

Accommodation Processes in Close Relationships: Theory and Preliminary Empirical Evidence

Caryl E. Rusbult, Julie Verette, Gregory A. Whitney,
Linda F. Slovik, and Isaac Lipkus
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

A theory of accommodation processes is advanced, and the results of 6 studies are reported. Accommodation refers to the willingness, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive act, to inhibit impulses to react destructively and instead react constructively. Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that accommodation is lower under conditions of reduced social concern and lower interdependence. Studies 3, 4, and 5 revealed that accommodation is associated with greater satisfaction, commitment, investment size, centrality of relationship, psychological femininity, and partner perspective taking and with poorer quality alternatives. Commitment plays a fairly strong role in mediating willingness to accommodate. Study 6 showed that couple functioning is associated with greater joint and mutual tendencies to inhibit destructive reactions. Study 6 also demonstrated that self-reports of accommodation are related to relevant behavioral measures.

All partners in close relationships eventually behave badly. It is inevitable that in responding to the irritations and dissatisfactions of everyday life, one or the other partner eventually will engage in a potentially destructive act (e.g., being thoughtless, yelling at the partner, or not spending adequate time at home). How are people likely to react to such breaches of good behavior? Are they likely to exacerbate the problem by reacting destructively in turn, or are they more likely to soothe ruffled feelings by reacting constructively? What makes them more willing to react constructively and inhibit destructive impulses? Do partners typically share equally in dealing with destructive content? Does feeling less involved than the partner lead to reduced willingness to react constructively? Our work addresses such questions, and concerns a phenomenon that we term *accommodation*.¹ Accommodation refers to an individual's willingness, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive behavior, to (a) inhibit tendencies to react destructively in turn and (b) instead engage in constructive reactions.

This article advances a general model of accommodation and presents preliminary empirical evidence regarding this phenomenon. We begin with a discussion of the response typology used in our model—the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect typol-

ogy. Then we explore the implications of conceptualizing accommodation using an interdependence analysis (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Finally, we advance several hypotheses regarding the causes and dynamics of accommodation and review the results of six studies that serve as preliminary empirical tests of our model.

Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect

Our theory of accommodation processes emerged from research on Rusbult's exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses to dissatisfaction in close relationships (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). The typology is based on the writings of Hirschman (1970), who discussed three reactions to decline in formal organizations: (a) exit—actively destroying the relationship; (b) voice—actively and constructively attempting to improve conditions; and (c) loyalty—passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve. To assess the comprehensiveness of this model, Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) performed multidimensional scaling studies of couple responses to dissatisfaction. They found that Hirschman's categories characterized responses to dissatisfaction in close relationships, and they

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Caryl E. Rusbult, Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-3270.

¹ Giles and his colleagues (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987; Giles & Smith, 1979) developed a model of communicative behavior termed speech accommodation theory. These authors use the term *accommodation* to refer to convergence and divergence processes in adapting to another's speech patterns. It should be noted that their usage differs somewhat from our own. Dictionary definitions of the term include "to bring into agreement or concord, to reconcile"; "to provide with something desired, as a helpful service"; "to give consideration to"; and "to adapt oneself." Our use of accommodation is consistent with these definitions of the construct.

identified a fourth important response: (d) neglect—passively allowing one's relationship to deteriorate. The following illustrate each response category:

Exit: Separating, moving out of a joint residence, actively abusing one's partner, getting a divorce, threatening to leave, or screaming at one's partner;

Voice: Discussing problems, seeking help from a friend or therapist, suggesting solutions, changing oneself, or urging one's partner to change;

Loyalty: Waiting and hoping that things will improve, supporting the partner in the face of criticism, or praying for improvement;

Neglect: Ignoring the partner or spending less time together, avoiding discussing problems, treating the partner poorly (being cross with him or her), criticizing the partner for things unrelated to the real problem, or just letting things fall apart.

The responses differ along two dimensions—constructiveness versus destructiveness and activity versus passivity. Voice and loyalty are constructive responses, wherein one attempts to revive or maintain a relationship; exit and neglect are relatively more destructive. Constructiveness/destructiveness refers to the impact of the response on the relationship, not to its effect on the individual. For example, exit is clearly destructive to the future of a relationship, although it may be a constructive act from the individual's point of view. In addition, exit and voice are active responses, wherein one does something about the problem; loyalty and neglect are relatively more passive. Activity/passivity refers to the impact of the response on the problem at hand, not to the character of the behavior itself. For example, it involves overt activity to avoid a discussion by going out drinking, but such an act is passively neglectful in regard to the problem at hand. Furthermore, we should note that the category labels are abstract symbols for a range of related reactions and should not be interpreted literally. For example, "exit" refers not merely to terminating a relationship, but also to other actively destructive behaviors such as threatening to end it, hitting the partner, and so on.

Previous research has demonstrated that the four responses are influenced by numerous qualities of relationships and of individuals (Rusbult, 1987; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986a; Rusbult, Morrow, & Johnson, 1987; Rusbult et al., 1982; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Iwaniszek, 1986). Previous research has also examined the adaptive value of the responses, exploring their link with distress and nondistress in dating relationships (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986b). Examining unilateral individual-level responses—the level at which each partner engages in each reaction—we found that variations in destructive responses are substantially correlated with couple distress/nondistress, whereas variations in constructive responses are only weakly related to couple functioning. These findings suggest a "good-manners" model: In some sense, scrupulously avoiding destructive acts is more important than attempting to maximize constructive behaviors.

These results are consistent with prior research: In comparison to nondistressed couples, distressed couples exhibit more negative problem-solving acts, engage in fewer joint recreational activities, emit more negative nonverbal behavior, engage in more frequent and intense negative communications, and express more criticism, hostility, and rejection (Billings, 1979; Birchler & Webb, 1977; Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975;

Fineberg & Lowman, 1975; Folger & Poole, 1984; Gottman et al., 1976; Hahlweg et al., 1984; Koren, Carlton, & Shaw, 1980; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Markman, 1979, 1981; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974; Schaap, 1984). Indeed, Montgomery (1988) noted that "research addressing this question suggests that it is less important to exchange positive behaviors than it is to *not* exchange negative behaviors" (p. 345). Thus, partners would be well-advised to maintain good manners, that is, to scrupulously avoid destructive acts.

Unfortunately, partners do not consistently maintain good manners; partners eventually (and, sometimes, chronically) engage in potentially destructive acts. Accordingly, we explored the links between couple distress and interdependent patterns of response (e.g., if a partner engages in neglect, what is the effect of a voice reaction?). We found that reactions to constructive acts (voice or loyalty) are only weakly related to couple functioning, whereas reactions to destructive acts are consistently linked with couple functioning: When a partner engages in exit or neglect, couple functioning is enhanced when the individual "bites the bullet" and reacts with voice or loyalty, inhibiting impulses toward exit or neglect. For example, consider an individual who returns home at the end of a tough day and interrupts the partner's attempts at conversation with a rude "just be quiet for a while." Muttering "you're a real joy" is unlikely to improve the situation; it is more adaptive for the partner to react by calmly shrugging it off or asking, "Do you need to talk about your day?"

These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that in comparison to nondistressed couples, distressed couples show greater reciprocity of negative communication, affect, and behavior (Billings, 1979; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Greenshaft, 1980; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Raush et al., 1974; Schaap, 1984; Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). Thus, it may be fruitful to conduct further research on this phenomenon, a pattern of interdependent responding that, as mentioned earlier, we term *accommodation*. Operationally, accommodation refers to one's willingness—when a partner has behaved badly by enacting exit or neglect acts—to enhance tendencies toward constructive reactions (voice and loyalty) and inhibit impulses toward destructive reactions (exit and neglect). Unfortunately, whereas prior research has consistently demonstrated that the tendency to sidetrack or diminish negative affect cycles is associated with lower couple distress, little of this work has explored *why* people behave as they do. That is, this research has tended to describe differences between distressed and nondistressed couples, rather than identifying the critical causes of response tendencies or describing the dynamics by which accommodation comes about.

Interdependence Analysis of Accommodation

In developing a theoretical model of accommodation, it is important to begin by understanding the fundamental structure of the accommodative situation. In this regard, interdependence theory makes an important distinction between the given matrix and the effective matrix (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The *given matrix* represents partners' "primitive" feelings about various joint outcomes; that is, the given matrix represents self-centered preferences for various joint behaviors, or the fundamental structure of the situation itself. Given the per-

vasiveness of the tendency toward reciprocity, we propose that the impulsive reaction to a destructive act often may be to react in kind: "If you're rude to me, I'm inclined to be rude in return." Also, reacting constructively frequently may be regarded as degrading or infuriating: "I must allow our relationship to be harmed, or abase myself by behaving well. I'm hurt, and I don't relish being pleasant under these circumstances." Of course, the primitive impulse to react in kind may be moderated by such factors as the degree to which the partner's destructive act was hurtful, whether the partner's act was unintended or justified, and whether reacting constructively will affect self-esteem or public image. But, on average, we believe that the fundamental structure of the accommodative situation is as follows: When Partner A engages in a destructive act, Partner B's primitive impulse is to behave destructively in turn.

However, the given matrix does not necessarily reflect how individuals actually behave. The *effective matrix* represents feelings about joint outcomes at the time partners actually react to the situation and represents a transformation of the given matrix. Transformations are the product of thoughts and feelings regarding the given situation and reflect such factors as feelings about partners and relationships (e.g., concern for the partner and the future of the relationship relative to concern for self), long-term goals (e.g., whether the reaction will affect odds of achieving other desirable goals and whether it will affect the partners' general balance of power), enduring dispositions (e.g., whether it would be aversive to live with destructive content and whether the individual is communal in orientation), and implicit or explicit norms (e.g., agreements to support each other during difficult times). Thus, although a partner's destructive act may be hurtful and seem unjustified—and although one's fundamental, primitive impulse may be to react destructively in turn—on deeper consideration one may transform the given situation, producing an effective situation in which greater value is attached to reacting constructively. In lay language, one may decide that reacting constructively seems like a good idea, that it seems like the right thing to do; under many circumstances, one may be willing to suffer the costs of reacting constructively.²

Thus, one question implied by an interdependence analysis is, at a fundamental, primitive level, do people feel disinclined to react constructively to partners' destructive acts and to inhibit destructive impulses? In a sense, we are asking whether accommodation should be regarded as a social good—a response that is costly to the individual but beneficial to the collectivity (in this case, the couple). In traditional games research, questions concerning transformation processes are addressed by confronting subjects with situations where the available behavioral options have clear numerical outcomes (e.g., points or cash; cf. Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977). If subjects react in ways that differ from what would be expected on the basis of pure self-interest, their behavior is assumed to have resulted from transformation of motivation. Unfortunately, in the domain of close relationships it is extraordinarily difficult to empirically assess given and effective matrixes and to observe or measure transformations: Outcomes in relationships cannot be expressed in terms of points or cash.

Accordingly, we adopted two indirect strategies to explore people's fundamental feelings about the accommodative situation. Our strategies are based on the following line of reason-

ing: If transformations occur as a result of such considerations as concern for the partner, long-term goals, and social norms, then eliminating or reducing such considerations should bring us closer to individuals' fundamental, primitive response preferences. Thus, one way to study how people fundamentally feel about accommodation is to compare response preferences under conditions of normal and reduced social concern; a second strategy is to compare response preferences under conditions of high and low interdependence with a partner. Under conditions of identical "given" situations, if response preferences differ as a function of level of social concern and level of interdependence, one may infer that such differences result from transformation-relevant motivation. Given low interdependence and reduced social concern, people should come closer to behaving as they *really*, fundamentally, impulsively wish to behave. Thus, our first prediction is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: All things being equal, when a partner behaves destructively, the individual's fundamental, self-centered inclination is to react destructively in turn. Accordingly, willingness to accommodate should be lower under conditions of reduced social concern than given normal social concern and should be lower in less interdependent relationships than in more interdependent relationships.

Interdependence theory implies a second question about accommodation: If accommodation is frequently regarded as a social cost, what leads people to engage in prorelationship transformations? When partners have enacted potentially destructive acts, what makes one willing to inhibit tendencies to reciprocate the destructive act and instead react constructively?

Determinants of Accommodation

For the moment, assume that willingness to accommodate is greater to the extent that people feel inclined to engage in prorelationship transformations, that is, when they wish to provide good outcomes for themselves *and* their partners, even when their own outcomes may suffer somewhat as a consequence. If this indeed is the nature of accommodation, we should find that people are more willing to accommodate to the degree that they are happier with their partners and relationships, feel more strongly committed to their relationships, believe their

² Although transformations sometimes result from conscious deliberation, they may sometimes be more automatic: People are likely to develop habitual reactions to frequently encountered situations—habits that have, in the long run, reduced conflict and effectively solved the problem at hand. These habitual tendencies may be mediated by emotions, so that an emotional reaction automatically directs one to the constructive reaction (e.g., compassion or apprehension) or to the ineffective, destructive reaction (e.g., exasperation or resentment). Also, accommodation is likely to be mediated by the attributions people form about their partner's destructive acts. When one infers that a partner's destructive act was unintended (e.g., "he's had a bad day at work and didn't really mean it") or justified (e.g., "he has a right to feel irritated—I've been working long hours and have ignored him lately"), accommodation may be more likely. Exploring such issues may increase psychologists' understanding of the conditions under which accommodation results in feelings of abasement—when, precisely, accommodation is experienced as a social cost (e.g., when and why does not retaliating create problems for self-esteem, impression management, deterrence, and so on?).

relationships are important to their well-being, and are dispositionally less self-centered. We address each of these factors in turn.

Happiness Factors

When we speak of happiness with a relationship, we refer to the variety of positive feelings one partner may have for the other, such as love, companionship, passion, and respect. Happiness may be increased through several routes. First, happiness should be greater among people who truly appreciate their relationships or enjoy greater rewards and fewer costs and therefore feel more satisfied (cf. Thibaut & Kelley, 1959)—among partners who enjoy intensely gratifying sexual pleasure, have a wonderful friendship, and suffer few drawbacks as a consequence of the relationship (e.g., living 2,000 miles apart). Also, happiness should be greater among people who appreciate their partners more, or believe their partners possess many positive qualities (e.g., “He’s still fun to be with”) and few negative qualities (e.g., “I can’t stand to watch him eat”), and therefore feel more satisfied (cf. Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Finally, happiness should be greater among people who have a lower comparison level or have low expectations regarding the quality of relationships, because early relationships with parents or siblings were abysmal or because previous relationships with friends or lovers were poor (cf. Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). We propose that people who are happier with their relationships will naturally feel more inclined to accommodate when a partner has behaved badly; when people find that their partners and relationships make them feel good, they should be more inclined to behave in ways that will maintain or enhance those good feelings.

