DESTINATION MARRIAGE? THE DIAGNOSTIC ROLE OF RITUALS IN DATING
RELATIONSHIPS

BY

CHRISTOPHER R. MANIOTES

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019

Urbana, Illinois

Master's Committee:

    Associate Professor Brian Ogolsky
    Professor Jennifer Hardesty

Abstract

The decision to marry is complex, often with seemingly innocuous events impacting a partner's marriage eligibility. Engaging in rituals is one area where couples have the opportunity to see their partners in a new light as well as assess commitment. Although rituals have impactful roles in married couples, there is a dearth of research when it comes to ritual activity in dating couples. Data from a random sample of dating couples was used to explore how rituals act as facilitators or barriers to commitment to wed. Results showed that celebration and tradition rituals played a contextual role in magnifying the importance of three normative relationship features, that of family interactions, relationship awareness, and conflict management. Experiencing these relationship features during a ritual time highlighted the uncertainty inherent in determining marriage eligibility with a current partner and enhanced the information gathering process.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Commitment is a central feature of relationships, and critical to understanding why divorce rates have doubled for those over 35 in the last two decades (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014). Yet the desire to enter marriage has changed very little during that time (Bogle & Wu, 2010). Although marriage may not appear to hold the same weight it once did in light of rising cohabitation rates (Cherlin, 2009; Lichter, Turner, & Sassler, 2010), over two-thirds of cohabitations result in marriage (Lichter, et al., 2010; Manning & Stykes, 2015). The fact that individuals are entering marriage later (Payne, 2014) suggests that daters may simply be more selective in the process of choosing a partner (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014).

Daters are faced with an important decision when contemplating marriage because marriage requires a higher level of dedication than other forms of commitment such as cohabitation (Ogolsky & Surra, 2014). Uncertainty is inherent in this process, as individuals are aware of the vulnerability, power exchanges, and hopeful outcomes that accompany close relationships (Surra & Bohman, 1991). These hopeful outcomes highlight that future-orientation is a salient feature of commitment for daters (Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999). Thus, gaining relational knowledge about one's partner plays a role in reducing uncertainty by creating a predictable climate regarding future interactions (Surra & Bohman, 1991).

Engaging in rituals (e.g. celebrations and holidays) is an area replete with potential for gaining relational knowledge. Although rituals have been thoroughly examined in family systems (Fiese et al., 2002) and in married couples (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Crespo, Davide, Costa, & Fletcher, 2008), there is a dearth of research on the role of rituals in dating couples. Experiences while dating have implications for the future viability of a relationship, as patterns established during this time can impact later marriage dynamics (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004). Given the emphasis daters place on the future of the relationship and its associated links to commitment and uncertainty, the goal of the present study is to explore how rituals in dating relationships influence commitment to wed a current partner.

Commitment and Relational Type

In a broad sense, commitment encapsulates the belief that a relationship will continue in the future (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Although this general feature is a common thread throughout commitment research, it belies the complexity underlying commitment. As a result, numerous theoretical models have been posited (e.g. Johnson, 1991; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Kelley, 1983; Rusbult 1980; Stanley & Markman, 1992). For example, Stanley and Markman (1992) bring the role of dedication and constraints to the center stage. Rusbult (1980) argues that investments, alternatives, and satisfaction dominate the commitment trajectory. Johnson, however, emphasizes moral, personal, and structural constraint to commitments (Johnson, 1991; Johnson et al., 1999).

1

The issue of a precise definition is further complicated by the type of relationship. Most research on commitment examines global commitment, which broadly addresses constructs that influence changes in continuation (Johnson et al., 1999). This global approach can be limited when examining nuanced experiences by relationship type (e.g., dating, married, cohabiting), as commitment does not always operate similarly in every type of relationship. For example, the key aspect of commitment for married couples is the intention to persist in a relationship that best safeguards against divorce (Schoebi, Karney, & Bradbury, 2012), though for daters the important facet of commitment is the emphasis placed on the continuation of the relationship (Surra et al., 1999).

Commitment to wed can be defined as the perceived likelihood that a relationship will result in marriage and be maintained for the foreseeable future (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Structural constraints are inherently intertwined with marriage, as leaving a marriage is a vastly different experience than leaving a dating relationship. When faced with exiting a marriage, individuals must contend with constraints such as financial and legal barriers and consider investments such as time and shared property. Daters are keenly aware of this, as structural constraints and future thoughts impact their changes in commitment to wed (Surra & Gray, 2000). Ultimately global commitment focuses on the general continuation of a relationship, whereas commitment to wed focuses on the goal of marriage. This core difference taps into the nuances individuals navigate when assessing the future. This future-oriented focus, especially pronounced for those considering marriage, creates fertile ground for uncertainty to take root.

Uncertainty and Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are fraught with uncertainty from a myriad of sources, which resulted in the emergence of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The premise of the theory is that individuals have an inherent need to reduce uncertainty, especially within the context of initial interactions (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The theory emphasizes acquiring certainty by way of gathering as much information as possible about the target individual (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), with three prescribed routes through which individuals seek information (Berger, 1979). The three strategies outlined by Berger (1979) are passive, active, and interactive.

Passive strategies include tactics such as making social comparisons, observing unobtrusively in social interactions, and searching for environments that permit a wide range of behaviors to be observed. *Active* strategies, as the name suggests, require energy and utilize others to gain information. One straightforward tactic involves asking third parties for their input about the uncertain issues at hand. Another active strategy is to tailor an environment (e.g. putting a friend in proximity with a partner) to gain information on the behavior of the target individual. Finally, *interactive* strategies focus on tactics used during social interaction, such as verbal engagement with a partner (e.g. asking questions) and engaging in self-disclosure. It is important to note that these various strategies are often governed by

social rules and norms, which play a role in appropriate or socially acceptable ways to seek information (Berger, 1979).

