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An examination of routine and strategic interactions in maintained marital relationships

Dainton, Marianne, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1994

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AN EXAMINATION OF ROUTINE AND STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS IN MAINTAINED MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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*****

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INTRODUCTION

The study of romantic relationships crosses a number of disciplinary boundaries, tying together interests in disparate relational domains from varying--and often contradictory--perspectives. These domains accentuate psychological, interactional, and structural variables that affect both the relationship and those in the relationship. Regardless of whether one focuses upon cognitions, interactions, or structures that affect relationships, however, a fundamental issue of concern to all scholars of romantic relationships is the question as to why some relationships stay together and others do not. In part, this question has been answered through investigations of marital satisfaction and marital stability. Unfortunately, despite more than a 50-year history of research into these areas, there are still many questions left unanswered regarding the prediction of the success or failure of relationships (for an overview see Adams, 1988; Glenn, 1991).

Recently, scholars of communication have turned their attention to more directly studying the problem of why some relationships stay together while others fall apart. These researchers have called the process whereby relationships are kept together maintenance. Relationships that are beyond the initiation stage and have not reached a dissolution phase are termed maintained relationships. Although the study of maintenance
is still in its infancy, significant strides have been made in uncovering aspects of the maintenance process. Preliminary results speak to the behaviors that individuals use to keep their relationship together, differences in the use of these behaviors by individuals in varying relational types, sex differences in the use of these behaviors, the relationship between specific maintenance behaviors and salient relational characteristics, and theoretical explanations of the mechanisms associated with maintenance (each of these topics will be discussed at length in the literature review).

The focus of this dissertation is alternatively upon interactions that take place within maintained relationships. Previous maintenance research almost universally has asked individuals in relationships what behaviors they enact in order to maintain their relationship (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Such efforts minimize the extent to which the maintenance of relationships is social, and is jointly enacted by relational partners. As Burleson and Samter (1994) note, "Relationship maintenance may be less a matter of what one individual does for (or to) another, and more a matter of what partners do with each other" (p. 62).

More specifically, this document lays the groundwork for a study of the nature and importance of interactions in maintained relationships. Regarding the nature of maintenance activities, an unresolved issue in maintenance research is the extent to which maintenance is achieved through strategic versus routine means. With few exceptions, those who have studied relationship maintenance have focused upon the strategies
that relational partners intentionally invoke to sustain their relationship (see for example Baxter, 1994; Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez, 1987; Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dindia, 1994; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Rawlins, 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Other scholars, however, posit that everyday, mundane behaviors likely serve important functions in the sustenance of a relationship (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Duck, 1988, 1994; Roloff & Cloven, 1994). As yet, however, there have been few efforts that have sought to conceptually differentiate between such routine and strategic behaviors (but see Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Further, no research has empirically ascertained the extent to which maintenance is achieved through routine versus strategic means.

This document reflects an effort to ameliorate some of the gaps in the maintenance literature. In so doing, there are several specific goals of this dissertation. First, previous research oriented to relational maintenance will be described. Second, conceptual clarification regarding the distinction between routine and strategic interactions will be provided. Finally, a study that seeks to ascertain the extent to which interactions in maintained relationships are routine, which interactional types are used routinely, and the relationship between the routineness of an interaction and its perceived importance to the relationship, will be discussed.
Defining Maintenance

Synthesizing existing maintenance research is problematic, in part because the central concept has been defined in different ways by different researchers. For example, Dindia and Canary (1993) have identified four classes of maintenance definitions that have been used in maintenance research. The first type includes definitions that are focused on things people do to keep the relationship in existence. According to Dindia and Canary, such a definition says nothing about the quality or stability of the relationship. Instead, they say, this definition is concerned only that the relationship continues. Such an assessment is inconsistent with current conceptualizations of stability within the marriage and family field, however. For example, Lewis and Spanier (1979) proposed that stability simply refers to the yes/no question of "is the relationship together?" If one answers yes, the relationship is stable. Thus, a definition focused on existence is inherently concerned with stability (for a clarification of this potential misunderstanding, see Stafford, 1994).

The second type of definition, according to Dindia and Canary (1993), is concerned with things people do to keep the relationship in a specified state or condition. Dindia and Canary focus specifically on
intimacy as the specified state or condition, although they acknowledge other conditions such as commitment, liking, and control mutuality. Further, Dindia and Canary imply that this definition is focused upon the stability of the relationship. However, as indicated above, stability simply refers to the existence of the relationship. Therefore, the first definition of maintenance likely is a better indicator of stability. Nevertheless, many scholars have conceptualized maintenance as efforts oriented toward a particular relationship condition (e.g., Ayres, 1984; Rusbuldt, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

Dindia and Canary's (1993) third type of definition regards things people do to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition. Dindia and Canary use this class of definition to differentiate between stability and quality. Clearly, such a distinction is necessary in order to account for seeming anomalies such as stable, unhappy marriages (see Heaton & Albrecht, 1991). Given the arguments presented above, however, the distinction between stability and quality can be made with the first two definitions. That is, stability inherently is referenced in the first definition, and quality seems to be referenced in the second; satisfaction is simply another relationship quality such as commitment and intimacy. Accordingly, this definition seems redundant with the second definition.

The final definition offered by Dindia and Canary (1993) is things people do to keep a relationship in repair. Such a definition includes two elements, according to Dindia and Canary: preventative maintenance and fixing a relationship in disrepair. While some might argue that maintenance and repair are conceptually distinct, Dindia and Baxter (1987)
found that strategies utilized for maintenance and repair overlap. Further, Roloff and Cloven (1994) argue that scholars must acknowledge the positive and negative events that affect personal relationships, and thus should consider not only how positive events affect maintenance, but how negative events are overcome.

Although these definitions reflect those used by the majority of maintenance researchers, Stafford (1994) notes that definitions of maintenance vary in the extent to which they conceptualize maintenance as a process versus a stage. Clearly, the definitions offered by Dindia and Canary (1993) represent processes; they all reflect things people do in order to keep the relationship in an identifiable condition (existence, repair, satisfied, etc.). An alternative way to depict maintenance is as a temporal stage between escalation and termination (see Duck, 1988; Gottman & Carrere, 1994; Montgomery, 1993; Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, & Thompson, 1989). That is, maintenance can be defined as the middle stage of relational life.

A stage definition of maintenance has a critical advantage over process definitions. Process definitions make the fundamental assumption that maintenance is, as Duck (1988) terms it, a centrifugal force. According to Duck, those who believe in centrifugal forces in maintenance assume that relationships fall apart unless they are kept together. Thus, this assumption places the onus of maintenance upon relational partners; if they do not put effort into their relationship, their relationship will terminate. By making this assumption, however, process definitions overlook centripetal forces in relationships. Those
who assume that centripetal forces affect the maintenance of relationships
avow that relationships stay together unless they are taken apart (see
Duck, 1988). This is in line with Lewis and Spanier's (1979) model of
marital stability, which asserts that the continued existence of a
relationship may be a function of external barriers that keep the
relationship together, or of a perceived lack of alternatives for the
relational partners. Such contingencies do not reflect processes internal to
the relationship, but, rather, forces outside of the relationship (see also
Attridge, 1994). A definition of maintenance that is based upon a stage of
relational life makes neither an assumption of centrifugal nor centripetal
forces; accordingly, maintenance may be achieved by internal processes or
by external influences, or by a combination of both.

The definition of maintenance utilized in this paper recognizes that
there are processes associated with maintaining a relationship, but
conceptualizes maintenance as fundamentally a relationship stage (note
that Scanzoni et al., 1989, calls them phases). This definition is embraced
with the following assumptions and implications. First, discussing
maintenance as a temporal frame is not to say that a specific time frame
can be applied to relationships. Thus, a statement such as “Maintenance
occurs after six months of interaction” would be false, as would any other
statement regarding calendar time. Rather, a couple is in the maintenance
stage if they have moved beyond escalation and have not terminated. For
example, couples in intact marriages are presumed to be in the
maintenance stage since they have moved beyond initiation stages and
have not dissolved the relationship (for the specifics of differentiating between stages, see Scanzoni et al., 1989).

Moreover, although defining maintenance in this way comes closest to Dindia and Canary's (1993) first definition, which references things that are done to keep a relationship in existence, the two definitions are not isomorphic. To illustrate, a marital relationship that has moved beyond the maintenance stage into termination is a relationship that no longer exists; even if the former spouses maintain a friendly relationship after divorce, the marital relationship no longer exists. Accordingly, processes of keeping a relationship together likely occur within the maintenance stage, but no longer are enacted once the relationship has been terminated. However, processes to keep a relationship in existence might also occur within the escalation stage, as the relationship does exist within this stage. Hence, although Dindia and Canary's first definition is similar to a stage-bound definition, they are not the same.

