

Pathways to commitment in living-apart-together relationships in the Netherlands: A study on satisfaction, alternatives, investments and social support

Master Thesis Research Master in Spatial Sciences

28 July 2016

Student: Roselinde van der Wiel, s2118165

Supervisors and intended co-authors: prof. dr. Clara H. Mulder and dr. A. Bailey

Contents

Draft paper.....	3
Abstract.....	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Theoretical and research background	7
2.1 Living-apart-together and commitment	7
2.2 Investment model of commitment	10
3. Data and methods	12
3.1 Method	12
3.2 Research participants	13
3.3 Analysis.....	13
4. Results	16
4.1 Motivations for living-apart-together.....	16
4.2 Commitment	17
4.3 Satisfaction.....	21
4.4 Alternatives	23
4.5 Investments	25
4.6 Social support.....	29
4.7 Future plans.....	30
5. Conclusion	31
Supplementary reflections.....	35
1. Topic and journal.....	35
2. Theoretical background	36
2.1 Chosen and alternative theoretical frameworks	36
2.2 Conceptual model and expectations.....	41
2.3 Literature.....	44
4. Method of data collection	46
4.1 Alternative methods	46
4.2 Choice for in-depth interviews.....	47
4.3 Data analysis	49
4.4 Data quality.....	51
6. Additional results.....	53

6.1 Gladly or regretfully LAT?	53
6.2 Societal norms.....	54
6.3 Comparing commitment	56
7. Research process.....	62
References	63
Appendix 1 Interview guide	70
Appendix 2 Code book.....	76
Appendix 3 Consent form	80
Appendix 4 Logbook.....	81

Draft paper

Abstract

CONTRIBUTION

This paper contributes to a better understanding of the implications and meanings of living-apart-together (LAT) as a modern, non-institutionalised partner relationship arrangement. Insight into commitment in LAT relationships furthers the debate about the individualization of society and “pure relationships”.

OBJECTIVE

We qualitatively explore how the partner commitment experiences of LAT couples in the Netherlands are shaped by their satisfaction with, alternatives to, investments in and social support for their relationship, and interlinked with the choice for LAT.

METHODS

22 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Dutch individuals in LAT relationships and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti. The major themes that emerged from the analysis were motivations for living-apart-together, commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support, future plans and relationship history.

RESULTS

LAT was mostly motivated by the “self”. Participants were emotionally highly attached to their partner, but their commitment to maintaining their relationship in the future was less strong and clear-cut. Satisfaction and intrinsic investments were described as contributing the most to feelings of commitment, and social support, quality of alternatives and extrinsic investments the least. Several older LATs avoided extrinsic investments precisely to limit commitment. The relationship history and life experience of older participants influenced their perceptions of all four determinants and their experiences of commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

Although emotional attachment appears to be high, people in LAT relationships may have a relatively limited belief and interest in life-long partnerships. Relationship history plays an important role in how middle-aged and older people, who have often gone through a divorce, experience several aspects of their LAT relationship. In this context, LAT expresses fear of commitment and getting hurt, which is further reflected in limited investments.

Keywords: commitment, living-apart-together, partner relationships, relationship satisfaction, investments, alternatives, social support

1. Introduction

Partner relationship arrangements have diversified profoundly in many western countries since the 1960s. This diversification revealed itself in, amongst other phenomena, a rise in unmarried cohabitation, divorce and extramarital childbirth. The notion of the Second Demographic Transition was formulated to account for and explain these changes (Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa, 1986). This transition was thought to be indicated by a de-institutionalisation of family life (Hantrais, 2006) and of marriage (Cherlin, 2004) and to be characterised by an increasing emphasis on individual autonomy and self-fulfilment, tolerance for diversity and respect for individual choice (Lesthaeghe, 2010).

Living-apart-together (LAT) relationships can be regarded as a more recent display of the Second Demographic Transition (Latten & Mulder, 2014; Lesthaeghe, 2010). LAT refers to couple relationships in which the partners do not live together (Haskey, 2005). The increased prevalence or visibility of LAT (Carter, Duncan, Stoilova, & Phillips, 2015) can be interpreted as further diversification of partner relationship arrangements and de-institutionalisation of family life in the Netherlands (Latten & Mulder, 2014).

The extent to which partners in non-institutionalised relationship types such as unmarried cohabitation and LAT are committed to each other, in the sense of being emotionally attached and wanting to maintain the relationship (Rusbult, 1980), is highly debated. According to Duncan et al. (2005), unmarried cohabitation is popularly considered as lacking commitment. The increased prevalence of this arrangement is even regarded as evidence of an overall reduced “willingness to create and honour life-long partnerships” (Jamieson et al., 2002, p. 356). People in LAT relationships (so-called “LATs”) are arguably even less committed than cohabiters, because their relationships mostly lack structural investments such as a joint mortgage or children (Carter et al., 2015), which are public expressions of commitment. On the contrary, it is sometimes argued by cohabiters (Duncan et

al., 2005) and LATs (Carter et al., 2015) that their relationships involve higher levels of commitment compared to married couples, precisely due to the lack of formal, legal and structural barriers to separation. “The only thing keeping them together is their desire to stay together” (Carter et al., 2015, p. 15).

Questions regarding commitment in partner relationships play a significant role in the debate about the individualisation of society. That is, the new and de-standardised family models that have arisen suggest, according to some, that commitment is of less importance in modern, individualised societies (Carter et al., 2015). Giddens’ (1992) notion of “pure relationships” reflects this viewpoint. Such pure relationships, in which autonomy, egalitarianism and emotional commitment are central, are entered and maintained purely for the sake of love and personal satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). LAT relationships appear to particularly suit this notion of pure relationships, because they are relatively easy to exit due to a lack of structural investments (Duncan & Philips, 2011; Haskey & Lewis, 2006). Apart from this, partner commitment plays an important role in people’s subjective wellbeing (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). More generally, mental and physical health, sexuality and finances can be related to partner relationships (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). For these reasons, several studies thus far have looked into and compared commitment in married and cohabiting relationships (Berrington, Perelli-Harris, & Trevena, 2015; Burgoyne, Reibstein, Edmunds, & Routh, 2010; Duncan et al., 2005; Hiekel & Keizer, 2015; Jamieson et al., 2002). In addition, Carter et al. (2015) have recently published on the experience of commitment by LATs in Britain. In Haskey and Lewis’ (2006) study on LAT, the concept of commitment comes forward more implicitly. Yet, our current knowledge about LATs’ commitment is still very limited and aforesaid studies fail to provide a detailed investigation of the underlying factors of commitment in LAT relationships.

The aim of this study is to qualitatively explore commitment and its determinants in LAT relationships, for a better understanding of the implications and meanings of living-apart-together as a modern, non-institutionalised partner relationship arrangement. As a framework for understanding the underlying determinants, we employ an extended version of the Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2011; Sprecher, 1988). The following main questions are based on this model's commitment determinants: *What motivates couples in the Netherlands to live apart-together? And how are their experiences of partner commitment shaped by their satisfaction with, alternatives to, investments in and social support for their relationship, and interlinked with their choice for LAT and future plans for their relationship?*

The study takes place in the Netherlands, where new demographic trends tend to appear early (Latten & Mulder, 2014). The term LAT was first introduced here (Otten & Te Riele, 2015). In 2013, over eight percent of those with a partner were in a LAT relationship in the Netherlands (Otten & Te Riele, 2015).

2. Theoretical and research background

2.1 Living-apart-together and commitment

The novelty of LAT relationships is debatable and depends on the way LAT is defined. So-called “dating LATs”, distinguished by Duncan & Philips (2010) from “partner LATs”, resemble the more traditional boyfriend-girlfriend relationships or steady dating relationships and are thus not notably novel. Because of these “dating LATs”, Carter et al. (2015, p. 3) argue that LAT relationships “have existed in other guises across the decades”. However, when following the definition as proposed by Haskey (2005), which is similar to that of Levin and Trost (1999), LAT is more than just a new guise of dating relationships. In this definition, only “partner LATs” are included: longer-term, monogamous partners who consider themselves a couple and are regarded as such by others, but who live in separate households.

This tight definition excludes married relationships (e.g. commuter marriages), short-term and casual relationships. Young adults and teenagers living with their parents and those in full-time education are also excluded; as they are not responsible for their own household, they are less likely to be in a position to choose whether or not to establish a joint household. This tight definition is adopted in this research.

Several studies in a range of western countries have shown that there are noteworthy numbers of couples living-apart-together: Liefbroer et al. (2015) for ten European countries, Haskey (2005) and Roseneil (2006) for Great Britain, Castro-Martin et al. (2008) for Spain, Haskey & Lewis (2006) and Lodewijckx & Deboosere (2011) for Belgium, Asendorpf (2008) for Germany, Strohm et al. (2009) for the US, Reimondos et al. (2011) for Australia, Régnier-Loilier et al. (2009) for France, Otten and Te Riele (2015) for the Netherlands and Levin & Trost (1999) and Levin (2004) for Norway and Sweden. Although these studies deploy different survey questions, sample groups and denominators, they point out that approximately 10% of all adults, including those who are single, are in a LAT relationship (Duncan, Phillips, Carter, Roseneil, & Stoilova, 2014). This share is about one (Otten & Te Riele, 2015) to four (Asendorpf, 2008) percentage points higher among partnered individuals only. According to Asendorpf (2008), both percentages have increased historically. However, since 2003 the 7% of Dutch, independently living adults who are in a LAT relationship has been stable (Otten & Te Riele, 2015).

Besides providing quantitative descriptions of living-apart-together relationships, most studies have concentrated on determining who are in LAT relationships and why (Carter et al., 2015). These two questions are inextricably linked, in that the reason to live apart mostly varies with the individual's life course stage (Strohm et al., 2009). For example, for many young people, LAT is a stage in the union formation process, preceding cohabitation and/or marriage (Liefbroer et al., 2015; Strohm et al., 2009). On the other hand, older adults may be

responsible for the care-taking of their children or elderly parents with whom they live in the same household, and therefore choose not to live with their partner (Levin & Trost, 1999). Alternatively, people may LAT to avoid problems experienced in previous co-residential relationships and to maintain their independence (De Jong Gierveld, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999; Liefbroer et al., 2015; Regnier-Loilier et al., 2009). Hence, LAT is relatively common among those who have been in a cohabiting or married relationship before and those who have children (De Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Liefbroer et al., 2015). External constraints or circumstances (e.g. job locations) are another frequently mentioned reason to live apart (e.g. Levin & Trost, 1999; Liefbroer et al., 2015; Regnier-Loilier et al., 2009; Roseneil, 2006). More generally, living-apart-together can be a way to combine intimacy with a partner with the autonomy, flexibility and independence of being alone (Duncan, Carter, Phillips, Roseneil, & Stoilova, 2013; Strohm et al., 2009). Instead of a temporary stage only, LAT is therefore sometimes characterised as a more permanent end-state, characterising a new orientation towards couple relationships (Bawin-Legros & Gauthier, 2001; Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006).

In contrast to the questions on who and why, very little attention has been paid to commitment in LAT relationships. The only study with such a focus was conducted by Carter et al. (2015) in Britain. This mixed-methods study explored the experience of five elements of commitment: a life course element, sexual exclusivity, love and longevity, moral and social expectations and relationship investments. They selected participants with a broad range of reasons for living apart and uncovered an equally broad range of perceptions of commitment. The authors distinguished between those with autonomous commitment (gladly apart, high commitment levels), contingent commitment (regretfully apart, high commitment levels contingent on living together in the future), ambivalent commitment (not yet ready to live together, some commitment) and limited commitment (LAT because it requires less

commitment). They concluded that participants' stances on the importance of structural investments (e.g. shared housing) for commitment mainly determined the perception of their own commitment. Highly committed couples attached low value to shared investments, whereas those with ambivalent commitment expressed clear unwillingness to share investments and responsibilities as involved in cohabitation. This sort of ambivalent commitment was also recorded by Haskey & Lewis (2006). They conclude that commitment is an important element of LAT couples' experiences, although dependent on the motivation for LAT and thereby also on relationship stage (i.e. whether they plan to cohabit and/or marry in the future). Although extrinsic relationship investments are generally low, Carter et al. (2015) stress that other elements of commitment can be of great significance in LAT relationships. Compared to cohabitation and especially marriage, living-apart-together can even involve greater commitment because of the lack of binding, formal ties.

Meanwhile, Kamp Dush and Amato (2005) argue that relationship statuses form a continuum of commitment, with casual dating relationships on one end and marriage on the other. Logically, on this continuum LAT relationships would be positioned below cohabitation and above dating relationships. The authors explain the continuum on the basis of the future orientation of the relationship and the extent to which the relationship contributes fundamentally to a person's identity as a social role. Marriage, they assume, is the most salient basis for personal identity. Considering the contradictory theories and limited empirical evidence, commitment in LAT relationships thus remains a subject of debate.

2.2 Investment model of commitment

Commitment in partner relationships is defined by Rusbult (1980) as psychological attachment to the current partner, together with the desire to maintain this relationship in the future (long-term orientation). According to Rusbult's (1980; 2011) Investment Model of romantic associations, a person's commitment is influenced by three factors. The first is

satisfaction with the relationship, as a function of rewards, costs and the individual's comparison level. Therefore, if partners spend much enjoyable time together (i.e. receive ample rewards), while seeing few negative qualities in their partner (i.e. incur few costs) and have low expectations due to unpleasant prior relationships (i.e. have a low comparison level), they should be relatively satisfied (Rusbult, 1983). The second factor is the perceived quality of available alternatives to the relationship, for example singlehood or an alternative partner. The third factor is the size of investments in the relationship. Investments are resources that are lost or decline in value when the relationship ends, and can be either intrinsic, extrinsic or planned for the future. Intrinsic investments are devoted to the relationship directly, for example in the form of time, effort and emotions. Extrinsic investments are initially unconnected resources that have grown to be inseparable from the relationship, such as mutual friends or a house. Investments increase the costs of ending a relationship and consequently induce commitment. Thus, when relatively satisfied with, without an attractive alternative to and having invested significantly in the current relationship, one is predicted to be relatively committed. Mostly quantitative, but also qualitative, empirical evidence from numerous studies on a range of inter-personal relationships supports the validity of this theoretical framework (Rusbult et al., 2011).