A voluminous amount of literature has explored uncertainty reduction theory in a range of contexts, and accordingly the theory has been extended to the context of close relationships. Knobloch and Solomon (1999) define relational uncertainty as "the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within close relationships (p. 264)." The less confidence experienced, the more uncertainty. There are three distinct sources of uncertainty that relate to the perceived involvement of the relationship –*self*, *partner*, and *relationship* uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). These sources have been explored separately in uncertainty reduction theory research (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975), and together strengthen the concept of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002).

Research indicates that each of the three sources of relational uncertainty are linked to specific concerns. For example, uncertainty regarding the goals for the progression of the relationship has been found in *self* and *partner* uncertainty and uncertainty about the future of the relationship has found in *relationship* uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Just as the future orientation takes on heightened salience when assessing commitment for daters, it takes on an equally important role in the domain of uncertainty. This future orientation is especially important for daters, as knowledge and impressions coalesce early in relationships (Park, 1986; Wilkinson, 1987). As norms and social rules (e.g. appropriate behavior for the stage of the relationship) permeate this process, uncertainty regarding how to engage in such norms is also considered an essential facet of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Rituals are one area that tap into social norms and uncertainty.

Rituals in Dyadic Relationships

Just as commitment is a dynamic construct with various definitions, rituals are also multifaceted. Specifically, the literature on rituals contains definitions and typologies of how they manifest in families, among friends, and within marital relationships. As a result, rituals can be defined as joint endeavors that are shared by individuals, have a recurring nature, impact communication, and have meaning that goes beyond a routine (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006; Fiese, 2006; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Not all rituals share the same properties, as evident in one of the most widely accepted typologies developed by Wolin and Bennett (1984). This typology situates rituals in three distinct categories – *celebrations*, *traditions*, and *patterned interactions*. *Celebration rituals* include two types of events, rites of passages (e.g. weddings and anniversaries) and holiday observances. *Tradition rituals* (e.g. vacations and reunions) are less organized and more idiosyncratic than celebrations. Finally, *patterned interactions* are engaged in the most, yet often with the least amount of conscious planning. These can be highly idiosyncratic rituals that are engaged in on a daily or weekly basis, such as regular mealtimes and leisure activities.

Rituals have been examined in dyadic relationships, including friendships and marriages. For example, Bruess and Pearson (1997) qualitatively assessed friends and married individuals, resulting in new typologies for each relationship type. Whereas the marital typology developed by Bruess and Pearson (1997) has been adapted to dating relationships to examine commitment (Campbell & Ponzetti Jr., 2007), some have argued that this adaptation is not sufficient in fully explicating the nuanced experience of daters, which has resulted in studies exploring rituals in dating couples (Campbell, Silva, & Wright, 2011; Pearson, Child, & Carmon, 2010). These rituals include the foundational categories contained in Wolin and Bennett's (1984) typology along with four newly identified rituals exclusive to daters (Campbell et al., 2011). Those rituals are *gift-giving*, *family involvement*, *future planning*, and *helping/supportive* rituals. Consistent with commitment and uncertainty research, future orientation is also relevant to daters engaging in rituals.

Although the inclusion of daters in the ritual literature is promising, limited research has explored the intersection of dating and rituals. This is a key area to advance, as rituals confer benefits and knowledge within interpersonal relationships that may relate to uncertainty and commitment. For example, attending the celebration ritual of a wedding highlights for daters the transition to the associated expectations of what it means to be married, tapping into the roles partners take on (Kalmijn, 2004). Rituals also have an inherently organizing structure and emphasize the symbolic nature of relationships (Fiese, 1992), which elevates them to meaning-making experiences. In addition, relational identities are erected through the use of symbolic practices such as rituals (Baxter, 1990). More specifically, marital identity (Braithwaite & Baxter, 1995; Crespo et al., 2008) and couple identity for daters (Campbell et al., 2011) are fortified by the enactment of rituals. In other words, rituals contribute to how individuals see themselves and their partner. For married individuals, rituals also have the ability to boost satisfaction and affirm the relationship (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Rituals also provide the protective role of aiding in transitions. This is in part due to their predictable and repeated nature (Broderick, 1993; Fiese et al., 2002). Ultimately, rituals highlight various components related to relational health (Pearson et al., 2010) and are inherently transformative to relationships (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine how rituals act as facilitators or barriers to commitment to wed.

Chapter Two: The Current Study

The previous section identified the theoretical and empirical nuances explored within commitment, uncertainty, and rituals, yet the intersection of these processes is absent in the literature. Although these phenomena have been extensively explored separately or associated with other processes, there remains a gap in understanding how rituals shape daters' relationships while considering marriage. The current study aimed to fill this gap by answering the following research question: How do rituals act as facilitators or barriers to commitment to wed? Select grounded theory methods (Birks & Mills, 2011) were used to analyze secondary data on daters' assessments of commitment to wed. Although a mid-range theory was not generated nor the goal of the present study, the strategies embedded in the grounded theory approach lend themselves well to exploring an area that has little empirical investigation (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, grounded theory methods are well suited to examining process and meaning (Goldberg & Allen, 2015) embedded in marital assessment for dating couples.

Method

Sample. The data used in this study were taken from a larger study examining commitment to wed in heterosexual dating couples over the course of 9 months. Participants were obtained by way of random digit dialing of approximately 36,000 households in a large southwestern city. Inclusion criteria consisted of dating someone of a different sex, availability to participate in the study for 9 months, between the ages of 19-35, and never married. This resulted in 861 eligible participants, with 27% indicating that their partners were also willing to participate. This resulted in a final sample of 464 individuals (232 couples).

