

Summer 2015

# Relationship Decision-Making as a Mediator between Regret, Autonomy, and Two Forms of Relationship Commitment: Dedication and Constraint

Ashley Fehr  
*Old Dominion University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/psychology\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/psychology_etds)

 Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Fehr, Ashley. "Relationship Decision-Making as a Mediator between Regret, Autonomy, and Two Forms of Relationship Commitment: Dedication and Constraint" (2015). Master of Science (MS), thesis, Psychology, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/ea13-b842  
[https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/psychology\\_etds/9](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/psychology_etds/9)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Psychology at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

**RELATIONSHIP DECISION-MAKING AS A MEDIATOR  
BETWEEN REGRET, AUTONOMY, AND TWO FORMS OF  
RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT: DEDICATION AND  
CONSTRAINT**

by

Ashley M. A. Fehr  
B.A. May 2013, Christopher Newport University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

PSYCHOLOGY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
August 2015

Approved by:

---

James M. Henson (Director)

---

Valerian Derlega (Member)

---

Miguel Padilla (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### RELATIONSHIP DECISION-MAKING AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN REGRET, AUTONOMY, AND TWO FORMS OF RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT: DEDICATION AND CONSTRAINT

Ashley M. A. Fehr  
Old Dominion University, 2015  
Director: Dr. James M. Henson

This study examined the relationships among autonomy, anticipated regret, decision-making, and dedication and constraint commitment of college students in romantic relationships. Two models were specified, with the first assessing autonomy as a predictor of dedication and deciding as a mediator. The second model assessed anticipated regret as a predictor of constraint and deciding again as a mediator. Participants were 267 undergraduates from a Mid-Atlantic region university, were recruited through a participant pool, and completed the study voluntarily or for course credit. To be included in analysis, participants had to be in a current dating, cohabiting, or married relationship for 30 or more days; the relationship partner had to be the opposite gender of that reported by the participant; and the participant and the current partner had to live within a defined close proximity to each other. Results showed that autonomy was positively related to decision-making, though autonomy was not significantly related to dedication. Decision-making also did not predict dedication, suggesting that deciding did not partially mediate the relationship between autonomy and dedication. Results also showed that anticipated regret predicted constraint, but the direction was unexpectedly negative. Anticipated regret negatively predicted deciding. Deciding, however, did not predict constraint, suggesting that deciding did not partially

mediate the relationship between anticipated regret and constraint. The findings are discussed in light of supportive literature and alternative explanations. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

*Keywords:* relationships, autonomy, regret, decision-making, commitment

Copyright, 2015, by Ashley M. A. Fehr and Old Dominion University,  
All Rights Reserved.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to James (Matt) Henson for his guidance, patience, and helpful suggestions in this endeavor. His editing and advice across two years has greatly improved my research and writing processes and allowed me to produce a researched product that has been of great interest to me. I would also like to thank certain lab members for their quick and helpful suggestions and Valerian Derlega and Miguel Padilla for participating in my thesis committee and providing insightful feedback.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY AND COMMITMENT FRAMEWORK ....	3
COMMITMENT IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS .....	4
DEDICATION COMMITMENT AND AUTONOMY .....	5
CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT AND ANTICIPATED REGRET .....	9
DECISION-MAKING BY ROMANTIC PARTNERS .....	12
THE CURRENT STUDY .....	16
II. METHOD .....	18
PARTICIPANTS .....	18
MEASURES .....	19
PROCEDURE .....	23
DATA ANALYSES .....	23
III. RESULTS .....	26
DEDICATION COMMITMENT .....	26
CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT .....	27
IV. DISCUSSION .....	30
DEDICATION COMMITMENT .....	30
CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT .....	37
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS .....	42
IMPLICATIONS .....	44
V. CONCLUSIONS .....	46
REFERENCES .....	48
APPENDICES	
A. RECRUITMENT FLYER .....	56
B. NOTIFICATION STATEMENT .....	57
C. INDEX OF AUTONOMOUS FUNCTIONING .....	59
D. SLIDE VERSUS DECIDE SCALE .....	60
E. DEDICATION COMMITMENT SUBSCALE .....	61
F. REGRET SCALE .....	62
G. CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT SUBSCALE .....	63
H. DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE .....	64
VITA .....	65

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Descriptive Statistical for all Measures .....	28
2. Summary of Mediated Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Romantic Partners' Dedication and Constraint Commitment .....	28
3. Bivariate Pearson Correlations among Autonomy, Decision-Making, Dedication, Regret, and Constraint .....	29



**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure	Page
1. Two Mediational Models .....	17
2. Analyzed Models Incorporating Autonomy as a Nonlinear Predictor .....	25
3. Standardized Regression Coefficients for both Models .....	29

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The commitment construct in a romantic relationship reflects the longevity and stability of the relationship (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Romantic relationships can be maintained through genuine dedication, called dedication commitment (Stanley & Markman, 1992), or obligation, which is called constraint commitment. In particular, dedication commitment has been characterized as more beneficial to the relationship as compared to constraint commitment. People who report high dedication commitment tend to prioritize the needs of the other partner and the relationship itself as well as be willing to sacrifice for the welfare of the partner and the relationship (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). In previous research, dedication commitment has been associated with increased relationship quality as compared to constraint commitment (Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011a). In contrast, Stanley et al. (2006) characterized constraint commitment as a potential explanation as to why people willfully remain in unhappy relationships. It is important to identify factors that lead to dedication commitment and constraint commitment because these two constructs strongly predict relationship stability or termination, respectively (Le et al., 2010). Two such theoretical antecedents for relationship stability are relationship autonomy and anticipated regret.

Retaining a sense of self and maintaining a degree of autonomy within the relationship leads to positive relationship outcomes, such as higher relationship quality (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006), self-esteem, and general commitment (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). In addition, autonomy has been positively related to workplace dedication (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010).

In contrast, romantic regret is related to high general distress and to low positive affect reported in the last week (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007), and constraint commitment may be another negative outcome stemming from anticipated relationship regret. Any committed person may regret leaving a relationship, but only people with high constraint commitment may regret maintaining the relationship. Research on commitment reveals a tendency to escalate commitment and further invest effort into a losing cause or course of action (Brockner, 1992). As people are faced with the decision to continue to invest in a potential losing cause or bet, they tend to think they will experience regret if they do not continue with the lost cause. That anticipated regret may then cause commitment to increase (Wong & Kwong, 2007). Although Wong and Kwong (2007) did not focus specifically on constraint commitment or on romantic relationships, their findings indicate that people may continue to invest in a relationship because of anticipated regret over withdrawing or ending the relationship, which in turn should increase constraint commitment.

Another relevant construct, decision-making in relationships can be conceptualized as intentional and thoughtful versus not being clear, intentional, or thoughtful, the latter of which is known as 'sliding,' such that people just let events occur without conscious choice (Owen, Rhoades, & Stanley, 2013). Active decision-making in relationships is associated with increased positive outcomes (Vennum & Fincham, 2011), whereas failing to make relationship decisions is associated with less favorable relationship outcomes, such as reduced support for continued general commitment in a relationship (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010). Individuals high in relationship autonomy should be engaged in a thoughtful and purposeful decision process, thereby exhibiting active relationship decision-making. In contrast, individuals prone to anticipated regret for outcomes of decisions may choose to

maintain their status quo, thereby sliding through the decision process rather than make a risky decision (Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2011). Therefore, autonomy should be positively related to decision-making, whereas anticipated regret should be negatively related to decision-making. The purpose of this research is to further examine the mediating effect of relationship decision-making, such that increased decision-making should lead to increased dedication commitment, but decreased constraint commitment.

### **Interdependence Theory and Commitment Framework**

Interdependence theory is the framework typically used to explain processes related to general commitment. Over time, couples may become more dependent on one another, thereby forming interdependence between romantic partners (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Dependence entails the degree to which one person may rely on the interaction with another person, such that one's outcomes are influenced by the other person. In romantic relationships, the couple's interdependence is shaped by each partners' needs and motives. Specifically, one partner may rely on interaction with the other partner to fulfill needs or motives in the relationship. Partners must first have some amount of dependence on each other to develop interdependence (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012), but too much dependence threatens the autonomy that individuals need to continue functioning and persisting in the relationship (Deci et al., 2006; Patrick et al., 2007).

Further, partner interdependence can result from behaviors relating to forms of dedication and constraint commitment (Owen et al., 2011a). For example, having long-term views of and plans for the relationship and being willing to put in the energy to accomplish those views would often exemplify dedication commitment (Stanley et al., 2010). Autonomy can be seen as fitting neatly into this theory and

shows how too much or too little autonomy (i.e., dependence) may be detrimental to the continuance of a relationship. In contrast, viewing a couple's break-up as a loss and desiring to avoid that loss aligns with constraint commitment and possibly anticipating regret.

Rusbult, Agnew, and Arriaga's (2012) investment model of general commitment processes is based in interdependence theory and posits that people persist in a relationship because of positive qualities (e.g., relationship satisfaction), poor alternatives outside the relationship, and investments that make partners interdependent by way of increasing one's dependence on his or her partner. Dependence on each other consequentially increases general commitment. Thus, dependence can be foundational in building both dedication and constraint commitment to a romantic partner. Partners' investing themselves in the relationship and building dependence helps explain the occurrence of dedication and constraint as well as how predictors such as autonomy and regret can affect those relationship outcomes.

### **Commitment in Romantic Relationships**

In general, overall commitment encompasses two distinct, but interrelated aspects: dedication and constraint commitment. Dedication commitment refers to the desire to persist and maintain the relationship, whereas constraint commitment keeps partners together despite what might be best for the individuals involved (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In other words, dedication commitment is an approach response toward maintaining the rewards of the relationship, whereas constraint commitment is an avoidance response of potential consequences of relationship dissolution. For the purposes of this paper, commitment will refer to a general motivation to maintain the relationship, and dedication commitment and constraint commitment (or simply

dedication or constraint, respectively) will refer to the different motives through which partners maintain the relationship.

Relationship stability has been defined as the length of time two people have been in a romantic relationship together (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). Le et al. conducted a thorough meta-analysis on relationship variables predicting stability and relationship dissolution, and general commitment predicted relationship termination and stability. In addition, Le et al. (2010) operationalized commitment as two related constructs (i.e., dedication and constraint) and linked each construct to relationship stability, whereas Johnson and Rusbult (1989) linked the two constructs to the tendency to devalue alternative partners. These findings indicate that although they are contrasting motives, both dedication and constraint commitment strongly underlie partners' decision to persist in the relationship. Moreover, the unique processes underlying partners' dedication and constraint commitment has not been thoroughly explored, providing motivation for the current study.

