

Approach Versus Avoidance: Different Types of Commitment in Intimate Relationships

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The major objective of the present study was to examine whether approach versus avoidance commitment to one's intimate relationship was differentially predictive of relationship quality parameters in the long run. In the 1st testing period, 134 participants (67 romantic couples) answered questions about approach- versus avoidance-related measures. Commitment and relationship quality parameters such as satisfaction and emotions depending on the partner's presence were assessed in all 3 testing periods. The proposed distinction between an approach and an avoidance type of commitment was validated through correlations with other approach- versus avoidance-related measures. Longitudinal analyses revealed that approach commitment predicted relationship quality parameters positively, whereas avoidance commitment predicted them negatively. The results are discussed in terms of the benefit of an approach-avoidance-based conceptualization of commitment.

Commitment to one's romantic relationship is a key construct in explaining relationship functioning (e.g., M. Johnson, 1991; Lund, 1985; Lydon, 1996; Rusbult, 1980; Sternberg, 1986). For many years, researchers in the field of close relationships have been defining commitment in many different ways (for an overview, see Lydon, 1996). Nevertheless, agreement does at least exist with respect to the view that commitment refers to a specific psychological state "in which a person feels tied or connected to someone" (Lydon, 1996, p. 192) and that "directly influences P's [a person's] decision to continue or end a relationship" (Rusbult, 1991, p. 156). Research on commitment in the realm of intimate relationships has mostly been guided by interdependence theory and its extension in Caryl Rusbult's investment model (e.g., Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999; for an overview, see

Rusbult, 1991). In the investment model, commitment is conceptualized as an additive function of (a) satisfaction with the relationship, (b) quality of alternatives, and (c) investment size. More specifically, commitment should increase as the individual feels increasingly satisfied with the relationship, as alternatives decrease in quality, and as the magnitude of the individual's investments in the association becomes greater (Rusbult, 1991).

The primary focus of Rusbult's (1983; Rusbult & Martz, 1995) research was on predicting outcome variables related to the stability of a relationship by directly analyzing the effects of commitment on the duration of the relationship or on behavior aimed at maintaining the relationship. It has been shown, for instance, that the more strongly committed an individual feels to his or her partner in a romantic involvement, the higher is the likelihood that this relationship will persist over time (e.g., Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Lund, 1985; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Furthermore, commitment also produces behavior that extends the longevity of a relationship (e.g., accommodation; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Wieselquist et al., 1999; derogation of alternative partners; D. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Meana, Sepinwall, Richards, & Mayman, 1999; Miller, 1997; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990; willingness to sacrifice; Van Lange et al., 1997). In summary, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that the degree of commitment affects the duration of the relationship.

Aside from assessing the extent of the commitment, however, one might also analyze the specific content of a given commitment and ask why a person feels committed to his or her romantic partner. That is, one could try to specify the incentives a person strives for in his or her relationship. From a motivational point of view, analyzing commitment in terms of its incentives permits a deeper understanding of underlying affective processes (e.g.,

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Heckhausen, 1991; Higgins, 1998). This, in turn, would be useful in going beyond stability concerns and investigating affective effects of commitment that are related to the quality of a relationship—another core dimension of relationship functioning along-side stability.

Although in the investment model various factors contributing to an individual's commitment to his or her partner are differentiated (i.e., satisfaction, alternatives, investments), the effects of these variables are thought to add up to determine the degree of commitment to the partner. As a consequence, this summary conception of commitment does not allow for an analysis of the specific content of a given commitment. However, some recent approaches to commitment have started to support a finer grained analysis of the content of a given commitment (e.g., Brickman, 1987; M. Johnson, 1991; Lydon, 1996; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; for related approaches outside the relationship domain, see Becker, 1992; Matthieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Novacek & Lazarus, 1990; Somers, 1995).

The Content Approach to Commitment

For example, both M. Johnson (1991), in the relationship domain, and Meyer and Allen (1991), with respect to organizational commitment, have argued that there are three different themes that need to be distinguished in the definition of commitment: (a) a "want to," (b) an "ought to," and (c) a "have to" type of commitment. M. Johnson (1991) named these types of commitment (a) *personal*, (b) *moral*, and (c) *structural* commitment, whereas Meyer and Allen (1991) called them (a) *affective*, (b) *normative*, and (c) *continuance* commitment.

Personal–Affective Commitment

By personal commitment, M. Johnson (1991) was referring to "the sense of wanting to continue a relationship" (p. 12) that results from a positive attitude toward the partner and the relationship and from relational identity (cf. Meyer & Allen's, 1991, positive affective attachment).

Moral–Normative Commitment

M. Johnson (1991) conceived of moral commitment as "the feeling that one ought to continue the relationship. . . . [the feeling that] 'I am not doing what I want to, but rather what I feel is right'" (p. 121), which involves a strong sense of self-constraint and results from person-specific obligation. This notion of obligation is also part of Meyer and Allen's (1991) normative commitment component.

Structural–Continuance Commitment

Finally, M. Johnson's (1991) structural and Meyer and Allen's (1991) continuance commitment reflect "the feeling that one has to continue the relationship" (M. Johnson, 1991, p. 122) and is due to "irretrievable investments, [negative] social reaction [to relationship dissolution], difficulty of termination procedures, and [lack of] availability of acceptable alternatives" (M. Johnson, 1991, p. 122).

Such content aspects of commitment have received some attention in the organizational domain. For example, Meyer et al. (1993) reported differential correlations between these different types of commitment and indices of goal-directed behavior with respect to occupational commitment to nursing (e.g., the intention to stay in the nursing profession, absenteeism). Furthermore, their research has shown attitudes and affective variables such as work satisfaction to be differentially related to these distinct commitment types (see also Becker, 1992). Obviously, the explanatory power of different bases for commitment extends from behavior-related variables into the field of emotional aspects.

However, whereas the organizational domain has benefited from differentiating the concept of commitment, the field of intimate relationships is still waiting for empirical work to be done in this area. One exception is Lydon et al.'s (1997) study of the effect of different types of commitment on relationship satisfaction and coping with relationship dissolution in terms of affect and illness symptoms. In their study, moral commitment (as defined by M. Johnson, 1991) predicted distress created by the ending of a romantic relationship, whereas enthusiastic commitment, which parallels Johnson's personal commitment, had no effect on affective variables whatsoever.

Aside from the meager empirical basis, what is even more important is that in M. Johnson's (1991) but also in Meyer et al.'s (1993) conceptualization, it remains unclear on a theoretical level exactly what the underlying, discriminating dimensions of the various proposed types of commitment are.

A Motivational Approach to Commitment Dimensions: Approach and Avoidance

We take the view that only by filling this theoretical gap with a genuinely motivational concept does a sound analysis of different commitment dimensions and an explanation for their distinct effects seem possible. We propose to apply the fundamental distinction drawn in motivation psychology between approach and avoidance motivation; that is, behavior directed at approaching positive incentives and avoiding negative incentives, respectively (e.g., Atkinson, 1957; Elliot & Church, 1997; Heckhausen, 1991; Higgins, 1998). From this point of view, one might feel committed to one's romantic partner because one strives for the positive incentives associated with continuing the relationship (i.e., approach commitment). In the same vein, one might feel committed to one's romantic partner because one tries to avoid the negative incentives associated with breaking up the relationship (i.e., avoidance commitment).

