Examing Romantic Relationship Maintenance Behaviors: A Prime Time Television Content Analysis and Audience Perceptions of Mediated Portrayals

Thesis

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Abstract

Maintenance behaviors play an important role in sustaining relational states, especially within committed romantic relationships. Limited research, however, has considered media portrayals and audience interpretation of these behaviors. From the framework of social cognitive theory, the content analysis in Study 1 examined relational maintenance behaviors portrayed by committed romantic couples on prime time network television. The frequency of maintenance behaviors (positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, assurances, relationships talks, tasks, and networks) varied by type, valence, program genre, and couple type. Results indicated that comedies featured more frequent relational maintenance behaviors than dramas. Additionally, comedies exhibited more frequent negative maintenance behaviors than dramas. Differences also existed between couple types (married/civil union or cohabitating) regarding the types of maintenance behavior exhibited.

Despite interesting and significant findings within the content analysis, the examination of mediated portrayals of romantic relationship maintenance should not stop at simply recognizing what is presented on television. Thus, Study 2 examined audience members’ perceptions of mediated portrayals in terms of which maintenance behaviors are recognized and how audience recognition fares in comparison to experts (i.e., the content analysis data). Results show that audience members are fairly accurate at recognizing the
individual maintenance behaviors that experts coded for in the content analysis. However, audience members also coded for the presence of maintenance behaviors when experts did not. In addition, participants seemed to have trouble connecting the presence of individual maintenance behaviors to the overall picture of relationship maintenance within a television clip. Data examining how individuals learned about maintenance behaviors, audience perception of clip conflict, and couple behavior play an important role in audience recognition and interpretation of this essential relational concept.
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**Introduction**

Romantic partners rely on maintenance behaviors to sustain their relationship. These behaviors, which include examples such as demonstrating positivity towards one’s partner or helping with household responsibilities, allow couples to develop their bond and maintain the relationship (Canary & Dainton, 2006). Although considerable research has been conducted regarding the interpersonal use of maintenance behaviors (see Dindia, 2003), few studies have examined how media depict maintenance in romantic relationships and what influence these portrayals have on audience perceptions and interpretations.

This research investigates how relational maintenance behaviors are portrayed on prime time television and how audiences perceive these mediated representations. Social cognitive theory (SCT) asserts that individuals learn behaviors as a result of viewing mediated models (Bandura, 1977, 2001). Observers may then enact these learned behaviors in their own relationships and expect outcomes similar to those shown on television. Previous studies have challenged the accuracy of televised depictions of relationships, however (e.g., Eyal & Finnerty, 2007, 2009), and several studies have noted deleterious outcomes from consumption of these relational portrayals (Ferris, S. W. Smith, Greenberg, & S. L. Smith, 2007; Osborn, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Thus, this research first employed content analysis to ascertain the nature of romantic relationship maintenance on prime time television and identify the type of behaviors being modeled for viewers. After mediated portrayals were identified, an experiment was conducted to
analyze whether participants could identify behaviors similar to those recognized by experts of relational maintenance (i.e., the content analysis data) in order to better understand audience perceptions of romantic relationship maintenance on television.

**Relationship Maintenance**

*Relationship maintenance* entails actions or behaviors that individuals engage in to sustain a specified relational state (Canary & Dainton, 2006). For example, two long-distance friends may engage in weekly phone calls to keep their friendship alive or spouses may visit a therapist to revitalize their marriage. Canary and Stafford (1994) note that maintenance is an ongoing process; without it, relationships will naturally deteriorate. Maintenance behaviors vary by relationship type, the stage of the relationship, individual differences, and relational idiosyncrasies.

Several typologies have been developed to examine how maintenance behaviors differ between individuals and across relationship types. Stafford’s (2011) relational maintenance behavior measure (RMBM), an expansion of Canary and Stafford’s (1992) original conceptualization, elaborates seven factors: positivity, understanding, assurances, self-disclosure, relationship talks, tasks, and networks. *Positivity* refers to using a cheerful or optimistic tone when interacting. *Understanding* refers to instances of apologizing, not being judgmental, or showing forgiveness to another. *Assurances* include any indication that an individual would like to remain in the relationship such as talk about the future (e.g., plans, events, anniversaries, or decisions) and expressions of liking or love. *Self-disclosure* refers to an offer or an encouragement of talk about thoughts, feelings, or fears. *Relationship talks* entail dialogue about the quality of the relationship and individual partners’ feelings toward the relationship. *Tasks* refer to
engaging in defined responsibilities or sharing in joint responsibilities of the relationship. This factor also relates to the motivation or intention one has to engage in the tasks expected of them. Tasks specifically look at measures of equity in the relationship. Lastly, the factor of *networks* examines instances where the couple engages with family members or mutual friends, including spending time with others and seeking advice from their respective networks.

These maintenance behaviors have been studied by interpersonal scholars, but have yet to be examined in terms of mediated portrayals. The impact of these portrayals on perceptions of relationships is particularly important considering Bandura’s (1977, 2001) social cognitive theory. If and when these behaviors learned from television are applied to interpersonal relationships, they may be advantageous or detrimental to keeping a relationship intact.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory (SCT) argues that individuals can learn by observing behaviors of others (Bandura, 1977, 2001). Television offers ample opportunities for individuals to observe the behavior of others. As a result, many researchers have argued that it is important to understand the kinds of behaviors television programs are modeling for viewers (Eyal & Finnerty, 2007, 2009; Holz Ivory, Gibson, & Ivory, 2009; Hust, Brown, & L’Engle, 2008; Nabi, & Clark, 2008).

Replication of these learned behaviors depends on four factors: identification, vicarious reinforcement, outcome expectancies, and self-efficacy. *Identification* is a process by which an observer experiences a psychological connection with a model due to perceptions of similarity in demographics, experiences, or goals (Bandura, 1977). This
factor has been shown to increase the likelihood of an individual enacting a learned behavior even when that behavior is negative. As a result, it is vital that we understand not only what behaviors are being exhibited on television, but also who is modeling these behaviors.

A second factor of SCT, *vicarious reinforcement*, proposes that individuals can observe the positive or negative outcomes experienced by models and evaluate the likelihood that these outcomes would happen to them should they perform a behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). For instance, Bandura et al. (1963) found that when children observed models being punished for aggressive behavior, they did not engage in violent behavior themselves; however, when children observed an aggressive model being rewarded, they were more likely to imitate that modeled behavior. Regarding maintenance behaviors, if television viewers see an act of self-disclosure that is rewarded with reciprocity and reassurances, viewers may be more likely to imitate the positive behavior. If, instead, viewers are exposed to romantic couples that display aggression, distrust, or disrespect and are rewarded for that behavior (e.g., a partner who always reacts with affection or forgiveness, friends who socially reward the behavior with encouragement, or even a reality show host offering a tangible prize), viewers may be more likely to learn and mimic this negative behavior.

This vicarious reinforcement leads to the development of *outcome expectancies*, or beliefs of what would happen were the observer to encounter a similar situation. Past literature has focused on outcome expectancies of television portrayals of, for example, sexual behavior (Pardun, L’Engle, & Brown, 2005), drug use (Katz, Fromme, & D’Amico, 2000), and alcohol use (Wood, Read, Palfai, & Stevenson, 2001). In terms of
relational maintenance, these behaviors may be portrayed with positive or negative outcomes. For instance, viewers could be exposed to repeated situations where engaging in self-disclosure results in nothing but pain, frustration, and sadness, thus discouraging a viewer from enacting a behavior that could have helped to sustain their current relationship. Conversely, a viewer may be subjected to a comedy where bad-mouthing your partner and lying is rewarded, which may encourage the viewer to engage in this negative behavior and expect to be rewarded in return.

The final factor, self-efficacy, refers to the extent to which an individual believes that he/she can reproduce a behavior and experience similar outcomes (Bandura, 1977). For example, if a woman identifies with a TV character that unclogs a sink drain for an appreciative spouse, the woman might feel like she, too, could fix a household problem for her partner. Seeing a variety of characters perform similar maintenance behaviors on television may bolster viewers’ levels of efficacy for those behaviors and encourage imitation. Given the predictions of social cognitive theory and what they mean for possible behavioral outcomes, it is important to assess how relationship maintenance is enacted on television.

**Media Portrayals of Romantic Relationships**

Several studies have examined the types of romantic relationships portrayed on television and the effects of those portrayals on the viewing population (e.g., Osborn, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Signorielli, 1991). These studies suggest that images of romantic relationships on television often produce conflicting portrayals. Sitcoms often depict romantic relationships as happy and satisfied, whereas dramas seem to focus on negative aspects, including divorce and adultery (Signorielli, 1991). Signorielli (1991)
analyzed the effects of these portrayals on adolescent viewers’ perceptions of marriage. She found that adolescents who viewed idealized portrayals of marriage were more likely to say that they wanted to get married, have children, and stay with their partner than those who were not exposed to these portrayals. However, because of the conflicting portrayals presented on television, adolescents also questioned whether the idealized portrayals were accurate representations of reality.