### **Dedication Commitment and Autonomy**

Independence and autonomy are frequently used interchangeably, but independence refers to practical reliance on oneself, whereas autonomy refers to rule by the self (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2012) and to maintaining a sense of self-direction and personal choice (Hui, Molden, & Finkel, 2013). Acts by a person are considered autonomous if one endorses and fully identifies with those acts; essentially, those acts feel representative of the person and his beliefs, such that the person has congruence underlying his actions and endorses the actions completely. It is important to note that autonomy is not defined by an absence of external pressures upon one's choices. Rather, an individual may consider external pressures and assent to them in a way that he or she agrees to. Thus, autonomy can be understood as a

type of congruence with the self and owning of one's actions, whereas independence may simply be freedom from external pressures and practical reliance on oneself or one's own resources (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Autonomy is further viewed as one of three basic psychological needs for the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Self-determination theory describes innate psychological needs for the self—one of those needs being autonomy and support for the individual's autonomy. These needs may be essential to one's optimal functioning and personal well-being. The theory describes autonomy as stemming from a sense of intrinsic motivation or immediate support for one's perceived autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). In fact, external rewards and outward pressures, such as threats and deadlines, can undermine intrinsic motivation and feelings of autonomy, whereas acknowledging a person's feelings and giving opportunities for choice or self-direction may enhance feelings of autonomy. Relationships can benefit from individual autonomy, such that autonomy and receiving support for being autonomous is critical to relationship well-being and high relationship quality (Deci et al., 2006; Patrick et al., 2007). Support for autonomy may also motivate feelings of commitment and effort from people (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Because dating (within the context of a monogamous relationship) may provide a foundation from which couples choose to marry (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010), the importance of autonomy may seem counter-indicative to a healthy relationship. Partners may realize this as well and experience conflict between the autonomy they desire for themselves and the interdependence they desire with partners (Goldsmith, 1990). Partners may implicitly understand the function of both autonomy and connectedness, but they have trouble maintaining a balance of autonomy for themselves and connectedness with a partner. Relationships benefit

from partners who maintain a sense of autonomy because autonomy is positively related to attachment security, relationship quality, well-being (Deci et al., 2006; Koestner, Powers, Carbonneau, Milyavskaya, & Chua, 2012), and positive conflict resolution (Patrick et al., 2007).

Le et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of predictors of dating relationship dissolution and found that dependence, or lack of autonomy, was among the strongest of predictors for relationship termination. Thus, the sense of self that may result from having autonomy is important for partners to maintain relationships. Weinstein et al.'s (2012) findings suggest that one's autonomy is related to healthy individual functioning, which could provide a foundation upon which more stable relationships are formed. Further, individuals may feel closer or more connected to their partner while maintaining their individual autonomy (Weinstein et al., 2010).

Goldsmith (1990) referred to the relation between autonomy and connectedness as a struggle, suggesting that partners continually experience tension in maintaining a balance that works for their relationships. However, too little or too much of autonomy can cause greater harm than benefit for the relationship, suggesting a nonlinear relationship between autonomy and commitment. For instance, too much dependence can indicate low autonomy for that person, which is a trait that is related to relationship termination (Le et al., 2010). Low autonomy has also been associated with depression and anxiety (Bekker & Croon, 2010). Additionally, Neff and Harter (2003) found that participants with an autonomous relationship style with their parents (i.e., high autonomy) had worse self-worth, satisfaction, and depression within relationships than participants without this style.

Other researchers have demonstrated that the desires for extreme closeness (sociotropy) or for extreme autonomy in relationships with parents, partners, or



friends are related to being socially impaired in one's peer group (Hodges, Finnegan, & Perry, 1999). Sociotropy is related to low autonomy because of the concern for closeness. In addition, sociotropic persons may be overly nurturing to distant persons and vindictive to close persons, whereas overly autonomous persons may be domineering to distant persons, but socially avoidant to close persons (Sato & McCann, 2007). Last, sociotropic and autonomous persons both display low self-esteem in response to interpersonal stressors, suggesting sociotropy engenders vulnerability, with results being less clear for autonomy's role in interpersonal stressors (Dasch, Cohen, Sahl, & Gunthert, 2007).

In sum, research suggests that maintaining autonomy and connectedness in a relationship is healthy for individual partners and beneficial to their interpersonal functioning. For instance, partners primed for autonomy felt closer and more in-sync emotionally and cognitively as well as were likely to provide support to each other (Weinstein, Hodgins, & Ryan, 2010). Just as Goldstein (1990) suggests, a fine line exists on the connectedness and autonomy spectrum, because going to either extreme may present negative effects to the relationship. The type of balance described is again indicative of a nonlinear trend in autonomy, such that relationship outcomes may be ideal when people possess a moderate amount instead of too little or too much.

Because interdependence theory states that partners become more dependent on each other as the relationship duration increases (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012), the theory provides a foundation for the relationship between autonomy and commitment (Goldstein, 1999). This theory suggests that partners may start out as more autonomous at the beginning of the relationship, but become more committed as they form dependence on each other. Patrick et al. (2007) showed that autonomy was

positively related to general commitment, and other research has specified that autonomy is positively related to dedication (Demerouti et al., 2010). High dependence and feelings of constraint positively predicted relationship termination (Kelmer et al., 2013; Le et al., 2010), indicating inversely that autonomy may prolong relationships. In other words, autonomy should predict dedication commitment, but too little or too much autonomy may not be ideal, suggesting a non-linear trend (Bekker & Croon, 2010; Neff & Harter, 2003).

**Hypothesis 1:** Autonomy will be non-linearly related to dedication commitment (path  $a_1$  in Figure 1), such that both high and low scorers in autonomy also have low dedication. This finding would be a partial replication of autonomy and general commitment (Patrick et al., 2007) and a replication of autonomy and dedication commitment (Demerouti et al., 2010), but in the context of romantic relationships.

### **Constraint Commitment and Anticipated Regret**

Counterfactual thought involves thinking about how a previous decision or outcome could have been executed differently or how one could undo that decision (Seta, Seta, McElroy, & Hatz, 2008). Regret stems from counterfactual thinking, making it a counterfactual emotion (Pierro, Leder, Mannetti, Kruglanski, & Aiello, 2008; Seta et al., 2008) that involves feeling personally responsible for a mistake or feeling guilty (Zeelenberg et al., 1998). Thus, regret is related to doubting previous decisions given an undesirable outcome (Baron, 2008).

Anticipated regret can occur before a decision is made if people believe they will regret that decision later (Schwarz, 2000; van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2005; Zeelenberg, Beattie, van der Pligt, & de Vries, 1996). Zeelenberg et al. (1996) and Zeelenberg and Beattie (1997) conducted multiple studies to determine the effect of

anticipated regret on decision-making. The researchers presented participants with equally attractive choices to see if they would prefer the safe gamble or risky gamble across gains-focused, loss-focused, high-risk, and low-risk situations. Participants chose the safe gamble more often than the risky one regardless of situation, which Zeelenberg and colleagues called the regret-minimizing choice. These findings suggest that when people expect feedback, they will make a decision that minimizes their risk, thereby also minimizing the possible amount of regret they may incur in the future. Thus, people appear to be averse to regret. Considering that potential losses loom heavier than gains (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), anticipated regret should influence decisions more when losses are involved than when gains are involved (Zeelenberg et al., 1996) as well as when people have been faced with worse options previously and then given a decision to make (Barreda-Tarrazona, Jaramillo-Gutierrez, Navarro-Martinez, & Sabater-Grande, 2014).

Anticipating regret over future decisions is even more distinguished based on decision type, such that people anticipate more regret for careless decisions than for careful decisions (Reb & Connolly, 2010). This finding suggests that people desire to think through decisions to avoid regretting outcomes that could have been avoided with more deliberate thought, which may be in line with overestimating anticipated regret (Gilbert, Morewedge, Risen, & Wilson, 2004).

In Regret Theory (Baron, 2008), people overweigh anticipated regret when the difference in value between two decisions is large. This over-valuation of regret may occur because people do not want to make the wrong decision. For example, a partner thinks about continuing or ending the relationship and considers a positive outcome of feeling better after the break-up or a negative outcome of feeling distress after the break-up. These outcomes have a large difference in the anticipated result

and would theoretically bring about large anticipated regret over the thought of deciding to break-up versus staying.

By measuring projected and actual distress after break-ups, Eastwick, Finkel, Krishnamurti, and Loewenstein (2008) demonstrated that people tend to overestimate their post-breakup distress. If people tend to overestimate post-breakup distress (Eastwick et al., 2008), it is not surprising that they also overestimate the regret they anticipate experiencing in the near future (Ku, 2008a). Because people are averse to experiences of regret (Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997; Zeelenberg et al., 1996) and that both regret and distress can be considered negative outcomes following a negative relationship outcome, people may avoid making regrettable decisions for as long as possible.

Economic psychology can elaborate on the possible relation between anticipating regret and constraint commitment. Van de Ven and Zeelenberg (2011) found that people were willing to forgo direct material gain in order to be protected from experiencing regret in the future. People displayed aversion to regret because they were reluctant to exchange lottery tickets for fear of losing a winning ticket. Additionally, people may think they will regret not placing a bet or making a certain decision, thereby increasing or escalating their commitment to a cause (Wong & Kwong, 2007). It is possible that escalation of commitment to a cause can be exacerbated when the decision associated with the object of commitment is separated into multiple possible decisions surrounding that object. In this case, people focus more on the object or cause (a romantic partner) to which they may escalate commitment as opposed to the alternative decision they may make in the relationship (Kwong & Wong, 2014).

Although after relationship dissolution partners would gain the freedom to

date new people or not stress about the current relationship, individuals may abstain from dissolving a relationship because they are averse to the regret that will result from later finding that decision non ideal. Alternatively, they may feel obligated to stay in the relationship and regret that constraining decision at the same time.

Therefore, anticipating romantic regret could influence future relationship decisions (Zeelenberg et al., 1998). More specifically, the anticipation of regret may lead to constraint commitment, which research has also shown keeps people from breaking up (Rhoades et al., 2010). If partners anticipate regret in their relationship, it may lead to or exacerbate constraint commitment, which will maintain the relationship even if the actual desire is to end it.

**Hypothesis 2:** Relationship regret may work as a constraint in relationships, making anticipated regret positively related to constraint commitment (path  $b_1$  in Figure 1), such that increased anticipated regret will be related to an increase in constraint or feelings of obligation to stay in the relationship. This hypothesis would provide new information for regret and constraint commitment and would further the research regarding the positive relationship between anticipated regret and escalating commitment (Brockner, 1992; Wong & Kwong, 2007); it would also confirm the tendency to limit future regret over decisions (Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2011; Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997; Zeelenberg et al., 1996) by abstaining from active decision-making in response to regret.

### **Decision-making by Romantic Partners**

Decision-making in romantic relationships assesses the thoughtfulness regarding relationship decisions on a spectrum of deciding versus sliding. It is based on people believing that they can actively effect change in the relationship.

Thoughtfulness about the relationship decisions means that partners carefully or

actively consider major steps in the relationship before they happen (Stanley et al., 2006; Vennum & Fincham, 2011). For example, making conscious or clear decisions about major relationship steps with a partner would demonstrate thoughtfulness in deciding. Sliding would indicate the opposite, such that people enter different relationship stages or events without consciously coming to a clear decision (Owen et al., 2013). Thus, decision-making is conceptualized as a scale ranging from intentional and thoughtful (deciding) to unclear, unintentional, or lacking thought (sliding).

**Autonomy and decision-making.** Maintaining autonomy would mean having the ability to govern one's own behaviors or choose when and for how long to engage in behaviors (Hui, Molden, & Finkel, 2013). Furthermore, autonomy and self-regulation are highly related, indicating that autonomy is closely related to regulating one's behaviors (Ryan et al., 1993; Weinstein et al., 2012). If autonomous individuals are highly likely to control or regulate their behaviors, it would suggest actively regulating the decision-making behaviors in their relationships. Research further shows that having choice and the opportunity to direct oneself allows people more feelings of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; 2000b).