The rationale for differentiating types of commitment as proposed by M. Johnson (1991) or Meyer and Allen (1991) would hence be based on the distinction between approach and avoidance motivation: Whereas the personal–affective (i.e., "want to") commitment component reflects an approach orientation by referring to positive incentives (e.g., positive affection, relational identity) that can be achieved by maintaining a relationship, the moral–normative (i.e., "ought to") and structural–continuance (i.e., "have to") components represent an avoidance orientation by involving negative incentives. According to Higgins's (1998) regulatory focus theory, duties, obligations, and responsibilities that are defined by the pressure to live up to one's own sense of right and wrong or to obligations toward particular persons represent ought

self-guides.¹ Ought self-guides “are goals that a person must attain or standards that must be met. . . . Discrepancies to such goals represent the presence of negative outcomes” (Higgins, 1998, p. 5). Ought regulation is inherently associated with an inclination toward avoiding breaches of duty as a self-regulatory strategy (e.g., Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). Moreover, the structural–continuance (i.e., “have to”) component, as specified by M. Johnson or Meyer and Allen, refers to negative outcomes that are connected to a dissolution of the relationship (e.g., negative social reactions, difficulty of termination procedure) and thus also represents avoidance commitment.

Differential Effects of Approach Versus Avoidance Motivation on Cognition, Affect, and Behavior

In the approach–avoidance literature (e.g., regulatory focus theory; Higgins, 1998), a well-documented phenomenon is that approaching positive incentives as opposed to avoiding negative incentives has distinct effects on cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes in goal striving (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Higgins, 1998; Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992; Schmalt, 1999). For example, when an individual is guided by the fear of aversive possibilities, the prevailing focus on negative outcomes and negative information is likely to evoke threat appraisals, anxiety, and self-protection processes (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Higgins, 1998). This, in turn, lessens the extent to which goal pursuit is experienced as being enjoyable and fulfilling (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Furthermore, avoidance goals are associated with more physical symptoms than are approach goals (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998; Emmons & Kaiser, 1996) and—by decreasing perceived competence—result in lower self-esteem and fewer feelings of personal control (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Most important in the context of our study, avoidance motivation affects psychological adjustment outcome variables; for instance, by impairing subjective well-being (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997), increasing negative emotionality (Roney, Higgins, & Shah, 1995), and lowering life satisfaction (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997).

Goals of the Present Study

M. Johnson’s (1991) as well as Meyer and Allen’s (1991) presentations of commitment as a tripartite construct are intellectually inspiring accounts of commitment processes. However, their differentiation of commitment types seems somewhat arbitrary, lacking a sound theoretical rationale. This theoretical basis could be derived from motivation theory, which permits predictions about differential effects of approach versus avoidance regulation on psychological functioning.

To evaluate the validity of our approach–avoidance distinction, we sought to identify different correlates of each type of commitment providing convergent and discriminant validity for the postulated distinction. Our predictions were based on different strands of research: (a) personal values as guidelines for life (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995), (b) the similarity between partners regarding their views about a good relationship (e.g., Antill, 1983; Byrne, 1971; Hassebrauck, 1996; Levinger, 1979), and (c) relationship duration as an indicator of irretrievable investments (M. Johnson, 1991; Rusbult, 1980).

Values represent “trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 665). They are represented on an abstract level in the hierarchy of self-regulatory variables and influence a person’s cognitive–affective appraisal of more concrete, situation-specific behavioral options (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Feather, 1990)—in one’s ongoing relationship, for example. The great variety of personal values can be classified into personal value domains (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Some of these domains represent what Higgins (1998) has termed a promotion focus in his regulatory focus theory. According to Higgins (1998), “a promotion focus is concerned with accomplishments, hopes, and aspirations” (p. 16) and is linked to a sensitivity to positive incentives and approach as a strategic means. Some other value domains express values that characterize a prevention focus in Higgins’s (1998) terminology; this prevention focus is “concerned with safety, responsibilities, and obligations” (p. 16) and is associated with the sensitivity to negative incentives and avoidance as a strategic means.

Following this line of reasoning, we hypothesized that promotion focus values (e.g., universalism, humanism) would show a positive correlation with approach commitment but not with avoidance commitment. In the same vein, we expected prevention focus values (e.g., security, conformity, tradition) to show a positive correlation with avoidance commitment but not with approach commitment (Hypothesis 1a).

A second differential correlate of approach versus avoidance commitment refers to the similarity between partners with respect to relevant beliefs. As Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) put it, “the crucial factor in attraction may be . . . the relative similarity or difference between self and the other” (p. 25) on beliefs and attitudes. Although the similarity–attraction hypothesis has not remained unchallenged (Rosenbaum, 1986; see also Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986), research suggests that partners in romantic relationships “who agree in their definition of their relationship are more apt to escalate their commitment” (Huston & Levinger, 1978, p. 142). Because mutual understanding and interpersonal attraction constitute positive incentives in a relationship, we hypothesized that approach commitment but not avoidance commitment is positively correlated with the similarity between partners’ views about a good relationship (Hypothesis 1b).

A third and final correlate of avoidance commitment, as distinct from approach commitment, relates to previous investments in the relationship in terms of resources (e.g., time and money) that would be irretrievably lost if the partners ended the relationship. “Investments of [this] sort intensify commitment by increasing the costs of ending the relationship” (Rusbult, 1991, p. 158). In accordance with a dissonance explanation of entrapment–escalation of commitment (Brockner, 1992) and the phenomenon of sunk costs (Arkes & Blumer, 1985), a person who has invested heavily

¹ The decisive factor for classifying an instance as ideal versus ought regulated is whether the psychological situation involves the presence of positive or negative outcomes, respectively. For example, values that one wholeheartedly embraces (e.g., being a faithful partner because one vowed faithfulness) do not represent ought self-guides but rather ideal self-guides (Higgins, 1998), that is, an approach and not an avoidance motivation, because living up to one’s values involves the presence of positive outcomes (e.g., contentment).

in a relationship should be less likely to leave the relationship because he or she wants to avoid the negative experience of losing the investments on the dissolution of the relationship. Following this line of thought, one should find that investments in terms of the duration of a relationship correspond positively with avoidance commitment but not with approach commitment (Hypothesis 1c).

Besides demonstrating the validity of our differentiation of two commitment types, our even more important research objective was to examine the predictive value of approach versus avoidance commitment in explaining relationship quality variables in a longitudinal design.

One important aspect of relationship quality is the partners' overall satisfaction with the relationship (Berscheid, 1994; Hassebrauck, 1991; Hendrick, 1988; for an overview, see Glenn, 1990). Other measures of relationship quality are the percentage of time that one experiences well-being in the presence of one's partner, on the one hand, and the frequency of positive emotions, on the other hand.

On the basis of the evidence from the approach-avoidance literature that avoidance-based motivation increases negative emotionality as well as impairs subjective well-being and life satisfaction, whereas approach-based motivation increases positive emotionality as well as furthers well-being and life satisfaction (e.g., Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot et al., 1997; Roney et al., 1995), we formulated a second set of hypotheses. We expected that in the long run, the approach form of commitment would be positively associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas the avoidance form of commitment would be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a). We predicted the same pattern for emotionality in terms of the percentage of time that one experiences well-being in the presence of one's partner (Hypothesis 2b) and the frequency of positive emotions (Hypothesis 2c).

To sum up, we first aimed at demonstrating that M. Johnson's (1991) and Meyer and Allen's (1991) different types of commitment can theoretically be integrated into an approach-avoidance perspective. Next, we sought to validate these two dimensions by a different pattern of correlates. Finally, we examined the contribution of approach and avoidance commitment in predicting relationship quality variables over the course of time.