However, if happiness were the only issue in understanding accommodation, many or most relationships would be in trouble. Partners are unlikely to feel uniformly happy, and most relationships suffer periods of distress. It is more interesting to consider the features of relationships and individuals that induce willingness to accommodate above and beyond feeling happy. In some sense, it is easy to “do the right thing” when a relationship is going well. Surely, there are forces that encourage accommodation even in the absence of happiness and during the inevitable less-good periods in a relationship. Next, we consider several such forces.

Commitment Factors

When we speak of commitment factors, we refer not only to global feelings of commitment to continue a relationship, but more generally to the variety of forces that bind people to relationships, for better or worse. If a person is going to continue a relationship, whether happy with it or not, that person is likely to feel more concerned that the relationship be a healthy one. Thus, greater global commitment should be associated with greater willingness to accommodate (cf. Rusbult, 1983). But beyond this, accommodation should also be greater among people who have invested more in their relationships, either directly (e.g., through disclosing intimately or investing time and effort) or indirectly (e.g., through tying originally extraneous resources to the relationship, such as mutual friends; cf. Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Accommodation should also be greater

among people who have poorer quality alternatives, either because their actual alternatives are poor or because they feel that spending time outside of a romantic involvement is unacceptable (cf. Rusbult, 1983; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Similarly, people who have lower self-esteem, particularly with respect to their social “worth,” should be more willing to accommodate out of fear that should their relationships end, they may not be valued by alternative partners (cf. Rusbult et al., 1987). Furthermore, accommodation should be greater among people who feel greater normative support for their relationships—based on religious proscriptions, cultural beliefs regarding appropriate behavior, support or pressure from friends or kin, and so on (cf. Johnson, in press; Rusbult, in press). Thus, people who have stronger feelings of commitment—because they have invested much, have poor alternatives, doubt their social worth, or experience strong normative support for their relationships—should feel more inclined to act so as to promote a relationship’s longevity and should be more willing to accommodate when a partner has behaved badly.

Importance Factors

When relationships are important to personal well-being, people should be more willing to accommodate. To the degree that harming a relationship means harming oneself, suffering the cost of accommodation is likely to seem like a sensible course of action. In particular, accommodation should be greater when a relationship is a more central component of life, that is, among people for whom career and other interests are relatively less important (cf. Lin & Rusbult, 1990). Accommodation should also be greater among women, who have been socialized to be relationship “caretakers,” or social-emotional experts (cf. Rusbult et al., 1986). Similarly, people with greater psychological femininity (i.e., a more communal, “relationships” orientation) should accommodate more, and people with greater psychological masculinity (i.e., a more agentic, “instrumental” orientation) should accommodate less (cf. Bem, 1974; Rusbult et al., 1986). Thus, accommodation should be enhanced when a relationship is the “centerpiece” of meaning in life, because it is closer to the core of one’s value system or because one has been socialized to believe that it is of great importance.

Self-Centeredness Factors

We predict that willingness to accommodate will be lower among people who are more self-centered (i.e., more egocentric), that is, among people who are more concerned with their own outcomes than with their partners’ outcomes or the general welfare of their relationships. In particular, accommodation should be lower among Machiavellians, because they are likely to selfishly manipulate others into doing the social “dirty work” rather than suffer the personal costs of accommodating (cf. Christie & Geis, 1970). Also, accommodation should be lower among people who are less empathetic or less inclined to “feel” how the partner feels about the problem situation (cf. Davis, 1983). Accommodation should be lower among people who engage in less perspective taking—especially with respect to the partner—or are disinclined to see the problem situation

from the partner's point of view (cf. Davis, 1983). And accommodation should be lower among people who are more cognitively rigid or find it difficult to think about the problem from the partner's point of view. In each case, tendencies to selfishly focus on one's own outcomes, feelings, and point of view should impede willingness to accommodate when a partner has engaged in potentially destructive behaviors. In short, more self-centered people should be likely to behave in more self-centered ways and to accommodate less.

Are these hypotheses consistent with prior research? Unfortunately, little work has directly addressed such questions. However, prior research does provide some indirect support for our hypotheses. First, some research has demonstrated that willingness to behave cooperatively in conflicts, tendencies to place some power in the partner's hands during stressful times, and tendencies to inhibit power-related behaviors are greater among people who are more involved in or dependent on a relationship—due to greater commitment, poorer quality alternatives, greater investment size, greater relationship centrality, and so on (Bahr & Rollins, 1971; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Molm, 1985; Secord, 1983; Shettel-Neuber, Bryson, & Young, 1978; Slusher, Roering, & Rose, 1974; White, 1980). Also, in comparison with partners in less satisfying relationships, partners in more satisfying relationships exhibit higher levels of affection and submission, are more likely to react positively to partners' negative behaviors, and are more willing to accept personal blame for negative events and to credit the partner for positive contributions to the relationship (Fineberg & Lowman, 1975; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Thompson & Kelley, 1981). Finally, several individual dispositions (e.g., greater femininity, lesser masculinity, greater empathy, and greater perspective taking) have been shown to be associated with lesser tendencies toward coercive-manipulative behavior, greater cooperativeness and submission, and greater interpersonal sensitivity and compliance (Adams & Landers, 1978; Barnes & Buss, 1985; Bernstein & Davis, 1982; Falbo, Hazen, & Linimon, 1982; Rosen & Aneshensel, 1976). Thus, we predict

Hypothesis 2a: Willingness to accommodate will be greater among people who are happier with their relationships—specifically, among those who feel more satisfied with their partners and relationships and have lower comparison levels.

Hypothesis 2b: Willingness to accommodate will be greater among people who are more committed to their relationships—specifically, among those who experience stronger global commitment, have invested more in their relationships, have poorer quality alternatives, have lower self-esteem (especially with respect to their social worth), and experience greater normative pressure to continue their relationships.

Hypothesis 2c: Willingness to accommodate will be greater among people for whom the relationship is more important—specifically, among those who perceive their relationships to be more central to their lives, among women, and among those who have greater psychological femininity and lesser masculinity.

Hypothesis 2d: Willingness to accommodate will be greater among people who are less self-centered—specifically, among those who are less Machiavellian, more empathetic, more inclined toward perspective taking in general and (particularly) with respect to their partners, and less cognitively rigid.

Dynamics of Accommodation

We need, however, to move beyond this simple, listlike set of predictions regarding the straightforward effects on accommodation of relationship-level variables and individual-level dispositions. We expect that the process by which partners become willing to accommodate is somewhat more complicated than what is implied in the static predictions advanced earlier. Three important dynamic processes may provide a richer understanding of the mechanisms by which couples negotiate accommodation processes in ongoing close relationships.

Critical Mediating Variables

First, exactly how do the motivational forces described earlier come to influence accommodation? We predict that willingness to accommodate will be largely mediated by the extent to which people feel committed to their relationships. Why should this be so? Commitment is the central construct in understanding the longevity and stability of relationships. If accommodation is indeed a social good that is promoted by concern for the long-term well-being of a relationship, then the commitment construct should summarize such concerns more thoroughly than any of the other variables mentioned earlier. Prior research has demonstrated that decisions to remain in or end a relationship are most directly and powerfully predicted by feelings of commitment (Rusbult, 1983). Also, commitment has been shown to be associated with degree of satisfaction, perceived quality of alternatives, magnitude of investments, centrality of relationship, and normative support for the relationship (Lin & Rusbult, 1990; Rusbult, 1980). In short, commitment is empirically related to all of the relationship-level factors discussed earlier except for comparison level, a factor that has not yet been empirically examined but has been predicted to be a component of commitment (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus, commitment arguably encompasses many or most of the concerns that are said to promote prorelationship transformation of motivation.

Furthermore, we expect that the remainder of the variables discussed earlier—the individual-level dispositions (e.g., sex role orientation and self-esteem)—influence willingness to accommodate largely through their impact on relationship-level factors (e.g., investment size and quality of alternatives). Relationship-level factors, in turn, modify feelings of commitment, which in turn should most directly influence willingness to accommodate. Why? We believe that dispositions influence relationships not by affecting concrete day-to-day behaviors, such as discrete decisions to accommodate rather than retaliate, but rather by affecting one's general orientation toward relationships. That is, individual dispositions are likely to exert general effects on features of relationships such as willingness to invest in a relationship, the inclination to forsake alternatives, or the tendency to recognize and show concern for friends' and family members' support. Thus, we expect that global commitment is the most direct and immediate determinant of accommodation, that commitment is affected primarily by features of relationships, and that broad features of relationships are affected by individual-level dispositions. Our research explores the validity of models of the following form: Individual-level dispositions (e.g., perspective taking and femininity) influence dyad-le-

vel processes (e.g., centrality and investments), which in turn influence global commitment, which in turn directly mediates willingness to accommodate. For example, psychological femininity may not be directly causally related to accommodation; femininity may relate to accommodation only insofar as feminine people are likely to invest in their relationships and regard relationships as central to their well-being. These dyad-level effects may produce stronger commitment, which in turn leads to greater accommodation. Thus, we predict

Hypothesis 3: The most direct predictor of accommodation will be commitment level. The impact of other dyad-level qualities (e.g., investments and alternatives) will be largely mediated through their effects on feelings of commitment, and the impact of individual-level dispositions (e.g., perspective taking) will be largely mediated through their effects on dyad-level variables.

Absolute Versus Relative Levels of Involvement

Second, whereas *absolute* level of involvement in a relationship (e.g., absolute commitment) may be one issue in understanding accommodation, it may also be fruitful to explore *relative* involvement (e.g., an individual's commitment relative to the partner). We believe that mutuality of involvement may be an issue in understanding accommodation, as implied in the Hill et al. (1976) "principle of least involvement." If accommodation is a social good, it makes sense that the burden of accommodation will fall on the shoulders of the partner who cares more about the outcome that good promotes (i.e., the partner who is relatively more involved). For example, imagine that in an absolute sense, neither Partner A nor Partner B feels very committed to their relationship; however, in a relative sense, A feels slightly more committed than B. Even though A's absolute commitment level is low, Partner A may end up engaging in moderate levels of accommodation: To the degree that maintaining the relationship is at all desirable, Partner A will bear the burden of accommodation because B feels more indifferent, or less inclined to "pay for" the social good. Thus, we predict that both absolute and relative involvement—both absolute and relative levels of each relationship-level predictor—are important in understanding accommodation, especially in the case of commitment (which, we assert, most directly mediates accommodation):

Hypothesis 4: Greater absolute levels of involvement (i.e., relationship-level predictors) and greater relative levels of involvement will promote greater willingness to accommodate. In particular, both absolute and relative commitment will be associated with greater accommodation.

Mutuality in Accommodation

Third, do partners typically share equally in dealing with destructive content, and is mutuality (i.e., similarity of levels) an issue in understanding how accommodation affects couple functioning? When a partner becomes increasingly willing to accommodate, does the individual reciprocate with more generous accommodation in turn? We expect that when one partner displays a strong willingness to accommodate, the other may become increasingly willing to do so in return. In the absence of apparent ulterior motives, acts of accommodation are likely

to be interpreted as demonstrations of goodwill—as attempts to maintain and improve a relationship. The nature of interdependence is such that partners' demonstrations of goodwill are likely to produce enhanced trust that one's own accommodation would not be for naught, and, in turn, this confidence should make one more willing to accommodate in the future (e.g., "Surely I can trust you if you care so deeply that you're willing to suffer my occasional insults. How can I do less?").

Also, we expect that well-functioning relationships are characterized by a tendency to reciprocate accommodation over the long run, resulting in greater *mutual* accommodation as well as greater *joint* accommodation (i.e., high combined levels). Just as reciprocating disclosure results in increasing intimacy, reciprocating accommodation should result in increases in the quality of couple functioning: One partner accommodates, which increases the other's trust and willingness to do so, which increases the initial partner's trust and willingness to do so, and so on. In the long run, the truism that "what goes around comes around" may produce accelerating goodwill and accommodation on the part of both partners. Of course, this acceleration process depends on the presence of both mutuality and increasing joint levels, which implies that these factors may interact: It seems unlikely that relationships will flourish if partners exhibit high mutuality by simultaneously refusing to accommodate. Therefore, two elements should be considered in understanding couple distress and nondistress. First, we expect that partners' joint willingness to accommodate will be greater in nondistressed relationships than in distressed relationships; that is, we expect that if partners collectively produce higher levels of accommodation, relationships will function better. Second, we expect that nondistressed relationships will be characterized by greater mutuality in combination with greater joint levels of accommodation (i.e., the interaction will affect couple functioning); that is, we predict that healthy function is promoted by "acceleration," which depends on high mutuality in combination with high joint levels of accommodation. Thus, we predict

Hypothesis 5: In nondistressed relationships, compared with distressed relationships, partners' joint accommodation will be stronger. Also, nondistressed relationships will be characterized by high joint accommodation (i.e., high combined levels) in combination with high mutuality (i.e., similarity of levels).

Overview of Research

This article reviews the results of six studies designed to test the hypotheses advanced earlier. Studies 1 and 2 are simulation experiments that test the claim that accommodation is a social cost—that people fundamentally and impulsively are not inclined to accommodate (Hypothesis 1). Studies 3, 4, and 5 are cross-sectional surveys of dating relationships. These studies provide preliminary evidence regarding factors that increase willingness to accommodate (Hypotheses 2a–2d). All three studies explore the effects of relationship-level factors, and Studies 4 and 5 explore the effects of several individual-level dispositions. We use causal modeling procedures to assess the role of commitment in mediating accommodation (Hypothesis 3). Study 3 also determines whether accommodation is predicted by absolute or relative levels of involvement (or both; Hypothesis 4). Study 6, a laboratory investigation of dating couples, has

two goals. First, Study 6 determines whether partners' accommodation is mutual and examines the link between mutuality and couple distress/nondistress (Hypothesis 5). Second, it determines whether self-reports of accommodation relate to behavioral measures. Together, these studies should provide a good initial test of the validity of our model.

