A Relative Commitment Approach to Understanding Power in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

In some romantic relationships, one partner has more power over joint decisions than the other. This study examines relative commitment as a key predictor of which partner has more power and developed a model based on classic interdependence theory. A survey was conducted ($N = 324$) using new measures of the key variables to test the model. When desire for control was high, relative commitment predicted self-perceived power, which predicted major and minor decision making as well as dominant conflict strategies. These results are consistent with the proposed modification of interdependence theory concerning desire for control.

Keywords: Relative Commitment, Investment Model, Interdependence Theory, Romantic Relationships, Power, Conflict

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Over 80 years ago, Waller (1934) published his in-depth analysis of the dating scene at a state college. The most influential of Waller's observations concerned the relationship between relative commitment in a given romantic relationship and power in that relationship. He noted, "control follows the principle of least interest, i.e. that person controls who is less interested in the continuation of the affair" (p. 733). This assertion has formed the basis of a great deal of theorizing about power in relationships, including that of interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and other related social exchange theories (e.g. Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). These theories all posit that one member of a romantic relationship will have more power over the other if they are less interested in continuing the relationship.

Unequal balances of power have a wide variety of impacts on romantic relationships. Several researchers (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999; Gray-Little & Burkes, 1983; Ting-Toomey, 1984) have found relationships between how egalitarian a relationship is (i.e. equal power) and how satisfied the members of that relationship are. Felmlee (1994) found that relationships characterized by unequal power were more likely to end.

What is consistent across the variety of researchers who have examined the issue is the causes of self-perceived power (SPP) are usually relative to one's partner. As Waller (1934) noted, it is not one's absolute level of interest in remaining in a relationship that affects one's SPP, but one's interest relative to what one perceives one's partner to possess. In the current investigation, it will be shown that perceived *relative* commitment will be well-suited to predicting SPP in romantic relationships. Additionally, decision-making power as well as dominant and submissive conflict styles will be discussed as outcomes and processes of SPP in relationships. Another aspect missing from previous theorizing about power is inter-individual

variation in desire for control (Burger, 1992) such that being in a position of power (lower commitment than one's partner) may only result in SPP and other outcomes if the individual has a preference for the control of others. Finally, Sprecher, Schmeeckle, and Felmlee (2006) argued that if power is to be understood, stronger, multi-item measures of its predictors are required. Therefore, this paper introduces new measures of the core constructs.

Relative Commitment and Self-Perceived Power

The core constructs will first be described before examining theoretical linkages between them. Initially, self-perceived power (SPP) will be defined as the belief that in a particular romantic relationship, one feels as though one is generally and consistently able to influence the behavior of one's partner more than one's partner is able to influence one's own. SPP is described as a general ability to influence because it is not limited to particular domains in this conceptualization. This choice reflects the theoretical stance that power is generalized rather than specific. The definition of SPP used the term "consistently" based on the prediction that this construct tends to be a stable aspect of a relationship over time. It could change as all things in relationship can, but the individual who self-perceives this kind of power is assumed for the purposes of this research to believe it to be unlikely to change in the near future.

Next, relative commitment will be described. Rusbult (1980) defined commitment as "the probability that he/she will leave the relationship" (p. 174). Relative commitment is the extent to which one believes that one is more or less committed to remaining in the relationship than one's partner. One can believe that both one and one's partner are equally committed to remaining in the relationship or one can believe that oneself or one's partner is more strongly committed.

Relative commitment will be proposed as a direct antecedent to SPP within a particular romantic relationship based on interdependence theorizing. The early social exchange theorist,

Blau (1964), proposed that, “The girl with whom a boy is in love has power over him, since his eagerness to spend much time with her prompts him to make their time together especially pleasant for her by acceding to her wishes” (p. 22). Blau argued that part of the impact relative commitment has is based on the behavior of the more highly committed partner such that the more highly committed partner is the one essentially giving power to the less committed partner. By giving the low commitment partner power, the high commitment partner is attempting to make the relationship more desirable and thus raise the low commitment partner’s level of commitment.

