Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
2001, Vol. 81, No. 2, 263–277

0022-3514/01/$5.00 DOI: 10.1037//0022-3514.81.2.263

Self-Control and Accommodation in Close Relationships: An Interdependence Analysis

Eli J. Finkel
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

W. Keith Campbell
University of Georgia

Accommodation refers to the willingness, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive behavior, to (a) inhibit impulses toward destructive responding and (b) instead respond constructively. A pilot study and 3 additional studies examined the hypothesis that self-control promotes individuals' ability to accommodate in response to a romantic partner's potentially destructive behavior. Dispositional self-control was positively associated with accommodative tendencies in all 4 investigations. In addition, Study 1 (a retrospective study) and Study 2 (a laboratory experiment) revealed that "in-the-moment" self-regulatory strength depletion decreased the likelihood that an individual would accommodate. Finally, Study 3 demonstrated that self-control exerted a significant effect on accommodation even after the authors included commitment to the relationship in the model. Implications for relationship functioning are discussed.

Maintaining a healthy and satisfying romantic relationship is not easy. Breakup, rather than marriage, is the norm in dating relationships. In addition, adherence to the "until death do us part" vow in marital relationships is the exception rather than the rule. Recent estimates of the likelihood that first marriages will end in divorce are as high as 67% (Martin & Bumpass, 1989); estimates increase by approximately 10% for second marriages (Glick, 1984). The negative consequences of relationship dissolution are severe, including increased risk for psychopathology, physical illness, suicide, violence, and death from disease (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Burman & Margolin, 1992). In short, breakups are distressingly common despite their deleterious consequences.

Why do some relationships succeed, whereas others fail? Perhaps one important factor promoting enhanced relationship functioning is partners' ability to engage in accommodative behavior (i.e., responding constructively rather than destructively to potentially destructive partner behavior; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Much evidence supports this contention. In a recent review of marital research involving sequential analysis, Gottman (1998) observed that unhappily married couples tend to reciprocate destructive behavior (i.e., they fail to accommodate), whereas happily married couples tend to interact in a "climate of agreement" (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1979; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Rausch, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974; Revenstorf, Vogel, Wegener, Halweg, & Schindler, 1980; Ting-Toomey, 1982). Among distressed couples, conflict spirals into a virtually unbreakable chain of reciprocated negativity. Gottman (1998) concluded that the "basic sequential result that held across laboratories was that greater reciprocated negative affective interaction is an absorbing state for dissatisfied couples" (p. 179). Much prior research has demonstrated that individuals' reactions to a partner's destructive behavior can exert profound effects on relationship functioning and couple well-being (e.g., Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Rausch et al., 1974; Rusbult et al., 1991). The present research investigates the process by which romantic partners resist the temptation to react destructively in response to potentially destructive partner behavior in favor of responding in a prorelationship manner (i.e., the process by which they exert self-control to get beyond their retaliatory impulses).

We begin this analysis by observing that all partners in romantic relationships behave badly at times. In dealing with the tribulations of everyday life, one partner or the other will inevitably engage in a potentially destructive act (e.g., being inconsiderate, failing to put adequate time and effort into the relationship, yelling at the partner). For example, Jeni may become irritable with Jeff when she is under a lot of pressure at work, or Jeff may forget to ask Jeni about an important event in her life. Such behavior places the nonoffending partner in a predicament: to retaliate or not to retaliate? Following a potentially destructive partner behavior, should the nonoffending individual act on the self-interested, gut-level impulse to "fight fire with fire," or should he or she instead resist the temptation to retaliate, choosing to behave in a constructive, prorelationship manner? As noted above, a prorelationship response to potentially destructive behavior can preempt the vicious cycle of negative reciprocity that is characteristic of distressed

Eli J. Finkel, Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; W. Keith Campbell, Department of Psychology, University of Georgia.

This work includes research conducted as part of Eli J. Finkel's doctoral dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the direction of Caryl E. Rusbult. We gratefully acknowledge Dr. Candida Abrahamson and Dr. Caryl E. Rusbult for their insightful comments on drafts of this article. We also thank Alison Baker, Brent Burke, Jeni Burnette, Joe Devlin, Casey Ferrell, Gena Kelly, and Erin Williams for their help in conducting the research.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Eli J. Finkel, Department of Psychology, CB 3270, Davie Hall, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599. Electronic mail may be sent to finkel@email.unc.edu.

relationships by halting the negativity before it escalates into a full-scale conflict. Why, and under what circumstances, do some individuals respond constructively rather than destructively to potentially destructive partner behaviors? In the present article, we propose that the answers to these questions rest in large part on the degree to which the nonoffending partner possesses the self-control necessary to inhibit self-interested impulses in favor of more constructive behaviors. A brief review of the empirical literature on accommodation sets the stage.

Accommodation—Theoretical and Operational Definitions

Accommodation is defined as the willingness, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive behavior, to (a) inhibit tendencies to react destructively and (b) instead engage in constructive responses (Rusbult et al., 1991). In the present research, accommodation is operationally defined using the "exit–voice–loyalty–neglect" typology (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983), which exhaustively categorizes the domain of possible responses to dissatisfaction in relationships along two dimensions: (a) constructive–destructive and (b) active–passive. These two dimensions lead to a conceptualization of four possible responses to dissatisfying incidents: (a) *exit* (destructive and active; e.g., picking a fight with the partner or breaking off the relationship); (b) *voice* (constructive and active; e.g., talking about the problem with the partner or telling the partner you understand that he or she didn't mean to hurt you); (c) *loyalty* (constructive and passive; e.g., deciding that the relationship is sufficiently important to allow the incident to pass quietly); and (d) *neglect* (destructive and passive; e.g., deciding that your partner cannot be trusted anymore). Throughout the present research, accommodation is operationally defined as the tendency, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive exit or neglect behavior, to (a) inhibit the impulses to "fight fire with fire" with an exit or neglect response and instead (b) engage in a prorelationship voice or loyalty response.

An Interdependence Analysis of Accommodation—Transformation of Motivation

The present research rests on the assumption that although accommodative behavior promotes couple well-being, such behavior is frequently costly and effortful to the self (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996; evidence validating this assumption has been demonstrated by Rusbult et al., 1991, and Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Thus, to understand how partners maintain long-term, well-adjusted relationships, we must first explain how and why individuals become willing and able to engage in accommodative behavior that is (a) antithetical to direct self-interest yet (b) beneficial to the relationship. Engaging in such behavior can disengage the spiral of reciprocated negativity and promote couple well-being.

Interdependence theory suggests that the psychological process by which individuals become willing to forego self-interested behavior in the interest of the relationship involves prorelationship *transformation of motivation* (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In interdependence terms, transformation of motivation involves a psychological progression from impulses based on direct, immediate self-interest (i.e., *given preferences*) to behavioral inclinations based on broader values and considerations (i.e., *effective preferences*; for a concise synopsis of interdependence theory principles, see Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). More recent research in the interdependence tradition (e.g., Rusbult, Davis, Finkel, Hannon, & Olsen, 2000; Rusbult et al., 1991; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994) has examined the cognitive and motivational processes that underlie transformation of motivation, demonstrating that responses to a potentially destructive partner behavior that are based on given preferences are likely to yield the pattern of negative reciprocity that is characteristic of distressed relationships. For example, when Jeni is irritable toward Jeff because of work-related stress, Jeff's gut-level, given preference impulses may cause him to enact a destructive behavior such as criticizing her for being self-centered. However, on the basis of effective preferences resulting from prorelationship motives, Jeff may take account of broader considerations such as long-term relationship well-being and his concern for Jeni's happiness. The transformation process thus enables Jeff to resist his destructive impulses, instead engaging in a constructive response (e.g., he may ask Jeni whether there is anything he can do to help her cope with this difficult period).

The degree to which a nonoffending partner feels tempted to respond destructively in response to a potentially destructive partner behavior arguably varies across interactions and as a function of the severity of the partner's destructive behavior (Rusbult et al., 1996). However, given (a) the pervasive tendency toward reciprocity and the contingent nature of inclinations to cooperate (Axelrod, 1981, 1984; Kelley & Stahelski, 1970), and (b) the fact that destructive behavior tends to generate negative affect on the part of the nonoffending partner (Rusbult, Finkel, Hannon, Kumashiro, & Childs, in press), it seems plausible that destructive partner behavior frequently produces destructive responding. Thus, we contend that accommodation rests on prorelationship transformation of motivation. Does the empirical literature support this claim?