Studies 1 and 2

Studies 1 and 2 provide evidence relevant to Hypothesis 1. Are people fundamentally disinclined to accommodate? Are people reflexively inclined to react in kind to partners' destructive acts? It is exceedingly difficult to gain empirical access to true, "behind the veil" feelings. In the current work, we adopted two simple strategies to reveal discrepancies between self-centered, primitive preferences and preferences that reflect broader social concerns and motives. In Study 1, we induced some subjects to set aside the concerns that normally influence social behavior—concern for the partner's feelings, the future of the relationship, and their public image or self-concept—and to behave as they "earnestly wish to behave." That is, we asked subjects to state their honest, reflexive response preferences. Do their preferences differ from those of others for whom normal social concerns continue to operate? If so, we may tentatively infer that at a "gut level" subjects are disinclined to accommodate. In Study 2, we presented subjects with identical social situations and varied the stated level of their interdependence with a partner, and we assessed resultant differences in response preferences. In a sense, all subjects were confronted with the same given situation and were induced to adopt different transformation-relevant motivation with regard to that situation. If desire to accommodate is lower among less interdependent partners, we may tentatively infer that individuals are disinclined to accommodate. Although this type of evidence constitutes a relatively weak test of Hypothesis 1, and although a variety of alternative explanations could be advanced for the observed results, this type of data may represent the best test of Hypothesis 1 that realistically is feasible. At the very least, we may demonstrate that accommodation is viewed as a "social cost," and as behavior that is more appropriate to more highly interdependent relationships.

Method

Subjects. Subjects in Study 1 were 25 undergraduates (11 men and 14 women) and subjects in Study 2 were 144 undergraduates (71 men and 73 women) who participated in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology courses at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Subjects were 19.49 years old on average and typically were freshmen or sophomores (30% freshmen, 45% sophomores, 13% juniors, and 12% seniors). Subjects were primarily White (94% White, 1% Asian, and 5% Black). Subjects had prior experience in close relationships; 93% reported that they were currently or previously had been involved in a close dating relationship. Their closest romantic relationships lasted an average of 14 months.

Procedure. Subjects read essays describing accommodative problems—situations in which Person X behaved in a rude or inconsiderate way toward the essay protagonist. Subjects placed themselves in the position of the protagonist and answered questions about their probable reactions. In Study 1 there were 10 essays, manipulating normal versus reduced levels of social concern in one of five accommodative situations. In Study 2 there were 20 essays, manipulating four levels of

interdependence between Person X and the protagonist in one of five situations. In Study 1, each subject reacted to one essay situation; in Study 2, each subject reacted to three different situations.

The Study 1 essays manipulated two levels of social concern. In the normal social concern condition, subjects were asked to "imagine that you and X are classmates—X is someone you know as a casual acquaintance." In the reduced social concern condition, subjects were asked to further

imagine that X really, honestly wouldn't care how you reacted—wouldn't be angry or hurt or think anything about you one way or another no matter how you behaved. Imagine also that you really, honestly aren't concerned about what impression you make—that your behavior would have no impact on X's feelings about you, other people's feelings about you, or your feelings about yourself. You can react however you want, with no consequences.

The Study 2 essays manipulated four levels of interdependence between the protagonist and Person X: The two were acquaintances, casual dates, regular dates, or were seriously involved. In the acquaintance condition, the essay stated that "X was a student in [the protagonist's] history class last semester—someone [she] knows by sight but to whom [she's] never previously spoken." In the casual dates condition, the essay stated that "[the protagonist] and X have been out on a couple of dates—nothing very serious, but they're friends at least." In the regular dates condition, the essay stated that "[the protagonist] and X have been dating for several months now, and may be headed for a fairly serious relationship." In the serious involvement condition, the essay stated that "[the protagonist] and X have been dating for two years now, and are engaged to be married as soon as they graduate from UNC."

Five accommodative situations were explored. For example, in "Misunderstanding at the Deli," X misunderstood something the protagonist intended as a joke, and when the protagonist apologized for the misunderstanding X remained angry; in "Zero-Sum Shrimp," the protagonist and X were waiting to buy shrimp on sale at the seafood counter, and when the protagonist unknowingly bought all the remaining shrimp, X angrily said he or she thought that was very nasty and unfair.

Dependent measures. Subjects answered 12 questions concerning their odds of engaging in each response: exit (e.g., "I'd tell X to go take a hike and quit being such a creep"), voice (e.g., "I'd ask if X might want to talk to me about what was going on"), loyalty (e.g., "I'd be a good sport, give X a smile, and just live with it even though it wasn't my fault"), and neglect (e.g., "I'd say something mildly unpleasant, and then ignore X") (three items per response; 0 = *not at all likely to do this*, 8 = *extremely likely to do this*).

Results

Reliability of measures. We calculated separate reliability coefficients for the set of items designed to measure each construct. These analyses revealed sizable alphas for the measures of destructive reactions (exit plus neglect; .91 for Study 1 and .86 for Study 2) and constructive reactions (voice plus loyalty; .61 and .67). Although the alphas for constructive reactions were lower than ideal, we judged them to be adequate, so we formed an averaged measure of each construct.

Hypothesis 1: Accommodation as a function of level of social concern. The Study 1 data were subjected to two types of regression analysis, one including main effects and interaction for level of social concern (0 = reduced, 1 = normal) and subject sex (0 = men, 1 = women) and one including main effects and interaction for level of social concern and accommodative situa-

Table 1
Impact of Level of Social Concern and Level of Interdependence on Destructive and Constructive Reactions to X's Potentially Destructive Behavior: Studies 1 and 2

Study/condition	<i>M</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Study 1: Reduced vs. normal social concern			
Destructive reactions		-2.70*	.240*
Reduced social concern	3.04		
Normal social concern	1.11		
Constructive reactions		2.85**	.261**
Reduced social concern	3.86		
Normal social concern	5.31		
Study 2: Interdependence Level			
Destructive reactions		-7.74**	.533**
Acquaintances	2.76		
Casual dates	2.50		
Regular dates	1.96		
Seriously involved	1.89		
Constructive reactions		12.12**	.523**
Acquaintances	3.44		
Casual dates	4.08		
Regular dates	4.62		
Seriously involved	4.87		

Note. For Study 1, table values are *ts* and *R*²'s from regressions of each measure onto level of social concern; for Study 2, table values are *ts* and *R*²'s from regressions of each measure onto level of interdependence, subject sex, and couple number (the latter included as a categorical variable). The Study 1 analyses were based on data from 25 subjects, and the Study 2 analyses were based on data from 144 subjects.

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

tion (five essays coded as categorical variables). Table 1 summarizes these analyses.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, in comparison with conditions of normal social concern, subjects under conditions of reduced social concern reported that they would be less likely to react constructively to another's potentially destructive behavior, and that they would be more likely to react destructively. That is, accommodation was substantially lower under conditions of reduced social concern (see Table 1). No other main effects or interactions were statistically significant.

Hypothesis 1: Accommodation as a function of interdependence level. Study 2 subjects completed questionnaires regarding three situations, so their data were not independent. To control for nonindependence, we performed a series of regression analyses including subject number as a categorical variable (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). We examined a variety of models, including main effects and interactions for interdependence level (0 = acquaintances, 1 = casual dates, 2 = steady dates, 3 = seriously involved), subject sex (0 = men, 1 = women), and accommodative situation (five essays coded as four categorical variables). Table 1 summarizes these analyses.

The analyses revealed only scattered categorical effects involving accommodative situation and revealed no interactions with other variables, so this factor was dropped. Consistent with predictions, the analyses revealed significant effects of interdependence on both constructive and destructive reactions—accommodation declined as a function of decreasing interdependence (see Table 1). Because information regarding subject sex was redundant with subject number, the impact of sex was assessed in analyses excluding subject number as a categorical variable. Consistent with Hypothesis 2c, these analyses revealed significant subject sex effects for both constructive reactions ($t = 2.05$, $p < .041$) and destructive reactions ($t =$

-2.97 , $p < .003$); in comparison with men, women were more likely to accommodate. No other main effects or interactions were significant.

Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 are consistent with Hypothesis 1, the assertion that people are disinclined to accommodate: Study 1 subjects exhibited greater accommodation under conditions of normal social concern than under conditions of reduced social concern, and Study 2 subjects exhibited greater accommodation in more interdependent than in less interdependent relationships. However, this evidence constitutes a relatively weak test of Hypothesis 1, in that several alternative explanations for the observed results could be advanced: Role-played behavior is not "real," the findings may reflect demand characteristics or stereotypes regarding appropriate behavior, a given behavior may be judged as more destructive in more interdependent relationships, and so on. Furthermore, in a broader sense, it is questionable whether our reduced social concern and low interdependence conditions can be argued to truly represent the given matrix. At best, these conditions are only relatively more primitive or fundamental than are circumstances of normal social concern and high interdependence. That is, our manipulations can be argued to tap into preferences at different points on the continuum of transformation-relevant motivation, some of which are more primitive. Thus, the reader should not place more weight on these findings than the data warrant. But at the very least, these findings suggest that accommodation is less likely in relatively more primitive or fundamental social situations and demonstrate that accommodation is viewed as somewhat more appropriate in more interdependent relationships and under conditions of normal social concern. As we noted

earlier, this may be the best empirical test of Hypothesis 1 that realistically is feasible.

Furthermore, consistent with Hypothesis 2c, the Study 2 data revealed that women exhibited greater inclinations to accommodate than did men. However, in Study 1 subject sex was unrelated to willingness to accommodate. The discrepancy between the results of the two studies may be due to several factors. First, it could be that the sample size in Study 1 was too small to detect weak differences between women and men. Alternatively, it could be that whereas Study 2 examined differences in how subjects thought they would actually behave in actual social situations, Study 1 examined differences in how subjects want to behave. It is possible that women's actual behavior is more accommodative (Study 2), but that they are no more likely than men to want to accommodate (Study 1). This issue remains to be explored in future research.

Studies 3, 4, and 5

Studies 3–5 are cross-sectional surveys that provide evidence about what makes people willing to accommodate (Hypotheses 2a–2d). All three studies explored the associations between accommodation and several relationship-level factors—commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, comparison level, normative support, and relationship centrality. Studies 4 and 5 also explored the links between accommodation and individual-level dispositions—psychological masculinity and femininity, self-esteem, empathic concern, perspective taking, cognitive rigidity, and Machiavellianism. We used causal modeling procedures to examine the role of commitment in mediating accommodation and to determine whether the lion's share of willingness to accommodate is accounted for by feelings of commitment (Hypothesis 3). Study 3 also included measures of both absolute and relative levels of the relationship-level predictors, to determine whether absolute or relative levels of involvement, or both, predict accommodation (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Subjects. Subjects were 498 undergraduates who participated in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology courses at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. About equal numbers of women and men participated in each study (81 vs. 85 in Study 3, 83 vs. 78 in Study 4, and 91 vs. 80 in Study 5). Subjects were 19.37 years old on average, and typically were freshmen or sophomores (32% freshmen, 48% sophomores, 12% juniors, and 8% seniors). Most subjects were White (90% White, 1% Asian, 8% Black, and 1% other). The mean duration of subjects' relationships was 16 months; they typically described themselves as dating regularly (14% dating casually, 78% dating regularly, 7% engaged, and 1% married); and they typically reported that neither they nor their partners dated others (74% said both partners were monogamous, 10% said one dated others but the other did not, and 16% said both dated others).

Procedure. Approximately 10 men and 10 women were recruited for each research session. Although sign-up sheets required that participants be involved in a relationship of at least 1 month in duration, upon arrival at the session we asked subjects to privately indicate whether they were indeed involved in such a relationship. The experimenter informed subjects that there were alternate forms of the research materials and asked them to fill out a slip indicating whether or not they were involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 month in duration. When distributing questionnaires, the experimenter gave each subject

appropriate materials (with identical covers, to protect subjects' privacy). (The alternate task was completed by 5% to 10% of the volunteers.)

Studies 3, 4, and 5: Structured measures of accommodation. All three questionnaires included a 24-item scale that measured self-reported tendencies toward accommodation. Each item asked whether the subject reacted in a given way (i.e., with exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect) when the partner behaved in a potentially destructive manner. We developed several destructive "stems," statements wherein we described a partner's destructive exit or neglect act (e.g., "When my partner is angry with me and ignores me for awhile . . ." and "When my partner yells at me or speaks in a raised voice . . ."). We added reaction statements to each stem, producing six measures of each construct: exit (e.g., ". . . I begin to think about ending our relationship"), voice (e.g., ". . . I talk to him/her about what's going on"), loyalty (e.g., ". . . I give my partner the benefit of the doubt and forget about it"), and neglect (e.g., ". . . I sulk and try to avoid my partner for awhile"). Items were answered using a 9-point scale (0 = *never do this*, 8 = *always do this*).

Studies 3 and 4: Open-ended measures of accommodation. The questionnaires used in Studies 3 and 4 also included open-ended measures of accommodation. (In Study 5, only structured measures were obtained.) Subjects wrote brief answers to statements of the form "If my partner was annoyed by one of my personal habits and started to treat me badly, I would probably . . ." In eight statements the partner engaged in a potentially destructive act, that is, with exit or neglect. (In eight filler statements the partner engaged in voice or loyalty.) We coded subjects' reactions to statements where the partner engaged in exit (e.g., "If we had a really serious problem in our relationship and my partner started to talk about ending our relationship, I would probably . . .") or neglect (e.g., "If my partner was annoyed by one of my personal habits and started to treat me badly [ignoring me or saying cruel things], I would probably . . .").

Subjects' responses were coded for degree of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect by two judges who were naive to subjects' other answers (e.g., 0 = *no exit*, 1 = *low exit*, 2 = *high exit*). For example, "get out of the relationship" and "decide he wasn't good enough for me" were coded as exit; "work harder on the problem" and "make him talk to me about it" were coded as voice; "continue to love him" and "be very hurt" were coded as loyalty; and "turn and walk away without saying anything" and "become defensive and bring up his shortcomings" were coded as neglect (all of these examples received ratings of 2). Some responses were blends (i.e., they were coded 1 for more than one category). For example, "try to work things out, and if it was useless let things go" was coded as a blend of voice and exit; "get mad and retaliate" was a blend of exit and neglect; and "hope that it would pass and that he'd talk to me if it didn't" was a blend of loyalty and voice.

Studies 3, 4, and 5: Relationship-level predictors. In all three studies, the relationship-level variables were measured using three to five 9-point scales (e.g., 0 = *not at all*, 8 = *extremely*). We measured seven features of relationships: commitment level (five items; e.g., "For how much longer do you want your relationship to last?"), satisfaction level (four items; e.g., "How does your relationship compare to your ideal?"), quality of alternatives (four items; e.g., "How attractive are the people other than your current partner with whom you could become involved?"), investment size (four items; e.g., "Have you put things into your relationship that you would in some sense lose if the relationship were to end [e.g., time you've spent together, secrets you've disclosed to each other, memories you share]?"), comparison level (three items; e.g., "Would you say that you expect a lot out of your romantic relationships?"), normative support (three items; e.g., "Do your friends approve of your relationship with your partner?"), and centrality of relationship (three items; e.g., "Compared to school, work, family, etc., how central is your relationship in your life?").