**Hypothesis 3:** Autonomy will positively predict with decision-making (path  $a_2$  in Figure 1), such that an increase in autonomy will result in an increase in active decision-making. This finding would add new information to the literature and support the theory that conscious effort and thoughtfulness are inherent aspects of autonomy (Hui et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 1993; Weinstein et al., 2012).

**Regret and decision-making.** Decision-making in relationships is critical because a lack of active decision-making may lead constraint commitment in the relationship (Stanley et al., 2006; Vennum & Fincham, 2011), which could manifest

as the tendency for partners to remain in the relationship out of a feeling of obligation. People are likely to highly weigh anticipated regret if they are comparing two different outcomes or choices for the same decision (Baron, 2008), such as the outcome of breaking up versus staying together. Anticipated regret can occur before people make decisions because of the thought process involved about that decision's outcome (Schwarz, 2000). Further, individuals will attempt to minimize their anticipated regret over decisions (van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2005; Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997), suggesting that people experiencing anticipated regret will abstain from active or thoughtful decision-making; they may also attempt to shield themselves from experiencing more regret in the future if they have already experienced some regret for an action and did not like the outcome (Martinez & Zeelenberg, 2015). Overestimating future regret may affect the decision process because people are influenced more by future decisions (yet to be made) than by recalled past decisions (Shani, Danziger, & Zeelenberg, 2015), such that people may desire to abstain from making a clear decision. In the relationship context, this decision may involve the couple's future. Although people prone to anticipated regret will weigh their options carefully, the actual decision may be left unclear because of aversion to experiencing the regret for an outcome.

**Hypothesis 4:** Anticipated regret will negatively predict with decision making (path  $b_2$  in Figure 1), such that increased anticipated regret will result in less decision making (or more sliding). This hypothesis would partially replicate the finding that people attempt to minimize regret (Martinez & Zeelenberg, 2015; van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2005; Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997) and adds new information in that anticipated regret may lower active decision making in relationships.

**Decision-making and dedication commitment.** High decision-making

would suggest that a romantic partner is involved in being active and thoughtful regarding relationship events. Previous research indicates that relationship decision-making should positively relate to dedication commitment (Owen et al., 2013; Vennum & Fincham, 2011) because being engaged in the major decisions of the relationship is a dedication commitment-driven process (Stanley et al., 2006).

**Hypothesis 5a:** Decision-making will positively relate to dedication commitment (path  $a_3$  in Figure 1).

**Hypothesis 5b:** Decision-making will partially explain (i.e., mediate) the relationship between autonomy and dedication commitment. Hypotheses 5a and 5b add new information to the literature on decision-making in relationships and dedication commitment. Further, it would support background indicating that relationship decision-making should be related to dedication (Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2006; Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

**Decision-making and constraint commitment.** A lack of active deciding manifests in sliding in which couples go through important relationship transitions, such as cohabitation, marriage, or pregnancy without actively communicating the steps involved in doing so (Stanley et al., 2006). The issue with these transitions occurring non-actively is that they may come to represent constraints or obligations keeping partners together (Owen et al., 2014; Surra, Chandler, Asmussen, & Wareham, 1987), presenting further problems for the couple. The clarity of decision-making that partners make in relationships could help differentiate between dedication and constraint commitment.

**Hypothesis 6a:** Decision-making will negatively relate to constraint commitment (path  $b_3$  in Figure 1).

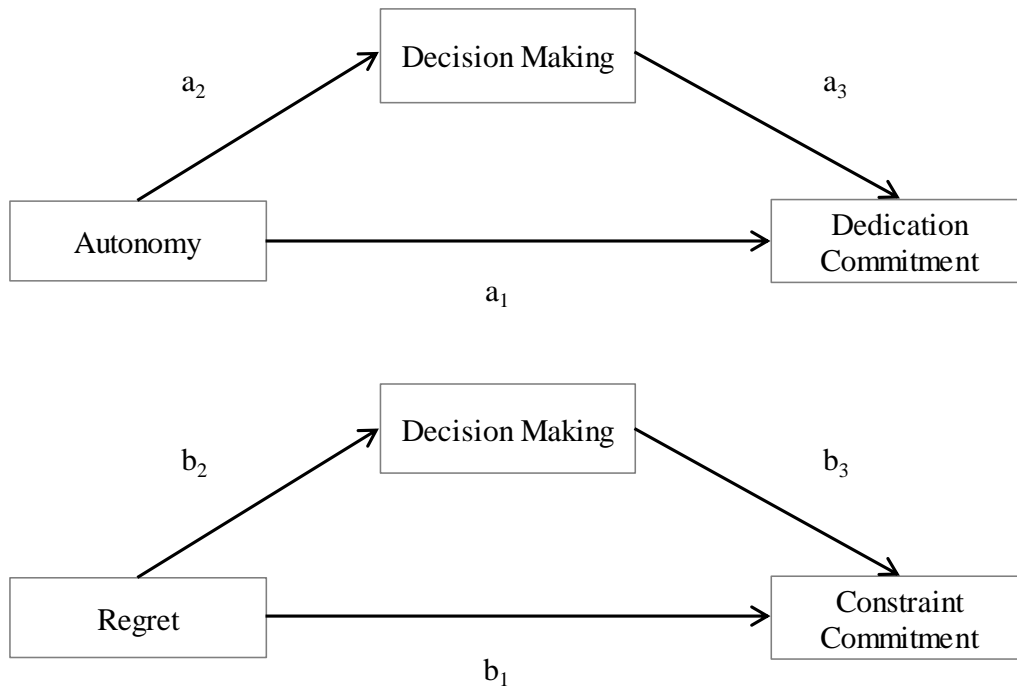
**Hypothesis 6b:** Decision-making will partially explain (i.e., mediate) the



relationship between anticipated regret and constraint commitment. Hypotheses 6a and 6b will provide empirical support to the largely-discussed trend in the literature on decision-making and constraints. Research proposes that a lack of conscious decision-making predicts constraints in a relationship (Stanley et al., 2006) because sliding through major relationship decisions such as cohabitation or marriage may create a constraint or obligation (Owen et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2014) for partners to stay in the relationship (Surra et al., 1987; Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

### **The Current Study**

The current study assesses the relationships among autonomy, regret, decision-making, and dedication and constraint commitment. In Model A (top of Figure 1), I predicted that autonomy would be positively related to dedication commitment and to decision-making. If significant, relationship decision-making would partially explain the path between autonomy and dedication commitment. In Model B (bottom of Figure 1), I predicted that regret would be positively related to constraint commitment and negatively related to relationship decision-making. If significant, decision-making would partially explain the path between regret and constraint commitment.



*Figure 1.* Two mediational models. The models show autonomy and regret being related to dedication and constraint commitment (respectively) through relationship deciding.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Participants

Participants included 267 students from a university in the Mid-Atlantic region who are in romantic relationships. To determine the number of participants required, the G\*Power program was used (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The effect size was related to commitment, and the study was powered for a small-medium effect of  $f^2 = .05$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , power at 80%, and 4 predictors, requiring at minimum 244 participants. Parameters used in this program included the *F*-test family, with the statistical test being linear multiple regression as a fixed model, testing  $R^2$  deviation from zero. The estimated effect size of  $f^2 = .05$  was based on converted values from previous literature reporting effects sizes of  $d_s = .30, -.29$ , and  $-.62$ ,  $d = -.80$ , and  $r_s = .28, .21$ , and  $-.63$  for the outcomes under investigation (Kelmer et al., 2013; Le et al., 2010; Rhoades et al., 2010, respectively).

Persons who were dating, dating and cohabiting, or married were allowed to participate in the current study. Dating was defined as being in a monogamous relationship, and cohabiting was defined as dating and living together, but not married. Previous research found no differences in deciding between these three couple types (Owen et al., 2013). Only opposite-sex couples were included to mirror previous relationship research (Kelmer et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2011a). The minimum relationship length required was one month to be as inclusive as possible, to mirror previous research in which participant relationship ranges began at one month, and to control for abrupt relationship dissolutions that may occur within weeks of beginning to date (Karakurt, 2012; Lewandowski, Nardone, & Raines, 2010).

Further, participants lived in close proximity of their partners, as opposed to partners

living long distances from each other. People in long-distance relationships have reported discrepancies in actual and perceived stability, but were just as likely as close-proximity dyads to have broken up (Kelmer et al., 2013); including long-distance partners could have confounded autonomy ratings because long-distance partners have reported lower levels of feeling trapped in the relationship (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Participants were classified as having a long distance relationship if the partner lived more than 50 miles away from participants' physical address (Kelmer et al., 2013). Undergraduate students had the opportunity to complete the study voluntarily or as part of a psychology course requirement.

### Measures

**Individual autonomy.** This study used the Index of Autonomous Functioning (IAF; Weinstein et al., 2012) to assess individuals' autonomy levels for those in relationships. The IAF includes three subscales: *authorship/self-congruence*, *susceptibility to control*, and *interest-taking*, with 5 items on each for a total of 15 items. Susceptibility to control items are reverse-scored. Authorship/self-congruence assesses perception of being the 'author' (creator or initiator) of behaviors or actions such that those behaviors authentically represent the person. Susceptibility to control assesses how one perceives there is personal choice in actions taken such that behaviors are not in response to social pressure or expectations. Interest-taking assesses reflection or awareness of internal and external events happening in the person's life; essentially, the subscale concerns reflection on choices made. The items are on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*) for a total possible score of 15 to 75, with high scores indicating high autonomous functioning. The IAF includes questions such as "I strongly identify with the things that I do" and "I like to investigate my feelings" (see Appendix C). Coefficient alpha

was .81. Divergent validity was demonstrated because subscales of the Big-5 measure such as agreeableness ( $r = -.20$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = .11$ ) were distinct from autonomy,  $ps > .05$ . Big-5 indicators most related to autonomy were extraversion ( $r = .44$ ) and openness ( $r = .29$ ),  $ps < .01$ ; Weinstein et al. (2012) stated that individual processes that are reflective of openness (such as curiosity and self-awareness) were predicted by two subscales: authorship/self-congruence and interest-taking. They further hold that different areas of study may call for a focus on different subscales from the IAF, as they may be differentially related to other constructs. For the current study, all three subscales were integral to fully representing the construct of autonomy. The researchers also demonstrated incremental validity of the IAF beyond that of other autonomy inventories for predicting well-being outcomes, including positive affect, clear meaning, and personal growth (Weinstein et al., 2012).

**Decision-making.** The study implemented the Slide Versus Decide Scale (SVDS) to assess the amount of thoughtfulness about general relationship decisions (Owen et al., 2013). The SVDS includes two subscales: *physical sliding versus deciding* and *emotional sliding versus deciding*. The scale has a total of 14 items on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) for a total possible score of 14 to 98 with high scores indicating high thoughtfulness about relationship-related decisions and low scores indicating less thought or sliding through these decisions. Five items are reverse-scored. The SVDS includes items such as “I think a lot about the kind of person to be with in a relationship” and “There are certain qualities I look for in a dating partner (boyfriend/girlfriend)” (see Appendix D). Coefficient alpha was .94 and .79 and two-month test-retest correlations were  $r_s = .78$  and  $.74$  for physical and emotional, respectively, indicating acceptable

reliability. Regarding construct validity, the physical subscale was negatively correlated to engaging in casual sex behaviors (Owen et al., 2013). The emotional subscale has also been related to efforts toward coupling (Owen et al., 2011a) and relationship adjustment (Owen et al., 2013).