Research regarding social value orientations presents evidence for the existence of the transformation process in interactions between strangers (Dehue, McClintock, & Liebrand, 1993). In an allocation task, individualists (who presumably act on the basis of their gut-level, self-interested preferences) exhibit shorter response latencies than do cooperators (who take account of broader considerations such as equity) and competitors (who take account of broader considerations such as winning at any cost). In other words, individuals who act on the basis of simple self-interest respond more quickly than do those who act in pursuit of broader considerations, irrespective of the specific motive underlying the transformation process (i.e., either maximizing joint outcomes or maximizing one's own relative outcomes). Thus, evidence suggests that among strangers, cognitive processing is more effortful for individuals who take account of their partner's outcomes relative to those who only take account of their own outcomes. Self-interested motives appear relatively automatic, whereas motives that take account of the partner's outcomes require relatively greater cognitive resources.

Is there evidence for transformation of motivation in close relationships as well? In their two-study investigation of accommodative behavior in close relationships, Yovetich and Rusbult (1994) presented evidence that the transformation process is not automatic. In Study 1, participants recalled an incident in which their current romantic partner behaved in a potentially destructive manner, reporting the degree to which they considered enacting a set of behaviors and the degree to which they actually

enacted these same behaviors. Consistent with transformation of motivation-based predictions, the responses participants considered enacting were more destructive and less constructive than were those they actually enacted, suggesting that individuals' immediate impulses are more destructive than their actual behavior. In Study 2, participants experienced either limited reaction time or plentiful reaction time to choose between a constructive and a destructive response to hypothetical destructive partner behaviors. When forced to react quickly, participants exhibited weaker accommodative tendencies in response to destructive partner behavior than when given adequate time to make a decision. Together, these findings suggest that (a) immediate impulses in response to destructive partner behavior tend toward negative reciprocity, (b) accommodative behavior rests on transformation of motivation, and (c) transformation of motivation is not automatic (i.e., the process requires cognitive effort). If the individual's immediate, gut-level response to destructive partner behavior is reciprocated destructive behavior, then why do individuals accommodate?

Empirical Correlates of Accommodation

Prior research has revealed several correlates of accommodative behavior in romantic relationships. First, *commitment level* to one's romantic relationship is a critical predictor of accommodation (Rusbult et al., 1991). Individuals are likely to engage in accommodative behavior to the degree that they intend to persist in their relationship, have a long-term orientation to their relationship, and feel psychologically attached to their relationship. Commitment level, in turn, results from (a) increasing satisfaction level (i.e., the relationship gratifies important needs), (b) declining quality of alternatives (i.e., important needs could not be gratified by other partners or by being single), and (c) increasing investment size (i.e., resources such as effort, memories, or material possessions become linked to the relationship; Rusbult, 1983). In addition, *attachment style* influences tendencies toward accommodation such that securely attached individuals exhibit greater levels of accommodation than do avoidantly attached and anxiously attached individuals (Gaines et al., 1997; see Hazan & Shaver, 1987, for a discussion of adult attachment styles). *Empathic accuracy* is positively associated with tendencies toward accommodation early in marriage, although this relationship declines to nonsignificance beyond the 1st year (Kilpatrick, Bissonnette, & Rusbult, 2000). The related constructs of *general empathy* and *partner perspective taking* also correlate positively with accommodative tendencies (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991). Finally, *psychological femininity* is associated with greater levels of accommodation (Kilpatrick et al., 2000).

In short, several variables are associated with individuals' tendencies to engage in the prorelationship transformation of motivation underlying accommodation. However, we believe that a central factor that is likely to influence tendencies toward accommodation has been neglected by prior research. Specifically, we expect that self-control should exert a strong impact on the degree to which individuals are likely to respond constructively to potentially destructive partner behavior. In the next section, we articulate why self-control should be an important predictor of prorelationship transformation of motivation.

Self-Control and Accommodation

We suggest that two categories of factors underlie the transformation of motivation process: (a) *motivational factors* and (b) *ability factors*. (See Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, for an example of a theoretical perspective using this motivation–ability distinction.) Transformation of motivation is promoted by individuals' desire to move beyond their direct, self-interested impulses as well as by their ability to move beyond these impulses. When Jeni behaves in a destructive manner toward Jeff, Jeff is faced with an accommodative dilemma. Should he retaliate on the basis of his direct, self-interested impulses, or should he move beyond these impulses toward prorelationship behavior? He should be especially likely to accommodate to the degree that he (a) wants to accommodate (e.g., he values the relationship; he wants to regard himself as a well-behaved, cooperative person) and (b) is able to accommodate (e.g., he possesses the cognitive resources required to will himself to accommodate; he possesses perspective-taking skills).

Given that departures from self-interest are costly and effortful (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994), regulating one's impulses requires some degree of self-control. Because given preferences represent an individual's gut-level, self-interested impulses, whereas effective preferences require cognitive or emotional reframing of these impulses on the basis of broader considerations, individuals who possess high levels of self-control should be better equipped to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation than should those who possess less self-control. In other words, whereas moving beyond immediate, self-interested preferences requires the inhibition of a natural response, acting on these immediate impulses requires nothing more than adhering to one's automatic inclinations. Inhibition of the natural response requires self-control. To the degree that Jeff possesses low self-control, he will be especially likely to act on his immediate, self-centered impulses toward retaliation (i.e., he will act impulsively). However, to the degree that he possesses high self-control, he will be better able to inhibit his destructive impulses and act on the basis of more thought-out, prorelationship preferences. In short, self-control is at the heart of the transformation process. The ability to control the self constitutes the essence of departures from immediate self-interest.

This assertion that controlling the self is a central component of the transformation process is not an original tenet of interdependence theory. The theory as originally formulated placed primary emphasis on the individuals' social context, largely neglecting intrapsychic factors that might promote transformation of motivation. Still, even the earliest interdependence theorizing on transformation of motivation recognized the importance of self-control. Kelley and Thibaut (1978) observed that "the ability to forego immediate rewards in favor of later ones—to delay gratification—is important in interdependent relationships" (p. 205). How does the present analysis fit in with the interdependence tradition? Our research constitutes an effort to explain the process by which transformation of motivation comes about by emphasizing the intrapsychic construct of self-control. This effort builds on the tradition of Rusbult and collaborators, who have examined the importance of cognitive and motivational factors in promoting accommodation (e.g., Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). In other words, we attempt to gain insight into this process by synthesizing con-

cepts from interdependence theory with recent theorizing on self-control.

The present research examines the influence of two different aspects of self-control: (a) *dispositional self-control* and (b) "in-the-moment" *self-regulatory strength depletion* (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Whereas dispositional self-control is conceptualized as a relatively stable personality trait assessing the degree to which individuals are able to control their impulses across time and across situations, self-regulatory strength represents an individual's capacity to control impulses at a particular time and in a particular situation. Accumulating research suggests that dispositional self-control is a relatively stable individual difference over time (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). For example, compared with base-rate estimates, "undercontrolled" 3-year-olds experienced relatively high rates of behavioral problems, less constraint, more troubled social relations, greater risk for unemployment, higher rates of psychiatric disorders, and greater likelihood of criminality over the following 18 years (Caspi, 2000). A broad range of studies demonstrate that individual differences in the ability to delay gratification (i.e., exert self-control) in childhood are cross-culturally related to a meaningful pattern of cognitive and personality variables (see Mischel, 1974, for an early review). Children who are ineffective at delaying gratification tend to be less competent, less able to resist temptation, possess less achievement motivation, and generally show less prosocial adaptive functioning. In short, self-control tends to be a relatively stable personality trait from early childhood into adulthood. Low self-control is associated with a variety of negative personal and interpersonal consequences, likely adversely affecting individuals' ability to accommodate. To the degree that Jeff possesses low dispositional self-control, he will find it more difficult to inhibit his gut-level impulses toward self-interested responding in favor of prorelationship responding—his ability to control himself across life domains also affects his ability to regulate his responses to Jeni's behavior.

However, as previously mentioned, dispositional self-control is not the whole story in regulating the self. There are substantial state-level fluctuations in individuals' ability to exert self-control. Recent theorizing suggests that self-regulation can be conceptualized as a strength, fluctuating markedly as a function of situational factors such as stress, frustration, exhaustion, or willpower exertion (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Thus, self-regulatory strength may be a limited, depletable, and renewable resource influenced not only by individual differences but also by prior volitional exertion. Specifically, much of our analysis rests on a "strength model" of self-regulation, suggesting that "each person's capacity for self-regulation appears to be a limited resource, which is renewable over time" and that "one cannot regulate everything at once" (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996, p. 3; see also Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). An important implication of this strength model of self-regulation is that "a person can become exhausted from many simultaneous demands and so will sometimes fail at self-control even regarding things at which he or she would otherwise succeed" (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996, p. 3). In the context of accommodation in close relationships, self-regulatory strength depletion should render individuals less capable of inhibiting their self-interested impulses in favor of more prorelationship responses to potentially destructive partner behavior. If Jeni happens to engage in a potentially destructive behavior at a time when Jeff has been trying to quit smoking, has been resisting the temptation to lash out at his boss, and has not managed to get enough sleep, he will be especially likely to respond destructively in return. Jeff's self-regulatory strength will be depleted enough to render him less capable of inhibiting his self-interested impulses in favor of more prorelationship responses, perhaps initiating a spiral of negative reciprocity.