Sprecher (1988), and later others with her (e.g. Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004), proposed to add social support as a fourth factor. When friends and family approve of and support a relationship, commitment can be expected to be greater (Sprecher, 1988). If this is the case, one would want to live up to the expectations of important others and would feel prohibited to end, and encouraged to continue the current relationship. A final extension to the original Investment Model is to consider not only past, but also planned investments, as suggested by Goodfriend and Agnew (2008). The potential loss of cherished plans for the future (e.g.

having children together) can motivate individuals to commit to the continuation of their relationship.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Method

To understand LATs' own perceptions of commitment and their evaluations of satisfaction, alternatives, investments and social support regarding their relationship, 22 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals in LAT relationships in May and June 2016. Partner relationships are a sensitive topic and commitment is a complex issue; one-to-one interviews allowed for the required nuance, detail and context (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Several strategies, such as attentiveness to contradictions and doubt, contributed to obtaining truthful answers. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to pinpoint and tackle issues of social desirability and reduction of cognitive dissonance in participants' answers; this has been taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

The interview guide was structured along central themes (relationship history, motivations for living apart, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support, commitment and future plans), while simultaneously allowing me as interviewer to follow the natural flow of the interview and to adapt to the circumstances and participants' answers. The average duration of the interviews was 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Dutch language and recorded on tape with the written consent of the participants. A point of theoretical saturation was achieved with the 22 interviews conducted; at that point, sufficient research material was collected to validate relationships between concepts, the major themes were fully developed, varied and integrated, and no new insights emerged from the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

3.2 Research participants

The study population is the adult partner LATs as tightly defined by Haskey (2005) and described earlier. To meet the criterion “long-term”, couples were selected who had been together for at least six months. Couples who had plans to cohabit within the next six months were excluded. The same applies to non-heterosexual couples, who are the focus of a later research project.

Participants were recruited via advertising through recruitment flyers in the Dutch and English language and personally approaching people in shops and supermarkets, via the first author’s personal network and via snowballing from several existing contacts. Except for three participants, all were resident in the Dutch province of Groningen, which was where the advertisements were spread and the personal network was largely located. There is no reason to believe LATs in this region experience commitment differently than their counterparts in different regions of the Netherlands do. More urban than rural participants were recruited; research shows that LATs are relatively likely to live in urban areas (Strohm et al., 2009). Because LATs living in rural areas might experience different normative pressures, three participants living in rural areas were purposively recruited. Purposive recruitment further allowed for the selection of a similar number of men and women and a diverse participant group in terms of age, life course stage, geographical distance between partners, relationship duration and motivation to live apart. This diversity (see Table 1) enabled us to obtain a wide variety of experiences and to also draw comparisons. None of the participants classified him- or herself as religious, and all participants were of Dutch origins.

3.3 Analysis

Verbatim, anonymised transcripts of the interviews were coded both deductively and inductively using the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical framework and supplemented by inductive codes derived

directly from the data. The inductive codes (e.g. influence of relationship history), indicate unanticipated topics and explanations and allow the data “to speak for itself” (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The codes enabled data analysis by topic and code families (e.g. investments) and by subgroup (e.g. younger or older) (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The major code families were: motivations for living-apart-together, commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support, future plans and relationship history.

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

Sex	Age (years)	Education	Rural/urban	Relationship duration (years)	Distance to partner (km)	Parental status	Relationship history
Female	20-35	Higher vocational	Urban	<5	< 5	No children	Never co-residential
Female	20-35	University	Urban	5-10	100-200	No children	Prior co-residential
Female	20-35	Higher vocational	Urban	5-10	< 5	No children	Never co-residential
Female	20-35	University	Urban	<5	< 5	No children	Never co-residential
Male	20-35	University	Urban	<5	100-200	No children	Prior co-residential
Female	20-35	University	Urban	<5	> 350	No children	Prior co-residential
Male	20-35	University	Urban	<5	> 350	No children	Prior co-residential
Male	20-35	University	Urban	5-10	> 350	No children	Prior co-residential
Male	20-35	University	Urban	<5	> 350	No children	Prior co-residential
Female	35-55	Higher vocational	Urban	<5	100-200	No children	Prior co-residential
Female	35-55	Lower education	Urban	≥10	< 5	Joint children	Never co-residential
Female	35-55	University	Urban	<5	< 5	Own children	Divorced
Female	35-55	University	Urban	<5	< 5	Own children	Divorced
Male	35-55	Higher vocational	Rural	<5	15-25	Own children	Divorced
Female	35-55	Higher vocational	Rural	5-10	100-200	Own children	Divorced
Male	35-55	Higher vocational	Urban	5-10	< 5	Own children	Divorced
Female	35-55	Higher vocational	Rural	≥10	100-200	Joint children	Prior co-residential
Female	55-70	Higher vocational	Urban	<5	15-25	Own children	Divorced
Male	55-70	Higher vocational	Urban	5-10	< 5	Own children	Divorced
Male	55-70	Higher vocational	Urban	≥10	< 5	Joint children	Prior co-residential
Male	55-70	Lower education	Urban	5-10	15-25	No children	Divorced and widowed
Female	55-70	Lower education	Urban	5-10	< 5	Own children	Prior co-residential

Notes: a prior co-residential relationship could be either with an ex or current partner

4. Results

Living-apart-together, commitment and the four determinants of commitment, namely satisfaction, alternatives, investments, and social support, are interlinked in a very complex and diverse manner. In this section, we discuss these themes and show the interlinkages between them. In doing so, we make a distinction between younger, childfree LATs (N=10) and older LATs with more relationship experience and often children from a previous relationship (N=12); these two groups surfaced from the data very clearly. This distinction is similar to the sub-groups of LATs distinguished by Régnier-Loilier et al. (2009), which are based mostly on age and the presence of children of a prior union in the household. No explicit distinction is made between males and females in reporting the results, because no clear gender differences arose that were independent of other factors such as relationship history or motivation for LAT.

4.1 Motivations for living-apart-together

For all younger and childfree participants, LAT was a temporary stage in their union formation process; in the future, they wanted to cohabit. About half of them felt not ready to cohabit, with this particular partner because of some uncertainty about the relationship, and/or more generally in this phase of their life in which they greatly valued time and space alone. The other half felt restrained from cohabiting by the distance between the locations of their and their partner's work as external circumstance. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that even then LAT is a choice, and that their choice was to currently prioritise their career over living together. In Ilse's (20-35) case, it was not her, but her partner's choice to work travelling in this phase of his life.

Those who were older and had a more complex relationship history, mostly involving divorce and children, were motivated to live apart by a mix of reasons reflecting their

relationship history, related to independence, protecting oneself from potential harm and child-related external circumstances. Many highly valued their regained freedom and independence after a long and often married former relationship. They now wanted to make their own, independent choices regarding finances, housing decorations, eating and sleeping, without obligations or responsibilities towards a partner. Others admitted that they were afraid to commit and trust again after their separation or divorce, and did not want to experience that pain all over. LAT, by allowing them to maintain their own, safe place, was for some a conscious strategy to reduce the consequences of a potential break-up. Whereas for the participants in the study by Carter et al. (2015), LAT was seldom a strategy to avoid commitment, it was in fact so for several of this study's participants. Yet another frequently mentioned motivation was external, namely related to children from a past relationship. They wanted to offer their children a safe, stable haven after one or multiple separations and moves, to raise their children without the interference of a new partner, to not burden their new partner with their pubertal children, or their children with a new partner. For some participants who had been in a LAT relationship with their current partner for many years already and also raised children together while living apart, personality and differing cleaning or decorating preferences motivated their choice to permanently live apart.

In line with the findings about LAT by Funk & Kobayashi (2014), living apart thus seemed to be motivated in particular by "the self": personal independence, career development and self-protection. Even for most of those who initially indicated an external circumstance as reason to live apart, it later appeared that such self-motivations played an important additional role.

4.2 Commitment

Participants were asked a separate question about both elements of commitment: their emotional attachment and their desire to maintain the relationship in the future. Noticeably, all

younger participants, including those who gladly lived apart because they were not ready to cohabit, expressed great emotional attachment to their partner. Although essentially all these younger participants expressed a desire to continue the relationship in the future as well, only two of them said without hesitation that this was very important for them. Rather, most of them expressed some form of uncertainty or openness about this long-term orientation component of commitment. They did not want to fixate on the future of their relationship or on wanting to stay forever, because they were aware that things do not always go the way you plan them to go in the future, referring also to the high divorce rate. Alternatively, they had a rather open stance towards the future. The following quote from Maggie (20-35) represents many of the similar thoughts held by other young participants:

If feelings change, either his or mine, and the relationship simply no longer works, then I won't be the person to hang on to that, to be flogging a dead horse, so to speak. When it's done, it's done, as far as I'm concerned.

They believe that a relationship would not be right if it would require great effort to make things work. In that sense, it appears that personal satisfaction and love are indeed central in their relationships, as Giddens (1991) suggested with his description of “pure relationships”, and not the notion of a life-long partnership for good and bad. The following citation exemplifies this:

I am actually only committed to what feels right for me. [...] If it would be that something that feels right for me and feels right for him means that we are not together, then that is where my commitment lies, really. So in that sense I am actually not committed to the relationship. Because for me that's not something, that's an empty shell so to say. If you start working a relationship, yeah, what is it that you are working on? (Hester, 20-35)

Among the older participants, there was more diversity in commitment experiences. Again, it is largely the way in which people were affected by their relationship history and life experience that explains this diversity. A minority of those who felt affected by their relationship history were able to let go of their reserves and fear of commitment after a few years in their new relationship, and were in fact very emotionally attached to their partner (“more than I would want to admit”, Hilde, 35-55) and also oriented towards the future of their relationship (“I completely believe in it”, Bert, 35-55). However, for the majority, relationship history still expressed itself in the form of limited commitment and/or hesitation to further develop a relationship. For example, after several failed relationships, Henk (55-70) simply lacked the energy to go all-in again in his current relationship. His limited emotional attachment (separation would have a “light impact, but not a blast”) can thus be attributed to his relationship experience. For many others, fear of commitment and getting hurt again negatively influenced both their emotional attachment and long-term orientation. Among them, a few consciously and successfully avoided growing too attached to their partner, for example by not planning too far ahead in the future and thereby reducing the potential pain of (another) separation. Most others found themselves affected by their relationship history without intending to, particularly in their long-term orientation. For example, although Mark (55-70) felt emotionally attached, he always kept a “what if the relationship ends tomorrow” scenario in mind and had a clear “we’ll see what it becomes” and “go with the flow” attitude. Similarly, Astrid (35-55) could never believe in “forever” again and was therefore less oriented towards the future of her relationship:

With my ex-husband, when I married, I thought, with him I will stay forever. But that idea is now in rags for good. [...] This is now forever a matter of “we’ll see”.

Not only relationship experience, but also age and broader life experience reduced older LATs’ long-term orientations. For example, Henk (55-70) had learnt to take life as it comes:

I always find it so strange when people say, "I hope I will stay with you forever". [...] I don't have that desire. [...] You don't know how things will go. Life is full of surprises and I like surprises.

Several other older participants attributed it to their age that they lived by the day and did not look too far in the future:

Look, we are of course no longer the youngest, you know. We don't look ahead that far anymore. We are more like, let's just enjoy every day. [...] We'll see again tomorrow. (Bob, 55-70)

A somewhat surprising finding is that whereas several older participants' choice for LAT was based on fear of commitment, for two others the choice for LAT was in fact based on high commitment. Precisely because Hanna (35-55) and Astrid (35-55) wanted their relationship to continue in the future, they chose to live separately from their partner, believing that cohabiting would not be beneficial to their relationship and might result in a break-up.

The categorisation by Carter et al. (2015) into those with autonomous commitment (gladly apart, high commitment levels), contingent commitment (regretfully apart, high commitment levels contingent on living together in the future), ambivalent commitment (not yet ready to live together, some commitment) and limited commitment (LAT because it requires less commitment) largely covers the range of experiences discovered in this study as well. However, a nuance we would like to make is that among those regretfully living apart were also LATs with a somewhat open or uncertain stance about the future of their relationship. Furthermore, some of those who were not ready to cohabit yet were nevertheless highly, not ambivalently, committed.

Carter et al. (2015) conclude that commitment is an important element of LAT couples' experiences, although dependent on the motivation for LAT and thereby also on relationship stage (i.e. whether they plan to cohabit and/or marry in the future). Besides

relationship stage, it seems that commitment also strongly depends on life experience and relationship history.

4.3 Satisfaction

From here on, unless mentioned otherwise, we refer to general commitment as a combination of both components (emotional attachment and long-term orientation) to describe participants' stories about the influence of the four determinants. The first theoretical determinant of commitment, relationship satisfaction, was experienced by participants to be very important. The rewarding aspects of a relationship and positive qualities of a partner were said to increase commitment to that partner. For example, Mark (55-70) felt more committed for the following reason:

We have wonderful sex, so I would really miss that.

Conversely, mostly for younger participants, feelings of commitment were diminished by relationship costs, such as negative partner qualities or potential future sacrifices related to dreams that could not be realised with the current partner. However, for the older participants, who had more relationship experience and history, these costs generally left their feelings of commitment unaffected; they tended to no longer believe in the perfect relationship, and to accept their partners as they were.

I used to have quite some demands, but in my marriage I have learnt to set those demands aside and simply adjust; that works best. (Bob, 55-70)

At the same time, for many participants, negative partner qualities contributed to the choice to live apart. This contribution was often indirect via commitment and (un)certainly about the relationship, but for others independent of that. Again especially for those older LATs who had learnt to accept their partners as they were, certain personality traits made their partners difficult to live with and thus in part motivated their choice to live apart, independent of

commitment. This was also the case for Hanna (35-55), who was very committed despite her partner's difficult qualities.

His character very much makes him want to have control himself, so something like "shall I make your sandwich" is already too much. That seems to me pretty difficult if you live together.

In contrast, one younger participant experienced that the current perils with his partner made him uncertain about the future of his relationship, without affecting his emotional attachment or choice to live apart, because he did not perceive cohabitation as an irreversible step.

An additional linkage is in opposite direction, namely the influence of LAT on relationship satisfaction. Particularly for those whose partners regretfully lived away a long distance, several negative aspects of that situation reduced their relationship satisfaction. Also some with a partner closer by acknowledged the higher effort involved in maintaining a relationship when living-apart-together rather than cohabiting. On the other hand, others argued as follows that LAT increased their relationship satisfaction:

Because you don't see each other every day, it is nice every time that you do. (Hilde, 35-55)

Hence, some participants believed that their satisfaction would remain higher when living separately, and were even worried that their relationship might not survive cohabitation.

The comparison level created by previous relationships is an element that is unique to the Investment Model (Agnew, 2009) and was indeed of great influence for some. Particularly those with a clearly low comparison level frequently compared elements in their current relationship for the better with a past relationship. This positively influenced their current relationship satisfaction, like it did for Willem (20-35):

They [ex and current girlfriend] are really complete opposites in many regards. [...]
There are very many things of which I now retrospectively think, yes that can be much easier, so to say. I only realised that when I got together with my current girlfriend.