A later look at television portrayals of marriage by Segrin and Nabi (2002) sought to determine how these portrayals influenced idealistic expectations of marriage. They found that although television viewing in general was not associated with romanticized portrayals of marriage, consuming certain genres of programming (e.g., romantic comedies and soap operas) was. Genre-specific programming is creating outcome expectancies, often leaving viewers with idealized and romanticized views of marriage.

Additionally, Osborn (2012) found that married television viewers who believed romantic relationships are accurately depicted on television had lower levels of commitment to their partners and deemed relationship alternatives as more attractive than viewers who did not perceive television to accurately portray romantic relationships. Those who believed television is accurate also reported that marriage had greater costs and fewer benefits than those who were skeptical of television depictions.

Regardless of the perceived accuracy of the behavior, individuals may still choose to model televised behaviors due to identification with characters, program popularity, and other factors. Nabi and Clark (2008), for example, found that individuals may model behaviors even when they are shown to have negative outcomes. The fact that negative behaviors are modeled even when undesirable consequences are shown points to the
gravity of understanding how relational maintenance is depicted on television. Additionally, understanding if and how audiences perceive these depictions may help in understanding interpersonal use of the behaviors shown on television.

A better understanding of media depictions of romantic relationship maintenance behaviors between committed couples is examined across two studies. In Study 1, a content analysis of prime time television examines how relationship maintenance behaviors are portrayed via romantically committed characters (i.e., married and cohabitating couples). In Study 2, participants are shown television clips from the content analysis sample and are asked to identify the maintenance behaviors depicted. The goal of Study 2 is to examine the relationship between maintenance behaviors identified by audience members and expert coders of the content analysis; this study seeks to understand whether maintenance concepts transcend from experts to the lay public and which variables influence audience perception.

**Study 1**

Although scholars agree that individuals can learn behaviors from mediated models, additional research is needed to examine this process within the context of relationship maintenance depictions. The first step is to determine what modeled behaviors are prevalent on television. To the authors’ knowledge, a content analysis has not yet been conducted on the portrayal of relational maintenance behaviors on television. Thus, this study seeks to determine how behaviors outlined by the RMBM (Stafford, 2011) are reflected in television portrayals of romantic relationships. Based on these concepts, we propose the following exploratory question:
**RQ1**: How frequently is each type of relational maintenance behavior (positivity, understanding, assurances, self-disclosure, relationship talks, tasks, networks) portrayed on prime time television?

In addition to examining the frequency of these behaviors, it is important to assess the valence of these behaviors to account for negative maintenance behaviors or interactions with mixed messages (e.g., a compliment given in a sarcastic tone; Ayers, 1983; Dainton & Gross, 2008; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Even though negative maintenance behaviors are usually connected with low-quality relationships (Goodboy et al., 2010), the fictional and comedic nature of various television shows may provide different contexts for the portrayal and interpretation of these behaviors. Therefore, we ask:

**RQ2**: How frequently are positive and negative relational maintenance behaviors portrayed?

The development of the RMBM (Stafford, 2011) was based on heterosexual married couples’ descriptions of maintenance behaviors. Therefore, the factors and items involved in the measure are based on self-reported behaviors of one specific couple type; however, long-term relationships featured on TV are growing more diverse (Holz Ivory et al., 2009). Our coding sample included couples who were married, in a civil union, or cohabitating. Due to this varied population, we propose the following research question:

**RQ3**: How do portrayals of maintenance behaviors vary by relationship type?

Previous research has indicated that men and women engage in some types of maintenance behavior at different frequencies (Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1998). For example, Dainton and Stafford (1993) found that men reported using positivity and
openness less frequently than women. In contrast, Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) found that men and women are similar in their use of self-disclosure. Given that television often depicts men and women in stereotypical manners (Scharrer, Kim, Lin, & Liu, 2006; Stern & Mastro, 2004) it is possible that television will reflect or perhaps magnify observed differences. Contrarily, it could be that, given the structural needs of television (e.g., reciprocal dialogue, the need to maintain relationships to fulfill plot lines or appease fans), these differences will be washed out. Thus:

**RQ4**: Are there differences in the types of maintenance behaviors portrayed by men and women?

Beyond character-level differences, behaviors may vary by television genre. Previous content analyses have noted differences across genres in how often characters portrayed physical aggression (S. L. Smith, Nathanson, & Wilson, 2002), the representation of altruistic acts (S. W. Smith et al., 2006), and the frequency of the portrayal of family conflict situations (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). Specific to our research interests, previous content analyses of romantic relationship communication found significant differences in the types of portrayals shown across television programming genres (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Signorielli, 1991). As a result, we ask:

**RQ5**: Are there differences according to television show genre in which specific relationship maintenance behaviors are portrayed on television?

**Method**

**Sample**

Following the procedures of other content analyses on prime time network television (Eyal & Finnerty, 2009; Kaye & Sapolsky, 2004; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000;
Signorielli, 2009), a sample week of programming across five major American networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, and The CW) was constructed. First, one week from each half of the 2011-2012 viewing season was randomly selected and the viewing week constructed. By sampling two weeks from different points within the viewing season, we were more likely to account for all shows airing on the network, including shows that were canceled after a few episodes or midseason replacements. From the two constructed weeks, we randomly sampled one show from each timeslot to form a composite week from which to draw our sample. In all, 76 shows were selected from across the five networks and coded (ABC = 17, NBC = 16, FOX = 12, CBS = 21, CW = 10). There were 22 half-hour shows, 50 one-hour shows, and 4 two-hour shows. The sample included 2 animated shows, 21 comedies, 40 dramas, and 13 reality shows.

Before coders began watching sample episodes, they were trained to identify romantic couples where 1) at least one member of the couple was a main character (Signorielli, McLeod, & Healy, 1994) and 2) the couple is involved in a legal union or cohabitating. We focused on main characters because their ongoing presence enabled the examination of maintenance behaviors. It also ensured the ability to verify the couple’s status as married, in a civil union, or cohabitating, which can be difficult or impossible to determine for background or nonrecurring characters. These relationships were selected because Stafford’s (2011) measurement was developed based on committed relationships. Also, some televised relationships (e.g., on-again, off-again dating, relationships based on casual sex, or “friends with benefits”) are ambiguous in whether or not they are intended to be or are perceived as romantic relationships. Thus, only legally united (i.e., married or in a civil union) and cohabitating relationships were selected.
Within the sample, 53 couples consisting of 52 females and 54 males were featured across 36 shows. These couples appeared across all networks (ABC = 12, NBC = 9, FOX = 5, CBS = 7, CW = 3) and genres (animated = 2, comedy = 16, drama = 16, reality = 2). There were 18 half-hour shows and 18 one-hour shows in the sample. Coded relationships included 34 couples who were married or in a civil union, and 19 couples who were cohabiting.

**Coding Scheme**

We chose to use speaking turns as our unit of analysis, following the methodology set forth by previous content analyses (Ferris et al., 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003). Analyzing individual speaking turns instead of individual sentences allowed us to achieve a better picture of overall maintenance behavior. Speaking turns were coded for every relevant maintenance behavior category based on Canary and Stafford’s (1992) assertion that maintenance behaviors can co-occur. Additionally, we coded only characters that are on screen together due to the nature of the measures used. By Stafford’s definitions (and the nature of television presentation), it is unlikely that maintenance would be identifiable when only one character is on screen. Even when a possible maintenance behavior is happening (e.g., a husband is alone, weeding the garden) it would be difficult to assess if this task was completed for the purpose of relational maintenance (because his partner asked him to) or other reasons (because gardening is his hobby). Thus, actions were coded when both characters were on screen together or when both sides of the conversation were perceptible to the viewer (e.g., talking on the phone when both sides of the conversation were audible).
**RMBM.** Stafford’s (2011) measure was adapted as a coding scheme. For this analysis, each type of maintenance behavior was coded for within each speaking turn as present or not present. If a speaking turn did not exhibit any maintenance behaviors at all, the speaking turn was coded as not being on the measurement scale. Categories can be viewed in Figure 1 of Appendix B.

**Behavior valence.** Each maintenance behavior was coded as positive or negative. A negatively-valenced maintenance behavior referred to an oppositional behavior of that category (e.g., negative understanding might refer to a character judging his or her partner). The category of positivity was reserved for instances in which positive (or negative) behavior did not overlap with another maintenance behavior on the RMBM.

Due to the nature of coding speaking turns instead of sentences, there were times when both positive and negative behaviors were exhibited during one speaking turn. In this instance, the behavior within the speaking turn was coded as both positive and negative. Sarcasm appeared frequently on some shows. Because sarcasm suggests the presence of both positive and negative elements and may be interpreted multiple ways, coders were instructed to code both positive and negative valence for that behavior.

**Reliability**

Approximately 10% of the total sample (8 shows) was randomly selected for independent reliability coding. Krippendorff’s alpha was computed for each coding category and for the overall sample. Within the first round of reliability coding, an acceptable level of reliability was not achieved. Therefore, the coders (two graduate students) discussed all discrepancies and worked with a third coder (a professor) to resolve disagreements and clarify codes.
In the second round of reliability coding, another 10\% of the total sample (8 shows) was randomly selected. Krippendorff’s alpha was computed for each coding category and for the overall sample; reliability was achieved ($\alpha = 0.92$). The two coders discussed all discrepancies in order to improve reliability going forward; any disagreements were brought to the attention of a third coder in order to clarify codes and resolve dispute. Once all discrepancies within the reliability sample were resolved, each of the two coders were then assigned a random sample of half of the remaining television shows.