**Dedication commitment.** Dedication commitment was measured using the Revised Commitment Inventory (Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011b). The revised version of the inventory is preferred for dating, unmarried couples (Owen et al., 2011a). The Revised Commitment Inventory includes one subscale making up *dedication commitment*. This subscale will use 8 items on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) for a total score 8 to 56, with high scores indicating high dedication commitment to one's romantic partner. Four items are reverse-scored. The inventory includes items such "My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans" (see Appendix E). The one dedication subscale was supported to measure dedication globally (Owen et al., 2011a). The coefficient alpha of the subscale was .95 for dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1992). The subscale has also shown concurrent validity with two other measures of commitment (Stanley & Markman, 1992), with relationship adjustment, and was negatively related to negative communication and social pressure to stay in the relationship (Owen et al., 2011a).

**Anticipated regret.** The current study used an anticipated regret scale reported in Godin et al. (2005) that has been adapted by other researchers to specific contexts as well (Newton, Newton, Ewing, Burney, & Hay, 2013). This scale was adapted to the relationship context to best assess the anticipated regret participants may feel in regards to staying in the relationship (see Appendix F). Participants read one context-specific item, "If I stay in my current romantic relationship", and

rate regret, being bothered, and disappointment. Total items included 3 ratings on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*) for a total possible score of 3 to 15, with high scores indicating high anticipated regret. The subscale showed a coefficient alpha of .87 (Godin et al., 2005).

**Constraint commitment.** Constraint commitment was also measured using the Revised Commitment Inventory (Owen et al., 2011b). Constraint commitment is made up of six subscales of which only five were used: *social pressure*, *termination procedures*, *concern for partner welfare*, *alternative financial status*, and *alternative availability*. Social pressure assesses pressure that partners may feel from family or friends to stay together. Termination procedures assesses how difficult partners believe it would be to end the relationship. Concern for partner welfare assesses the beliefs partners hold about how relationship termination would affect the other person. Alternative financial status assesses how a partner's financial situation would change if the relationship ended. Alternative availability assesses partners' perception of other potential partners if the current relationship ended. The Constraint commitment scale used 15 items on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) for a total possible score of 15 to 105, with high scores indicating high constraint commitment to one's romantic partner. Nine items are reverse-scored on the included subscales. The scale includes items such as "The steps I would need to take to end this relationship would require a great deal of time and effort" (see Appendix G). Owen et al. (2011a) showed a similar factor structure for men and women on the constraint composite scale. The majority of subscales tested overall showed adequate internal consistency, with coefficient alphas greater than .70. The subscale also showed divergent validity with relationship adjustment (Owen et al., 2011a). The coefficient alpha for total constraint scale was  $\alpha = .92$  (Stanley &

Markman, 1992).

### **Procedure**

Participants first viewed a description of the study through the SONA online research management program at their university (see Appendix A), where they could choose to sign up for the study. Once they signed up, participants clicked on a link that directed them to complete the study in a webpage through the Inquisite survey system. The first webpage for the study link described what involvement in the study details, with participants providing their notification statement before continuing (see Appendix B). Afterward, participants completed all measures online. Last, participants provided demographics (see Appendix H). The measures took approximately 1 hour to complete. Upon completion of all measures, participants were debriefed on the last webpage of the online survey and later assigned participation credit for their respective courses, if eligible.

### **Data Analyses**

Before data analysis, data was screened for missing information, outliers, and normality of the outcome variables. In addition, statistical assumptions were checked. Missing data was estimated using an EM algorithm in SPSS to obtain unbiased estimates. Screening data involved inspecting the standardized residuals, histograms, and Q-Q plots, showing no outliers and normality of data. Statistics and scatterplots were further checked, and data met the assumptions of collinearity, independent errors, and homoscedasticity.

Multiple regression was used to assess the predicted relationships between autonomy, deciding, and dedication commitment as well as between regret, relationship deciding, and constraint. Specifically, data was analyzed using the MEDCURVE process model in SPSS to determine the significance of two meditation



models (Hayes, 2010), allowing for one path in Model A to be non-linear. It was necessary to convert the data to Z-scores to retrieve standardized coefficients for the quadratic pathway through MEDCURVE. The mediation pathways followed Model 4, as displayed in Hayes (2013), which depicts a mediation and simple regression model. However, autonomy was modeled as having a quadratic, mediational pathway with relationship deciding and dedication commitment (see Figure 2). Hayes (2010) explains that the MEDCURVE approach is the latest and most appropriate development in the methodological literature for testing nonlinear relationships. For both models, the total, direct, and indirect effects of autonomy, anticipated regret, and relationship deciding on dedication and constraint commitment was examined. The analysis process produced simultaneous estimates using bootstrapping.

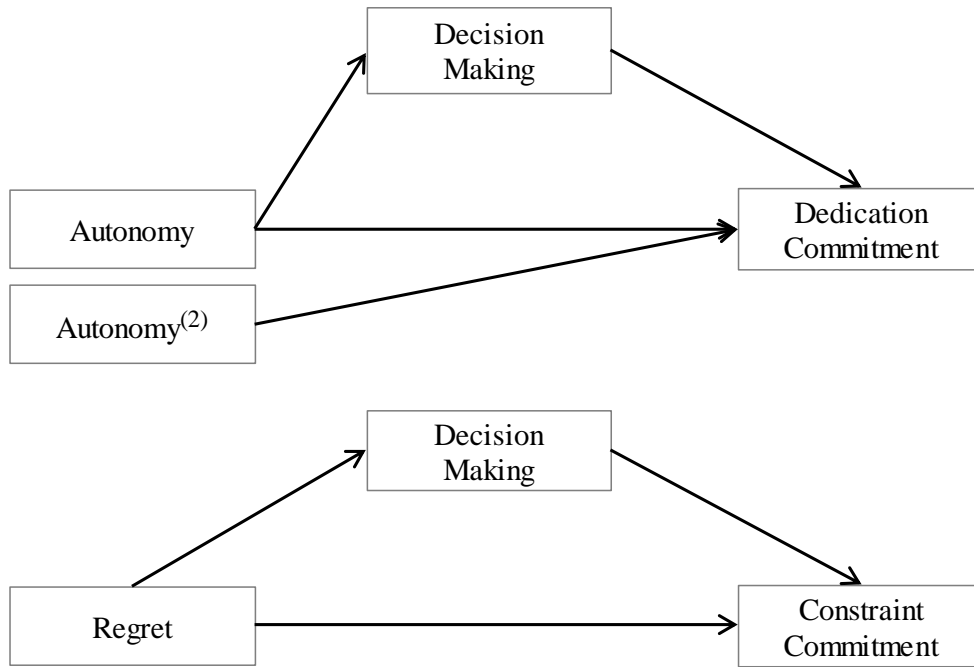


Figure 2. Analyzed models incorporating autonomy as a nonlinear predictor.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

Data from 503 participants were collected and screened so that all participants met the inclusion criteria for (a) having an opposite-gender partner, (b) being in a relationship with the current partner for 30 or more days, and (c) living within 50 miles of the partner. Thus, the final sample yielded 267 participants for the current study. Missing data were less than 2.3% for questions on all measures and were imputed using SPSS EM imputation before analysis. Descriptive statistics on all measures can be found in Table 1. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 53 ( $M = 23.49$ ,  $SD = 6.17$ ), with a median age of 21 years old. Participants were in dating (62.2%), cohabiting (21.7%), or married (16.1%) relationships.

#### **Dedication Commitment**

A mediated regression analysis through MEDCURVE was performed between dedication commitment as the criterion and autonomy and decision-making as predictor variables (see Table 2 for Model A). Hypothesis 1 was that autonomy would be non-linearly related to dedication commitment, but was not supported,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $SE = .24$ , 95% CI [-.16, .78]. In line with Hypothesis 3, autonomy was positively related to decision making,  $\beta = .41$ ,  $SE = .11$ , 95% CI [.56, .98]. A bivariate correlation further supported this finding,  $r = .41$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 3). Hypothesis 5a was that decision-making would be positively related to dedication commitment, but was also not supported,  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $SE = .09$ , 95% CI [-.27, .10]. An instantaneous indirect effect of autonomy on dedication through decision-making was computed using 1,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval. As suggested by the lack of direct effects, the instantaneous indirect effect was not significant,  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% CI [-.22, .09]. Thus, hypothesis 5b was not supported for decision-

making partially mediating the relation between autonomy and dedication. Overall, 5.9% of the variability in dedication was predicted by this model,  $F(3, 263) = 5.50, p = .001$ .

### **Constraint Commitment**

A separate mediated regression analysis was computed through MEDCURVE between constraint commitment as the criterion and anticipated regret and decision-making as predictor variables (see Table 2 for Model B). Hypothesis 2 that anticipated regret would be positively related to constraint was not supported because the direction of the relationship was negative, although significant,  $\beta = -.23, SE = .06, 95\% CI [-.35, -.11]$ . A bivariate correlation supported this direction as well,  $r = -.25, p < .001$ . In line with Hypothesis 4, anticipated regret was negatively related to decision-making,  $\beta = -.22, SE = .05, 95\% CI [-.30, -.09]$ , which was further supported by a bivariate correlation,  $r = -.22, p < .001$ . Hypothesis 6a was that decision-making would be negatively related to constraint, but was not supported,  $\beta = .05, SE = .07, 95\% CI [-.08, .19]$ . An instantaneous indirect effect of anticipated regret on constraint through decision-making was computed using 1,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval. The instantaneous indirect effect was not significant,  $\beta = -.01, SE = .01, 95\% CI [-.04, .02]$ . Thus, hypothesis 6b was not supported for decision-making partially mediating the relation between anticipated regret and constraint. Overall, 6.25% of the variability in constraint was predicted by this model,  $F(2, 264) = 8.80, p < .001$ . See Figure 3 for path coefficients of each model.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for all Measures (N = 267)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	$\alpha$
Autonomy	3.71	.48	2.33	5.00	.72
Decision-Making	5.23	.92	3.00	7.00	.85
Dedication	3.08	1.28	1.00	6.75	.83
Regret	1.62	1.01	.88	5.00	.97
Constraint	3.92	1.01	1.33	6.60	.83

*Note: Regret (Anticipated Regret).*

Table 2

*Summary of Mediated Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Romantic Partners' Dedication and Constraint Commitment (N = 267)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>CI</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
<b>Model A – Dedication</b>					.06	5.50	3, 263
Autonomy	-2.82	-1.79	-.19	-6.35, .71			
Autonomy <sup>2</sup>	.31	.24	.06	-.16, .78			
Decision-Making	-.09	.09	-.06	-.27, .10			
Indirect effect	-.07	.08	-.03	-.22, .09			
<b>Model B – Constraint</b>					.06	8.80	2, 264
Regret	-.23	.06	-.23	-.35, -.11			
Decision-Making	.05	.07	.05	-.08, .19			
Indirect effect	-.01	.01	-.01	-.04, .02			

Table 3

*Bivariate Pearson Correlations among Autonomy, Decision-Making, Dedication, Regret, and Constraint (N = 267)*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Autonomy	--			
2. Decision Making	.41***	--		
3. Dedication	-.22***	-.15*	--	
4. Regret	-.14*	-.22***	.30***	--
5. Constraint	-.09	-.10	-.28***	-.25***