Studies 4 and 5: Individual-level predictors. Study 4 included scales

to measure self-esteem and sex role orientation. Self-esteem was measured using Hoyle's (1987) Multifaceted-Evaluation-of-Self Inventory. Subjects indicated the degree to which each of 20 items described them, using a 9-point scale (0 = *not at all*, 8 = *very much*). In particular, we were interested in two subscales of Hoyle's instrument: (a) global self-esteem (5 items; e.g., "I sometimes think I am a worthless individual" [reverse-scored]) and (b) social self-esteem (5 items; e.g., "I usually feel as if I have handled myself well at social gatherings"). Psychological masculinity and femininity were measured using Bem's (1974) Sex-Role Inventory. Subjects indicated the degree to which each of 60 adjectives or phrases described them, using a 9-point scale (0 = *never true of me*, 8 = *always true of me*). Twenty items measured psychological masculinity (e.g., "assertive" and "dominant"), and 20 items measured psychological femininity (e.g., "yielding" and "sensitive to the needs of others").

Study 5 included scales to measure empathic concern, perspective taking, Machiavellianism, and cognitive rigidity. Cognitive rigidity was measured using Wesley's (1953) scale. Subjects indicated whether each of 16 items was true or false (e.g., "There is usually only one best way to solve most problems"). The measures of Machiavellianism were taken from the short form of the Christie and Geis (1970) scale. Subjects indicated the degree to which they agreed with each of 20 opinion statements, using a 9-point scale (0 = *disagree strongly*, 8 = *agree strongly*; e.g., "The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear"). The measures of empathic concern, general perspective taking, and partner perspective taking were from Davis's (1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index. Subjects indicated how well each of 33 items described them, using a 9-point scale (0 = *does not describe me very well*, 8 = *describes me very well*). We were particularly interested in the subscales for general empathic concern (7 items; e.g., "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me") and general perspective taking (7 items; e.g., "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision"). We developed five additional items to measure partner perspective taking, that is, tendencies to take the partner's point of view in problem situations (e.g., "When my partner and I are having a disagreement, I recognize that there are two sides to every question, and try to think about my partner's point of view").

Study 3: Measures of relative involvement. Study 3 included items to measure relative involvement. Subjects indicated how they believed they rated relative to their partners with respect to each relationship-level variable (3 items per variable): commitment (e.g., "Who's more committed to maintaining your relationship?"), satisfaction (e.g., "Who's more in love—you or your partner?"), investment size (e.g., "Who's 'put more into' the relationship in terms of time, emotions, energy, etc.?"), quality of alternatives (e.g., "If your relationship were to end, who would do better on the 'dating scene?'"), normative support (e.g., "Who feels stronger support from others to continue in your relationship?"), comparison level (e.g., "Who wants and expects more out of relationships in general?"), and relationship centrality (e.g., "For whom is your relationship a more central, important part of life?") (for each item, 0 = *my partner*, 4 = *we're equal*, 8 = *me*).

Results

Reliability of measures. To assess the reliability of our measures, we calculated alpha coefficients for the set of items designed to measure each construct (separately for each study). These analyses revealed acceptable coefficients for the items that measured all features of relationships that we assessed in Studies 3, 4, and 5: commitment (.81, .89, and .88), satisfaction (.86, .91, and .88), quality of alternatives (.57, .52, and .54), investment size (.74, .74, and .78), comparison level (.54, .55, and .57), normative support (.86, .88, and .90), and centrality of

relationship (.81, .84, and .75). Acceptable alphas were also obtained for the Study 3 items that measured relative levels of each relationship-level quality: relative commitment (.57), relative satisfaction (.72), relative quality of alternatives (.74), relative investment size (.72), relative comparison level (.81), relative normative support (.83), and relative centrality of relationship (.84). The alphas were acceptable for the individual-level variables measured in Studies 4 and 5: psychological femininity (.79), psychological masculinity (.85), global self-esteem (.88), social self-esteem (.69), general empathic concern (.84), general perspective taking (.76), partner perspective taking (.81), cognitive rigidity (.58), and Machiavellianism (.78). We also obtained acceptable alphas for the structured measures of accommodation obtained in Studies 3, 4, and 5, that is, for destructive reactions (exit plus neglect; .92, .91, and .92) and constructive reactions (voice plus loyalty; .80, .75, and .78). Finally, we assessed the degree of agreement between our coders' ratings of the open-ended responses obtained in Studies 3 and 4. These analyses revealed sizable alphas for the coders' ratings of destructive reactions (exit plus neglect; .84 and .82) and constructive reactions (voice plus loyalty; .77 and .78). A few of these values were lower than ideal but were judged to be generally acceptable, so we formed an averaged measure of each construct.

Validity of measures. Because we obtained multiple measures of each response in Studies 3 and 4, we were able to explore the convergent and discriminant validity of our measures by calculating correlations between the ratings of the open-ended items and the structured self-report measures of each construct (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The two measures of destructive reactions were significantly positively correlated ($r = .46, p < .001$), as were the two measures of constructive reactions ($r = .63, p < .001$). Also, destructive and constructive reactions were negatively correlated: The open-ended measure of destructive reactions was negatively correlated with the open-ended and structured constructive measures ($r_s = -.80$ and $-.33, p_s < .001$), and the structured measure of destructive reactions was negatively correlated with the open-ended and structured constructive measures ($r_s = -.48$ and $-.20, p_s < .001$).

Hypotheses 2a–2d: Predicting accommodation from characteristics of relationships and individuals. Hypotheses 2a–2d concerned the relationships between accommodation and a variety of predictors. To test these hypotheses, we calculated simple zero-order correlations between each predictor and our structured and open-ended measures of destructive and constructive reactions. These analyses are summarized in Table 2.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, more satisfied subjects exhibited greater accommodation (see Table 2, satisfaction level row; all four effects were significant). However, Hypothesis 2a predicted that high comparison level would be negatively related to accommodation, whereas we found the opposite—comparison level was positively linked with accommodation (three of four effects were significant). Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, accommodation was greater among subjects with stronger commitment, poorer quality alternatives, greater investment size, and greater normative support. However, global and social self-esteem were not related to accommodation. Consistent with Hypothesis 2c, accommodation was greater among subjects who reported that their relationships were more central, and among subjects with greater psychological femininity. The influence of

Table 2
Correlations Between Relationship-Level and Individual-Level Predictors and Destructive and Constructive Reactions to Partners' Potentially Destructive Behavior: Studies 3, 4, and 5

Factor	Destructive reactions		Constructive reactions	
	Structured measures	Open-ended measures	Structured measures	Open-ended measures
Happiness				
Satisfaction level	-.48**	-.34**	.16**	.35**
Comparison level	-.17**	-.18**	.04	.19**
Commitment				
Commitment level	-.50**	-.37**	.14**	.33**
Quality of alternatives	.27**	.29**	-.07	-.24**
Investment size	-.30**	-.21**	.11*	.19**
Normative support	-.31**	-.17**	.09*	.18**
Global self-esteem	.01	.09	-.08	-.10
Social self-esteem	.02	.07	-.07	-.03
Importance				
Centrality of relationship	-.36**	-.39**	.15**	.34**
Psychological femininity	-.28**	-.30**	.21**	.28**
Psychological masculinity	.15†	.14†	-.09	-.17*
Self-centeredness				
Partner perspective taking	-.29**	—	.29**	—
General perspective taking	-.11	—	.27**	—
General empathic concern	-.12	—	.06	—
Cognitive rigidity	.11	—	.01	—
Machiavellianism	.11	—	-.11	—

Note. Table values are zero-order *r*s between each predictor variable and each measure of accommodation. For the structured measures, correlations with satisfaction, comparison level, commitment, alternatives, investments, normative support, and relationship centrality are based on data from 498 subjects (Studies 3, 4, and 5); for the open-ended measures, correlations are based on data from 327 subjects (Studies 3 and 4). Correlations with femininity, masculinity, and self-esteem are based on data from 161 subjects (Study 4). Correlations with perspective taking, empathic concern, cognitive rigidity, and Machiavellianism are based on data from 171 subjects (Study 5).

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

masculinity was significant or marginal in three of four cases. Because the Hypothesis 2d predictions were tested in Study 4, we have only structured measures of accommodation. Consistent with Hypothesis 2d, partner perspective taking was associated with greater accommodation. Also, general perspective taking was positively linked with constructive reactions. However, empathic concern, cognitive rigidity, and Machiavellianism were unrelated to response tendencies.

We performed analyses of variance to test the Hypothesis 2c predictions concerning gender. In three of four cases, women accommodated more than men; in the fourth case, men accommodated more than women. In comparison with women, men exhibited greater tendencies toward destructive reactions; this effect was significant for the structured measure ($M_s = 1.92$ and 2.18), $F(1, 495) = 5.32, p < .022$, and was marginal for the open-ended measure ($M_s = 0.65$ and 0.74), $F(1, 325) = 2.89, p < .090$. In contrast, for constructive reactions, women scored lower than men on the structured measure ($M_s = 4.14$ and 4.33), $F(1, 495) = 4.36, p < .037$; women scored higher than men on the open-ended measure ($M_s = 1.54$ and 1.34), $F(1, 325) = 8.86, p < .003$.

In general, how did our relationship-level predictors fare? Out of 28 effects, 26 were significant. Six of seven relationship-level predictors consistently "behaved" as hypothesized (commitment, satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment size, normative support, and centrality of relationship). However,

high comparison level was generally associated with greater willingness to accommodate, contrary to predictions. How did our individual-level predictors fare, on average? Out of 30 effects, only 14 were significant or marginal. Two individual-level predictors consistently "behaved" as hypothesized (psychological femininity and partner perspective taking). We obtained moderate support for predictions involving masculinity, general perspective taking, and gender. We obtained no support for predictions involving global or social self-esteem, general empathic concern, cognitive rigidity, or Machiavellianism. Thus, we obtained generally good support for predictions concerning the effects of relationship-level variables but weaker support for predictions involving individual-level dispositions.

Hypothesis 3: Commitment as the direct mediator of accommodation. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the most direct mediator of accommodation would be degree of commitment to relationships and that other features of relationships would affect accommodation largely through their links with feelings of commitment. Hypothesis 3 also predicted that individual-level dispositions relate to accommodation largely through their impact on dyad-level processes (e.g., willingness to invest and tendencies to forsake alternatives). Dyad-level processes, in turn, affect commitment, which in turn directly influences accommodation. Causal modeling techniques were used to assess the means by which features of dyads, as well as individual dispositions, influence accommodation (Reis, 1982). The data from

Table 3
Relationships Between Relationship-Level and Individual-Level Predictors and Destructive and Constructive Reactions to Partners' Potentially Destructive Behavior—Simple Effects and Effects on Residuals From Commitment-Level Regressions: Studies 3, 4, and 5

Reaction	Structured measures		Open-ended measures	
	Simple regression	Residuals regression	Simple regression	Residuals regression
Destructive				
Studies 3, 4, and 5 (Studies 3 and 4 for open-ended measures)				
Commitment level	-12.88**	—	-7.33**	—
Satisfaction level	-12.23**	-3.11**	-6.52**	-2.16*
Quality of alternatives	6.15**	1.48	5.42**	2.95**
Investment size	-7.00**	-0.60	-3.91**	-0.26
Comparison level	-3.76**	-0.38	-3.37**	-1.79†
Normative support	-7.24**	-2.39*	-3.20**	-0.31
Centrality of relationship	-8.67**	-0.78	-7.74**	-3.09**
Women	-2.31*	-1.45	-1.70†	-1.07
Study 4				
Commitment level	-7.45**	—	-4.97**	—
Psychological femininity	-3.70**	-3.11**	-3.89**	-3.39**
Psychological masculinity	1.92†	1.00	1.75†	1.07
Global self-esteem	0.19	-0.85	1.17	0.55
Social self-esteem	0.23	-0.94	0.87	0.13
Study 5				
Commitment level	-6.69**	—	—	—
Partner perspective taking	-3.90**	-2.65**	—	—
General perspective taking	-1.39	-1.29	—	—
General empathic concern	-1.51	-0.72	—	—
Cognitive rigidity	1.42	1.31	—	—
Machiavellianism	1.38	0.87	—	—
Constructive				
Studies 3, 4, and 5 (Studies 3 and 4 for open-ended measures)				
Commitment level	3.17**	—	6.37**	—
Satisfaction level	3.61**	1.10	6.64**	1.64
Quality of alternatives	-1.67†	-0.31	-4.37**	-1.96*
Investment size	2.49*	0.68	3.58**	0.00
Comparison level	0.79	-0.20	3.52**	1.98
Normative support	1.98*	0.58	3.38**	0.55
Centrality of relationship	3.48**	1.29	6.51**	2.09*
Women	-2.09*	-2.42*	2.98**	2.42*
Study 4				
Commitment level	2.82**	—	5.13**	—
Psychological femininity	2.72**	2.34*	3.63**	3.11**
Psychological masculinity	-1.16	-0.73	-2.21*	-1.54
Global self-esteem	-0.97	-0.59	-1.21	-0.57
Social self-esteem	-0.91	-0.48	-0.37	0.43
Study 5				
Commitment level	0.98	—	—	—
Partner perspective taking	3.94**	3.68**	—	—
General perspective taking	3.59**	3.56**	—	—
General empathic concern	0.72	0.58	—	—
Cognitive rigidity	0.14	0.19	—	—
Machiavellianism	-1.43	-1.34	—	—

Note. Values listed under Simple regression are coefficient *ts* from simple regressions of each accommodation measure onto each predictor; values under Residuals regression are coefficient *ts* from regressions of each residualized accommodation measure onto each predictor (residuals are from regressions of each accommodation measure onto commitment). Analyses for Studies 3, 4, and 5 are based on 498 subjects; analyses for Studies 3 and 4 are based on 327 subjects; analyses for Study 4 are based on data from 161 subjects; and analyses for Study 5 are based on data from 171 subjects.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Studies 3, 4, and 5 were combined in analyses of the structured measures, and the data from Studies 3 and 4 were combined in analyses of the open-ended measures.

We worked our way through the model backward, beginning with a series of regression tests to evaluate the relationship between commitment and accommodation. First, we regressed

each measure of accommodation onto commitment, calculating regression slopes and residuals. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3 (see commitment level rows). Consistent with predictions, commitment was significantly predictive of accommodation in 9 of 10 cases. Stronger commitment was associated with inhibited destructive reactions (all five effects were significant) and with enhanced constructive reactions (four of five effects were significant).

