Rodrigues, D. & Lopes, D. (2015). The role of moral commitment within the Investment Model. *International Journal of Psychology, 50*, 155-160. doi:10.1002/ijop.12088

Abstract

The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980) defines general commitment as a long-term orientation towards relationship maintenance and feelings of psychological attachment, influenced by satisfaction, quality of alternatives and intrinsic/extrinsic investments. We suggest the importance of additionally assessing moral commitment, defined by an intrapersonal predisposition to remain in the relationship (Johnson, 1991). We argue moral commitment's association to perceived intrinsic investments acting as internal barriers influencing general commitment and promoting relationship maintenance. A correlational study resorting to structural equation modeling showed that moral commitment predicted intrinsic investments, which in turn predicted general commitment (Model 1). No direct paths emerged from moral commitment to satisfaction or quality of alternatives (Model 2), nor it emerged as a fourth direct predictor of general commitment (Model 3). Results are discussed under relationships maintenance and dissolution frameworks.

Keywords: Moral commitment; General commitment; Investment Model; Structural equation modeling

Relationship maintenance and dissolution are two key topics in romantic relationships literature. Much empirical evidence focuses on the factors contributing to relationship stability (cf. Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). One such factor is commitment, broadly defined as the intention to maintain the relationship (for review, see Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010), and central to the empirically robust Investment Model (IM; Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Our research is framed within these matters and by the IM, analyzing the role of an important yet understudied internal predisposition promoting relationship maintenance – moral commitment (Johnson, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992) –, and suggesting it as a complementary component in the prediction of relationships commitment (for a similar argument with avoidance motivation see Kurdek, 2007).

The IM (Rusbult, 1980) defines general commitment as long-term orientation and intent to persist in the relationship, and as an affective attachment with one's partner. This in turn is influenced by greater satisfaction, greater investments, and less quality among alternatives (i.e., IM's antecedents). Bridging with other theoretical perspectives, general commitment and satisfaction relate to attraction forces (Levinger, 1999), dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1992), commitment to spouse (Adams & Jones, 1997) or personal commitment (Johnson, 1991), while investments and quality of alternatives relate to barriers (Levinger, 1999), constraints (Stanley & Markman, 1992), structural commitment (Johnson, 1991), feelings of entrapment (Adams & Jones, 1997) or avoidance motivation (Kurdek, 2007).

Being an additive model, the IM explains why individuals endure in a relationship solely based on great investments, void of satisfaction or perceived alternatives (e.g., abusive relationships). Greater investments (e.g., children) promote the perception of greater constraints and barriers preventing relationship dissolution. Importantly, these investments can be extrinsic (e.g., house bought together; see also structural investments; Johnson, 1991;

Stanley & Markman, 1992), or intrinsic non-material resources (e.g., time spent together; see also intangible investments, Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008).

Although literature uses the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult et al., 1998) to assess different investments, this scale has been criticized (e.g., Kurdek, 2007) for not directly assessing perceived constraints such as external social pressure (e.g., from family; Stanley & Markman, 1992) or difficulty of termination procedures (e.g., division of assets; Johnson, 1991), which would be highly informative. Furthermore, it does not assess internal personal predispositions associated to relationship maintenance (Johnson, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992). These usually refer to attitudes towards divorce (e.g., morality of divorce; Stanley & Markman, 1992) and are analyzed among other perceived barriers (e.g., causing pain to the partner, difficulty of acceptance from friends; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Yet, converging with the notion of moral commitment (Johnson, 1991; see also commitment to marriage, Adams & Jones, 1997), they can also emerge from more stable personal values, beliefs and attitudes, and influence behavior (e.g., maintaining promisses; Stanley & Markman, 1992).

Following Johnson (1991), moral commitment comprises attitudes towards separation, obligation and responsibility for taking care and not abandoning the partner, and personal values to maintain consistency in choices. As a broader intrapersonal predisposition, moral commitment is formed prior to relationship initiation, being influenced by different values and beliefs, such as religiosity (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). As such, moral commitment can influence relationships from their beginning and not only throughout its development. In this sense, and within the IM, moral commitment can be seen as an antecedent of the predictors of general commitment, and more specifically of the intrinsic investments placed in the relationship.