Some researchers have attempted to capture power via a combination of social exchange variables. Solomon and Samp (1998) argued that dependence power is the three-way interaction between the respondent’s commitment level, the respondent’s perception of her or his partner’s commitment level, and the partner’s access to quality relationship alternatives. The relative commitment approach taken here instead offers several improvements on that method. First, there is a single variable for relative commitment whose psychometric properties can be individually assessed rather than attempting to measure the antecedent of power as a combination of variables. Furthermore, in many cases, quality of alternatives may be redundant. If Rusbult’s (1980) investment model is correct, then the quality of alternatives influences relationship variables via commitment. In other words, quality of alternatives only affects SPP because it affects commitment. If commitment is being assessed, quality of alternatives does not theoretically add additional explanation. If an individual has high quality of alternatives, but remains highly committed, the approach taken here suggests that such a person will not have more SPP than someone who has low quality of alternatives and is highly committed. Either way, the partner of such a person has no fear of that person leaving.

An interdependence theory expansion by Drigotas et al. (1999) argued that although level of dependence is an important aspect of power, commitment is the more direct predictor of SPP. Commitment is the expression of being dependent on someone else for the satisfaction of relational needs. One may feel more or less dependent on one's partner but the concrete expression of that is ultimately the extent to which one wishes to remain in a relationship. Person A might be somewhat dependent on her or his romantic partner, Person B. Yet, if A is more willing to leave B than B is A, it is A who ultimately has higher SPP because the fear of relational termination is what ultimately matters to B. Additionally, Drigotas et al. argued that one might not be aware of dependence in a relationship but one is aware of commitment. So despite traditional social exchange theories discussing degree of dependence as an aspect of power (see Dunbar, 2015 for a review), this research follows Drigotas et al. and focuses on relative commitment as the key antecedent of SPP. Therefore, the first hypothesis to be tested proposes that relative commitment will be substantially related to SPP such that being less committed than one's partner will be associated with higher SPP.

Relationship Power and Decision Making

SPP is expressed in romantic relationships when one partner gets her or his way more consistently than the other and is aware of it. Having SPP means that when decisions that affect both partners need to be made and the partners disagree, one partner is usually more likely to prevail over the other. When the decision only affects one member of the couple or when they both agree, SPP is unlikely to be a factor. Decision making is often researched as an expression of SPP in a relationship (Bentley, Galliger, & Ferguson, 2007; Drigotas et al., 1999; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh, & Kawaguchi, 1999) Consistent with this perspective,

Felmlee (1994) found that relative decision making in a relationship is a strong indicator of power in that relationship.

This study will conceptualize two types of decision making: major and minor. Major decisions are those that have a large impact or long-lasting impact on both members of the relationship. Minor decisions are those that are unlikely to have an impact beyond a single day or interaction. Some previous measures of decision making have been proposed that measured just one type, combined the two, or left it unclear (Bentley et al., 2007; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Grauerholz, 1987; Murstein & Adler, 1995; Oyamoto, Fuglestad, & Snyder, 2010; Safilios-Rothschild, 1976). As SPP is conceptualized as consistently getting one's way, greater power will be associated with increased likelihood of making decisions in both minor, everyday situations and major, important situations. It is hypothesized for the current study that SPP will be positively associated with both types of decision-making.

SPP and Conflict Strategies

Another predicted impact of SPP in romantic relationships concerns how romantic partners communicate during conflict. Although decision making indicates who tends to win conflicts, SPP is also likely to predict what kinds of communication strategies romantic partners might use when their goals conflict. This investigation will examine the extent to which SPP affects the frequency with which romantic partners use dominant and submissive conflict strategies.

According to Zacchilli, Hendrick, and Hendrick (2009), dominance strategies are characterized by trying to win conflicts and forcing one's partner to agree with one's position. These strategies are hypothesized to be related to higher SPP as partners of a romantic relationship who were in a low power position would be unlikely to use these strategies for fear

of pushing their partner away. Emerson's (1962) analysis described power as the ability to overcome resistance on the part of a target. Believing that one has the higher SPP enables one to use the kind of dominant, direct strategies described by Zacchilli et al. (2009) that include making demands rather than putting forth the effort to try to convince one's partner.

