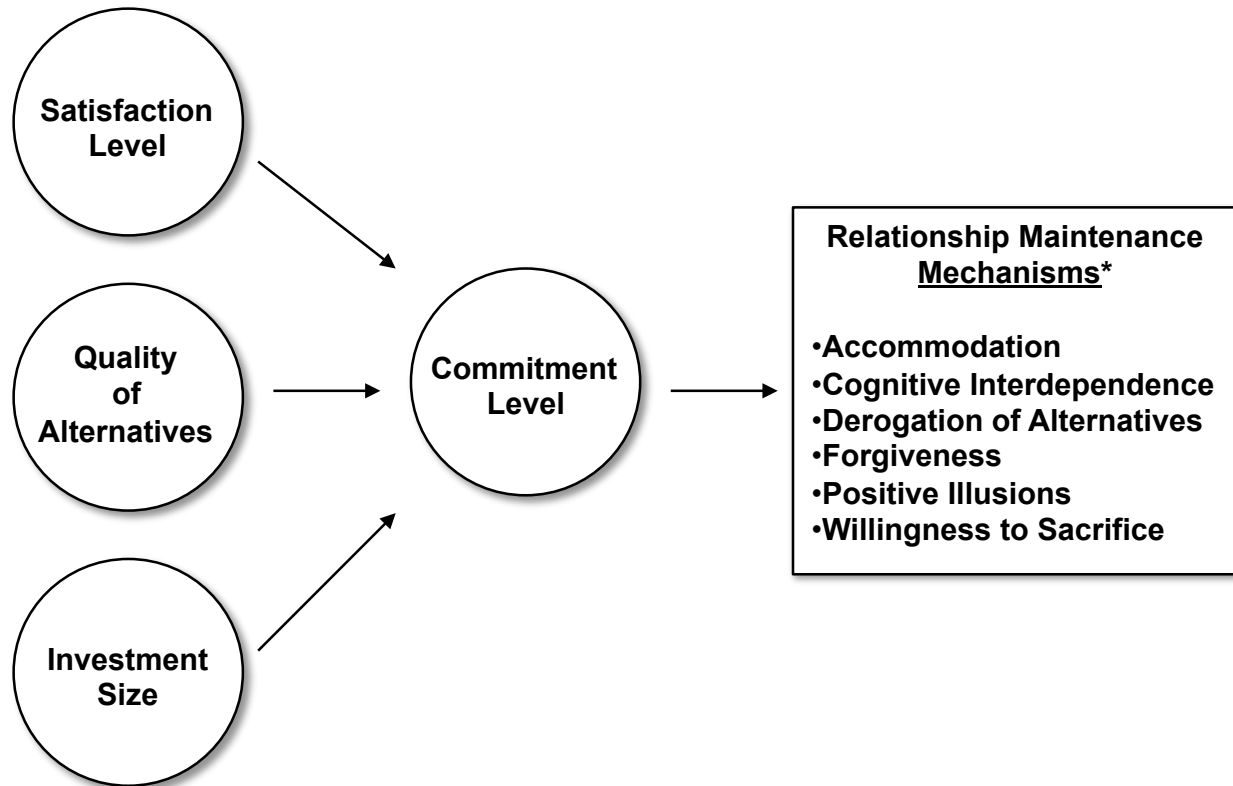
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Figure 1: The Investment Model of Commitment Processes



* Note that the specific relationship maintenance mechanisms listed here are based on extant empirical findings and that future research may uncover additional mechanisms.