Results

RQ1: Frequencies of Maintenance Behaviors

There were a total of 2,227 speaking turns featuring 2,669 behaviors across all shows in the sample. The number of total times each maintenance factor was exhibited within the sample is as follows: networks (1,029), self-disclosure (555), tasks (511), understanding (269), positivity (124), relationship talks (107), and assurances (74).

Because programs differed in terms of viewing length, all data was weighted to reflect 1-hour programming, which reflects the length of the longest coded television show in our sample; all means refer to the number of observed behaviors per hour. A typical hour of prime time programming features the following maintenance behaviors, in order from most to least frequent: networks ($M = 21.84, SD = 36.05$), self-disclosure ($M = 11.42, SD = 19.72$), tasks ($M = 8.33, SD = 31.46$), understanding ($M = 5.95, SD = 11.79$), positivity ($M = 2.67, SD = 8.41$), relationship talks ($M = 2.31, SD = 6.16$), and assurances ($M = 1.47, SD = 4.23$).
The average number of times a given individual in the sample exhibited a maintenance behavior (i.e., the number of behaviors demonstrated per character per hour) are as follows: networks ($M = 15.70$, $SD = 17.83$), self-disclosure ($M = 8.22$, $SD = 9.27$), tasks ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 10.14$), understanding ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 5.96$), positivity ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 4.92$), relationship talks ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 3.51$), and assurances ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 2.60$).

**RQ2: Valence of Maintenance Behaviors**

On average, prime time television featured the following positive maintenance behaviors each hour: networks ($M = 13.79$, $SD = 14.42$), self-disclosure ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 9.13$), tasks ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 10.08$), understanding ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 3.45$), relationship talks ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 3.81$), and assurances ($M = 1.01$, $SD = 2.60$). An hour of programming also featured the following negative maintenance behaviors: understanding ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 4.60$), networks ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 7.24$), self-disclosure ($M = 1.02$, $SD = 2.81$), relationship talks ($M = 0.93$, $SD = 2.61$), assurances ($M = 0.36$, $SD = 2.35$), and tasks ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.65$).

One-way chi square analyses were run to examine the frequency of positive and negative behaviors within each of these categories. Examining individual behaviors, we found that behaviors were skewed positively for networks, $\chi^2(1) = 778.67$, $p < .0001$; tasks $\chi^2(1) = 563.50$, $p < .0001$; self-disclosure, $\chi^2(1) = 548.17$, $p < .0001$; assurances, $\chi^2(1) = 32.83$, $p < .0001$; and relationship talks, $\chi^2(1) = 4.20$, $p < .05$. However, individuals displayed higher levels of negative behavior than expected in understanding, $\chi^2(1) = 26.09$, $p < .0001$.

**RQ3: Frequencies of Maintenance Behaviors by Relationship Type**
An independent-samples \( t \)-test revealed that the average number of speaking turns exhibited among married/civil union individuals \((M = 31.24, SD = 34.66)\) and cohabitating individuals \((M = 35.21, SD = 25.83)\) were not significantly different, \( p > 0.05 \).

The difference between married/civil union \((M = 36.13, SD = 35.57)\) and cohabitating \((M = 49.29, SD = 41.50)\) individuals on the overall number of maintenance behaviors bordered on significance, \( t(104) = 1.72, p = .09, d = 0.34 \). Considering the maintenance behavior types individually, cohabitating couples demonstrated significantly more relationship talks \((\text{cohabitating}, M = 2.66, SD = 4.59; \text{married/civil union}, M = 1.10, SD = 2.60)\), \( t(104) = 2.23, p < 0.05, d = 0.42 \); positivity \((\text{cohabitating}, M = 3.42, SD = 7.73; \text{married/civil union}, M = 1.07, SD = 1.74)\), \( t(104) = 2.41, p < 0.05, d = 0.42 \); and tasks \((\text{cohabitating}, M = 8.76, SD = 11.62; \text{married/civil union}, M = 4.41, SD = 8.93)\), \( t(104) = 2.15, p < 0.05, d = 0.42 \).

**RQ4: Frequencies of Maintenance Behaviors by Sex**

\( T \)-test results indicated no significant differences between number of speaking turns for males and females, \( p > .05 \). There were also no significant differences between male and female characters for any of the seven maintenance behaviors, all \( ps > .05 \).

**RQ5: Frequencies of Maintenance Behaviors by Program Genre**

Consistent with literature citing genre-specific portrayals, a one-way ANOVA revealed that maintenance behaviors exhibited in animated \((M = 83.50, SD = 70.79)\), comedy \((M = 56.71, SD = 43.07)\), reality \((M = 31.10, SD = 16.24)\), and dramatic programming \((M = 21.89, SD = 16.71)\) were significantly different, \( F(3, 102) = 10.53, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.24 \). Post-hoc \( t \)-tests with a Bonferroni correction revealed significant
differences between dramas and animated programming, $t(46) = 4.86$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.43$, and dramas and comedy, $t(90) = 5.03$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.06$.

Among the seven maintenance behaviors, significant differences were cited among programming in networks, $F(3, 102) = 12.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$, understanding, $F(3, 102) = 9.71$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.22$, self-disclosure, $F(3, 102) = 8.44$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.20$, and relationship talks, $F(3, 102) = 3.12$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. Post-hoc $t$-tests with a Bonferroni correction revealed significant differences between genres. Means, standard deviations, and significant differences across genres are shown in Table 1 in Appendix A.

**Discussion**

The survival of romantic relationships depends upon partners’ use of relational maintenance behaviors, which may be learned from mediated models. In this study, we examined prime time television portrayals of relationships to determine what maintenance behaviors are demonstrated on television. All of the maintenance behaviors delineated by the RMBM (positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, assurances, relationship talks, tasks, and networks) appeared on prime time television, but some of these maintenance behaviors differed by genre, couple type (married/civil union or cohabitating), and valence.

Regarding the frequency of behaviors, some behaviors were observed in greater proportion on television than real life relational maintenance studies would indicate. For instance, networks appeared more frequently than any other behavior. This finding is inconsistent with Stafford (2011), where partners reported roughly equal frequencies across RMBM factors. This difference may be due to the nature of ensemble television programming wherein couples are generally embedded in a complex community of
characters. *Grey’s Anatomy*, for instance, shows several couples who work together and regularly interact with shared co-workers along with their romantic partners. This group interaction situation where friends and family were consistently involved in interactions between partners was observed across all genres. Though this structure makes for a more compelling storyline, it could be a false depiction of reality for some audience members. SCT suggests that viewers may believe that heavy network involvement is normative or necessary for maintaining a successful relationship when this may not actually be true.

Overwhelmingly, maintenance behaviors were used positively by characters on television. This is unsurprising because scholars tend to characterize successful maintenance behaviors as positive even though negative maintenance behaviors exist (Dainton & Gross, 2008; Goodboy et al., 2010). Although the majority of our data suggest that characters are more positive than negative in their maintenance behaviors, understanding was more negatively valenced in the sample (e.g., judging a partner for an action or not apologizing when recognizing fault). The prevalence of negative understanding on television may be due to formal features of genre-specific programming. This kind of behavior was commonly employed in comedies for comedic effect; although a character’s intentions may have been negative, rarely did it affect the relationship negatively. For instance, in *Whitney*, the characters regularly judged and mocked each other for their views on romance; however, the narrative ended with the couple feeling closer by engaging in negative understanding. The live audience’s laughter also indicated that they found the situation humorous. Thus, television may vicariously reinforce negative maintenance behaviors as they are rewarded on multiple levels.
We were also interested in examining how maintenance behaviors were reflected in prime time television across different variables (couple type, sex, and genre). Our findings indicate that cohabitating individuals were more likely to exhibit behaviors of positivity, relationship talks, and tasks than individuals who are married or in a civil union. Engagement in relationship talks could vary between these relationship types due to differences in perceived relationship stability. Additionally, the prevalence of performing tasks also favors cohabitating individuals. One reason for this may be that individuals who live together may be engaging in tasks jointly in order to establish a sense of shared responsibility within the relationship, whereas partners in a legal union might have developed more distinct roles over time. It also seems likely that children are more common in this latter group, and the presence of children may force couples to divide rather than share tasks to manage the extra responsibility of childcare (e.g., one parent stays home to watch the children while the other runs errands).

When examining maintenance behaviors according to sex, there were no significant differences between males and females as have been identified in previous research (e.g., Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Some studies have found that maintenance behaviors vary by gender (i.e., masculinity and femininity) rather than sex (e.g., Stafford et al., 2000), and it is possible that the gender of characters may predict relational maintenance behaviors more so than character sex. Future research should investigate the intersection of relationship behaviors and gender roles independent of sex.

