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Three Cords Twisted Together. The Investment Model, Religiousness and Forgiveness

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Abstract

The main purpose of the present research is to explore the influence of religiousness on couple commitment, drawing from previous studies where religiousness was confirmed as a strong predictor for positive relationship outcomes. We also aim to analyze relationship satisfaction as a mediating variable between religiousness and commitment. Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate forgiveness in dyadic romantic relationships, testing its role as a moderator of the association between relationship satisfaction and commitment.

The procedure includes the recruitment of heterosexual students enrolled in post-graduate courses and their partners to take part in the present study. The final sample consists of 116 individuals involved in romantic relationships. All participants filled in a series of validated self-reported measures, providing data which was analyzed using parametric statistical tests. Additionally, we conducted mediation and moderation analyses.

Results indicate that relationship satisfaction is positively associated with commitment, whereas religiousness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction, thus having an indirect effect on commitment. Additionally, considering overall forgiveness as well as the negative vs. positive components of the construct, we find that positive forgiveness is associated with commitment, when satisfaction is also considered in the equation.

The current results have important therapeutic implications, such as using forgiveness-related therapies for couples and enhancing relationship satisfaction as means to consolidate relationship commitment.

Keywords: *commitment; relationship satisfaction; forgiveness; religiousness; couple relationship.*

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1. Introduction

To date, the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980) has been one of the most prominent and influential theories of commitment in relationships. It states that commitment is the outcome of three variables: marital satisfaction, lack of alternatives to the relationship and size of investments partners devote to their relationship. The robustness of the model has been demonstrated in studies across the 40 years of research since its inception (Tran et al., 2019). Given the importance of commitment in maintaining and enhancing relationships, researchers have explored predictors of commitment beyond the investment model and its variables- satisfaction, alternatives, and investments (Coy et al., 2019). Religiousness has been one of these potential predictors for both commitment to the relationship and relationship satisfaction. In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature reporting the various benefits of religion on individual well-being (Levin, 2010). More than that, religiousness has been positively associated with marital satisfaction and stability (Goddard et al., 2012). Shared religious beliefs and activities have been positively associated with marital functioning (Mahoney et al., 1999). Overall, most published research suggests a core positive relationship between religion, as embraced by couples/ families- and satisfaction levels in the couple.

Although attempts to integrate forgiveness into broader theories of marriage hardly exist, researchers have conceptualized forgiveness in a plethora of ways (Fincham et al., 2006). Throughout the present study, we define forgiveness as a set of prosocial motivational changes that take place within a relationship, so that the offended partner becomes less vengeful, less avoidant and more benevolent toward his/her transgressing relationship partner (McCullough et al., 1998). Recent models suggest that forgiveness incorporates at least two dimensions (Fincham & Beach, 2002). The first dimension underlines "a motivational change in which negative response tendencies toward the transgressor decrease" (Apostu, 2021, McCullough et al., 2003). Yet, decreasing negative motivation is likely insufficient for repairing the relationship, because it implies returning to a state of neutrality rather than positivity towards the partner (Braithwaite et al., 2011). Hence the second dimension refers to increased positive motivation towards the transgressor as an additional component of forgiveness- a positive dimension (Paleari et al., 2009).

Forgiveness should not be studied exclusively as an outcome for relationships, but also as a cause. Forgiveness can lead to different positive individual and relational outcomes, from health consequences to psychological wellbeing (Larson & Larson, 2003; Witvliet et al., 2001).

Likewise, positive correlations among relationship satisfaction, forgiveness and positive outcomes in marriages have been underlined in a series of studies (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Mc Nulty, 2008), which underline that couples with higher levels of forgiveness also have higher levels of satisfaction and an overall better marital adjustment and commitment (Kachadourian et al., 2005).

2. Research overview and hypotheses

"Considering the previously mentioned theoretical and empirical framework, we aim to explore a possible model of investment that not only refers to satisfaction and commitment, but also includes forgiveness. Our main hypotheses are as follows:

Hypotheses 1: Relationship satisfaction mediates the effect of religiousness on commitment to a relationship.