Further, all of the processes discussed by Dindia and Canary may be occurring during the maintenance stage, not just processes to keep a relationship in existence. That is, partners might enact specific behaviors oriented toward a particular relational state or condition (e.g., intimacy level or satisfaction level) or toward relational repair during the maintenance stage. At the same time, a definition of maintenance focusing on a stage of relational life also acknowledges that negative interactional processes might also be taking place (e.g., processes of abuse). That is, a stage-bound definition of maintenance does not implicitly
assume that a healthy relationship is being maintained, or that all interactions are positive.

The final implication of defining maintenance as a temporal stage is that both interactional types--intentional and unintentional--are considered maintenance behaviors within the maintenance stage, although some behaviors might more directly serve maintenance functions than others (see Duck, 1988). That is, maintenance involves more than just strategies intentionally invoked to keep a relationship intact, or to keep it in some specified condition, or to keep it repaired. It also involves the everyday behavioral enactment by relational partners. Accordingly, the focus of this proposal is upon the interactions that take place within maintained relationships, rather than upon intentional maintenance processes.

**Maintenance Research**

Relationship maintenance refers generally to the vast unstudied void in relational research—that huge area where relationships continue to exist between the point of their initial development (which has been extensively studied) and their possible decline (which has also been studied but somewhat less intensively). (Duck, 1994, p. 45, emphasis added)

The opening paragraph of many treatises on relational maintenance asserts that a scholarly focus upon the issues surrounding maintenance is relatively new, and that the topic is as yet understudied (see for example Baxter & Simon, 1993; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Duck, 1994; Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). While this may have been the case in the recent past, there is a growing body of current
scholarship focused upon the ways in which relational partners maintain their relationship. This body of literature can be synthesized around five themes: the identification of maintenance techniques, differences in the maintenance practices of individuals in varying relational types, sex differences in maintenance activities, the relationship between maintenance activities and relational characteristics, and theoretical explanations of maintenance. The scholarship surrounding each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

The Identification of Maintenance Techniques

The primary focus of many studies of relational maintenance is upon identifying the techniques used by relational partners to keep their relationship together. The earliest studies of maintenance emphasized behaviors that relational partners individually and unilaterally enact for maintenance purposes (e.g., Ayres, 1983; Bell et al., 1987; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991). More recently, however, scholars have recognized that there are multiple levels associated with maintenance; maintenance can be achieved inside the head of one partner (i.e., through cognitions), by one partner performing a particular action, by both partners interacting, and through characteristics external to the relational partners.

Cognitions. First, it is only recently that scholars have proposed that cognitions play a role in keeping relationships together. Thus far, the extent to which cognitions serve maintenance functions is speculative. However, Rusbult et al. (1994) provide some evidence that relationships may be maintained by one or both partners engaging in the following cognitions: perceived relational superiority, which is an idealistic belief
that one's relationship is better than other relationships; derogation of alternatives to the relationship; or willingness to sacrifice one's own self-interest for the good of the relationship. Similarly, Rusbult and Buunk (1993) propose that managing jealousy and extra-relational involvements can serve maintenance functions.

Taking a different approach, Attridge (1994) describes internal barriers to relational dissolution, which are in essence cognitions; such barriers are beliefs or commitments that relational partners hold that prevent relationships from breaking up. Specifically, Attridge identifies the following internal barriers: a commitment or obligation to the marriage, religious or moral beliefs, self-identity/roles, investments, and obligation to children.

Such cognitions are "everyday" cognitions, in the sense that relational partners would likely utilize such thought patterns during mundane periods of their relational life. Most scholars who have focused on the use of cognitions for relational maintenance have focused on critical periods during a relational life, however. For example, Wilmot (1994) proposes that two ways to rejuvenate relationships taking a downward turn are to accept and forgive (which is conceptually similar to willingness to sacrifice) and to reassess the importance of the relationship. Further, Roloff and Cloven (1994) discuss the possibility that three cognitive variables might be used in the face of relational transgressions. These cognitions serve to keep together a relationship that has been damaged by such events as conflict, abuse, or infidelity. First, a partner might use reformulation, wherein he or she changes the nature of his or
her relational understanding so that the transgression is no longer viewed as a transgression. Second, he or she might use minimization, which is recasting the transgression so it is no longer perceived as a threat to the relationship. Finally, justification involves a focus on the reasons for staying in the relationship. Justification might entail focusing on the benefits of the relationship, obligations to the relationship, or lack of alternatives. It is similar to Wilmot's (1994) reassessment strategy, as well as Attridge's (1994) internal barriers, which were discussed above.

**Actions.** The second general form of maintenance techniques is actions or behaviors. As discussed earlier, the first studies of maintenance focused upon the behaviors utilized by relational partners in order to keep a relationship maintained (Ayres, 1983; Bell et al., 1987; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Summarizing this research, Dindia (1994) concludes that the strategies developed in this corpus can be categorized as falling into one of 11 general behavioral types. These categories include: contact (e.g., spend time together), communication (e.g., self-disclosure), metacommunication (e.g., talk about relationship), avoid metacommunication, rewards (e.g., self-concept confirmation), costs (e.g., anti-social behaviors), self-presentation, attraction (e.g., affection, supportiveness), spend time with network, share tasks, and other (e.g., ceremonies, avoidance, conversational rule-keeping, seek outside help, seek/allow autonomy). Subsequent research has confirmed the use of these strategies for maintenance purposes (e.g., Baxter & Simon, 1993; Burleson & Samter, 1994; Wilmot, 1994).
Two additional inductive analyses have been conducted since Dindia (1994) synthesized existing maintenance strategies. Both of these analyses have added actions that had not been identified in the earlier maintenance research. For example, Canary, Stafford, Hause, and Wallace (1993) found the following additional categories: advice, need satisfaction, comfort, conflict, talk time, visits, cards/letters/calls, and humor. Moreover, Dainton and Stafford (1993) found three categories that were not present in previous research. These include small talk, nonverbal assurances, and focus on self.

In addition, Waldron (1991) studied the maintenance strategies that subordinates utilize to maintain their relationship with their superior. He identified four strategies, which include personal strategies (e.g., informal and personal communication), contractual strategies (e.g., conformity to formal role requirements), regulative strategies (e.g., impression management), and direct strategies (e.g., explicit discussion of the relationship). With the exception of contractual strategies, each of these strategies is conceptually similar to strategies in the list provided by Dindia (1994).

Finally, two quite contradictory actions have been proposed as serving maintenance functions. On the one hand, Roloff and Cloven (1994) posit that a possible maintenance strategy in transgressed relationships is retribution, wherein the transgressed-against partner retaliates or expresses hostility (note that Roloff and Cloven admit that such a strategy runs the risk of causing further relational harm). On the other hand, Rusbult et al. (1994) propose that accommodation, or the use
of constructive responses to dissatisfaction, is a functional maintenance strategy. It is intriguing that fundamentally opposite behaviors, such as retribution and accommodation or metacommunication and avoid metacommunication, have been simultaneously nominated as serving maintenance functions.

In sum, a number of studies have sought to identify the behaviors utilized by one individual in order to maintain his or her relationship. Further, maintenance behaviors do seem to vary in predictable ways. That is, Baxter and Dindia (1990) found that there are three underlying dimensions in maintenance strategies: constructive versus destructive communication styles, ambivalence-based versus satiation-based conditional use (i.e., the extent to which strategies can be used occasionally versus those that must be used regularly), and proactivity versus passivity in behavioral enactment.

**Interactions.** The third type of maintenance technique is interactions. Although many of the actions discussed in the section above can certainly be used interactively, these behaviors were identified by asking participants what they did individually to maintain their relationship. Those who espouse an interactional approach to maintenance assert that maintenance must be achieved interactionally, however, and that one partner’s use of a maintenance behavior likely has limited impact in and of itself (see Burleson & Samter, 1994; Rawlins, 1994).

As of yet, few scholars have pinpointed the interactional types required to facilitate maintained relationships except in very broad strokes.
Vangelisti and Huston (1994), for example, propose that interactions are a critical "domain" in marriage, and use communication, influence, and sex as exemplar interactions. Duck (1994) focuses only on verbal interaction. He asserts that everyday talk is the process of maintenance, as it is the means by which couples jointly construct the reality of their relationship. Still, it seems likely that maintenance can take place interactively in ways other than talk, influence, or sex. Accordingly, the first question of interest concerns the identification of interactional types in maintained relationships. Specifically, the first research question is:

**RQ1: What types of interactions are reported in maintained relationships?**

**External Characteristics.** Returning to a review of the literature, the last level in the ways that relationships are maintained is external characteristics. These characteristics are in some way or another beyond the control of the relational partners, and are not related to the cognitions or behaviors of the partners (see Rawlins, 1994). Nevertheless, such external characteristics influence the stability of the relationship. To illustrate, Vangelisti and Huston (1994) propose that a couple's finances and quantity of leisure time are significant contextual factors that influence relational maintenance. Attridge (1994) concurs with Vangelisti and Huston regarding the importance of finances to keeping a relationship together; he proposes that external barriers to dissolution such as legal costs, shared financial assets/debts, and financial dependence can keep relational partners in the relationship.
Relationship Types

Thus far, maintenance has been discussed as if the processes associated with keeping a relationship together are the same in all relational types. Research to date indicates that this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, scholars have determined that there are differences in the maintenance activities of friends as compared to relatives and romantic relationships, and that there are differences in the maintenance activities of different romantic relational types. This section will provide an overview of research comparing the maintenance processes of alternative relational types.