In addition to examining character-level variables, this study also addressed the program-level variable of genre. One notable difference is that maintenance behaviors (specifically understanding, self-disclosure, and networks) were more prevalent in
comedies than dramas. These differences hold significant implications for serial viewers of one type of programming. For instance, individuals who only watch network comedies will be exposed to more instances of maintenance than individuals who only watch network dramas. Due to the nature of genre-specific programming, fans of either genre may develop a skewed perception of how frequently one should engage in relational maintenance (e.g., fans of comedy shows thinking that self-disclosure with a partner needs to occur frequently). There also may be inherent differences in the outcomes of maintenance behaviors across genres: for example, comedies might always insist on a happy resolution, regardless of the depicted behaviors, whereas dramas might focus on more negative outcomes. Future studies should investigate the effects of characters’ behaviors both within the show and on viewers.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations are inherent within this analysis. First, the sample was comprised of only the five largest U.S. broadcast television networks’ prime time programming. To gain a better understanding of how maintenance behaviors are shown across television, a more diverse sample should be constructed including different sources (e.g., cable channels and Internet programming) and shows that air at different times (e.g., soap operas). Also, coding shows over a season as opposed to a single, independent episode may offer further insight into the evolution of maintenance behaviors over time and their long-term consequences.

Second, within our sample week we only identified a limited number of gay or lesbian couples ($n = 3$). This lack of romantically-involved LGBTQ characters on network television does not accurately reflect the makeup of the U.S. population. The
Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) reported that the number of LGBTQ characters increased between the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 seasons (Kane, Gouttebroze, Townsend, & Carter, 2012), so future content analyses may find a more diverse sample.

The third limitation to this study speaks to the nature of our coding scheme and how we coded for behavior valence. Mixed (i.e., positive and negative) behaviors exhibited within one speaking turn and sarcastic behaviors were both coded in the same manner, thus we are unable to parse out one kind of behavior from another. In the future, these concepts should be denoted differently within the coding scheme to make claims about their appearance in prime time programming.

Additionally, we did not code for romantically involved but non-cohabitating couples. The decision to exclude these couples was due to the fact that the RMBM was created to measure relational maintenance behaviors among serious, committed couples. However, by excluding non-cohabitating couples, we may have overlooked potential portrayals of relational maintenance behaviors that could inform our analyses. Future studies may examine behaviors among dating or casual romantic relationships.

Individuals in a committed romantic relationship need to engage in relational maintenance behaviors to keep the relationship intact. To learn about these behaviors, individuals can rely on interpersonal or mediated portrayals of romantic relationships. The results of this study bring us closer to understanding how viewers learn about relational maintenance behaviors and use them in their own personal relationships. Going forward, we must continue to analyze the content of mass messages as well as user-generated messages to recognize what lessons viewers are learning.
As with all content analyses, future research should seek to examine viewer perceptions of these behaviors and understand how these portrayals influence viewer attitudes and behavior. Significant claims according to current relationship maintenance scales cannot be made if individual audience members do not categorize these behaviors similarly to how scholars have defined them; rather, this disconnect would call for a reinterpretation of how relationship maintenance is measured in media depictions of relationships. Thus, Study 2 examines the differences between audience perceptions and the perceptions of scholars and how this could result in a different understanding of how these behaviors work, who should engage in them, and whether or not they are successful. This research not only examines differences between perceptions, but also seeks to determine what is causing these dissimilarities (e.g., social norms, cultural norms, or personal experience).

**Study 2**

Audience perceptions and interpretations of television characters and the behaviors they enact have been studied across many different contexts (see Cohen, 2002; Oppenheimer, Goodman, Adams-Price, Codling, & Davis Coker, 2003; Signorielli, 1993); however, relationship maintenance behaviors portrayed on television have not been viewed from an audience perspective, nor have audience perceptions been contrasted with expert interpretations. The similarities and differences between a lay audience and an expert could point to implications for use of mediated portrayals in interpersonal relationships. Thus, this study seeks to understand if differences in overall and specific maintenance behavior recognition occur between audience members and experts in the field. The following exploratory research questions are posed:
**RQ1a:** Are there differences between audience and expert coding of television clips according to the RMBM?

**RQ1b:** Do experts and audience members differ in recognizing overall use of maintenance behaviors within a television clip?

**RQ1c:** Do experts and audience members differ in recognizing specific maintenance behaviors within a television clip?

One explanation for why differences between these two groups occur could be explained through schemas. Based on the literature, this study aims to look at various individual variables that could influence a schema of relationships or relational maintenance behaviors and, in turn, influence the interpretation of the media message. An important variable to the formation of schemas is the perceived importance of where or from whom individuals learned about maintenance behaviors. Therefore, pretest questions concerning how important behavior models are to learning about relationship maintenance will be taken into consideration. Perhaps where individuals learned about relationship maintenance will inform whether or not they recognize the mediated portrayals of maintenance behaviors. Other possible variables of interest include: number of RMBM (Stafford, 2011) items present in the television clip, perceptions of maintenance success by the TV couple, perceptions of couple happiness within the television clip, and degree of relational conflict present in the television clip. Based on this information, the following research question will be examined:

**RQ2:** What or whom do individuals claim as important models of relationship maintenance behaviors?

**Method**

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Participants

Two hundred and forty-five undergraduate students (149 females and 95 males, 1 missing response) participated in this research. Ages ranged from 18 to 40 ($M = 20.54$, $SD = 2.33$). Participants received partial credit toward fulfillment of a class requirement or extra credit for a communication class at a large Midwestern university.

Design and Procedures

This study employed a between-subjects design where participants viewed and responded to half of the available television clips in the sample; this design was employed in order to keep the study duration at a reasonable length of one hour. In order to account for differences between experts and audience members, the experts indicated in Study 1 coded each television clip. At least three days prior to the experiment, participants completed a pre-test questionnaire containing various items, including demographic information, family background, exposure to various interpersonal relationships (e.g., marriage, divorce, cohabitation), information about past/current romantic relationships, influence of relationship maintenance models, and self-report of maintenance use (if currently engaged in a romantic relationship). Pretest questions used in analysis are shown in Figure 2 of Appendix B. All participants electronically signed an informed consent form before filling out the pretest questionnaire.

At least three days after completing the pretest questionnaire, participants came into a laboratory setting to complete the experiment session. This session was conducted on desktop computers in a campus building. Each participant used a computer that was separated by partitions from other participants completing the study at the same time. All
participants electronically signed an informed consent form before starting the laboratory experiment.

First, participants were randomly assigned to view six of the twelve possible television clips. Ten of the available clips were taken directly from the content analysis in Study 1 and two additional clips were found outside of the sample; these two clips were included in order to show a clip with extreme amounts of conflict and a clip that showcased all seven maintenance behaviors. The experts who completed the coding for Study 1 coded the two new clips.

After viewing each clip, participants were first instructed to indicate whether they believed that any relationship maintenance behaviors happened in the clip. Then, participants were given Stafford’s (2011) Relationship Maintenance Behavioral Measure (RMBM) and were instructed to indicate whether each item was present in the clip they just viewed. In addition, participants indicated the perceived success of the maintenance behaviors used, couple happiness at the beginning and end of the clip, and maintenance initiation; participants also self-reported on their familiarity with the television show and the couple highlighted in the clip, as well as general interest of each clip viewed. Each of the questions used in analysis are shown in Figure 2 of Appendix B.

**Stimulus materials**

Twelve clips from ten different television shows were chosen as the stimulus materials for this study. Nine of the twelve clips were taken directly from the content analysis in Study 1 and three of the twelve clips were gathered from the same television networks, but were outside of the sample year. These three clips were added to the stimuli sample in order to add diversity of romantic couple interaction. Whereas the nine
television clips from the content analysis all exhibited a few signs of relational
maintenance, two of the clips taken from outside of the content analysis exhibited high
ratings of conflict ($\text{Parenthood}_a = M = 10.26, SD = 1.16$, $\text{Perfect Couples}_a = M = 9.09,$
$SD = 1.80$) and one clip involved a couple who exhibited all seven maintenance
behaviors on the RMBM ($\text{Perfect Couples}_b$).

All of the television clips used as stimuli were coded for relational maintenance
behavior presence, regardless of whether the television clips were from the content
analysis in Study 1 or from outside of the sample. Because all of the sample clips were
coded for items on the RMBM, analyses could be conducted on the difference between
participants and expert coders. Between the twelve television clips, all relational
maintenance behaviors on RMBM were exhibited. The television clips varied in length
from 56 seconds to 2 minutes and 32 seconds each. Married and cohabitating couples, as
well as heterosexual and homosexual couples were depicted throughout the sample.

The first television clip used in the sample came from CW’s 90210 (labeled
90210<sub>a</sub>). This clip features a cohabitating couple, Erin Silver and Navid Shirazi, who
share an apartment with Navid’s little sister, Leilah. Within this scene, Erin and Navid
are shown interacting with a family member (i.e., Leilah) and self-disclosing to one
another about the frustrations involved in finding “alone time.”