On average, participants in the larger study were approximately 24 years old ($M = 24.80$, $SD = 3.86$ for men; $M = 23.26$, $SD = 3.58$ for women), had about 14 years of formal education ($M = 14.83$, $SD = 2.10$ for men; $M = 14.89$, $SD = 1.83$ for women), and had been in their romantic relationships for just over 2 years ($M = 26.30$ months, $SD = 21.77$). The analytic sample for the current study was a random subsample of 48 participants. Participants from the subsample were also approximately 23 years old ($M = 24.54$, $SD = 3.68$ for men; $M = 22.71$, $SD = 3.11$ for women), had about 15 years of formal education ($M = 14.88$, $SD = 2.25$ for men; $M = 15.04$, $SD = 1.49$ for women) and had been in their relationships for about 2.5 years ($M = 30.64$ months, $SD = 28.11$). There were no significant differences between the subsample and larger sample on any of the aforementioned demographic variables. Age, $t(462) = -0.08$, $p > .05$ [CI -1.12, 1.04]; education, $t(462) = -1.03$, $p > .05$ [CI -0.87, 0.27]; relationship length, $t(462) = -1.00$, $p > .05$ [CI -10.83, 3.51]. The subsample was identified with a random number generator to produce participant identification numbers. The final subsample contained 48 Phase 1 interviews from 48 participants (24 couples).

Procedure. For the larger study couples were recruited together, and over the course of 9 months engaged in three phases of the study. All correspondence and data collection with partners was done separately. Phase 1 included face-to-face interviews lasting between 1-3 hours in which participants were asked about the development of their current relationship from the date it started until the date of the interview. Phase 2 took place over the next 7 months, with a short interview each month lasting between 15-30 minutes. Phase 3 was a replication of the long interview at Phase 1, that took place 1-3 months after the last Phase 2 interview. During each interview participants were given a graph with "chance of marriage" on the *y*-axis and time in months on the *x*-axis and were asked to indicate points in the development of their relationship where the chance of marriage changed. Participants were then asked "Tell me, in as specific terms as possible, what happened here from [date] to [date] that made the chance of marriage go [up/down][__%]." They were then asked, "Is there anything else that happened?" until participants said "No."

Data analysis. Two stages of coding were used during analysis: open coding and focused coding. Open coding involved using gerunds to code actions in an effort to capture process in the data (Glaser, 1978). During open coding, 20 Phase 1 transcripts from 20 participants were coded line by line using gerunds. Gerunds (e.g. visiting family) versus topical codes (e.g. family visit) and line by line coding (vs. incident coding) were used in the beginning of analysis to help the researcher stay close to the data and remain process-oriented (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). The broad focus at the outset was on reasons participants gave for changes in commitment to wed. The initial codes were compared and analyzed by writing memos, staying aligned with constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis was integrated at every stage of coding and required comparing data in various ways (e.g. new codes with existing codes; diagrams with codes) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As the analysis progressed, focused coding was used to sift through data using the most frequent and salient codes identified through open coding (Charmaz, 2006). A random number generator was used again to identify 28 new participants and 28 interviews. Focused coding involves coding incidents (i.e. a complete thought or segment of the data) rather than each line of data, which allows the researcher to check the conceptual fit and relevance of the initial codes (Charmaz, 2006) while continuing to remain open to new codes not yet identified. As memos and diagrams were written, constant comparative analysis shifted to focus on comparing incidents with categories derived from coding and memo writing. The diagrams aided in the process by allowing for additional connections to be made and pushed the analysis forward. Focused coding also involved elevating codes to conceptual categories and explicating their characteristics and dimensions. Through the constant comparative process, codes were condensed and elevated into categories. For example, initial codes such as "meeting partner's family" and "asking family for advice" were subsumed into the category "involving family." Codes that appeared frequently

were elevated to a category, but other codes that appeared meaningful yet infrequent, such as "breaking up" and "reuniting after breakup," were also included in the codebook.

Trustworthiness. Steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness throughout the entire analysis. Trustworthiness involves the accuracy of coding and evidential support associated with the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During analysis another researcher coded a random subset of the interviews and codes were compared and discussed, addressing any inconsistencies and reaching consensus. Inconsistencies during this process primarily revolved around interpreted actions (e.g. relying on family vs interacting with family). This process aligns with Denzin's (1970) investigator triangulation, aimed at adding credibility and reducing bias in the findings. Second, memo writing and diagraming were used throughout the analysis, creating an audit trail (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, direct quotes are provided as evidence of interpretations throughout the results.

Chapter Three: Results

Celebration and tradition rituals took on a meaningful role when assessing commitment to wed, with rituals including annual religious celebrations (e.g. Christmas and Easter), secular holidays (e.g. Fourth of July and New Year's Eve), and rites of passage (e.g. weddings and funerals; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). These rituals facilitated and inhibited commitment to wed by creating a heightened relational context that allowed for three normative relationship features to become magnified. These three features of relationships were family interactions, relationship awareness, and conflict management. Each of these relationship features acted in ways to facilitate or inhibit commitment to wed by taking on an elevated role that provided information to partners during critical relationship moments. In the sections that follow, the context provided by rituals is discussed as well as each heightened relationship feature and the role of rituals in facilitating or inhibiting commitment to wed.

Context

Rituals had a magnifying effect on relationships, in that they served to create a context for the couple that prompted partners to critically consider commitment to wed in ways that differed from non-ritual times. Whereas family interactions, general relationship awareness, and conflict management are common relationship features, when experienced during a ritualized time (e.g. during a holiday), the state of the relationship is often thrust into a cognitive spotlight. Participants were aware that the context provided by rituals differed from non-ritual times. For example, Alina spoke to this when discussing how "we're back at school and things were back to normal I guess, from the holidays and spending time together and being close." James echoed this sentiment: "I think the relief of having the holidays out of the way made us both feel, like our lives were, getting on again." Given such statements, individuals recognized that entering the ritualized context created a break from what is "normal" and that this context is fixed in place until the ritual concludes. The three relationship features that follow demonstrate how experiencing ritualized contexts inhibited or facilitated commitment to wed.

Family Interactions

Facilitating commitment to wed. Rituals often bring couples together with close and extended family. This is in part due to the social and historical practices deeply engrained in rituals. For example, families of the bride and groom seated on opposite sides of a ceremony, extended family congregating at a funeral, or children waiting to open gifts from parents on Christmas morning are all family-centric ritual practices. This family presence tasks members with enacting and preserving rituals. By including family in various rituals, families have the opportunity to model their relationships, dispense relationship advice, and accept or decline new members in the family unit. For example, watching another's anniversary celebration served as a relationship template as Ricky described: "I was just watching my folks. You know they've been married for 30 years and just had their 30th anniversary. . . . I mean they just

communicate, they sit there and they tell each other how they feel and . . . it's the way that I've tried to do our relationship." Ricky touched on how observing the ritual of an anniversary helped to create a relationship blueprint amidst the uncertainty of contemplating a life together with his partner.