First, it is intuitive that there are differences in the way that friendships are maintained as compared to family relationships and romantic relationships; each of these relational types typically serve different relational functions (Burleson & Samter, 1994). Nevertheless, Ayres (1983) found no significant differences in the ways that individuals reported maintaining acquaintanceships, friendships, teacher-student relationships, and coworker relationships. However, Ayres assigned his subjects to imagine maintaining a relationship with one of the relational types, and he admits that this manipulation might have been too weak to ascertain differences.

Canary et al. (1993), on the other hand, did find significant differences in the ways that individuals reported maintaining their real-life friendships, family relationships, and romantic relationships. Specifically, these researchers found that positivity, openness, and assurances were reported less than expected in friendships, but more than
expected in romantic relationships. Further, they found that assurances, sharing tasks, and cards/letters/calls were listed more frequently than expected by relatives, but less than expected by friends. In sum, there is some evidence of significant differences in the way that varying relational types are maintained.

In the study described above, romantic relationships were grouped together as if all romantic relationships are the same. Other scholars have noted that there are differences even within this relational type. For example, Guerrero, Eloy, and Wabnik (1993) found significant differences in the frequency of proactive/constructive maintenance strategies in escalating, stable, and deescalating romantic relationships. Guerrero et al. report that proactive/constructive maintenance strategies were perceived to be used more frequently in escalating and stable relationships than in deescalating relationships. Moreover, measuring perceptions over time, they found that the perceived use of these strategies remained constant in stable relationships, increased in escalating relationships, and decreased in deescalating relationships. Thus, these authors conclude that proactive/constructive strategies serve as a vehicle for change as well as stability.

Within a given relational type, proactive/constructive strategies are differentially used depending upon yet another relational characteristic: attachment type. Simon and Baxter (1993) measured individuals' ways of connecting with others and related the attachment type to the frequency of use of varying maintenance strategies. Utilizing a category scheme of four attachment types that differ on levels of self-esteem and valuation of
others, Simon and Baxter found that secure individuals (i.e., those with a high self-esteem and who place a high value on others) use more prosocial strategies than those with other attachment types, especially those with a dismissing attachment type (i.e., high self-esteem, low value of others). Contrary to predictions, however, these researchers found no difference in the use of antisocial maintenance strategies among the four attachment types.

Most frequently, romantic relationships have been differentiated by marital status. To date, weak differences have been found in the maintenance efforts of dating versus married individuals. Honeycutt et al. (1993) found that engaged couples endorsed positive understanding in conflict episodes more than do married couples. Dainton and Stafford (1993) found that married individuals more frequently reported sharing tasks, whereas dating individuals more frequently reported using mediated communication. Further, Stafford and Canary (1991) found that engaged and seriously dating partners perceived their partners as using more positivity and openness than did married persons, while married, engaged, and seriously dating individuals perceived their partners as using more assurances and sharing tasks than did individuals who had just begun dating. Also, these researchers found that married persons perceived their spouse as using social networks more often than did unmarried persons.

Finally, one study compared differences in the maintenance activities among varying marital types. Specifically, Honeycutt et al. (1993) looked at the differences in the ways that traditional, independent, and
separate couple types endorse conflict rules (for a description of these couple types, see Fitzpatrick, 1988). As predicted, traditional couples endorsed more rules for enacting conflict than did other couple types. However, it should be noted that Honeycutt et al.'s sample contained only 2% separate couples, limiting the generalizability of results.

To summarize, there appears to be significant differences in the way that maintenance is achieved in different relational types. First, there are differences in the reported maintenance activities of friends, relatives, and romantic partners. Second, within the range of romantic relationships, there are differences in the use of maintenance strategies according to the developmental stage of the couple, the attachment type, whether the couple is dating or married, and if married, whether the couple subscribes to a traditional, independent, or separate marital schema. Because such differences exist, the study proposed in this manuscript will utilize a sample comprised of marital couples only. Nevertheless, as will be described later in this document, differences in married couples due to length of marriage and presence or absence of children in the household will be considered.

Sex Differences

Despite Canary and Hause's (1993) conclusion that there is little reason to study sex differences in communication, maintenance researchers have looked for—and occasionally found—differences in the way that men and women maintain their relationships. Nevertheless, these differences are generally weak and inconsistent. Moreover, two out of the ten studies that sought sex differences found no evidence of a
difference in the way that males and females maintain their relationships (Ayres, 1983; Honeycutt et al., 1993).

Still, some sex differences have been found, however inconsistent. For example, Stafford and Canary (1991) found that three percent of the variation in maintenance strategy perceptions was a function of sex; females perceived their partners as using more positivity, assurances, and social networks. In contrast, Canary and Stafford (1992) found that wives reported using higher levels of openness, networks, and sharing tasks than did their husbands. Again, the effect sizes were small. The differences between the results of these two studies is likely a function of method; the former used perceptions of partner's use of the strategies, whereas the latter relied upon self reports. As Stafford and Canary (1991) note, these results might simply reflect women's greater attention to the behaviors enacted in their relationships.

In general, results of other studies support the possibility that women engage in more maintenance activities than do men. Dindia and Baxter (1987) found a weak main effect for sex, wherein females were more likely to report seeking outside help as a maintenance strategy than were men. Dainton and Stafford (1993), however, found significant differences in the frequency with which four maintenance behaviors were reported. That is, they found that women more frequently reported the use of positivity, openness, talk, and anti-social behaviors than did men. Similarly, Simon and Baxter (1993) found that women reported using assurances and romantic strategies more often than did men. Men, on the
other hand, more frequently reported using avoidance. Together, these findings partially replicate those of Canary and Stafford (1992).

Finally, two sets of researchers have looked at the ways that variations in relational characteristics are associated with different behaviors for women and men over time. Gottman and Carrere (1994), for example, found that when comparing the interactions of couples who eventually stay together versus those that eventually break up, the husbands in the divorced couples were more likely to stonewall and be defensive in interaction, and also were less likely to state complaints in a positive manner and were less positive listeners than husbands whose marriages stayed intact. On the other hand, wives in marriages that eventually broke up were more contemptuous and disgusted, and laughed less and were sadder than wives in marriages that stayed intact. Gottman and Carrere conclude that the behaviors necessary to prevent divorce are different for men and women.

Vangelisti and Huston (1994) also used a longitudinal method to track changes in love and satisfaction over time. These researchers found that changes in wives' love and marital satisfaction over the first two years of marriage were linked to interactive variables such as communication and influence. Changes in husbands' love and marital satisfaction, however, were linked to the way spouses organize their behavior, specifically in terms of the division of housework.

In conclusion, it seems that the maintenance research to date typifies the conclusion offered by Canary and Hause (1993) that sex differences in interaction are small and inconsistent. Such differences
often can be traced to sex-role stereotypes (i.e., individuals reporting that their behavior is in-line with stereotypes). Moreover, if one takes an interactive approach to the study of maintenance (as opposed to the focus on actions in much of research presented in this section) a focus on sex differences is unimportant; the joint enactment of behaviors is of interest. Accordingly, because this study will emphasize interactions as opposed to actions, sex differences will not be studied.

**Maintenance Techniques and Relational Characteristics**

Because one of the predominant definitions of maintenance involves keeping the relationship in some specified state or condition, many researchers have looked at the relationship between particular maintenance activities and salient relational characteristics. The characteristics studied include: commitment, liking, love, trust, control mutuality, equity, and satisfaction. The results of this research regarding each of these relational characteristics will be discussed in turn.