4.4 Alternatives

Most participants did not perceive an attractive alternative to their current relationship, which is the second determinant of commitment in the Investment Model. Two older participants linked this to their age, due to which they deemed it less appropriate or realistic to consider alternatives. Several, also mostly older, participants stated that this increased their feelings of commitment to their current partner. Other participants, however, denied that the lack of an attractive alternative contributed to their commitment, for one or both of the following reasons. Firstly, although the perceived quality of alternatives was not high, alternatives were often perceived as neutral: many participants felt confident that they could find an alternative partner if needed, or had a neutral stance towards singlehood. Secondly and most importantly, they believed that feelings of partner commitment are unrelated to perceptions of alternatives. Rather, commitment is enhanced by satisfaction, and satisfaction influences perceptions of alternatives. Saskia (55-70) defended this as follows:

Almost from a negative mechanism: there is no alternative, well then I find him nice.
No, it's not like that. [...] We are good together, and so there is no alternative feeling.
It's the other way around! I think that is different, because otherwise I would do injustice to my relationship. [...] Look, at the moment that you're not good in a relationship, you look at other men. I turn it around.

Thus, when satisfied, one does not even perceive the available alternatives. Conversely, when experiencing elements of dissatisfaction, one can feel attracted towards alternatives. This logic was confirmed both by younger and older, satisfied and somewhat unsatisfied participants. This reasoning is in line with that of Levinger (1983, cited by Levinger 1999, p.

45), who says that “Perceiving acceptable alternatives to one’s primary relationship depends in large part on one’s exploration of such alternatives. In turn, the effort put into such an exploration is generally more contingent on perceiving weaknesses in one’s own primary attractions than on external, structural influences.”

While many participants thus denied any contribution of the quality of alternatives to their commitment, others said to consciously not allow a lack of alternatives to play a role. For example, Celine (35-55) felt pressure to fulfil her desire to have children soon, because of her age. Despite this, when she considered breaking up in the past because of a negative partner quality, she consciously refused to allow a lack of alternatives influence her decision. Similar considerations had also crossed the mind of a younger participant:

I have thought about it. You know, I’m almost 28, jeez if it ends now I have to start all over again. [...] But that can definitely not play a role and it will not either. (Erik, 20-35)

The LAT element of individuals’ relationships not only affects satisfaction, it can also affect the perception of alternatives. For instance, Ilse’s (20-35) partner has been travelling since they met, and when he is gone for long, she feels less connected to him and more open to alternatives. Astrid (35-55) experienced the same feeling in the beginning of her relationship, when she was less comfortable being on her own:

One of my ideas about such a relationship [LAT] was that you had to see each other often, because otherwise I do not feel the connection anymore. [...] And when I did not see him for two weeks, [...] then by the end of that second week, I was just arguing with him in my mind, or I felt like, if I meet someone else now I could just as well continue with that, as if the whole relationship was no longer there or something.

However, Astrid said that her emotional attachment was unrelated to her perception of alternatives, and was only influenced by her feelings about him, so in that sense again linking it back to satisfaction.

As an exception, three participants perceived high-quality alternatives independently of their relationship satisfaction. For them, singlehood or alternative partners could offer benefits (e.g. freedom to travel, excitement of new love) that a steady relationship could not. One of them admitted that this perception of a high-quality alternative played a minor role in the choice to live apart, and another that it reduced commitment to maintaining the relationship in the future.

4.5 Investments

Judging from participants' stories, the third determinant, investments, seems to be very relevant for understanding commitment in LAT relationships. The younger participants with a partner at close distance spent a large part of their week with their partner, and thus invested much time in their relationship. They had emotionally invested in their relationship, and explained this largely on the basis that they could share anything with their partner. Like Maggie (20-35) said:

[I tell him] *When something is up, if I am happy about something, but also when something is bothering me terribly.*

Their emotional investment increases their feelings of commitment. Oppositely, commitment can also lead to greater intrinsic investment, as the following citation clarifies:

It feels like a waste to let a relationship fall apart like that, because we did not put in enough effort. (Maaike, 20-35)

Because Maaïke was committed to maintaining her relationship, she was willing to invest more in order not to let past investments go to waste.

Those with a long-distance relationship in addition emphasised the time, effort and money invested because of the travelling involved. On the other hand, the long distance can negatively affect emotional investments. Matthijs (20-35) experienced this effect regretfully:

I find it difficult to empathise with what happens with my girlfriend at work or in her city, because we are at such a distance. So I'm less emotionally involved because a way for us to really, to be very involved, is cuddling.

Alternatively, René (20-35) is consciously somewhat reserved in his emotional investments because of the long-distance aspect of his relationship, to limit the pain when parting again.

I do invest emotionally, and yet I also do somewhat protect myself, [...] because I always know there will be a long period again in which you do not see each other.

Although intrinsic investments (e.g. emotions, time, effort) were generally high, the size of non-intrinsic investments was limited for most LATs. Those who did have joint resources (often of a social and sometimes material nature) or future planned investments (e.g. children) that would be lost in case of separation, said that these did not add to their commitment. Similar to alternatives, some participants very consciously did not want to experience commitment for such investment reasons (e.g. financial dependence). However, Willem (20-35) felt that the total enrichment his relationship offers him, which is bigger than his partner alone, does contribute to his commitment:

She is a sort of hub to which all sorts of important things to me are now connected. And if I break that connection with her, everything is lost.

For the majority of older participants, the influence of relationship history was clearly reflected in the limited size of investments in their relationship. The pain caused by previous separation(s) has created some fear of commitment and sense of realism and awareness of a potential break-up scenario, like for Astrid (35-55):

I realise that that is always on my mind, the fact that it has gone wrong.

For that reason, she tries to limit the material consequences of separation;

I would want to make agreements on what to do with it [joint purchases] in case it does go wrong or something. (Astrid, 35-55)

For several other older participants, living apart was to some degree motivated by the desire to avoid extrinsic investments and ties, or to keep financial control, for example after a financially costly divorce. Bert's story (Box 1) exemplifies discomfort to invest too greatly in a relationship, originating from fear of commitment.

Box 1. Influence of relationship history on the size of investments in a relationship

Bert is in his early 50s and has experienced two painful separations. This experience has made him afraid to let his new partner come close: "I was again happy with a really great woman, but at the same time knew that it can hurt really badly if it goes wrong." His partner had wanted to cohabit, whereas he preferred to maintain the safe territory that he had created for himself and his children after his second failed co-residential relationship. After several years together, he eventually agreed to her buying the house right next to his own. However, it was one step too much for him when she additionally proposed to remove the fence that separates their gardens: "Then I suddenly get a little anxious. [...] I had something like, oh that fence you know, I was secretly already reinforcing it!" He realises that his desire to keep some distance, also materially, is grounded in his relationship history: "You get damaged a

little bit [by a break-up]. Yes that sounds big, but in a relationship where all that in fact got very painful and difficult, like 'yes but I have also painted part of this house!', that kind of arguments. Well, you know, I will not let anyone help with the painting anymore, because apparently that means that suddenly 10% of that house is yours too, or something. [...] Yes, there is a bit of fear there." Despite this, he has increasingly let go of these concerns and has now emotionally invested highly, and is more generally highly committed to his partner.

By limiting multiple forms of investments, several older participants purposively tried to limit their commitment, both the emotional attachment to their partner and the importance of the future continuation of their relationship. In so doing, they aimed to reduce the consequences of a potential future separation. Living apart was for them one way of shaping this. Astrid (35-55) explained this by drawing a comparison with cohabitation:

I think that if you move in together, you get used to that of course, having someone around. I really do not want to experience that once more, losing someone again.

In relation to this, Robert (35-55) said with relief about his own LAT situation:

If this would stop, she could just pick up her life again and so could I.

Next to living apart, some older LATs purposively restrained themselves from investing in other ways. For example, Robert (35-55) consciously avoided planning future investments, because he found that the pain caused by separation is often in the disappointment that future plans will no longer come to fruition. He further did not allow himself to invest too much intrinsically again.

There is also an element of self-protection there. You know, you have already had three times that it didn't work. That I put in a lot of effort and time, sacrificed things for the other. That never again. (Robert, 35-55)

Also by avoiding minor extrinsic investments, like Mark (55-70) does, the consequences of separation were reduced:

You know, I don't want to put my [tv] remote there [at her place] and that if we break up that I then have to... Look, those things, I don't want that.

Many older LATs thus felt uncomfortable in one way or other to invest in their relationship and become committed for that reason. However, Saskia (55-70), similar to her stance on alternatives, denied the role played by investments in her commitment and instead stressed that her partner is worth to invest in, thereby linking it back to satisfaction. Likewise, part of Henk's (55-70) limited intrinsic investments can be attributed to an element of dissatisfaction. Namely, he cannot always talk very well with his partner, being on somewhat different levels intellectually. In addition, although his relationship experience has not made him afraid to commit, it has made him more laconic in his current relationship.

That all stays a bit superficial. In part because I have slightly had it, you could say, with all those relationships. [...] So if you then do start a relationship again, it is perhaps with a little less energy and less conviction. That's possible. Yes, you then no longer have that passion you had at young age, expecting golden mountains, but you perhaps sobered up by things that have happened. (Henk, 55-70)

The minority of older participants who did not feel held back by their relationship experience indicated to have emotionally invested and felt that this contributed to their commitment, although mostly to their emotional attachment, not to the importance of the future continuation of their relationship.

4.6 Social support

Most participants said that their family and friends approved of or at least accepted their partner. However, they generally perceived the influence of this social support, the fourth

determinant, to be limited. Many said that approval was reassuring and/or convenient, for example for family gatherings. However, they generally believed that if their family and friends had disapproved of their partner, this would have not affected their relationship or commitment. Yet, the effect of such an alternative scenario of disapproval may have been difficult to imagine. Older participants in particular said that the influence of social support was limited:

When you're younger, then all that matters, but when you're older, it really does not make a difference. (Coby 55-70)

The fact that some older participants were not even aware of the opinion of family and friends reflects this. On the other hand, others were very well aware that their children from a previous relationship were not supportive of their current partner. Although this did not cause doubt about their partner choice or diminish commitment to their partner, it was an extra reason to not live together with both their partner and children.

More than older participants, younger participants expressed that support from friends and family was somewhat important and influential. Nevertheless, only two of them attached high value to this and said that it made them feel more committed to their partner. Erik (20-35) explained this as follows:

If they would disapprove I might think: hmm, what am I missing? But the fact that they think, "well, this one is really nice!", that reinforces my feeling.

4.7 Future plans

Participants' open-mindedness and/or uncertainty about the longer term of their relationship are also reflected in their ideas about the future. Marriage was seldom part of their future plans. All younger LATs expressed an intention to cohabit in the future, in several cases related to their desire to have children, for which they saw cohabitation as a necessary

preceding step. However, only three younger participants said that they would possibly marry in the future.

Of the older participants, about half were certain that they wanted to remain living apart in the future. Others could see themselves cohabiting someday, although they were uncertain when exactly. Of these, several expressed a desire to maintain some element of LAT and in some way or another, or keep their own place, even when living together. They called this their “escape option” or “back-up plan”. In this desire for an “escape option”, the avoidance of extrinsic investments is again revealed.

She [partner] then makes those plans of “later when we live together”, and then she knows that in my mind the word ‘Never!’ immediately pops up. [...] I would not choose to give up those things so quickly anymore. Or give up, I do leave room for, you know, there has to be an escape. So if my children have left home in four years, then I will keep my little house. And then it might just be that I spend whole weeks at hers, but that little house remains for a while. (Robert, 35-55]

Marriage was also not included in the future plans of the older participants. Only Hanna (35-55) considered marrying, desiring to counterbalance what had become a non-romantic image of love by time and experience.

5. Conclusion

To better understand the implications and meanings of living-apart-together as a modern partner relationship arrangement, this paper has explored commitment and its underlying determinants in LAT relationships, using an extended version of the Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult et al., 2011; Sprecher, 1988). This theoretical framework has driven the exploration of the way LATs evaluate their *satisfaction* with, *alternatives* to, *investments* in and *social support* for their relationship. In addition, the

interlinkages between these evaluations, LATs' commitment, choice to live apart and plans for the future were considered.

The results show that motivations to live apart mostly revolve around personal independence, career development and self-protection, or as Funk and Kobayashi (2014, p.7) say, "living apart for the self". Even when external circumstances motivate LAT in the first place, such self-motivations often play an important additional role. It therefore seems appropriate to regard LAT as a more recent display of the Second Demographic Transition (Latten & Mulder, 2014; Lesthaeghe, 2010), which is described as being characterised by an increasing emphasis on individual autonomy and self-fulfilment (Lesthaeghe, 2010).

Although experiences of commitment were diverse, most LATs in this study were emotionally highly attached to their partner, which could largely be attributed to their feelings of being satisfied with and having emotionally invested in their relationship. However, participants' commitment to maintaining their relationship in the future was less strong and clear-cut. Their stance on this was relatively open, emphasising the large margin of uncertainty when it comes to the future and the central importance of relationship quality and satisfaction above all. The notion of a life-long partnership was generally not valued very highly. Older participants had unfortunately been taught differently by their relationship experience, and younger participants were only interested in a life-long partnership on the condition that that partnership remained satisfying for life. In that sense, Jamieson et al. (2002, p. 356) may be right to speak of a reduced "willingness to create and honour life-long partnerships", although we would suggest phrasing it as a reduced *belief* and *interest* in life-long partnerships in the case of LATs. These experiences of commitment seem to be well captured by Giddens' (1991) notion of "pure relationships", in which autonomy and emotional commitment are centralised, and which are entered and maintained purely for the sake of love and personal satisfaction.

Of the four theoretical determinants shaping commitment experiences, relationship satisfaction seems to be the central determinant for individuals in LAT relationships, together with emotional investments. Not only was satisfaction described as directly contributing to commitment, it also influenced perceptions of alternatives and the extent of LATs' investments in their relationship. Extrinsic investments, social support and quality of alternatives were generally perceived to play no or only a minor influential role. However, this could possibly be explained in part on the basis of social desirability and/or reduction of cognitive dissonance. Only several older LATs acknowledged the contributory role played by extrinsic investments on commitment, by avoiding it for that reason.

Besides these four theoretical determinants, former relationship experiences and more generally life experience have arisen from the interviews as central factors for understanding commitment, the choice for LAT, future plans and the way satisfaction, alternatives, investments and social support were experienced by LATs. Research by De Jong Gierveld (2002), too, indicates the strong influence of relationship history on the choice of living arrangement with a (new) partner. However, she only described autonomy and independence as motivations for LAT for divorcees, not fear of commitment and getting hurt.