Families also played an active role in the ritual experience. Often this took the form of vetting new partners and dispensing relationship advice. For example, Kourtney talked about how "I went back the next week for Christmas and went over to my Dad and was talking to him and he was asking all these questions about [him] and . . . he didn't seem to think he was weird or anything." With the context of Christmas, Kourtney's father took a more active role in learning about a partner who may become a new addition to their Christmas ritual. In addition, family acceptance of a partner was a salient factor in the ritual context. After Kourtney's father assessed her partner, she recounted that

Family approval [is] kind of there. I'm not real close to my dad and he doesn't really have much say over my life, but it's nice to have that sort of acceptance, [at] least for . . . me, so I don't feel judged.

Other participants also detailed the impact of family approval during rituals. Alyssa explained that:

We took our trip to California. . . . we went to a wedding up there and his family accepted me more as a family member now instead of just [his] girlfriend. . . . I think it kinda got us a little bit closer.

Family acceptance is crucial because it creates a sense of certainty. In Alyssa's case, not only was family acceptance a central feature to the ritual context of a wedding, but the wedding itself modeled a successful relationship and prompted deeper marital considerations. James also described how he felt to be accepted by his partner's family: "Well I felt very comfortable at her mother's house. I got along well with her mother. She wanted me to go there for Christmas . . . [and] I'd say [my commitment to marry her increased] like another 10%." Once the family acceptance hurdle had been passed, it allowed for comfort and closeness to further develop.

Roberta explained an additional layer to the acceptance experience:

Moving [in] with his parents, getting close to his family and having them, especially after my big fight with my mom, having them embrace me more you know and just really feeling the love from his whole family and then him . . . once again standing by me. . . . so [commitment to wed] was going up.

In this example, family acceptance became even more critical, as it intersected with the ritual of moving in together with a partner's family. More was at stake for both Roberta and her partner's family, so the acceptance here continued to convey greater certainty in the partnership.

Participants also discussed the impact of family presence during the holidays, even when family members were not physically present. Kevin explained:

Christmas . . . she had a lot of trouble getting rid of the bond that she and her parents had because they were really close and her coming to A from B was kind of a big shock for her. . . . so I kind of helped her through it.

In a similar vein of facilitating commitment to wed, Jessica recounted with her partner that, "spending Christmas with his family seemed to . . . [increase commitment to wed by] maybe 10%." For participants, the role of Christmas acted as a paramount holiday to bring families together, both physically and in thought.

Inhibiting commitment to wed. As families are complex organizations, they did not always play a facilitating role when in the context of ritual times. Although the aforementioned individuals experienced families modeling relationships and accepting new members, some individuals faced a clash of expectations as well as a lack of inclusion. With Christmas at the forefront, Nina described her experience with her partner's family:

We decided to spend Christmas together, which we'd never done before . . . and for me it was the day from hell. I found his family's traditions to be real different. . . . my family's real close, and Christmas is a real sentimental time. His family is real spread out it's more of a time to do a lot of drinking, to joke around a lot and just very different, and I was feeling very isolated. . . . I found that Steve wasn't really as sensitive to my feelings as I wanted him to be . . . and so the day after Christmas we drove back and I suddenly just kinda let loose with how I was feeling. And instead of compassion he was very defensive, which in a way I can understand, but his evaluation was that it was a mistake to spend Christmas together and we just became very angry with each other. By the time we got back here, we weren't speaking at all and he suggested that we stop dating.

Just as families modeled what it would be like to be in a good relationship, families also provided a template of what future rituals would look like. Nina conveyed what was meaningful to her about Christmas and how it differed from her partner and his family's traditions. Although the ritual itself was problematic, Nina's partner's response was the most salient takeaway. The defensive stance he took was absent of an understanding of Nina's perspective, which impacted commitment.

Giselle described similar frustrations when attempting to integrate with her partner's family during Christmas:

His mother would . . . [make] sure that everybody had [their] presents and . . . his mother would talk to me . . . gradually. I noticed that. And me and [him] talked about that

because it makes him mad because everything I do for him, you know, they don't

appreciate. . . . it was mainly around Christmas time that I started seeing that.

As rituals require families to adapt to new members, roles, and obligations (Broderick, 1993) a lack of such adaptation can create disharmonious experiences. With Giselle, the context of Christmas elevated her awareness of a dynamic with her partner's mother that was not apparent before. Her partner's mother had not adapted to the new role Gisele had in their family and this spilled into Gisele's relationship, as evident from her partner's anger about the situation. Just as Nina grappled with how to make meaning of her place in her partner's family, Gisele also struggled with a sense of her role in the ritual of Christmas and a feeling of not being accepted.

Although Nina and Giselle describe accounts of their encounters with their partner's family, Rob described a preemptive measure before even meeting his partner's family:

We were going to tell her parents that we were gonna be engaged that Christmas. And it wasn't that I didn't want to marry [her] so much as I didn't want to be engaged or married. So I felt that once we told her parents, my parents already knew, but once we told her parents, then I had to follow through. And so I broke it off before we could tell her parents.

Rob's experience speaks to how rituals create a context that magnifies common relationship features, in this case family interaction. For Rob, a Christmas engagement created an accelerated timetable, one that he was not ready for. If the engagement had not happened near Christmas, the pressure to formally announce might not have been the same.

Even though Christmas was the most salient holiday for family presence, it was not the only holiday context experienced. Ryan recounted family presence magnified at Easter: "We were debating about Easter, whether we were gonna be going to see each other and we also thought how to end the fight that our families were getting in the way. . . . [we] were deciding whether we wanted to see each other or not." With Ryan, this was not the first experience he had with family interference. By the time Easter was nearing, the family dynamics in place created a tenuous environment that impacted their time together.