The present research examines the influence of both dispositional self-control and self-regulatory strength depletion on accommodative tendencies. Regardless of one's motivation to accommodate, self-control factors should be important in promoting accommodative behavior. One can readily imagine an individual who is committed to his or her romantic relationship but who fails to accommodate because of self-control failure. Even if Jeff wants to accommodate (e.g., he feels highly committed to Jeni), low dispositional self-control or high self-regulatory strength depletion may render him less capable of doing so in some circumstances. Despite the fact that his heart is in the right place, his diminished ability resources might outweigh his motivation to accommodate; he may fail to accommodate despite his desire to do so.

The Present Research

Implicit in all prior research regarding accommodation is the observation that romantic relationships require work. It takes effort to inhibit self-interested, destructive tendencies in favor of prorelationship behavior. In the present research, we explore whether individuals' (a) dispositional self-control and (b) self-regulatory strength depletion influence their ability to accommodate in romantic relationships. Specifically, we hypothesized that individuals are less accommodating following potentially destructive partner behavior to the extent that they (a) possess low dispositional self-control or (b) are temporarily experiencing self-regulatory strength depletion. That is, in comparison with individuals who possess high self-control or experience low self-regulatory strength depletion, individuals who possess low self-control or experience high self-regulatory strength depletion should find it more difficult to (a) inhibit immediate, self-centered impulses and (b) instead respond in a prorelationship manner.

We conducted a pilot study and three additional studies to test these predictions, using both nonexperimental and experimental methods to obtain convergent, hypothesis-relevant evidence. The pilot study was a cross-sectional survey study of women in which we examined the association between self-control and accommodation in dating relationships. Study 1 was a within-subject experiment in which participants described (a) one instance in which they engaged in accommodative behavior following a potentially destructive partner behavior and (b) one instance in which they engaged in nonaccommodative behavior following a potentially destructive partner behavior. After each description, they completed a measure assessing self-regulatory strength depletion preceding their accommodative versus nonaccommodative behaviors. In Study 2 we experimentally manipulated self-regulatory strength depletion in the laboratory and then assessed reactions to hypothetical accommodative dilemmas initiated by destructive partner behavior. Finally, in Study 3 we examined the interplay between self-control (an ability factor) and commitment (a motivational factor) in predicting accommodation.

Pilot Study

The pilot study constitutes an initial investigation into the relationship between dispositional self-control and accommodation in the context of ongoing romantic relationships. The primary goal is to examine whether high self-control promotes accommodative tendencies. On the basis of our expectation that low self-control should interfere with the ability to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation, we hypothesized that relative to individuals who possess high dispositional self-control, those who possess low dispositional self-control would exhibit weaker accommodative tendencies.

Method

Participants. Participants were 35 undergraduate women who volunteered to take part in the study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Sign-up sheets indicated that to take part, participants must currently be involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 month in duration. On average, participants had been involved with their dating partners for 17.0 months, and most described their relationship as a steady dating relationship (3% dating casually, 17% dating regularly, 77% dating steadily, 3% engaged or married).

Procedure. Participants completed Tangney and Baumeister's (2000) Self-Control Scale and Rusbult et al.'s (1991) Accommodation Scale. (It is important to note that although the Accommodation Scale is a 16-item scale, 1 item consistently failed to correlate with the other items on the scale; therefore we used the remaining 15-item measure in the present research.) Sample items from the self-control scale are "I have a hard time breaking bad habits," "I blurt out whatever is on my mind," and "Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done." Scale scores range from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Four items each from the accommodation scale assessed exit tendencies (e.g., "When I'm angry at my partner, I threaten to break up"), voice tendencies (e.g., "When my partner and I are angry with one another, I suggest a compromise solution"), loyalty tendencies (e.g., "When we have problems in our relationship, I patiently wait for things to change"), and neglect tendencies (e.g., "When I'm upset with my partner, I sulk rather than confront the issue"). Scale scores range from 0 (*never*) to 8 (*constantly*).

Results

Reliability analyses. We performed reliability analyses on the items designed to measure each construct. These analyses revealed acceptable alphas for our two most critical measures—self-control (α = .86) and total accommodation (α = .84). We also explored the relationship between self-control and the Accommodation subscales. Items assessing exit tendencies (α = .84) and voice tendencies (α = .83) exhibited acceptable reliabilities; items assessing loyalty tendencies (α = .45) and neglect tendencies (α = .38) were less reliably assessed.

Associations of dispositional self-control with accommodation. To examine the association of self-control with accommodative tendencies, we calculated simple correlations of self-control with our measure of total accommodation and with each of the four Accommodation subscales (Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect). We present the results of these analyses in Table 1. Consistent with the prediction that self-control would be positively associated with accommodation, the correlation between self-control and total accommodation was statistically significant (r = .43, $p < .01$). Individuals who possessed high dispositional self-control reported stronger accommodative tendencies toward their romantic partners than did those who possessed low dispositional self-control. In addition, self-control exhibited significant correlations in the predicted direction with three of the four Accommodation subscales: exit, voice, and neglect (see Table 1). The relationship between self-control and loyalty was nonsignificant.

Discussion

Consistent with the assertion that low self-control interferes with individuals' ability to inhibit destructive impulses and exert the energy necessary to engage in prorelationship responding, dispositional self-control exhibited a positive correlation with total accommodation. Relative to individuals who possessed low dispositional self-control, individuals who possessed high dispositional self-control were more likely to engage in accommodative behavior in their romantic relationships. Thus, our primary hypothesis was supported. We also examined the associations of self-control with the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect subscales of the Accommodation measure, expecting a general trend such that self-control would correlate negatively with destructive responses (exit and neglect) and positively with constructive responses (voice and loyalty). Significant associations of self-control in the expected direction were evident for exit, voice, and neglect responses; no significant association was evident for loyalty responses. In sum, these results provide preliminary evidence that self-control factors might be important in understanding accom-

Table 1
Simple Correlations of Grasmick et al.'s (1993) and Tangney and Baumeister's (2000) Dispositional Self-Control Scales With Rusbult et al.'s (1991) Accommodation Scale

Type of response	Pilot study[a]	Study 1[a]	Study 2[b]	Study 3[b]	Study 3[a]
Total accommodation	.43**	.43**	.43**	.45**	.49**
Exit	−.45**	−.47**	−.42**	−.49**	−.46**
Voice	.36*	.25*	.33*	.23**	.32**
Loyalty	−.05	.24*	−.22	.17*	.14†
Neglect	−.34*	−.37**	−.46**	−.38**	−.44**

Note. All significant effects were in the predicted direction, such that high self-control was positively associated with stronger tendencies toward accommodation.
[a] Associations between accomodation and the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale. [b] Associations between accomodation and the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale.
† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

modation in close relationships. However, the pilot study only included female participants, was strictly correlational, and did not assess self-regulatory strength depletion. We conducted three additional studies to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between self-control and accommodation.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants described two instances in their current romantic relationship: (a) one in which they engaged in an accommodative behavior following a potentially destructive partner behavior, and (b) one in which they engaged in a nonaccommodative behavior following a potentially destructive partner behavior. After describing each incident, participants completed a measure assessing self-regulatory strength depletion preceding each incident. We predicted that relative to incidents in which they behaved in an accommodative manner, participants would report greater self-regulatory depletion preceding instances in which they behaved in an nonaccommodative manner. In addition, Study 1 assesses dispositional self-control, providing an opportunity to replicate the pilot study correlation between dispositional self-control and accommodative tendencies.

Method

Participants. Participants were 80 undergraduates (17 men, 63 women) who volunteered to take part in the study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Sign-up sheets indicated that participants must currently be involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 month in duration. On average, participants had been involved with their dating partner for 18.6 months. Most described their relationships as steady dating relationships (9% dating casually, 12% dating regularly, 74% dating steadily, 4% engaged or married, 1% in a friendship), and most indicated that they dated their partners exclusively (91% reported that neither partner dated others, 7% reported that one partner dated others, 3% reported that both partners dated others). About 41% indicated that they were involved in long-distance relationships (i.e., they did not live within 60 miles of their romantic partners).