Younger LATs' more idealistic views on relationships were still intact, and cohabitation and children were clearly part of their vision of the future, even though marriage mostly was not. Those who were older and more experienced in life and love tended to have a less idealistic and more practical conception of relationships, sometimes to their own regret. They lived apart to avoid downsides of married life and enjoy their regained freedom and independence, and/or to limit the consequences of a potential separation, which, they had learnt, is unfortunately a realistic scenario. For that reason, they did not want to marry again, and they saw LAT as an arrangement for the unknown or very long term. Either intentionally or not, they found themselves less oriented towards the future of their relationship. They had

learnt to be accepting of their partner's negative personality traits, saw few attractive alternatives at their age, frequently avoided or lacked the energy to invest much in their relationship, and cared less about social approval. "Laconicism" (casualness or indifference) is a term that frequently came forward. LAT was a strategy to avoid commitment for several older participants who feared to commit again after one or several painful break-ups.

Overall, the interlinkages between the key concepts of this study, that is LAT, commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support and future plans, were even more present and multi-directional than one would expect given Rusbult's Investment Model and the literature. For example, satisfaction level influenced commitment and the choice for LAT. In the meantime, LAT also influenced satisfaction and was for some a strategy to maintain a relationship whereas for others it was a strategy precisely to limit commitment. Intrinsic investments were perceived to contribute to commitment, whereas extrinsic investments generally were not. However, limited commitment induced the avoidance of extrinsic investments, and in that way also the choice for LAT, while investments were also sometimes avoided to prevent too great commitment. In general, commitment has shown to be a very relevant concept in discussions about LAT, and particularly the determinants satisfaction and investments greatly help to understand the meaning of and motivations for LAT.

For future studies, we recommend consistently enquiring about both components of commitment separately. In most questions, participants were asked to refer to general commitment as one concept, having been informed about the two components. Our impression was that participants found it easier and possibly also more appropriate to discuss the two components separately. Future studies could further try to pinpoint and tackle socially desirable answers and cognitive dissonance between attitudes and behaviour regarding, for

example, the role played by a lack of attractive alternatives. A mixed-methods design may be suitable to achieve this.

Supplementary reflections

In this supplement to my draft paper, I provide additional reflections about important choices made during the process of this research, for example regarding the topic, journal, theory and method, and a discussion of alternatives to several of those choices. In addition, literature and results excluded from the draft paper are discussed in this supplement, as well as my conceptual model, ethical issues and reflections on data quality and the research process.

1. Topic and journal

My interest for the topic of commitment in LAT relationships has arisen during a previous research project in which I have looked into differences between two-sex and same-sex couples in their types of relationships, and discovered that LAT was relatively common among same-sex couples (Van der Wiel, Mulder, & Krapf, 2015). This finding was theoretically predicted and explained on the basis of the Investment Model's (Rusbult, 1980) determinants of commitment, but within the limits of that project, I was not able to study the causes underlying this finding in depth. For this reason, I plan to study commitment experienced by same-sex LAT couples in a future project, using the same research design as applied in this paper. The two-sex LAT couples I have studied now will then form the comparison group. With knowledge of both two-sex and same-sex LATs' commitment experiences, I can explain in more detail why LAT is an attractive arrangement for same-sex couples, and in what way their choice to live apart-together and their experience of commitment is shaped differently from two-sex couples.

To understand more about the choice for living apart and the societal meaning of LAT relationships, I believe it is essential to understand how LATs experience partner

commitment. Such insight contributes to the debate about the individualization of society and ‘pure relationships’ (Giddens, 1992). Kamp Dush & Amato (2005) speak of a continuum of commitment, on which LAT relationships would logically be placed somewhere between dating and cohabitation; this suggests relatively low commitment when living-apart-together. On the other hand, Carter et al. (2015) show that commitment is in fact an important element in LATs’ experiences, though much stronger for some than for others. Having worked with the Investment Model before, and being aware of its empirical validity, I aimed to uncover how the determinants specified by this model underlie LATs’ experiences of commitment.

This paper will be submitted to *Demographic Research*: a peer-reviewed, open-access journal of population sciences. This journal frequently publishes papers on modern partner relationship arrangements and on the diversification of family and romantic life (e.g. unmarried cohabitation, LAT, divorce, remarriage). Also, the largest number of my references is published in this journal, including certain key references. *Demographic Research* has further shown to acknowledge the value of qualitative research methods. Considering that my results have wider implications than just for the Netherlands, an international journal such as *Demographic Research* can reach a wide readership.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Chosen and alternative theoretical frameworks

The theory that has guided my understanding of the underlying determinants of commitment is Rusbult’s Investment Model (1980; 1983). This model is rooted in interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), from which Rusbult derived the factors of satisfaction and alternatives. Rusbult extended this theory with the investment size concept as a stabilising factor in relationships, which therefore contributes to dependence and commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003). Rusbult et al. (1998) argued that commitment arises as a consequence and as a

subjective experience of dependence, where dependence refers to reliance on the relationship for attaining desired outcomes.

Since the development of the Investment Model in the 1980s, others have proposed further extensions of this model. Firstly, Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) argue that the investment concept should be extended to include cherished plans for the future of the relationship. Secondly, several researchers (e.g. Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Sprecher, 1988) have proposed to consider an individual's social networks' (dis)approval of the relationship. The Bases of Relational Commitment (BORC) model was developed partly in response to these proposed extensions to the Investment Model, which it has incorporated. However, they have further altered the model in such a way as to predict relative commitment to a specific relationship type (e.g. friends, lovers, spouses) and thereby to predict continuity or change within a relationship (e.g. development from a friendship to lovers versus remaining friends). They describe three predictors of this relative commitment, the first of which they call obtained and alternative satisfaction levels. This is composed of obtained outcomes measured against one's comparison level, outcomes perceived as obtainable in a different relationship type with the same partner, and anticipated outcomes in the same relationship type with a different partner. The second predictor is valued linkages, which includes both past investments and future plans that one would likely and regrettably lose in case of separation. The third factor is subjective norms regarding the relationship type that one believes is most supported by important others.

Although the BORC model cleverly incorporates additional extensions to the original Investment Model, it is not applicable to this research, because of its specific target of commitment. Namely, this research focuses on commitment to one's current partner in general, not on commitment to the current type of relationship with that partner (in this case

LAT), or on shifts between relationship types with that same partner (e.g. from LAT to cohabiting), as the BORC model targets.

Alternative theories on relationship commitment that have been developed more independently from above-mentioned models are Levinger's Cohesiveness Theory and Johnson's tripartite typology of commitment (reviewed by Agnew, 2009). A common line of thought in most commitment frameworks is that "commitment can be seen as the degree to which attracting powers overwhelm repelling forces" (Le & Agnew, 2003, p. 37). In other words, most frameworks incorporate factors that create a desire to stay with a partner, and that prevent a person from leaving that partner (Agnew, 2009).

This common line of thought is also clearly reflected in Levinger's (1999) Cohesiveness Theory, which has four components: present attractions, alternative attractions, present barriers and alternative barriers. Present attractions (e.g. love) help sustain a person's current relationship, whereas alternative attractions (e.g. an appealing colleague) pull one away from that relationship. Present barriers (e.g. feelings of obligation, divorce laws, money invested) constrain a person from leaving the current relationship, whereas alternative barriers prevent a person from leaving an alternative relationship (e.g. family ties or a work relationship) and can thus negatively impact commitment to the current relationship. In Cohesiveness Theory, the role of subjective norms is mentioned as a present barrier derived from pressure by friends and relatives for a couple to stay together. Levinger appears not to acknowledge that the approval or disapproval from friends and family, apart from any explicit pressures from their side, can affect commitment by confirming or repudiating one's own feelings. The theory also does not accommodate for the influence of future plans for the relationship, as proposed by Goodfriend & Agnew (2008). Levinger (1999) describes private, public, internal, external and irretrievable investment barriers, but not future plans as a present

barrier. Furthermore, his theory does not consider the role played by a comparison level created by past relationship experiences, which influences attraction or satisfaction.

The tripartite typology of commitment developed by Johnson et al. (1999) is unique in distinguishing three types of commitment: personal commitment (*want* to remain in a relationship), moral commitment (*ought* to remain) and structural commitment (*have* to remain). These types of commitment are said to be influenced by different factors. Personal commitment is supposed to be a function of attraction to the partner, attraction to the relationship and importance of the relationship for one's identity. Moral commitment is said to be a function of moral obligation towards a relationship type (e.g. not to divorce a spouse), personal moral obligation towards a person, and the experienced need to be consistent in general values and beliefs. Structural commitment, in a sense of experiencing no other choice than to continue the relationship, becomes important when personal commitment and moral commitment are relatively low. It is theoretically grounded in available alternatives, social pressure, irretrievable investments and difficulty involved in ending the relationship. I agree with Levinger's (1999) critique on Johnson's typology that irretrievable investments and unavailable alternatives do not seem rightly arranged under *structural* commitment. For example, invested emotions and time which cannot be retrieved and the perception of available alternatives are not stable, objective constraints, as the term "structural" suggests. Further, similar to Cohesiveness Theory, the role attributed to important others is limited to pressurising a couple to stay in the relationship, and a comparison level created by past experiences is excluded.

Rusbult's Investment Model is one of many two-partite models, which does not distinguish feelings of moral commitment. Rather, the Investment Model's commitment component of a long-term orientation, wanting to continue the relationship in the future, covers both "want to", "ought to" and "have to" elements. The second commitment

component, which is emotional and psychological attachment, can be said to represent personal commitment (*want* to remain). However, emotional attachment reflects more than *wanting* to remain in the relationship; attachment can be independent from a long-term orientation. My result that it is in fact mostly the attachment component which is strong among LATs, whereas their long-term orientation is less clear-cut, in a way confirms the unique element of attachment in commitment. In other words, although Johnson's moral type of commitment is not clearly represented in the Investment Model, Johnson's typology does not accommodate for an attachment component of commitment independent of intentions to continue the relationship. This attachment component actually appeared most salient in LAT relationships. Besides, moral commitment was found not to contribute significantly to predicting "global commitment", as Johnson et al. (1999) coin Rusbult's operationalisation of commitment.

Rusbult's Investment Model is widely acknowledged as a valid conceptualisation of commitment and its determinants, and as a tool of operationalisation. It is one of few theories that have explicated how to apply the model in practice, and how to operationalise the different determinants. Both quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence from numerous studies on a range of inter-personal relationships supports the validity of this framework (see Rusbult et al., 2011 for an overview of these studies). Satisfaction level, quality of alternatives and investment size have been shown to uniquely and significantly contribute to predicting commitment (Rusbult et al., 2011). A meta-analysis by Le & Agnew (2003), summarising the Investment Model's performance in 52 quantitative empirical tests, has shown that the three determinants are all highly correlated with commitment, and together account for 61% of variance in commitment.

Because the Investment Model has so widely proven to be an empirically valid model, whereas fewer evidence exists for the validity of Cohesiveness Theory and Johnson's

tripartite typology, I have chosen to ground my explanations of commitment in the factors provided by this theory. As subjective norms (Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004) and future plans (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008) have been shown to have additional predictive value for relationship commitment, above and beyond satisfaction, alternatives and (past) investments, and because they appear to be the two most acknowledged extensions (Agnew, Arriaga, & Wilson, 2008; Rusbult et al., 2011), I have decided to incorporate these into the original Investment Model. The other points of critique concerning the alternative frameworks discussed above naturally also play a role in my decision to employ the Investment Model. Besides, all these frameworks share their central line of thought, namely that of repelling and attracting forces (Le & Agnew, 2003). Hence, differences between the theories are not critical and empirical findings of the different theories are comparably supportive (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010).

2.2 Conceptual model and expectations

Further explanation of the Investment Model is provided in the following paragraph, on the basis of a conceptual model (Figure 1) and in the form of *expected* outcomes of this study. In a simplified manner, this Figure visualises my logic of reasoning in explaining commitment levels and linking those to motivations to live apart and plans for the future. These elements are interlinked in a complex, multi-directional manner.

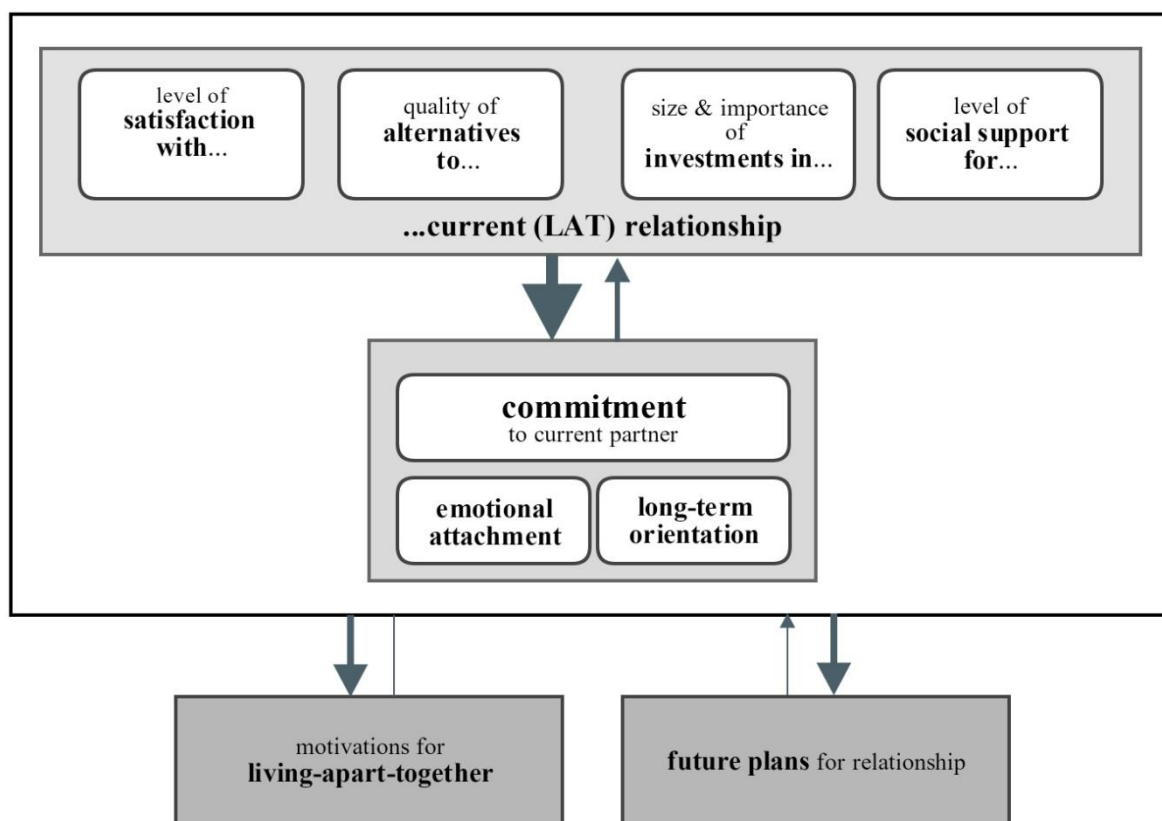


Figure 1. Conceptual model visualising the extended Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1980) and the interlinkage with motivations to live apart-together and plans for the future of the relationship.