The hypothesis of linear relationships between SPP and dominance may contradict Dunbar's (2004) prediction of a curvilinear relationship between power and dominance derived from dyadic power theory (DPT). Despite the elegance of DPT, there are several reasons to doubt that the DPT prediction will be valid in all cases. Dunbar argued that high power people would not need to use dominance because their position of power means that the weaker partner would simply do what the stronger partner wants without needing to discuss it. Yet there will be many cases in which a new situation develops or the stronger partner's wishes change. Given that the weaker partner is not a mind reader (cf. Bem, Palmer, & Broughton, 2001), the stronger partner is more likely to openly make demands of the weaker partner than vice-versa. Additionally, previous research found that when either partner acts in a dominant way, both partners are *less* able to predict what the other partner wants and what they are expected to do (Millar, Rogers-Millar, and Courtright, 1979). DPT's predictions rely on the assertion that the weaker partner is better able to predict their partner's behavior, not less. These considerations led to the current predictions of linear relationships.

Consistent with the current prediction, Dunbar and Burgoon (2005) found evidence of a substantial, positive relationship between self-reported power and dominant behavior in an observational study of dating and married couples (though that linear relationship may have been due to a range restriction problem, and follow up work by Dunbar and Johnson from 2015 found that there is some evidence that when the variance is enhanced with random assignment some of

the expected curvilinear effects appear). Similarly, Samp and Palevitz (2014) found that the lower dependence was associated with a greater self-reported likelihood of confronting a partner due to a potential relational transgression. On the other hand, Worley and Samp (2016) found that DPT did explain the likelihood of participants voicing their feelings such that the likelihood was highest at when power was equal. That research is consistent with the Millar et al. (1979) finding that in non-dominant relationships the partners understand each other better. Feeling comfortable raising issues with one's partner may be a hallmark of equal power, but acting dominant and demanding explanations for transgressions seems to be more likely to be associated with high power. It may be that acting dominant and voicing feelings are separate process.

Additionally, a parallel prediction to the dominance hypothesis is hypothesized for submission. If low SPP individuals are trying to improve their partner's rewards by acceding to their wishes, they would be predicted to use submissive strategies when in conflict with their partners. Zachilli et al. (2009) described submissive strategies as giving in to one's partner and trying to "satisfy my partner's needs rather than my own" (p. 1081). These strategies would be the most likely to be used by the lower SPP partner.

Moderation by Desire for Control

Previous research and theorizing on power in romantic relationships has neglected the extent to which one partner even wishes to exert control over the other. Although the proposed relationships are likely to be found for many people, low desire for control individuals may be an exception. Being less committed to a relationship does not necessarily translate into dominant outcomes if the less committed partner has a low desire for control in general. Being less

committed to the relationship than one's partner gives one the means, but not the motive to possess greater power in the relationship.

Specifically, the relationships between relative commitment and the other constructs (SPP, decision making, and conflict strategies) are predicted to be moderated by the desire for control (DC; Burger, 1992). DC refers to "the extent to which people generally are motivated to see themselves in control of the events in their lives" (p. 6). Burger also notes that such a trait generally causes some people to be "highly motivated to make the decisions in a relationship" (p. 6). Someone who has a very low DC will be unlikely to translate being less committed into SPP in the relationship because they will not want to have control.

Although Burger (1992) suggested the possibility of high DC impacting power in romantic relationships, no study (to the author's knowledge) has examined the issue directly. Burgoon and Dunbar (2000) called for more research on how personality can influence dominance by examining social skills as a predictor. This study will therefore offer an extension of previous work on power in romantic relationships by determining the extent to which the personality trait of DC interacts with relative commitment such that the relationship between relative commitment and, SPP, decision making, and conflict styles are only substantial when DC is high but not when it is low.