Method

Overview

To test our hypotheses, we used a longitudinal design. Members of couples separately answered three questionnaires about their relationship over a period of 13 months. All Time 1–Time 3 questionnaires included measures referring to (a) descriptive data such as relationship status (e.g., married or not, living together or not) and duration of the relationship so far, (b) commitment, (c) relationship satisfaction, and (d) emotions experienced while with the partner. In addition, personal values and similarity regarding ideas about what characterizes a good relationship were assessed at Time 1.

Participants and Design

Sixty-seven heterosexual couples, recruited among their acquaintances by 15 social science students of a research seminar on close relationships at the University of Linz, Austria, participated in the study. Only couples who had been seriously involved for at least 6 months were invited to participate. Data were collected at three testing periods over a period of 13

months. The first testing period (Time 1) took place in April. Subsequent testing periods occurred 6 months (Time 2, October) and 13 months (Time 3, May of the following year) after the first testing period.

In each testing period, participants were contacted by student experimenters. Questionnaires including our main variables were answered in the presence of a student experimenter and independently of the romantic partner. Each participant was instructed to assign himself or herself a personal code that was to be used across all three testing periods to identify participants without infringing on their anonymity. The mean age of the sample was 25 years, with a range of 16 to 36 years. For a variety of reasons, the sample size dropped from 67 couples to 54 couples at Time 2 (81% of the original sample) and 43 couples at Time 3 (64% of the original sample). Four couples moved to another city, 2 withdrew from the study because their relationship had broken up, 2 failed to remember their identifying code, and 3 explicitly declined to continue their participation in the study. For the remaining 13 couples, we have no information about why they did not answer the second and/or third questionnaire. Those couples who withdrew after the first or second testing period did not differ significantly from those who remained in the sample throughout Times 1–3 in terms of any of our measures at Time 1.

Questionnaires

Personal values. Schwartz and Bilsky's (1990) value list was administered to participants at Time 1. This list contains 58 values derived from 10 value domains (see Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Participants had to rate each value according to its importance as a guideline for their own life. Judgments were made on a 9-point scale ranging from -1 (*contrary to my values*) to 7 (*extremely important*). We created an index of promotion-related values (Higgins, 1998) by averaging the scores on the universalism (including, e.g., "inner harmony," "tolerant") and humanism (e.g., "a sense in life," "true friendship") value domains (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).² Analogously, we constructed a composite score comprising value domains referring to the prevention of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1998), that is, security (e.g., "familiar security," "clean"), conformity (e.g., "politeness," "self-discipline"), and tradition (e.g., "respect towards tradition," "moderate"). Cronbach's alpha was .80. The remaining dimensions (e.g., "power," "performance") were not analyzed any further.

Similarity between partners regarding ideas about a good relationship. The definition of what constitutes a good relationship affects one's attitude toward one's actual relationship. We assessed participants' conceptions of what characterizes a good relationship at Time 1 using a 32-item scale constructed by Hassebrauck (1996). Participants rated the extent to which each item was important for a good relationship on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all important*) to 6 (*extremely important*). Sample items are "accept each other," "share similar views," and "have fun together." Items were later averaged to produce a single measure for ideas about a good relationship (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). We assessed similarity between partners with respect to ideas about what constitutes a good relationship by first calculating the absolute difference between the 32 z-transformed ideas of the 2 members of the couple and then averaging these differences across the 32 items of the scale. As a result, lower numbers indicate higher similarity between partners.

Commitment. To our knowledge, M. Johnson (1991) has not developed an instrument to test his commitment types, whereas Meyer and colleagues have (see Meyer et al., 1993), although not for the relationship but for the organizational domain. We therefore adapted items used by Meyer et al. (1993) for our purposes. For the sake of coherence, we stick to Meyer et al.'s (1993) terminology of affective, normative, and continuance commitment in this article. Drawing on this measure, we used affective commit-

² Because all analyses are reported on the dyad level in the Results section, reliability analyses have been performed with the dyad average as well.

ment variables to represent approach commitment, whereas avoidance commitment was supposed to be captured by normative and continuance commitment items.

Commitment measures consisted of a series of 12 commitment items³ and were administered to participants at all three testing periods. Nine of these items were based on an adaptation of the Meyer et al. (1993) items for the relationship domain (in the questionnaire, items were presented at random). The items for affective commitment were (a) "I regret having entered this relationship" (reverse coded), (b) "I am attached to my partner," (c) "I identify with my partner," and (d) "I would not suffer a lot if this relationship would break up" (reverse coded). The items for normative commitment were (a) "Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to end this relationship," (b) "I feel a responsibility towards my partner to continue this relationship," and (c) "People who are important to me would react negatively if I were to end this relationship." The items for continuance commitment were (a) "Too much of my life would be disrupted if I were to end this relationship," and (b) "I have put so much into this relationship that ending it would be very painful."

Another 3 items—those that could be applied in the relationship context—were taken from Brunstein's (1993) 6-item commitment scale and were not assigned a priori to a particular commitment type. These items are (a) "Even if it means a lot of effort I'll do everything necessary to preserve this relationship," (b) "No matter what happens, I will not give up this relationship," and (c) "I sometimes doubt if I should continue this relationship" (reverse coded). All 12 items had to be rated by participants according to the extent to which each statement was true for themselves (1 = *not at all true for me*, 5 = *very much true for me*).

Relationship satisfaction. To assess relationship satisfaction, we distributed the German version of Susan Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale (Hassebrauck, 1991) at each testing period (Times 1 through 3). Participants were told to rate the seven items of the scale according to their present situation. Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*very*) to 7 (*not at all*). Sample items are "How well does your partner fulfill your needs?" and "How good is your relationship compared with most other couples' relationships?" After reversing the scale, we averaged the ratings across all items to generate an index of relationship satisfaction (Cronbach's alpha for the three testing periods = .90, .90, and .93, respectively).

Emotions while with partner. The emotions participants experienced while in the company of their romantic partner were assessed using two different measures. First, general well-being was assessed in quantitative terms. Participants had to indicate the percentage of time during the past 2 weeks they had felt subjectively well when their partner was present. Secondly, the quality of the emotions they experienced while in the company of their romantic partner was assessed using a list of three positive emotional nouns (i.e., *happiness, love, sexual satisfaction*) and four negative emotional nouns (i.e., *sadness, anger, disappointment, contempt*). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt these moods during the past 2 weeks while in the company of their romantic partner (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). After recoding negatively worded nouns, we constructed an overall composite score of positive affect (Cronbach's alpha for the three testing periods = .80, .80, and .88, respectively).

Results

Descriptive Data

Twenty-four (17.9%) participants had a *Hauptschule* (a secondary school leaving certificate), 21 (15.7%) had a *Fachschule* (a technical college leaving certificate), 70 (52.2%) had a *Matura* (a school-leaving examination at grammar school needed for entry to higher education), and 18 (13.4%) had a university diploma. Within couples, 37 couples had the same education level, 29 couples differed with respect to education level reached, and 1 couple was not classifiable.

On average, at Time 1 couples had been involved for 42.6 months, with a range between 6 months and 10 years ($SD = 29.7$ months). Thirty-one couples were living together, and 36 couples were not. Among those not living together, the frequency of dating was rather high ($M = 5.1$ days per week at Time 1, $M = 5.4$ at Time 2, and $M = 4.9$ at Time 3). At Time 1, only 1 couple reported that they were married, but during the course of the study another 5 couples got married. Eighteen couples had been separated once before; 49 had not. Of the 41 couples answering the question of whether they had children together or not, 8 answered yes, and 33 answered no.