The upper part of the diagram visualises how the sum of the effects of satisfaction, alternatives, investments and social support influence people’s level of commitment to their partner. Diversity in how LATs perceive these four determining factors results in, and explains, a range of experiences of commitment amongst LAT couples, in line with the findings of Carter et al. (2015).

According to the Investment Model, those who express limited commitment to their partner perceive one or more of the four determining factors as sub-optimal. That is, these LATs may not be fully satisfied with their relationship, either because they receive few rewards, incur significant costs or have a high comparison level. Furthermore, they may believe they have attractive alternatives to their relationship. This could mean they would enjoy being single, have many friends and family with whom they wish to spend more time, are drawn towards an alternative partner and/or feel confident about their position in the

partner market. Alternatively, their social environment may not be fully supportive of their relationship. For example, parents may disapprove of their partner, causing hesitation to commit. At the same time, their disapproval can influence relationship satisfaction on the costs side. For others, children from a previous union might be unsupportive of their parent engaging with a new partner. Regarding the factor investment size, in most LAT relationships, regardless of the level of commitment, the number and importance of extrinsic investments made is limited due to the nature of the living arrangement (i.e. no reason to buy a house together or to have a joint bank account). An additional way of reasoning that may apply to those with limited commitment is that a couple may live apart precisely because they wish to avoid investing in their relationship (i.e. not willing to share financial resources or the risk of a mortgage). On the other hand, intrinsic investments such as time and effort can in fact be relatively high in LAT relationships, because one has to plan and make time for seeing each other when not living together. Similarly, LATs may have many investments planned for the future of the relationship (e.g. cohabiting, having children) that they hope to see come to fruition.

Conversely, the Investment Model predicts that those who express great commitment to their partner perceive all or most of the four determining factors as optimal. That is, they feel very satisfied with, perceive they are without an attractive alternative to, have invested significantly in and receive social support for their current relationship. It is relatively unlikely for LAT couples to be trapped in and therefore be committed to an unsatisfying relationship due to high extrinsic investments.

The four determinants can be mutually compensatory; it is the overall “sum” of the effects that determines commitment (Rusbult, 1980). For example, even though the investment size factor, as explained before, points to lower commitment for many LAT couples, the effect of this factor may be compensated for by other factors when these are

experienced very positively. This explains why there are just as well couples who live apart and are highly committed, despite not being tied by great (extrinsic) investments. It is important to note that commitment and the four determinants are related in a multi-directional manner; not only do the four factors determine partner commitment, at the same time, commitment levels (positively or negatively) influence perceptions of the four factors. For example, when highly committed, one could tend to overlook certain negative qualities in a partner.

Moreover, the diversity in experiences of commitment is in part attributable to diversity in reasons to live apart and plans for the future; these reflect, and are reflected in, people's evaluations of the four determinants. This connection is visualised by linking the (determinants of) commitment in the top with motivations to live apart and plans for the future on the bottom. Couples' levels of commitment are linked to future plans in two directions. Most obviously, when highly committed and wanting to maintain the relationship, one can be expected to express long-term future plans, possibly including cohabitation and/or marriage. If this is the case, one might also invest more in the relationship. Reasoned in the opposite direction, commitment to maintaining the relationship may be greater among those for whom marriage is very important. Regarding motivations to live apart: low commitment due to one or more of the (sub-optimal) four determinants can be a reason to not live together. Although not in a causal sense, couples' reasons to live apart can be reflected in the four determinants and in commitment. For example, among those regrettably living apart due to career reasons, commitment could be relatively high.

2.3 Literature

Because of the great diversity in motivations for LAT, entailing various combinations of needs, preferences and constraints (Duncan et al., 2013; Haskey & Lewis, 2006), most scholars have distinguished different types of LAT relationships. This is an interesting

element in research on LAT relationships, in that the need for creating typologies and distinguishing sub-groups indicates how diverse the population of LATs in fact is. However, in consideration of the word limit of the selected journal and the minimal relevance considering the research question and results focused on, I have chosen to exclude the following impression of different typologies in the draft paper. A reference to one such typology is made in the supplementary results, paragraph 6.1.

A differentiation also mentioned in the draft paper is between “dating LATs” and “partner LATs” (Duncan & Phillips, 2010). Another common distinction is between those who would want to live together but cannot, and those who actually prefer to be in a LAT relationship (Levin, 2004). Roseneil (2006) coined these as living apart “regretfully” versus “gladly”, besides the “undecidedly”. Levin’s (2004) dual categorisation is also reflected in the distinction based on perceived commitment by Carter et al. (2015). The authors distinguish between those with autonomous commitment (gladly apart, high commitment levels), contingent commitment (regretfully apart, high commitment levels contingent on living together in the future), ambivalent commitment (not yet ready to live together, some commitment) and limited commitment (LAT because it requires less commitment). The group with so-called ambivalent commitment is similar to Duncan & Philips’ (2010) “dating LATs”. Contrary to the aforementioned typologies, the typology of LAT relationships by Régnier-Loilier et al. (2009) is determined mostly by age and whether or not one of the partners has children of a prior union living in the same household.

Further, a finding by Carter et al. (2015) left unmentioned in my draft paper was that although individuals may perceive their own relationship as committed, they may view LAT relationships in general as lacking commitment. The authors speculate that different elements of commitment could be referred to in this case: love and longevity for their own relationships, and (lack of) investments when it concerns the relationships of others. Having

chosen to discuss my own results on such comparisons in this supplement only, I reflect on the finding by Carter et al. there, while excluding it from the paper's literature review.

4. Method of data collection

4.1 Alternative methods

The research question in this study was addressed by means of in-depth interviews. An alternative qualitative method could have been Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in which a pre-selected group of people engage in an interactive discussion about a specific issue (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). However, because of the complexity and sensitivity of the topic and the social desirability concerns involved with it, FGDs would have been an inappropriate method to tackle the research questions. In a group of people, participants may feel that they need to conform to certain societal norms and values, and thereby act in a socially desirable way. Further, because of the group setting, confidentiality is not ensured, which is important considering the sensitive and private nature of the topic (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Mostly, however, a group setting would not have allowed for the desired detailed understanding of participants' individual experiences regarding the factors shaping their commitment. However, for a somewhat different study design on a closely related topic, for example perceptions of the meaning of LAT in society, FGDs may be very suitable. Then, a multitude of perspectives could be gathered efficiently, and the group can challenge and provoke each other to think of different perspectives, and probe for more information or explanation (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

A different alternative to the chosen method would have been to approach the research questions quantitatively. The Investment Model has proven to be well suited for a quantitative approach; regression analyses have been used the most to test the model, and have given very supportive results (Rusbult et al., 2011). However, existing large-scale surveys do not offer information on relationship experiences and history as rich as needed to be able to

operationalise all commitment determinants of the Investment Model, plus the two components of commitment themselves. Hence, primary data collection through surveys would have been needed. Considering the small population who meets the selection criteria, and considering the lack of a central database through which to identify and contact this population, it would have been challenging to attain a large enough sample to identify significant statistical relationships. However, such practical considerations are irrelevant as a quantitative approach is inappropriate to answer the research questions as they are formulated, as will become clear from the following reflections.

4.2 Choice for in-depth interviews

For this particular research question, a one-to-one interview setting was more suitable than either FGDs or surveys. The interviews allowed LATs to describe and formulate their experiences and thoughts in their own words, rather than in the pre-determined words of a survey. Partner relationships are a highly sensitive topic and commitment is a complex issue; only one-to-one, in-depth interviews could allow for the required nuance, detail and context (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). It is also a topic surrounded by social desirability concerns. Participants may, for example, have hesitated to admit to not being satisfied with their partner, or to being attracted by an alternative partner. Discussions about individualisation and lower levels of partner commitment in modern times are frequently interlaced with negative connotations. The norm is that people ought to be happy in their relationship, and willing to endeavour to maintain it. Hence, participants may further have been hesitant to admit to being indifferent about whether or not their current relationship will last in the future, or to not being strongly attached to their partner. They may not even have been fully aware of this, but unconsciously inclined to express satisfaction and attachment, feeling they ought to; cognitive dissonance could play a role here. On the one hand, one can argue that in an anonymous survey people may have felt less inhibited by such social

desirability concerns to answer honestly. On the other hand, in an interview I was able to encourage participants to openly share their thoughts and experiences, to be attentive to inconsistent or contradictory statements and facial and verbatim expressions, and to repeat, rephrase and probe when sensing hesitation or uncertainty. In other words, I could employ my human senses and social skills to elicit the most truthful stories.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured along central themes (see Appendix 1 for the interview guide). The flexibility of structure allowed me to follow the natural flow of the interview and to adapt to circumstances and participants' answers. In this way, participants' stories could best be understood and the flexibility also gave the interview the sensation of a regular conversation rather than of a formal interview. Talking about relationships is something generally done with friends and family, and is for that reason much more natural in a conversational rather than formal interview style. By creating such a natural and comfortable setting, more truthful answers could be elicited.

In addition to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the following strategies contributed to obtaining a valid impression of LATs' experiences. Firstly, by far the most interviews were conducted in participants' own homes, without their partner present, to ensure that participants felt comfortable and safe, and willing to share private stories. In other instances, the location was a different comfortable setting, such as their private office. Secondly, I as interviewer have repeated questions in different wordings, and probed when sensing that a participant was hesitant or when (facial or verbatim) expressions were inconsistent. It was important to be aware of both actual expressions of feelings (e.g. word choice, voice tone, facial expression or hand gestures expressing negative or positive feelings) and self-reports of feelings (e.g. the participant explicitly saying to be (dis)satisfied with the partner) (Brown & Rutter, 1966). Thirdly, assuring the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality with which the interview data would be treated diminished most reluctance to

share private information. Naturally, respect, empathy and sincere interest enhanced rapport with the interviewee (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011) and thus contributed to eliciting personal and private information as well.

My experience was that most people were happy to talk to me about their relationships. In a way, I was for them an outlet to their feelings and someone with whom they could reflect on their relationship. From one participant I even received an e-mail afterwards saying that he enjoyed participating and frequently contemplated the questions and our conversation. Others have also explicitly said after the interview that they felt comfortable and understood.

A final reflection I wish to make concerns the choice to interview only one individual of a LAT couple. Interviewing both partners in a couple could enhance understanding of the dynamics shaping the couple's commitment, and could have offered interesting insights. However, by interviewing both individuals, participants could be hesitant to discuss their feelings freely, being afraid that their partner will later hear about what they said. This was because the interviews required participants to be critical about their partner and their relationship, and thus not only positive stories were obtained. Also, participants could be unhappily aware that I as interviewer would hear their partner's side of the story too. They could then have wanted to ensure that their stories align, not wanting to come across as a "bad" couple. Another consideration is that within a limited number of interviews, I was able to obtain a more diverse range of experiences when interviewing single elements from many different couples, than both elements from a smaller number of couples.

4.3 Data analysis

During the phase of data collection, I briefly summarised each interview directly afterwards and noted down anything of importance that was not audio recorded, such as general impressions based on bodily expressions and statements made before or after the recorder was

turned on. In this phase, I further listed thoughts about patterns that started to arise and about other noticeable elements, and drew first comparisons.

Consequently, as also explained in the draft paper, I coded and analysed verbatim, anonymised transcripts of the interviews with the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti. I developed a rough code list based on my brief summaries of the interviews, and completed this code list in the process of coding the first interviews. To identify a broad variety of initial codes, I selected the first interviews for coding on the basis of diversity (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). I then coded all interviews on the basis of this code list, and later combined these codes into code families, which represented different themes. See Appendix 2 for the code book. During the process of coding the interviews, I simultaneously summarised the interviews more elaborately, to provide thick descriptions by topic per participant. This enabled me to understand specific topics searched for in Atlas.ti (e.g. satisfaction) in the broader context of the story line.

I have considered several types of subgroups based on age, parental status, motivation for LAT and future plans. Atlas.ti has enabled me to search the data per topic by these subgroups, to discover if and how the subgroups were grounded in the data. Based on these data searches and analytic comparisons between subgroups, I have eventually inductively defined two groups: younger, childfree participants and older participants with more relationship experience.

Subsequently, I have searched the data in Atlas.ti for codes (e.g. emotional attachment) around specific topics (e.g. commitment) per participant subgroup. I have then created an overview of participants' experiences per topic and subgroup, with the additional help of my summaries. This has enabled the transition from analysis to description and reporting of the data. Atlas.ti, together with my summaries, was then used to pick exemplary citations.

It is important to note that the process of analysis as described above was not as linear as it may appear. For this reason, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) say the process of analysis can be considered cyclic or spiral. The different steps were often repeated at different points in the process, or conducted simultaneously. For example, data searches in Atlas.ti were executed throughout the whole process, coding and summarising were done simultaneously and several elements of analysis (e.g. drawing comparisons and discovering patterns) were also part of the phase of data collection.

4.4 Data quality

Certain elements related to the complexity and sensitivity of the topic commitment have possibly lowered the quality of the interview data. A first element is related to the concept of commitment, which Rusbult (1980) specifies as consisting of two components: emotional attachment and a long-term orientation. Participants were asked separate questions on how they experienced both elements. However, when asked about the perceived contribution of the four determinants to their commitment, they were asked and expected to refer to commitment as one concept. Although they knew what this “general commitment” comprised, I believe they sometimes found it difficult or even inappropriate to discuss it without distinguishing between the two components. Furthermore, by enquiring about general commitment, I have had to find a Dutch translation for that single term. Whereas the two components are easily correctly translated, commitment on itself is difficult to properly translate into one word. Consequently, I have not been entirely consistent in the word I used for it, often using multiple words to explain what commitment entailed, and often referring back to the emotional attachment and long-term orientation. Therefore, for future studies, I recommend consistently enquiring about both components of commitment separately.

