



Partner commitment moderates the association between commitment and interest in romantic alternatives

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown that individuals who are committed to their relationship are less interested in romantic alternatives. This research examined whether the negative association between commitment and interest in alternative partners depends on the level of partner's commitment. In Study 1, married individuals ($N = 289$) completed questionnaires assessing their commitment, perceptions of their partner's commitment, and two indicators of interest in alternatives. We found that committed individuals' tendency to remain inattentive to alternatives and to report fewer infidelity experiences was significantly weaker among individuals who perceived their partner to be low (vs. high) in commitment. In Study 2, we recruited both members of married couples ($N = 156$) and replicated the moderating effect of partner commitment using the partner's self-reports. Our findings suggest that how committed the partner is, or is perceived to be, can play an important role in committed individuals' faithfulness, highlighting the dyadic processes of relationship maintenance.

Keywords Commitment mutuality · Commitment asymmetry · Infidelity · Extramarital relationship

One of the many challenges facing married couples is the temptation of infidelity, or the desire to be emotionally or sexually intimate with someone other than one's partner. As attractive alternative relationships pose great threats to the relationship (Drigotas and Rusbult 1992), and can even lead to relationship dissolutions (Amato and Previti 2003), individuals who are highly committed to their relationship tend to guard themselves against attending to those opportunities (Miller 1997); that is, commitment can be a protective factor against experiencing attraction to alternative partners (Fincham and May 2017). However, research suggests that rather than being non-contingent, committed individuals' responses to attractive alternatives rest on various contextual factors such as the level of the threat (i.e., whether the alternative partner also shows romantic interests; Lydon et al. 1999) and self-regulatory resources at the moment (Ritter et al. 2010).

In the present research, we aimed to examine partner's commitment as an important contextual factor (McNulty 2016) that

can affect the extent to which committed individuals remain uninterested in alternative partners. Specifically, we predicted that this association between commitment and disinterest in alternatives would be weaker when the partner's level of commitment, as perceived by the individual (Study 1), or as reported by the partner (Study 2), is low as opposed to high.

Commitment and Infidelity

Commitment represents an individual's psychological attachment to the partner and willingness to maintain the relationship (Rusbult 1983). Given their long-term orientation toward a relationship, individuals committed to a relationship tend to engage in a wide range of relationship promotive behaviors aimed to prevent the relationship from ending. For example, commitment is associated with forgiving the partner's transgressions (Finkel et al. 2002), making sacrifices (Etcheverry and Le 2005), and accommodating the partner's needs (Rusbult et al. 1991).

Further, committed individuals are equipped with a set of relationship maintenance strategies aimed to keep themselves interested in the current relationship. Given the frequent temptations of extradyadic relationships people face in everyday life (Neal and Lemay 2017), one way committed individuals can stay with their current partner with unwavering conviction

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has to do with the way they handle the presence of appealing alternatives. For example, committed individuals are inclined to remain disinterested by paying less attention to the alternatives (Maner et al. 2008; Miller 1997), perceiving them to be less attractive (Simpson et al. 1990), processing information about the alternatives in a selective way (Gagné et al. 2008; Visserman and Karremans 2014), and avoiding engaging in positive interactions with them (Karremans and Verwijmeren 2008; Linardatos and Lydon 2011). Indeed, these conscious and nonconscious strategies appear to be effective as individuals high in relationship commitment generally report less willingness to engage in extradyadic behaviors (Mattingly et al. 2011) and fewer experiences of infidelity (Drigotas et al. 1999; Le et al. 2011).

The Moderating Role of Partner Commitment

Despite the strong rewarding experiences warranted from committing to one romantic relationship (Spielmann et al. 2012), people in romantic relationships have to consider the costs that accompany maintaining the relationship. Putting aside their personal interest for the sake of their partner may be good for the relationship, but not necessarily for the individual (Righetti and Impett 2017). For example, foregoing alternative relationships (e.g., completely removing oneself from the dating pool) would help one to focus solely on the current relationship, but make it harder for the person to find a new partner if the relationship were to end. Also, as greatly rewarding as they can be, relationships can hurt and disappoint the individuals who were more committed in it to a greater degree (Sprecher et al. 1998).