Relationship Awareness

Facilitating commitment to wed. The heightened relationship awareness in the context of rituals was also quite salient to participants. Celebration and tradition rituals provided opportunities to contemplate a future with a partner and the overall state of a relationship. Although participants described a number of rituals, the celebration ritual of weddings took on a heightened meaning relative to other rituals, often allowing for participants to gain insight on their own progression to marriage. Larissa provided an example of this and talked about how "my ex-roommate got married . . . and just being involved with that, it really seemed to, I don't know, it got me more interested in [marriage] and more

11

thinking about it." The context provided by the ritual of marriage allows for a host of relationship thoughts to emerge, from aforementioned considerations of family acceptance, to more idiosyncratic ways of internalizing the experience.

Alex echoed this statement about the wedding experience with his partner Larissa and mentioned that "getting involved in her friend's wedding. . . . you know we talked about it some more . . . that commitment of getting married and you know, raising a family." Here Alex talked about what that same experience meant for him, and discussed how it went beyond just thinking to having a conversation. The relationship awareness that becomes heightened during a ritual has the ability to prompt conversations as well as thoughts that extend beyond the act of getting married, such as raising a family.

The act of moving in together also heightened awareness about the potential for marriage. Moving in together can be categorized as a celebration ritual, specifically a rite of passage that is imbued with meaning. For example, Roberta recalled:

> For him to move away from his parents and move in with me . . . I'd say [commitment to
> wed] probably went up. . . . and we weren't certain what was gonna happen moving in a
> new place, but he was right there with me and he says, "Ok . . . we are gonna do this" and
> . . . I started seeing him in a different light.

Again returning to the role of meaning in rituals, Roberta imbues special meaning to her partner's actions during the context of the moving in together. This experience leads her to a greater awareness of her partner, which in turn facilitates her commitment to wed.

Stacey also discussed a deeper level of awareness during the act of moving in together. For example, when asked about a recent increase in commitment to wed, Stacey relayed that, "him asking me to live with him made me feel like he was a lot more confident about having a relationship seriously, and . . . him asking me to live with him was a big step for him, just because he was able to admit that he was in a serious relationship and handle it." Both Stacey and Roberta saw qualities in their partners that only became highly visible during the context of a ritual, in this case moving in together. The qualities they identify in their partners, such as taking a chance and imparting optimism, also engendered certainty in the face of the uncertainty they both articulated.

Sometimes the magnified awareness was not focused on the partner, but rather on oneself as Chloe explained with her unexpected move in: "When we moved in together. That probably made [commitment to wed] go up just a little bit higher because I always said to myself I would never move in with someone and I kinda didn't move in with him on purpose." In this case, Chloe had to reconcile her long-standing relationship beliefs with the reality she found herself in during the ritual of moving in together. The context provided by moving in together magnified an awareness of the break in her own rules, yet that very break signaled greater certainty and facilitated commitment to wed. Even just

discussing this rite of passage was impactful, as Kayla demonstrated: "We started talking about moving in together. I was 100% sure at that time we were gonna get married . . . and I realized that . . . this is the guy I'm gonna marry."

Tradition rituals such as birthdays also prompted couples to assess their relationship. Jason explained:

> That was my birthday that year. We had gone out together and we had dinner and spent the night together. And that was around about the time that we had first started talking about the relationship being a long term kind of thing as opposed to more just enjoying ourselves for the time being. We both realized that we really wanted something more than that out of it.

Jason demonstrated the power of a ritualized context to act as a catalyst for deeper relationship thoughts and longevity.

Alina also explained how her involvement in a birthday celebration prompted further thoughts about her partner:

> And then there's like . . . a sharp increase [in commitment] at the end of December . . . because I decided I was going to give a party for his birthday. . . . I think I realized when I decided I was gonna take the effort to do all that, that I realized how much he meant. And me organizing the party for him . . . made me realize how much I valued him . . . and felt that he deserved something like that.

Alina's assessment of her behavior is yet another example of how ritual contexts work in ways to magnify commitment to wed. Alina also described how her partner's actions on her birthday further allowed her to assess her partner:

> And I guess on my birthday it probably went up a lot because he was always doing sweet stuff. . . . he took me out to dinner, some nice place and bought me flowers. . . . it made me feel more secure. I guess it reinsured the fact that this is a good guy and thoughtful and everything.

For Alina, birthdays were a context that served as a guidepost for the relationship, in turn creating greater certainty in the relationship. These examples demonstrate that it is not just the mere presence of a ritual that transforms a relationship, but it is also how individuals talk about and engage in such rituals that creates a reverberating effect on the relationship.

Anniversaries, when celebrated, were another ritual context that facilitated a greater awareness. Jessica relayed this when saying:

> Right around April when we were hitting our 9-month anniversary . . . somebody had told me once that if you reach 9 months with somebody that it was sort of a possibility that

13

maybe it would . . . be a good relations[hip]. . . . for some reason I just took a lot of stock

in it and when I realized that we were making it further than 9 months . . . I could tell that

. . . we weren't gonna just break up right after April. It gave me a lot of . . . hope.

Similar to weddings, the ritual of anniversaries also modeled what a relationship should look like and served as a milestone that uniquely positioned individuals to assess and celebrate the past while also looking towards the future. In this example, Jessica not only drew certainty from the anniversary, but also what that anniversary actually signals. This continued to tie in with the multilayered meanings that rituals inherently took on. Similarly, Erika explained:

We had our first year anniversary and he made it really special. . . . it was just a feeling

that was growing inside me that I wanted to be with him for more years. . . . the

anniversary was the time to think of all the good things and the way our relationship has

changed and grown in the past year.

Again, commitment to wed is bolstered by experiencing an anniversary. Anniversaries are especially salient to marital considerations because they directly relate to the relationship, as opposed to other rituals such as holidays.

Kevin also talked about how celebrating an anniversary contributed to a joint shift in perspective:

And then on February fourth we went ahead and celebrated our two-year anniversary,

even though there was a three-month hiatus or whatever you want to call it, and that was

probably a high point. We knew that we were sort of on the right track and that we'd

been together for two years and so we could probably make it and everything.