Procedure. Participants were told that the broad goal of the study was to learn about situations in which individuals accommodate and do not accommodate in their romantic relationships. They described two instances in their current romantic relationship: (a) one in which they engaged in an accommodative behavior following a destructive partner behavior, and (b) one in which they engaged in an nonaccommodative behavior following a destructive partner behavior. To ensure that participants understood what we meant by the term *accommodation* and to enhance the likelihood that participants would be willing to report honestly on both instances, we provided explicit instructions in the questionnaire:

> In the course of all romantic relationships, it is inevitable that each member of the couple will behave badly at some point in time. After all, it is not possible to be on our best behavior at all times. . . . Please take a couple of minutes to think of *two* different instances in which your partner behaved in a manner that was *potentially destructive towards your relationship.* One of these examples should be a situation in which you immediately inhibited your urge to behave badly in return and instead behaved in a constructive manner for your relationship. That is, it should be an instance in which you were *accommodating* towards your partner. . . . The other instance should be an example in which you *were not immediately so accommodating.*

We provided examples of destructive partner behavior and of accommodating and nonaccommodating responses.

Participants provided a description of an incident in which they accommodated and of an incident in which they failed to accommodate. After describing each incident, they completed a 10-item Concurrent Depletion Scale assessing self-regulatory depletion at the time of the incident (e.g., "I felt overwhelmed with work/school," "I felt preoccupied with other things," "I felt tired") and a 26-item Recent Depletion Scale assessing self-regulatory depletion during the week leading up to the incident (e.g., "I had been trying to be more 'responsible,'" "I had been exerting a lot of 'willpower' in my life," "I had been on a diet"). Both depletion measures were assessed on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*I didn't feel at all this way*) to 7 (*I felt very much this way*). We computed a measure of total depletion by taking an average of the items tapping concurrent depletion and recent depletion. Finally, participants completed the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) dispositional Self-Control Scale as well as the Rusbult et al. (1991) Accommodation Scale. We counterbalanced the order in which participants described the accommodating and nonaccommodating incidents.

Results

Reliability analyses. We performed reliability analyses on the items designed to measure each construct. After we dropped one unreliable concurrent depletion item, reliability analyses revealed acceptable alphas for scales assessing all critical variables. For instances in which the participant behaved in an accommodating manner, concurrent depletion (α = .85) and recent depletion (α = .85) exhibited strong reliability, as did the summed measure of total depletion (α = .89). The equivalent alphas for instances in which the participant behaved in a nonaccommodative manner were .83, .87, and .91, respectively. In addition, scales assessing accommodation (α = .88) and self-control (α = .89) exhibited good reliability. The reliabilities of the Accommodation subscales were somewhat higher than those exhibited in the pilot study (for exit tendencies, α = .82; for voice tendencies, α = .84; for loyalty tendencies, α = .52; and for neglect tendencies, α = .58).

Self-regulatory depletion and accommodation. To examine the hypothesis that individuals tend to be more depleted preceding nonaccommodative behavior than accommodative behavior, we performed one-factor, repeated-measures analyses on our measures of total depletion, concurrent depletion, and recent depletion; incident type was a categorical within-subject independent variable (accommodative behavior vs. nonaccommodative behavior). We present the results of these analyses in Table 2. Consistent with

Table 2
Means and Hypothesis Tests Assessing Whether Depletion Was Greater Preceding Accommodative or Nonaccommodative Behavior: Study 1

Type of response	Mean depletion prior to accommodating	Mean depletion prior to not accommodating	*F*
Total depletion	2.89	3.22	9.15**
Concurrent depletion	2.85	3.37	9.71**
Recent depletion	2.89	3.16	7.25**

Note. Higher mean values represent greater levels of depletion. The possible range for each variable is 1–7. The degrees of freedom for total depletion, concurrent depletion, and recent depletion are, respectively, (1, 69), (1, 74), and (1, 70).
** $p < .01$.

the prediction that self-regulatory strength depletion would increase the likelihood that participants will engage in gut-level, nonaccommodative reactions to potentially destructive partner behavior, all analyses revealed that participants experienced significantly more self-regulatory depletion preceding nonaccommodative behavior than preceding accommodative behavior (see Table 2 for means and tests of significance).

Associations of dispositional self-control with accommodation. In addition, as in the pilot study, we performed correlational analyses to examine the relationship between dispositional self-control and self-reported accommodative tendencies. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. It is important to recall that in the pilot study, dispositional self-control exhibited significant associations in the predicted directions with four of the five measures of accommodation—total accommodation, exit, voice, and neglect—but not with loyalty. In Study 1, the correlations between the Self-Control Scale and all five measures of accommodation were significant in the expected direction. Specifically, dispositional self-control was associated with greater tendencies toward total accommodation ($r = .43$, $p < .01$), and this association held for all four Accommodation subscales, including Loyalty. Once again, the correlations between dispositional self-control and the measures of accommodation demonstrate that individuals who possess low dispositional self-control are relatively unlikely to exhibit accommodative behavior in their romantic relationships.

Participant sex and order effects. To determine whether participant sex and the order of the tasks (whether the participant described accommodative or nonaccommodative behavior first) affected reports of depletion, we performed a 2 (incident type) × 2 (participant sex) × 2 (order of task) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the three depletion measures. These analyses revealed no significant main effects or interactions involving either participant sex or order of task.

Discussion

Consistent with the hypothesis that individuals experiencing self-regulatory strength depletion exhibit weaker tendencies toward accommodative behavior, participants reported significantly greater self-regulatory depletion prior to incidents in which they failed to accommodate than prior to incidents in which accommodated. This effect was significant for all three measures of depletion (total depletion, concurrent depletion, and recent depletion). In short, Study 1 demonstrates that in actual incidents from participants' current romantic relationships, there were significantly greater levels of self-regulatory strength depletion preceding nonaccommodative behaviors than preceding accommodative behaviors.

In addition, Study 1 replicates the finding that dispositional self-control exhibits positive associations with tendencies toward accommodation in one's romantic relationship. In conjunction with the pilot study and Study 1 results indicating that individuals who possess high dispositional self-control are relatively more accommodating toward their romantic partners, the Study 1 finding that high self-regulatory strength depletion is associated with lesser accommodative behavior provides relatively good evidence that ability factors may be important in predicting and understanding accommodation. Specifically, the two investigations suggest that individuals who possess low self-control and experience high self-regulatory depletion are less capable of engaging in prorelationship transformation of motivation than are individuals who possess high self-control and experience low self-regulatory strength depletion.

However, there are at least two limitations of Study 1. First, perhaps the finding that individuals were less accommodating in response to destructive partner behavior when they were depleted than when they were not depleted can be explained as a function of the perceived negativity of the partner's behavior. Perhaps participants were less accommodating when they were depleted because (a) the partner's behavior at such times tended to be more severe or (b) the partner's behavior was perceived as more severe when the participants were depleted because the partner should have been more sympathetic. Second, socially desirable responding may have played a role in shaping participants' responses. For example, perhaps participants wished to present themselves in a favorable manner, finding that they could justify their nonaccommodative behavior by enumerating all of the other depleting circumstances in their lives.

In sum, the pilot study and Study 1 provide consistent evidence that self-control factors are related to accommodative tendencies. In addition, Study 1 provides preliminary evidence that in-the-moment self-control factors may be causally related to the inability to accommodate, in that participants indicated how depleted they felt prior to the incident in which they failed to accommodate. However, this conclusion must remain tentative in the absence of an experiment in which self-regulatory strength is systematically manipulated.

Study 2

As a stronger test of the hypothesis that self-control factors are causally related to changes in accommodative behavior, in Study 2 we experimentally manipulated self-regulatory strength depletion in a laboratory setting. In keeping with prior research demonstrating that suppressing a natural emotional response is an effortful process, whereas expressing a natural emotional response is not as effortful (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Baumeister et al., 1998), the depletion manipulation involved emotion regulation. Participants in Study 2 were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: (a) *emotional suppression* (high depletion) or (b) *emotional expression* (low depletion). Participants either suppressed or expressed their affective responses to emotionally evocative film segments.

Following this depletion manipulation, participants indicated how they would react to each of a series of 12 hypothetical destructive partner behaviors. As in the pilot study and Study 1, *accommodation* was operationally defined as the degree to which participants (a) inhibited destructive exit and neglect response tendencies and (b) exhibited greater constructive voice and loyalty response tendencies. We expected that in comparison with highly depleted participants, those in the low-depletion condition would exhibit stronger accommodation—stronger voice and loyalty tendencies and weaker exit and neglect tendencies.