Indeed, if individuals are morally committed to themselves, in a relationship they will also be committed towards relationship maintenance by experiencing internal barriers. Importantly, moral commitment is not necessarily negative (e.g., feelings of entrapment, more related to structural commitment; Johnson, 1991; Ramirez, 2008), as it can positively promote commitment depending on marital quality (Adams & Jones, 1997). This allows to express oneself identity and values (Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997) and promotes the use of relationship maintenance strategies (e.g., assurances; Ramirez, 2008). Hence, it emerges as an important component of commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997; Ramirez, 2008; Rhoades et al., 2010), distinct from contextual variables associated with relationship development (e.g., extrinsic investments; Johnson et al., 1999). For instance, while extrinsic investments increase throughout relationship development (Rusbult et al., 1998), moral commitment is similarly experienced across relationship statuses (e.g., single, married; Adams & Jones, 1997).

In sum, we argue moral commitment as an internal predisposition that promotes relationship maintenance by impacting general commitment antecedents. More specifically, and within the IM framework, we conceive moral commitment as an internal predisposition experienced as intrinsic investments, feeding into the experience of general commitment. Resorting to structural equations models (SEM) we analyzed moral commitment as an indirect predictor of general commitment via investments, not related to satisfaction or quality of alternatives (see also Adams & Jones, 1997; Lydon et al., 1997).

Method

Participants

A total of 584 participants (75.7% female) with ages varying from 18 to 62 years (M = 29.11, SD = 8.16) voluntarily took part in this study. Participants were mainly from Portugal metropolitan areas (92.1%), with Bachelor/Major (50.3%) or Master/PhD (34.1%) degrees.

Participants were in a romantic relationship, 20.2% married (M_{Lenght} = 154.76 months, SD = 98.60) and 79.8% unmarried (M_{Lenght} = 45.30 months, SD = 40.67), and when questioned they indicated high support from family and friends (M = 6.15, SD = 1.08; 1 = *Low support*, 7 = *High support*). Also, 20.7% indicated to have at least one child (Married = 71.2%; Unmarried = 7.9%), and half (50.7%) indicated to be religious (e.g., Catholic, practicing or not; Married = 66.1%; Unmarried = 46.8%).

Measures

Investment Model Scale (IMS). The Portuguese IMS (Rodrigues & Lopes, 2013; Rusbult et al., 1998) assessed each IM component: satisfaction (5 items; α = .90; e.g., *I feel satisfied with our relationship*), quality of alternatives (5 items; α = .83; e.g., *The people other than my partner with whom I might become involved are very appealing*), investments (5 items; α = .81; e.g., *I have invested a great deal of time in our relationship*) and general commitment (7 items; α = .89; e.g., *I want our relationship to last for a very long time*). Responses were given on a 7-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all*, 7 = *Agree completely*).

Moral Commitment Scale (MCS). The original MCS (Johnson et al., 1999) was translated to Portuguese and subjected to a validation study (N = 335). To broaden the scope of application, terms referring to “marriage” or “divorce” were changed to “significant romantic relationship” and “separation”. Participants assessed their agreement with each

MCS item on a 7-point scale (1 = *Do not agree at all*, 7 = *Agree completely*). A principal axis factor analyses with *oblimin* rotation revealed the expected three factors solution: partner contract (5 items; $\alpha = .81$; e.g., *It would be difficult to tell [partner's name] that you wanted a separation*), consistency values (2 items; $r_p = .43$; e.g., *You feel that you should always finish what you start*) and separation attitudes (2 items; $r_p = .34$; e.g., *It's all right to get separated if things are not working out*). The average of means across each factor resulted in a mean moral commitment score ($\alpha = .76$)[i].