Hypotheses 2: Positive forgiveness moderates the effect of relationship satisfaction on commitment to a relationship" (Apostu, 2021).

3. Method

3.1. Measures

"We used the following four instruments to assess the main concepts of the study" (Apostu, 2021).

The Investment Model Scale- IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998**)-** a widely used scale of measuring marital investment, constructed after its eponymous model proposed by Rusbult, it comprises four subscales (satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment and commitment). We selected the commitment subscale for our analysis. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient for our sample (the commitment subscale) is 0,731.

*The Dyadic Adjustment Scale- DAS (*Spanier, 1976)- a well-known instrument for measuring the quality of marital relationship and marital satisfaction, with 32 items spread across four subscales: (a) Consensus, (b) Marital Satisfaction, (c) Couple cohesion, (d) Affective expression. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient for our sample is 0,864.

The Family Religiosity Questionnaire (Rusu & Turliuc, 2011*)* -the scale has 23 items ranging from 1 = not true to 4 = always true. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient for our sample is 0,964.

The Marital Offence- Specific Forgiveness Scale (Paleari et al., 2009)- The scale measures the degree of forgiveness for specific offences in marital relationships. It can be set apart in a positive subscale- benevolence

(positive regarding forgiveness) and negative subscale- unforgiveness (seeking revenge, negative aspects of situations implying offence) (Clydesdale, 1997). The Alpha Cronbach coefficient for our sample is 0,819 for positive forgiveness and 0,812 for negative forgiveness.

3.2. Procedure

"We recruited heterosexual students enrolled in post-graduate courses and their partners to take part in the study. All participants consented to attending and were given course credits for participation, as at least of the partners was enrolled in university/post-university studies" (Apostu, 2021). Participants were aware that their data would be anonymized and kept confidential and that they could discontinue the study at any time.

3.3. Participants

"The sample consisted of 115 individuals, 36 men (31,3%) and 79 women (68,7%,), with ages between 18 and 55 and having mostly an urban vs. a rural background (75,7% urban *vs* 24,3% rural). The mean duration of the couple relationship they were involved at the time of the study was 4.71 years for men (SD=5,03) and 5.74 years for women (SD=5,41). Of the entire sample, 67% of couples were living in consensual unions, whereas 33% were married. 59 participants (51,3%) were aged 25 or less, 45 (39,1%) were aged 26 to 40 years and 11(9,6%) were aged 41 to 55" (Apostu, 2021).

3.4. Statistical analysis

3.4.1. Preliminary analysis

We used SPSS version 21 for the preliminary data analyses. The mediation analysis was conducted using the macro PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2009) to examine the mediating role of satisfaction in the relationship between religiosity and commitment. We used 5000 bootstrap samples, and biases were corrected at 95% confidence intervals (CI) to calculate the indirect effect of the variable. If the CI of the indirect effect did not include zero, it indicated that the indirect effect was significant at $p = 0.05$ (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We also used the PROCESS macro for the moderation analysis. We explored the main and interaction effects of the variables. All the predictors were mean- centered before the analysis.

Means and standards deviations for the main variables, together with the Pearson correlation coefficients can be consulted in the above table- Table no. 1. "Results show a series of significant correlations. Commitment

positively correlates to relationship satisfaction (r= 0.342, p <0.01) and to forgiveness (r=0.262, p < 0.01), respectively positive forgiveness (r= 0.245, p< 0.01), although the correlation has a low to medium intensity. Satisfaction, at its turn, positively correlates to religiosity (r= 0.387, p<0.01)" (Apostu, 2021).