Is commitment the immediate mediator of accommodation? We regressed the residuals from the commitment analyses onto each variable to determine whether they predict accommodation once the effects of commitment are accounted for (see Table 3). To enable comparisons of direct and indirect effects, the test statistics for the simple effects of each predictor (the equivalent of zero-order correlations) are presented in the simple regression columns in Table 3, and the residuals regression columns display the corresponding test statistics for the relationship between each predictor and residualized accommodation, or the partial correlation. If commitment completely mediates accommodation, the effect of a variable should drop to zero in the latter analyses—the predictors should not be substantially related to residuals from the commitment analyses.

Recall that in analyses assessing the simple links between accommodation and each of 16 relationship- and individual-level predictors, 37 of 54 effects were significant or marginal (see Table 3, simple regression columns; 33 effects were significant and 4 were marginal). However, in the residuals analyses—analyses of the influence of each variable once the effect of commitment was partialled out—only 17 of 54 effects were significant or marginal (see residuals regression columns; 16 were significant and 1 was marginal). Thus, once the influence of commitment is accounted for, 20 of the 37 effects observed in the simple regressions drop to nonsignificance. Do our findings differ for relationship- and individual-level variables? For the relationship-level variables, 23 of 24 simple effects were significant or marginal (20 variables accounted for over 2% of the variance), whereas only 8 effects were significant or marginal in the residuals analyses (only 2 variables accounted for over 2% of the variance). For the individual-level variables, 14 of 30 simple effects were significant or marginal (10 variables accounted for over 2% of the variance), whereas in the residuals analyses only 9 effects were significant or marginal (7 variables accounted for over 2% of the variance).

Thus, we may tentatively conclude the following: First, people are more likely to accommodate to the degree that they feel more committed to their relationships.³ Second, although global commitment is not the *sole* predictor of accommodation, it seems clear that many variables we examined offer little predictive power beyond that accounted for by the commitment variable. Third, although more relationship-level than individual-level predictors exhibited significant simple relationships with accommodation, the power of commitment in mediating accommodation was more widespread for relationship-level predictors than for individual-level predictors. Fourth, in terms of consistency of findings and percentage of variance accounted for, psychological femininity and partner perspective taking clearly exerted direct effects beyond the mediating role of commitment; other variables that appeared to exert some direct influence beyond commitment were satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and centrality of relationship.⁴

However, it should be noted that few of these direct effects are strong in an absolute sense; our predictors accounted for more than 2% of the variance beyond that accounted for by commitment in only 9 of 54 analyses.

We are now in a position to move backward one step in the model, using causal modeling techniques to identify the direct and indirect predictors of commitment. A summary of the results of these analyses is presented in Table 4. First, we regressed commitment onto each of the remaining predictors, assessing the simple effect of each predictor (see Table 4, simple regression column). Pooling the data from the three studies, we used Cramer's (1972) model comparison techniques to identify the simplest and most parsimonious model for predicting commitment. Then we regressed commitment onto the critical predictors identified using Cramer's technique, calculating regression slopes for each predictor and calculating residuals for the

³ Of course, alternative causal models could be advanced, and such models might work equally well. Accordingly, we performed exploratory analyses to evaluate the mediating role of the next most plausible mediator, satisfaction level (its simple link with accommodation was nearly as strong as that of commitment). We regressed each measure of accommodation onto satisfaction, calculating regression slopes and residuals. In analyses where we regressed each predictor onto the resulting residuals, we found that the relationship- and individual-level factors continued to exert significant or marginal direct effects on accommodation in 26 of 54 cases; for the parallel analyses of commitment residuals, only 17 of 54 effects were significant or marginal. We explored the possible mediating role of several other variables and found that none of these variables eliminated nearly the number of significant residuals effects as did commitment. Thus, in comparison to other promising candidates, commitment functions as the most effective mediator of accommodation.

⁴ We performed two other types of analysis to explore the role of commitment in mediating accommodation. First, we performed "bottom-up" regression tests: We began with commitment and systematically added each of the other variables to the model, using model comparison tests (Cramer, 1972) to determine whether each larger model predicted accommodation significantly more powerfully than the model including only commitment. These analyses revealed that—in addition to commitment—satisfaction, alternatives, and centrality were typically necessary to accurately predict accommodation (as well as femininity in Study 4 and partner perspective taking in Study 5). Second, we performed "top-down" regressions, systematically comparing larger models with simpler ones until we identified the most accurate yet parsimonious model. These analyses, too, revealed that the most accurate yet parsimonious model typically included commitment, along with satisfaction, alternatives, centrality, and femininity or partner perspective taking. Thus, these two types of analysis revealed findings that are congruent with the results of our residuals analyses. Also, because the residuals analyses are equivalent to simple correlations with residualized accommodation, we regressed the residualized accommodation scores (i.e., the residuals from the commitment analyses) onto the full set of predictors from each study to determine which factors contributed to predicting accommodation beyond the variance accounted for by commitment—and beyond the variance accounted for by other variables that exert direct effects. We used model-testing techniques to identify the simplest and most parsimonious model for predicting each residualized measure. These analyses revealed findings consistent with our previous analyses: The best regression models consistently included psychological femininity (in Study 4) and partner perspective taking (in Study 5), and frequently included satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and centrality of relationship.

Table 4
Relationships Between Relationship-Level and Individual-Level Predictors and Commitment to Relationships—Simple Effects and Effects on Residuals From Critical Variable Regressions: Studies 3, 4, and 5

Study/commitment predictor	Simple regression	Residuals regression
Studies 3, 4, and 5		
Satisfaction level	28.57**	—
Quality of alternatives	-10.70**	
Investment size	15.54**	
Centrality of relationship	21.18**	
Studies 3, 4, and 5		
Comparison level	7.36**	0.60
Normative support	11.19**	0.66
Women	2.17*	1.16
Study 4		
Psychological femininity	1.89†	-0.51
Psychological masculinity	-2.08*	0.09
Global self-esteem	-1.82†	-0.52
Social self-esteem	-2.06*	-0.96
Study 5		
Partner perspective taking	3.13**	-0.59
General perspective taking	0.50	-0.34
General empathic concern	1.79†	-1.12
Cognitive rigidity	-0.62	-1.63
Machiavellianism	-1.31	-0.27

Note. Values listed under Simple regression are *ts* from simple regressions of commitment onto each predictor; values listed under Residuals regression are *ts* from regressions of residualized commitment onto each predictor (residuals are from a simultaneous regression of commitment onto the four critical predictors of commitment—satisfaction, alternatives, investments, and centrality). Analyses for Studies 3, 4, and 5 are based on 498 subjects; analyses for Studies 3 and 4 are based on 327 subjects; analyses for Study 4 are based on data from 161 subjects; and analyses for Study 5 are based on data from 171 subjects.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

model. Finally, we regressed the residuals onto each remaining predictor to determine whether any of them predicted commitment once the effects of critical model variables were accounted for (see residuals regression column).

Using the pooled data from the three studies, Cramer's (1972) model-testing methods revealed that the most essential and powerful predictors of commitment were satisfaction ($t = 6.60$, $p < .001$), alternatives ($t = -2.60$, $p < .010$), investments ($t = 4.81$, $p < .001$), and relationship centrality ($t = 6.34$, $p < .001$; model $R^2 = .701$, $p < .001$). The same basic model emerged across the three studies. Satisfaction and centrality of relationship were critical in all three studies, investment size was critical in two studies, and alternative quality was critical in one study and of marginal importance in another. There was no instance in which an individual-level disposition emerged as a critical predictor.

In the analyses assessing the simple effect of each predictor on feelings of commitment (see Table 4, simple regression column), commitment was greater among subjects with higher satisfaction, investment size, comparison level, normative support, and relationship centrality, and among subjects with poorer alternatives. These findings were consistent across all three studies and are congruent with previous investment model research (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986c), except for the positive relationship between comparison level and commitment. (No previous research has examined the effects of comparison level, but if we had examined these effects we would have predicted that higher compari-

son level would induce *reduced* commitment [cf. Thibaut & Kelley, 1959])

Furthermore, the simple regression analyses revealed that stronger commitment was associated with lower masculinity, lower social self-esteem, and greater partner perspective-taking tendencies. Also, commitment was marginally associated with greater femininity and lower global self-esteem. However, the residuals analyses revealed that once the effects of the critical predictors were partialled out (i.e., satisfaction, alternatives, investments, and centrality), none of the remaining predictors exerted significant direct effects on commitment (see Table 4, residuals regression column). Indeed, none of these predictors accounted for as much as 2% of the variance in the residuals. Thus, consistent with Hypothesis 3, if individual dispositions are associated with commitment, this relationship is mediated through dyad-level processes such as feeling satisfied, forsaking alternatives, being willing to invest, and feeling that the relationship is central to one's well-being.

We are now in a position to move backward one last step, identifying the simple predictors of our relationship-level variables and assessing the links among the remaining relationship-level and individual-level factors. However, we are now dealing with relatively distal predictors of accommodation, so in terms of understanding accommodation, the utility of further causal modeling analyses is somewhat low. Also, to make claims regarding the causal ordering of the remaining factors seems imprudent at best (e.g., which comes first, self-esteem or femininity, general empathic concern or Machiavellianism?). There-

fore, instead of reporting the full complement of relationships among the remaining variables, we merely report the links among the variables that are most powerfully related to accommodation, that is, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, centrality of relationship, psychological femininity, and partner perspective taking: Subjects with greater psychological femininity reported greater investment size and centrality of relationship ($t_s = 3.12$ and 3.49 , both $p_s < .05$). Also, subjects with greater partner perspective-taking tendencies reported greater satisfaction and centrality of relationship ($t_s = 4.24$ and 2.37 , both $p_s < .05$).

Hypothesis 4: Absolute versus relative levels of involvement. Study 3 obtained measures of subjective absolute and relative levels of all relationship-level variables. Hypothesis 4 predicted that willingness to accommodate would be related not only to absolute levels of each model variable but also to relative levels. That is, we expected that merely feeling more involved in and committed to a relationship than one's partner would lead individuals to accommodate, above and beyond what one would expect simply from knowledge of absolute feelings of involvement or commitment: An individual may feel only moderately committed to a relationship, but if she or he feels far more committed than the partner, she or he may nevertheless engage in high levels of accommodation.

We tested Hypothesis 4 in two steps. First, we examined the relationship between accommodation and (a) absolute commitment level and relative commitment level (each variable included in separate one-factor models) and (b) seven measures of absolute involvement and seven measures of relative involvement (each set entered simultaneously and in separate models). The effects of absolute involvement were significant in seven of eight cases (see Table 5, rows labeled 1 and 2). In contrast, the effects of relative involvement were marginally significant in only three of eight cases (see Table 5, rows labeled 3 and 4).

Despite this unpromising beginning, it was necessary that we proceed with the next step in our analysis. In Step 2 we performed causal modeling analyses, assessing the power of absolute and relative involvement, respectively, in predicting accommodation. To determine whether measures of relative involvement predict willingness to accommodate above and beyond absolute commitment, we regressed each measure of accommodation onto absolute commitment, calculating regression slopes and residuals. Then we regressed the residuals onto relative commitment and onto a model including all seven measures of relative involvement (all seven relationship-level predictors; see Table 5, rows 1a and 1b). These analyses revealed that when the influence of absolute commitment was partialled out, in no case did relative commitment or the seven measures of relative involvement significantly predict the residuals. Second, we performed parallel analyses regressing our accommodation measures onto a model including all seven measures of subjective absolute involvement, again regressing the residuals onto relative commitment and onto a model including all seven measures of relative involvement (see Table 5, rows 2a and 2b). Once again, when the influence of the seven measures of absolute involvement was partialled out, in no case did the measure of relative commitment level or the seven measures of relative involvement significantly predict the residuals.

Then we reversed these two types of analysis. To determine whether measures of absolute involvement predict willingness

to accommodate above and beyond relative commitment, we regressed each measure of accommodation onto relative commitment, calculating regression slopes and residuals. Then we regressed the residuals onto absolute commitment and onto a model including all seven measures of absolute involvement (see Table 5, rows 3a and 3b). When the influence of relative commitment was partialled out, absolute commitment continued to predict the residuals in three of four cases, as did the seven measures of absolute involvement. Finally, we regressed our accommodation measures onto a model including all seven measures of subjective relative involvement, again regressing the residuals onto absolute commitment and onto a model including the seven measures of absolute involvement (see Table 5, rows 4a and 4b). Once again, when the influence of the seven measures of relative involvement were partialled out, absolute commitment predicted the residuals in three cases, as did the seven measures of absolute involvement. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported: Relative involvement level has little impact on willingness to accommodate. Instead, absolute involvement—in particular, absolute commitment level—seems sufficient to account for accommodative behavior.

Discussion

Studies 3, 4, and 5 provided good support for Hypotheses 2a–2d. The results of simple correlational analyses revealed that accommodation is generally more likely among people who feel more committed, experience greater satisfaction, believe their alternatives are poor, have invested more in their relationships, perceive greater normative support for their relationships, have higher expectations (this was contrary to predictions, however), perceive their relationships to be more central, are more psychologically feminine, and engage in greater partner perspective taking.

We also obtained good support for Hypothesis 3. The causal modeling analyses revealed findings consistent with our claim that feelings of commitment mediate willingness to accommodate.⁵ That is, many of the variables we examined influenced accommodation primarily through their relationship with commitment; compared with the variance they accounted for in simple regression analyses, most of our predictor variables accounted for substantially reduced variance once the variance attributable to commitment was accounted for. However, a few predictor variables continued to directly relate to accommodation even beyond the mediating role of commitment. Figure 1

⁵ Causal modeling techniques assume a given ordering of variables—the order assumed by the scientist who specifies the model and performs the analyses—but they cannot unequivocally determine whether that particular ordering of variables is the “true” one. We assessed the possible mediating role of several factors other than commitment and found that none of them eliminated as many indirect effects as did the commitment variable (see Footnote 3). However, because the data in Studies 3, 4, and 5 are from a cross-sectional survey study, direction of causation remains to be established in future research. Also, in future research we believe it might be fruitful to augment the causal modeling techniques adopted herein by adopting a structural equations analysis strategy such as the LISREL approach. Such an approach would be useful in obtaining precise estimates of the strength of specific links in our model.