Overview of the Proposed Models

In addition to the proposed bivariate and moderated bivariate relationships, this study will also test a moderated mediation causal model. Although a longitudinal design is needed to offer strong evidence for causal ordering, assessing the fit of basic path models can offer some evidence consistent with causal ordering. The proposed model indicates that relative commitment is the exogenous variable at the beginning of the simple causal chain. SPP is

proposed as the next variable in the causal chain. It is likely that in order to demand that one get one's way via dominant strategies and to make most of the decisions, one must first feel that one has more power in the relationship. Safilios-Rothschild (1976) suggested that being in a position of power will only be translated into behavior if the individual is aware they have that power. SPP is proposed as the mediator between relative commitment and the other outcomes (decision making and conflict strategies).

As the effects of relative commitment on the other variables are expected to be moderated by DC, a moderated mediation hypothesis will be tested such that the models will be proposed to fit when people have a high desire for power. If relative commitment only affects power and the outcomes of power when DC is high, the models with power as the mediator are proposed to fit when DC is high but not low.

Method

Sample

The sample was obtained by an undergraduate research methods class such that each member of the class solicited participation by emailing individuals and posting requests on social media. Of the 319 who participated and reported their sex, 211 reported being female and 108 reported being male. Five did not respond. The average age was 28.91 ($SD = 12.37$). In this sample, 43% reported they were not college students. With this sample size, power analysis indicates a greater than 95% chance of detecting correlations of .2 with a two-tailed test with alpha set at .05 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009)

The sexual orientation of the sample was assessed with five response options. 281 indicated romantic and sexual interest only in the opposite sex. 17 indicated romantic interest in the opposite sex and both sexes for sexual interest. Three chose both sexes for romantic and

sexual interest, four chose opposite and same sex for sex but only same for romantic, and 5 chose same sex only for both romance and sex.

Procedure

The participants who chose to begin the survey by clicking on the offered link to the online survey were first shown an informed consent form. Upon indicating their consent, the survey was displayed. They were then thanked for participation at its conclusion.

Instrumentation

The means, standard deviations, and reliability estimates are in Table 1. First the participants were asked if the relationship they were going to focus on to respond to the survey was a current relationship or a previous relationship. If they were in a current relationship, they were instructed to choose that option. If they were not, they were asked if they had been in a romantic relationship previously. In this sample 213 were currently in a romantic relationship and 111 were focusing on a previous romantic relationship.

Participants were then asked to complete the relative commitment measure with these instructions:

Please consider both how you feel and how you think your partner feels about the relationship. Consider each statement and use the scale to indicate if you or your partner would be more likely to agree with each statement.

The scales they were given ranged from 1-9 with 1 labeled “My partner would be much more likely to think this than me,” 5 labeled “We are both equally likely to think this,” and 9 labeled “I would be much more likely to think this than my partner.” The subjects were then shown the commitment items from the investment model scales (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Relative commitment was composed of averaging each participant’s scores on the relative commitment

items. Scores higher than 5 indicated the participant was more committed than their partner, scores lower than 5 indicated the partner was more committed than the participant, and scores of 5 indicated equal commitment to the relationship. The distribution was leptokurtic

Next the new major and minor decision making scales were displayed. Both employed 7-point response options ranging from 1-7 with 1 labeled “my partner always makes the decision,” 4 labeled “Neither of us is more likely than the other to make the decision,” and 7 labeled “I always make the decision.” All new items are included in the appendix. Both scales’ distribution were leptokurtic. Higher scores indicating greater decision making.

The new SPP scale included 7-point response scale with 1 labeled “My partner is,” 4 labeled “We both are,” and 7 labeled “I am.” The participants were asked to use the scale to describe their relationship in response to the four items concerning who is the more powerful member in the relationship. The distribution was also leptokurtic.

The participants then responded to the domination and submission subscales of the romantic partner conflict scale (Zacchilli et al., 2009). These items were not relative to the partner and only concerned the individual participant’s behavior during conflict. Both scales used 7-point likert response options scored such that higher scores indicated more frequent use of those conflict styles. The domination scale distribution was slightly negatively skewed.