Procedure

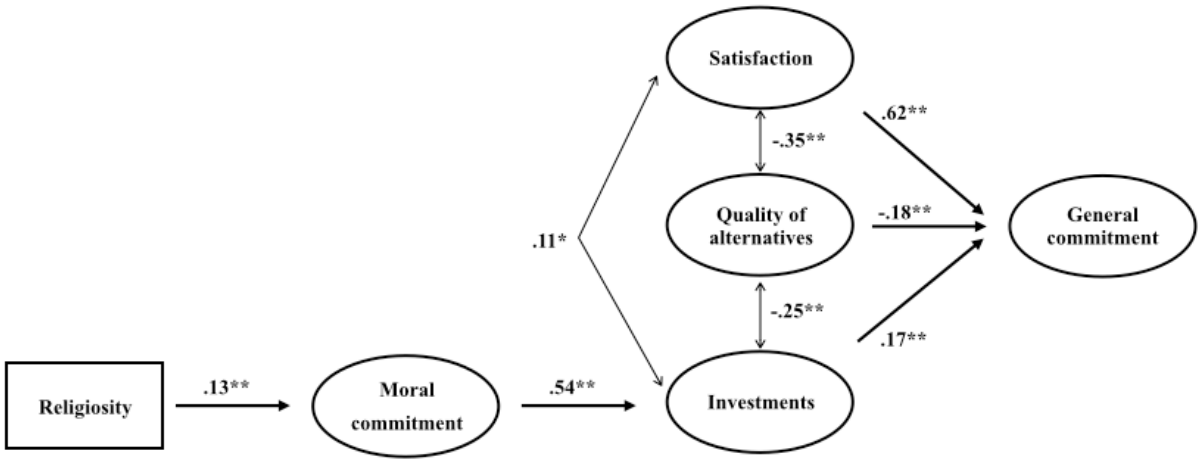
Measures were inserted into Qualtrics® web platform and the resulting hyperlink was published in social network sites and sent by e-mail to mailing lists, inviting the participation in a study about relationships. When interested, individuals clicked on the hyperlink and were redirected to a secure webpage informing they could abandon the study at any point by closing the browser. After confirming, participants were presented with sociodemographic questions (e.g., age), followed by the IMS and the MCS, presented randomly. At the end, participants were thanked, provided with a short debriefing, and given an email address to contact the researchers for further questioning about the research and its results. There was no time limit to complete the questionnaire ($M_{Duration}$ = 15 minutes). Only completed questionnaires were retained for analyzes (approximately 90%).

Results

Resorting to SEM using M-plus (Muthén & Muthén, 2010), we estimated three models using maximum likelihood estimation with the Yuan–Bentler correction for skewness (MLR). Models were based in the original IM assumptions (Rusbult, 1980), i.e., general commitment

predicted by satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investments, with the antecedents intercorrelating. In all models we expected moral commitment to be predicted by religiosity (internal predisposition; Johnson et al., 1999). Specifically, Model 1 (our hypothesis) expected moral commitment to indirectly predict general commitment via investments. Alternatively, we tested the hypotheses of moral commitment indirectly predicting general commitment via all three antecedents (Model 2), or directly predicting general commitment as a fourth antecedent (Model 3)[ii]. We obtained relative and absolute goodness of fit indexes: chi-squared statistic, comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean squared residual (SMSR).

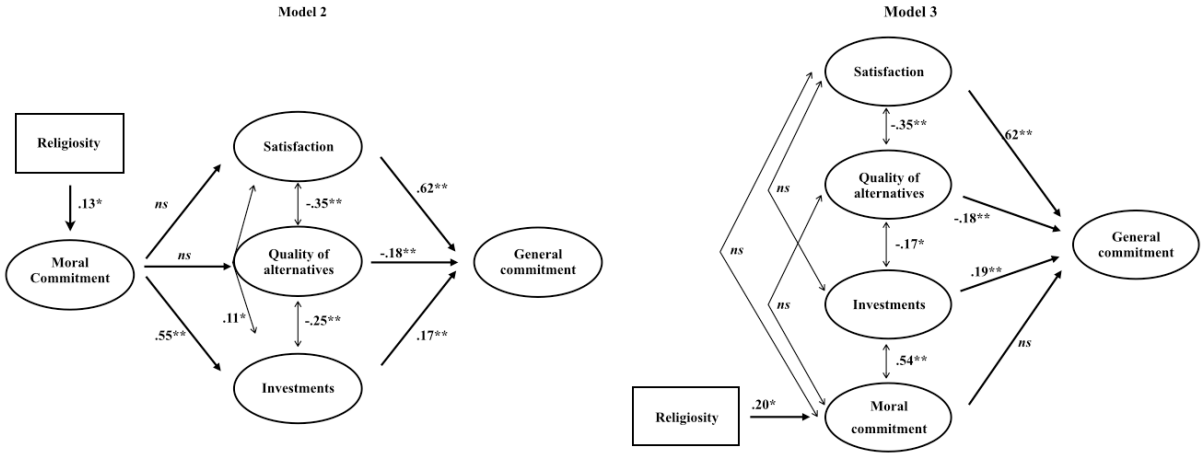
Based on the standards established in literature (Bentler, 1990; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984), the final version of Model 1 (without non-significant paths, maximizing fit and reducing error; Byrne, 2012) presented an adequate fit, $\chi^2 = 1097.13$, $\chi^2/df = 2.42$, CFI = .91, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .05 (CI: .046; .053) and SRMR = .07. General commitment was predicted by satisfaction ($\gamma = .62$), quality of alternatives ($\gamma = -.18$) and investments ($\gamma = .17$). As expected, moral commitment predicted investments ($\gamma = .56$) and was predicted by religiosity ($\gamma = .13$) (see Figure 1 for details)[iii].