**Commitment.** Rusbult's investment model (see Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1994) is inherently concerned with the relationship between maintenance techniques and commitment to the relationship. She proposes that commitment is a central construct in explaining maintenance phenomena. More specifically, Stafford and Canary (1991) found that 56% of the variance in commitment can be predicted by three maintenance strategies: assurances, network, and sharing tasks. In partial replication, Canary and Stafford (1992) found that assurances and sharing tasks were significant and strong predictors of commitment.
Liking. Bell et al.'s (1987) research is based on the assumption that affinity-maintenance functions to improve and maintain marital quality, and that the use of affinity maintenance strategies increases the stability of close relationships. Moreover, a number of researchers have linked liking to the use of particular maintenance strategies. Stafford and Canary (1991), for example, found that four of their maintenance strategies predicted 54% of the variance in liking, with perceptions of the use of positivity as the primary predictor. Canary and Stafford (1992) found that positivity and network were strong, significant predictors of liking. In a later effort, Canary and Stafford (1993) found that assurances, positivity, and networks predicted liking. Similarly, Dainton, Stafford, and Canary (in press) found that the use of positivity, openness, and networks predicted 39% of the variance in liking. In sum, it appears that using positivity and relying upon social networks are vital to the maintenance of liking in a relationship.

Love. Both Marston and Hecht (1994) and Vangelisti and Huston (1994) frame relational maintenance in terms of maintaining love. As described earlier in this paper, Vangelisti and Huston found that the changes in partners' feelings of love were related to different domains for males and females; for males the maintenance of love was associated with the division of labor, whereas for females it was associated with satisfaction with interaction. Marston and Hecht discuss "loveships," and propose that the maintenance of loveships is a process of enmeshment that is established through behavior. However, they do not discuss specific behaviors necessary to maintain love. Regarding specific
behaviors associated with love, however, Dainton et al. (in press) found that perceptions of the partner’s use of assurances and positivity are consistent and strong predictors of an individual’s own feelings of love, predicting 35% of the variance for men and 45% of the variance for women.

**Trust.** Although research indicates that trust is crucial to relational quality (Canary & Cupach, 1988), few maintenance scholars have looked at the relationship between trust and specific maintenance behaviors. The exception is Canary and Stafford (1993), who found that positivity and assurances combined predicted 16% of the variation in trust.

**Control Mutuality.** Control mutuality refers to the agreement made between relational partners as to who has the right to influence the other (see Canary & Stafford, 1994). Note that mutual influence is not the preferred arrangement; as long as both partners agree as to who has control, control mutuality has been achieved. The researchers seeking to link maintenance efforts with control mutuality are Canary and Stafford. In a series of research efforts, they have found that the use of positivity and social networks are consistent and strong predictors of control mutuality (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

**Equity.** Canary and Stafford (1992) assessed the relationship between perceived equity levels and the use of maintenance behaviors. As equity theory predicts, Canary and Stafford found that overbenefitted individuals used fewer maintenance strategies than did individuals who felt their relationship was equitable. Further, underbenefitted individuals also used fewer maintenance strategies than did individuals who felt their
relationship was equitable. Finally, equity levels generally were not predictive of other relational characteristics, such as control mutuality, liking, or commitment.

Satisfaction. The bulk of research connecting maintenance behaviors to relational characteristics has focused on relational satisfaction as the dependent variable. In some instances this is problematic; some researchers have defined maintenance as keeping a relationship in existence, yet used satisfaction as the outcome variable (e.g., Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993).

With the exception of one study (Dindia & Baxter, 1987), all of the research focusing on maintenance and relational satisfaction has found a relationship between the two. Looking specifically at the degree to which maintenance behaviors predict marital satisfaction, Bell et al.'s (1987) investigation of wives found that 52% of the variance of their marital satisfaction could be explained by sensitivity, spirituality, physical affection, self-inclusion, and honesty. In a similar vein, Stafford and Canary (1991) found that 56% of the variance of satisfaction could be explained by assurances, positivity, sharing tasks, networks, and openness. Dainton et al.'s (in press) results indicate that two maintenance behaviors, assurances and positivity, were the best predictors of satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Finally, Reissman et al. (1993) conducted a longitudinal study over a period of 10 weeks. These researchers found that an increase in marital satisfaction was greater for those who engaged in self-defined exciting behaviors than for those engaging in merely pleasant activities. However, they found no significant increase in marital
satisfaction in couples assigned to spend more time together as compared to a control group.

**Theories and Explanatory Principles in Maintenance**

Much of the research investigating relational maintenance is variable analytic. However, there have also been several theoretical propositions put forward, and still other research has been grounded in theory. For example, Dindia and Canary (1993) have identified two theories commonly used by maintenance researchers: interdependence theory and dialectical approaches. While this is a useful start for a discussion of theory, this section will be organized around a higher level. Specifically, Fisher's (1978) perspectives will be used to discuss the two frameworks used by maintenance researchers (Stafford, 1994, has recently proposed a third--the systems perspective. As of yet it has not been used in research).

The first perspective used to study maintenance is the psychological perspective. This perspective in essence attempts to link characteristics or cognitions of individuals to behaviors. One genre of theories that is considered psychological is social exchange theories. To date, social exchange is the most frequently utilized theoretical framework within the corpus of maintenance research (see for example Attridge, 1994; Ayres, 1983; Bell et al., 1987; Canary & Stafford, 1992; Guerrero et al., 1993; Rusbult et al., 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). Two social exchange theories have been used. The first is equity theory (see Canary & Stafford, 1992), which predicts feelings and behaviors within relationships depending upon perceptions of equity in inputs and outputs in the
relationship. The second social exchange approach is interdependence theory (see Rusbult et al., 1994), which is concerned with expectations regarding the relationship and alternatives to the relationship in predicting relational quality and stability.

These theories have been explicitly used by scholars in framing their research. Implicitly, however, other scholars have invoked cognitive structures in discussing maintenance processes. Cognitive structures refer to types of knowledge and how that knowledge is organized (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). These structures, such as schemas, scripts, and prototypes, are hypothesized to guide behaviors and interpretations. Maintenance scholars referring to such structures (again, either implicitly or explicitly), include Rusbult et al. (1994), who talk about stable response orientations; Burleson & Samter (1994), who talk about tacit definitions that guide behavior; and Dainton (1992—unpublished), who has suggested the possibility of maintenance scripts.

A second perspective taken by those studying maintenance is the interactional perspective (Fisher, 1978). This perspective asserts that humans are actors, not reactors. More importantly, it firmly places interaction within a social context, and asserts that relationships cannot be understood outside their context. Scholarship utilizing an interactional perspective falls into one of two genres: symbolic interactionism and dialectical models. First, Duck (1994) clearly evokes symbolic interactionism by conceptualizing maintenance as synonymous with shared meaning. He proposes that relationships are maintained by continual negotiation via everyday talk.
Dialectical models are a more common way to frame maintenance within an interactional perspective. Dialectical thinking is included as part of the interactional perspective by virtue of its focus on the processes of adjustment and the dynamic nature of interaction. Specifically, those framing maintenance as dialectical assert that relational partners manage their relationships by negotiating between tensions reflecting opposite tendencies. Common tensions include the pull between openness and closedness, predictability and novelty, and autonomy and connection (Baxter, 1988).

Dialectical perspectives assume that the central characteristic of relationships is change. More specifically, Montgomery (1993) has outlined four essential tenets of dialectical approaches: (1) all social phenomena are founded upon oppositional forces; (2) change is constant; (3) the relationship of characteristics defines social phenomena, not the characteristics themselves; and (4) dialectical tensions never cease, but may be managed. In short, scholars utilizing a dialectical perspective adamantly contend that stability is merely a momentary state between transitions, and thus it is virtually nonexistent (e.g., Baxter, 1994; Montgomery, 1993).

A number of dialectical tensions have been identified by researchers. For example, Baxter (1988, 1994) has detailed three dialectics: integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-privacy. Each of these fundamental dialectics has an internal and an external manifestation, according to Baxter. Similarly, Rawlins (1989, 1994) categorizes contextual dialectics, which include private-public and ideal-
real, as well as interactional dialectics, which include freedom to be independent-freedom to be dependent, affection-instrumentality, judgment-acceptance, and expressiveness-protectiveness.

One of the strengths of the dialectical approach is that it includes both internal and external effects upon the sustenance of a social system. For example, Rawlins "depicts individuals as conscious, active selectors of possible choices from a field that is partially conceived by them, partially negotiated with others, and partially determined by social and natural factors outside of their control" (1994, p. 277). Indeed, Rawlins admonishes researchers who have taken a purely internal processes stance to the maintenance of relationships "as if they were somehow separate from their sociocultural envelope" (1994, p. 278).

However, a major weakness of this perspective is its stance on stability. That is, relational stability is not the anomaly portrayed by dialectical thinkers. Indeed, such work overlooks the fact that most people perceive their relationships as stable, and this perception is in itself important. As Duck (1994) proposes, "we should recognize the fundamental role of perpetual change in human experience and the importance to people of stabilizing is so they can attach meaning to it" (p. 57).