Accordingly, people in relationships are motivated to gauge where the relationship stands by remaining vigilant about how the partner feels about the relationship and how committed he or she is to the relationship (Arriaga et al. 2006). Perceiving that the partner cares about the relationship can help people to quell lingering doubts and motivate them to maintain the relationship (Joel et al. 2013). In other words, there is likely to be less ambivalence about committing to the relationship for those who are confident about the partner's commitment and are less worried about the consequences of their vulnerability (Gere et al. 2013; Joel et al. 2011). Importantly, such perceptions of the partner's commitment are likely to affect the extent to which committed individuals are willing to take more risks of dependence. Having a highly committed partner can provide a context in which individuals feel safe enough to put themselves at risk of vulnerability, allowing for a stronger link between commitment and relationship maintenance strategies to emerge.

Consistent with this view, the risk regulation model (Murray et al. 2006; Murray et al. 2008) also proposes that individuals have a risk regulation system that governs their

behavior in situations involving interpersonal risk. Depending on the expectations about the partner's acceptance or rejection, this system will assign different weights to the connectedness and self-protection goals. Specifically, while those who are confident about their partner's regard would regulate their dependence in a way that increases it by engaging in relationship promotive behaviors (e.g., sharing their feelings with their partner), those who do not have the confidence would lower their dependence by engaging in self-protective behaviors (e.g., derogating and withdrawing from their partner; Overall and Sibley 2009).

Likewise, we suggest that the link between commitment and relationship maintenance by means of conscious or unconscious resistance to the temptation of infidelity will depend on the level of the partner's commitment. Specifically, depending on how committed the partner is to the relationship, people are likely to differ in how they navigate the dilemma between strengthening connection to a partner by dismissing the alternatives and protecting oneself from becoming more vulnerable by leaving rooms for alternatives. If individuals believe that their partner is willing to stay in the relationship, it is likely that they will act according to their predominant motivation which is to connect with a partner; they will resist the alternatives to the extent that they are committed to the relationship. In contrast, if individuals lack such confidence in a partner's commitment, their motivation to connect with the partner may be interfered with their self-protection needs; commitment will not be as strongly related to the defenses against attractive alternatives. In other words, it is likely that the negative association between commitment and interest in alternatives would be significantly weaker if the partner has low, rather than high, commitment.

The Present Research

We conducted two studies with married individuals and couples to examine the role of partner's commitment in committed individuals' faithfulness. In Study 1, we examined whether the association between one's commitment and interest in alternatives depends on the perception of the partner's commitment. In Study 2, we aimed to examine the moderating role of partner commitment using the partner's self-reported commitment (i.e., drawn from a different source). Across the two studies, the following two measures were used to assess interest in romantic alternatives: 1) Miller's (1997) measure of attentiveness to alternatives that captures the extent to which individuals pay attention to alternative partners, and 2) Drigotas and colleagues' (Drigotas et al. 1999) measure of infidelity, which assesses physical and emotional intimate experiences with alternative partners. In both studies, we predicted that commitment would be negatively related to indicators of interest in alternatives (Drigotas et al. 1999), but that this

association would be significantly weaker when perceived partner commitment (Study 1) or partner-reported commitment (Study 2) is low.

Study 1

In Study 1, married individuals reported their commitment, their perceptions of their partner's commitment to the relationship, and interest in alternative partners. Although perception of the partner's commitment may not be reflecting the objective reality (Murray and Holmes 2009), it is arguably more relevant to how the participants regulate their behavior than their partner's actual commitment.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk. To facilitate the data collection, we aimed to recruit 600 participants without restricting eligibility, and only those who identified their relationship status as married were directed to the questionnaire that included the measures described below. A total of 289 married adults (148 men) were recruited, with an average age of 37 ($SD = 10.4$) years, and marital duration of 9 years and 9 months ($SD = 10$ years). Participants indicated their race/ethnicity as Caucasian (45%), Asian/Pacific Islander (19%), African American (3%), Hispanic/Latino (2%), Native American/American Indian (1%), or Other/Unspecified (30%). Participants who completed the survey received monetary compensation.