In this case, experiencing an anniversary cemented the relationship, even in the face of a prior breakup. Kevin and his partner characterized the relationship as resilient, a thought prompted by the ritual context of an anniversary. Beliefs about a relationship, such as resiliency, then become integrated in an individual's assessment of commitment to wed. In the case of anniversaries, this ritual allowed for a comprehensive reflection of the relationship and provided confidence that they were on the right path.

Finally, the context provided by holiday celebration rituals also allowed for a unique time to gain greater awareness. For example, Mark discussed how:

We had just spent our first holidays together. And at that point in time really seemed like

we were . . . starting to open up and trust one another and really communicate and just

continued to fall that much more in love.

Although holidays may not play the role that other rituals do in prompting greater awareness, they still are an important piece to consider. Similar to how Jason extracted resiliency during the time of an

anniversary, Mark extracted trust and communication as key takeaways from experiencing the context of holiday rituals.

Conflict Management

  Facilitating commitment. Although it may seem counterintuitive, conflict in the context of rituals played a positive role at times. Managing conflict and seeing it as surmountable reinvigorated the relationship. For example, in the aftermath of a fight near Valentine's Day, Ryan said, "we talked things over. What had been happening and stuff like that, what our feelings towards the current situation was, things like that. And basically it was a reaffirmation of what we felt and everything like that." Valentine's Day was an especially important holiday for couples, as it centered solely on the couple, informing the relationship dynamics present at that time.

  As recounted before with Easter and family interference, even the anticipation of an upcoming ritual can impact the ways couples navigate their relationship. In a similar vein, time apart during a ritual aided in managing the conflict as Erika described: "We got to spend some time apart because we both went home for Christmas. So that helped to give us both a chance to step back and think about the . . . big fight we just had." Had the context of Christmas not forced a separation and subsequent pause after a fight, the same perspective might not have been gained.

  In another example of facilitation, Shelly recounted how the rite of passage of moving out from one's parents' house prompted conflict about the future along with new information about her partner's future orientation:

> He got his own apartment so he wasn't living with his Dad anymore which gave him a
> new sense of freedom, [but] I had so many talks with him about how I felt, that you know
> it was ok to hope for a future together and he was afraid to hope for a future. . . . he didn't
> want to make any sudden decisions and didn't want to think about the future and just
> wanted to be together and that was it. And I said that I had to be able to hope about the
> future and plan even if that didn't happen. He didn't want to hope for it because he didn't
> want to have the pain if it didn't come about but I was convinced that it was better to go
> ahead and hope for it and make plans just in case. If it didn't then you recover. So I think
> [commitment to wed] went up there.

In Shelly's case, the conflict surrounding her partner's trepidation was tied in with his newfound freedom attained by experiencing the ritual context of moving for the first time. Shelly was able to successfully generate certainty by way of managing the conflict that arose during this ritual context.

  Inhibiting commitment to wed. Although conflict proved to be facilitative at times, this was not always the case. Alyssa described such conflict in relation to her partner's birthday celebration:

15

So then on his birthday I was at work…and we had planned a really nice dinner and I

never could get back in touch with him. And when I got home his friends were like,

"well you know I thought . . . we were all supposed to meet at some place," and I went to

that place and he was there with that one girl and I got over-jealous and I caused a big

scene and I was just really really upset 'cause I've really never seen him with another girl

and . . . I overreacted.

In this case, rituals such as birthdays have a prescribed structure to them that when altered can exacerbate concerns and create an element of uncertainty. A hallmark of rituals is the predictable structure attached to them. As such, expectations were embedded in many participants' accounts of rituals. In Alyssa's case, the context of her partner's birthday created a heightened set of expectations that only came about because of the ritual.

Steve also described conflict, this time at the intersection of two ritual times: New Year's and an anniversary:

Basically, we got in fight on New Year's. Pretty much kind of rocked our relationship

quite a bit. . . . it was a bad New Year's to try and spend together . . . and it was our

anniversary and basically we were working on each other's nerves.

Whereas anniversaries in the absence of conflict and/or another ritual proved helpful, the presence of conflict and two intersecting rituals acted to compound the situation. Steve's example, along with others who discussed the positive role of anniversaries and holidays, demonstrate that rituals are inherently neutral contexts that magnify the relationship features at the given time.

Ultimately, rituals provided a context in which typical relationship features took on heightened meanings. During the context of rituals, these relationship features were often used as diagnostic tools that generated more or less certainty in the partnership. Whether the degree of certainty came from external sources such as family or internal sources such as introspection about one's own actions, the result was still the same – changes in commitment to wed were inextricably tied to the various rituals individuals experienced.

Chapter Four: Discussion

This study aimed to explore how individuals' experiences with rituals influenced commitment to wed with a current partner. Rituals were found to play a key background role that served as the context individuals navigated while dating. When experiencing this ritual context, three normative features of relationships took on greater importance. Those three aspects were *family interactions*, *relationship awareness*, and *conflict management*.

Family interactions proved to be an important area for daters, a feature consistent with research on the role of rituals in dating couples (Campbell et al., 2011). Campbell and colleagues (2011) categorized family interactions as a new type of ritual for daters, whereas family interactions in the current study were not ritualized (e.g. regular visits). Instead, family interactions took on various forms, from advice-seeking to modeling what a marriage may look like. These types of family interactions can be experienced during any time in a relationship, but the current study found that when they co-occur with a ritual they act as an information-gathering strategy. As family related rituals assist in personal development (Fiese, 1992; Giblin, 1995; Mize, 1995), the marital journey can be seen as an extension of such growth, with ritualized family interactions prompting deeper life considerations.

In past research, relationship awareness and conflict management were two relationship features that have not been explored in relation to rituals for daters. Participants often talked about how these two relationship features impacted their marital assessments when occurring with celebration and tradition rituals. Whereas relationship awareness proved to be solely facilitative for commitment to wed during ritual times, conflict management and family interactions played a dual role in both facilitating and inhibiting commitment to wed.