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

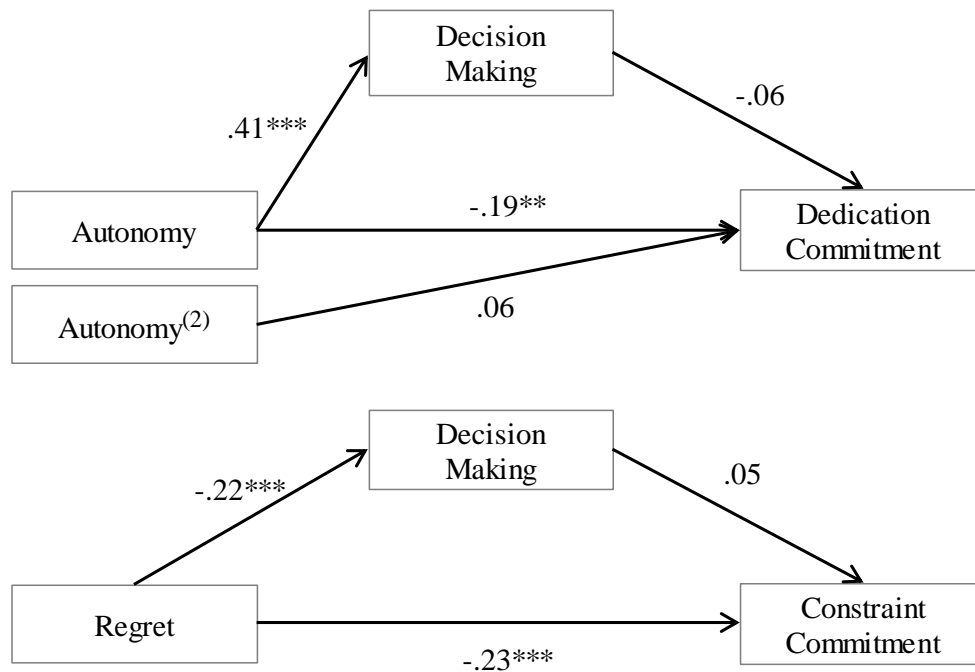


Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients for both models. The top model shows the relationship between autonomy and dedication commitment, as mediated by decision-making (top). The bottom model shows the relationship between anticipated regret and constraint commitment, as mediated by decision-making (bottom).

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the relationship literature by examining the construct of decision-making in the context of romantic relationships and factors therein that could affect relationships. Specifically, I hypothesized that autonomy would be a predictor of dedication, whereas I also hypothesized that anticipated regret would be a predictor of constraint. Last, I hypothesized that both relationships would be mediated by relationship deciding. Only some of the hypotheses were supported, suggesting limited factors in predicting different types of commitment to relationships.

#### **Dedication Commitment**

**Hypothesis 1.** Hypothesis 1 was that autonomy would be non-linearly related to dedication commitment, such that both low and high scorers in autonomy would both have low dedication, but this hypothesis was not supported. Previous research had indicated that autonomy is related to general (overall) commitment and to dedication commitment in the workplace (Demerouti et al., 2010; Patrick et al., 2007). However, previous theory had also suggested a non-linear relationship, such that people at both low and high extremes for autonomy experience negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety (Bekker & Croon, 2010), worse self-worth (Neff & Harter, 2003), and social impairment within one's peer group (Hodges et al., 1999). Although non-linear relationships for autonomy was not examined empirically, researchers provided a theoretical foundation for these extremes being related to less dedication; the current data, however, did not support this presupposition. There was an unexpected significant and negative (linear) relationship between autonomy and dedication, such that more autonomy is related to less dedication. This linear pathway

was significant, but the confidence interval included zero, indicating further support is needed. Bivariate correlations in the current study provide preliminary support for this linear relationship (see Table 3). This finding is consistent with some previous research outside of romantic relationship literature. A possible explanation for the negative and linear relationship between autonomy and dedication may be that more autonomous people, which is one extreme suggested by previous theory, has been identified as one extreme typically experiencing negative interpersonal outcomes. Dedication was not explicitly related to high autonomy in the literature as a negative outcome, however, social impairment with peers (Hodges et al., 1999) may provide a basis through which to understand less dedication for highly autonomous people. In Hodges et al. (1999), children of 9 to 14 years old demonstrated social impairment with their peers over time if they previously showed an excessive concern for autonomy with the mother. Thus, it is possible that people who have historically had an excessive concern for autonomy or who report extremely high autonomy have fostered an impairment in how they interact in their peer relationships. Further empirical study may find that this social impairment extends to romantic partners.

The lack of a nonlinear finding for Hypothesis 1 may be because the current population may not exhibit the same patterns between autonomy and commitment as other populations studied. The current study included primarily college-aged students, whereas other autonomy research has examined parents and friends as opposed to only romantic partners. The hypothesized non-linear nature of autonomy is evidently complex and merits more review. Ryan and Deci (2000a) discuss how different populations may be more conducive to autonomy or autonomy support. Given the different samples in which autonomy has been studied (e.g., Hodges et al., 1999; Neff & Harter, 2003; Patrick et al., 2007) and the contexts supportive of



autonomy discussed by Ryan and Deci (2000a; 2000b), future work could comparatively measure autonomy in different kinds of relationships such as friendship, family, or romantic to determine if relationship type affects how people express their autonomy and if the structure of the relationship changes depending on the type of relationship. The purpose of introducing relationship type may be to determine whether different types of relationships moderate the association between autonomy and commitment. It is possible that not only autonomy, but also the support from a friend or romantic partner for autonomy needs may change the way the individual feels about a continued friendship or romantic involvement with the partner.

Autonomy motives may also be a critical concept for relationship researchers, such that researchers can measure motivation for autonomy along a continuum of extrinsic to intrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; 2000b). Self-Determination Theory can be applied to autonomy motivation to produce a continuum with explanations for how behavior is regulated and influenced by the environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). For those who are extrinsically motivated, behavior is more externally regulated by environmental aspects such as forced compliance, rewards, and punishments. These influences are pressures from the environment that may take away choice and intentional acts because completion of these actions is expected. Instead, these acts may be characterized as going through the motions. As the continuum shifts to the intrinsic side, behavior is more internally motivated by aspects such as genuine interest in the activity, congruence with the self or beliefs, and enjoyment. The influences for these actions may arise from the desire to experience the inherent satisfaction associated with completing the action, such as with personal hobbies (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Behavior guided by intrinsic motivation supports the expression of autonomy more than behavior resulting from extrinsic motivation because opportunities that enhance intrinsic motivation also allow people high autonomy. In opposition, external conditions may control the person's behavior and allow for lower autonomy than if driven by internal conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Motives for autonomy merit attention because they may explain how autonomy is related to dedication commitment and explain an underlying variable that accounts for this effect. The purpose for incorporating motivation into future studies would be to assess the way in which people are motivated generally or in specific contexts and determine whether the motives for autonomy better predicts relationship commitment than autonomy. Measuring motivation and autonomy may help explain the nonlinear nature suggested by previous research or shed light on whether autonomy should be assessed linearly. For instance, the motivation to maintain a relationship may differ for people who are more intrinsically motivated, such that they have a desire to maintain the relationship for the genuine enjoyment or satisfaction they receive from being with the partner. People characterized as extrinsically motivated may desire to maintain the relationship but for reasons such as expectations from sources like friends, family, or their own ideas of romantic relationships. Both intrinsic and extrinsically-motivated people can be autonomous, so identifying the degree of intrinsic motivation that best relates to autonomy may show that, as greater degrees of autonomy tend to stem from intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), people express more commitment to relationships. However, the current study did not find that autonomy is significantly related to commitment, so including motivation in the model may point to a moderation of the autonomy-dedication relationship. It would indicate that autonomy is related to dedication when people are more intrinsically motivated.

**Hypothesis 3.** Hypothesis 3 was that autonomy would positively predict decision-making, and this hypothesis was supported by the current data. Because conscious effort and thoughtfulness are described as integral aspects of autonomy (Hui et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 1993; Weinstein et al., 2012), it is consistent with expectations that romantic partners who identified as more autonomous reported more active decision-making as it relates to their relationship and partner. This significant finding adds new evidence to support the theory on autonomy and deciding. In particular, people in romantic relationships who are more autonomous may benefit from a tendency to also experience active decision-making with the partner. Active decision-making for romantic partners has been related to positive outcomes, such as being more verbal in conflict resolution and management (Vennum & Fincham, 2011), which may mitigate future conflict from unresolved issues.

This finding and previous research suggests that more autonomous partners may provide constructive feedback in decisions that provide direction for the future of the relationship. Sliding through decisions or major relationship stages, such as moving in together or getting married may describe a poor communication style (Owen et al., 2013), whereas autonomous partners may prefer to discuss the potential positive as well as negative outcomes and the implications of these events. For example, autonomous partners may prefer an explicit discussion on responsibilities involved in sharing an apartment so as to hold each other responsible for future actions. This active role in the decision-making process may promote more communication about transitions in the relationship that would greatly affect the couple's future.

**Hypothesis 5a and 5b.** Hypothesis 5a was that deciding would be positively related to dedication, but this relationship was not supported by the current data,

thereby not supporting Hypothesis 5b that deciding would partially explain the autonomy to dedication relationship. Previous research indicated that relationship deciding should be positively related to dedication commitment in relationships (Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2006; Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

Although Vennum and Fincham (2011) used a large college sample to find that deciding was correlated with dedication, deciding at the beginning of the semester did not predict dedication at the end of the semester. They explained that college students are a population that faces multiple transitions and stages in their relationships and that increased dedication may be more indicative of deciding occurring around major relationship transitions rather than general thoughtfulness or deciding in relationships. This explanation indicates that a college population may be more volatile in the report of high dedication, as it could be connected with transition stages rather than being steady throughout the relationship's duration.

Further, Owen et al. (2013) used a sample in which over 85% of participants already earned a bachelor's degree or were pursuing an advanced degree; thus, their sample was primarily out of college, which may indicate a difference in the relationship transitions experienced that Vennum and Fincham (2011) suggested. Although Owen et al. (2013) controlled for age (median of 28 years old), they also found that age was a significant predictor of dedication. Thus, it is possible that college student status or age may influence decision-making and the corresponding dedication relationship because of the relative high frequency of relationship transitions that could provide more opportunities for dedication (Owen et al., 2013; Vennum & Fincham, 2011).

Research has indicated that relationship length is inherent in defining stability of a relationship (Karakurt, 2012), which may be important in assessing commitment

of couples who have been together longer. Specifically, couples who are out of college may be further into their relationships simply by tending to be older. Thus, future work should take age, college status, and relationship length into account because these factors may influence relationship transitions and factors in continuing relationships. Relationship length may be especially important because it has been predictive of dedication (Owen et al., 2013) and because commitment items may be conceptualized differently per gender across relationship stages, such as dating, cohabiting, and married stages (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2006; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). Although the current study did include these three relationship stages, the general age range of people in college tends to be younger (median = 21 for the current study) than post-graduates (median = 28; Owen et al., 2013). Therefore, future research may include relationship length as a covariate to more accurately assess dedication commitment.