Table 5
*Relationships Between Absolute and Relative Involvement and Destructive and Constructive Reactions to Partners' Potentially Destructive Behavior—
 Simple Effects and Effects on Residuals: Study 3*

Involvement level	Destructive reactions				Constructive reactions			
	Structured measures		Open-ended measures		Structured measures		Open-ended measures	
	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>
Absolute								
1. Absolute commitment level								
One-factor regression model	-6.92**		-4.00**		1.50		3.56**	
Regressions of residuals onto								
1a. Relative commitment level	0.25		-0.73		-0.47		0.15	
1b. Relative levels of seven predictors	0.33		0.68		1.59		0.93	
2. Absolute levels of seven predictors								
Seven-factor regression model	9.21**		4.16**		2.25*		2.45*	
Regressions of residuals onto								
2a. Relative commitment level	0.74		0.15		-0.55		-0.41	
2b. Relative levels of seven predictors	0.41		0.36		0.83		0.86	
Relative								
3. Relative commitment level								
One-factor regression model	1.91		-1.71†		-0.08		1.09	
Regressions of residuals onto								
3a. Absolute commitment level	-6.45**		-3.53**		1.52		3.27**	
3b. Absolute levels of seven predictors	7.99**		3.15**		1.75		2.00†	
4. Relative levels of seven predictors								
Seven-factor regression model	1.35		1.92†		1.91†		1.52	
Regressions of residuals onto								
4a. Absolute commitment level	-5.54**		2.51*		0.68		2.63**	
4b. Absolute levels of seven predictors	5.39**		2.73*		0.73		2.41*	

Note. Values in rows labeled One-factor regression model are from simple regressions of absolute commitment (under Absolute)—and relative commitment (under Relative)—onto the four measures of accommodation. Values in rows labeled Seven-factor regression model are from simultaneous regressions of seven measures of absolute involvement—and seven measures of relative involvement—onto the four measures of accommodation. Values in “residuals” rows are from regressions of the residuals (from the preceding analysis) onto each predictor or set of predictors. Table values are *t*s for one-factor models and *F*s for seven-factor models. Most analyses are based on data from 166 subjects.
 † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

displays a path model that represents a plausible account of the causal links among our variables. Variables that directly relate to a criterion are linked to that criterion with a direct path. For links with accommodation, we display the average standard-

ized regression coefficients across all four measures of accommodation. The variables that were most reliably associated with accommodation beyond effects mediated through commitment were satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, central-

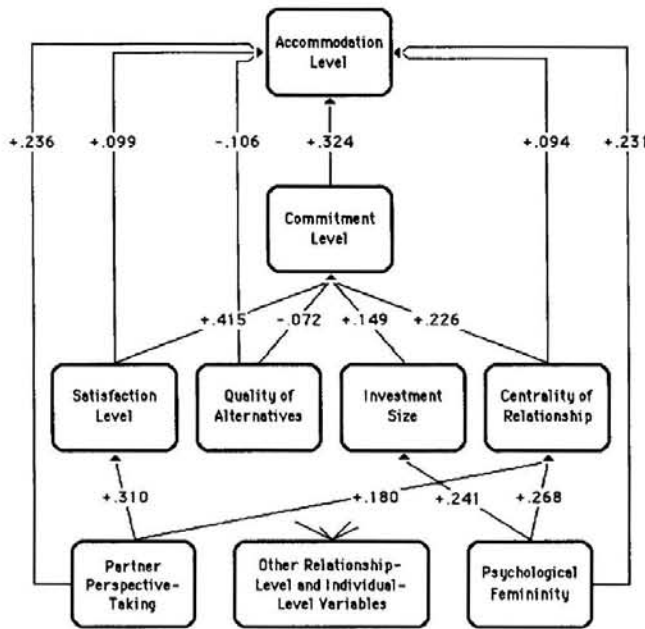


Figure 1. Links between individual-level variables, relationship-level variables, feelings of commitment, and willingness to accommodate—summary of causal modeling results: Studies 3, 4, and 5.

ity of relationship, psychological femininity, and partner perspective taking. Figure 1 also displays the direct predictors of commitment—satisfaction, alternatives, investments, and centrality. Finally, Figure 1 shows the direct effects of psychological femininity and partner perspective taking on these four variables (i.e., on the four predictors of commitment).

Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Whereas our measures of absolute involvement consistently predicted accommodation, accommodation was only weakly related to relative involvement. Also, causal modeling analyses revealed that once the influence of absolute involvement was accounted for, relative involvement was not associated with accommodation. It is entirely possible that our measures of relative involvement were poor measures: These measures should properly be regarded as measures of subjective absolute and relative involvement; plausibly, it is difficult for people to accurately report on how involved their partners are relative to themselves. However, in recent work on married couples, we have found that these same measures predict important processes such as relative power and marital adjustment (Rusbult & Verette, 1990).

On the assumption that these null results are reliable, how can we account for them? It appears that people do not really take into consideration how they feel about an ongoing relationship in relation to how they report their partners feel. The real issue appears to be the degree to which the individual personally feels committed to a relationship. In retrospect, these findings are somewhat cheering: Rather than calculating the degree to which they need to accommodate in light of their partners' willingness (or lack of willingness) to do so, instead people appear to merely suffer the costs of accommodation to the degree that they in some sense want to do so, and to the

degree that they are personally motivated to do so irrespective of what they believe their partners are willing to do.

Study 6

Study 6, a laboratory investigation of ongoing dating relationships, had two goals. First, because both partners in dating relationships participated in the study, we were able to test Hypothesis 5. That is, we were able to explore the relationship between couple distress/nondistress and the partners' joint level of accommodation, as well as their mutuality in accommodation. Specifically, Study 6 tested the claim that couple nondistress would be greater when the partners exhibited high joint accommodation (i.e., when their combined accommodation was greater) and when their accommodation was mutual (i.e., when their levels were more similar). Second, this research determined whether our structured self-report measures of accommodation are related to behavioral measures; that is, Study 6 assessed the validity of these measures of willingness to accommodate.

Method

Subjects. Subjects were 41 couples involved in ongoing dating relationships (41 men and 41 women) recruited at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. One partner in each relationship participated in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology courses; typically, the other partner participated on a purely voluntary basis (in a few cases, both partners were enrolled in introductory psychology courses, and both accordingly received course credit). Subjects were 19.74 years old on average and typically were freshmen or sophomores (30% freshmen, 32% sophomores, 26% juniors, and 12% seniors). Subjects were primarily White (91% White, 2% Asian American, and 7% Black). The mean duration of couples' relationship was 13 months, and they typically described themselves as dating regularly (11% dating casually, 81% dating regularly, and 8% living together or engaged or married).

Procedure. One couple participated in each research session. The 2-hr session was composed of four activities: (a) questionnaires—subjects individually completed questionnaires describing themselves and their relationships; (b) interaction task—couples conversed about specified topics for two 5-min sessions, and their conversations were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded; (c) matrix games—subjects played three matrix games in which the points they earned depended on both their own and their partners' trial-by-trial decisions, and they received false feedback that their partners behaved competitively; and (d) moral dilemmas task—subjects attempted to reach consensus recommendations regarding four moral dilemmas and received false feedback that their partners stubbornly persisted with recommendations different from their own.

Questionnaire. Subjects were escorted to separate cubicles to fill out their questionnaires. Because some items used in Studies 3, 4, and 5 were only weakly related to our predictors, we slightly modified the instrument we used to measure self-reported tendencies toward accommodation. The current instrument was composed of four stems (e.g., "When my partner is unintentionally unpleasant or thoughtless [or if my partner were to do this] . . ."), each of which was followed by four scales. Subjects indicated the degree to which they would react in each of four ways to the situation described in the stem—with exit (e.g., "I feel so angry that I want to walk right out the door"), voice (e.g., "I talk to him/her about what's going on, trying to work out a solution"), loyalty (e.g., "I give my partner the benefit of the doubt and forget about

it”), and neglect (e.g., “I sulk and try to stay away from my partner for awhile”) (for each item, 0 = *never*, 8 = *always*). Subjects also completed parallel items indicating the degree to which their partners engaged in exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect behaviors when *they* behaved badly (0 = *never*, 8 = *always*). For example, one stem was “When I am unintentionally unpleasant or thoughtless (or if I were to do this). . .” and one exit item was “My partner feels like yelling at me, or doing something equally nasty.”

Our measure of distress/nondistress combined information on both partners’ reported feelings of satisfaction with and commitment to their relationship (four commitment measures and four satisfaction measures; e.g., “For how much longer do you want your relationship to last?” and “Are you satisfied with your relationship?”). These two variables were the best predictors of accommodation in Studies 3, 4, and 5 and were part of the measure of distress/nondistress we used in previous research (Rusbult et al., 1986b; our previous measure combined information about commitment and positivity of feelings about partner/relationship, as did the present measure, but also included a measure of perceived effectiveness of couple problem solving). Also, these variables, especially commitment, have been shown to be predictive of individuals’ later decisions to remain in or to end their relationships (Rusbult, 1983).⁶

Audiotaped interaction task. Next, we audiotaped conversations between the partners. Each partner was given a sheet of paper listing the conversation topic (e.g., “Recall the last time you had an argument or a disagreement. Pick a disagreement that was of moderate importance—not a trivial matter, but also not anything major. Together, decide when that incident occurred, explain what it was about, and re-create that discussion.”). The experimenter then read the topic aloud, answered any questions the partners had about their task, asked the partners to discuss the topic for 5 min, and left the room. The experimenter knocked on the door after 4.5 min to let subjects know that they needed to bring their discussion to a close. When 5 min had passed the experimenter returned to the room and gave subjects their next conversation topic. Partners then discussed the second topic, following the same procedure.

Written transcriptions were produced for each audiotaped conversation. Six couples’ tapes were impossible to transcribe because of equipment failure or because one or both partners spoke too quietly for their conversations to be clearly heard. Each of the 35 remaining interactions was rated for both process and content by two trained coders. First, the interactions were coded for process; that is, we rated the “micro-level” features of the interaction itself. Coders proceeded twice through each tape and transcript. The first time, the coder identified each destructive act (e.g., saying something hurtful or putting the partner down). If a subject engaged in a repeated or persistent destructive act, each instance was recorded as a unique destructive act. Coders noted which partner engaged in each act and scored each act for degree of destructiveness. The second time through each tape and transcript, coders identified how the partner reacted to each destructive act (constructive reaction, no response, or destructive reaction) and scored how accommodative the reaction was. For each partner in each couple, we recorded (a) the number of destructive acts initiated by each partner and the average score for each partner’s destructive acts (–1 = *a little destructive*, –3 = *exceptionally destructive*), (b) the number of destructive reactions to the partner’s destructive acts and the proportion of destructive reactions (given the number of opportunities provided by the partner), (c) the number of constructive reactions to the partner’s destructive acts and the proportion of constructive reactions, (d) the average constructiveness across all reactions (–3 = *exceptionally destructive*, 0 = *neutral*, +3 = *exceptionally constructive*), and (e) the overall rated level of accommodation (coders’ estimates of how accommodative each partner was, in terms of process; 0 = *not at all accommodative*, 3 = *exceptionally accommodative*). Following statistical

convention, we recorded and analyzed the arcsin square root transformation of each proportion score (Myers, 1966).

Second, the interactions were coded for content: Coders examined the global content of each conversation, rating the nature of the problem and deciding who accommodated most to the other’s point of view. For each conversation, coders rated (a) the severity of the problem (0 = *not at all serious*, 3 = *extremely serious*), (b) who “caused” the problem (male, female, both, or unclear), (c) who accommodated most (–2 = *male by a lot*, 0 = *equal*, +2 = *female by a lot*), and (d) total content accommodation (each partner’s accommodation level; 0 = *not at all*, 3 = *exceptional*).

Matrix games. Subjects participated in three matrix games—games in which the points subjects earned depended on both their own and their partners’ decisions. We told subjects that to enable the study of decision making in the absence of verbal and nonverbal communication, they would perform the task from separate rooms. First, subjects read instructions and completed a face-to-face practice game. The instructions explained that partners would play three to seven “trials” of each game. On each trial, they would each select one of two choices (e.g., A or B). Each task specified who would select first. The points subjects earned would depend on both their own and their partners’ decisions; the combination of decisions would determine how many points each person earned. For each game, subjects were given a list of the points they and their partners would earn for each combination of choices, along with cards with the choice letters printed on them.⁷

Subjects were asked to begin by examining the outcomes associated with all four combinations of decisions. The person who was to select first would then give the experimenter a card with the chosen alternative printed on it, and the experimenter would deliver it to the partner. The partner would then make his or her choice, which would be conveyed to the other person. The pair of choices would determine the points each partner would earn. After completing one trial, they would move on to an unspecified number of additional trials. Subjects were given record sheets to note the choices made by each person on each trial, as well as the points earned by each partner.

Subjects were escorted to separate rooms and proceeded through several trials of each of three games. On the first and third games—the

⁶ The questionnaire also included scales to measure the other relationship-level variables examined in Studies 3, 4, and 5 (alternatives, investments, comparison level, normative support, and centrality) as well as several of the individual-level variables assessed in those studies (masculinity and femininity, perspective taking and empathy, and self-esteem). However, these scales are not relevant to the main concerns of Study 6, so they will not be discussed further.

⁷ Readers may question the validity of our matrix game as a means of studying accommodation. First, it could be that earning points in a game has no real meaning for subjects and that subjects were so indifferent to such outcomes that their behavior is meaningless with respect to the issue of accommodation. However, subjects appeared to be quite involved: Typically, they spent a fair amount of time contemplating their choices, they carefully recorded their own and their partners’ points (i.e., they showed interest in who was earning what), and they displayed emotion in reaction to feedback concerning partners’ choices (e.g., “she zapped me again!”). Also, if subjects were indifferent to matrix game outcomes, it is unlikely that behavior in these games would have related to self-reported accommodation. Second, if subjects’ relationships were highly interdependent, they may have thought of their earned points as a “pool,” so that couple points rather than individual points were their primary concern. We believe this is unlikely, because the outcomes were not resources that could be taken away from the session and shared—points in a matrix game have no exchange value beyond the immediate experimental setting.

key games—subjects believed their partners were instructed to select first. In fact, the experimenter provided false information about the partner's choices, following a specified schedule. The first and third games were versions of the Prisoners' Dilemma and Eve and the Serpent; the second game, a filler, was a version of Hero (cf. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Subjects played four trials of the Prisoners' Dilemma, two trials of Hero, and three trials of Eve and the Serpent. Each game had a constructive choice (i.e., a choice that would benefit both partners) and a destructive choice (i.e., one wherein the partner might earn high outcomes, but the subject either had to accept a very low outcome and allow the partner to earn high points or had to react destructively by earning relatively low points and giving the partner very low points). On the first and third trials of the key games, the subject received false information that the partner opted for the destructive choice, at which time the subject could either react destructively in turn and give both persons low outcomes (i.e., refuse to accommodate) or react constructively, suffer low personal outcomes, and allow the partner to earn high points (i.e., accommodate). On trials where subjects believed they were selecting first, subjects were given false feedback that their partners reacted by selecting the same choices they had selected (i.e., if the subject selected a constructive choice, subjects were told that the partner, too, had selected a constructive choice). (For the filler game, Hero, subjects' actual choices were exchanged.)