This finding provides a glimpse into the mechanisms that drive the information-gathering process. The reasons why family interactions and conflict management played dual roles whereas relationship awareness did not, can be examined through the lens of information-gathering strategies posited by Berger (1979). These *passive*, *active*, and *interactive* strategies were all strategies used by participants in this study. Family interactions and conflict management contained all three strategies, whereas relationship awareness only contained passive and interactive strategies. In fact, for relationship awareness, the majority of participants relied on interactive strategies (e.g. those done with a partner) to gather information. These interactive conversations brought the relationship to the forefront for participants. Combined, interactive and passive strategies used by participants fortified certainty and fostered commitment to wed.

The relationship awareness found in the current study could be accounted for by the mechanisms of relationship thinking, which promote a better understanding of a relationship and impact the perceived outcomes of the experiences of daters (Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Wilson, 1995). These two mechanisms of

17

relationship thinking were embedded in relationship awareness in the current study. Further, partners' communicative interactions are predicted by the level of complexity involved in relationship thinking (Martin, 1992), which may have played a role in the interactive component participants exhibited when communicating with one another. Marital assessments are inherently complex by virtue of all a marriage entails, such as personal, social, and legal changes to one's life. Essentially, the relationship between how participants thought about their relationship and how they communicated was a salient feature that directed information gathering and commitment to wed.

Finally, the relationship awareness finding could also be due to the fact that relying on outsiders (e.g. active strategies) generates information not viewed as reliable as information generated by an environment/oneself (e.g. passive strategies) or one's partner (e.g. interactive strategies). For example, this was evident when Kourtney explained that her father's opinions about her partner were not essential to her decision-making process.

The passive strategy was also relevant when participants recalled attending weddings for friends and family, described what a parent's marriage looked like, and recalled knowledge about how the number of months together reflected a stable relationship. This social comparison extended to participants when they compared what rituals would look like *with* or *without* a partner. This finding is supported by the fact that when making negative social comparisons, individuals gain more information about what traits they want in a partnership, whereas positive social comparisons predict greater commitment (Morry & Sucharyna, 2016).

Participants in the current study described positive social comparisons that facilitated commitment to wed. Such comparisons tie in with an important antecedent of information gathering and reducing uncertainty, deviation from expectations (Berger, 1979). Participants were able to explain how deviations were a catalyst to deeper thinking about their partner and the future of the relationship. Some deviations played a facilitative role whereas some were inhibitive. This is a fine-tuned distinction, as deviations were part of a broader constellation of ritual-based activity. Although participants expressed uncertainty and searched for information, reductions in uncertainty did not always equate to facilitating commitment to wed.

Limitations. There are several limitations that may prompt future research. First, whether participants eventually married each other is unknown. Such data could extend the current research and provide a rich account of what rituals were the most impactful for eventually committing to marriage and why. Another limitation lies in the representativeness of the sample, as participants were all in different-sex relationships. Individuals in same-sex relationships might enact different rituals together as well as alter behavior or avoid family rituals based on the climate at home and in their community. For example, lesbian couples' face difficulties in navigating the private/public divide of rituals (Suter, Bergen, Daas,

Durham, 2006). Finally, only retrospective reports of commitment to wed were used, which can be subject to memory distortions (Ogolsky & Surra, 2014).

   Future directions. Whereas previous literature on rituals has noted the presence of celebration rituals for daters and married individuals, these rituals are reported to be the most infrequent of all rituals enacted together (Bruess & Pearson, 1997; Campbell et al., 2011). Although celebration rituals have an inherently limited nature to them (e.g. holidays occur once a year), the role these rituals play has not been examined in daters before this study. The dynamics at play that cause such low frequency events to be so highly impactful to commitment needs further inquiry. This may be an especially fruitful and overlooked area of rituals when it comes to daters. Also, as the relationship awareness component was solely facilitative in this study, the intersection of relationship thinking and rituals warrants further examination. Finally, researchers are encouraged to broadly examine rituals in dating relationships. As this is still a burgeoning area of the field, a greater focus will provide insight into how rituals operate in various contexts as well as adding to the literature on how dating relationships later impact marriage.

References

Baxter, L. A. (1990). Dialectical contradictions in relationship development. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7*(1), 69–88. doi:10.1177/0265407590071004

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2006). Family rituals. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 259-280). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:10.4135/9781452233024.n14

Berger, C.R. (1979). Beyond initial interaction: Uncertainty, understanding, and the development of interpersonal relationships. In H. Giles & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Language and social psychology* (pp. 122–144). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Berger, C. R. (1988). Uncertainty and information exchange in developing relationships. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 239-256). Chichester, EN: Wiley.

Berger, C. R., & Bradac, J. J. (1982). *Language and social knowledge: Uncertainty in interpersonal relationships.* London, UK: Edward Arnold.

Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*(2), 99-112. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x

Birks, M. & Mills, J. (2011). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bogle, R. H., & Wu, H. S. (2010). *Thirty years of change in marriage and union formation attitudes, 1976–2008 (FP-10-03)*. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family and Marriage Research. Retrieved from https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/NCFMR/documents/FP/FP-10-03.pdf

Braithwaite, D.O., & Baxter, L.A. (1995). "I Do" again: The relational dialectics of renewing marriage vows. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12*, 177-198.

Broderick, C. B. (1993). *Understanding family process: Basics of family systems theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage.

Bruess, C. J. S., & Pearson, J. C. (1997). Interpersonal rituals in marriage and adult friendship. *Communication Monographs*, *64*(1), 25–46.