A second television clip from 90210 (labeled 90210<sub>b</sub>) was used in this sample. In
this clip, Erin Silver tells Navid Shirazi that she found $100,000 in a bag in their
apartment and demands to know what’s going on. Navid engages in self-disclosure by
explaining that the money will repay a debt owed from his past. Afterward, Erin seems to
understand and they part by telling each other, “I love you.”
A segment from the FOX crime-drama, *Bones*, features live-in partners, Temperance “Bones” Brennan and Seely Booth. As they are getting ready for work and completing household tasks, Bones approaches Booth and self-discloses about her physical appearance since having their baby, Christine. Booth tries to console Bones by telling her that nothing has changed and gives her some advice. Bones seems discontent with Booth’s reply and storms off claiming that he was of no help.

In a segment of NBC’s short-lived sitcom, *Best Friends Forever*, cohabitating partners, Lennon White and Joe Foley, are seen discussing recent interactions with Joe’s parents. The previous evening Joe brought his parents back to the messy apartment before Lennon and their roommate, Jessica, were able to clean. Lennon also confronts Joe about telling his parents that he quit his job. Joe tries to explain how the situation can be resolved by using humor.

*Whitney*, a hit sitcom on NBC, explores the lives of cohabitating partners Alex Miller and Whitney Cummings. In this clip, Whitney expresses her amazement at Alex’s defense of old-fashioned romance. Witty banter and sarcastic comments are exchanged between the couple concerning instances of romance that have occurred in their own relationship. Alex confesses that he had to give up on romance when he started dating Whitney, but combats that statement by complimenting her physical features.

A segment from CW’s *Ringer* depicts married couple Henry and Gemma Butler talking about a mistake that Henry has made. In the beginning of the scene, Gemma walks in on Henry while he’s on the telephone. Catching the end of his conversation, Gemma assumes Henry is talking to someone about committing adultery. Instead, Henry reveals that his publisher has dropped him from their list of possible authors. Gemma
candidly reveals her disgust by calling herself an idiot and proclaiming that she’s leaving
the relationship.

The first of two scenes from NBC’s *Parenthood* (labeled *Parenthood*₁) focuses on
married couple, Joel and Julia Graham. Here, Julia comes home and announces that she’s
brought home a coworker, Zoe, to have dinner with them. Joel seems surprised, but
welcomes Zoe happily. The couple steps outside to bring in some groceries from the car
and Joel questions why Zoe is at their house; Julia gives a long explanation about Zoe’s
circumstances and casually mentions that Zoe will be staying the night. Joel clearly
exhibits frustration at not being informed of the situation beforehand.

The second scene from *Parenthood* (labeled *Parenthood*₂) is not taken from the
content analysis. This scene was chosen due to the high intensity of conflict, but also the
use of a relational maintenance act. Here, married couple Adam and Kristina Braverman
are arguing about Adam’s recent kiss with a coworker. Kristina, crying and upset, listens
to Adam explain that the woman kissed him and that he is not attracted to her. He
proclaims his love Kristina and tries to hug her, but she pushes him away and exclaims
that this is how they can quickly become divorced.

NBC’s *Smash* features cohabitating couple, Dev Sundaram and Karen Cartwright.
In this scene, Karen visits Dev at work and sees him flirting with another woman. They
step out into the hall and quickly fight over their recent lack of communication. Karen
tries to resolve the situation by inviting Dev to join her at a movie premiere that night.
Later, at the movie, we see Karen sitting alone in the theater and Dev’s text message
proclaiming that he didn’t feel like attending.
ABC’s *Suburgatory* depicts the relationship of homosexual, cohabitating couple, Mr. Wolfe and Chef Alan. Here, we see Mr. Wolfe wrongfully kidnapping a dog that he thinks is his own. Chef Alan returns home and demands to know what’s going on. Mr. Wolfe is sad they decided not have dogs in the apartment, causing Chef Alan to rethink his opinions. In the end, Chef Alan is in favor of having a dog and happily proclaims that he and Mr. Wolfe should no longer think of each other as roommates, but as a couple.

Two clips from NBC’s short-lived sitcom, *Perfect Couples*, were added to this sample. These clips were not included in the content analysis of Study 1. The first clip (*Perfect Couples, a*) was chosen for the high prominence of conflict, but the inclusion of relational maintenance acts. In this segment, a group of three couples are playing a party game. Amy uses the name of an ex-lover as a clue, which makes her husband Vance very upset. They fight for some time about who has slept with whom and end up storming to opposite ends of the house, proclaiming that they never want to see each other again.

The second clip of this same show (*Perfect Couples, b*) features married couple, Dave and Julia, engaging in all seven maintenance behaviors on the RMBM. Dave tried to dispose of a possum by catapulting it over the house, but it ended up landing on the roof overtop of the skylight. When the couple is kissing on the couch, Julia spots the possum and Dave tries to explain what happened. During the conversation, Dave mentions his fear of possums and not being able to take care of Julia. After their discussion, the two of them venture onto the roof to dispose of the possum together.

**Measures**

Participants were given the full RMBM (Stafford, 2011) after each television clip and were instructed to indicate whether the each item was present in the clip previously
viewed. Three to five example items were provided to represent each of the seven maintenance behaviors (see Figure 1 in Appendix B). Before analysis, the items within each maintenance behavior were collapsed; if a participant indicated that at least one item within a specific maintenance behavior was present in the clip, the behavior was coded as present for that clip. This was done in order to create a measure comparable to the expert coders of the content analysis. Thus, each television clip could have up to seven codes of presence, one for each maintenance behavior on the RMBM.

Additionally, participant scores were collapsed across the six television clips viewed. This combined score \((0 = \text{not present}, \ 6 = \text{present in all six clips})\) represented the total number of times that a participant saw each maintenance behavior across the six clips. Participant scores for overall maintenance were also collapsed across the six viewed television clips \((0 = \text{not present}, \ 6 = \text{present in all six clips})\).

**Results**

**RQ1a: Difference between audience and expert RMBM coding**

In order to determine whether or not audience viewers and experts recognize the same relationship maintenance behaviors depicted on television, we first had to analyze the overall correlation of each participant’s coding to the expert coding. To do this, we first computed Pearson’s \(r\) to determine the correlation between each participant and the expert codes. This was achieved by analyzing how each participant’s codes for maintenance behavior presence per television clip matched the expert codes; thus, each participant’s codes were correlated with the expert codes to determine similarity. Then, Fisher’s \(r\)-to-\(z\) transformation was computed for each participant in order to assess the significance of the difference between the coding of lay audience members and experts.
The mean z-score after the r-to-z transformation was 0.32 ($SD = 0.22$). Transforming the z-score back to r resulted in an average correlation of 0.30. An independent samples $t$-test analyzing the z-scores revealed that the correlations were significantly different from zero, $t(244) = 22.88, p < .001$.

**RQ1b: Difference in Overall Maintenance Recognition**

After viewing the television clip, participants first judged whether maintenance behaviors, as a whole, were depicted. Thus, participants could indicate whether maintenance behaviors were present (1) or not present (0) in the clip. Each of the clips in the sample included several maintenance behaviors; thus, the answer to whether maintenance behaviors were depicted in the clip should have been coded as present. In order to assess whether participants were successful at recognizing these behaviors, the percent of participants who positively responded to this question were calculated and are shown in Table 2 of Appendix A.

Participants seemed to be fairly accurate in their recognition of overall maintenance behavior depictions in that maintenance behavior presence was recognized by a large percentage of the participants across the sample (range: 71.9% to 97.6% of the sample coded behaviors as present). However, a few clips revealed recognition of maintenance behavior presence near chance (range: 47.5% to 64.5% of the sample), while other clips had an extremely small percentage of participants recognize the presence of maintenance behaviors ($Perfect Couples_a = 15.4\%$ and $Ringer = 47.5\%$).

An independent samples $t$-test was computed with a comparison point of 50.00 to examine whether participant recognition of maintenance behaviors differed from chance. The average percentage of maintenance behavior recognition across the entire sample
was 73.53 ($SD = 23.69$). $T$-test results indicate that participant coding of maintenance behavior recognition significantly higher than chance, $t(11) = 3.44, p < 0.006$.

**RQ1c: Difference in Specific Maintenance Behavior Recognition**

The participant codes for presence or absence of each of the seven maintenance behaviors within each television clip were analyzed to determine agreement with the expert codes of each television clip. Table 3 in Appendix A reveals the percent agreement and percent disagreement between participants and experts regarding behavior presence within all twelve televisions clips in the sample.

In order to understand what participants were recognizing (or not recognizing) in comparison to expert coders, analyses of both percent agreement and percent disagreement of all behavior recognitions were warranted. Percent agreement corresponds to an instance where both the participant and the expert agree that the behavior is present in the clip. Percent disagreement, on the other hand, corresponds to an instance where the participant believes the behavior is present in a television clip, but the expert coders did not indicate the behavior as present.

**Percent agreement.** Considering the seven maintenance behaviors outlined in the RMBM (Stafford, 2011), participants are significantly better than chance at agreeing with the experts in judging the following maintenance behaviors as present across the sample of twelve television clips: understanding (94.54%), positivity (93.48%), self-disclosure (93.13%), tasks (79.38%), and relationship talks (74.58%). However, participants were less likely to recognize the following maintenance behaviors that were recognized by expert coders: assurances (65.14%) and networks (58.31%).
Additionally, the average percent agreement of participants and experts was calculated for each clip and is indicated in Table 4. Results show that participants are fairly accurate at recognizing present behaviors per clip (range: 73.03% to 93.70%). Only two shows indicated total percent agreement close to chance ($90210_a = 67.80\%$ and $Smash = 71.3\%$).