Two scores were recorded for each subject: First, we counted the number of "reactive" accommodative choices; we assessed subjects' reactions on trials where the partner chose first, and chose destructively. When the partner (false feedback) selected a destructive choice, how frequently did the subject react, on that same trial, with the constructive choice (i.e., the reaction that benefited the partner at some personal cost)? This measure is called "Reactive Accommodation—Trial n Reactions." Second, we counted the number of "initiated" accommodative choices; we assessed subjects' choices on trials where they chose first, following trials where the partner chose first and chose destructively. When the partner had previously behaved badly by starting a trial with a destructive choice, how often was the subject willing to start the next trial with a constructive choice? Of course, in doing so the subject exhibited trust that this constructive move would be matched by the partner—that the partner would "move" the two to a mutually beneficial cell of the matrix rather than behaving destructively once again. This measure is called "Initiated Accommodation—Trial $n + 1$ Choices."

Moral dilemmas task. Finally, subjects made joint decisions regarding four moral dilemmas. Subjects read descriptions of four dilemmas and were asked to reach a consensus recommendation regarding each (e.g., "As a professor, regulations require you to fail a student guilty of plagiarism. One of your talented students buys an essay, turns it in for a grade, feels guilty about it, and confesses to you. Do you flunk the student?"). Subjects were escorted to separate cubicles and exchanged notes indicating their recommendations (using cards labeled *yes*, *depends*, and *no*). They continued to exchange notes, through the experimenter, until they reached a consensus recommendation (or five trials passed with no consensus decision having been reached).

For the first and third dilemmas, subjects received false feedback that the partner recommended a decision different from the subject's and stubbornly persisted with that recommendation. At the first opportunity, the false feedback indicated that the partner recommended a decision two "steps" discrepant from the subject's and persisted with that recommendation for the remaining four trials (e.g., for a subject's "yes," the partner's feedback was "no"). On a second dilemma, the subject received feedback indicating that the partner's recommendation was one step discrepant from the subject's and persisted with that recommendation (e.g., for a "no," the partner's feedback was "depends"; for "depends," whether the feedback was "yes" or "no" was

determined by chance). On the other two dilemmas, subjects' actual recommendations were delivered, and the two attempted to reach actual consensus decisions. Did subjects accommodate by moving toward their partners' recommendations? We calculated a "Speed \times Number of Moves Toward Partner" score for the two false feedback dilemmas: how far the subject moved toward the partner (zero, one, or two steps) multiplied by the trial on which the move was made (4 = *second trial* [immediately], 0 = *not at all*).

Results

Reliability of measures. To assess the reliability of our self-report measures, we calculated separate alphas for the set of items designed to measure each construct. These analyses revealed good reliability for the items designed to measure couple distress/nondistress: First, within each subject's questionnaire responses, there were sizable alphas for the commitment (.91) and satisfaction (.88) items. Second, within a given relationship, there were strong correlations between men's and women's feelings of commitment (.67) and satisfaction (.57). Third, within a given relationship, pooled couple satisfaction and couple commitment were strongly correlated (.69). Therefore, for each couple, we formed a single distress/nondistress score—the sum of the partners' reported feelings of satisfaction with and commitment to their relationship.

We also obtained acceptable alphas for our measures of accommodation, that is, the self-report measures of own constructive reactions (voice plus loyalty; .63) and own destructive reactions (exit plus neglect; .77) and for perceptions of the partner's constructive reactions (voice plus loyalty; .70) and destructive reactions (exit plus neglect; .84). Finally, we assessed degree of agreement between our coders' ratings of the interaction data. With respect to process ratings, these analyses revealed acceptable alphas for coders' ratings of number of destructive acts (.57) and the average destructiveness of each destructive act (.53). Also, these analyses revealed acceptable alphas for (a) ratings of the proportion of partner reactions to these destructive acts that were destructive (.65) and the proportion that were constructive (.62), (b) the average constructiveness of the partners' reactions (.71), and (c) subjective accommodation (.60). With respect to content ratings, these analyses revealed acceptable alphas for ratings of the severity of the problems partners discussed (.54), for who accommodated more (.59), and for overall accommodation (.52). Also, these analyses revealed an acceptable gamma for ratings of who caused the problems partners discussed (.60). A few of these coefficients were lower than ideal, but they were judged to be acceptably strong. Therefore, we formed a single averaged measure of each construct.⁸

Validity of measures. An important goal of Study 6 was to determine whether our self-report measures of accommodation are related to actual behavior. Thus, the first substantive task in the analysis of our data was to assess the link between our

⁸ We performed a series of *t* tests to determine whether women and men differed in their reported satisfaction and commitment, in self-reported accommodation, or in the behavioral measures of accommodation. None of these measures differed significantly for women and men.

Table 6
Relationship Between Structured Likert-Type Measures of Destructive and Constructive Reactions to Partners' Potentially Destructive Behavior and Alternative Measures of Accommodation: Study 6

Self-descriptions/structured measures	Destructive reactions	Constructive reactions
Interaction behavior		
Process coding: Reactions to partner's destructive acts		
Proportion of destructive reactions	1.66	-2.83**
Proportion of constructive reactions	-2.27*	2.81**
Average constructiveness of reaction	-1.98*	2.49**
Overall rated level of accommodation	-2.38*	2.86**
Content coding: Total accommodation	-0.45	3.76**
Matrix games		
Reactive accommodation: Trial <i>n</i> reactions	-3.51**	1.20
Initiated accommodation: Trial <i>n</i> + 1 choices	-2.64*	1.73†
Moral dilemmas task		
Speed × number of moves toward partner	-2.30*	1.88†
Correspondence between partners' descriptions		
Women's perceptions of men's reactions and men's self-reported reactions	2.40*	2.15*
Men's perceptions of women's reactions and women's self-reported reactions	1.23	0.80

Note. Table values are *t*s from regressions of each structured measure of accommodation onto each alternative measure. Analyses listed under Interaction behavior, Matrix games, and Moral dilemmas task included couple number as a categorical variable. Table values listed under Correspondence between partners' descriptions did not include couple number as a categorical variable. Most analyses are based on data from 41 couples.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

self-report measures and the several behavioral measures of accommodation. Because the measures obtained from the partners in a given couple are not independent, all of our analyses include couple number as a categorical variable (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Table 6 presents the *t* values for each coefficient from regressions of each behavioral measure of accommodation onto both of our self-report measures.

First, do tendencies to accommodate in interaction relate to self-reports of willingness to accommodate? The data from our interaction ratings revealed good support for such a link (see Table 6, Interaction behavior section): Across our measures of accommodation at the process and content levels, greater accommodation was associated with reduced self-reported tendencies toward destructive reactions (three of five effects were significant) and with enhanced self-reported tendencies toward constructive reactions (all five effects were significant). Second, do subjects' tendencies to accommodate in the matrix games relate to self-reported accommodation? Greater accommodation in the matrix games (see Matrix games section) was consistently associated with reduced self-reported tendencies toward destructive reactions and was weakly associated with enhanced self-reported tendencies toward constructive reactions (one of two effects was marginal). Third, do subjects' tendencies to accommodate in the moral dilemmas task relate to self-reported tendencies to accommodate? Our "Speed × Number of Moves Toward Partner" score was significantly associated with self-reported destructive reactions and was marginally associated with self-reported constructive reactions (see Moral dilemmas task section).⁹

We also examined the link between subjects' descriptions of

their own tendencies toward accommodation and their partners' reports of their willingness to accommodate. The relationships between men's and women's self-descriptions and

⁹ It may be informative to present descriptive information regarding our behavioral measures: Examining process features of the interaction task, we found that subjects engaged in an average of 2.33 destructive acts (range = 0 to 13; *M*s = 2.66 for men and 2.00 for women) and that these acts were typically moderately destructive ($M = -0.93$, on a scale from 0 to -2). Partners were more likely to react constructively than destructively; the arcsin-transformed proportions were 51.36 for constructive reactions and 19.80 for destructive reactions (actual proportions = 61% and 11%; reactions were coded "no reaction" 28% of the time). The average constructiveness of subjects' reactions was +0.37 on a scale ranging from -3 to +3, and the coders' overall rating of partners' process accommodation was 1.32 on a scale ranging from 0 to 3. Examining content features, we found that partners typically discussed problems that were not terribly severe ($M = 1.45$, on a scale ranging from 0 to 3). In judging who caused each problem, coders judged that men caused the problem in 31% of the cases, that women caused it in 17% of the cases, and that the problem was jointly caused in 43% of the cases (9% of the cases were judged "unclear"). Coders indicated that women accommodated slightly more than men ($M = 0.10$, where -2 = *man by a lot* and +2 = *woman by a lot*). Subjects' average accommodation level was 2.21 on a scale ranging from 0 to 3. In our matrix games, on four occasions subjects received false feedback that their partners enacted destructive choices. On average, subjects' reactions to these choices were constructive on 1.56 occasions and destructive on 2.45 occasions. On average, on the four trials following those trials where the partner began game play with a destructive choice, subjects initiated constructive choices on 2.64 occasions and destructive choices on 1.36 occasions. For one moral dilemma, sub-

their partners' descriptions of them are also displayed in Table 6. All four relationships were positive, but only two of four were statistically significant. It is interesting to note that in comparison to men, women perceive their partners in ways that are more congruent with their partners' self-reports. Thus, the Study 6 data provide fairly good support for the validity of individuals' self-reports of accommodation; self-reports and alternative measures of accommodation were significantly or marginally related in 15 of 20 cases.

Hypothesis 5: Relationships between couple nondistress and both joint level of accommodation and mutuality of accommodation. Before directly testing Hypothesis 5, we performed some preliminary descriptive analyses. First, to determine whether partners generally accommodate at similar levels, irrespective of level of couple functioning, we calculated simple correlations between partners' self-reported constructive and destructive reactions. These analyses revealed that mutuality is not uniformly high—the correlation between partners' self-reports was not significant for constructive reactions ($r = -.04, p < .783$) or destructive reactions ($r = .26, p < .105$).

Second, to assess the relationship between couple functioning and each partner's tendency toward accommodation, we calculated simple correlations between couple distress/nondistress and both men's and women's self-reports of accommodation. The results of these analyses suggested that men's self-reported tendency to accommodate may be more powerfully related to couple functioning than women's, for both destructive reactions ($r_s = -.39$ vs. $-.05$) and constructive reactions ($r_s = .35$ and $.07$). However, these pairs of correlations did not differ significantly ($z_s = 1.58$ and $1.29, p_s < .114$ and $.197$). Also, we should note that men and women reported similar mean levels of both constructive reactions ($M_s = 5.08$ vs. 5.09) and destructive reactions ($M_s = 2.62$ vs. 2.61), and the variability in the responses of men and women was similar for both constructive reactions ($SD_s = 1.01$ vs. 0.82) and destructive reactions ($SD_s = 1.02$ vs. 1.19). These analyses hint, albeit very weakly, that men's willingness to accommodate may have somewhat more impact on overall couple functioning than women's willingness to do so.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that couple functioning would be enhanced to the degree that the partners jointly engaged in high levels of accommodation. Furthermore, it was predicted that the hallmark of effective couple functioning, or nondistress, would be high joint accommodation (i.e., high combined levels) in combination with high mutuality of accommodation (i.e., more similar levels). To test this prediction, we calculated three scores for each reaction: (a) joint response level—the sum of the partners' respective reactions (i.e., the total amount of accommodation in the relationship [ignoring whether one or both partners "produce" the accommodation]); (b) mutuality of response—the absolute value of the discrepancy between the

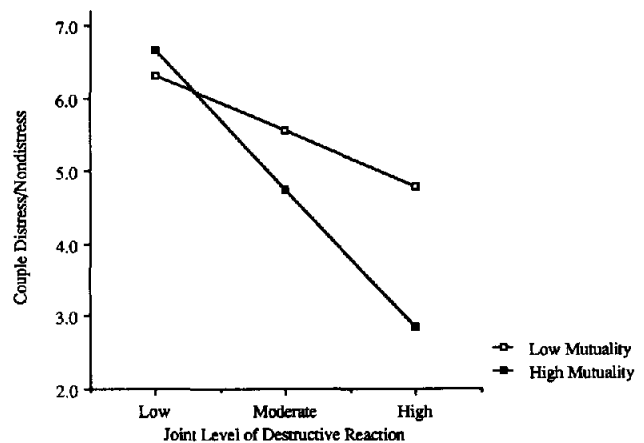


Figure 2. Impact on couple distress/nondistress of partners' joint level of destructive reaction, mutuality of reaction, and the joint level by mutuality interaction—regression analysis results: Study 6.

partners' levels, split at the median to divide couples into high and low mutuality groups (i.e., Is the relationship one in which partners accommodate at similar levels? 0 = low mutuality; 1 = high mutuality); and (c) joint response by mutuality—the interaction term, or the product of these two factors (i.e., How much total accommodation is there in relationships where level of accommodation is highly mutual?).

To test Hypothesis 5, we regressed our measure of couple nondistress onto a three-factor model including joint response level, mutuality of response, and the Joint Response Level \times Mutuality interaction. For destructive reactions, the overall model was statistically significant (model $R^2 = .358, p < .001$), as were both terms that were predicted to affect couple functioning—the main effect of joint response level ($t = -2.65, p < .012$) and the Joint Response Level \times Mutuality interaction ($t = -2.58, p < .014$). The main effect of mutuality was not significant (we made no predictions regarding this term; $t = 1.26, p < .214$). We used the intercept and unstandardized regression coefficients to plot regression slopes for the low and high mutuality groups; these results are displayed in Figure 2. Consistent with predictions, couple functioning was lower when joint tendencies toward destructive reactions were high, and this was particularly true among highly mutual couples; that is, distress was especially great when partners mutually exhibited strong joint tendencies toward destructive reactions. However, for constructive reactions, the overall regression model was not significant (model $R^2 = .041, p < .666$), nor were any of the model terms ($t_s = 1.04, 0.01, \text{ and } -0.13$).