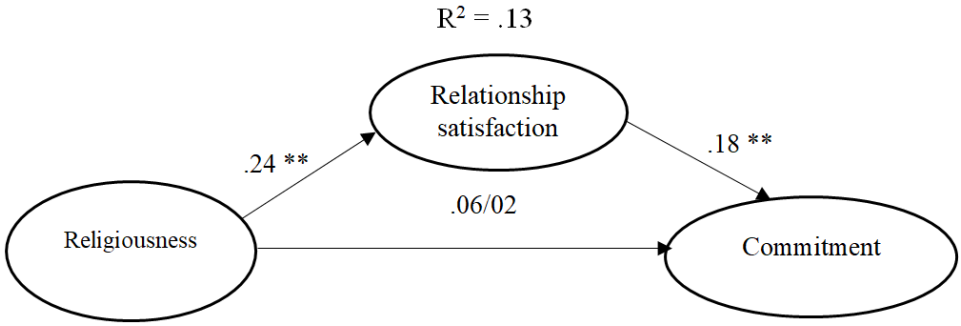
Table 1 Pearson correlations among the variables of the study

Variable	Measures		Correlations					
	M	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
1. Commitment	44,62	7,23	____					
2. Satisfaction	105,08	12,91	.342**	___				
3. Religiousness	54	19,49	.160	.387**	___			
4. Forgiveness	36,98	10,44	. 262**	-.007	.128	___		
5. Positive forgiveness	14,83	5,34	. 245**	.052	.165	.840**	___	
6. Negative forgiveness	19,82	9,91	.102	-.052	. 112	.872**	.690**	___

Note.
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.4.2. Mediation analysis

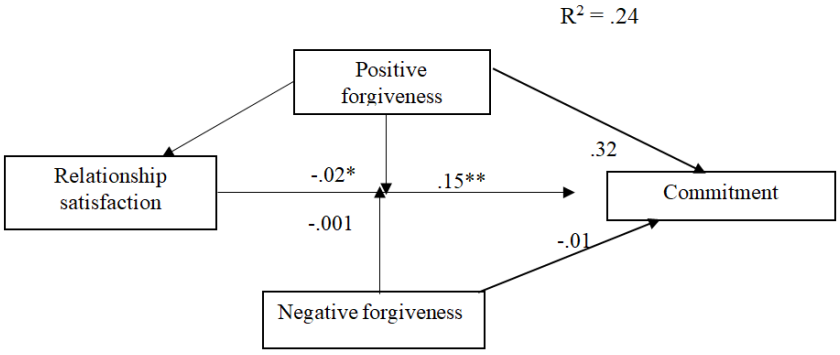
"In our mediation analysis we explored whether religiousness is associated with commitment through the mediating role of relationship satisfaction. Results suggest that religiousness does not have a direct association with commitment (b = .06, p = .08). However, religiousness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction (b = .24, p < .001) and relationship satisfaction is positively associated with commitment (b = .18, p = .002). The indirect effect is also significant (b = .04, [01; 08]). Thus, although we did not find a direct effect of religiousness on commitment, the existence of an indirect effect through relationship satisfaction points to an indirect effect-only mediation" (Apostu, 2021).



Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001

Figure 1 Mediation analysis religiousness- commitment, with relationship satisfaction as a mediator

3.4.3. Moderation analysis



Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; ***p < .001

Figure 2 Moderation analysis relationship satisfaction- commitment, with positive vs. negative forgiveness as moderator

"Further in our analysis, we were interested to verify the moderating effect of positive vs. negative forgiveness on the association between relationship satisfaction and commitment (Figure 2). Given the rather low number of participants, we decided to use a simple moderation analysis instead of a more complex, mediated moderation model (which would have required a larger sample for our study). Neither positive forgiveness towards a partner (b = .32, p = .06) nor negative forgiveness (b = -.01, p = .93) were associated with commitment. However, the interaction between the positive aspects of forgiveness and relationship satisfaction had an effect on commitment (b = -.02, p = .04), thus moderating the link between

satisfaction and commitment" (Apostu, 2021). Satisfaction has a positive association with commitment only when the level of positive forgiveness is low. In this case, those with higher levels of satisfaction will also have higher levels of commitment. At high levels of positive forgiveness, the level of commitment tends to be high, regardless of satisfaction.

4. Discussion

"As other consistent studies and meta-analysis confirm (Tran et al., 2019) relationship satisfaction positively correlates with commitment. In our study the correlation has a moderate intensity (r= .342; p=.001), thus endorsing the investment model proposed by Rusbult (1988). More than that, our mediation analysis confirms that relationship satisfaction is positively associated with commitment, whereas religiousness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction, thus having an indirect effect on commitment and partially confirming our first hypothesis" (Apostu, 2021).