Method

Participants. Participants were 46 undergraduates (10 men, 36 women) who volunteered to take part in the experiment in partial fulfill-

ment of the requirements for introductory psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Participants took part either by themselves or in groups of up to 6 participants. Sign-up sheets indicated that participants must currently be involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 month in duration. On average, participants had been involved with their dating partners for 18.7 months. Most described their relationships as steady dating relationships (4% dating casually, 7% dating regularly, 80% dating steadily, 7% engaged or married, 2% other), and most indicated that they dated their partners exclusively (94% reported that neither partner dated others, 2% reported that they dated others but the partner did not, 4% reported that both dated others). About 41% indicated that they were involved in long-distance relationships (i.e., they did not live within 60 miles of their romantic partners).

Procedure. The procedure for the depletion manipulation was adapted from that used by Baumeister et al. (1998, Study 3). At the beginning of the session, the experimenter explained that the broad goals of the study were (a) to investigate whether being in a relationship affects the manner in which people experience emotions and (b) to learn about how people react to hypothetical events in their dating relationships. Participants were told that the first part of the experiment would involve watching an emotionally evocative film segment. They were seated in individual cubicles separated by dividers such that they could view the experimenter and the television monitor but none of the other participants.

In the emotional suppression (high-depletion) condition, participants were instructed to try not to feel any emotions at all during the film clip. Specifically, they were told the following:

> Your task for this part of the experiment is to experience absolutely no emotional reaction to the film whatsoever. . . . In addition, you should be certain not to *show* any emotion at all. Your reactions will be videotaped . . . so that we'll be able to code how successful you were at concealing your emotions. Thus, make sure that you control both your face and your body language, and try your best not to feel any emotions at all.

Although participants were told that a video camera was positioned behind a mirror next to the video monitor, their reactions were not actually recorded (it is important to note that we positioned the mirror such that participants could not see their own reflection or anyone else's). We implemented the video camera manipulation to motivate participants to control their body language and facial expressions, thereby strengthening the depletion manipulation. In contrast to participants in the emotional suppression condition, participants in the emotional expression (low-depletion) condition were instructed to "let your emotions flow honestly while watching the film" and were reassured that "any emotional response is appropriate." These participants were also told that they were being videotaped while viewing the film segment.

Following the instructions, participants viewed a 7-min film segment containing two short film clips. Within each depletion condition, half of the participants viewed an amusing film segment including scenes from a Robin Williams stand-up comedy routine and an episode of "Candid Camera." The other half viewed a sad film segment including heart-wrenching scenes from *Bambi* and *Sophie's Choice*. When the film segment ended, the experimenter reinforced the cover story by informing participants that they would have to wait 15–20 min for their sensory memory of the film to fade. During this delay, they completed a relationships questionnaire asking them to describe their probable reactions to several hypothetical events in their dating relationships. They were told that this questionnaire was unrelated to other parts of the study and that after they had completed the instrument, they would answer a brief questionnaire about the film segment.

In fact, the relationships questionnaire included the primary dependent measures for the study. Participants read descriptions of 12 potentially destructive partner behaviors (e.g., "Your partner shows up two hours late for a date that the two of you had made together"), indicating how likely they would be to enact each of four possible responses to the incidents. The four response options for each incident assessed tendencies to react with exit tendencies (e.g., "I would tell my partner how furious I was and call him/her 'unreliable'"), voice tendencies (e.g., "I would say that I was upset, but that I'm sure that there is a good explanation"), loyalty tendencies (e.g., "I would not complain at all, happily noting that at least we are together now"), and neglect tendencies (e.g., "I would give my partner the 'cold shoulder' and act unpleasantly on the date"). Scale scores ranged from 0 (*not at all likely to react this way*) to 8 (*extremely likely to react this way*). Thus, we obtained 12-item measures of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect reactions to the destructive partner behavior.

In addition, we administered Rusbult et al.'s (1991) Accommodation Scale and Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, and Arneklev's (1993) Self-Control Scale. Although the accommodation measure was the same one used in the pilot study and in Study 1, the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale used in Study 2 differed from the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) one used in the first two investigations. We used a different measure in Study 2 to explore whether the correlations of self-control with accommodation observed in the first two studies were attributable to the unique properties of those particular scales. If the Grasmick et al. scale exhibits the same pattern of associations with the accommodation scale as did the Tangney and Baumeister scale, we can be more confident that self-control and accommodation are related. Sample items from the Grasmick et al. Self-Control Scale are "I often act on the spur of the moment without stopping to think," "I frequently try to avoid projects that I know will be difficult," and "I'm more concerned with what happens to me in the short run than in the long run." Scale scores range from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 8 (*strongly agree*). After participants completed the relationships questionnaire, they completed a brief manipulation check exploring whether the emotional suppression condition required greater exertion than did the emotional expression condition. At the end of the session participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Reliability analyses. We performed reliability analyses on the items designed to measure each construct. It is important to recall that in the present study the main accommodation reliabilities were based on the reactions to the hypothetical incidents, not on the accommodation scale. These analyses revealed acceptable alphas for items assessing total accommodation (α = .87) and for the accommodation subcomponents (for exit tendencies, α = .80; for voice tendencies, α = .64; for loyalty tendencies, α = .79; and for neglect tendencies, α = .74). In addition, self-control exhibited acceptable reliability (α = .86).

To examine the association of the Grasmick et al. (1993) dispositional Self-Control Scale with the Rusbult et al. (1991) Accommodation Scale, we also computed reliabilities for the Accommodation Scale. These analyses revealed acceptable alphas for total accommodation (α = .76), exit tendencies (α = .79), and voice tendencies (α = .76), and somewhat weaker reliabilities for loyalty tendencies (α = .46) and neglect tendencies (α = .48).

Manipulation check. At the end of the session, participants completed a five-item instrument assessing how effortful it had been to comply with the instructions while watching the film segment (e.g., "I exerted a lot of effort while watching the film," "I had to concentrate on the instructions while watching the film," "I felt emotionally tired after watching the film"). We scored their responses on a scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*; α = .84). To examine whether it required greater effort to suppress emotions than to express them and to explore whether it was more effortful to watch either an amusing

or a sad film, we performed a 2 (depletion manipulation: emotional suppression vs. emotional expression) × 2 (film type: amusing vs. sad) between-subjects ANOVA on our measure of effort exerted while viewing the film. As expected, there was a main effect of the depletion manipulation such that participants in the emotional suppression condition found the experience of watching the film segments to be significantly more effortful (M = 3.79) than did those in the emotional expression condition (M = 1.58), $F(1, 40) = 19.82$, $p < .01$. The film type main effect and the Depletion Manipulation × Film Type interaction were not statistically significant. Thus, the emotional suppression versus emotional expression manipulation appears to have been successful in manipulating the amount of effort participants exerted while viewing the film segments, and this effort effect was not moderated by the valence of the film segments.

The effects of the depletion manipulation on accommodation. To test the hypothesis that self-regulatory strength depletion causes individuals to exhibit weaker tendencies toward accommodation and to explore whether the valence of the film segment influenced accommodative tendencies, we performed a 2 (depletion) × 2 (film type) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on our exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect measures of accommodation. We summarize the results of this analysis in Table 3.

Consistent with the hypothesis that self-regulatory strength depletion causes weaker tendencies toward accommodation, the analyses revealed a significant multivariate main effect of depletion on the four measures of accommodation, multivariate $F(4, 38) = 2.64$, $p < .05$. This effect demonstrates that individuals who experienced the depleting manipulation exhibited weaker accommodative tendencies than did those who experienced the nondepleting manipulation on the optimal linear combination of the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect measures. The univariate analyses revealed significant effects for constructive voice, $F(1, 41) = 5.00$, $p < .05$, and loyalty, $F(1, 41) = 4.74$, $p < .05$, responding. Consistent with expectations, the means for the univariate analyses in Table 3 show that participants in the low-depletion condition exhibited a significantly greater preference for voice and loyalty responding than did those in the high-depletion condition (for voice, Ms = 5.64 and 5.06, respectively; for loyalty, Ms = 3.75 and 3.04). However, tendencies toward destructive exit and neglect responding were not significantly affected by the depletion manipulation. Thus, our manipulation of self-regulatory strength depletion affected constructive responses to destructive partner behavior but did not significantly affect destructive responses.

Table 3
Means and Hypothesis Tests Assessing the Effects of Depletion on Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect Response Tendencies: Study 2

Effects	Low depletion	High depletion	F
Multivariate effects			
Depletion condition main effect			2.64*
Film type main effect			0.98
Depletion × Film Type interaction			0.45
Univariate depletion main effects			
Exit	2.67	2.63	0.01
Voice	5.64	5.06	5.00*
Loyalty	3.75	3.04	4.74*
Neglect	2.83	2.88	0.11

Note. Higher mean values represent greater levels of each construct. The means for low depletion and high depletion collapse across film type (the latter variable did not exhibit a significant multivariate main effect or interaction effect). The possible range for each variable is 0–8. The degrees of freedom for the multivariate tests are (4, 38); for the univariate tests, they are (1, 41).
* $p < .05$.