Notes: For clarity purposes, measurement models are omitted in this figure. Only latent and observed variables are depicted.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$

Figure 1. Moral commitment predicting investments (Model 1)

The alternative models (see Figure 2 for details) presented similar fits, $\chi^2 = 1094.59$, $\chi^2/df = 2.43$, CFI = .91, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .05 (CI: .046; .053) and SRMR = .06 (Model 2), and $\chi^2 = 1094.71$, $\chi^2/df = 2.42$, CFI = .91, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .05 (CI: .046; .053) and SRMR = .06 (Model 3) (see Figure 2 for details).



Notes: For clarity purposes, measurement models are omitted in this figure. Only latent and observed variables are depicted.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$

Figure 2. Alternative models

Despite their adequate fit, the alternative models further support our rational. While Model 2 shows no direct path from moral commitment to satisfaction or quality of alternatives, Model 3 shows no direct path from moral commitment to general commitment, nor its correlation with satisfaction and quality of alternatives. Furthermore, in Model 3 the correlation between investments and satisfaction fails to reach significance (an original IM assumption). In all these alternative models, moral commitment only predicts or is correlated with investments, supporting our previous argumentation that this specific type of commitment can be more clearly conceived as a predictor of the this antecedent of general commitment within the IM model.

Discussion

This study analyzed moral commitment as an additional component influencing general commitment. Within the IM framework, general commitment is conceived as a broader experience of intent and motivation to maintain the relationship, dependent upon satisfaction, quality of alternatives and the perception of internal/external barriers drawn from investments (Rusbult et al., 1998). Moral commitment, however, is an internal predisposition to maintain the relationship, stemming from personal attitudes, values and beliefs influenced by general norms and conventions (e.g., religiosity; Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson, 1991). Supporting our theoretical rationale, in general the results presented in this article suggest moral commitment to indirectly predict general commitment through perceived investments (Model 1), and not through satisfaction or quality of alternatives (Model 2), nor directly as a fourth antecedent of commitment (Model 3).

Our results also suggest moral commitment to be conceived as an internal predisposition promoting the perception of intrinsic barriers, possibly boosting relationship

maintenance regardless of external investments, barriers or constraints (social support/pressure, marriage or children). Although our data fits our rationale, the correlational nature of our data does not allow a definitive conclusion regarding its causality.

More broadly, these evidences converge with Goodfriend and Agnew's (2008) suggestion that the IMS mainly assesses past intrinsic/intangible investments (e.g., *I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end*), i.e., non-material invested resources that cannot be retrieved (e.g., self-disclosure; Ramirez, 2008). We further argue that these past intangible investments may be associated with a sense of moral commitment/predisposition, consequently experienced as internal barriers promoting relationship maintenance. Explicit measures of tangible investments (e.g., *My partner and I have major shared possessions*; Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008) converge with Johnson's (1991; Johnson et al., 1999) structural commitment, i.e., external barriers preventing or difficulting relationship termination: termination procedures (e.g., *Having to move your things would be a burden*), invested resources (e.g., *You would lose money you'd put into the marriage*), social pressure (e.g., *It would be difficult to face your friends and family after you broke up*), and perceived alternative scenarios (e.g., *You would miss the help you get around the house from having a partner*). The importance of tying moral commitment with intrinsic investments is that intrinsic/intangible (vs. extrinsic/tangible) investments can now be better understood in their role of predictors of relationship maintenance (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008).

The use of IMS undeniably helps understand romantic relationships within the IM framework. Nonetheless, our research suggests the importance of distinguishing investments to a broader understanding of the reasons associated with stay/leave behaviors. In a situation where the individual has no satisfaction, and/or pursues attractive alternatives, the decision to maintain the relationship could derive from greater investments. In this situation, the IM

would predict relationship maintenance given the level of investments. However, we would not be able to completely understand which type of resources invested in the relationship (intrinsic or extrinsic) influence the decision solely based on the IMS. By using the MCS, we would be able to distinguish if general commitment derives from the individual's moral predisposition to maintain the relationship, bolstering perceived intrinsic investments and thus general commitment.

Importantly, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, one could argue that some items from partner contract factor of the MCS scale refer to relationship, rather than personal, characteristics of the partners. This being the case, investments could emerge as a predictor of moral commitment. Our present data does not seem to fit such alternative hypothesis. Nonetheless, we are currently planning further studies to disentangle this, namely by proposing a broader measure of moral commitment comprising internal (i.e., relationship related) and external (i.e., partner related) aspects of such an experience.