The correlation between religiousness and relationship satisfaction is consistent with a large body of research (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Religious faith and practices are positively correlated with how satisfying couple relationships are perceived by the partners. One possible explanation of this association is that shared practices and common beliefs lead to positive relationship outcomes, because they strengthen the affective bond between partners (Wilson & Musick, 1996). In the present study not only does relationship satisfaction correlate with religiousness, but it is also associated with commitment. The results sustain the Investment Model of commitment and its' longstanding assumption, confirmed in numerous empirical studies, that satisfaction is the best predictor for commitment compared to investment size and quality of alternatives (Call & Heaton, 1997; Le & Agnew, 2003).

Going further with the results of the current study, relationship satisfaction also correlates with forgiveness, being consistent with previous research where positive aspects of forgiveness have been found to influence relationship outcomes (McCullough et al., 1998). In our present analysis, forgiving one's partner proves to have an interesting dynamic with satisfaction. Negative forgiveness has no influence on commitment, even when associated with satisfaction levels. Yet, positive forgiveness is associated with commitment, when relationship satisfaction is also considered in the equation. When positive forgiveness levels are low, relationship satisfaction influences the level of commitment, with higher

satisfaction leading to higher commitment. When forgiveness levels are high, satisfaction decreases its influence on commitment.

"The positive relationship between forgiveness and commitment demonstrates a link between intrapsychic and relational processes: the reduction of intrapsychic motivations to avoid and harm one's offender, together with the restoration of goodwill towards him/ her may facilitate the relational process, when paired with overall satisfaction levels of the relationship" (Apostu, 2021). "Relationship satisfaction has a positive and high intensity connection with commitment, which becomes secondary to the outcome of the relationship when individuals express a higher degree of positive forgiveness" (Apostu, 2021, Kachadourian et al., 2005; Paleari et al., 2009).

5. Limitations and future directions

First, the use of cross-sectional data limits the understanding of psychological processes on the within person level and bounds the results of the study to a partial manifestation of the variables. Secondly, the scales used throughout the study are self-report scales, that prevent us from observing the real manifestation of the processes we analyze. Accordingly, future studies should focus on dyadic assessment of psychological processes, which allows a much broader understanding of interactions in the couple. The use of specific statistical models should also be in focus, such as APIM (Actor Partner Interdependence Model) and MLM (Multilevel Modeling for Repeated Measures). Moreover, future studies may seek to examine the broader applicability of the current associations to diverse facets of forgiveness, religiousness, and investment model. Future research may seek to implement more advanced procedural methods (observational, experimental manipulation studies) in order to verify the robustness of all significant and non-significant mediation/ moderation effects. In any event, previous research likewise our own current study enriches a classic model of understanding commitment in marriage (Gordon, & Baucom, 1998).

6. Conclusion

The current paper, drawing from previous psychological research (Baron & Kenny, 1986), confirms and enriches a classic model of commitment in couple relationships- the Investment model- by including some associated variables (Finkel, et al., 2002). Firstly, the current research endorses relationship satisfaction as a predictor for positive relationship

outcomes, expanding the cross-cultural importance of the concept by analyzing it in a specific Romanian sample. Secondly, continuing prior classical studies in relationship dynamics, our results indicate that religiousness, together with forgiveness (defined as a secular concept, not only as a religious one) highlight the internal couple dynamics which lead to relationship commitment.

The clinical and practical implications of our results refer mainly to couple interventions and therapy. Several new marital therapies emphasize forgiveness, particularly in the context of marital infidelity (Baucom et al., 2006), but they could also be addressing forgiveness for less severe transgressions. More than that, educational/ prevention interventions could focus on enhancing relationship satisfaction and addressing its role in couple stability.

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All sources quoted in the text as (Apostu, 2021) refers to the thesis ROTARU (CĂS. APOSTU), M.N. (2021). Intimacy and associated relationship quality variables (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Al.I.Cuza University, Iasi.

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