Strategy for Analysis

Data for partners in a given relationship are not statistically independent (cf., e.g., Gonzalez & Griffin, 1997; Judd, McClelland, & Culhane, 1995; Kenny, 1996). Approaches accounting for this problem, such as hierarchical linear modeling (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) or Gonzalez and Griffin's (1997) pairwise correlation method, are not applicable to our data, either because a larger sample than ours is required or because there are no recommendations for the types of analyses performed by us (e.g., factor analysis). Consequently, we decided to follow the more conservative—albeit power-reducing—strategy of using average scores on a couple level. These results are largely consistent with analyses performed on the individual level and those run separately for men and women.

Commitment Dimensions

Commitment items from Times 1–3 were subjected to three separate principal-components analyses. For each analysis, four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 emerged. The initial eigenvalues of the unrotated solutions were 2.9, 2.3, 1.2, and 1.0 (Time 1); 2.9, 1.9, 1.2, and 1.1 (Time 2); and 2.9, 2.5, 1.4, and 1.3 (Time 3). Because all scree tests revealed a clear elbow after two factors, we extracted two factors at each testing period. Eigenvalues and factor loadings after varimax rotation are presented in Table 1.

Notably, results from the factor analyses are, in general, in line with our theoretical a priori assignment of items to commitment dimensions. Items from the first factor (see Table 1) refer for the most part to affective attachment and, thus, affectional rewards associated with the relationship itself, which represent approach-related commitment. Therefore, we interpret this factor as approach commitment. Most of the items in Factor 2 refer to costs associated with the termination of the relationship and the obligation to remain in the relationship—all negative incentives associated with leaving the relationship. Therefore, we interpret this second factor as avoidance-related commitment. Both factors account for approximately equal shares of variance in the data over the three testing periods (see Table 1).

A closer look at the factor loadings reveals that Factor 2 involves doubt about continuing the relationship, stemming from Brunstein (1993), and Factor 1 comprises willingness and deter-

³ Because commitment items were later subject to separate factor analyses for each testing period, we do not report Cronbach's alphas here.

Table 1
Varimax-Rotated Principal Components of Commitment Times 1–3

Item	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2
Approach commitment						
I sometimes doubt if I should continue this relationship. (reverse coded)	.85		.59		.78	
I am attached to my partner.	.66		.67	.37	.67	
I regret having entered this relationship. (reverse coded)	.64		.62		.79	
I would not suffer a lot if this relationship would break up. (reverse coded)	.64		.35		.40	
I identify with my partner.	.59		.57		.59	
Avoidance commitment						
Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to end this relationship.		.75		.69	-.41	.62
Too much of my life would be disrupted if I were to end this relationship.		.65		.54		.64
I feel a responsibility towards my partner to continue this relationship.		.64	-.37	.53		.70
Even if it means a lot of effort I'll do everything necessary to preserve this relationship.		.56		.66		.82
No matter what happens, I will not give up this relationship.	.47	.52		.64		.60
People who are important to me would react negatively, if I were to end this relationship.		.50		.56	.39	.44
I have put so much into this relationship that ending it would be very painful.		.49		.67		.27
Eigenvalue of factor	2.7	2.6	2.9	2.0	2.7	2.7
% variance explained by factor	22.8	21.5	24.1	16.3	22.6	22.4

Note. With one exception, only factor loadings greater than .35 are reported. F1 is the approach commitment factor; F2 is the avoidance commitment factor. F = factor.

mination. The avoidance item “I have put so much into this relationship that ending it would be very painful” was only loosely attached to the avoidance factor (Factor 2) at Time 3. However, because the avoidance factor loadings for Time 1 and Time 2 were satisfactorily high and also because it corresponds to our a priori assignment to commitment types, we left this item in the avoidance factor. A similar logic applies to the items “No matter what happens, I will not give up this relationship” and “People who are important to me would react negatively if I were to end this relationship,” both of which we left with the avoidance factor (Factor 2).

For the subsequent analyses, after reversing negatively worded items, we calculated composite scores for the two commitment dimensions—approach and avoidance—at the three measurement periods on the basis of the unweighted mean of the responses to the items pertaining to each factor (means and standard deviations of these scores are shown in Table 2). As assessed by coefficient alpha, the reliabilities of the two commitment dimensions appear not to have been too bad (with one exception, all α s > .69; cf. Table 2). Stability between testing periods (see Table 2) was acceptably high for both commitment dimensions (all r s > .53), considering the length of the interval between testing periods.

Summary Statistics

The means and standard deviations of all other main study variables as well as their correlations with the commitment measures are given in the lower part of Table 2. The intercorrelations between major study variables—except for approach and avoidance commitment (see Table 2)—are given in Table 3.

Correlates of Approach Versus Avoidance Commitment (Hypotheses 1a–1c)

Personal values (Hypothesis 1a). As expected, the promotion focus scale comprising universalism and humanism correlated posi-

tively with approach commitment, albeit not reaching conventional significance, $p < .07$ (one-tailed), but not with avoidance commitment (see Table 2). More important, the two correlations differed significantly from each other. Using a formula put forward by Cohen and Cohen (1983, p. 57) resulted in $t(64) = 1.69$ for the difference between correlations, $p < .05$ (one-tailed). In line with predictions, prevention focus values (i.e., security, conformity, and tradition) correlated significantly positively with avoidance commitment but not with approach commitment. Again, the difference in correlation coefficients proved significant, $t(64) = 1.68$, $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

Similarity on ideas about a good relationship (Hypothesis 1b). As can be seen in Table 2, our hypothesis regarding the association between commitment types and similarity between partners was confirmed, with a high similarity on central ideas about a good relationship corresponding significantly to higher approach commitment—but not avoidance commitment. Again, this difference in correlation coefficients proved significant, $t(64) = 2.67$, $p < .01$ (one-tailed).⁴

Relationship duration (Hypothesis 1c). The longer an involvement persists, the more has been invested—meaning that the cost of leaving the relationship increases with the duration of the relationship.

⁴ We are well aware that the use of difference scores is not unproblematic (e.g., Griffin, Murray, & Gonzalez, 1999). To circumvent one of the problems associated with it—the problem of different variances in the two variables that compose the difference score—we used z -transformed measures. However, we also pursued other strategies to test our assumption. For example, we computed correlation coefficients for each couple on the basis of a transposed data matrix, treating the 2 members of each couple as items and the 32 items of the scale as cases. Fisher's z transformation was then used to make correlation coefficients comparable. As expected, the correlation between these coefficients and approach commitment at Time 1 yielded $r = .23$, $p < .04$ (one-tailed). Following another procedure, applied by Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996), we also categorized the 2 members' scores on the 32 ideas of a good relationship separately in low or high importance and then examined the resulting 2×2 table in an ANOVA