Secondly, our data is not longitudinal and therefore we cannot fully test the presumed causality of our model. Although recent evidences suggest the causal nature of the IM (Agnew, Hoffman, Lehmiller, & Duncan, 2007), future studies should seek to longitudinally understand how individual differences in values, beliefs and attitudes (defining moral commitment; Johnson, 1991) shape relationship initiation and development, how they influence perceived investments and general commitment throughout relationship development, and if they predict stay/leave behaviors.

In this line, future studies should also seek to further understand the role of moral commitment in activating relationship-protection mechanisms, namely derogation of attractive alternatives (Rusbult et al., 1998; see also Ramirez, 2008). Two outcomes can be expected based on our results. If individuals are highly morally committed, they should express higher investments and high general commitment, thus engaging in derogation. If

individuals are low in moral commitment, they may express lower investments and succumb to the alternative, depending on extrinsic investments and/or satisfaction.

In sum, this research builds upon the IM and suggests that our understanding of romantic relationships may be improved if explicitly taking into account specificities in investments and general commitment. By disentangling different types of investments, we may better understand individuals' perception of barriers, experience of general commitment and relationship maintenance.

References

Adams, J., & Jones, W. (1997). The conceptualization of marital commitment: An integrative analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*, 1177–1196. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1177

Agnew, C., Hoffman, A., Lehmiller, J., & Duncan, N. (2007). From the interpersonal to the international: Understanding commitment to the "War on Terror." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *33*, 1559–1571. doi:10.1177/0146167207305540

Bentler, P. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, *107*, 238–246. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.107.2.238

Byrne, B. M. (2012). *Structural equation modeling with Mplus: Basic concepts, applications, and programming*. New York, NY: Routledge Academic.

Cooper, M., & Sheldon, M. (2002). Seventy years of research on personality and close relationships: Substantive and methodological trends over time. *Journal of Personality*, *70*, 783–812. doi:10.1111/1467-6494.05024

Goodfriend, W., & Agnew, C. (2008). Sunken costs and desired plans: Examining different types of investments in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 1639–1652. doi:10.1177/0146167208323743

Johnson, M. (1991). Commitment to personal relationships. In W. Jones & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships* (Vol. 3, pp. 117–143). London, UK: Kingsley.

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

Jöreskog, K., & Sörbom, D. (1984). *LISREL 6: User's guide*. Mooresville, IN: Scientific Software International.

Kurdek, L. (2007). Avoidance motivation and relationship commitment in heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian partners. *Personal Relationships*, *14*, 291–306. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00155.x

Levinger, G. (1999). Duty toward Whom? In J. Adams & W. Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal commitment and relationship stability* (pp. 37–52). New York, NY: Springer.

Lydon, J., Pierce, T., & O'Regan, S. (1997). Coping with moral commitment to long-distance dating relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*, 104–113. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.1.104

Muthén, L., & Muthén, B. (2010). *Mplus user's guide* (6th ed.). CA: Muthén & Muthén.

Ramirez, A. (2008). An examination of the tripartite approach to commitment: An Actor-Partner Interdependence Model Analysis of the effect of relational maintenance behavior. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *25*, 943–965. doi:10.1177/0265407508100309

Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Predicting dating relationship stability from four aspects of commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *24*(5), 543–550. doi:10.1037/a0021008

Rodrigues, D., & Lopes, D. (2013). The Investment Model Scale (IMS): Further studies on construct validation and development of a shorter version (IMS-S). *The Journal of General Psychology*, *140*, 16–28. doi:10.1080/00221309.2012.710276

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

Rusbult, C., Martz, J., & Agnew, C. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, *5*, 357–387. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x

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

Stanley, S., Rhoades, G., & Whitton, S. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *2*, 243–257. doi:10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00060.x

[i] Further details of the MCS psychometric analyzes, as well as its full version in Portuguese, can be obtained from the first author.

[ii] All models were re-estimated placing age, gender, relationship duration, marriage, and children as co-variables. No significant impact of co-variables emerged, and no increase in the fits were observed in these models as compared to the original ones.

[iii] The measurement models not depicted in Figure 1 yielded significant results, i.e., moral commitment: all $\lambda > .14$, $p < .004$; investments: all $\lambda > .50$, $p < .001$; quality of alternatives: all $\lambda > .65$, $p < .001$; satisfaction: all $\lambda > .45$, $p < .001$; general commitment: all $\lambda > .38$, $p < .001$.