Measures

Commitment and Perceived Partner Commitment

Participants completed a 7-item measure of commitment from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al. 1998; e.g., "I want our relationship to last for a very long time"; $\alpha = .84$). They also completed analogous items as a measure of perceived partner commitment (e.g., "My partner wants our relationship to last for a very long time"; $\alpha = .83$).

Attentiveness to Alternatives Participants responded to Miller's (1997) Attentiveness to Alternatives Index that consists of six items assessing participants' alertness to alternative partners (e.g., "I flirt with people of the opposite sex without mentioning my partner"; $\alpha = .74$). This measure has also been related to the actual amount of time spent on inspecting alternative partners in a lab (Miller 1997).

Infidelity A scale developed by Drigotas and colleagues (Drigotas et al. 1999) was used as a measure of infidelity. Rather than directly asking for the number of times participants engaged in infidelity, this measure asks participants to think about the person they were most attracted to besides their partner and presents questions about a range of behaviors reflecting both emotional and physical infidelity ($\alpha = .94$). The questions gradually increase in intensity, from "How attractive did you find this person?" to "How physically intimate were you with this person?" in order to overcome the issue of social desirability.

All measures used a 7-point Likert scale for participants' responses to the items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the variables are presented in Table 1. Significant gender differences were found, such that women reported greater commitment ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.08$) and perceived their partner to be more committed ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.06$) than men did ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.14$ for commitment; $M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.16$ for perceived partner commitment), $t(287) < -2.34$, $ps < .02$. Women were also less attentive to alternatives ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.17$) and had fewer infidelity experiences ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.67$) than men did ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.22$ for attentiveness; $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.46$ for infidelity), $t(287) < 5.44$, $ps < .003$. However, none of the interactions involving gender were significant in the following analyses, and the results did not change when gender was controlled for; therefore, we do not discuss these findings further.

Primary Analyses

To examine whether the associations between commitment and the two indicators of interest in alternatives are moderated by perceived partner commitment, regression analyses were conducted with commitment, perceived partner commitment, and the interaction term as predictors. Variables were centered before computing the interaction term, in order to reduce multicollinearity (Cohen et al. 2003), and simple slope analyses

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables (Study 1)

Variable	2	3	4	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
1. Commitment	.86**	-.52**	-.35**	6.03 (1.12)
2. Perceived partner commitment	–	-.48**	-.34**	6.00 (1.12)
3. Attentiveness to alternatives		–	.62**	2.98 (1.25)
4. Infidelity			–	3.76 (1.59)

** $p < .01$

were conducted to probe significant interactions (Aiken and West 1991). Specifically, we examined the links between commitment and the outcome variables when perceived commitment was one standard deviation (*SD*) above and below the mean.

Attentiveness As shown in Table 2, main effects of commitment and perceived partner commitment emerged, such that individuals who were committed to the relationship or those who perceived that their partner was committed to the relationship tended to be less attentive to alternatives. However, these main effects were qualified by their interaction. Simple slope analyses indicated that highly committed participants were less likely to attend to alternatives when they perceived their partner to be highly committed (+1 *SD*), $b = -0.92$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$, but this tendency was significantly attenuated when the perceived level of partner commitment was low (−1 *SD*), $b = -0.30$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .005$ (Fig. 1).¹