Table 2
Means, Standards Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients for Approach (AP) and Avoidance (AV) Commitment Scales and Other Major Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. AP, T1	4.22	0.46	(.74)					
2. AP, T2	4.30	0.38	.65***	(.56)				
3. AP, T3	4.18	0.54	.53***	.62***	(.69)			
4. AV, T1	2.92	0.57	.15	-.04	-.11	(.69)		
5. AV, T2	3.04	0.62	.36**	.03	.00	.65***	(.73)	
6. AV, T3	3.01	0.55	.15	.00	.07	.54***	.81***	(.71)
7. Promotion focus values ^a	4.64	0.60	.19	.05	-.03	-.08	-.09	-.28
8. Prevention focus values	3.33	0.69	.15	.20	-.01	.40***	.40**	.22
9. Similarity ^b	0.94	0.42	-.33**	-.35**	-.03	.08	.10	.05
10. Investments (duration of relationship in months) ^c	42.90	30.30	-.01	-.12	-.04	.26*	.20	.20
11. RELSAT, T1	4.73	0.67	.84***	.48***	.49***	.07	.29*	.17
12. RELSAT, T2	4.80	0.73	.67***	.69***	.52***	-.12	.10	.06
13. RELSAT, T3	4.51	0.92	.59***	.62***	.88***	-.16	-.06	.03
14. WELL, T1	79.89	14.10	.64***	.38**	.51**	-.08	-.09	-.16
15. WELL, T2	80.32	19.10	.44**	.53***	.38*	-.36*	-.09	-.08
16. WELL, T3	77.51	20.20	.32*	.41**	.78***	-.33*	-.16	-.05
17. POSEM, T1	3.68	0.30	.55***	.33*	.43**	.01	.11	.05
18. POSEM, T2	3.63	0.36	.44**	.55***	.30*	-.19	.00	-.09
19. POSEM, T3	3.52	0.40	.28	.41**	.68***	-.05	.05	.02

Note. Data in parentheses are reliabilities estimated using the coefficient alpha. T = time; RELSAT = relationship satisfaction, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating more satisfaction; WELL = percentage of time that a participant experiences well-being when with partner; POSEM = frequency of positive (and reversed negative) emotions, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more positive emotions.

^a Personal values and similarity between partners regarding ideas about a good relationship were assessed only at Time 1. ^b This measure is based on the difference between men's and women's standardized scores. Lower values represent higher similarity. ^c Note that duration cannot vary from Time 1 to Time 3—aside from variation due to missing data—because testing periods Time 2 and Time 3 occurred after a fixed interval. Because logarithmic values are difficult to interpret, the mean and standard deviation are reported for the raw values; however, all correlations are based on the log of the duration.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the positive correlation between the log of the duration⁵ and avoidance commitment (see Table 2), whereas there was no significant correlation with approach commitment. Testing this difference yields $t(64) = 1.72, p < .05$ (one-tailed).

Thus, in sum, the correlational patterns for approach versus avoidance values, the similarity between partners regarding their ideas about a good relationship, and the duration of the relationship provide convergent and discriminant validity for our distinction between approach and avoidance commitment.

Longitudinal Results: Testing Long-Term Effects of Approach and Avoidance Commitment on Satisfaction and Emotions (Hypotheses 2a–2c)

To test our second set of hypotheses (Hypotheses 2a–2c), which state that approach commitment is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and with one's emotions while in the com-

approach. If our assumption was correct, then approach commitment should be higher in the high–high and low–low cells than in the other two cells. Accordingly, the ANOVA revealed an interaction between the 2 partners' scores, with $F(1, 63) = 2.83, p = .05$ (one-tailed). When we inspected the table, it was clear that approach commitment was especially high if both partners had given high importance estimates for the 32 ideas about a good relationship (i.e., were categorized as high). To sum up, all these analyses confirm the results of our difference score correlation. Because a difference score measure is intuitively plausible as an indicator of similarity and because this approach best joins the rest of the analyses concerning Hypothesis 1, we focus on the difference score results.

pany of the romantic partner, whereas avoidance commitment is negatively associated with them, we performed a series of hierarchical regression analyses. In each analysis, we controlled for our baseline measures of relationship satisfaction at Time 1 and emotions at Time 1. In a second step, Time n relationship satisfaction and emotionality were each predicted by means of the approach and avoidance commitment also assessed at Time 1.

Predicting relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a). As shown at the top of Table 4, when we controlled for relationship satisfaction at Time 1, approach and avoidance commitment at Time 1 were significant predictors for relationship satisfaction at Time 2 (see also upper part of Figure 1) and Time 3, respectively.⁶ More important however, and supporting our Hypothesis 2a, approach commitment always yielded a positive beta weight for predicting relationship satisfaction; that is, it was positively associated with relationship satisfaction 6 and 13 months later, whereas avoidance commitment received a negative beta weight in both cases.⁷

⁵ Because duration was not normally distributed but skewed, we used a logarithmic transformation for all analyses concerning duration. However, the same relationships held true when we used the raw values of duration instead.

⁶ Predicting Time 3 relationship satisfaction by Time 2 approach and avoidance commitment yields similar results.

⁷ Exploratory analyses of whether avoidance commitment moderates the relationship between approach commitment and relationship satisfaction—tested by introducing the interaction between avoidance commitment and approach commitment into the regression equation—yielded no significant results.

Table 3
Intercorrelation Between Major Study Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Promotion focus values												
2. Prevention focus values	.04											
3. Similarity	-.29*	-.24*										
4. Investments (duration of relationship)	-.01	.01	-.05									
5. RELSAT, T1	.25*	.07	-.27*	-.10								
6. RELSAT, T2	.20	.12	-.32*	-.30*	.70***							
7. RELSAT, T3	.11	-.09	-.12	-.13	.57***	.73***						
8. WELL, T1	.18	-.14	-.22	-.12	.72***	.46**	.58***					
9. WELL, T2	.16	-.25	-.26	-.20	.46***	.67***	.53***	.44**				
10. WELL, T3	.11	-.17	-.07	.02	.29	.50**	.85***	.36*	.43**			
11. POSEM, T1	.24*	.00	-.22	-.23	.81***	.61***	.55***	.73***	.39**	.25		
12. POSEM, T2	.30*	.05	-.25	-.36**	.52***	.83***	.61***	.42**	.73***	.39**	.56***	
13. POSEM, T3	.05	.04	.02	-.21	.38**	.52***	.83***	.47**	.34*	.76***	.48**	.54***

Note. T = time; RELSAT = relationship satisfaction, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating more satisfaction; WELL = percentage of time that a participant experiences well-being when with partner; POSEM = frequency of positive (and reversed negative) emotions, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more positive emotions.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Predicting percentage of time during which well-being is experienced (Hypothesis 2b). After the term for initial well-being at Time 1 had first been partialled out, approach commitment had—as expected—a significantly positive link with the percentage of positive time spent with the partner, whereas for avoidance commitment the relationship was negative (cf. respective beta weights in middle of Table 4). A similar pattern emerged with respect to predicting the percentage of time when well-being is experienced at Time 3 (see also middle of Table 4); however, this time avoidance commitment only displayed a trend in the expected direction. Thus, in sum, Hypotheses 2b was fully confirmed with respect to Time 2 dependent measures, and partial support was found at Time 3.

Predicting the frequency of positive emotions (Hypothesis 2c). When we controlled for the frequency of specific emotions participants experienced while in the company of their partner at Time 1 in a first step, in line with Hypothesis 2c, we found that approach commitment went hand in hand with significantly more frequent positive emotions, whereas avoidance commitment was associated with less frequent positive emotions at Time 2 (see lower part of Table 4). For predicting Time 3 positive emotions (see also lower part of Table 4), no significant effects of either approach commitment or avoidance commitment were found. In summary, then, Hypothesis 2c was fully supported for predicting the Time 2 frequency of emotions; however, no support was found for Time 3 frequency of emotions.