It is also important to consider the original sliding versus deciding scale that was implemented in the current study. The null findings regarding relationship deciding may be because the measurement of sliding versus deciding was conceptualized differently than suggested by Stanley et al. (2006). Stanley et al.'s (2006) conceptualization of sliding versus deciding was based at the level of the couple as one unit, and concerned the degree to which the dyad makes decisions about transition stages. The current study and Owen et al. (2013) closely used this model, but took the approach of assessing thoughtfulness about decisions (deciding) more generally for individuals in relationships as opposed to couple's decisions. Model A (Figure 1) in the current study may have further benefitted from a dyadic design, especially considering that partners in a dyad may have different deciding and dedication as well as affect each other (Owen et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2006). For

instance, if one partner is not as thoughtful about relationship decisions as the other partner, corresponding dedication commitment between partners could greatly differ. Collecting dyadic information may shed light on an interaction between partners' individual reports, such that not only do partners differ in ratings, but an interaction at the partner level may affect their dedication overall.

### **Constraint Commitment**

**Hypothesis 2.** Hypothesis 2 was that regret would be positively related to constraint, and this hypothesis was not supported because the direction was negative, such that more anticipated regret over staying in the relationship was significantly related to less constraint to stay. Research had indicated a positive relation between anticipated regret and the escalation of commitment, such that more anticipated regret was associated with pouring more commitment into a cause that could be viewed as losing or an eventual loss. Theory holds that people escalate their commitment to avoid the regret associated with not continuing with that cause or bet (Wong & Kwong, 2007). Considering that people tend to avoid regret (Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997; Zeelenberg et al., 1996), they should naturally escalate in commitment, which parallels the idea of constraint or obligation in the relationship literature. An explanation for the unexpected finding of more regret being related to less constraint can be explained more conceptually with how people understand commitment. Bivariate correlations for the current study provide further support to match the MEDCURVE findings, such that regret was negatively related to constraint. These correlations also showed, however, that regret was positively correlated to dedication (see Table 3), raising the question on how dedication and constraint are differentially conceptualized when romantic partners are asked to think about their anticipated regret for staying in the current relationship. Petrocelli, Kammrath, Brinton, Uy, and

Cowens (2015) explain that people with regret over missing out on a previous possible romantic partner still report high commitment to remain with the current partner; these people who experienced regret over a forgone alternative partner may determine for themselves that they must have high commitment to remain with the current partner despite regret over missed opportunities. Similarly, when anticipating regret for staying in the current relationship, partners may have interpreted their decision to stay as still having high dedication commitment to the current partner despite alternatives they could be missing out on. However, the bivariate correlation only provides preliminary support for this direction. Further, the models discussed in the current study did not include both types of commitment in each model to determine whether anticipated regret better or differently predicts dedication versus constraint. It would be necessary for future researchers to include both commitment types in a model with regret as well as assessing anticipated regret for if people stay versus leave the relationship. With asking people their anticipated regret for staying versus leaving the current relationship, future researchers may be able to determine how dedication and constraint are conceptualized differently, especially considering research does not yet explain this difference in conceptualization.

Research suggests that the way in which regret is measured may play an important part in how people report regret and escalating commitment (Ku, 2008a). The measurement of anticipated regret may have obfuscated the resulting finding. For example, the current study only prompted participants with one scenario and had them briefly respond to questions on regret, whereas other research in this area typically has participants engage in many what-if scenarios and a generally deeper thinking process. It may have been beneficial to implement multiple scenarios in the current study to more accurately assess regret related to staying in the relationship. It

is possible that deep thought or more cognition is required for people to anticipate regret over leaving their partners. This possibility suggests that some rumination over future decisions may be required to impact constraining factors that keep partners in the relationship.

As an alternative explanation, Counterfactual Potency theory takes relationship commitment into account (Petrocelli, Percy, Sherman, & Tormala, 2011), and provides a quantifiable way to measure counterfactual thought. Therefore, this theory assesses the tangibility or possible influence (potentially, predictive power) that thinking about possible relationship alternatives can have on a person's subsequent decisions or thoughts.

Petrocelli et al. (2015) tested this theory in romantic relationships and was able to describe how forgone alternative partners fit into the Investment model of general commitment processes detailed earlier (Rusbult et al., 2012). Petrocelli et al. (2015) found that when partners view past alternatives as a forgone possibility that may have led to happiness, they experience regret. Furthermore, the more potent that counterfactual thought was for a forgone alternative partner, the less commitment partners reported for their current relationships; in this research, low commitment may be qualified as constraint, whereas high commitment may be qualified as dedication or a genuine desire to prolong the relationship. This finding was further moderated by the investment that participants felt for the current partner, suggesting that high investment to one's partner may be more important for high commitment than is the tangibility of forgone alternatives.

One suggestion Petrocelli et al. (2015) made was that participants may have interpreted that their regret was evidence of commitment to the current partner because even though they experienced regret over forgone alternatives, they must



have high commitment to remain with the current partner. However, this assertion requires replication. Thus, future research may want to include regret as an intermediary variable to see how it accounts for constraint when counterfactual potency for forgone alternatives and when partners' investment to the current relationship are added.

**Hypothesis 4.** Hypothesis 4 was that regret would be negatively related to deciding, and this hypothesis was supported. People are generally averse to regret and try to minimize the amount of regret they will experience over decisions (van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2005; Zeelenberg & Beattie, 1997). Because more anticipated regret is related to decision-making, the result is in line with previous literature that people may abstain from making decisions if they think they will regret them. Thus, increased anticipated regret may be associated with sliding through relationship decisions, adding new information to relationship literature. Sliding through relationship decisions or transitional stages has implications for the couple's future. In particular, one who anticipates regretting a decision and is not an active decider in the relationship may not make a clear or thoughtful decision with the partner. This hesitation to make decisions may mean agreeing to a partner's requests without fully communicating one's thoughts, concerns, or preferences for the decision. Furthermore, a passive decision-making partner may be more likely to experience negative outcomes such as a reduced support from the partner for continue commitment to the relationship (Stanley et al., 2010). It is possible that perceiving a less thoughtful or disengaged partner prompts the other romantic partner to withdraw support for their continued commitment or desire to prolong the relationship.

**Hypothesis 6a and 6b.** Hypothesis 6a was that deciding would be negatively related to constraint, but this hypothesis was not supported, meaning that Hypothesis

6b that deciding would partially explain the relationship between regret and constraint was also not supported. Research indicated that less active decision-making (or sliding) in relationships may be related to more constraints in relationships (Stanley et al., 2006). In particular, sliding through decisions in the relationship may facilitate constraining factors that keep partners together (Owen et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2014). Given the current findings, less deciding was not related to more constraint, and deciding did not partially explain the relationship between anticipated regret and constraint commitment.

Owen et al. (2011) provides an alternative explanation and consideration for future research on constraint. He indicated that use of the constraint scale to measure constraint commitment globally was not supported in his study and that other types of measurement or specific constraint subscales may be more fruitful. Specifically, some couples may have constraints that other couples do not and potentially attach more meaning to those constraints. Thus, having a checklist, for example, of which constraints are present may provide a meaningful sum of all constraints.

Alternatively, identifying specific constraint subscales may most accurately capture constraint commitment; the current study chose this approach by excluding one subscale that was least relevant to the relationship context being assessed. This type of measurement, in the appropriate context, may shed light on how decision-making is actually related to constraint. Although Hypotheses 6a and 6b were not supported, constraint subscales were chosen appropriately for this context, but multiple measures of constraint commitment may be implemented in the future to assess the best method of measurement. Furthermore, one study identified 'felt constraint' as a predictor of relationship termination (Rhoades et al., 2010). It is evident that the different types of constraint that made up the composite factor in the

current study are complex and require further research for use as a composite measure overall for different relationship types (dating, cohabiting, and married couples).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Some important limitations to this study should be addressed. First, the estimated relationships did not control for gender. It may have been important to control for gender in this study because items assessing commitment could be interpreted differently across gender, specifically in early relationship stages such as unmarried relationships. Research has shown some evidence that men report less dedication than women in relationships where the partners were cohabiting or had cohabited before marriage (Rhoades et al., 2006; Stanley et al., 2004). This finding points to a possibly different conceptualization of commitment across gender. The current study included participants in dating, cohabiting, and married relationships, so a possible gender effect could also extend to different relationship stages. However, research did indicate a similar factor structure across men and women for commitment (Owen et al., 2011; Stanley & Markman, 1992). Future work may account for gender and include it as a covariate to assuage this concern or consider research into different interpretations based on wording of commitment items.

Second, the population assessed may not be the most appropriate for the constructs in this study. The current study included students from the college population for the sample under investigation. However, research indicates that it is possible for the college population to experience a high amount of transitions in romantic relationships (Vennum & Fincham, 2011), suggesting a potential impact on the dedication reported by students in contrast to non-students (Owen et al., 2013). In addition, research suggests context or the type of relationship (e.g., family member, friend, romantic partner) may be more conducive to autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

The current study only included participants currently in romantic relationships, so future researchers could use data from multiple populations such as students and non-students to answer the questions sought in the current study. They may also assess different relationship types within a college population to determine if there may be a moderating factor.

Third, the Anticipated Regret scale adapted from Godin et al. (2005) may provide limited results for this construct. This scale was selected for the current study because a specific anticipated (or future) regret in romantic relationships scale did not exist at the time. Although other regret and relationship regret scales exist and were considered (Bagger, Reb, & Li, 2014; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2002), there were issues with using these scales for the current study's context. The Regret Scale created by Schwartz et al. (2002) is intended to assess one's tendency to experience regret in life. Adapting this scale to romantic relationships and for anticipated regret would have essentially created a new scale, which was not within the scope of the current study.

The Relationship Regrets Scale (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007) captures recalled events in which people would rate their regret for each event; similarly, the anticipated regret scale from Bagger et al. (2014) is also a scenario-based prompt, requiring anticipated regret ratings but for a work-family conflict event. Saffrey and Ehrenberg's (2007) scale was not ideal because it deals with past regrets as opposed to anticipated regret for events that have not happened. However, given the common method of people rating anticipated regret for a scenario (Bagger et al., 2014) and the general anticipated regret questions provided in multiple scales (Bagger et al., 2014; Godin et al., 2005) the best option to assess anticipated regret in relationships was to provide a prompt ("If I stay in my current romantic relationship") and have

participants rate their anticipated feelings across three established questions for this construct. Ku (2008a) suggests a deeper thought process (i.e. more than three questions) for what-if scenarios may be required to elicit the depth of anticipated regret participants have reported in previous studies of escalation of commitment (Wong & Kwong, 2007). Researchers may choose other scales in the future or use multiple or lengthy scenarios to elicit anticipated regret to ensure a more accurate collection of relationship-specific regret and follow-up commitment ratings.

### **Implications**

After further research, clinical implications may involve therapists or couples counselors being able to identify partners' expectations in relationships and how to align those expectations to build dedication or reduce constraints in the relationship (Owen et al., 2013). Considering dating may be a stage or transition into marriage for many people (Le et al., 2010), decision-making and making beneficial choices may become important for the longevity of the relationship. Therapy for a couple or knowledge about the trajectory of healthy relationships could be fundamental in facilitating more dedication to the relationship or in identifying when constraints to stay are no longer part of a healthy relationship for individuals. Specifically, romantic partners may learn to identify when they are considering dissolution or have strong feelings in that regard and the events or thoughts that may have led the relationship from more initial dedication to break-up (Rhoades et al., 2010).