Infidelity The same analyses were repeated with infidelity as the outcome variable. We found significant main effects of both commitment and partner commitment, again qualified by their interaction (Table 2). Specifically, the association between commitment and infidelity was significant at high levels (+1 *SD*) of partner commitment, $b = -1.03$, $SE = 0.18$, $p < .001$, but not at low levels (−1 *SD*) of partner commitment, $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .52$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported our hypothesis that although highly committed individuals tend to remain inattentive to romantic alternatives, this tendency would weaken when they perceive their partner's commitment to the relationship to be low. In Study 2, we obtained data on commitment from both members of married couples and attempted to replicate these findings with partner's commitment drawn from a difference source (i.e., a partner's self-report). A partner's actual commitment is indeed what shapes one's perceptions of partner commitment (Wieselquist et al. 1999), and using this as a proxy for perceived partner commitment provides us a more conservative test of our hypotheses given that it is not a direct assessment of an individual's confidence in the partner's regard. Further, using a partner's self-report allows us to rule out a potential alternative explanation for our findings. Specifically, one may argue that an individual's other personality characteristics such as attachment anxiety (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016) may have

¹ Data analyzed in the present study are part of a larger dataset on married life. A subset of the data has been published (Park et al. 2018), but no variables in this article were reported elsewhere. A complete list of measures used for this study is available on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/dq7ze/>).

Table 2 Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis (Study 1)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Attentiveness to alternatives				
Commitment	−0.63	0.11	−5.84	< .001
Perceived partner commitment	−0.24	0.10	−2.28	.02
Commitment × Perceived partner commitment	−0.29	0.05	−5.88	< .001
Infidelity				
Commitment	−0.59	0.15	−3.97	< .001
Perceived partner commitment	−0.33	0.14	−2.28	.02
Commitment × Perceived partner commitment	−0.44	0.07	−6.38	< .001

Unstandardized coefficients are reported

led to both biased perceptions of the partner's commitment and greater interest in alternatives. Replicating our effects using a partner's own reports of commitment can effectively address this issue.

Study 2

In Study 2, we examined the moderating role of partner-reported commitment on the association between an individual's commitment and interest in alternatives in a sample of Koreans. Using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al. 2006), we sought to examine the interactive effect of the couple's commitment (i.e., actor-partner interaction) while controlling for the main effects of each spouse's commitment (i.e., actor effect and partner effect).

Method

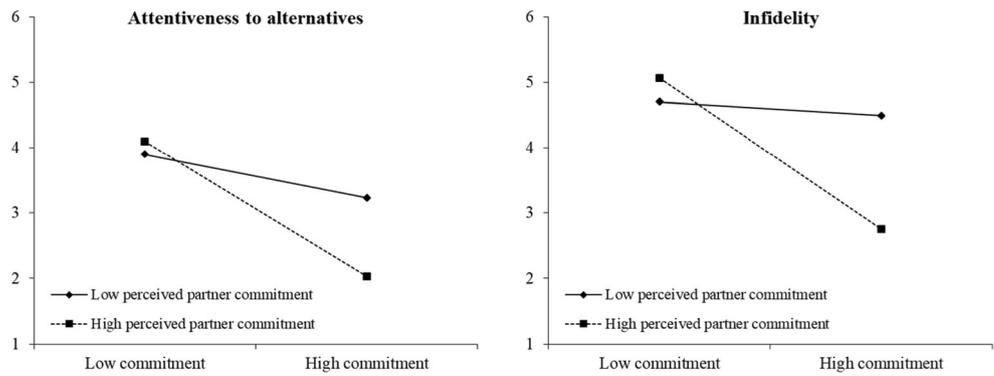
Participants and Procedure

We aimed to recruit as many couples as possible within our budget (80 couples). Seventy-eight married couples ($N = 156$) were recruited via online advertisements and posters around a large private university in Korea. Participants' mean age was 37 ($SD = 6.53$) years, and they had been married for an average of 7.24 ($SD = 6.64$) years. All participants were Korean. They attended a laboratory session in exchange for a monetary compensation of 50,000 KRW (approximately 45 USD) per couple, and completed a battery of questionnaires that included the measures listed below. No data were excluded from the analyses.¹

Measures

Commitment Participants completed the same measure from Study 1 (Rusbult et al. 1998; $\alpha = .78$).

Fig. 1 The moderating effect of perceived partner commitment on the associations between an individual’s commitment and interest in romantic alternatives (Study 1). High value is indexed at the maximum commitment score (i.e., 7) and low value is indexed at 1 SD below the mean



Attentiveness to Alternatives Participants responded to Miller’s (1997) 6-item measure as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .70$).