Finally, the participants responded to the desire for control scale (Burger, 1992). There were twenty items and 7-point likert response options ranging from 1-7 were provided such that higher scores indicate greater dominance motives. There was a slight negative skew.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Results

First, the measurement model for the construct validity of the new scales will be assessed. Then the proposed bivariate relationships will be examined. Then the moderation by dominance motive will be tested using moderated regression. Finally, the simple slopes results from the moderated regression will be used to test the proposed moderated mediation models using path analysis.

Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which the measurement model was consistent with the obtained inter-item relationships and the factor loading estimates for all of these variables. A CFA was conducted using the lessR program for the R Statistics software (Gerbing 2014). The data indicate that the model was a good fit as the absolute mean error was .06¹. The proposed measurement model was maintained.

Bivariate Relationships²

It was proposed that relative commitment would be related to SPP such that being less committed relative to the partner would be associated with higher SPP. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix and indicates there was a small, but statistically significant relationship in the predicted direction. SPP was proposed to be positively related to greater major and minor decision making as well as dominant conflict styles but negatively related to submissive. The correlation matrix indicates there was medium to large relationships in the predicted directions. These hypotheses were confirmed.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Moderated Regressions

The correlation matrix in Table 2 shows that relative commitment was only weakly related to SPP and weakly related to the other variables as well. Those findings are unsurprising

because being in that position of power (less commitment) was hypothesized to only translate into SPP and the other outcomes when the individual was higher in desire for control (DC) but not when they were lower. The presence of low DC participants weakens the bivariate relationships. To test these hypotheses, a series of moderated regressions with standardized variables were conducted by regressing each outcome variable onto relative commitment, DC, and the product of relative commitment and DC. Then, simple slopes analysis was used to interpret the nature of the moderation (Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 3 shows the results of these regressions by displaying for each outcome, the standardized effects and p-values for each of the three predictors. For SPP, major decisions, minor decisions, and dominance, the results indicated that the effect of relative commitment on these outcomes was moderated by DC, as indicated by the statistically significant product term. None of the predictors were statistically significant for submission.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

Next, simple slopes analysis was used to assess the extent to which the nature of those interactions were consistent with predictions. As per Aiken and West's (1991) recommendations, the standardized relationship between the predictor and outcome was calculated using the linear regression formula at one standard deviation below and above the mean for the moderator. In this case, the relationship between relative commitment and each outcome was assessed for low levels of DC and at high levels. It was predicted that at high levels, the relationships would be ample and negative. Table 4 shows that for SPP, major decisions, minor decisions, and domination, the relationships were all in the predicted direction. The results suggest that being less committed is more likely to confer more power on the participant, but only if the participant has a strong desire for control motive. For SPP, major decisions, and domination, having low DC

produces trivial relationships between relative commitment and these variables. Surprisingly, for minor decisions, when the participants had low DC, being more committed was associated with making more of the minor decisions. These results are mostly consistent with hypotheses.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

Mediation Tests

Evaluating mediation has recently begun to move away from the traditional Baron and Kenny (1986) method of relying on statistical significance tests (Hayes, 2009; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Another option is to rely on the basic path analysis algorithms that underlie structural equation modeling (SEM). Wright (1934) established that if one predicts that the relationship between X and Z is mediated by Y, then one's model predicts that the correlation between X and Z is equal to the product of the X and Y correlation and the Y and Z correlation ($r_{xz} = r_{xy} * r_{yz}$).

To assess model fit, such standardized estimates enable the researcher to easily estimate the difference between the predicted and obtained relationships in a standardized format (Hunter & Hamilton, 2002). Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend the use of standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) to assess model fit. These residuals are values that indicate the extent to which obtained values differ from those predicted by the model. That index standardizes the residuals that result from model testing using covariance matrices. They present evidence that values below about .08 indicate good fit. In the case of using standardized relationships instead of the covariances, the root mean squared error (RMSE) is calculated directly from the residuals because the estimates are already standardized and can therefore be interpreted similarly. Thus, values below .08 also indicate good fit for RMSE. In the case of the simple models tested here,

the mean of the standardized residuals is not required as there is only one residual per model, represented here by indicating the amount of error (E).