A second element to be critically aware of is that participants’ answers may sometimes have been socially desirable and/or may have reflected cognitive dissonance between the

perceived and actual influence of a determinant such as social support. This is related to the sensitivity of the topic. For example, participants may not have wanted to admit, to themselves let alone to me as interviewer, that they felt more committed because they perceived no alternative to their relationship. Possibly by applying a mixed-methods design, in which such influence can be measured more objectively in addition, future studies could further try to pinpoint and tackle socially desirable answers and cognitive dissonance between attitudes and behaviour. However, participants' reflections afterwards about the interview, saying that they felt comfortable and understood, can be interpreted as a signal that they did not feel hindered by social desirability considerations.

A final reflection on data quality is not related to the topic, but to the sample of participants. Unfortunately, no people from a different ethnicity than Dutch were recruited, nor people characterising themselves as religious. The latter is not surprising, as being religious decreases the likelihood of LAT over marriage (Castro-Martín et al., 2008). The uniform ethnicity in the sample can be attributed to the snowballing technique and use of my personal network, even though recruitment flyers were also spread in the English language. Elements of ethnicity and religion may affect how LATs experience, for example, the effect of social support on their relationship.

5. Ethical issues

Participants have partaken on a voluntary basis, have been well informed about the research and ensured that the information shared during the interview would be anonymised and treated confidentially. Participants' have given their written (see Appendix 3) and oral consent for participation and for audio recording. Third parties have transcribed part of the interviews, but have not had access to participants' addresses or full names, which were not recorded on audio. Only I have access to these data, which are stored securely.

As mentioned before, participation felt beneficial to many participants, being given a welcome outlet for reflections on their relationship. Any harm to participants after publication (e.g. confrontation by partners or embarrassment) has been prevented by ensuring full anonymity. For this reason, the table with participant characteristics is not associated with the quotations by means of fictive names. Only age and sex are present in both table and quotations. To prevent association between table and quotations via these two characteristics, large age ranges were chosen so that at least two participants of the same sex fell within the same age range.

6. Additional results

The following results, interpreted in relation to the literature, are excluded from the draft paper. They represent noticeable and interesting findings, but are less directly related to the research question focused on in the paper. The first two issues on distinguishing gladly from regretfully LATs and on societal norms arose inductively from the data; the third issue on comparing commitment was included in the interview guide.

6.1 Gladly or regretfully LAT?

In line with the analysis of LAT by Funk & Kobayashi (2014), living apart seemed to be motivated in particular by “the self”: personal independence, career development and self-protection. Even for most of those who initially indicated an external circumstance as reason to live apart, it later appeared that such self-motivations played an additional, central role. A distinction between those living apart “gladly” or “regretfully” was therefore not always easily made. This is similar to Roseneil’s (2006) experience, who for that reason added the third category of living apart “undecidedly” to Levin’s (2004) dichotomous categorisation. For younger participants, these additional self-motivations were related to autonomy and personal uncertainty about the relationship. Several older participants said that their initial expression of regret about LAT was attributable to their traditional image of how relationships

ought to develop, namely involving cohabitation, “but if you probe a little, you think yeah on top of that there is just... Leave it like this [LAT], that’s fine.” (Robert, 35-55) When probing beyond this “ought to” feeling, self-protection motivations appeared to largely explain their choice to LAT. Hilde (35-55), for example, questioned the true motivation behind her choice for LAT:

Are those children my protection, have I used them as harness, because I find it difficult to open up and reveal myself? How would it have been if they had not been there?

Most participants who initially lived apart-together for external motivations were uncertain whether they would actually choose to cohabit if they could. And if they would, they would want to create some safety net and maintain an element of LAT, for example by continuing registration in their own municipality, or by keeping their own house on the side, like Robert (35-55).

I do leave the room for, you know, there has to be an escape. So if my children are out of the house in four years, then I will keep my little house. And then it might just be that I spend whole weeks at hers, but that little house remains for a while.

6.2 Societal norms

The opinion of friends and family not only concerned the partner, as discussed in the draft paper, but also the LAT relationship with that partner. LAT is frequently perceived as a somewhat strange choice, not fitting traditional notions of relationships. For example, although Carolien’s (35-55) parents liked her partner, she experienced that they could not appreciate the untraditional path along which her relationship had developed, namely on-off and living apart, also while raising children.

When I was little I thought like, you know at one point you finish school and then you get a steady relationship and you get married. And well, we never got married. [...] I

think that for my parents, they found that difficult. [...] That had everything to do with that it did not seem right to them.

Also some younger participants experienced that their social environment expected and valued more traditional relationship settings than LAT. For Maaïke (20-35), this caused distress and doubts about whether or not to move in together.

We have thought about it now and then, living together. But at one point that was more because our social circle was really asking about it than that we were ready for it ourselves. [...] It's a bit socially accepted or something, to cohabit after a few years together. [...] It caused stress because then I was worried that other people would think our relationship was no good.

Matthijs (20-35) mostly experienced it as irritating, not raising doubt, that people in his surroundings often do not understand why he and his partner are not married.

A lot of people [...] are all surprised about the fact that Marie and I are not yet married. [...] And then I have to defend myself each time again. I find that very irritating because then I think, the fact that we are not married or do not have a registered partnership does not at all mean for me or for us that we are less committed. We just don't feel like it. I feel absolutely no connection to marriage. [...] But to a lot of people that still seems, they still find that weird.

Long-distance relationships do not fit people's traditional notions of relationships either. René (20-35), whose partner lives away a long distance, said the following about this:

Look, my relationship just does not fit how a relationship is generally framed. [...] Always, always do people ask: "Have you seen Lucie? Is it still going well? I find it very special that you guys still make it work!" It's always about that! And that is just, instead of how nice things are...

However, René admits that before, long-distance relationships did not fit his conception of relationships either.

In contrast, two younger participants, a few years ago when they were in their early 20s, felt restrained from rather than pushed towards cohabiting by the opinion of family and friends about cohabitation.

Also because we have been together for so long, a lot of people said “You do enjoy your student life, right?” I did do that, but when you live together it is even more that idea. [...] I was still a student; I didn’t want to live that highly civil life of living together with the two of us. (Femke, 20-35)

In the beginning we did talk about moving in together very fast. All like, “Oooh!!” head over heels happy, so to say. But I did notice then that, I did know that my surroundings would not support that, cohabiting. (Maggie, 20-35)

In their case, societal norms dictated them to enjoy their freedom and not move in together at a too young age.

For several older participants, the influence of societal norms expressed itself in their own notions rather than in their social environment. Their traditional conceptions of how relationships ought to develop made them initially regret the fact that they lived apart from their partner due to external circumstances (e.g. children, work), whereas they later realised that they were in fact happy about this situation.

In the beginning of our relationship I saw us living together, also with the children, but that slowly disappeared. [...] After a while, very gradually I thought: why do I even want that, why do we need to live together? (Hanna, 35-55)

6.3 Comparing commitment

Notions about differing commitment between partner relationship arrangements are implicit in the societal norms and expectations regarding relationships. The LATs in this study were

explicitly asked to compare commitment in LAT relationships with commitment in cohabiting and married relationships. Their ideas about this ranged from LAT involving more, equal to less commitment. Sometimes this range of ideas was even expressed by a single participant, which indicates that it was experienced as a difficult question.

Similar to the LATs in the study by Funk & Kobayashi (2014), several participants believed that relationship quality is often better in LAT than in cohabiting relationships, in which there is a higher risk of ending up in a “rut” and living completely separate lives, even though together. It is therefore not surprising that four older participants stated that their married friends frequently expressed jealousy about their LAT situation, specifically about the time and space they had for themselves.

The perceived higher quality of LAT relationships is in part related to staying true to oneself. Several participants said that being in a LAT relationship allowed them to remain authentic and an individual.

It is indeed important that I remain an individual or something. And also that I like it if people see me like that, not like: she's always with him. [...] Sometimes, a couple is just always together, they are fused together, so to say. And that, that I don't really like. (Maaïke, 20-35)

She sees this fusion as interdependence, whereas she values her position to make independent choices, for example when to leave a party she visits together with her partner. That image of fused couples is also reflected in Maggie (20-35) saying:

We are more individuals who have a relationship together, and they [married friends] are really a relationship.

The description of LAT couples as two individuals rather than as one suggests that the contribution to one's personal identity is perhaps smaller in LAT relationships than in cohabiting and married relationships. Based on this, one could agree with Kamp Dush &

Amato (2005), who position marriage highest on their continuum of commitment based on a couple's future orientation and the extent to which a relationship contributes fundamentally to a person's identity.

Besides individuality, according to Henk (55-70), the frequently lower quality of cohabiting and married relationships is the result of "ought to" feelings: people choose to cohabit and marry because it is the normal or right thing to do, and consequently stay together because of the barriers to separation, even though the relationship is unsatisfying.

According to some older participants, the individuality, independence and freedom offered by LAT could mean that many couples who live apart-together are in fact more committed than cohabiting or married couples. Robert (35-55) explained it as follows:

From a position of freedom you can give much more.

For that reason, Robert believes that love is purer in a LAT relationship, as there is no claim or burden of proof on commitment. Similar to the argument by Carter et al. (2015) that LAT relationships possibly represent the strongest type of commitment, many older participants argued that LAT shows elements of greater commitment compared to cohabitation, because it requires more effort and intentionality to be together. The following quote from Celine (35-55) represents many others' similar thoughts:

[more committed] *Because you more consciously choose for each other. And not just as you happen to live in one house and sleep next to each other. That's not what makes a relationship. Yes, you really have to consciously choose each time again, and also make the effort.*

On the contrary, mostly younger participants and also two older participants believed that cohabitation signals higher commitment than LAT, as it is more serious and definitive.

You for sure will not separate again, or live separately if you already live together. Certainly not if you're married. So yes, it's just much more serious or something.
(Maaïke, 20-35)

Two older participants acknowledged that cohabiting and married couples have to give and take more, both the good and bad. On this basis, Mark (55-70) explained as follows why he believed commitment may be higher in cohabiting and married relationships:

I believe that people who are married and live together, that they share joys and sorrows. You know, for the good and the bad, I will stay with you [...]. Whereas we do it more for the joys. And if there are times of sorrow, then we break up or it's each on one's own until the good times come back.

As an exception, three younger participants did not perceive cohabitation or marriage as irreversible per se; only children are irreversible, and therefore the ultimate form of commitment. Rather, Femke (20-35) mostly sees marriage as a big party to celebrate happiness together, without any pressure on the future.

I then don't feel like, "Yes, now we have said yes, so now we have to stay together until death or something".

Besides notions of more or less commitment, it was also acknowledged by both some younger and older LATs that in certain situations and considering some people's personalities, LAT may not at all reflect commitment:

When you know that it [living together] does not work for you at the moment or maybe in general, not just in this relationship but in any relationship, then I do not think you indicate you love someone less or something, or that you are less committed to someone. Because perhaps it just does not suit you. (Maggie, 20-35)

For Henk (55-70), who has been in LAT relationships for the largest part of his life, personality is indeed the largest motivation. He needs space to be able to give the most in a

relationship. More generally, all older LATs who had been in a LAT relationship for long with their current partner and also raised children while living apart, said that living arrangement does not reflect commitment at all.

There are of course very many ways in which people can love each other [...]. That can be with or without a ring. That can be in one house or in separate houses. I personally don't think that's determining for the level of commitment. (Henk, 55-70)

Another perception was that the type of commitment may simply be different in LAT relationships compared to cohabiting and married relationships. For example, René (20-35) said that in cohabiting relationships commitment expresses itself in part as respect for each other's habits and life style, whereas it comes forward differently when living apart. Hester (20-35) said that it is a difference between commitment to the relationship and commitment to the partner:

I am not committed to the relationship. [...] That is a difference with married couples or with cohabiting couples or with people who feel like they should, who are just committed to the relationship. (Hester, 20-35)

Another difference in type of commitment is in emotional attachment versus long-term orientation. Some participants said that although the boundary to separation is higher when cohabiting or married, which contributes to intentions to maintain the relationship, emotional attachment is equal or higher in LAT relationships. This reflects the finding that the emotional attachment component of commitment was stronger among the LAT participants than their long-term orientation, which is more related to boundaries to separation.

A few younger participants living apart at a long distance for work-related reasons linked their comparison of commitment to factors of choice. Willem (20-35) believed he was equally committed as cohabiting or married couples, because he felt ready for those steps too, but simply could not make them yet because of the distance between his and his partner's

work locations. Similarly, René (20-35) seemed to defend that living arrangement says nothing about the meaning of a relationship because of his own regretful LAT situation. Matthijs (20-35) believed that choosing for LAT can be interpreted as sign of less commitment, but when one maintains such relationship on the long term, that shows high commitment.

You could interpret the choice for LAT as a sign of not that much commitment, [...] because you do not choose for each other and together and be close together, but at that moment you choose to live apart. But then if you are in that relationship and you have, you stay together, and you put in effort every time to see each other and you stay emotionally involved with each other, then I think yes, that actually shows a lot of commitment. (Matthijs, 20-35)

Lastly, several participants made a connection between religion and the meaning of and commitment in marriage. They believed that the meaning of marriage is greater for religious people, whereas for non-religious people marriage is not definitive anyway, considering the easy option of divorce. Bob (55-70) therefore specifically said that he may be less committed compared to religious married people, but not to non-religious married people. Hester (20-35) acknowledged that religious married people may be more committed, but possibly for other reasons than love.

Overall, a relatively large share of younger LATs saw cohabitation and marriage as involving more commitment, whereas no younger participant believed that LAT involved stronger commitment. This reflects the intention of all younger LATs to cohabit in the future, while at the time of the interview, they were not ready yet or could not cohabit yet due to external circumstances. With the exception of two, older LATs believed that LATs were either equally or more committed compared with cohabiting or married couples. This reflects that many older LATs were uncertain about whether or not they wanted to cohabit with their

partner in the future. Despite this, they possibly did not want to detract from the meaning of their relationship and therefore argued that LAT involves just as much or more commitment.

An interesting finding by Carter et al. (2015) was that although individuals may perceive their own relationship as committed, they may view LAT relationships in general as lacking commitment. The participants in this study were generally coherent in their comparisons with LAT relationships in general and their own LAT relationship.

7. Research process

The process of developing, conducting and reporting this study has been pleasantly smooth. Because the research question had arisen during a previous research project, I had a clear notion of what I wanted to study and how. Thanks to this, not much time was wasted in the process of developing the research proposal. Two supervisors have guided me through this process, one of whom was involved for her knowledge on the topic, and the other for his understanding of qualitative data collection methods. Both have allowed me the freedom to work in an autonomous and self-directed manner, while always being very willing and capable of helping me when asked. The research proposal has received more than one round of feedback from both supervisors, and the other central chapters of this thesis have all been commented on in writing once by at least one supervisor, before submitting the draft version of the complete thesis. Both supervisors have provided written feedback on this draft version. Only in the process of writing the research proposal and once in the process of analysing the data have I initiated to meet with a supervisor. For the rest, sufficient feedback was provided in writing. See Appendix 4 for a logbook of the hours spent on different thesis-related activities.