Infidelity Participants responded to the measure of infidelity (Drigotas et al. 1999) that was used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .94$).

Participants responded to a Korean version of all the measures, which had been translated and back-translated by four graduate students. In all measures, participants were asked to respond to the items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Results

To account for the non-independence in our data, we estimated the APIM using multilevel modeling in which persons are nested within dyads. As the dyads were not significantly distinguishable (Olsen and Kenny 2006; $\chi^2(4) = 6.27, p = .18$, for attentiveness and $\chi^2(4) = 2.86, p = .58$ for infidelity), we present models that treated the dyads as indistinguishable following Kenny and colleagues’ (Kenny et al. 2006) recommendations. We note that in all analyses that included gender in the models, there was no significant effect of gender or an interaction involving gender. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the variables are presented in Table 3. No significant gender difference was found in the variables, $t_s(77) < 1.59, p_s > .12$.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables (Study 2)

Variable	2	3	4	M (SD)
1. Commitment	.35**	-.33**	-.20**	6.01 (0.82)
2. Partner commitment	–	-.08	-.18*	6.01 (0.82)
3. Attentiveness to alternatives	–	–	.51**	3.47 (0.92)
4. Infidelity	–	–	–	2.69 (1.38)

Correlations do not take into account the dyadic nature of the data

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

Primary Analyses

To examine whether the association between actor commitment and interest in alternatives is moderated by partner’s commitment, we created the actor-partner interaction term, which was the product of the partners’ (grand-mean centered) commitment scores. We then included both partners’ scores on commitment and the interaction term as predictors of the two indicators of interest in alternatives. Simple slopes analyses (Aiken and West 1991) were conducted to interpret significant interactions.

Attentiveness As shown in Table 4, we found a significant actor effect, indicating that more committed partners tended to be less attentive to alternatives, and the predicted actor-partner interaction effect. Replicating Study 1, for those with highly committed (+1 SD) partners, commitment was negatively related to attentiveness, $b = -0.62, SE = 0.14, p < .001$, but this association was significantly attenuated, $b = -0.22, SE = 0.12, p = .06$, for those with a partner low (–1 SD) in commitment (Fig. 2).

Infidelity The same analysis was conducted with infidelity as the outcome variable. A significant main effect of actor commitment emerged, indicating that committed partners were less likely to engage in infidelity (Table 4). The actor-partner interaction effect was also in the predicted direction, such that the negative association between commitment and infidelity was significant for those with a highly committed (+1 SD) partner, $b = -0.54, SE = 0.20, p = .008$, but not for those with a partner low (–1 SD) in commitment, $b = -0.04, SE = 0.18, p = .80$ (Fig. 2).

Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated the moderating effect of partner commitment found in Study 1 using a different source for the assessment and in a different cultural context. Specifically, the extent to which committed individuals

remained faithful to their partner depended on the partner's commitment, such that participants' own commitment was rather weakly related to inattentiveness to alternative partners or fewer infidelity experiences when the partner was low (vs. high) in commitment. Although the predicted effect was marginally significant with infidelity as the outcome in Study 2, this result most likely is a reflection of the different moderator that was used in this study, which arguably has made the test more conservative. Specifically, using a partner's self-report of commitment instead of one's perception—which likely has greater relevance to his or her fidelity-related mechanisms—should make it harder to find significant effects.

General Discussion

Although previous studies have consistently shown a link between commitment and faithfulness to the current partner (Le et al. 2011; Mattingly et al. 2011), the present research suggests that the extent to which committed individuals are disinterested in alternative partners depends on the partner's level of commitment. In Study 1, we found that the negative associations between commitment and two indicators of interest in alternatives (i.e., attentiveness to alternatives and infidelity experience) were significantly weaker among individuals who perceived their partner to be low (vs. high) in commitment. Study 2 extended this finding by showing that committed individuals' tendency to be less interested in alternatives was weaker when the partner's self-reported commitment was low (vs. high). Overall, there was compelling evidence for our hypothesis using two different assessments of partner's commitment as a moderator across studies and across cultural contexts.