Further Analyses: Mutual Influences Between Partners

To examine interdependence between partners—that is, mutual influences on approach and avoidance commitment and relationship satisfaction—we adopted a mutual cyclical growth model approach outlined by Wieselquist et al. (1999). To investigate whether relationship satisfaction of one dyad member was associated with approach and avoidance commitment of his or her partner, we first looked at the concurrent associations between an individual’s score on relationship satisfaction and his or her partner’s score on each commitment type (for Times 1–3 separately;

see upper part of Table 5). Obviously, if anything, only the partner’s approach commitment was significantly associated with the individual’s satisfaction, indicating that one’s satisfaction comes hand in hand with one’s partner’s approach commitment. Second, we investigated lagged associations between one member’s score on relationship satisfaction at Time n , controlling for his or her relationship satisfaction at Time $n - 1$ as well as the partner’s score on each commitment type at Time $n - 1$ (for predicting Time 2 and Time 3 satisfaction separately). This strategy only yielded highly significant results for one’s own relationship satisfaction at Time $n - 1$, whereas neither approach nor avoidance commitment of one’s partner ever approached statistical significance (all t s < 1). A comparison of the correlation coefficients (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) confirmed the conclusion that one’s own satisfaction at an earlier point in time was a much stronger predictor for one’s later satisfaction than was the partner’s approach or avoidance commitment (because all correlation comparisons were significant; all t s > 4.22 , all p s $< .05$).

We also tested the reverse direction, that is, that one’s approach and avoidance commitment is associated with one’s partner’s relationship satisfaction in the two ways described above. The first way, regressing the approach commitment (and avoidance commitment, respectively) of one partner on the concurrent relationship satisfaction of the other partner again demonstrated associations between approach commitment and relationship satisfaction (see lower part of Table 5). The second strategy (lagged associations) did not result in any significant proportion of variance explained by relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

This study examined whether approach versus avoidance commitment is the underlying dimension of qualitatively distinct types of commitment identified by M. Johnson (1991) and by Meyer and Allen (1991; Meyer et al., 1993) and attempts to validate this approach–avoidance distinction conceptually. Furthermore, the key aim of the study is to provide evidence for differential associations between these commitment types, on the one hand, and

relationship quality parameters such as satisfaction with the relationship and positive emotions during times spent with the partner, on the other hand.

Identifying Approach Versus Avoidance Commitment Types

The study's findings with respect to factor analyses run on commitment items originally stemming from Meyer et al. (1993) can be summarized as follows: Those commitment themes that represent positive incentives for the continuation of the relationship—that is, the affective commitment items (which parallel M.

Table 4
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses with Approach (AP) and Avoidance (AV) Commitment

Variables	df	β	adj. R^2	F change
Hypothesis 2a: Predicting Time 2 RELSAT				
Step 1: RELSAT, T1	52	.70***	.47	48.48***
Step 2	50		.53	4.05*
AP, T1		.39*		
AV, T1		-.20*		
Hypothesis 2a: Predicting Time 3 RELSAT				
Step 1: RELSAT, T1	42	.57***	.31	20.06***
Step 2	40		.38	3.44*
AP, T1		.45*		
AV, T1		-.24†		
Hypothesis 2b: Predicting Time 2 WELL				
Step 1: WELL, T1	50	.44	.17	11.71**
Step 2	48		.34	7.38**
AP, T1		.40*		
AV, T1		-.40**		
Hypothesis 2b: Predicting Time 3 WELL				
Step 1: WELL, T1	41	.36	.11	5.92*
Step 2	39		.21	3.64*
AP, T1		.28		
AV, T1		-.36*		
Hypothesis 2c: Predicting Time 2 POSEM				
Step 1: POSEM, T1	52	.56	.30	24.05***
Step 2	50		.40	4.97*
AP, T1		.32*		
AV, T1		-.29*		
Hypothesis 2c: Predicting Time 3 POSEM				
Step 1: POSEM, T1	42	.40	.21	12.65**
Step 2	40		.10	< 1.00
AP, T1		.12		
AV, T1		-.11		

Note. adj. = adjusted; RELSAT = relationship satisfaction, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating more satisfaction; T = time; WELL = percentage of time that a participant experiences well-being when with partner; POSEM = frequency of positive (and reversed negative) emotions, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more positive emotions.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

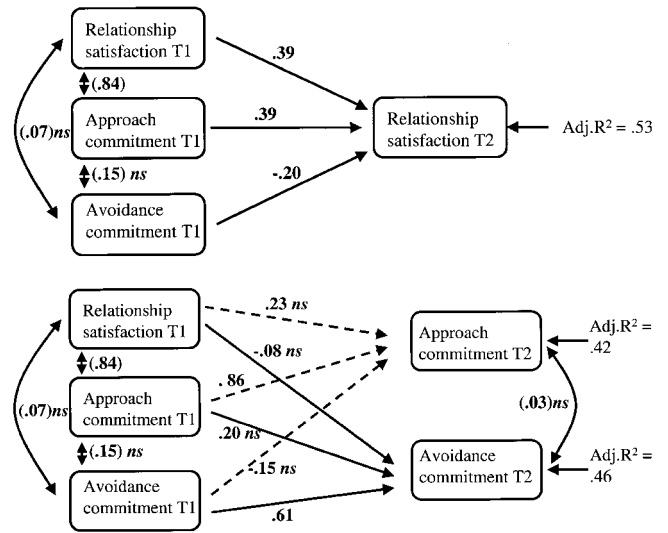


Figure 1. Path model for predicting relationship satisfaction at Time 2 (upper panel) and path model for predicting approach and avoidance commitment at Time 2 (lower panel). Data are standardized regression coefficients (betas) and correlation coefficients (in parentheses). Unless otherwise stated, all coefficients are significant at $p < .05$. For all predictors, regression coefficients are displayed with controls for other predictors. T = time; Adj. = adjusted.

Johnson's, 1991, personal commitment type)—represent one factor, which we have termed approach commitment. Unlike the first factor, the second factor, interpreted as avoidance commitment, mainly comprises normative and continuance commitment items (which cover Johnson's structural and moral commitment type)—that is, negative incentives for the termination of the relationship. Thus, we were able to corroborate our assumption that affective, normative, and continuance commitment from Meyer et al. (1993) in fact reduce to the two types of commitment we suggested.

Moreover, the distinct pattern of correlations between commitment types, on the one hand, and approach- versus avoidance-related personal values, similarity between partners' conceptions of a good relationship, and investments in the relationship in terms of duration, on the other hand, altogether validates the proposed distinction. Approach commitment was more strongly associated with promotion focus values, as compared with avoidance commitment, whereas avoidance commitment but not approach commitment correlated significantly and positively with prevention focus values (Hypothesis 1a). The rewarding similarity between partners on central ideas about how to define a good relationship was positively associated with approach commitment but not with avoidance commitment (Hypothesis 1b). By contrast, investments in terms of the duration of the relationship so far only showed a significant positive correlation with avoidance commitment, not with approach commitment (Hypothesis 1c).