References

- Agnew, C. R. (2009). Commitment, theories and typologies. In H. T. Reis, & S. K. Sprecher (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of human relationships, volume 1* (pp. 245-248). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Agnew, C. R., Arriaga, X. B., & Wilson, J. E. (2008). Committed to what? Using the bases of relational commitment model to understand continuity and changes in social relationships. In J. P. Forgas, & J. Fitness (Eds.), *Social relationships: Cognitive, affective and motivational processes* (pp. 147-164). New York: Psychology Press.
- Asendorpf, J. B. (2008). Living apart together: Alters- und kohortenabhängigkeit einer heterogenen lebensform. *Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie*, *60*(4), 749-764. doi:10.1007/s11577-008-0035-4
- Bawin-Legros, B., & Gauthier, A. (2001). Regulation of intimacy and love semantics in couples living apart together. *International Review of Sociology*, *11*(1), 39-46. doi:10.1080/03906700020030983
- Berrington, A., Perelli-Harris, B., & Trevena, P. (2015). Commitment and the changing sequence of cohabitation, childbearing, and marriage: Insights from qualitative research in the UK. *Demographic Research*, *S17*(12), 327-362.
- Brown, G. W., & Rutter, M. (1966). The measurement of family activities and relationships: A methodological study. *Human Relations*, *19*(3), 241-263. doi:10.1177/001872676601900301

- Burgoyne, C. B., Reibstein, J., Edmunds, A. M., & Routh, D. A. (2010). Marital commitment, money and marriage preparation: What changes after the wedding? *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 20(5), 390-403. doi:10.1002/casp.1045
- Carter, J., Duncan, S., Stoilova, M., & Phillips, M. (2015). Sex, love and security: Accounts of distance and commitment in living apart together relationships. *Sociology*, doi:10.1177/0038038515573689
- Castro-Martín, T., Domínguez-Folgueras, M., & Martín-García, T. (2008). Not truly partnerless: Non-residential partnerships and retreat from marriage in Spain. *Demographic Research*, 18(16), 443-468.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 848-861. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (2002). The dilemma of repartnering: Considerations of older men and women entering new intimate relationships in later life. *Ageing International*, 27(4), 61-78. doi:10.1007/s12126-002-1015-z
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (2004). Remarriage, unmarried cohabitation, living apart together: Partner relationships following bereavement or divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(1), 236-243. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00015.x
- De Jong Gierveld, J., & Latten, J. (2008). Incidentie en achtergronden van transitionele en duurzame latrelaties. *Bevolkingstrends*, 56(3), 2-38.

- Duncan, S., Barlow, A., & James, G. (2005). Why don't they marry? Cohabitation, commitment and DIY marriage. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 17(3), 383-398.
- Duncan, S., Carter, J., Phillips, M., Roseneil, S., & Stoilova, M. (2013). Why do people live apart together? *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 2(3), 323-338.
doi:doi:10.1332/204674313X673419
- Duncan, S., & Philips, M. (2011). People who live apart together (LATs): New family form or just a stage? *International Review of Sociology*, 21(3), 513-532.
doi:10.1080/03906701.2011.625660
- Duncan, S., & Phillips, M. (2010). People who live apart together (LATs) - how different are they? *The Sociological Review*, 58(1), 112-134. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2009.01874.x
- Duncan, S., Phillips, M., Carter, J., Roseneil, S., & Stoilova, M. (2014). Practices and perceptions of living apart together. *Family Science*, 5(1), 1-10.
doi:10.1080/19424620.2014.927382
- Etcheverry, P. E., & Agnew, C. R. (2004). Subjective norms and the prediction of romantic relationship state and fate. *Personal Relationships*, 11(4), 409-428. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00090.x
- Funk, L. M., & Kobayashi, K. M. (2014). From motivations to accounts: An interpretive analysis of "living apart together" relationships in mid- to later-life couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, doi:10.1177/0192513X14529432
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goodfriend, W., & Agnew, C. R. (2008). Sunken costs and desired plans: Examining different types of investments in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(12), 1639-1652. doi:10.1177/0146167208323743
- Hantrais, L. (2006). Living as a family in Europe. In L. Hantrais, D. Philipov & F. C. Billari (Eds.), *Policy implications in changing family formation: Study prepared for the european population conference 2005* (pp. 117-181). Strassbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Haskey, J. (2005). Living arrangements in contemporary Britain: Having a partner who usually lives elsewhere and living apart together (LAT). *Population Trends*, 122, 35-45.
- Haskey, J., & Lewis, J. (2006). Living-apart-together in Britain: Context and meaning. *International Journal of Law in Context*, 2(01), 37-48. doi:10.1017/S1744552306001030
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. London: Sage.
- Hiekel, N., & Keizer, R. (2015). Risk-avoidance or utmost commitment: Dutch focus group research on views on cohabitation and marriage. *Demographic Research*, S17(10), 311-340.
- Jamieson, L., Anderson, M., McCrone, D., Bechhofer, F., Stewart, R., & Li, Y. (2002). Cohabitation and commitment: Partnership plans of young men and women. *The Sociological Review*, 50(3), 356-377. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.00387

- Johnson, M. P., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 61(1), 160-177. doi:10.2307/353891
- Kamp Dush, C. M., & Amato, P. R. (2005). Consequences of relationship status and quality for subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(5), 607-627. doi:10.1177/0265407505056438
- Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence*. New York:
- Latten, J., & Mulder, C. H. (2014). Partner relationships in the Netherlands: New manifestations of the second demographic transition. *Genus*, 69(3). doi: 10.4402/genus-588
- Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the investment model. *Personal Relationships*, 10(1), 37-57. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00035
- Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review*, 36(2), 211-251. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00328.x
- Lesthaeghe, R., & Van de Kaa, D. J. (1986). Twee demografische transitie's? In R. Lesthaeghe, & D. J. Van De Kaa (Eds.), *Bevolking: Groei en krimp, mens en maatschappij book supplement*. (pp. 9-24). Deventer: Van Loghum-Slaterus.
- Levin, I. (2004). Living apart together: A new family form. *Current Sociology*, 52(2), 223-240. doi:10.1177/0011392104041809

- Levin, I., & Trost, J. (1999). Living apart together. *Community, Work & Family*, 2(3), 279-294. doi:10.1080/13668809908412186
- Levinger, G. (1999). Duty toward whom? In J. M. Adams, & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal commitment and relationship stability* (pp. 37-52). Boston, MA: Springer US. doi:10.1007/978-1-4615-4773-0_2
- Liefbroer, A. C., Poortman, A., & Seltzer, J. (2015). Why do intimate partners live apart? evidence on LAT relationships across europe. *Demographic Research*, 32(8), 251-286.
- Lodewijckx, E., & Deboosere, P. (2011). *Huishoudens en families: Stabiliteit en snelle veranderingen gaan hand in hand* GGP Belgium Paper Series, 6.
- Otten, K., & Te Riele, S. (2015). Latrelaties in Nederland. *Bevolkingstrends*, 14, 2-25.
- Regnier-Loilier, A., Beaujouan, E., & Villeneuve-Gokalp, C. (2009). Neither single, nor in a couple. A study of living apart together in France. *Demographic Research*, 21(4), 75-108.
- Reimondos, A. A., Evans, A., & Gray, E. (2011). Living-apart-together (LAT) relationships in Australia. *Family Matters*, 87, 43-55.
- Roseneil, S. (2006). On not living with a partner: Unpicking coupledness and cohabitation. *Sociological Research Online*, 11(3)
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 16, 172-186.

- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(1), 101-117. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.101
- Rusbult, C. E., Agnew, C. R., & Arriaga, X. (2011). The investment model of commitment processes. *Department of Psychological Sciences Faculty Publications, Paper 26*
- Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5(4), 357-387. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x
- Sprecher, S. (1988). Investment model, equity, and social support determinants of relationship commitment. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 51(4), 318-328.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2(4), 243-257. doi:10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00060.x
- Strohm, C. Q., Seltzer, J. A., Cochran, S. D., & Mays, V. M. (2009). "Living apart together" relationships in the United States. *Demographic Research*, 21, 177-214.
- Van der Wiel, R., Mulder, C. H., & Krapf, S. (2015). *Relationship choices of two-sex and same-sex couples in the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom: Living-apart-together, cohabitation or marriage/registered partnership*. Unpublished manuscript.

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Introduction

This research project is about stable couples who do not live together. These couples are in so-called “LAT relationships”, which stands for living-apart-together. I am particularly interested in commitment in these relationships, in the sense of feeling emotionally attached to a partner and wanting to maintain the relationship. Through several themes I will discuss your current relationship with you: a) how satisfied you are, b) how you feel about alternatives to your relationship, c) the investments you have made and d) the social support you receive from friends and family for this relationship.

- Timing (approximately 1 hour, depending on how much you wish to share)
- Confidentiality (careful procession of collected information)
- Anonymity (participants’ identities will not be traceable in published materials; fictional names; removal of other information facilitating the identification of participants)
- Recording (consent)
- Breaks/stop (participant can ask for a break or stop the interview at any moment)
- Consent form
- Questions?

Background information

Ask participant to repeat recording consent for the recorder. Briefly record the participant’s age, whether he/she lives in a rural or urban residence, distance to current partner, educational level and whether or not religious.

Interview themes

1. Relationship history

SUMMARY: Provide contextual information and determine the potential influence of past relationships

- Previous relationships: how many, married/cohabiting/children, good/bad memories?
- Current relationship: since when, development path?

1. I would like to start by asking you how your current relationship has developed over time.
 - a. When did the current relationship start? (determine actual year) Together ever since, or periods in separation? Ever lived together? Partnership registered? Children together?
2. Now, it would be very helpful if you can briefly tell me about the previous partner relationships that you have had, just to give me some background information.
 - a. How many? Ever cohabited or married before? Children from previous unions? Are your memories of these previous relationships positive or negative, and why? (*comparison level for satisfaction*)

2. Motivation for LAT

SUMMARY: Understand reasons and influences in the choice to live-apart-together

- Reason(s) not to live together
- Whose idea was it to LAT?

3. There are a lot of different reasons why many couples choose to live separately from their partner, rather than in the same household. Could you explain to me what motivates the choice to live separately from your partner in your case?
 - a. Is there a single reason or a combination of factors?
 - b. Same reason(s) for partner?
4. Do you and your partner feel the same way about living apart together?
 - a. Did both of you prefer LAT, or was it mainly your or his/her choice?

3. Satisfaction

SUMMARY: Explore satisfaction with current relationship and what has influenced this

- Rewards: happy with current partner?
E.g. shared interests/values/attitudes, partner's appearance/intelligence/humour/personality, sexual relationship, partner's reliability, ease of communication
- Costs: costly in terms of time/effort/money to be with current partner?
E.g. loss of personal freedom, monetary/time costs, partner's unattractive habits/qualities/attitudes, conflict, dependency, low reciprocation, low emotional stability
- Comparison level: high or low expectations?

5. How do you feel when you spend time together with your partner?
6. In what situations do you feel positive about your relationship?
 - a. How does your partner contribute to that feeling?
 - b. In what way does your relationship contribute to your life? (e.g. feeling joy, secure, confident, emotionally or financially supported, relaxed, stimulated, belonging, affection, comfort)
 - c. How happy and satisfied are you with your current partner?
7. In what situations do you feel less positive about your relationship?
 - a. How does your partner contribute to that feeling?
 - b. How difficult do you feel it is to maintain your relationship? (effort)
 - c. Are there any important sacrifices you had/have to make in order to maintain your relationship? (e.g. work, hobbies, family and friends)
 - d. Do you feel you can be fully yourself when you are together?
 - e. Can you tell me how often you argue and how that makes you feel? (e.g. emotionally exhausting, diminishing self-worth, as a relief, good for the relationship))
8. Thinking of previous partners you have had, which relationship so far was the most satisfying?

4. Alternatives

SUMMARY: Discover the perceived quality of alternatives to the current relationship

- How would life be different? (singlehood, friends & family, dating, alternative partner)
- Appeal of the best alternative

9. I would now like to talk to you about alternatives for your current relationship. In the hypothetical situation that you would not be in this relationship, how would you want your life to be like?
 - a. What is the most attractive alternative compared to what you have now: being alone, spend more time with friends and family, dating, a different partner?
 - b. How attractive is this alternative?
 - c. How realistic would you say this alternative is? (differentiate alternative you want and you expect)
 - d. What would be different? (e.g. alone, dating, with a different partner?)

5. Investments

SUMMARY: Determine the costs of ending the relationship, in terms of lost investments

- Intrinsic investments (time, effort, emotions, memories)
- Extrinsic investments (shared possessions, activities, friends, money)

10. Intrinsic: I would like to get a sense of how invested you are in your relationship. Can you tell me about...

- a. How much time you spend together? (→ time, effort)
- b. How emotionally involved are you in this relationship? (sharing feelings, emotions, dreams, pains, fears / pain caused in case of break-up)

11. Extrinsic: Thinking of the hypothetical scenario that your relationship would end now, could you think of anything or anyone you would then possibly lose?

- a. Do you have any shared possessions, which you could lose? (e.g. pet, car, tv)
- b. Would you lose contact with certain people who are important to you? (e.g. mutual friends, family-in-law)
- c. Are there any activities you do with your partner only, that are unique to this relationship and for which your partner is hard to replace? (e.g. hobby, walking)

6. Social support

SUMMARY: Determine the level and influence of social support for the current relationship

- Approval of family
- Approval of friends

12. How does your family feel about your current relationship?

- a. To what extent do they approve or disapprove of your current partner? (e.g. parents, children from previous union, siblings) Why? (e.g. partner choice, LAT choice) Is this important to you?

13. How do your friends feel about your current relationship?

- a. To what extent do they approve or disapprove of your current partner? Why? (e.g. partner choice, LAT choice) Is this important to you?

7. Commitment

SUMMARY: Understand perceptions of commitment in current LAT relationship, and in LAT relationships in general

- Future orientation
- Emotional attachment
- Influence of satisfaction, alternatives, investments and social support on commitment
- Commitment in LAT relationships in general, compared to cohabitation/marriage
- Commitment in this relationship, compared to cohabiting and married relationships

14. How important is it for you that this relationship lasts in the future?

- a. How far would you go in terms of concessions and sacrifices to make it last?