These findings are consistent with previous research that examined partner commitment as a moderator of different relationship processes (McNulty 2016). For example, in Cross et al. (2017), partner's low commitment served as a context in which individuals with dependency concerns were likely to be aggressive. Specifically, men who were worried about being exploited by women tended to engage in self-protective, yet relationship-destructive behaviors like aggression when partner's low commitment heightened their fear about dependence. Similarly, our findings suggest that, despite the typical strong link between commitment and effortful relationship maintenance (Rusbult et al. 2001), committed individuals' tendency to remain faithful hinges on how their partner feels, or is perceived to feel, about the relationship. When there are doubts about the partner's commitment, the risks and costs to the self that inattention to alternative partners brings forth (Kavanagh et al. 2014) will be more salient.

Notably, this focus on the interpersonal dynamics underlying attraction to alternatives makes an important contribution to the existing literature on infidelity. Although researchers

have called for the need to delve deeper into what makes individuals vulnerable to the temptations of extradyadic relationships (Blow and Hartnett 2005), previous research has largely focused on examining the process at an individual level, such as the effects of one's personality traits (Jones and Weiser 2014) or relationship quality (Previti and Amato 2004), rather than at a dyadic level (Munsch 2012). Our results highlight the importance of looking at the couple contextual factors such as partner's level of commitment that can play a role in infidelity-related processes.

It should be noted that we recruited married individuals in both studies. Although many of the past findings on infidelity and the associated mechanisms have relied on samples of dating couples, they are limited in their generalizability to married populations (Russell et al. 2013). As such, the use of married individuals and couples in our studies highlight greater applicability of these findings in understanding this highly committed population. Further, we conducted Study 2 in Asia (Korea) with Asian couples, a relatively understudied population in the infidelity literature (Blow and Hartnett 2005). Arguably, the two studies were not identical and there were differences in the results that possibly reflect cultural differences such as gender differences in commitment or interest in alternatives that emerged in Study 1 (American sample), but not in Study 2 (Asian sample). Possibly, in Asian cultures where the prevailing attitudes toward divorce are more negative (Toth and Kimmelmeier 2009), the gender differences that are pronounced among Western samples (for infidelity, Atkins et al. 2001; for commitment, Le and Agnew 2003) are less likely to surface as both men and women are under high environmental pressure. Notwithstanding these cultural differences, our primary effects of interest were found in both studies.

One way to understand our findings is in relation to previous research on the negative consequences of partners' asymmetrical levels of commitment (Rhoades et al. 2012), in that even highly committed individuals were relatively less relationship-promotive when the partner was low in commitment. However, because we focused on the role of the partner's commitment as a context in which committed individuals' faithfulness may be differently manifested, rather than examining the effect of the *magnitude* of the discrepancy between the two partners' commitment (Oriña et al. 2011; Rhoades et al. 2012), our findings should not be interpreted as suggesting negative implications of a greater discrepancy. In fact, it might be overly simplistic to predict a linear association between the discrepancy of the two partners' commitment and interest in alternatives. Specifically, depending on where the discrepancy takes place, people with the same discrepancy score are likely to experience a different degree of commitment-based drive that contributes to defenses against the alternatives. For example, a person who scores 1 on commitment and has a partner scoring

Table 4 Summary of the actor-partner interdependence model (Study 2)

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Attention to Alternatives				
Actor commitment	−0.42	0.09	−4.83	< .001
Partner commitment	0.02	0.09	0.28	.78
Actor commitment × Partner commitment	−0.24	0.11	−2.14	.04
Infidelity				
Actor commitment	−0.29	0.14	−2.08	.04
Partner commitment	−0.25	0.14	−1.74	.08
Actor commitment × Partner commitment	−0.30	0.15	−1.96	.06