Research has also suggested it is possible to learn to de-escalate commitment to a cause, such that one need not be tied to sunk-cost situation (Ku, 2008b). This finding involved previous exposure to regret after an event in which participants escalated their commitment to a losing cause. This type of learning makes it possible to target people's responses when faced with a losing or sunk cost; instead of pouring

commitment into the cause, people may learn from previous regret and adaptively respond in their personal lives.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The current study assessed how multiple factors are related to dedication and constraint commitment as well as contributed new information to the relationship literature. The romantic relationship literature has included little research on autonomy and decision-making and even less on anticipated regret. Traditionally, regret and decision-making have been studied in contexts separate from relationships (Joel, MacDonald, & Plaks, 2013), so this study also bridged that gap by relating those variables to relationships.

I demonstrated that more autonomous partners are actively involved in decision-making in their relationships, indicating a more involved or communicative role for autonomous partners. I also unexpectedly found that anticipating regret over staying in a relationship is related to less constraint to stay. Research suggested that a deeper thinking process may be required to elicit the type of thought or rumination characteristic of regret and, therefore, constraint commitment to stay. Alternatively, more research may be needed to relate anticipated regret differentially to dedication versus constraint. Lastly, I demonstrated that anticipating regret is related to less active decision-making for romantic partners. This finding indicates anticipating more regret for leaving a relationship is related to sliding through relationship decisions and possibly important transitions in the relationship. Autonomy showed to be more theoretically complex than anticipated, providing a fruitful direction upon which future research can elaborate. Furthermore, decision-making as an intermediary variable related to both dedication and constraint commitment requires further review in the context of romantic relationships. In conclusion, the models

studied provided important initial glimpses into relationship processes as they related to two distinct types of commitment.



## REFERENCES

- Baron, J. (2008). Descriptive theory of choice under uncertainty. *Thinking and deciding* (pp. 257-287). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Barreda-Tarrazona, I., Jaramillo-Gutierrez, A., Navarro-Martinez, D., & Sabater-Grande, G. (2014). The role of forgone opportunities in decision making under risk. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, *49*, 167-188.
- Bekker, M. H. J., & Croon, M. A. (2010). The roles of autonomy-connectedness and attachment styles in depression and anxiety. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *27*, 908-923.
- Brockner, J. (1992). The escalation of commitment to a failing course of action: Toward theoretical progress. *Academy of Management Review*, *17*, 39-61.
- Dasch, K. B., Cohen, L. H., Sahl, J. C., & Gunthert, K. C. (2008). Moderating effects of sociotropy and autonomy on affective and self-esteem reactivity to daily stressors. *Cognitive Therapy & Research*, *32*, 177-195.
- Deci, E. L., La Guardia, J. G., Moller, A. C., Scheiner, M. J., & Ryan, R. M. (2006). On the benefits of giving as well as receiving autonomy support: Mutuality in close friendships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 313-327.
- Demerouti, E., Mostert, K., & Bakker, A. B. (2010). Burnout and work engagement: A thorough investigation of the independency of both constructs. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *15*, 209-222.
- Eastwick, P. W., Finkel, E. J., Krishnamurti, T., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Mispredicting distress following romantic breakup: Revealing the time course of the affective forecasting error. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*, 800-807.
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G\*Power 3: A flexible

statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 175-191. Retrieved from <http://www.psych.uni-duesseldorf.de/abteilungen/aap/gpower3/download-and-register>

Godin, G., Sheeran, P., Conner, M., Germain, M., Blondeau, D., Gagné, C., ... & Naccache, H. (2005). Factors explaining the intention to give blood among the general population. *Van Sanguinis*, 89, 140-149.

Goldsmith, D. (1990). A dialectic perspective on the expression of autonomy and connection in romantic relationships. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 537-556.

Halpern, J. Y., & Leung, S. (2014). Weighted sets of probabilities and minimax weighted expected regret: A new approach for representing uncertainty and making decisions. *Theory and Decision*. doi:10.1007/s11238-014-9471-y

Hayes, A. F. (2010). Quantifying and testing indirect effects in simple mediation models when the constituent paths are nonlinear. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 45, 627-660.

Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Model templates for PROCESS for SPSS and SAS*. Retrieved from <http://www.afhayes.com/public/templates.pdf>

Hodges, E. V. E., Finnegan, R. A., & Perry, D. G. (1999). Skewed autonomy-relatedness in preadolescents' conceptions of their relationships with mother, father, and best friend. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 737-748.

Hui, C. M., Molden, D. C., & Finkel, E. J. (2013). Loving freedom: Concerns with promotion or prevention and the role of autonomy in relationship well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 105, 61-85.

Joel, S., MacDonald, G., & Plaks, J. E. (2013). Romantic relationships conceptualized

- as a judgment and decision-making domain. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 461-465.
- Johnson, D. J., & Rusbult, C. E. (1989). Resisting temptation: Devaluation of alternative partners as a means of maintaining commitment in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 967-980.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica*, 47, 263-291.
- Karakurt, G. (2012). Relationship stability through lenses of complexity. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 40, 126-140.
- Kelmer, G., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. J. (2013). Relationship quality, commitment, and stability in long-distance relationships. *Family Process*, 52, 257-270.
- Koestner, R., Powers, T. A., Carbonneau, N., Milyavskaya, M., & Chua, S. N. (2012). Distinguishing autonomous and directive forms of goal support: Their effects on goal progress, relationship quality, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38, 1609-1620.
- Ku, G. (2008a). Before escalation: Behavioral and affective forecasting in escalation of commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34, 1477-1491.
- Ku, G. (2008b). Learning to de-escalate: The effects of regret in escalation of commitment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 105, 221-232.
- Kwong, J. Y. Y., & Wong, K. F. E. (2014). Reducing and exaggerating escalation of commitment by option partitioning. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 99, 697-712.
- Le, B., Dove, N. L., Agnew, C. R., Korn, M. S., & Mutso, A. A. (2010). Predicting

- non-marital romantic relationship dissolution: A meta-analytic synthesis. *Personal Relationships, 17*, 377-390.
- Lewandowski, G. W., Nardone, N., & Raines, A. J. (2010). The role of self-concept clarity in relationship quality. *Self & Identity, 9*, 416-433.
- Martinez, L. F., & Zeelenberg, M. (2015). Trust me (or not): Regret and disappointment in experimental economic games. *Decision, 2*, 118-126.
- Neff, K. D., & Harter, S. (2003). Relationship styles of self-focused autonomy, other-focused connectedness, and mutuality across multiple relationship contexts. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 20*, 81-99.
- Newton, J. D., Newton, F. J., Ewing, M. T., Burney, S., & Hay, M. (2013). Conceptual overlap between moral norms and anticipated regret in the prediction of intention: Implications for theory of planned behaviour research. *Psychology & Health, 28*, 495-513.
- Ng, K. M. (2012). *The escalation of commitment and affect* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from PsycNET. (AAI3602410)
- Owen, J., Rhoades, G., Shuck, B., Fincham, F. D., Stanley, S., Markman, H., & Knopp, K. (2014). Commitment uncertainty: A theoretical overview. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice, 3*, 207-219.
- Owen, J., Rhoades, G. K., & Stanley, S. M. (2013). Sliding versus deciding in relationships: Associations with relationship quality, commitment, and infidelity. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 12*, 135-149.
- Owen, J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2011a). The Revised commitment inventory: Psychometrics and use with unmarried couples. *Journal of Family Issues, 32*, 820-841.
- Owen, J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2011b). Revised

commitment inventory. Retrieved from PsycTESTS.

- Patrick, H., Knee, C. R., Canevello, A., & Lonsbary, C. (2007). The role of need fulfillment in relationship functioning and well-being: A self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 434-457.
- Petrocelli, J. V., Kammrath, L. K., Brinton, J. E., Uy, M. R. Y., & Cowens, D. F. L. (2015). Holding on to what might have been may loosen (or tighten) the ties that bind us: A counterfactual potency analysis of previous dating alternatives. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 56*, 50-59.
- Petrocelli, J. V., Percy, E. J., Sherman, S. J., & Tormala, Z. L. (2011). Counterfactual potency. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 100*, 30-46.
- Pierro, A., Leder, S., Mannetti, L., Higgins, E. T., Kruglanski, A. W., & Aiello, A. (2008). Regulatory mode effects on counterfactual thinking and regret. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 44*, 321-329.
- Reb, J., & Connolly, T. (2010). The effects of action, normality, and decision carefulness on anticipated regret: Evidence for a broad mediating role of decision justifiability. *Cognition and Emotion, 24*, 1405-1420.
- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Pre-engagement cohabitation and gender asymmetry in marital commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20*, 553-560.
- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Predicting dating relationship stability from four aspects of commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*, 543-550.
- Rusbult, C., Agnew, C., & Arriaga, X. (2012). The investment model of commitment processes. In P. Van Lange, A. Kruglanski, & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of*

- theories of social psychology* (pp. 218-232). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2003). Interdependence, interaction, and relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*, 351-375.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 54-67.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality, 74*, 1557-1585.
- Ryan, R. M., Rigby, C. S., & King, K. (1993). Two types of religious internalization and their relations to religious orientations and mental health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*, 586-596.
- Saffrey, C., & Ehrenberg, M. (2007). When thinking hurts: Attachment, rumination, and postrelationship adjustment. *Personal Relationships, 14*, 351-368.
- Sato, T., & McCann, D. (2007). Sociotropy-autonomy and interpersonal problems. *Depression and Anxiety, 24*, 153-162.
- Self-Determination Theory. (2015). *Questionnaires*. Retrieved from <http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/questionnaires/>
- Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyubomirsky, S., White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Regret scale. Retrieved from PsycTESTS.
- Schwarz, N. (2000). Emotion, cognition, and decision-making. *Cognition and Emotion, 14*, 433-440.

- Seta, C. E., Seta, J. J., McElroy, G. T., & Hatz, J. (2008). Regret: The roles of consistency-fit and counterfactual salience. *Social Cognition, 26*, 700-719.
- Shani, Y., Danziger, S., & Zeelenberg, M. (2015). Choosing between options associated with past and future regret. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 126*, 107-114.
- Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54*, 595– 608.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations, 55*, 499–509.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 2*, 243-257.
- Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment and premarital or nonmarital cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues, 25*, 496-519.
- Surra, C. A., Chandler, M., Asmussen, L., & Wareham, J. (1987). Effects of premarital pregnancy on the development of interdependence in relationships. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology, 5*, 123–139.
- van de Ven, N., & Zeelenberg, M. (2011). Regret aversion and the reluctance to exchange lottery tickets. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 32*, 194-200.
- van Dijk, E., & Zeelenberg, M. (2005). On the psychology of 'if only': Regret and the comparison between factual and counterfactual outcomes. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 97*, 152-160.
- Van Lange, P., & Rusbult, C. (2012). Interdependence theory. In P. Van Lange, A. Kruglanski, & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social*

- psychology* (pp. 251-273). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Vennum, A., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Assessing decision-making in young adult romantic relationships. *Psychological Assessment, 23*, 739-751.
- Weinstein, N., Hodgins, H.S., & Ryan, R.M. (2010). Autonomy and control in dyads: Effects on interaction quality and joint creative performance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*, 1603-1617.
- Weinstein, N., Przybylski, A. K., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). The index of autonomous functioning: Development of a scale of human autonomy. *Journal of Research in Personality, 46*, 397-413.
- Wong, K. F. E., & Kwong, J. Y. Y. (2007). The role of anticipated regret in escalation of commitment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92*, 545-554.
- Xiong, W., Luo, X., Ma, W., & Zhang, M. (2014). Ambiguous games played by players with ambiguity aversion and minimax regret. *Knowledge-Based Systems, 70*, 167-176.
- Zeelenberg, M., & Beattie, J. (1997). Consequences of regret aversion 2: Additional evidence for effects of feedback on decision-making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Processes, 72*, 63-78.
- Zeelenberg, M., Beattie, J., van der Plight, J., & de Vries, N. K. (1996). Consequences of regret aversion: Effects of expected feedback on risky decision-making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 65*, 148-158.
- Zeelenberg, M., van Dijk, W. W., van der Pligt, J., Manstead, A. S. R., van Empelen, P., & Reinderman, D. (1998). Emotional reactions to the outcomes of decisions: The role of counterfactual thought in the experience of regret and disappointment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 75*, 117-141.