Discussion

The Study 6 findings provide good support for the claim that self-reported tendencies toward accommodation may be valid indexes of actual behavior in relationships. Across eight different behavioral measures, encompassing the data from 2 hr per couple, self-reported willingness to accommodate was fairly reliably related to actual behavioral tendencies. Study 6 also provided evidence relevant to Hypothesis 5, although this hypothesis was only partially supported: Consistent with predic-

jects received false feedback that their partners persisted with recommendations one step discrepant from their own. On average, subjects moved to their partners' recommendations on the fifth trial or not at all ($M = 0.76$, where 4 = second trial and 0 = not at all). For a second dilemma, subjects received feedback that their partners persisted with recommendations two steps discrepant from their own. On average, subjects moved one step toward their partners on the third trial ($M = 2.85$) and moved a second step on the fifth trial ($M = 0.64$).

tions, couple distress was greater when partners jointly engaged in high levels of destructive reactions. Also consistent with predictions, the interaction of joint level of response with mutuality of response was significant for destructive reactions: Relationships were most distressed when partners mutually exhibited strong joint tendencies toward destructive reactions. Finally, simple descriptive analyses hint that men's willingness to accommodate may have more bearing on couple functioning than that of their female partners. Because the means and standard deviations for men and women were roughly equivalent, we take these findings at face value: In terms of relationship health, whether men accommodate *may* matter more than whether women do.

General Discussion

This research serves as a good first step toward understanding accommodation processes in close relationships. We obtained good support for Hypothesis 1, Hypotheses 2a–2d, and Hypothesis 3; we obtained partial support for Hypothesis 5; and we obtained no support for Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 1 predicted that in a fundamental sense, when partners engage in potentially destructive acts, people are somewhat disinclined to accommodate—at a “primitive” level, people typically do not reflexively wish to accommodate. The results of Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that accommodation is lower under conditions of reduced social concern than under conditions of normal social concern and is viewed as less appropriate in less interdependent relationships than in more interdependent relationships. As we noted earlier, a variety of alternative explanations could be advanced for these findings, including arguments based on the validity of role-played behavior, the possibility that our findings were influenced by demand characteristics or stereotypes, or the possibility that our findings result from perceptual rather than motivational processes. However, these data, at the very least, demonstrate that people are not willing to accommodate for all other people under all circumstances. Thus, it seems that accommodation is generally regarded as entailing some social cost, and this finding in itself is an important one.

Studies 3, 4, and 5 provided very good support for Hypotheses 2a–2d. As predicted, people are generally more willing to accommodate to the degree that they feel more committed to their relationships, are more satisfied, believe their alternatives are poor, have invested much in their relationships, feel stronger normative support for continuing their relationships, and feel that their relationships are more central in giving meaning to their lives. We also found that accommodation is more likely among people who are more psychologically feminine and among people who are more inclined to engage in partner perspective taking. We obtained only weak or inconsistent evidence regarding several other variables—gender, global and social self-esteem, general perspective taking and empathy, cognitive rigidity, and Machiavellianism.

Our findings regarding the effects of comparison level were contrary to predictions: Higher comparison level was associated with greater accommodation. Consistent with interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), we expected that high comparison level would have a depressing effect; that is, people with high expectations would feel less happy with their

relationships, and this would translate into reduced accommodation. Instead, high comparison level appears to produce a self-fulfilling effect. People who expect a lot out of their relationships appear to behave in ways that confirm those expectations. Indeed, high comparison level was also associated with greater feelings of satisfaction and commitment. It may be that in the present work we measured “mental models” regarding relationships rather than comparison level per se (cf. Hazan & Shaver, 1987). That is, our measures of comparison level may have tapped into broad schemas regarding the course of attachment experiences. If so, it is not surprising to discover that people who have secure and positive mental models end up feeling more satisfied and committed, and accordingly accommodate at higher levels. Alternatively, it may be that our measure of comparison level was an indirect indicator of satisfaction (i.e., “I’m getting a lot out of this relationship; I expect a lot out of this relationship”) or that the causal ordering is reversed—comparison level may become elevated as a result of being involved in a particularly good relationship (i.e., a satisfying and committed relationship in which partners accommodate a great deal).

However, it is not enough to note that such factors as greater investment size and poorer quality alternatives are related to willingness to accommodate. Hypothesis 3 represented an attempt to move beyond these straightforward, static predictions toward a greater understanding of precisely how willingness to accommodate is mediated. We predicted that accommodation would primarily be mediated by feelings of commitment, because commitment is the central construct in understanding the longevity and stability of relationships and because concern for the future and desire for enhanced stability are assumed to be critical components of the motivation to accommodate. As illustrated in Figure 1, the results of our causal modeling analyses are congruent with a model wherein willingness to accommodate is mediated primarily through variations in feelings of commitment. Although many factors appear to be related to accommodation in simple correlational analyses, these relationships often dissipate or disappear once the influence of commitment is accounted for. Indeed, few of our predictor variables accounted for more than 2% of the variance in accommodation above and beyond the variance accounted for by the mediating role of commitment (fewer than a fifth of our residuals regressions accounted for over 2% of the variance).

However, some variables influence willingness to accommodate both indirectly—through the mediating role of commitment—and directly. For example, people who are more psychologically feminine and people who are more inclined toward partner perspective taking reliably accommodate at higher levels, even when the effects of commitment are accounted for. Also, greater satisfaction, lower perceived quality of alternatives, and greater relationship centrality appear to exert direct effects on accommodation, even when the effects of commitment are partialled out.

Hypothesis 4 concerned the issue of relative involvement: Does relative involvement predict willingness to accommodate over and above the influence of absolute involvement level? We expected that a sort of “principle of least involvement” would operate, such that the less involved partner would be forced to contribute a greater share of the accommodation in his or her relationship. Intuitively, if one thinks of accommodation as a

social good, it would seem that the burden of accommodation should fall on the shoulders of the person who cares more about the outcome that good promotes. Study 3 provided no support for this claim. In retrospect, we were rather cheered by this discovery. Being in a lower power position does not force people to accommodate; instead, people appear to accommodate to the extent that they are personally motivated to do so. Alternatively, it may be that relative involvement is an issue in understanding accommodation processes, but that relative involvement predicts relative willingness to accommodate.

In Study 6, we observed good correspondence between our self-report measures of accommodation and indexes of accommodation obtained using behavioral measures: measures of both process and content accommodation coded from audiotaped interactions and actual behavioral choices in matrix games and a moral decision-making task. Furthermore, in Studies 3 and 4 we found that self-reported accommodation related to coders' ratings of descriptions obtained in open-ended measures. It is encouraging to discover such correspondence, especially in light of the fact that everyday accommodation is a relatively complex phenomenon. People may accommodate by shrugging off a potentially destructive act, by saying nothing, or by saying "come here and kiss me" (to mention only three possibilities). It is tremendously encouraging, from a scientific point of view, that behavioral tendencies in artificial tasks performed in a sterile laboratory environment relate to self-reports of everyday willingness to accommodate. A priori, we did not have tremendous confidence that people could accurately self-report on their tendencies to accommodate, or that accommodation would be manifested in micro-level analyses of interaction¹⁰ or in choices subjects made in a Prisoners' Dilemma Game. Apparently, either people are actively aware of their willingness to swallow their pride and accommodate when partners have been rude and inconsiderate, or they are able to accurately judge their willingness to do so upon reflection. These findings bode well for future research on accommodation processes.

Finally, Study 6 provided partial support for Hypothesis 5. First, several analyses suggested that the male partner's willingness to accommodate may be more reliably predictive of couple functioning than the female partner's willingness to do so. This pattern of results is reminiscent of Barry's (1970) claim regarding the marital conflict literature—that men's level of "adjustment" is generally more strongly related to the quality of marital relations than is women's. Alternatively, these findings may reflect traditional stereotypes regarding men's and women's roles; if the female partner's role is that of social-emotional expert, whose job it is to promote smooth interpersonal functioning, then it makes sense that whether or not the male partner accommodates will strongly relate to accommodation: Her accommodative behavior may be taken for granted, whereas his accommodative behavior may be quite salient because it is counternormative. Although we did not obtain consistent evidence of sex differences in willingness to accommodate, when such differences were obtained, women tended to exhibit greater accommodation than men. However, these results are quite preliminary, and such questions should be further addressed in future work.

Also, and consistent with predictions, we found that couple functioning is influenced by joint level of accommodation and

mutuality of accommodation. First, we found that couple functioning is greater when the partners' joint tendency to inhibit destructive reactions is greater, irrespective of whether one or both partners "carry the burden": Couple distress is lower when the partners do a good job of inhibiting destructive impulses (whether the male partner inhibits destructive impulses, the female partner inhibits destructive impulses, or both inhibit destructive impulses). Also, for destructive reactions, the interaction of joint level of response and mutuality of response is significantly related to couple functioning: Couple distress is greatest when partners mutually fail to inhibit destructive reactions. These findings are consistent with our claim that "what goes around comes around"; if partners exhibit mutuality by consistently trading fire for fire, the relationship is unlikely to flourish. Indeed, our results may be a summary description of prior findings in the clinical literature: In distressed relationships, partners tend to enter into endless destructive chains, wherein each partner's destructive act is matched by a destructive reaction, producing a spiraling, mutually destructive cycle of response. When neither partner is able to trust the other sufficiently to stop the cycle, the result may be accelerating mutual destructiveness.

Why is it that Hypothesis 5 was not supported for the constructive form of accommodation? This finding may represent yet another instance of Montgomery's (1988) claim that "it is less important to exchange positive behaviors than it is to *not* exchange negative behaviors" (p. 345). Reacting constructively when the partner has behaved badly may have less of an impact because constructive reactions suffer declining marginal utility and have less affective impact over time, constructive reactions produce elevated expectations and come to seem less positive, or constructive reactions are less perceptually salient in that destructive reactions present a more real and present danger to the relationship. These lines of speculation should be explored in future work.

Directions for Future Research

Beyond the recommendations proffered above, several directions for future research seem promising. First, one promising direction for future research concerns a phenomenon that might be termed *conflict aversion*. In the introduction, we implicitly assumed symmetry in partners' feelings about one another's destructive acts; we assumed that Partner A felt as horrible when the partner behaved destructively as did Partner B. In actual ongoing relationships, feelings about destructive content may not be symmetrical. One partner may say "I cannot bear it when you yell at me," whereas being yelled at may not bother the other partner at all. Also, when feelings about destructive content are asymmetrical, willingness to accommodate may

¹⁰ Our interaction results are especially encouraging in light of Levenson and Gottman's (1985) comments regarding the validity of schemes used to code couple interactions: "When observers code brief marital interactions, they are in effect applying a normative metric to that which they observe. . . . Of course, the observer's metric may be totally inappropriate for the couple being observed. . . . The only observers who we can be certain are applying the appropriate normative metric to a couple's marital interaction are the husband and wife themselves" (pp. 92-93).

well become asymmetrical. Apart from the variety of social motives, relational rules, and personal dispositions that lead partners to accommodate, one should consider that a priori feelings about accommodation may affect tendencies to accommodate. It may be that on average, the partner who most dislikes conflict and bad feelings becomes the accommodation expert in the family. Just as "he who most abhors dirty dishes does the dishes," it may be that "she who most abhors destructive content does the accommodating."

Second, it is important that future research attempt to gain a better understanding of some important temporal issues that we have not examined in the present work. For example, following the line of reasoning that is implicit in the current discussion of accommodation processes, one should find that temporal increases in involvement modify tendencies to accommodate; that is, changes in important forces in relationships should predict changes in accommodative behavior. Also, direction of causality needs to be established. Do people accommodate because they have become more heavily invested in relationships, or do they invest because they have accommodated? Do they accommodate because they are inclined toward partner perspective taking, or does the fact of accommodation make them more likely to engage in partner perspective taking? Also, what is the precise nature of the interdependence between partners? Does Partner A's increased willingness to accommodate lead Partner B to accommodate more in turn, or is Partner B more likely to take a free ride and allow Partner A to carry the burden? These sorts of questions require longitudinal research. At present, we are in the midst of an extended longitudinal study of newly married couples. The answers to such questions are pending.

A third direction for future work concerns the consequences of accommodation for the relationship and for the individual partners. With respect to relationship health, we expect that we will continue to discover that accommodation generally pays off. However, future research should determine whether inhibiting destructive impulses generally pays off more than enhancing constructive reactions, as we found in Study 6. Also, we should note that the range of distress examined in Study 6 may have been rather limited. All of our subjects were involved in ongoing dating relationships, and it is likely that (a) few of their relationships were on the verge of termination or in the midst of serious conflict and (b) few of their relationships have had the chance to exhibit strong and invincible "health" by weathering serious problems with scars healed and affection intact. A more powerful exploration of issues concerning couple distress awaits research using samples with greater variance in couple functioning.

To date, there is no evidence regarding the impact of accommodation on individual partners. Although we expect that individual "functioning" will be greater in relationships that are less distressed, and although high joint accommodation appears to promote relationship functioning, we expect that mutuality of accommodation may be an important predictor of individual well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, general well-being, emotional/psychological health, and physical health). In the long run, can *nonmutual* accommodation be good for the accommodator? Given that we have characterized accommodation as a social cost, we believe that partners who carry most of the accommodative burden in their relationships will suffer some

personal distress as a consequence. We are examining issues concerning individual well-being in our longitudinal investigation of newly married couples.

Conclusions

The research reported herein serves as a solid initial step toward increasing psychologists' knowledge of accommodation processes in close relationships: Consistent with Hypothesis 1, it appears that accommodation is regarded as something of a social cost. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, it appears that accommodation is associated with features of relationships and individuals that relate to happiness with relationships, commitment to relationships, importance of relationships, and self-centeredness. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, it appears that willingness to accommodate may be primarily (although not entirely) mediated by feelings of commitment to relationships. Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 5, it appears that couple functioning is generally associated with strong joint tendencies to inhibit destructive impulses, especially when such behavior is mutual. However, much remains to be learned. We believe that it is very important to gain a greater understanding of the willingness to react to a partner's potentially destructive act with a laugh and a conciliatory comment, or with a sensitive appeal to talk and an exploration of feelings. Also, we believe that it is very important to understand how people inhibit their impulses to react to partners' potentially destructive acts with anger and increased hostility. Our own research and the research of other social scientists has consistently demonstrated that the manner in which romantic partners react to destructive content is importantly predictive of couple functioning. But whereas prior research has identified accommodation as a hallmark of well-functioning relationships, little of the previous work on distressed and nondistressed relationships has gone beyond this simple descriptive level. The present research suggests that the orientation proffered herein—an orientation informed and directed by interdependence theory—may be one promising means of examining the processes and dynamics by which accommodation is negotiated.

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