An independent samples $t$-test was computed with a comparison point of 50.00 to examine whether participant recognition of present maintenance behaviors differed from chance. The average percent of present maintenance behavior recognition across the entire sample was 80.27 ($SD = 8.05$). $T$-test results indicate that participant coding of present maintenance behavior recognition significantly differed from chance, $t(11) = 13.03$, $p < 0.001$.

**Percent disagreement.** When analyzing percent disagreement of maintenance behavior items, a significant amount of participants code for maintenance behaviors when they are not being depicted in the clip, according to the experts. Participants are reporting recognition of disagreeable items at higher levels than chance for understanding (84.63%) and assurances (73.67%). Additionally, incongruent recognition of relationship talks (60.08%) was near chance. The additional RMBM items (positivity, self-disclosure, tasks, and networks) were indicated as present at lower levels than chance. It is important to note that self-disclosure could not be assessed for percent disagreement since it was present in all twelve of the sample television clips.

Similar to percent agreement, the average percent disagreement of participants and experts was calculated for each clip and is indicated in Table 4. Results show that few participants recognize behaviors differently from experts on a per clip basis (range:...
28.25% to 54.75% disagreement). However, four clips indicated total percent disagreement at levels higher than chance (Bones = 73.03%, 90210 = 71.02%, Best Friends Forever = 74.00 and Suburgatory = 75.00). It is important to note that Perfect Couples could not be used in this analysis, since all seven maintenance behaviors were depicted.

An independent samples t-test was computed with a comparison point of 50.00 to examine whether participant recognition of maintenance behaviors that were not recognized by coders differed from chance. The average percent of maintenance behavior recognition across the entire sample was 52.10 (SD = 18.42). T-test results indicate that participant recognition of maintenance behaviors that experts did not code for did not significantly differ from chance, t(10) = 0.38, p > 0.7.

**RQ2: Important Behavior Models of Relationship Maintenance**

One set of questions in the pretest concerned where individuals learned maintenance behaviors and how important these models were in influencing or shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward relationship maintenance behaviors of positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talks, assurances, tasks, and networks. Participants indicated the importance of twelve different sources of relationship maintenance information on a scale from 1 (not influential) to 5 (extremely influential). Means and standard deviations for each of the twelve sources across the seven maintenance behaviors are shown in Table 5 of Appendix A.

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted to determine the effect of perceived importance across each of the seven maintenance behaviors. Results revealed a significant multivariate main effect of perceived importance of the relationship
maintenance models across the seven maintenance behaviors, $F(6, 239) = 24.08, p < 0.001$, partial eta$^2 = 0.38$. Additionally, a significant multivariate main effect of perceived importance of the model in learning about relationship maintenance differed significantly between the twelve given behavior models, $F(11, 234) = 75.14, p < 0.001$, partial eta$^2 = 0.78$. A significant interaction effect between perceived importance of the maintenance models across the seven maintenance behaviors and within the twelve behavior models was also analyzed with a repeated measures MANOVA and was statistically significant, $F(66, 179) = 3.75, p < 0.001$, partial eta$^2 = 0.58$. Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects for the importance of behavior models on each maintenance behavior were computed and all results were statistically significant, $ps < 0.001$.

General patterns in the data reveal that for most of the maintenance behaviors, the most important models for learning behaviors are personal experiences and close interpersonal relationships (parents, friends), followed by media sources (movies, television programs), moderately close interpersonal relationships (siblings, grandparents), distant interpersonal relationships (friends of the family, aunts/uncles, cousins, acquaintances), and school experiences. The top four responses for positivity, self-disclosure, assurances, and relationship talks were: personal experiences, parents, friends, and movies. Similar patterns were found in understanding, but this behavior resulted in parents having the most influence, followed by personal relationships. The relationship maintenance behaviors of networks and tasks varied the most from general patterns. Both of these behaviors showcased a similar pattern of parents and personal experiences as most important to learning and understanding behavior, yet these two
categories placed moderately close relationships (siblings, grandparents) above media influence. In fact, media sources ranked fairly low on these lists, when compared to other relationship maintenance behavior categories.

**Discussion**

It has been argued that the survival of romantic relationships depends upon use of relational maintenance behaviors (Canary & Dainton, 2006; Canary & Stafford, 1994), which may be learned from mediated models. In this study, participants viewed prime time television portrayals of relationship maintenance behaviors as a first step in determining audience recognition of these mediated portrayals. Participant recognition of maintenance behaviors was examined in terms of recognition by expert coders (i.e., content analysis data). The data for overall maintenance behavior recognition and individual behavior recognition were examined for each television clip. This was done to determine whether audience and expert recognition of behaviors were similar to one another. Additionally, analyses were conducted on pre-test data concerning where participants report learning about maintenance behaviors; these analyses prove helpful in determining which behavior models are most important to understand in learning about relational maintenance.

In order to make claims concerning similarity of maintenance behavior recognition between audience members and expert coders, analyses between the two groups’ reported recognition were conducted. The first analysis included codes for behavior presence of each of the seven maintenance behaviors across the sample clips for both audience members and expert coders. This analysis aimed to determine whether audience members and expert coders recognized behaviors similarly throughout all
twelve of the television clips. Results reveal a significant correlation between behavior recognition of the two groups, meaning that audience members and expert coders recognized similar maintenance behaviors on television.

*T*-test results indicate that participant agreement with experts was above chance. However, there were a few behaviors that participants seemed to have difficulty recognizing. Therefore, responses were broken down in order to examine audience and expert recognition of maintenance behaviors 1) when both groups recognized a similar behavior and 2) when audience members recognized behaviors that experts did not. First, responses of the two groups were examined at times when both audience members and experts recognized maintenance behaviors as present. A significant correlation between these two groups reveals that lay individuals are fairly accurate at recognizing behaviors portrayed on television.

When both groups recognized similar maintenance behaviors, there is strong evidence for successful audience member recognition of all the individual RMBM items. But participants seemed particularly accurate in their recognition of positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talks, and tasks. Results of Study 1 reveal the prevalence of these particular maintenance actions on prime time television programming. However, the lay audience does not easily identify two particular maintenance behaviors – assurances and networks.

This general lack of recognition for assurances could be explained by examining the content analysis data in Study 1. In that study, assurances were found to be the least frequently depicted maintenance behavior across the television sample. Thus, perhaps
audience members are unable to recognize assurances due to their relative invisibility on network programming.

Although there is evidence to explain why individuals do not recognize acts of assurance on prime time television, there doesn’t seem to be a clear explanation for why networks are not being recognized. This becomes especially puzzling when considering the content analysis data from Study 1; the RMBM item of networks was the most frequently depicted maintenance behavior across prime time television programming. Although the inclusion of others may be a feature of network television (e.g., a large cast, multiple story lines), inclusion of friends and family in a mediated romantic relationship comes in two major forms: physical presence and couple talk of an intention to include important individuals in their lives. Upon further investigation of the clips viewed by participants, it seems as though they are largely discounting this second form of network involvement as a relationship maintenance behavior (e.g., Ringer = 5.7%, Perfect Couples_b = 27.0%, and Suburgatory = 40.0%) and are mostly recognizing the physical presence of other individuals alongside a romantic couple (e.g., Perfect Couples_a = 95.0%, Best Friends Forever = 89.9%, and Parenthood_a = 89.4%). Further research investigating perceptions of talk or intention of network involvement could shed light on why this behavior is not being recognized as romantic relationship maintenance in a mediated context.

Second, participant and expert codes were examined at times when participants indicated behaviors as present when experts did not. This analysis revealed that audience members tend to “recognize” or “see” behaviors when they are not really being exhibited according to the experts. In fact, a large percentage (i.e., seemingly greater than chance)
of participants falsely perceived the maintenance behaviors of understanding, assurances, and relationship talks as present in the clip when the experts did not code for these behaviors in the clip. In addition, false recognition of maintenance behavior presence for positivity, tasks, and networks were also indicated by a smaller amount of participants. The results from Study 1 may help to explain these findings.

Understanding, assurances, and relationship talks were three of the four maintenance behaviors depicted the least frequently on prime time network television, yet were most likely to be falsely recognized on television. Perhaps participants falsely identify these behaviors as present due to a lack of mediated models. In addition, these three maintenance behaviors exhibited moderate to high percentages of presence within both percent agreement and percent disagreement; this could indicate that participants were guessing at maintenance behavior presence and chose to indicate the behavior as present, no matter what.

This inaccurate recognition of maintenance behaviors may also be due to individuals labeling negative maintenance behaviors as components of the RMBM coding scheme. Future research parsing out the difference between conflict behaviors resulting in relationship dissolution and negative maintenance behaviors resulting in maintenance may prove a helpful distinction and may be a key component in audience members’ recognition patterns. An example of a conflict behavior resulting in dissolution would include a partner refusing to discuss their concern about their partner spending time with someone of the opposite sex; instead, that partner engages in behaviors that lead toward relationship dissolution (e.g., moving out, not talking, seeing other people). Whereas, an example of a negative maintenance behavior resulting in relationship
maintenance would include a partner confronting their partner about the situation and saying, “I don’t understand why you are spending so much time with [person].” This behavior can be classified as a negative maintenance behavior (i.e., not engaging in understanding), but is enacted in order to maintain the relationship by trying to understand the situation at hand. The existing relationship maintenance literature does not spend much time clearly defining what negative maintenance behaviors look like and how they can be recognized in interpersonal or mediated relationships.