Clearly, a stable relationship is one in which changes can be woven into the fabric of the relationship (see Stafford, 1994; Wilmot, 1994). That is, stability is likely achieved by adapting to changes (see Ayres, 1983; Montgomery, 1993). Such stability does not refer to a static nor even a homeostatic state, but refers instead to the notion that relational partners
have developed an acceptable pattern of behaviors and exchanges within their relationship (see Scanzoni et al., 1989). Indeed, several dialectical thinkers have acknowledged that such patterning is a necessary part of relational life (see Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Montgomery, 1993). In short, simply because relational partners are adapting does not mean the relationship is not stable.

No single theory is used to frame the current research proposal. Instead, it is proposed that a synthesis of the psychological and interactional perspectives provides the best foundation for the study of interpersonal communication in general, and relational maintenance in particular. Together, these approaches allow for a focus on how meaning is constructed and used individually and jointly in established relationships. More specifically, a combination of the two perspectives is useful because it overcomes the limitations associated with each perspective individually. For example, interactionists are often criticized for ignoring the role of individual cognitions in the interactional process (see Littlejohn, 1990). A pure interactional view of individuals is that individuals are social creatures that cannot be studied independently from social interaction. However, as Simmel (1908/1971) argues, individual factors (such as affect or temperament) do affect interaction; the self is both social and individual.

On the other hand, those advocating a psychological perspective are criticized for using the individual as the unit of analysis when communication is by definition a social activity. Interpersonal communication is often defined by some level of interdependence (see for
example Cappella, 1987). Thus, the effect of one individual upon another is an important consideration that is often overlooked in a purely psychological perspective.

If one advocates that communication is a social process between two (or more) individuals, both levels must be assessed. Accordingly, merging the two perspectives allows the focus to be placed upon individual cognitions as well as shared meaning. Such a combination is possible because of the essential similarity of the two perspectives. Both perspectives are fundamentally concerned with the process of the interpretation of communication phenomena (although each has other concerns, too). That is, those informed by a psychological perspective focus upon the ways that interpretive structures affect behavior, while those informed by an interactional perspective focus on the interpretive process of creating meaning. Meaning and behavior likely are reflexive; one behaves a certain way based upon the meanings one has for given behaviors, objects, etcetera (a psychological perspective), but interaction with others creates, modifies, or reinforces these meanings (an interactional view). Accordingly, this proposal is informed by both interactional and psychological perspectives in order to allow for a broader conceptualization of the link between meaning and behavior.

It is important to outline the theoretical roots in which this proposal is grounded, as the scaffolding of the study that is framed in this paper only makes sense given such an articulation. That is, the emphasis of this proposal is not just on maintained relationships and maintenance processes, but also the extent to which maintenance is achieved via
routine and strategic interaction. An understanding of the nature of routine and strategic interaction must be informed by theoretical assumptions. Thus, the next section seeks to provide conceptual clarification regarding routine and strategic interaction.

**Routine and Strategic Interaction**

As outlined in the Introduction, scholars disagree as to whether an appropriate focus of maintenance scholarship is routine interaction; several scholars explicitly state that strategic interaction is the means by which maintenance occurs (see Baxter, 1994; Dindia, 1994; Rawlins, 1994). However, the extent to which maintenance is achieved through routine interaction seems to be an empirical question. Accordingly, this section will provide a conceptual clarification of what is meant by routine and strategic so that such a study may be conducted.

Duck (1986, 1988, 1994) was the first scholar to argue that maintenance involves both the use of carefully selected strategies as well as everyday, routine interaction. Several scholars have acknowledged and accepted his claims, and they incorporate these ideas into their own research efforts (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Roloff & Cloven, 1994; Wilmot, 1994). As of yet, however, only one study has sought to explicate the components that differentiate between routine and strategic behavior. Specifically, Dainton and Stafford (1993) offered the following definitions of strategic and routine behavior.

First, Dainton and Stafford (1993) relied upon existing conceptualizations to define strategic behavior. For example, Dindia defines strategy as a "plan, method or series of maneuvers or stratagems
for obtaining a specific goal or result . . . Relational strategies are intentional" (1991, p. 4). Dindia (1994) further asserts that strategies are consciously enacted. Similarly, Kellermann (1992) argues that strategic behaviors are those that are purposive, selected, adjusted, systematic, and intentional. In short, as Roloff (1976) noted, the word strategy carries with it the connotation of intentionality (see also Canary & Stafford, 1994).

Dainton and Stafford (1993) conceptualized routine behaviors as having two characteristics. First, they asserted that routine behavior generally takes place at a lower level of consciousness than strategic behaviors. Cognitive scientists have established that behaviors enacted frequently are hierarchically at a low level of consciousness, and hence require little thought to perform (Greene, 1984). Further, there is considerable evidence that stable relationships are ones in which little cognitive energy is exerted in behavioral selection or interpretation (see Abele, 1984; Baxter & Philpott, 1985; Burnett, 1987; Surra & Bohman, 1991). Thus, it has long been accepted that in developed relationships much communication involves taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations; indeed, interaction in established relationships is posited to be routinized (Sillars & Wilmot, 1989; Waller, 1938).

Second, Dainton & Stafford (1993) proposed that routine maintenance behaviors likely are not used intentionally for maintenance purposes. Although all communication is goal-directed (see Kellermann, 1992), routine behaviors are generally not performed with the express goal of maintaining the relationship, but, rather, for some other purpose. For example, a relational partner may cook dinner with the simple goal of
fulfilling a biological need to eat. Nevertheless, the performance of such an act may indeed serve to keep a relationship together.

Dainton and Stafford's (1993) differentiation between routine and strategic behaviors provides a solid foundation from which to build a more thorough conceptualization of the nature of interactions enacted in maintained relationships. Although such interactions have been termed strategic and routine by maintenance researchers, cognitive scientists have many other terms. Accordingly, each will be discussed in turn.

**Cognitive Processes**

**Automatic Behaviors.** Automaticity refers to cognitive processes (as opposed to cognitive structures, which will be described later). In general terms, it refers to the extent to which an individual is aware of the acquisition and use of behaviors. The clearest explication of automaticity is outlined by Bargh (1989), who identifies three levels of automaticity. However, Fiske (1992) extended this typology by adding her own work (Fiske, 1989) and the work of Martin and Tesser (1989), arriving at a final typology that incorporates five levels of automaticity. These levels range from completely automatic (i.e., complete lack of awareness) to completely controlled (i.e., complete awareness). In behavioral terms, the hierarchy might illustrate the movement from motion to action.

Specifically, the lowest level in Bargh's (1989) hierarchy is preconscious automaticity. In this case, the individual is neither aware of the instigating stimulus nor the ensuing process of meaning construction. The second level, postconscious automaticity, is one in which the individual is aware of the stimulus, but not of the effects nor of the
process. Examples include mood effects and salience effects. **Spontaneous automaticity**, the third level, involves goal-dependent processing, and unintended effects. That is, behaviors appear spontaneous and effortless. It is likely that it is this level that is under consideration by maintenance researchers focusing on routine behaviors. The fourth level is **rumination** (see Martin & Tesser, 1989). Referring primarily to thinking (as opposed to behavioral enactment), while ruminating the individual is aware of the stimulus and of their thoughts, but not necessarily of the connection between the two. Finally, the fifth level, **intent**, requires awareness of alternatives and focusing attention on the chosen alternative (see Fiske, 1989).

Kellermann (1992), has argued that most communication behaviors are automated in both their acquisition and enactment. This would imply that such behavior is at the "automatic" end of Fiske's hierarchy. However, Kellermann further asserts that automated behavior is often intentional and monitored, but still occurs outside consciousness. This assertion is contradictory given Fiske's definition of intent; Fiske proposes that intentional behavior is by definition behavior one is aware of selecting and performing (i.e., conscious of performing). Hence, contradictory definitions of intent may create conceptual gaps in social cognition research. Indeed, different views of the nature of intent seems to be a culprit in many inconsistencies. This will be discussed at length in a later section of this manuscript.

**Mindless Behaviors.** One type of automated behavior is mindless behavior (Langer, 1989). Mindless behavior is consciously learned
(perhaps even overlearned) and becomes so familiar it is performed automatically. This is different from truly automated behaviors as defined by Bargh (1989), which are never consciously learned.

Langer (1978) argues that much of social behavior is performed mindlessly, in what she calls a scripted fashion (note that scripts will be discussed under cognitive structures). Indeed, she proposes that behavior only becomes mindful when (a) in novel situations; (b) behavior becomes effortful because more or different behaviors are called for; (c) external features interrupt them; and (d) when experiencing consequences discrepant to the script. Burnett (1987) and Baxter and Philpott (1985) have provided empirical support for these propositions.