The association of dispositional self-control with accommodation. Additional analyses examined the association of dispositional self-control with the five measures of accommodation from the accommodation scale—total accommodation and exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect tendencies. It is important to recall that in Study 2 we examined associations with a different measure of dispositional self-control (Grasmick et al., 1993) from the one used in the pilot study and in Study 1. We present correlations in Table 1. The significant positive correlation of dispositional self-control with total accommodation was replicated (r = .43, $p <$ .01). It is important to note that the strength and direction of the correlation between the Grasmick et al. (1993) scale and the Accommodation Scale was identical to those exhibited between the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) scale and the Accommodation Scale in the pilot study and in Study 1. The consistency of these associations suggests that there is a reliable association between dispositional self-control and tendencies toward accommodation such that individuals possessing low dispositional self-control exhibit weaker tendencies toward accommodation than do those possessing high dispositional self-control. As in the pilot study, dispositional self-control exhibited significant correlations in the predicted direction for exit, voice, and neglect but not for loyalty.

Participant sex effects. To determine whether participant sex moderated any of these effects, we performed a 2 (depletion condition: emotional suppression vs. emotional expression) × 2 (participant sex: male vs. female) MANOVA on our exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect measures of accommodation. The multivariate interaction effect for Depletion × Sex was not significant, multivariate $F(4, 38) = 0.68$, *ns*, suggesting that the effects of depletion did not differ for men and women. The multivariate main effect for participant sex was significant, multivariate $F(4, 38) = 4.29$, $p <$ .01, suggesting that women's responses differ from men's responses on the mean of the optimal linear combination of the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect measures. This multivariate participant sex main effect is attributable to the fact that women are relatively more likely to engage in active responses (for exit, M = 2.75; for voice, M = 5.43) than are men (for exit, M = 2.33; for voice, M = 5.15), whereas men are relatively more likely to engage in passive responses (for loyalty, M = 3.63; for neglect, M = 3.31) than are women (for loyalty, M = 3.36; for neglect, M = 2.72). However, these conclusions should be regarded as tentative because examination of the univariate analyses associated with the sex main effect revealed that none of the exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect measures of accommodation varied significantly as a function of participant sex. In addition, we had advanced no predictions pertaining to the active–passive dimension of Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) exit–voice–loyalty–neglect typology; rather, the critical issue for assessing accommodation is the constructive–destructive dimension. More relevant to this latter dimension, men and women did not differ in their tendencies

toward constructive accommodation (i.e., the mean of voice and loyalty; for men, $M = 4.39$; for women, $M = 4.40$) or antidestructive accommodation (i.e., the mean of exit and neglect; for men, $M = 2.82$; for women, $M = 2.73$). In addition, it is important to note that even after we included participant sex in the model, the multivariate main effect of depletion remained significant, multivariate $F(4, 41) = 3.02$, $p < .03$.

Discussion

Consistent with the hypothesis that self-regulatory strength depletion leads to diminished ability to engage in the prorelationship transformation of motivation necessary to yield accommodative behavior, multivariate analyses revealed that the experimental manipulation of self-regulatory strength depletion led to weaker accommodative tendencies in response to hypothetical destructive partner behaviors. Follow-up univariate analyses revealed that the depletion manipulation significantly influenced self-reported constructive voice and loyalty tendencies but did not significantly affect destructive exit and neglect tendencies.

In addition, Study 2 replicated the finding that individuals who possessed high dispositional self-control were more likely to exhibit accommodative tendencies than were those who possessed low dispositional self-control. This finding mirrors those observed in the pilot study and in Study 1 using a different measure of self-control. In total, Study 2 provides the strongest evidence yet that in response to potentially destructive partner behavior, self-control factors can affect the degree to which an individual is able to resist destructive impulses, instead exhibiting more constructive response tendencies. More generally, these results are consistent with the assertion that self-control factors influence one's ability to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation.

Study 3

Although the pilot study and Studies 1 and 2 reveal relatively strong support for the hypotheses that dispositional self-control is positively associated with tendencies toward accommodation and that self-regulatory strength depletion renders individuals less capable of engaging in accommodative behavior, we ran Study 3 to address two limitations of the earlier studies. First, although (a) prior research (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1991) has demonstrated that commitment level promotes accommodation and (b) the present research demonstrates that self-control promotes accommodation, no research has examined how commitment level and self-control interrelate in predicting accommodative tendencies. Do these two factors exert independent effects on accommodation? Second, a relatively small number of men participated in the previous studies. Although both prior research (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1991) and the previous studies in the present article have failed to show consistent sex differences in accommodative tendencies, it is important to procure a relatively large number of both men and women to examine whether the associations of self-control with accommodation are moderated by participant sex.

As mentioned previously, we conceptualize self-control as a fundamental ability factor promoting accommodation, and we conceptualize commitment level as a fundamental motivational factor promoting accommodation. How do self-control and commitment level interrelate in promoting accommodation? If these two predictor variables were placed into a simultaneous multiple regression, what sort of interrelationships would occur? Would commitment level "wipe out" the effect of self-control? Would self-control wipe out the effect of commitment level? Would both self-control and commitment level exert independent effects? Of the possible interrelationships that could exist between self-control and commitment level (only a few of which are listed above), our perspective is most consistent with the prediction that commitment level (a motivational factor) and self-control (an ability factor) will yield independent effects on accommodation. If self-control failed to display a significant association with accommodation after we controlled for commitment, its importance as a predictor of accommodation would be cast into doubt. We expected to find evidence that individuals tend to accommodate to the degree that they experience either high self-control or a high level of commitment to the relationship. They should be especially accommodating to the degree that they possess high levels of both predictors, because each should exert independent effects on accommodative tendencies.

Method

Participants. Participants were 148 undergraduates (73 men, 75 women) who volunteered to take part in the experiment in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Participants took part in groups of up to 18. Sign-up sheets indicated that participants must currently be involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 month in duration. On average, participants had been involved with their partners for 18.9 months. Most described their relationships as steady dating relationships (3% friendship, 14% dating casually, 14% dating regularly, 67% dating steadily, 1% engaged or married, and 1% other), and most indicated that they dated their partner exclusively (84% reported that neither partner dated others, 1% reported that the partner dated others but that they did not, 6% reported that they dated others but the partner did not, and 10% reported that both partners dated others). About 30% indicated that they were involved in long-distance relationships (i.e., they did not live within 60 miles of their romantic partners).

Procedure. Participants completed a variety of scales to assess the constructs of interest. They completed both the Grasmick et al. (1993) and the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scales and the Rusbult et al. (1991) Accommodation Scale from the previous studies. In addition, they completed the seven-item Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) commitment level scale (e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner"). Scale scores ranged from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*).

Results

Reliability analyses. We performed reliability analyses on the items designed to measure each construct. These analyses revealed acceptable alphas for our four most critical measures: (a) the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale ($\alpha = .86$), (b) the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale ($\alpha = .90$), (c) commitment level ($\alpha = .91$), and (d) total accommodation ($\alpha = .81$). As before, we also examined the Accommodation subscales. These analyses revealed acceptable reliabilities for items assessing exit tendencies ($\alpha = .76$) and voice tendencies ($\alpha = .80$), and

somewhat lower reliabilities for items assessing loyalty tendencies (α = .40) and neglect tendencies (α = .53).

Associations of dispositional self-control with accommodation. One goal of Study 3 is to replicate the association of dispositional self-control with accommodative tendencies with two measures of self-control and a large sample size consisting of approximately 50% men. We calculated simple associations of each self-control measure with our measure of total accommodation and with each of the four Accommodation subscales (Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect), and we present the results in Table 1. Consistent with the expectation that self-control would be positively associated with accommodation, the correlation between self-control and total accommodation was statistically significant (for the Grasmick et al., 1993, Self-Control Scale, $r = .45, p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister, 2000, Self-Control Scale, $r = .49$, $p < .01$). Replicating the findings of the pilot study and Studies 1 and 2, these associations reveal that individuals possessing high dispositional self-control reported stronger accommodative tendencies with their romantic partners than did those possessing low dispositional self-control. In addition, examining the associations of self-control with the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect subscales revealed that self-control (as assessed by both scales) exhibited associations in the expected directions with all four subscales (all of these associations were statistically significant except the association of the Tangney & Baumeister, 2000, Self-Control Scale with loyalty responding, which was marginally significant; see Table 1).

The interrelationship between commitment and self-control in predicting accommodation. A primary goal of Study 3 is to examine how self-control (hypothesized to be a fundamental ability factor promoting prorelationship accommodation) and commitment level (hypothesized to be a fundamental motivational factor promoting prorelationship accommodation) interrelate in predicting accommodation. Earlier, we argued that the most likely model is one in which self-control and commitment level exhibit independent, additive effects on accommodation.