**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT FLYER**

Date Posted: \_\_\_\_\_

IRB/COSHSC #: \_\_\_\_\_

Study Name	Project Relationships
Abstract	This study requires participants to complete a survey using a computer regarding their personal beliefs and behaviors.
Description	<p>To be eligible for this survey, please review the following questions. You are eligible if you answer "yes" to all questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are you currently in a dating (monogamous), cohabiting (dating &amp; living together), or married relationship?</li> <li>2. Is your current romantic partner the gender opposite of yours (ex: you are a woman dating a man or vice versa)?</li> <li>3. Have you been in your current relationship for 1 month or more?</li> <li>4. Do you live close to your romantic partner (50 miles or less away from them)?</li> </ol> <p>Please only continue if you said yes to all 4 criteria. This is an online study. You will complete a survey assessing psychological variables. Specifically, we are interested in how various characteristics relate to commitment to current romantic relationships. At the end of the survey, you will be directed to click a link where you may enter your SONA ID number. Make sure you know your SONA ID number before signing up for this study. It is NOT your student ID number. If you do not know your SONA ID number, please click My Profile at the top of this screen. Once you click on My Profile you will be able to see your SONA ID number. Please write it down, as you need it in order to participate. You will NOT be issued credit if you do not enter the correct SONA ID number. You may also want to either print or save the confirmation page at the end of the study. Please make sure your computer is capable of printing or saving this webpage confirmation. If there is a problem with receiving credit, you will need the confirmation page.</p>
Web Study	This is an online study. To participate, sign up, and then go to the website listed below to participate.
Website	[View Website Here]
Eligibility Requirements	18+ years old
Duration	Approximately 1 hour
Credits	1 Credits
Researcher	Ashley Fehr  Email: afehr002@odu.edu
Principal Investigator	<a href="#">Matt Henson</a>

## APPENDIX B

### NOTIFICATION STATEMENT

NOTIFICATION STATEMENT  
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

**PROJECT TITLE:** Project Relationships

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in the online study entitled "Project Relationships", and to acquire consent from those individuals who choose to participate. It is your responsibility to inform the experimenter if you wish to discontinue your participation.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

James M. Henson, Ph.D., Associate Professor, College of Sciences, Psychology Department, Old Dominion University, Responsible Project Investigator  
Ashley Fehr, Graduate Student, College of Sciences, Psychology Department, Old Dominion University

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the correlates of different facets of commitment to a romantic relationship among college students. Specifically, we are interested in the effects of autonomy, regret, and decision-making in people's current relationships. Participation in this study will require you to fill out an online survey using a computer, and it will take approximately 1 hour to complete.

#### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** The potential risks are those similar to normal computer viewing and usage. In addition, participants are asked to report their personal behaviors; this may cause some psychological discomfort. You are free to leave any question blank that you do not feel comfortable answering.

**BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

#### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. There will be no costs to you, nor any monetary payments. Participation in this study will give you 1 Psychology Department Research Credit, which may be applied for extra credit in certain Psychology courses. Equivalent credits may be obtained in other ways. You do not have to participate in this study, or any Psychology Department study, in order to obtain this credit.

#### **NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researcher cannot identify you. We do not ask for any identifying information, so your responses cannot be traced back to you.

#### **WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

#### **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

By clicking the "Next" button below, your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in this research project, you may contact Dr. James Henson at 757-683-5761, the lead investigator, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By clicking the "Next" button below, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you and are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. James Henson. 757-683-5761. [jhenson@odu.edu](mailto:jhenson@odu.edu)

And importantly, by clicking the "Next" button, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study.

## APPENDIX C

### INDEX OF AUTONOMOUS FUNCTIONING

Below is a collection of statements about your general experiences. Please indicate how true each statement is of your experiences on the whole. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.

- 1 = not at all true
- 2 = a bit true
- 3 = somewhat true
- 4 = mostly true
- 5 = completely true

1. My decisions represent my most important values and feelings.
2. I strongly identify with the things that I do.
3. My actions are congruent with who I really am.
4. My whole self stands behind the important decisions I make.
5. My decisions are steadily informed by things I want or care about.
6. I do things in order to avoid feeling badly about myself. (R)
7. I do a lot of things to avoid feeling ashamed. (R)
8. I try to manipulate myself into doing certain things. (R)
9. I believe certain things so that others will like me. (R)
10. I often pressure myself. (R)
11. I often reflect on why I react the way I do.
12. I am deeply curious when I react with fear or anxiety to events in my life.
13. I am interested in understanding the reasons for my actions.
14. I am interested in why I act the way I do.
15. I like to investigate my feelings.

## APPENDIX D

### SLIDE VERSUS DECIDE SCALE

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements based on your life currently.

1 = strongly disagree

7 = strongly agree

1. I think a lot about the kind of person to be with in a relationship.
2. Sometimes I wonder what I'm doing with the kinds of partners I choose to date.
3. A person has to have certain qualities for me to even consider dating them.
4. It's important for me to get to know a person before starting a physical relationship with them.
5. Having sex with someone is a decision that should be given a lot of thought.
6. Having a casual sexual relationship with someone is no big deal. (R)
7. I put a lot of thought into the kind of person I want to be with in a relationship.
8. There are certain qualities I look for in a dating partner (boyfriend/girlfriend).
9. It is important for me to know a person pretty well before having sex with them.
10. I think about where I want this relationship to go before I become sexually involved.
11. I think it is important to see how a relationship progresses and not to analyze it. (R)
12. I feel comfortable with casual sexual relationships. (R)
13. I don't see any problems with occasionally having sex with someone who is a friend. (R)
14. Being sexually involved with a person doesn't necessarily mean I feel committed to the relationship. (R)

## APPENDIX E

### DEDICATION COMMITMENT SUBSCALE

Read the statements below about your romantic relationship and partner. Indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the statements.

1 = strongly disagree

7 = strongly agree

1. My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything in my life.
2. I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we encounter.
3. I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of “us” and “we” than “me” and “him” or “her”.
4. I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner. (R)
5. My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans.
6. My career (or job, studies, homemaking, childrearing, etc.) is more important to me than my relationship with my partner. (R)
7. I do not want to have a strong identity as a couple with my partner. (R)
8. I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now. (R)

**APPENDIX F****ANTICIPATED REGRET SCALE**

Read the following statement and indicate to what extent each item is unlikely or likely.

1 = very unlikely

5 = very likely

If I stayed in my current romantic relationship:

1. I will regret it
2. It will bother me
3. I will be disappointed

## APPENDIX G

### CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT SUBSCALE

Read the statements below about your romantic relationship and partner. Indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the statements.

1 = strongly disagree

7 = strongly agree

1. My friends would not mind if my partner and I broke up. (R)
2. If we ended this relationship, I would feel fine about my financial status. (R)
3. The steps I would need to take to end this relationship would require a great deal of time and effort.
4. I could not bear the pain it would cause my partner to leave him or her even if I really wanted to.
5. It would be difficult for my friends to accept it if I ended the relationship with my partner.
6. It would be relatively easy to take the steps needed to end this relationship. (R)
7. I would not have trouble supporting myself should this relationship end. (R)
8. My family really wants this relationship to work.
9. I would have trouble finding a suitable partner if this relationship ended.
10. I believe there are many people who would be happy with me as their spouse or partner. (R)
11. Though it might take a while, I could find another desirable partner if I wanted or needed to. (R)
12. I would not have any problem with meeting my basic financial needs for food, shelter, and clothing without my partner. (R)
13. The process of ending this relationship would require many difficult steps.
14. If I really felt I had to leave this relationship, I would not be slowed down by concerns for how well my partner would do without me. (R)
15. My family would not care if I ended this relationship. (R)



**APPENDIX H**  
**DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE**

What is your age? \_\_\_\_

What is your relationship status?

- Single
- In a committed relationship
- Cohabiting (dating and living together but not married)
- Married
- Divorced

Do you consider yourself to be:

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Is your romantic partner:

- I do not have a romantic partner
- the opposite gender that you are
- the same gender that you are

How long have you been in a romantic relationship with your current partner?

- I do not have a romantic partner
- Less than one month (30 days)
- One month (30 days) or more

How far away does your romantic partner live from you?

- I do not have a romantic partner
- Less than 50 miles
- 50 or more miles

## VITA

### ASHLEY M. A. FEHR

Psychology Department  
Mills Godwin Building  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

#### EDUCATION

<b>MS</b>	Psychology Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA 23529	Attended: 2013 – 2015 GPA: 3.92 Credit Hours Completed: 46
<b>BA</b>	Majors: Psychology and Philosophy Minors: French and Women's & Gender Studies Christopher Newport University Newport News, VA 23606	Attended: 2009 – 2013 Cumulative GPA: 3.74 Psychology GPA: 3.78 Credit Hours Completed: 136

#### PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

**Research Assistant II** (July 2015 – Present)  
Science & Technology Division  
Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, VA  
Includes: knowledge in psychology and learning topics as needed in behavioral and social science and national security/defense; creation of documents such as internal publications, presentation graphics, and literature reviews; collaboration with research staff members in multiple subject matter domains; managing tasks in multiple ongoing projects over time.  
Supervisor: Dr. Jim Belanich

**Research Coordinator** (July 2013 – May 2015)  
Children's Cancer & Blood Disorders Center  
Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk, VA  
NHLBI-funded project focusing on the use of patient navigators to enhance medication compliance of Sickle Cell patients. Included: participant outreach and enrollment; database and patient information management, knowledge of human subject protection; mentoring new personnel; feedback on forms and procedures; suggest solutions to enrollment and procedural problems; collaboration with investigators and personnel from Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center, Eastern Virginia Medical School, and Virginia Dept. of Health.  
Supervisors: Dr. Anthony Villella and Dr. Ian Chen

#### PUBLICATION

Gibbons, J., **Fehr, A.**, Brantley, J., Wilson, K., Lee, S. A., & Walker, W. R. (Revising for Resubmit). *Do death attitudes and religious variables moderate the fading affect bias across significant (death) and regular autobiographical events?* A paper submitted to a peer-reviewed journal in August, 2015.

#### ACADEMIC HONORS

- Baccalaureate graduation with Magna Cum Laude Latin honors (May, 2013)
- Excellence in Psychological Research award (May, 2013)
- Departmental Distinction award in Psychology (May, 2013)
- Pass with distinction on exit exam for Philosophy & Religious Studies (May, 2013)
- Acceptance into the Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program at VT (Summer, 2012)
- Lifetime membership in professional organizations: Psi Chi, Alpha Chi, Phi Sigma Tau, and Pi Delta Phi