One objection could be that the two dimensions we obtained may be explained alternatively in terms of intrinsic-extrinsic motivation (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, one might argue that the approach factor represents an intrinsic form of motivation (e.g., an interest in connecting to the other person), whereas the avoidance factor represents a more extrinsic form of motivation (based

Table 5
Predicting Individual Relationship Satisfaction From Partner's Approach (AP) and Avoidance (AV) Commitment, and Vice Versa

Variable	Women				Men			
	<i>df</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>
Predicting IND's RELSAT on the basis of PART's AP and AV commitment								
IND's RELSAT, T1	64	—	.14	6.16**	64	—	.03	1.96
PART's AP, T1		.41**				.24*		
PART's AV, T1		-.04				.02		
IND's RELSAT, T2	51		.03	<1.00	51		.02	1.42
PART's AP, T2		.16				.21		
PART's AV, T2		.02				.07		
IND's RELSAT, T3	39		.13	4.17*	39		.07	2.53†
PART's AP, T3		.41*				.32*		
PART's AV, T3		-.29				.11		
Predicting IND's AP commitment on the basis of PART's RELSAT								
IND's AP, T1 by PART's RELSAT, T1	65	.24†	.04		65	.40**	.15	
IND's AP, T2 by PART's RELSAT, T2	52	.22†	.03		52	.16	.03	
IND's AP, T3 by PART's RELSAT, T3	40	.32*	.08		40	.32*	.10	

Note. IND = individual; RELSAT = relationship satisfaction, measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating more satisfaction; PART = partner; T = time.
 † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

on gains and losses independent of the affiliative bond). Our approach items do indeed have some affinity to an intrinsic partnership orientation. However, the avoidance items are not explicit with respect to the intrinsic–extrinsic partition. At least some of them allow for an intrinsic interpretation. Empirically, the correlational pattern discussed above speaks against an intrinsic–extrinsic interpretation. None of the constructs with which approach or avoidance commitment were correlated lie clearly at one end of the intrinsic–extrinsic dimension. In addition, on a conceptual level, one can quite easily conceive of intrinsic approach aspects (e.g., affection) as well as of extrinsic approach aspects (e.g., family income); in the same vein, one can think of intrinsic avoidance aspects (e.g., loss of intimacy) as well as of extrinsic avoidance aspects (e.g., negative social reactions from important others).

Additionally, one might wonder whether approach commitment is really something different from relationship satisfaction. However, there are good reasons to answer this question positively. First, on a theoretical level, approach commitment can unambiguously be distinguished from relationship satisfaction: Satisfaction (and emotions) represent affective judgments of the relationship. By contrast, approach commitment focuses on the participant's determination to continue the relationship. As such, it represents a motivational concept (cf. Brunstein, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Gollwitzer, 1993), namely, the binding decision or intention to continue one's intimate relationship. Second, from an empirical point of view, for two concepts to be called distinct from each other, it is crucial that the first construct still be able to explain a substantial proportion of variance in certain third variables after the influence of the second construct has been partialled out, whereas this is not the case for the second construct (or at least it is so to a clearly lesser degree). More concretely, for our argument to be valid, satisfaction—but not approach commitment—should

explain a significant amount of variance in affective judgment variables, whereas approach commitment—but not satisfaction—should be a significant predictor for motivational variables. Regression analyses entering both satisfaction and approach commitment support our hypotheses.⁸ As expected, only satisfaction, not approach commitment, was a significant predictor for variables related to affective judgment, such as percentage of well-being time and frequency of emotions—combined into one single measure of affect—satisfaction, $r_{\text{part}} = .64$, $\beta = .77$, $t(67) = 6.61$, $p < .001$; approach commitment, $r_{\text{part}} = .08$, $\beta = .11$, $t < 1$. It was also the only predictor for a single item tapping resignation; satisfaction, $r_{\text{part}} = -.48$, $\beta = -.68$, $t(67) = -4.33$, $p < .001$; approach commitment, $r_{\text{part}} = -.07$, $\beta = -.07$, $t < 1$.

In contrast, only approach commitment, not satisfaction, emerged as a significant predictor in regression analyses with motivational related measures. More concretely, predicting disengagement and interest for alternatives (a scale consisting of five items, e.g., “When I meet another man/woman I consider him/her from the perspective of him/her potentially being a new partner”) resulted in $r_{\text{part}} = .35$, $\beta = -.58$, $t(67) = -2.97$, $p < .005$, for approach commitment, and $r_{\text{part}} = .00$, $\beta = .00$, $t < 1$, for satisfaction. In sum, there is a consistent and theoretically convincing pattern of data that speaks for the distinctiveness of approach commitment and satisfaction. Notwithstanding the correlation between them, each of the two constructs' unique variance explains a set of different criteria variables.

⁸ Some of the following variables have not been mentioned in the article so far because they were not part of the central hypotheses. For the sake of power and brevity, all variables used in the following regression analyses were collapsed across the three testing periods.

Longitudinal Effects of Approach Versus Avoidance Commitment

The longitudinal results of the study confirm our prediction of a distinct association between approach–avoidance commitment and relationship satisfaction at both Time 2 and Time 3 assessments (Hypotheses 2a). Thus, approach commitment was positively associated with relationship satisfaction 6 and even 13 months later, whereas avoidance commitment was negatively related with these parameters.⁹

With respect to both of our emotional measures, predictions for approach versus avoidance commitment were fully confirmed for the Time 2 percentage of well-being and the frequency of positive emotions, respectively (Hypotheses 2b and 2c), and we found partial support in the Time 3 percentage of well-being. However, it remains open to speculation why neither approach nor avoidance commitment became significant predictors for the frequency of positive emotions at Time 3. Notably, even in the latter analysis, approach commitment yielded a positive beta weight as in all other analyses, whereas avoidance commitment carried a negative sign.

Taken together, results from these regression analyses lend support to our notion that approach commitment is positively and avoidance commitment negatively associated with relationship quality.¹⁰ By using Time 1 predictors to explain the variance in Time 2 and Time 3 dependent measures, we were able to demonstrate that this association holds true for a time period as long as 13 months.

These results replicate findings from studies on approach–avoidance personal goals and subjective well-being (e.g., Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot et al., 1997; Roney et al., 1995) and extend them into the field of intimate relationships by providing empirical support for Rusbult's (1991) hitherto untested assumption in the relationship domain that "people acting out of a strong positive desire to continue a line of action should differ in serious ways from . . . people acting out of a sense of . . . pressure" (p. 163).

Direction of Influence

In the present research we assume a direction of influence that goes from commitment types to relationship satisfaction. A similar view within the domain of organizational commitment and satisfaction is supported by research done by Vandenberg and Lance (1992). In the relationship domain, however, our position contrasts with that of Rusbult and colleagues (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Van Lange et al., 1997), who advocated the reverse direction of influence: In their view, commitment is determined by satisfaction with the relationship (for a summary, see Rusbult, 1991).

To test Rusbult's approach, we assessed the predictive value of the direction of influence advocated by Rusbult and colleagues (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Van Lange et al., 1997). Analogously to testing our model, we computed regression analyses predicting approach and avoidance commitment, respectively, at Time *n* by entering approach and avoidance commitment at Time 1 as well as satisfaction with the relationship at Time 1 (see lower part of Figure 1 for a path model presentation). Predicting Time 2 approach commitment, approach commitment at Time 1 resulted in $\beta = .86$, $t(50) = 4.48$, $p < .001$, satisfaction at Time 1 resulted in $\beta = .23$, $t(50) = 1.20$, $p < .24$, and avoidance

commitment at Time 1 resulted in $\beta = -.15$, $t(50) = -1.38$, $p < .17$. The respective results for predicting avoidance commitment at Time 2 were as follows: avoidance commitment at Time 1, $\beta = .61$, $t(50) = 5.99$, $p < .001$; satisfaction at Time 1, $\beta = -.08$, $t < 1$; and approach commitment at Time 1, $\beta = .20$, $t(50) = 1.09$, $p > .27$. That is, in neither of the two cases did relationship satisfaction become a significant predictor when we controlled for the effects of approach and avoidance commitment.¹¹

Because we did not perform a statistical comparison of the two different causality models, no conclusive statement can be made about the predictive value of one model in relation to the other. Instead, we argue for possible bidirectionality (see also Bandura's, 1986, concept of reciprocal causality). In more recent publications, Rusbult and colleagues (e.g., Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) have also started to discuss the possibility of bidirectionality. Actually, some of the variables serving to explain commitment in the theoretical formulation of the investment model (e.g., alternatives; Rusbult, 1983) sometimes also serve as variables that are contingent on commitment (e.g., derogation of alternatives; D. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). It is interesting that, as our analyses regarding the mutual influence between partners demonstrated, there seems to be a bidirectional influence between partners: One partner's approach commitment predicted the other partner's relationship satisfaction, and vice versa, this reinforcement hopefully resulting in a kind of mutual escalation of satisfaction and approach commitment.