This was indeed the case. For the simultaneous regression analysis including the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale, both high self-control, $\beta = .38$, $t(144) = 5.60$, $p < .01$, and high commitment level, $\beta = .41$, $t(144) = 5.98$, $p < .01$, promoted high levels of accommodation. The analysis including the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale revealed virtually identical results, with both high self-control, $\beta = .42$, $t(141) = 6.35$, $p < .01$, and high commitment level, $\beta = .42$, $t(141) = 6.28$, $p < .01$, promoting high levels of accommodation. These results suggest that self-control and commitment level exert additive effects on accommodative tendencies. In a second set of analyses including the Self-Control × Commitment Level cross-product term, we found no evidence of an interaction effect on accommodative tendencies. In sum, self-control was significantly linked to accommodation even when we controlled statistically for the effects of commitment level. Likewise, the association between commitment level and accommodation remained significant after we controlled statistically for the effects of self-control. Consistent with expectations, this study suggests that both ability factors (operationalized as self-control) and motivational factors (operationalized as commitment level) are important and independent predictors of accommodation.

Participant sex effects. Although Studies 1 and 2 failed to reveal sex differences moderating the association of self-control with accommodative tendencies, in Study 3 we set out to provide a stronger test of whether participant sex moderates the association of self-control with accommodation. We investigated the effects of self-control, commitment, and participant sex in simultaneous multiple regression analyses, examining each self-control scale in turn. These analyses revealed the same general pattern of results for each self-control scale. No interactions involving self-control approached statistical significance. The only significant interaction term was the two-way interaction between commitment and sex, which was significant in the analysis including the Grasmick (1993) Self-Control Scale, $\beta = .15$, $t(142) = 2.10$, $p < .05$, and marginal in the analysis including the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale, $\beta = .13$, $t(139) = 1.82$, $p < .08$. This Commitment × Sex interaction reveals that the association of commitment level and accommodation was stronger in women than in men. However, separate analyses regressing accommodation on self-control and commitment level for men and for women led to the same conclusions as did the analyses that collapsed across sex. For men, the self-control main effect—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .38$, $t(70) = 3.74$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .39$, $t(70) = 3.85$, $p < .01$—and commitment main effect—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .36$, $t(70) = 3.56$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister analysis, $\beta = .37$, $t(70) = 3.68$, $p < .01$—remained highly significant. Women exhibited the same pattern both for self-control—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .41$, $t(71) = 4.36$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .49$, $t(71) = 5.67$, $p < .01$—and for commitment—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .48$, $t(71) = 5.14$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .45$, $t(71) = 5.14$, $p < .01$. In sum, the association of self-control with accommodation was virtually identical for men and women.

Of central importance to the present work, both the self-control main effect—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .40$, $t(142) = 5.89$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .43$, $t(139) = 6.49$, $p < .01$—and the commitment main effect—for the Grasmick et al. (1993) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .47$, $t(142) = 6.32$, $p < .01$; for the Tangney and Baumeister (2000) Self-Control Scale analysis, $\beta = .45$, $t(139) = 6.18$, $p < .01$—remained highly significant after including sex in the model. The sex main effect did not approach significance in analyses including either self-control scale. In short, both self-control and commitment exerted highly significant main effects on accommodative tendencies, even in analyses in which we controlled for participant sex.

Discussion

In this study we set out to address two limitations of the first three investigations: (a) these investigations ignored the interrelationship between self-control and commitment level in predicting accommodation, and (b) they did not include enough men to draw firm conclusions about whether the association between self-control and accommodation differs for men and women. Consistent with the expectation that self-control and commitment level

exert independent effects on accommodative tendencies, simultaneous regression analyses revealed that both self-control and commitment level each exhibited highly significant main effects on our measure of accommodation. In addition, the interaction term was not significant, suggesting that self-control and commitment level exerted independent, additive effects on accommodation rather than multiplicative effects. In addition, the interaction of Self-Control × Participant Sex was not significant in predicting accommodation, suggesting that the association of self-control with accommodation was not moderated by participant sex. In sum, Study 3 replicates the association between self-control and accommodation, this time controlling statistically for the effects of both commitment level and participant sex. We conclude that high self-control is associated with high levels of accommodation.

General Discussion

In a pilot study and three additional studies we sought to expand our understanding of accommodative behavior by examining whether self-control influences individuals' ability to engage in the prorelationship transformation of motivation required to yield accommodative responses to potentially destructive partner behavior. These studies examine whether self-control factors help individuals to inhibit their self-interested impulses in favor of more prorelationship responses. This pattern of responding is likely to yield enhanced relationship functioning and couple well-being. All four investigations demonstrate that possessing low dispositional self-control decreases the likelihood that one will engage in accommodative behavior. Likewise, Studies 1 and 2 reveal that self-regulatory strength depletion decreases the likelihood of an accommodative response to destructive partner behavior.

The pilot study demonstrates that dispositional self-control is positively associated with accommodative tendencies in ongoing romantic relationships. Study 1 replicates this finding and also demonstrates that self-regulatory strength depletion renders individuals less likely to accommodate in response to destructive partner behavior. Specifically, participants recalled two incidents from their current relationships—one in which they engaged in accommodative behavior and one in which they engaged in nonaccommodative behavior. Participants reported that they felt less depleted prior to the instance in which they accommodated than prior to the instance in which they failed to accommodate, suggesting that depletion inhibits individuals' ability to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation.

In addition to replicating the association of dispositional self-control with accommodation that we observed in the first two investigations, in Study 2 we experimentally manipulated self-regulatory strength depletion. Following the depletion manipulation, participants reported how they would be likely to respond to a series of hypothetical accommodative dilemmas in their relationships. Results reveal that individuals who had experienced a depleting manipulation reported weaker accommodative tendencies than did those who had experienced a nondepleting manipulation. Finally, Study 3 explores the interrelationship of self-control and commitment level in promoting accommodation, revealing that both variables exert independent effects beyond the effects of the other. In sum, the results of these studies suggest that low dispositional self-control and high self-regulatory strength depletion decrease the probability that individuals will inhibit their destructive impulses and instead engage in constructive behavior in response to potentially destructive partner behavior, and that this effect is not moderated by commitment level.

More generally, these results further elucidate the underpinnings of transformation of motivation. In the absence of either (a) the motivation or (b) the ability to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation, individuals are likely to act on their self-interested preferences toward destructive reactions in response to destructive partner behavior. The present research suggests that self-control is an important ability-relevant factor contributing to the likelihood of moving beyond gut-level impulses in favor of more prorelationship responses. Prior research has demonstrated that motivational variables such as commitment and trust promote prorelationship responses to a variety of interpersonal situations over an extended time frame, earning these variables the term "macromotives" (Holmes, 1981). Heretofore, no "macroabilities" of commensurate importance have been identified and validated across relationship domains (e.g., forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice). Could self-control be a macroability in close relationships, enabling individuals to engage in prorelationship behavior across various relationship domains over an extended period of time? As mentioned earlier, it makes sense that self-control should be an important ability-relevant factor promoting transformation of motivation because self-control represents the essence of inhibiting self-interested impulses in favor of more prorelationship behavior. The ability to control the self seems to be fundamental in promoting prorelationship transformation of motivation.

Nuances in the Relationship Between Self-Control and Accommodation

The overall trends observed in the four studies suggest that self-control factors influence accommodation in romantic relationships. However, these overall trends should not blur subtle differences in our findings across the studies. For findings relevant to dispositional self-control, Table 1 shows significant associations in the predicted direction for four of the five measures of accommodation—total accommodation, exit, voice, and neglect—for all five investigations (including both self-control scales in Study 3). The associations with loyalty were less consistent, although two of the five investigations revealed significant associations and one revealed a marginal association (all in the predicted direction). Is the fact that loyalty was not consistently associated with dispositional self-control theoretically meaningful? In light of prior research suggesting that loyalty sometimes exhibits weak or nonsignificant associations with other relationship-relevant phenomena (cf. Drigotas, Whitney, & Rusbult, 1995), we suspect that the inconsistent associations between self-control and loyalty tendencies have more to do with "the peculiarities of loyalty" (Drigotas et al., 1995, p. 596) or with the manner in which loyalty was assessed than with accommodative tendencies per se. We conclude that the association of dispositional self-control with accommodation is robust, assuming that the inconsistent results observed for loyalty are not theoretically meaningful. It is important to reiterate that the relationship between self-control and total accommodation was significant across all studies.