As Aiken and West's (1991) moderated regression produces standardized estimates of the effects of one variable on another under different levels of a moderator, those standardized estimates can be used to assess model fit. Specifically, the correlations in the basic $r_{xz} = r_{xy} * r_{yz}$ formula are replaced by standardized regression coefficients estimated at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator. Then the model can be tested at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator to determine if the model predictions fit at these varying levels of the moderator (see Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005 for an extended discussion of using the +1 SD and -1 SD values method of estimating different coefficients in path modeling). Based on Boster's (2002) recommendations, all relationships were corrected for measurement error before testing the models.

The first model tested was the extent to which SPP mediated the relationship between relative commitment and major decision making when DC was high. The error of prediction was higher than desirable ($E = .112$) due to the obtained relationship being weaker than the one predicted by the constrained paths. The second model tested the extent to which the relationship between relative commitment and minor decision making was mediated by SPP when DC was high. The error of prediction was very low ($E = .007$), suggesting very good fit of the mediation model. The third model tested the extent to which SPP mediated the relationship between relative commitment and dominant conflict styles when DC was high. The error of prediction was at the borderline ($E = .088$). The observed relationship was slightly larger than the relationship predicted by the model. This model may be said to be marginally consistent with the data. The model was not tested with submissive behaviors because the direct paths were too

small to indicate a causal relationship. The data were most strongly consistent with the proposed mediation by SPP when minor decision making was the outcome, marginally consistent when dominance was the outcome, and weakly consistent when major decisions was the outcome.

Additional Analysis

Some of the sample was responding to the survey items based on their current relationship and some were recalling a previous relationship. Although not the focus of this investigation, it was a possibility that this variable might moderate some of the proposed relationships. That possibility was tested with a series of moderated regressions in which current relationship responders were coded 1 and previous -1. Relationship status was not a substantial or statistically significant moderator of the relationship between relative commitment and any of the other variables. However, the relationships between SPP and both types of decision making were so moderated. Simple slopes analysis was again employed. For the relationship between SPP and major decision-making, the interaction term for type of relationship and SPP had a small but statistically significant effect ($\beta = -.10, p = .04$) such that the effect of SPP on major decision-making ($\beta = .61$) was somewhat smaller for current relationships ($\beta = .51$) than for previous relationships ($\beta = .71$). A similar pattern emerged with minor decision-making such that the interaction between relationship status and SPP was again statistically significant ($\beta = -.15, p = .005$). Again, the effect of SPP on minor decision making ($\beta = .50$) was smaller for current relationships ($\beta = .35$) than previous relationships ($\beta = .65$). The reason for this pattern is unclear but future research should continue to carefully consider whether survey respondents are considering current or former relationships.

Discussion

Relative commitment, as per social exchange theory and the related interdependence theory (Blau, 1964; Drigotas et al., 1999) proved to offer an effective explanation of both self-perceived relationship power and the outcomes of that power (major and minor decision making and dominant conflict strategies). These data demonstrate the value of interdependence and social exchange theory by showing how SPP, decision-making, and dominant behavior are all rooted in relative commitment to the relationship. The relationship focus in these theoretical approaches was augmented by including the personality trait DC with the prediction that not everyone uses their position of power to dominate their partner. Only people who have higher levels of desire for control of their lives in general, are likely to translate that position of power into actual outcomes, unlike people with low DC. By merging both the traditional relationship-focused approach with personality theory, the current approach was able to offer a stronger prediction of who would be making the decisions and what kinds of communication strategies they would use.

Additionally, the models tested in this study found some evidence that when people have a high level of DC, the effects of being less committed on being more likely to make minor decisions may be dependent upon feeling more powerful. There is some evidence, though less strong, for the same being true of using dominant strategies when in conflict with one's romantic partner. Future work should expand on the use of moderated mediation to explore how relative commitment can affect other variables via increasing one partner's power.

There was, however, mixed evidence that these variables were related to using submissive strategies. The relationship between relative commitment and submissive strategies was not substantial and not moderated by DC. On the other hand, the data were consistent with the predicted negative relationship between SPP and submission. It is unclear why the self-

perceived power that produces submission is not rooted in relative commitment. Perhaps submissiveness is related to some non-relationship source such as previous relationships or a personality trait. Further work is needed to both replicate this finding and offer a new theoretical approach to explain it.