Related Concepts Amenable to an Approach–Avoidance Interpretation

Although our model is a new means of formally distinguishing between different types of commitment, similar concepts have

⁹ Additional analyses were run with a composite score of only those three items that were taken from a general commitment measure (i.e., the three items of Brunstein, 1993, see Method section). Analogously to our two-faceted regression approach for predicting relationship satisfaction at Time 2 and Time 3, we first entered the baseline of relationship satisfaction at Time 1, then added the newly created general commitment measure (the same was done for the other two dependent measures, well-being time and frequency of positive emotions). In all regression analyses, this general measure did not add significantly to the prediction—that is, when we predicted relationship satisfaction at Time 2, for increment, $F(1, 51) = 1.83$, $p < .19$; in the remaining five analyses, all F s for increment were less than 1.

¹⁰ Given the low (and nonsignificant) zero-order correlations between avoidance commitment and the respective dependent measures, one might wonder whether the effect of avoidance commitment in the regression analyses reported was due to a suppressor effect of approach commitment. However, regression analyses run with the respective baseline measure of the dependent variable in a first step and avoidance commitment alone in a second step revealed that avoidance commitment at Time 1 still added to the prediction of Time 2 satisfaction, $\beta = -.20$, $F(54) = 2.7$, $p = .10$; well-being time, $\beta = -.31$, $F(54) = 6.6$, $p = .01$; and frequency of emotions, $\beta = -.20$, $F(54) = 3.1$, $p = .08$, respectively.

¹¹ Conceptually identical results were obtained for predicting Time 3 approach and avoidance commitment on the basis of Time 1 relationship satisfaction and approach or avoidance commitment, respectively. Furthermore, results using well-being time or frequency of emotions as predictors for approach and avoidance commitment parallel those reported above.

been introduced in the past by other social scientists. For example, Levinger (1979) discussed a notion of attractions versus barriers that can be interpreted in terms of approach versus avoidance commitment. Despite the conceptual overlap between Levinger's model and ours, there is one important difference between them. As documented in Levinger's (1979) comprehensive review of the literature on marital cohesiveness and divorce, attractions and barriers both promote marital stability indiscriminately. Hence, Levinger's conceptual distinction between attractions and barriers seems less illuminating than our explication of the distinct effects of different types of commitment on relationship satisfaction and emotionality, which is new to our theorizing. Simpson (1990) also discussed a notion similar to our approach–avoidance distinction in his work. However, his secure versus avoidant attachment styles in romantic associations are conceptualized as a relatively stable individual-differences variable originating in early socialization. The specific and possibly changing nature of commitment a person might experience in an ongoing relationship over the course of time or in different intimate relationships cannot be captured by Simpson's concept.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Clearly, there are some limitations and unresolved issues inherent in the present research, some of them indicating avenues for future research. First, our analysis does not systematically address the question of which factors contribute to the development of approach and avoidance commitment. The pattern of correlation with values, relationship duration, and similarity between partners' conceptions of a good relationship hints at a combined influence of more stable individual-differences variables and relationship-specific situational determinants.

As a second unresolved issue, one might ask why avoidance commitment is negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Drawing on the finding that avoidance motivation leads to a heightened sensitivity for negative information (Higgins, 1998; Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992), one might speculate that avoidance-driven commitment makes a partner's negative attributes and actions or the incurred cost of the relationship more salient. Such focusing on cost is known to be a characteristic of unsatisfactory relationships (Gottman, 1998). Further research would have to analyze such mediating processes on a more microscopic level.

Third, related to the previous issue, experimental laboratory research is needed to circumvent the methodological limitation of our study. Research on close relationships might substantially benefit from multimethod approaches, including observational and experimental methods beyond simple self-report measures (Clark & Reis, 1988; see also Berscheid, 1994). Additionally, the use of diary studies might be a promising avenue of exploration to illuminate how approach and avoidance commitment affect other important relationship variables in everyday relationship functioning.

Fourth, the interpretation of our results is restricted to samples that are similar in age, education level, and ethnical–cultural background. As Markus and Kitayama (1991) have argued in their programmatic review, many social–psychological phenomena once thought to be universally valid only hold true in Western cultures. However, we still argue that our basic finding—according to which approach commitment is positively and avoidance

commitment negatively associated with relationship quality—would also be found in non-Western cultures. “The hedonic principle that people approach pleasure and avoid pain has been the *basic* motivational principle throughout the history of psychology, with ancient roots” (Higgins, 1998, p. 1). Moreover, approach and avoidance with their specific affective concomitants can even be distinguished on a neurobiological level (e.g., Gray, 1982). Therefore, the distinction between approach and avoidance as basic motivational tendencies should be valid among all human beings. What might differ between Western independent and non-Western interdependent cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), though, is the content of approach- versus avoidance-motivated commitment as well as their relative weight in predicting outcome variables. For example, interdependence, care for others, and harmony might be more important and positively regarded values in Eastern cultures, whereas they might disappear behind more individualistic issues in Western, independent cultures. Yet the question of cultural generalizability remains an interesting issue for future research.

Fifth, the present study tells us little about how approach–avoidance commitment is related to partnership stability. Only 3 couples who answered the second and/or third questionnaire indicated that they had separated. Therefore, we can only speculate about the distinct effects of approach versus avoidance commitment on the continuity of relationships on the basis of prior research and theorizing. For example, Levinger (1979) pointed out that “barriers are important to keep long-term relationships intact. . . . Barriers lessen the effect of temporary fluctuations in interpersonal attraction; even if attraction becomes negative, barriers act to continue the relationship” (p. 41). This should be a caveat for the reader not to conclude immediately from our results on relationship quality measures that avoidance commitment is exclusively negative in its effects. Instead, this type of commitment might serve an important and beneficial function in relationship stability.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, the purpose of the present research is to provide evidence for an approach versus avoidance type of commitment and its link to relationship quality parameters. The study yields encouraging results, suggesting that approach and avoidance commitment are opposite and powerful predictors explaining variance of relationship quality parameters.

In sum, we believe that applying the approach–avoidance perspective in the field of commitment to personal relationships has several theoretical advantages. It is a new approach to the study of commitment and satisfaction in close relationships, although our model's basic concepts are firmly rooted in existing psychological literature. It is parsimonious, as several theoretical accounts of commitment and related concepts (M. Johnson, 1991; Levinger, 1979; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Simpson, 1990) can be integrated under a single theoretical construct. Moreover, it incorporates social–psychological theorizing on relationship functioning with motivational constructs of goal striving. An even more important advantage is that drawing on the approach–avoidance distinction provides a rich understanding of basic motivational processes, which are of crucial importance not only in self-regulation but also with respect to the functioning of intimate relationships. Approach and avoidance motivation affect emotional regulation, which, in

turn, determines relationship quality, which is a core determinant of global life satisfaction as well as of mental and physical health (Christensen & Heavey, 1999; Gottman, 1998). We therefore strongly argue that researchers in the field of commitment should consider these different commitment bases in their research.

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