Benoit and Benoit (1986), on the other hand, argue that Langer's research is flawed. Specifically, they propose that Langer has failed to take into account the cognitive activity inherent in script enactment, and that Langer has studied only one type of speech act: requests. Accordingly, Benoit and Benoit assert that Langer simply does not have the evidence to claim that "most" communication activity is mindless (for a similar argument, see Bargh, 1984).

Kellermann (1992) also argues against the notion that much communication activity is mindless, but she uses a different approach to her argument. Kellermann posits that communication generally cannot be considered mindless, because it never was mindful. That is, she argues that most communication behavior is not consciously learned (a requirement for mindless behavior), and therefore cannot be
"overlearned." Rather, she argues that most communication behavior is tacit in acquisition.

The extent to which communication behavior is mindless is an empirical question. Unfortunately, the jury is still out regarding this question. It is safe to argue, however, that at least some communicative behavior is mindlessly performed.

**Tacit Knowledge.** Tacit knowledge, according to Kellermann (1992), is knowledge that is acquired implicitly, held implicitly, and used unconsciously. That is, one "knows" something, but is unable to identify the rules associated with this knowledge. Kellermann argues that in order to acquire tacit knowledge an individual must attend to a stimulus and attempt to learn its pattern. It is unconscious, however, since most people do not recognize that they have learned anything at all; that is, one is unaware of having the knowledge.

**Planning.** Ochs (1983) suggests that adult communication is most often spontaneous and unpredictable (i.e., unplanned), and thus reflects a reliance upon communication strategies acquired at a developmentally early stage of language acquisition. She differentiates between planned and unplanned discourse, wherein unplanned discourse refers to communicative action in which there is no forethought and no design or organization. According to Ochs, discourse can be unplanned due to situational or conceptual demands. However, she acknowledges that planning can occur prior to, or within, the communicative act. She suggests that there is a planning continuum, and that the bulk of communication occurs somewhere in between the totally planned and
completely unplanned ends. For example, Ochs proposes that conversation is generally unplanned, but is "locally managed" in the sense that it is planned within the communicative act. Thus, routine interactions might be those that fall at the unplanned end of the planning continuum since they require no forethought. However, routine interactions also might be locally managed, and therefore have some characteristics of planned discourse.

**Unconscious Processing.** The idea that routine behavior is that which is conducted at a relatively low level of consciousness was proposed by Dainton and Stafford (1993). Similarly, tacit knowledge of behavior, which is what Kellermann (1992) argues is the foundation for automated behavior, is also proposed to be at low levels of consciousness. Hence, unconscious processing seems to be a key idea in understanding the routine nature of some maintenance interactions.

According to Motley (1992), the sender's transmission of a message may be viewed as a series of decision points. In the interest of cognitive efficiency, most encoding decisions are made nonconsciously, except when unusual circumstances serve to make one or more decisions conscious (note the similarity to Langer's description of mindless behavior). Motley proposes that some of the communicative decisions to be made are whether to transmit a message or not (communication intention), word choice, syntax, and sequencing, to name just a few. Specifically, he argues that these decisions become conscious when: (a) there is conflict or competition between two goals; (b) there is recognition of undesirable consequences of a planned message; (c) when there is a nonroutine delay...
between planning and execution (e.g., waiting for a speaking turn); and (d) when the goals or situation are unfamiliar. Again, these moments that evoke conscious processing are quite similar to those that Langer (1978) proposes causes mindfulness in behaving.

**Goals.** There are two terms that might be causing some of the conceptual contradiction among all of the terms discussed thus far: goals and intent. For example, Miller and Read (1991) define goal as something an individual desires or wants to attain. This does not necessarily imply awareness of the goal, nor intentionality of action. Indeed, Turk (1974) argues that goals are "retrospective ways of making sense of what we have been doing—not causes of action" (p. 48). Similarly, Burnett (1987) proposes that people generally don't recognize the causes of their behavior, and when they are asked they retrospectively come up with an answer. Thus, goals do not necessarily reflect intentions, nor even causes of behaviors.

Kellermann (1992), on the other hand, defines goals as purposive; goals are states of affairs individuals are trying to bring about. Thus, Kellermann views goals as causes of behavior. Like Miller and Read, Kellermann claims that individuals are not necessarily aware of their goals. However, she proposes that goals are intentional. Similarly, Fiske and Taylor (1984) define goal as situation-specific intent. As with Kellermann's definition, this does not imply conscious awareness, but it does imply intentionality. Whether one views goals as intentional, however, might depend upon one's definition of intentionality.
Intent. Much confusion about the nature of goals, as well as routine behaviors, might be a function of definitional inconsistency. For example, Motley (1992) defines intention as desire or motivation. Accordingly, he views intentionality as synonymous to goals. Kellermann (1992) defines intention as voluntary and controllable action that is oriented toward a particular stimulus. Thus, according to Kellermann, one might not be aware of performing an intentional act. Fiske (1989), on the other hand, defines intention as planning; individuals are aware of being intentional. Moreover, the popular conception of intention (i.e., dictionary definition) should be considered. Intention in everyday usage implies deliberate or willful action. Thus, Fiske’s definition is closest to the lay conception.

Regarding these inconsistencies in definition, Hample (1992) makes an important point. He argues that part of the problem with social science research is the language used. The way we talk about cognitive processes gives an impression of mindfulness/purposiveness/control. Accordingly, many theories of communication might not be as biased towards consciousness as we assume. For example, Kellermann’s use of the word intent gives a different impression than what she likely intends.

Cognitive Structures

All of the concepts discussed above refer to cognitive processes. That is, the focus has been on the level of awareness or consciousness in processing information. However, such processes cannot explain the seeming ease of performing routine interactions entirely; knowledge about how and when to perform these interactions must be stored in a cognitive structure. Indeed, recent research provides evidence that
automatic processing is facilitated by schemas (Andersen, Spielman, & Bargh, 1992).

Cognitive structures refer to types of knowledge and how that knowledge is organized. Generally speaking, a reliance upon cognitive structures facilitates top-down processing (Fiske & Taylor, 1984); that is, prior knowledge shapes future data processing. Specifically, conceptualizations of cognitive structures focus on the way that existing knowledge shapes what information is attended to, and how that information is interpreted. Recent research, however, emphasizes that knowledge structures do not uniformly dominate perceptions; there is a balance between perceptions and knowledge structures (Fiske, 1992).

Cognitive structures are of many types. Surra and Bohman (1991), for example, propose three types of structures: prototypes, causal accounts, and schemas. Although these three types of structures are quite frequently used in the literature, this is by no means a comprehensive list. To illustrate, Wegner and Vallacher (1977) propose that the types of structures are categorical, dimensional, and relational. Clearly, there are many forms a cognitive structure can take.

One of the most frequently utilized concepts among those studying cognitive structures is schema. There are many definitions of schema. Fiske and Taylor (1984) define schema as a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a given concept and the relationship among the attributes. Similarly, Anderson defines schema as "large, complex units of knowledge that organize much of what we know about general categories of objects, classes of events, and types of people" (1980, p. 108).
Glass and Holyoak (1986) propose that schemas are a series of if-then rules. Due to the frequency of use of the term, as well as the inconsistency in definitions, Markus and Zajonc (1985) acknowledge that the term schema has often been used "promiscuously" in the literature (p. 147).

Fiske and Taylor (1984) argue that there are five types of schemata. First, there are person schemata, which involve knowledge about types of people. Second, there are self-schemata, which include knowledge about the self. Role schemata are information about roles (e.g., doctor, wife, etc.). Event schemata, which include cognitive scripts, are the fourth type. Finally, the fifth type of schemata are content-free or procedural schemata. This last type includes rules for information processing, but is not tied to a particular content domain. Further, this type of schemata includes causal accounts.

In looking at marital interaction, it is difficult to say exactly which type of schema will be activated. For example, one might use person schemata to understand a partner's behavior. Or, one might base interaction on role schema for husband and wife. Finally, one might tap into an event schema in order to facilitate what the typical or routine way to interact should be.

Event schema are more frequently known as cognitive scripts. The term script has been used by scholars in a number of different disciplines (e.g., linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociology) in similar yet fundamentally different ways (see Raskin, 1976 for a brief overview). Moreover, conceptually similar terms such as Memory Organization Packets (MOPs) are used by some scholars to refer to essentially the same
idea (e.g., Abelson, 1981; Kellermann, 1992). For the purposes of this paper, however, cognitive scripts will be defined as event schemata for routine series of interactions (Abelson, 1976; Schallert, 1982).

Abelson (1981) and Berger and Douglas (1982) have proposed that cognitive scripts explain the manner in which social reality is constructed, and further, how these social constructions of reality are translated into behavior (for details about the nature, development, and instantiation of scripts and/or schemas see also Abelson, 1976; Benoit & Follert, 1986; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Forgas, 1991; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Miell, 1987; Planalp, 1987; Planalp & Rivers, 1988; Schallert, 1982; and Schank, 1982).