Limitations

The cross-sectional design prevents assessing causality. Though the perspective proposed here is that relative commitment causes SPP, other scholars argue the causality flows in the other direction (Lennon, Stewart, & Ledermann, 2013). The current study cannot provide evidence concerning that controversy because a model in which SPP influences both relative commitment and the other outcomes would also be consistent with the data due to the nature of modeling with cross-sectional data. Longitudinal designs are needed to assess the causal ordering of the key variables. The theorizing that produced this study is merely able to suggest one possible interpretation of that data.

Conclusion

This study sought to integrate social exchange and interdependence theory approaches to understanding power in romantic relationships with insights from work on desire for control. The new measure of relative commitment was proposed as an exogenous variable in understanding the process of power in relationships. The study validated the use of that measure and of other new measures. These measures may be of use to other researchers attempting to understand power in romantic relationships regardless of theoretical orientation. Future work on power in romantic relationships may help both social scientists and clinicians alike understand how to help people maintain more satisfying relationships.

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Appendix

Decision Making Scales Items*Major decisions:*

When situations come up concerning issues that will have a large effect on both of our lives.

In situations in which we will both have to live with the decision for a long time.

When we disagree about an important decision.

If something I wanted very much conflicted with my partner getting something important to her or him.

If we had to make a serious decision that would have an impact on our ability to stay together as a couple.

When the decision will have an impact on both of our abilities to be happy with our lives.

Minor decisions:

Everyday kinds of choices where the impact on our lives is minimal.

Decisions that will not matter much the next day.

Choices such that we disagree but neither of us feels very strongly about the outcome.

When we disagree about an unimportant decision.

If we had to make a decision that might affect how happy we each are for just the evening but not after that.

When we want different things but neither of us will be upset if we do not get our way.

Self-Perceived Power scale

Who is the member of the couple that has more power in the relationship?

Who is the member of the couple that your friends would probably say is more in charge?

Who is the member of the couple that is the more dominant member of the relationship?

If your relationship were a country, who would be the leader?

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Reliability for the Measured Variables

Measure	Mean	SD	Alpha
Relative Commitment	4.08	1.35	0.87
Major decision-making	4.23	0.88	0.78
Minor decision-making	4.08	0.94	0.82
SPP	4.21	1.50	0.87
Domination	4.00	1.31	0.86
Submission	4.01	1.25	0.87
DC	4.83	0.72	0.81

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Relative Commitment						
2. SPP	-0.15*					
3. Major Decision-Making	-0.06	0.59*				
4. Minor Decision-Making	-0.03	0.47*	0.49*			
5. Domination	-0.10	0.33*	0.23*	0.28*		
6. Submission	0.07	-0.32*	-0.19*	-0.16*	0.06	
7. DC	-0.11	0.20*	0.11	0.09	0.14*	-0.07

* $p < .05$

Table 3

Regression Results of Moderation Tests

Predictor Variables	Outcome Variable									
	Power		Major Decisions		Minor Decisions		Domination		Submission	
	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p
Relative Commitment	-0.2	0.03	-0.05	0.37	-0.004	0.94	-0.07	0.24	0.08	0.22
Desire for Control	0.26	0.01	0.08	0.14	0.09	0.17	0.13	0.04	-0.07	0.31
Product Term	-0.25	0.01	-0.12	0.03	-0.24	<.001	-0.15	0.02	0.06	0.35

Table 4

Simple Slopes Analysis Showing Standardized Regression Coefficients at -1 and +1 SD of Desire for Control

	Power	Major Decisions	Minor Decisions	Domination
-1 SD	0.04	0.07	0.24	0.08
+1 SD	-0.45	-0.17	-0.24	-0.23

Footnotes

¹ This statistic is calculated similarly to the standardized root mean residual and can be interpreted similarly such that a lower value indicates better fit.

² The scatterplots of the predicted relationships were examined for any evidence of non-linearity and none was found.