Because the results for the recognition of mediated presence of relational maintenance behaviors are varied, it may be important to further analyze influential models that individuals self-report learning these behaviors from. General patterns in the data reveal that the most important models for learning relationship maintenance behaviors are personal experiences, close interpersonal relationships (parents, friends) and media sources (movies, television programs). These three models accentuate the fact that close interpersonal relationships are important in participants’ self-reports of where they learn relational maintenance behaviors and subsequently affect how we think about, react to, and apply modeled behaviors in our personal relationships.

However, the consistent inclusion of films as an influential source on learning about relationship maintenance warrants further research on mediated portrayals. In fact, film was consistently rated higher than television in terms of importance, except within the maintenance category of networks. These data reveal that perhaps television is not as important in learning maintenance behaviors as we thought. By comparing portrayals in film and television, we may gain a better understand of why film is considered more important to learning.
Due to the fact that relationship maintenance behaviors are important in keeping a relationship in a satisfied state (Canary & Dainton, 2006), it is imperative that audience members understand the implications of enacting these behaviors. However, in order to effectively teach individuals these implications, we first need to create mediated examples that can be recognized by the average audience member. Only then can we examine the incorporation of mediated portrayals in real life relationships.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Although this research is a good first step in analyzing media portrayals and audience interpretations, it is also important to recognize the limitations with the present research. First, participant measurement of maintenance behavior presence differed from that of the expert coders of the content analysis. Within the content analysis of Study 1, experts coded for maintenance behaviors after each speaking turn, causing them to evaluate the situation at a particular instance in time. Participant coders within Study 2, however, viewed the clip in its entirety before answering questions of maintenance behavior presence. By viewing the clip as a whole, participants’ view of relationship maintenance could have been colored by the overall content and emotion embedded within the clip, perhaps clouding their view of behavior presence. Going forward, care should be taken to measure behavior presence similarly; however, we first need to decide whether specific behavior recognition per speaking turn or overall interpretation of a relationship maintenance situation is more important for the viewer to grasp.

Additionally, in order to keep a relationship intact, relationship maintenance behaviors need to be engaged in throughout the course of a relationship. Thus, it may be most beneficial to look at a relationship via an entire television program, season, or
series, in order to capture how relationship maintenance behaviors are displayed and interpreted across time. By viewing an entire episode, season, or series of a television program, audience members will be able to gain a better view of how relationship maintenance behaviors are used throughout the course of a relationship.

Of course, a third limitation to this study is the use of an undergraduate convenience sample and the subsequent effects on generalizability. Although young adults are a part of the population who watch prime time television, they are only one component of total media viewers. In the future, care should be taken to include participants from across the viewing population.

From here, future research should aim to reach several goals. First, audience recognition can be viewed in different ways, through different theoretical perspectives. An expansion of this study should consider viewing recognition of maintenance behaviors through social cognitive theory’s emphasis on the behavior model. Each audience member is likely to differ in what television character, if any, they pay attention to as their behavior model for romantic relationship maintenance. By viewing recognition of maintenance behaviors via behavior models, we may be able to understand more clearly why individuals are recognizing certain behaviors and not others.

Additionally, the event-indexing model (see Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Yang, & Lee, 2007; Zwann, 1999; Zwann, Langston, & Grasesser, 1995) within the comprehension literature could inform how audience members view and comprehend behavior, which in turn affects memory. Rather than viewing mediated maintenance behaviors in terms of speaking turns, clips, or whole television shows, we could view recognition in terms of events and their placement in the overall story.
Viewing representations in this way should follow the five indexes noted as important for clustering information into events: changes in time, changes in space, causal relationships between antecedents and consequences, goals of the protagonist, and focus on different agents/objects (Magliano, Miller, & Zwann, 2001; Roskos –Ewoldsen et al., 2007).

Future research on recognition should also take nonverbal communication into consideration. This suggestion stems from Study 1 where nonverbal communication and verbal communication do not match in some types of programming (e.g., network comedies). Nonverbal communication could play an important part in how audience members interpret behaviors. For instance, a romantic partner could say, “I love you,” while rolling their eyes. Taking this nonverbal communication into account could greatly change the interpretation of the behavior and the nature of the relationship.

More broadly, this study attempted to make a first step toward better understanding relationship maintenance behavior representation within the media. However, further research needs to examine audience interpretation of mediated relationship maintenance behaviors in film due to self-reported influence of models within this media text. Finally, scholars must examine interpersonal models with mediated portrayals of maintenance behaviors to understand the messages being interpreted by the public and how they may be similar or different.

**Conclusion**

Relationship maintenance behaviors have been examined as occurring between individuals and happening across interpersonal contexts. This study has extended that line of research by analyzing how individuals recognize and interpret relationship maintenance within a mediated context. Importantly, this study has formed a foundation
for future scholars to begin analyzing not only how relationship maintenance is depicted on television, but what impact those depictions are having on interpersonal relationships.
References


Dindia, K., & Canary, D. J. (1993). Definitions and theoretical perspectives on


### Table 1

Differences in RMBM factors across genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Animated</th>
<th>Reality</th>
<th>Comedy</th>
<th>Drama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>4.50 (4.12)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.42)</td>
<td>2.92 (6.87)</td>
<td>0.98 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>9.00 (1.15)&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.10 (0.32)&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.88 (7.62)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.93 (2.00)&lt;sub&gt;bc&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure</td>
<td>16.50 (12.26)&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.30 (0.48)&lt;sub&gt;bc&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>11.67 (11.31)&lt;sub&gt;ac&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.50 (4.24)&lt;sub&gt;bc&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship talks</td>
<td>2.00 (1.63)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>2.71 (4.85)</td>
<td>0.86 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurances</td>
<td>2.00 (1.63)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.32)</td>
<td>1.42 (3.55)</td>
<td>0.80 (1.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>1.00 (1.15)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>25.20 (13.76)&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.00 (7.85)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.11 (6.82)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>42.00 (52.69)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.60 (2.80)&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>22.79 (17.43)&lt;sub&gt;ac&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>8.11 (6.39)&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means and standard deviations within each row with no subscript in common significantly differ statistically. A Bonferroni correction was applied to the standard p-value (.05); thus, all differences noted here are significant at the p < .002 level.
Table 2

Percent recognition of overall maintenance behaviors per television clip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Show</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Not Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bones</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Couples&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Friends Forever</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smash</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringer</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburgatory</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Couples&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The show Perfect Couples is not from the content analysis sample in Study 1.

Also, subscripts are shown to indicate different clips of the same television show.
### Table 3

Percent agreement/disagreement between participants and experts on RMBM items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Show</th>
<th>Positivity</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Self-Disclosure</th>
<th>Assurances</th>
<th>Relationship Talks</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bones</strong></td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td><strong>93.3</strong></td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood</strong>&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td><strong>94.9</strong></td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perfect Couples</strong>&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenthood</strong>&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>43</td>
<td><strong>81.1</strong></td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Friends Forever</strong></td>
<td><strong>94.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.2</strong></td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td><strong>89.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whitney</strong></td>
<td><strong>93.4</strong></td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td><strong>53.3</strong></td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ringer</strong></td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td><strong>89.3</strong></td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smash</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>90.1</strong></td>
<td>95</td>
<td><strong>38.5</strong></td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>18</td>
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</table>

(continued)
Table 3, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Show</th>
<th>Positivity</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Self-Disclosure</th>
<th>Assurances</th>
<th>Relationship Talks</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburgatory</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Couples</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. % Agreement</td>
<td>93.48</td>
<td>94.54</td>
<td>93.13</td>
<td>65.14</td>
<td>74.58</td>
<td>79.37</td>
<td>58.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. % Disagreement</td>
<td>47.16</td>
<td>84.63</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>73.67</td>
<td>60.08</td>
<td>21.68</td>
<td>28.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Numbers shown in bold represent items of percent agreement (both participant and expert coded behavior as present in the clip), whereas numbers shown in italics represent items of percent disagreement (participant coded behavior as present, but expert coder did not).
Table 4

Average percent agreement/disagreement between participants and experts per clip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Show</th>
<th>Average Percent Agreement</th>
<th>Average Percent Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bones</td>
<td>75.95</td>
<td>73.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>87.24</td>
<td>46.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>71.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90210&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>77.83</td>
<td>40.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Couples&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>44.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>73.03</td>
<td>27.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Friends Forever</td>
<td>87.64</td>
<td>74.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>80.87</td>
<td>54.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smash</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>38.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringer</td>
<td>74.53</td>
<td>28.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburgatory</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Couples&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>87.34</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Average percent agreement and average percent disagreement per clip should not add up to 100 percent. The average percent disagreement for Perfect Couples<sub>b</sub> is not available, due to the fact that all seven maintenance behaviors were depicted in the clip.
### Table 5