Specifically, the functions of scripts are (a) to simplify an interaction; (b) to fill-in missing pieces of an interaction; (c) to serve as interpretive frameworks; and (d) to facilitate the maintenance of social order and social rituals (Ginsburg, 1988).

Given these functions, it is likely that knowledge structures called cognitive scripts might explain how maintenance routines develop, how they are enacted, and what causes them to be interrupted (Ginsburg, 1988). Schemas, scripts, and related constructs have been used fruitfully in theorizing about other relational processes (e.g., Berger & Douglas, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1991). Moreover, empirical investigations have confirmed the use of these constructs in several relational contexts (e.g., Planalp, 1985; Rose & Serafica, 1986; Weiss, 1984; Wilmot & Baxter, 1983).

Redefining Routine

The social cognition literature provides many potential avenues to explore when considering what Dainton and Stafford (1993) have called
routine interactions. Given the conceptual clarifications provided in the past several pages, it is necessary to redefine routine interaction. This redefinition involves reworking the definition provided at the beginning of this section, as well as adding new considerations.

Recall that Dainton and Stafford (1993) argued that routine maintenance behaviors are those that (a) are enacted at lower levels of consciousness (b) without the explicit goal of maintaining the relationship. Thus, this definition centers on awareness in selecting and performing the behavior as well as the goal of the performance. A third element, which has not yet been discussed, might reference the typicality of the interaction. These definitional elements will be discussed separately.

Awareness. First, routine interactions are performed at low levels of consciousness. The social cognition literature provides many terms for such interactions. For example, routine interactions might be those performed relatively automatically (Bargh, 1989). Bargh argues that automatic processing is unintentional, involuntary, effortless, autonomous, and outside awareness. However, automaticity more accurately refers to processing of information, not behavioral enactment (Bargh, 1984). Still, Kellermann (1992) proposes that much communication is automatic.

Another cognition concept for these interactions might be mindlessness (Langer, 1989). That is, the reason such interactions are performed with ease might be because they have been overlearned. Accordingly, routine maintenance interaction might be mindless, and it
might be mindless because of relationship-specific knowledge the relational partners hold regarding their marriage. That is, each partner might have a relationship schema or a cognitive script guiding their behavior.

Although scholars disagree as to the extent to which interactions are performed mindlessly (e.g., Bargh, 1984; Benoit & Benoit, 1986), there is some evidence that cognitive structures exist for relationships. For example, Fitzpatrick (1988) has developed a typology of marital couples based upon the individual partners' subscription to three marital schemas: traditional, independent, or separate. These schemas represent beliefs about marriage, including the way married partners should interact. Indeed, in a program of research Fitzpatrick has established that couples do interact with each other differently based upon their marital schemas (for a review, see Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Other characteristics of a marriage might predict the use of maintenance scripts. Langer (1978), for example, has posited that the more experience one has with a particular situation, the more likely one is to rely upon scripted behavior. The implication is that the longer a couple is married, the more likely their interactions will be performed mindlessly. As corroborative evidence, Dindia & Baxter's (1987) discovery that the longer a couple was married the fewer maintenance strategies they reported might indicate that scripted interaction (as opposed to mindful, strategic interaction) is relied upon more often by long-term couples. Further, although not directly related to cognitive scripts, Sillars and Wilmot (1989) have discussed the likelihood that the longer a couple is
together the more routinized their interactions and the less explicit their communication. Together, these individual pieces of evidence provide a strong foundation for the proposition that maintenance scripts exist, and that the longer one is married the more likely one is to rely upon them.

The information discussed in this section has moved from cognitive processing (e.g., consciousness and automaticity) to cognitive structures (e.g., schemas and scripts). A central theme has been the degree of consciousness or awareness involved with the interactional performance. Assessing the degree of consciousness is difficult, however; Bargh (1984) has pointed out that we are unaware of most cognitive processes (see also Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). What we are unaware of we cannot report. Thus, although consciousness is a useful concept in distinguishing routine versus strategic interaction on a theoretical level, such a distinction is difficult on a methodological level.

However, another concept that has appeared throughout the literature related to consciousness is degree of effort. That is, behavior that is performed relatively unconsciously (mindlessly/scripted/schema-relevant) is generally behavior we don't have to think about. Thus, it seems that redefining routine interactions from those that are performed unconsciously to those that we don't think about allows for more accurate assessment in real-life situations.

Goals. In defining routine interaction, Dainton and Stafford (1993) focused on the nature of the goal one has for engaging in the interaction. Specifically, they argued that routine maintenance behaviors are not performed with the explicit goal of relational maintenance. There are two
possible interpretations of such a statement. First, the use of the term explicit might indicate that one cannot identify the goal of his or her activity. This is in line with Turk’s (1974) and Burnett’s (1987) proposal that one is typically not aware of his or her goals in social interaction.

However, there is a second way to interpret this statement. Specifically, one could interpret this to mean that the actor is aware of his or her goals, but the goal is not relational maintenance. Using Fiske’s (1989) definition of intent, this interpretation of Dainton and Stafford’s (1993) characterization of routine interactions would indicate that such interactions are indeed intentional. Nevertheless, a distinction can be drawn between interactions that are intended to serve one function (i.e., accomplish a goal such as identity management), yet unintentionally serve another function (i.e., maintaining the relationship). Thus, the same interaction can be paradoxically intentional and unintentional when goals are assessed.

Such contradiction is not the only problem with using the notion of goal in defining routine interaction. The second problem is more critical. Specifically, to say that a maintenance interaction is an interaction performed for maintenance goals is tautological; one cannot use a concept to define itself. Thus, while the notion of goal may still be important when describing interactions in maintained relationships, it does not seem central to differentiating between routine and strategic interaction.

Typicality. Although the notion of typicality has not been explicitly expressed in previous conceptualizations of routine interaction, the social cognition literature indicates that routine interaction might be interaction
that is typical or usual to the relationship. For example, Langer's (1978, 1989) description of mindless behaviors are those that an actor has performed so often (i.e., they are typical) they are overlearned. Similarly, scripted behaviors are defined as the usual behaviors performed in a given situation. Further, schema-driven behaviors are those that are congruent with one's knowledge of usual sorts of people, or role enactments, or events. On the other hand, Duck (1994) asserts that strategies are only occasionally enacted in everyday life. Accordingly, the extent to which an interaction reflects typical behavior for the relational participants might provide an indication of whether the interaction is routine.

Accordingly, routine maintenance interaction as redefined in this document is interaction that requires relatively little thought and that is typical to the relationship. Strategic maintenance interaction, then, is that which an individual thinks about and is relatively atypical. Given this conceptualization, as well as the separation of goal from considerations of whether a given interaction is routine or strategic, the following research questions are offered:

RQ2: How routine are interactions in maintained relationships?

RQ2(a): To what extent are interactions thought about?

RQ2(b): To what extent are interactions typical?

RQ3: Which interactional types are reported as routine?

RQ4: To what extent are interactions in maintained relationships oriented to maintenance goals?
RQ5: Which interactional types are reported as being performed for maintenance purposes?

RQ6: What is the relationship between an interaction's orientation to maintenance goals and its routineness?

Relative Importance of Interactions

In their study of everyday talk, Duck, Rutt, Hurst, and Strejc (1991) provide substantive evidence that the interactions one has with a particular relational partner vary considerably from interaction to interaction on a number of dimensions, including the quality of the interaction and the perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship. Based on their findings, Duck et al. conclude that "Communication researchers should not assume that all communications are equally important, either practically in persons' daily lives or theoretically in our understanding of those lives" (p. 259). Similarly, Burleson and Samter (1994) assert that some types of behavior are more important in fulfilling relational functions than are others. A consideration of the perceived importance of a given interaction, then, seems to be a salient issue.

Although researchers of personal relationships have not often explicitly considered interactional importance, implicitly the notion of importance has garnered much attention. For example, Dainton et al. (in press) focused on the relative importance of various maintenance strategies and physical affection in predicting an individual's feelings of love, liking, and satisfaction with his or her relationship. These researchers found that positivity and assurances were relatively more
important in predicting the relational characteristics than other maintenance strategies or physical affection.

Further, besides simply identifying interactional types within maintained relationships, this research proposal is founded upon the assumption that it is necessary to consider routine interactions when attempting to develop a complete picture of relational maintenance. Indeed, Duck (1988) has asserted that routine interactions serve particularly important functions in relational maintenance, and may be more important to the sustenance of a relationship than are more strategic efforts. However, Duck was not specific regarding his conceptualization of routine; at issue is whether he intended to reference interactions requiring little thought that were typical to the relationship (i.e., the present conceptualization of routine) or interactions that are not performed for maintenance purposes.