Campbell, K., & Ponzetti, J. J., Jr. (2007). The moderating effects of rituals on commitment in premarital involvements. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *22*(4), 415–428. doi:10.1080/14681990701496415

Campbell, K., Silva, L. C., & Wright, D. W. (2011). Rituals in unmarried couple relationships: An exploratory study. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, *40*(1), 45–57. doi:10.1111/j.1552-3934.2011.02087.x

Cate, R. M., Koval, J., Lloyd, S. A., & Wilson, G. (1995). Assessment of relationship thinking in dating relationships. *Personal Relationships*, *2*, 77 – 95. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1995.tb00079.x

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practice guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cherlin, A. (2009). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said "I do": Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66,* 613–626. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00041.x

Crespo, C., Davide, I. N., Costa, M. E., & Fletcher, G. J. O. (2008). Family rituals in married couples: Links with attachment, relationship quality, and closeness. *Personal Relationships, 15*, 191–203. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2008.00193.x

Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Fiese, B. H. (2006). *Family routines and rituals*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fiese, B. H., & Tomcho, T. J. (2001). Finding meaning in religious practices: The relation between religious holiday rituals and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *15*(4), 597–609.

Fiese, B. H., Tomcho, T. J., Douglas, M., Josephs, K., Poltrock, S., & Baker, T. (2002). A review of 50 years of research on naturally occurring family routines and rituals: Cause for celebration? *Journal of Family Psychology*, *16*(4), 381–390. doi:10.1037//0893-3200.16.4.381

Giblin, P. (1995). Identity, change, and family rituals. *The Family Journal*, *3*(1), 37–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480795031006

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine.

Goldberg, A. E., & Allen, K. R. (2015). Communicating qualitative research: Some practical guideposts for scholars. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *77*(1), 3–22. doi:10.1111/jomf.12153

Johnson, M. P. (1991). Commitment to personal relationships. In W. H. Jones, & D. W. Pelman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships* (pp. 117-143). London, UK: Jessika Kingsley.

Johnson, M., Caughlin, J., & Huston, T. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 61*(1), 160-177. doi:10.2307/353891

Kalmijn, M. (2004). Marriage rituals as reinforcers of role transitions: An analysis of weddings in the Netherlands. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 582–594. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00039.x

Kelley, H. H. (1983). Love and commitment. In H. Kelley, E. Berscheid, A. Christensen, J. Harvey, T. Huston, G. Levinger, I. McClintock, L.A. Peplau, & D. Peterson (Eds.), *Close relationships* (pp. 265–314). New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.

Kennedy, S., Ruggles, S. (2014). Breaking up is hard to count: The rise of divorce in the United States, 1980–2010. *Demography, 51*(2), 587–598. doi:10.1007/s13524-013-0270-9

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (1999). Measuring the sources and content of relational uncertainty. *Communication Studies, 50,* 261–278. doi:10.1080/10510979909388499

Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2002). Information seeking beyond initial interaction: Negotiating relational uncertainty within close relationships. *Human Communication Research*, *28*(2), 243–257. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00806.x

Lichter, D. T., Turner, R. N., & Sassler, S. (2010). National estimates of the rise in serial cohabitation. *Social Science Research, 39*, 754–765. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.11.002

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Manning, W. D., & Stykes, B. (2015). Twenty-five years of change in cohabitation in the U.S., 1987-2013.(FP-15-01). National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from http://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/ BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/NCFMR/documents/FP/FP-15-01-twenty-five-yrs-change-cohab.pdf

Martin, R. W. (1992). Relational cognition complexity and relational communication. *Communication Monographs,* 59,150-163. doi:10.1080/03637759209376258

Mize, L. (1995). Ritual experience and its emergence with story: An experience in meaning. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 17*, 109-125. doi:10.1007/BF02249308

Morry, M. M., & Sucharyna, T. A. (2016). Relationship social comparison interpretations and dating relationships. *Personal Relationships, 23*, 554–576. doi:10.1111/pere.12143

Ogolsky, B., & Surra, C. (2014). A comparison of concurrent and retrospective trajectories of commitment to wed. *Personal Relationships, 21*, 620-639. doi:10.1111/pere.12054

Park, B. (1986). A method for studying the development of impressions of real people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 907-917. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.51.5.907

Payne, K. K. (2014). Marriage rate in the U.S., 2013. National Center for Family and Marriage Research: Family Profiles, FP-14–15, 1–3. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1100&context=ncfmr_family_profiles

Pearson, J. C., Child, J. T., & Carmon, A. F. (2010). Rituals in committed romantic relationships: The creation and validation of an instrument. *Communication Studies, 61*, 464–483. doi:10.1080/ 10510974.2010.492339.

Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *16*, 172–186. doi:10.1016/0022-1031(80)90007-4

Schoebi, D., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2012). Stability and change in the first 10 years of marriage: Does commitment confer benefits beyond the effects of satisfaction? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*, 729–742. doi:10.1037/a0026290

Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *54*, 595–608. doi:10.2307/353245

Surra, C. A., & Bohman, T. (1991). The development of close relationships: A cognitive perspective. In G. J. O. Fletcher & F. D. Fincham (Eds.), *Cognition in close relationships* (pp. 281-305). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Surra, C. A., & Gray, C. E. (2000). A typology of processes of commitment to marriage: Why do partners commit to problematic relationships? In L. J. Waite, C. Backrach, M. Hindin, E. Thomson & A. Thornton (Eds.), *The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation* (pp. 253–280). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Surra, C. A., & Hughes, D. K. (1997). Commitment processes in accounts of the development of premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *59*(1), 5–21. doi:10.2307/353658

Surra, C. A., Hughes, D. K., & Jacquet, S. E. (1999). The development of commitment to marriage: A phenomenological approach. In J. M. Adams & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal commitment and relationship stability* (pp. 125 – 148). New York, NY: Kluwer.

Suter, E. A., Bergen, K. M., Daas, K. L., & Durham, W. T. (2006). Lesbian couples' management of public-private dialectical contradictions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 23*, 349–365. doi:10.1177/0265407506064201.

Wilkinson, S. (1987). Explorations of self and other in a developing relationship. In R. Burnett, P. McGhee, & D. Clark (Eds.), *Accounting for relationships: Explanation, representation, and knowledge* (pp. 40-59). London, UK: Methuen.

Wolin, S. J., & Bennett, L. A. (1984). Family rituals. *Family Process, 23*(3), 401-420. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1984.00401.x