Means and standard deviations of perceived importance of behavior models of relationship maintenance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Model</th>
<th>Positivity</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Self-Disclosure</th>
<th>Assurances</th>
<th>Relationship Talks</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal exp.</td>
<td>2.84 (2.08)</td>
<td>2.78 (2.16)</td>
<td>2.87 (2.17)</td>
<td>2.79 (2.26)</td>
<td>2.68 (2.23)</td>
<td>1.78 (2.16)</td>
<td>2.44 (2.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2.84 (2.02)</td>
<td>3.06 (1.97)</td>
<td>2.42 (2.19)</td>
<td>2.23 (2.17)</td>
<td>2.18 (2.17)</td>
<td>3.07 (2.05)</td>
<td>2.64 (2.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>1.16 (1.90)</td>
<td>1.28 (1.96)</td>
<td>0.99 (1.84)</td>
<td>0.93 (1.78)</td>
<td>0.91 (1.75)</td>
<td>1.04 (1.79)</td>
<td>1.16 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>2.40 (1.80)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.97)</td>
<td>2.13 (2.07)</td>
<td>1.80 (2.04)</td>
<td>2.01 (2.07)</td>
<td>1.18 (1.83)</td>
<td>2.39 (2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunts/Uncles</td>
<td>1.13 (1.69)</td>
<td>1.01 (1.68)</td>
<td>0.58 (1.35)</td>
<td>0.46 (1.24)</td>
<td>0.49 (1.32)</td>
<td>0.87 (1.65)</td>
<td>0.77 (1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins</td>
<td>0.86 (1.52)</td>
<td>0.75 (1.49)</td>
<td>0.50 (1.28)</td>
<td>0.49 (1.29)</td>
<td>0.45 (1.23)</td>
<td>0.46 (1.26)</td>
<td>0.76 (1.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>1.64 (1.99)</td>
<td>1.35 (1.96)</td>
<td>0.91 (1.74)</td>
<td>0.89 (1.67)</td>
<td>0.60 (1.45)</td>
<td>1.16 (1.86)</td>
<td>0.96 (1.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>1.55 (1.69)</td>
<td>1.31 (1.69)</td>
<td>1.17 (1.66)</td>
<td>1.01 (1.59)</td>
<td>1.22 (1.66)</td>
<td>0.70 (1.38)</td>
<td>0.95 (1.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>1.68 (1.72)</td>
<td>1.42 (1.71)</td>
<td>1.28 (1.73)</td>
<td>1.10 (1.63)</td>
<td>1.27 (1.70)</td>
<td>0.86 (1.49)</td>
<td>0.92 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of family</td>
<td>1.18 (1.69)</td>
<td>0.84 (1.54)</td>
<td>0.53 (1.26)</td>
<td>0.37 (1.09)</td>
<td>0.51 (1.25)</td>
<td>0.37 (1.11)</td>
<td>0.76 (1.51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Table 5, cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Models</th>
<th>Positivity</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Self-Disclosure</th>
<th>Assurances</th>
<th>Relationship Talks</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
<td>0.66 (1.34)</td>
<td>0.49 (1.18)</td>
<td>0.32 (0.97)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.92)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.98)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.90)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School exp.</td>
<td>1.22 (1.70)</td>
<td>0.91 (1.60)</td>
<td>0.60 (1.38)</td>
<td>0.48 (1.25)</td>
<td>0.55 (1.29)</td>
<td>0.39 (1.12)</td>
<td>0.57 (1.41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Figures

*Figure 1.* RMBM items by factor (Stafford, 2011)

**Positivity**

Acts positively with me.

Is upbeat when we are together.

Acts cheerfully with me.

Acts optimistically when he/she is with me.

**Understanding**

Is understanding

Is forgiving of me.

Apologizes when he/she is wrong.

Does not judge me.

**Self-Disclosure**

Talks about his/her fears.

Is open about his/her feelings.

Encourages me to share my thoughts with him/her.

Encourages me to share my feelings with him/her.

**Relationship Talks**

Discusses the quality of our relationship.

Tells me how he/she feels about the relationship.

Has talks about our relationship.
Assurances

Talks about future events (e.g., having children, or anniversaries, or retirement, etc.)

Talks about our plans for the future.

Tells me how much I mean to him/her.

Shows me how much I mean to him/her.

Tasks

Shares in the joint responsibilities that face us.

Performs his/her household responsibilities.

Helps with the tasks that need to be done.

Does not shirk his/her duties.

Networks

Includes our friends in our activities.

Does things with our friends.

Spends time with our families.

Asks a family member for help.

Turns to a family member for advice.
Figure 2. Romantic Relationships in Televisions (Study 2): Materials and Measures.

Part One (Pretest)

The following questions pertain to your past and current romantic relationship status.

1. What kind of romantic relationships have you been involved in? [Check all that apply.]

   ( ) Married
   ( ) Divorced
   ( ) Separated
   ( ) Involved a civil union
   ( ) Engaged to be married/anticipating performing a civil union
   ( ) Cohabitating with partner
   ( ) Exclusively dating
   ( ) Casually dating

2. Please indicate your age during your most recent romantic relationship.

3. Please indicate the type of romantic relationship that you are currently involved. [Check all that apply.]

   ( ) Married
   ( ) Divorced
   ( ) Separated
   ( ) Involved a civil union
   ( ) Engaged to be married/anticipating performing a civil union
   ( ) Cohabitating with partner
( ) Exclusively dating

( ) Casually dating

( ) Single

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

( ) 6 months or less

( ) 7 to 12 months

( ) 13 to 18 months

( ) 19 to 24 months

( ) over 24 months

5. (This question was asked for each of the seven maintenance behaviors.)

Assurances refer to expressing a desire to remain involved in the relationship (e.g., talking about plans for the future, telling someone how much they mean to you, showing someone how much they mean to you). Where did you learn about this relationship maintenance behavior?

( ) Personal experiences

( ) Parent(s)

( ) Sibling(s)

( ) Friend(s)

( ) Aunts/Uncles

( ) Cousin(s)

( ) Grandparent(s)

( ) Friends of the Family

( ) Acquaintances
( ) School experiences
( ) TV programs
( ) Movies
( ) I don’t know
( ) Other __________

(For each option checked, also ask:) To what extent has this source influenced/shaped your attitudes/beliefs/behaviors toward engaging/not engaging in this behavior:

( ) He/she was extremely influential
( ) He/she was very influential
( ) He/she was somewhat influential
( ) He/she was slightly influential
( ) He/she was not influential

Part Two (Experiment)

Video clip #1 (Same questions asked for all video clips)

The following questions ask about several relationship maintenance behaviors that one or both partners in a relationship may engage in. Please keep in mind that relational maintenance behaviors help to keep the individuals satisfied with the relationship they are currently engaged in.

1. Do you think that the couple in the previous clip engaged in relationship maintenance behaviors?
2. Please indicate the degree to which you feel each type of maintenance behavior was present in the clip that you just viewed on a scale from 0 “Not
present” to 5 “Present.” (Examples of each type of maintenance behavior are included in order to help determine the maintenance behavior depicted.)

a. **Positivity** (i.e., acts positively with me, is upbeat when we are together, acts cheerfully with me, acts optimistically when he/she is with me, etc.)

b. **Understanding** (i.e., is understanding, is forgiving of me, apologizes when he/she is wrong, does not judge me, etc.)

c. **Self-disclosure** (i.e., talks about his/her fears, is open about his/her feelings, encourages me to share my thoughts with him/her, encourages me to share my feelings with him/her, etc.)

d. **Relationship talks** (i.e., discusses the quality of our relationship, tells me how he/she feels about the relationship, has talks about our relationship, etc.)

e. **Assurances** (i.e., talks about our plans for the future, tells me how much I mean to him/her, shows me how much I mean to him/her, talks about future events, etc.)

f. **Tasks** (i.e., shares in the joint responsibilities that face us, performs his/her household responsibilities, helps with the tasks that need to be done, does not shirk his/her duties, etc.)

g. **Networks** (i.e., includes our friends in our activities, does things with our friends, spends time with our families, asks a family member for help, turns to a family member for advice, etc.)

3. Based upon this clip, which character initiated the maintenance behavior?
( ) Character 1 (description of characteristics to help identify character)
( ) Character 2 (description of characteristics to help identify character)
( ) I don’t know

4. Please indicate how happy/satisfied you feel the couple was with their relationship AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CLIP on a scale from 0 “Not happy at all” to 5 “Very happy.”

5. Please indicate how happy/satisfied you feel the couple was with their relationship AT THE END OF THE CLIP on a scale from 0 “Not happy at all” to 5 “Very happy.”

6. Please indicate how successful you feel the maintenance behavior was in maintaining the couple’s relationship on a scale from 0 “Not successful at all” to 5 “Very successful.”

7. Please indicate how familiar you are with the couple presented in this clip on a scale from 0 “Not familiar at all” to 5 “Very familiar.”

8. Please indicate how interested you are with the clip presented on a scale from 0 “Not interested at all” to 5 “Very interested.”