Unstandardized coefficients are reported

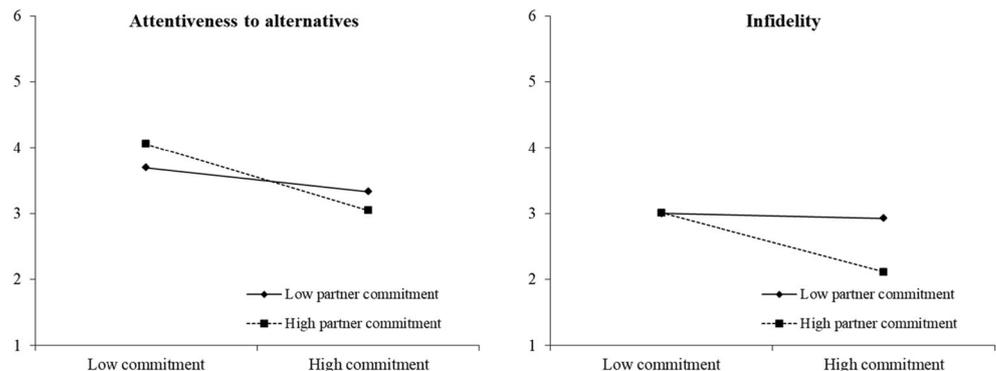
3 would have weaker motivation to resist the alternatives compared to a person who scores 5 on commitment and has a partner scoring 7 to start with. Ideally, future research using a larger sample and a different statistical approach (response surface analysis; Barranti et al. 2017) can allow for a more nuanced approach.

In future research it is also essential to capture intricate mechanisms that underlie committed individuals’ varying degrees of faithfulness depending on the partner’s commitment. We have speculated that partner’s low commitment serves as a context that elicits more or less concerns about rejection (Cross et al. 2017) and thus more self-protective responses, but we did not directly test for this prediction. To examine whether the weaker link between commitment and faithfulness among those with low (vs. high) partner commitment is related to their different levels of risk perceptions, we need to directly assess the level of threat or risk perceived by individuals in their current relationship (Spielmann et al. 2012). Committed individuals’ high levels of threat perceptions would indicate conflicting forces acting on their motivations to be faithful, such that while strongly driven by the expectation of rewards the relationship can provide (Baker et al. 2017), they are simultaneously being held back by the need to protect oneself from the possibility of rejection.

Lastly, several limitations of the present research should also be considered in future studies. As the correlational nature of our data precludes conclusions about the direction of causality, daily diary studies in which the temporal fluctuations of the partners’ level of commitment (Arriaga et al. 2006; Dailey et al. 2013) are tracked or laboratory studies in which one’s own or the perceptions of the partner’s commitment (Finkel et al. 2002) are manipulated can help us understand more precisely what encourages or discourages committed individuals from attending to the attractive alternatives. Such an approach can also address the possibility that perceived partner commitment affects the level of commitment (Sciara and Pantaleo 2018). In addition, although we relied solely on self-report measures, some of the relationship maintenance mechanisms operate at an implicit level (Karremans and Verwijmeren 2008) and may not be assessable using self-reports. As such, future research may benefit from using behavioral measures such as the actual amount of time spent on inspecting alternatives (Miller 1997) or more automatic responses (Lydon and Karremans 2015) in assessing infidelity.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the present study offers practical implications for everyday relationship maintenance or for marital counseling, especially for couples struggling with or recovering from infidelity. Specifically, this research draws attention to the fact that, despite the critical role of the weakly committed partner in determining the fate of the relationship (Schoebi et al. 2012; Stanley et al. 2017), maintaining marriage and handling the challenges of marriage are essentially dyadic processes that are related to both partners’ inputs. One partner’s low commitment matters not only because of what this person does or does not do, but also because of the different nature of a relationship context it lays out for the other partner and his or her relationship maintenance. Consequently, when understanding one partner’s behaviors, we should be mindful of the context that each partner has provided for the other in which the behaviors occur.

Fig. 2 The moderating effect of partner’s commitment on the associations between an individual’s commitment and interest in romantic alternatives (Study 2). High and low values are indexed at 1 *SD* above and below the mean



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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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