More interesting are the nuanced findings for self-regulatory strength depletion. Specifically, multivariate analyses performed on the Study 3 data revealed that experimentally induced self-

regulatory strength depletion caused decreased accommodative tendencies. Univariate analyses revealed that this effect was significant for constructive voice and loyalty tendencies but not for destructive exit and neglect tendencies. These nonsignificant results for exit and neglect were not predicted. Are they theoretically meaningful? What does it mean that compared with nondepleted individuals, depleted individuals responded less constructively but not more destructively in response to potentially destructive partner behaviors?

The data are consistent with the possibility that accommodation is an additive two-stage process through which individuals first inhibit destructive impulses and then engage in constructive behaviors. Both of these stages require separate exertions of self-control. This two-stage explanation accounts for the finding that experiencing the depleting manipulation caused participants to exhibit relatively less constructive behavior but not more antidestructive behavior than those who experienced the nondepleting manipulation. This analysis begins with the observation that relative to real-life depleting circumstances (e.g., quitting smoking, entertaining in-laws for the weekend), our laboratory depletion manipulation of suppressing an emotional response for 7 min was relatively weak. Although severe depletion impairs one's ability to engage in both stages of the accommodation process, mild depletion might only affect the second stage. Why should this be the case? Relative to a nondepleted individual, a mildly depleted individual possesses enough self-regulatory resources to inhibit destructive impulses but not enough to engage in constructive behaviors, and a highly depleted individual struggles at both stages of the accommodation process. For a mildly depleted individual, the self-regulatory exertion associated with inhibiting destructive exit and neglect tendencies is likely to add to the preexisting depletion and render prorelationship voice and loyalty behavior less likely. This additive, two-stage model of accommodation could account for why mild depletion affects constructive tendencies but not destructive tendencies. We suspect that a stronger manipulation of self-regulatory strength depletion would have resulted in significant effects for both constructive and destructive accommodation. Future research should explore this possibility.

Implications of the Present Research

What are the implications of the fact that self-control factors influence individuals' abilities to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation? One possible implication is that regulating our impulses may be something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, impulse regulation allows for healthier relationship functioning in that inhibiting destructive impulses promotes optimal interaction and couple well-being. On the other hand, overregulating impulses can cause problems because such regulation depletes individuals' limited capacity to regulate future impulses. Thus, attempts to behave perfectly at all times are likely to backfire in the form of a significant breakdown in self-control.

Still, indiscriminately indulging our impulses is unlikely to enhance relationship functioning. The present results, for example, suggest that individuals are better able to accommodate in their relationships to the degree that they possess adequate self-control to regulate their impulses. Such accommodative behavior is salutary for relationship functioning. Individuals face a difficult decision—under what circumstances should they exert their limited self-regulatory capacities? It appears that a compromise solution between indulging our impulses and regulating these impulses is optimal. Perhaps the best way to achieve such a solution is to train ourselves to recognize—on the basis of internal and environmental cues—when we are becoming depleted. If we become effective at recognizing these cues, we can implement effective self-regulatory strategies (e.g., count to 10; consider the partner's perspective) immediately, allowing us to make deliberate decisions regarding how we want to respond to our impulses. Once these impulses are in conscious awareness, we can decide under what circumstances we will indulge them (e.g., I will go out with my friends tonight rather than write that paper) or override them (e.g., if I ever want to complete my Ph.D. research, I must stay home and work tonight).

A related approach would be to make an overall effort to avoid depleting experiences as much as possible. Perhaps many relationships dissolve less because of a lack of desire to maintain the relationship than because the environmental or situational forces outside the relationship are extremely depleting. For example, a relationship in which both partners are forced to exert almost superhuman amounts of self-control in their jobs might be especially prone to dissolution. This depletion can contribute to a spiral of nonaccommodation and eventual breakup. Exacerbating the problem, individuals may be unable to identify the depleting situational sources contributing to relationship discord, increasing the likelihood that they will attribute problems to characteristics of the partner. Indeed, this inability to recognize situational causes of behavior is a theme that runs through a significant portion of social psychological theorizing. Are individuals especially likely to succumb to the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) when they are experiencing self-regulatory depletion?

This argument that regulating the self can have destructive consequences is not intended to take away from the importance of self-regulation. Prior theoretical analysis and empirical evidence suggest that, like other strengths, self-regulatory strength can be enhanced through exercising. Exerting self-regulation tends to increase one's long-term self-regulatory strength in two ways: (a) Self-regulated behaviors can become habitual (James, 1890) and (b) exerting self-regulation tends to strengthen our self-regulatory "muscle," just as lifting weights tends to increase muscular strength (Baumeister et al., 1994; Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Recent evidence is consistent with the notion that exerting self-regulation tends to enhance individuals' ability to exert self-regulation in the future (Muraven, Baumeister, & Tice, 1999), suggesting that the long-term consequence of engaging in self-regulation is strengthened ability to engage in future self-regulation. This long-term benefit must be reconciled with the short-term depletion associated with exerting self-regulation in a particular situation.

Limitations and Strengths of the Present Research

Before concluding, we note two limitations of the present research. Although we expect that our findings would apply to other populations (e.g., married partners; friendships) and other cultures (e.g., more interdependent cultures; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we examined accommodative tendencies only in college students' romantic relationships in North America. To examine the generalizability of our findings, future work should examine the effects

of ability factors such as self-control on accommodation in other populations and in other cultures.

A second limitation derives from our use of self-report methods. Because all investigations used self-report methods, our work is subject to common critiques of this method—our results might be influenced by socially desirable response tendencies, acquiescence bias, retrospective reconstruction of prior events, and the like. However, although these concerns might be valid for Study 1, it is somewhat more difficult to interpret the results of the pilot study, Study 2, and Study 3 in terms of methodological artifact. For example, our manipulation of self-regulatory strength depletion in Study 2 was relatively subtle. It seems unlikely that participants guessed that the emotional suppression versus expression manipulation in Study 2 was actually a manipulation of self-regulatory strength depletion. (If they made any guess at all as to why they were asked to view film segments, they probably suspected that the segments were designed to manipulate mood. Valence of mood exerted no significant effect on our findings.) Thus, credible alternative explanations based on self-report method critiques are unlikely to account for our findings. Nonetheless, it is important for future work to use behavioral measures of accommodation in the context of ongoing romantic relationships to ascertain whether actual behavior is consistent with the behavioral intentions participants reported in Study 2. Research regarding attitude–behavior consistency suggests that the behavioral intentions reported in the present research should generalize to actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and future research should explore this possibility.

We would also like to highlight an important strength of the present research. We used diverse methods, providing relatively strong convergent evidence that self-control factors influence one's ability to accommodate in response to potentially destructive partner behavior. The pilot study demonstrated that dispositional self-control is positively associated with participants' accommodative tendencies toward their current romantic partners (this effect was replicated in Studies 1, 2, and 3). In Study 1 participants recalled actual accommodative dilemmas from their current romantic relationships and reported how depleted they felt prior to their own accommodative and nonaccommodative behavior. In Study 2 we experimentally manipulated participants' self-regulatory strength depletion before asking them how they would be likely to respond to hypothetical accommodative dilemmas initiated by their current romantic partner. Finally, in Study 3 we demonstrated that self-control exerts highly significant effects on accommodation even after including commitment level in the model. In total, these four investigations examined the relationship between self-control and accommodation in a variety of ways, and all evidence suggests that low dispositional self-control and high self-regulatory strength depletion are associated with weaker accommodative tendencies toward one's romantic partner.

Conclusions

Prior research suggests that the manner in which individuals respond to potentially destructive partner behavior reliably discriminates between distressed and nondistressed couples. Individuals in distressed couples tend to reciprocate destructive behavior, whereas individuals in nondistressed couples tend to inhibit their self-centered impulses in favor of more prorelationship responding. In other words, nondistressed couples exhibit tendencies toward accommodation, whereas distressed couples do not. The present research examined whether self-control factors influence individuals' ability to resist self-interested, gut-level reactions in favor of more personally costly, prorelationship responses. Consistent with expectations, a pilot study and three additional studies demonstrate that low self-control weakens accommodative tendencies. Specifically, relative to their high dispositional self-control and nondepleted counterparts, individuals who possessed low dispositional self-control or experienced high self-regulatory strength depletion exhibited weaker accommodative tendencies. More generally, it seems that self-control factors influence individuals' ability to engage in prorelationship transformation of motivation—low self-control individuals tend to act on the basis of their immediate self-interest without taking account of broader considerations such as relationship well-being. In short, self-control lies at the heart of transformation of motivation—individuals who possess the ability to control the self are able to inhibit self-interested impulses in favor of more prorelationship responses to potentially destructive partner behavior. Such an ability bodes well for the prospects of a long-term, well-adjusted relationship.

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Received December 28, 2000
Accepted December 28, 2000 ■