15. To what extent do you feel emotionally attached to your partner? (link to emotional investments)

16. Now I would like to discuss with you if and how you think that the topics we have just discussed have influenced the choices you have made in this relationship, and your commitment to your partner. So how about...

- a. Your level of satisfaction with your partner?
- b. The fact that you (don't) feel you have attractive alternatives to this relationship?
- c. The (many/few) emotional and material investments that you have put into this relationship? To what extent would they prevent you from ending the relationship?
- d. The (dis)approval of family and friends?

17. In your opinion, how is commitment in most LAT relationships different from cohabiting and married relationships?

18. How would you compare commitment in your own LAT relationship with that of cohabiting and married couples?

- a. What is similar/different, and why?

If applicable: what is different between your own and others' LAT relationship, that you differently compared them with married/cohabiting couples?

8. Future plans

SUMMARY: Explore preferred future development of relationship

- Do they want to live together in the future? (LAT as stage or state)
- Under what circumstances?
- What are their expectations of living together?

19. How do you see the future of your relationship?

- a. Would you prefer to remain living apart or to move in together in the future?
- b. Do you and your partner want the same in that regard?
- c. If wanting to cohabit in the future, within what time span?

20. Under what circumstances would you change your preferred plan for the future? (e.g. changes in the four factors, such as children growing independent, growing older > decreasing position in the dating scene, less conflict in relationship)

Appendix 2 Code book

Code family	Code	Type	Description	Example
<i>Motivation LAT</i>	<i>Motivation LAT</i>	Deductive	Reasons why individual lives apart-together	<i>I just need to maintain my own domain; otherwise I get itchy and annoyed. [...] It's a sort of claustrophobia.</i>
	<i>Partner's opinion LAT</i>	Deductive	How partner feels about LAT situation (mutual choice?)	<i>Well, she really wanted to live together. Then... I said, yeah well, I don't. Yes, that really hurt her.</i>
	<i>Motivation LAT – satisfaction</i>	Deductive	LAT motivated by elements of dissatisfaction, or LAT to keep satisfaction high	<i>His character very much makes him want to have control himself. [...] That seems to me pretty difficult if you live together.</i>
	<i>Motivation LAT – alternatives</i>	Deductive	LAT motivated by perception of (attractive) alternatives	<i>I do think that that [attractive alternative] influences the fact that we do not live together yet.</i>
	<i>Motivation LAT – investments</i>	Deductive	LAT motivated by avoidance of investments in the relationship	<i>I was very much guarding my own space. That she than at once stumped in with stacks of papers like, well, I'll settle here nicely. Oh my god.</i>
	<i>Motivation LAT – social support</i>	Deductive	LAT motivated by lack of social support for either partner or cohabitation	<i>I did know then that my surroundings would not support that, living together.</i>
	<i>Cohabitation – step</i>	Inductive	Perceptions of cohabitation as a “step”: more serious, more committed, not ready	<i>Yes it is sort of definitive. You won't then, I don't know, say after a year: I will live separately again anyway.</i>
<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Commitment emotional attachment</i>	Deductive	Commitment component of emotional attachment to partner	<i>Yes, I would just really miss him. [...] I simply really love him.</i>

	<i>Commitment long-term orientation</i>	Deductive	Commitment component of wanting and intending to maintain relationship in future	<i>I am quite open about it, in the sense that I don't need to have that "we'll stay together until we're 80"</i>
	<i>Commitment – satisfaction</i>	Deductive	When satisfaction is discussed in connection to commitment	<i>The overall picture, eventually of course many more plusses [...], confirms my feeling that I want a relationship with this man.</i>
	<i>Commitment – alternatives</i>	Deductive	When perceptions of alternatives are discussed in connection to commitment (in either direction)	<i>I find it very uncomfortable to see things as "there are no more alternatives", like turning into a long-term road.</i>
	<i>Commitment – investments</i>	Deductive	When investments (intrinsic, extrinsic or future) are discussed in connection to commitment (either direction)	<i>I don't want to give up on him because of that [plans for the future].</i>
	<i>Commitment – social support</i>	Deductive	When the (dis)approval of friends and family is discussed in connection to commitment	<i>I like it [family's approval], but I mean it's not that it's extra [...], I am not more attached because of that.</i>
	<i>Comparing commitment</i>	Deductive	Comparisons between LAT versus cohabitation/marriage on elements of commitment	<i>I am not committed to the relationship. [...] That is a difference with married couples or with cohabiting couples</i>
	<i>Commitment fear</i>	Inductive	Expressions of fear to commit or to get hurt (again), often after failed former relationship	<i>Maybe my commitment is not 100% in the sense that I am always sort of armed against things of which I think: "If it can hurt me, I must be fearful of that."</i>
<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	Deductive	General expressions of how satisfied one is	<i>I mostly feel very positively about this relationship.</i>
	<i>Costs</i>	Deductive	Negative aspects of partner or relationship	<i>That she does not exercise, does not do anything about her weight, I find that regretful.</i>

	<i>Rewards</i>	Deductive	Positive aspects of partner or relationship	<i>She's open and social; those are generally qualities I just really like in people.</i>
	<i>Comparison level</i>	Deductive	Positive or negative comparison level based on former partners	<i>My ex, I don't want to run her down, but she wasn't particularly sweet or anything.</i>
<i>Alternatives</i>	<i>Alternatives</i>	Deductive	Perceived quality of alternatives to relationship	<i>I do think about it occasionally, how it would be if I were single. In some ways that does appeal.</i>
<i>Investments</i>	<i>Investments extrinsic</i>	Deductive	Resources that have grown to be tied to the relationship (e.g. friends, furniture)	<i>We have a car. He bought it and I drive it.</i>
	<i>Investments intrinsic</i>	Deductive	Investments directly into the relationship (e.g. time, effort, emotions)	<i>You mostly invest in the time together. And that is costly enough: train tickets, hotels and the like.</i>
	<i>Future plans</i>	Deductive	Plans for the future of the relationship (e.g. children)	<i>There are things I definitely see myself doing together with him in the future.</i>
<i>Social support</i>	<i>Social support</i>	Deductive	Level of (dis)approval of partner or relationship by friends and family	<i>She [mother] does not really like the way he [boyfriend] associates with me.</i>
	<i>Social support influence</i>	Deductive	Degree to which social support is deemed important and influential	<i>Well that [parent's approval] confirms the feeling that I have myself.</i>
<i>Relationship history</i>	<i>Development current relationship</i>	Deductive	How the relationship has developed over time	<i>We lived together for about for years. For me, that was not an overwhelming success.</i>
	<i>Relationship history</i>	Inductive	Past relationship experiences (e.g. divorce)	<i>I have been married and since then two two-year relationships.</i>
	<i>Relationship history influence</i>	Inductive	Influence of past relationship experiences, other than providing comparison level	<i>You carry [emotional] baggage. You're in your 50s. [...] Of course that all plays a role, to consider LAT.</i>

<i>Other inductive</i>	<i>Influence past events</i>	Inductive	Influence on relationship experience of past events other than past relationship experiences	<i>Besides that I really do still need my own space, for example also to process those things from my childhood, which have not been nice for me.</i>
	<i>Ideal housing situation</i>	Inductive	Expressions about the perfect housing situation, often between LAT and cohabitation	<i>I occasionally fantasise about a little house in his garden or something.</i>
	<i>Jealous of LAT</i>	Inductive	Cohabiting/married friends are jealous of LAT situation	<i>I also often hear people who do live together, because most do, or who are married, say: "Oh I wish I had a relationship like that. I wish I had my own place."</i>
	<i>Life course</i>	Inductive	When age or life course stage influences the relationship, separate from relationship history	<i>Now we don't have children, we're flexible, we can do this now [prioritise career and live apart]</i>
	<i>Relationship philosophy</i>	Inductive	Ideas about and attitudes towards relationships in general (e.g. not believing in perfect partner, value of marriage)	<i>How do I become happy? By setting the bar low. [...] My girlfriend is not the most beautiful if you place ten [women] on one line, but she is right for me.</i>
	<i>LAT positive</i>	Inductive	Positive aspects about LAT, besides motivations for LAT	<i>Because you live a bit further away from each other, you appreciate that time [together] more, really.</i>
	<i>LAT negative</i>	Inductive	Negative aspects about LAT	<i>You then don't even have the time and place to fight, to talk things over.</i>
	<i>Societal norms</i>	Inductive	(own or others') Norms and expectations about how relationships should be	<i>My relationship just does not fit [...] how a relationship is generally framed.</i>



Appendix 3 Consent form

You have been asked to participate in a research project by the University of Groningen about so-called living-apart-together (LAT) relationships – stable couples who do not live together. This research is done by myself as Master student, Roselinde van der Wiel, and supervised by Prof. Dr. C.H. Mulder en Dr. A. Bailey.

During this interview, I will ask questions about the choice to live apart from your partner, how you experience several aspects of your relationship, and about your desired plans for the future, with regards to your relationship.

As participant, you are fully in your right; it is my obligation to ensure that by participating, you are influenced in the most positive and least negative way. To this end, I inform you of the following:

- The interview will be recorded with a voice recorder, so that I can fully focus on your story and can afterwards once more listen to what you have shared with me. The recording will be used solely as source of information for my research, and for no other purposes. As soon as I have transcribed the interview, the recording will be destroyed.
- Whatever you share with me during this interview, cannot be traced back to you personally. Personal information such as names and street names will be removed.
- The information you share with me can be used (anonymously) in scientific publications and educational presentations.
- You do not have to answer every question I ask you; if, for any reason, you are not willing to answer a question, you do not need to.
- You can ask me, as interviewer, to leave at any time. Even when you have signed this consent form, you can still decide at a later point to drop out of the study.
- To my knowledge, participation in this research project does not lead to any risks.
- By participating in this research, you contribute to an important university project.

With questions about the research, you can reach Roselinde van der Wiel at the following e-mail address: r.van.der.wiel@student.rug.nl.

By signing this form, you, as participant, declare that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary; the choice to participate has been made by no other person than yourself. You further declare to have read this consent form and to fully understand its contents; any questions you might have had, have been answered. You give your consent to participate in this research project, and will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Signature Participant:

Date:

Signature Interviewer:

Date:

Appendix 4 Logbook

Date	Activity/Summary	Outcome	Hours
20-12 to 20-01	Write first draft of research proposal, to be discussed in a meeting on 20-01	1st draft proposal	48
20-01 to 07-03	Improve research proposal, by incorporating comments by Louise, fellow students, Ajay and Claartje. Decision to include not only gladly LATs, but all LATs taken on 07-03.		8
07-03 to 08-04	Rewrite proposal, now with all LATs included (including those who are regretfully apart). Revised proposal sent to supervisors on 08-04	2nd draft proposal	16
19-04 to 30-04	Incorporate 2nd round of feedback on proposal (in particular interview guide, expectations and conceptual model) by supervisors.		16
01-05 to 05-06	Recruit participants and make appointments, conduct 22 interviews, transcribe two interviews, rewrite expectations and redesign conceptual model, transform research proposal into first chapters of article, write supplementary reflections about theory, prepare presentation Graduate Research Day, make codebook, code first interviews	data collection finished, first chapters of article, first interview coded and analysed	75
05-06	Code interview nr 2. 3, 4 and part of 5 and summarise their stories	Total of four interviews coded and analysed	7.5
06-06	Code and summarise interview nr 5, 6 and 7	Total of seven interviews coded and analysed	5.25
07-06	Start coding interview nr 8		0.5
09-06	Training for keynote speech at Graduate Research Day + preparing presentation myself		5
11-06	Code and summarise interview nr 8	Total of eight interviews coded and analysed	3

12-06	Practice keynote speech, work on supplementary reflections	Reflection on topic and journal choice, part of reflection on theory	5
13-06	Supplementary reflections	Reflection on theory	5.5
14-06	Practice keynote speech, work on supplementary reflections, clean Refworks		7
17-06	Work on supplementary reflections and first chapters of draft paper.	Reflection on method	4.5
18-06	Transcribe interview		2.25
19-06	Transcribe interview, code and summarise	Third interview transcribed	4
20-06	Transcribe interview, anonymise transcripts, code and summarise 9th interview	Fourth interview transcribed, nine interviews coded	4.5
21-06	Incorporate conceptual model and expectations into supplementary reflections, fight with Atlas.ti, anonymise transcripts		2
22-06	Supplementary reflections (conceptual model and expectations, methods) and thesis (data & methods)		2.5
23-06	Discuss analysis with Ajay, code and summarise 10th and 11th interview	11 interviews coded and summarised	3.25
24-06	Code and summarise 12th, 13th and 14th interview	14 interviews coded and summarised	5.25
25-06	Code and summarise 15th interview and 16th interview	15 interviews coded and summarised	4.25
26-06	Code and summarise 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th interview	18 interviews coded and summarised	6.25
27-06	Code and summarise 19th and 20th interview, transcribe last interview	20 interviews coded and summarised	6
28-06	Code and summarise 21st and 22nd interview, transcribe last interview, analyse data	All interviews transcribed, coded and summarised	7.75
29-06	Analyse data	Draft of first supplementary reflections and first chapters sent to supervisors	5.5
30-06	Analyse data, develop structure of results chapter		7
01-07	Analyse data		1.5

03-07	Analyse data, write results section	2500 words of results reported on motivations to LAT, satisfaction and alternatives	8.5
04-07	Analyse data, write results section	5500 words of results: motivations LAT, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support, commitment	7.5
05-07	Write and revise results section	5250 words of results: motivations LAT, satisfaction, alternatives, investments, social support, commitment, future plans	7.5
06-07	Revise results section and write discussion & conclusion		5.5
07-07	Revise results section and write discussion & conclusion		3.5
08-07	Thesis meeting with Rema, incorporating their feedback	Draft paper 8970 words	6.5
09-07	Revise results and conclusion	Draft paper 8706 words	5
10-07	Revise/shorten introduction, literature review, results and conclusion, create table with participant characteristics	Draft paper 8168 words	8.25
11-07	Revise draft paper, write results for in the supplementary reflection	Draft paper sent to supervisors, for feedback on results and conclusion.	6.25
12-07	Write results for supplementary reflection		1
13-07	Write results for supplementary reflection, incorporate Clara's feedback on draft paper	Supplementary results written	8.5
14-07	Incorporate feedback on draft paper, write and revise supplementary reflections		6.5
15-07	Create code book as appendix, revise supplementary reflections		6
18-07	Incorporate Ajay's feedback on draft paper and revise draft paper and supplementary reflections	8625 words for draft paper	7.25
19-07	Create first version thesis	First version thesis submitted	1.5
26-07	Incorporate feedback on first version		1.75
28-07	Incorporate feedback on first version	Submit final version	3.5
Total number of hours spent			362.75