Given the apparent significance of the relative importance of certain interactional types in general, and routine interactions specifically, the following research questions are posed:

RQ7: Which interactional types are perceived as most important to the relationship?

RQ8: What is the relationship between routineness and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?

RQ9: What is the relationship between the performance of an interaction for maintenance purposes and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?
**Life-Span Differences**

As discussed earlier in this manuscript, variations in relational type account for interactional differences. Thus far, however, variations in the marital experience have been overlooked. Nevertheless, there are several factors that might explain differences in the way that marital partners interact with each other. For example, Sillars and Wilmot (1989) propose that there are three elements that affect marital interaction: developmental processes (e.g., the development of shared meaning over time), cohort effects (e.g., changes in marital ideologies and expressiveness norms), and life-stage events (e.g., birth of children, retirement).

Central to all of these factors is the notion of time. To date, scholars of interpersonal relationships have been remiss in considering time in their examinations of relational life. However, family scientists utilizing a developmental framework for understanding family processes have explicitly incorporated time in their research. These scholars, such as Aldous (1978) and Duvall (Duvall & Miller, 1985), propose that people behave differently and organize their lives differently depending on the developmental stage they are in. Movement through these stages is contingent upon biological aging, as well as the presence or absence of children in the household. Moreover, such movement is presumed to hold true regardless of social class, ethnicity, religious adherence, or other differences (Aldous, 1978).

An example of developmental stages is provided by Duvall (Duvall & Miller, 1985). She details eight stages that are distinguishable based on the following characteristics. The first stage includes newly married
couples before the birth of children, and lasts approximately two years. The second stage is childbearing families, which lasts from the birth of the first child until he or she is approximately 30 months old. It lasts for two and one-half years. Third, families with preschool children lasts approximately three and one-half years. The fourth stage is called families with school-aged children. Note that movement to this stage is contingent upon the oldest child entering school; families in this stage might still have toddlers or preschool children at home. The fourth stage lasts seven years. The fifth stage is families with teenagers. In this stage, the oldest child is from 13 to 20 years old. Accordingly, this stage is also seven years. During the sixth stage, family as a launching center, the children leave the household. Duvall estimates that this stage lasts about six and one-half years. Middle-aged families, the seventh stage, are those in the period from the empty nest to retirement. This stage lasts approximately 13 1/2 years. Finally, aging families last from retirement to death, and lasts sixteen years and up.

There are several problems with such a view of families over time. First, Duvall's scheme, like that of Aldous (1978), focuses only on one function of the family: the birth and socialization of children. Moreover, as Elder (1975) notes, such schemes fail to take into account variations in family form. For example, the earliest stage in the marriage of two people who have been previously married might begin with children already present. On the other hand, there is also a growing number of married couples who choose not to have children. The life-span of these, and
other, family forms cannot be explained by models such as the one described above.

Certainly, however, the presence or absence of children in the household can account for differences in the marital experience. For example, a host of studies have provided strong evidence that the birth of the first child is associated with a decline in marital satisfaction, and that marital satisfaction does not rise again until the children leave the home (for a review, see Glenn, 1991). More specifically, the presence of children in the household is associated with a decline in marital interaction, particularly affectional and companionate interaction. Moreover, the birth of children tends to have a traditionalizing effect on married couples such that the division of household labor falls along sex-stereotyped lines, even if such a division did not exist prior to the birth (Belsky, 1989; McHale & Huston, 1985; Sillars & Wilmot, 1989).

Although the effect of children on marital interaction seems relatively clear, the effect of children on marital satisfaction is less clear. That is, despite a wealth of studies supporting a curvilinear pattern of marital satisfaction due to the presence or absence of children (see Glenn, 1991), there is some speculation that such a trend can be better explained by marital duration. Specifically, Huston and colleagues (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; McHale & Huston, 1985; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994) have found evidence that marital satisfaction declines over the course of the marriage regardless of the presence or absence of children. However, voluntarily childless women do report higher marital quality than do mothers (e.g., Houseknecht, 1979), despite an initial drop.
Nevertheless, marital duration is associated with a number of interactional differences. For example, Zietlow and Sillars (1988) broke married couples down into three stages based on Duvall's (Duvall & Miller, 1985) stages of family development. Young couples were those that just got married through those with children under the age of 21 (Duvall's stages 1-5). Middle-aged couples were those in the launching and empty nest stages (stages 6-7). Elderly couples were those in stage 8, retirement. Zietlow and Sillars found significant differences in the way these three groups discussed conflict issues. Specifically, they found that middle-aged and elderly couples had a less expressive style of communication about conflicts than did young couples, who were relatively intense and engaged in the interaction. However, when communicating about self-determined salient problem issues, middle-aged couples resembled the young couples in their conflict style. Zietlow and Sillars propose that such differences might be a function of differential uses and interpretations of communication as a tool. They argue that young couples use communication as an outlet for expression and a means for negotiating roles. Middle-aged couples also use communication to negotiate roles, but are less intense since they have fewer role conflicts to negotiate. Elderly couples, on the other hand, seem to use communication as a reflection of the relationship, and not as a tool for adjusting it. Zietlow and Sillars conclude that a cohort effect might be the underlying explanatory mechanism for these differences.

Still, marital duration might account for such differences above and beyond cohort influences. Sillars and Wilmot (1989) posit that the need to
resolve issues pertinent to family integration and role ambiguity necessitates explicit communication during early marriage. Such an observation is echoed by Scanzoni et al. (1989), who assert that explicit decision-making is required in the early stages of a relationship so that satisfactory exchange levels might be negotiated. However, once these issues have been resolved, couples begin to rely upon more implicit communication. Indeed, Sillars and Wilmot (1989) propose that over time relational partners utilize increasingly implicit, idiosyncratic, and efficient forms of communication. Providing empirical support, Illig (1977) found that elderly couples have more predictable patterns of interaction than do younger couples.

Combined, these pieces of evidence support the likelihood that marital duration might be linked with the routineness of interactions in the marriage. That is, if communication becomes more predictable and efficient over the course of the marriage, it is likely that interactions will be more routine. Further, the number of interactions oriented to maintaining the relationship might decrease over time. For example, Baxter and Dindia (1987) found evidence that the number of strategies reported to maintain a relationship decreases with marital longevity. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are offered:

**H1:** The longer a couple is married, the more routine their interactions will be.

**H2:** The longer a couple is married, the fewer interactions will be performed for maintenance purposes.
As described above, marital duration alone does not account for all of the variation in the marital experience. The presence or absence of children in the household has a significant effect on the way married partners interact with each other. To date, there is no evidence directly linking the presence of children in the household to the routine or strategic nature of marital interaction. However, there is some evidence that the presence of children is associated with a decrease in interactions oriented toward the marital experience (Belsky, 1989; McHale & Crouter, 1985). Moreover, discussions in couples with children more often focus on instrumental as opposed to affectional concerns. Accordingly, the following research question and hypothesis is proposed:

**RQ10:** What is the relationship between the presence of children in the household and the routineness of interactions?

**H3:** Individuals in marriages with children present in the household will report fewer interactions performed for maintenance purposes.

In sum, there are three hypotheses and ten research questions posed in this study. To reiterate, the following hypotheses and research questions have been posed:

**RQ1:** What types of interactions are reported in maintained relationships?

**RQ2:** How routine are interactions in maintained relationships?

**RQ2(a):** To what extent are interactions thought about?

**RQ2(b):** To what extent are interactions typical?
RQ3: Which interactional types are reported as routine?

RQ4: To what extent are interactions in maintained relationships oriented to maintenance goals?

RQ5: Which interactional types are reported as being performed for maintenance purposes?

RQ6: What is the relationship between an interaction's orientation to maintenance goals and its routineness?

RQ7: Which interactional types are perceived as most important to the relationship?

RQ8: What is the relationship between routineness and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?

RQ9: What is the relationship between the performance of an interaction for maintenance purposes and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?

H1: The longer a couple is married, the more routine their interactions will be.

H2: The longer a couple is married, the fewer interactions will be performed for maintenance purposes.

RQ10: What is the relationship between the presence of children in the household and the routineness of interactions?

H3: Individuals in marriages with children present in the household will report fewer interactions performed for maintenance purposes.
CHAPTER II
METHODS

Despite the many efforts to identify the behaviors couples use to keep their relationship together (e.g., Bell et al., 1987; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991), the methods utilized thus far have prevented a complete picture to emerge. For example, the use of a priori typologies and closed-ended questionnaires do not enable relational partners to offer alternative interactions that are not included in the category scheme. The use of open-ended questionnaires does allow partners to offer such interaction behaviors. However, the nature of a retrospective questionnaire is such that global perceptions rather than specific events are typically addressed (Miell, 1987). That is, people have difficulty in retrospectively retrieving detailed information about mundane or repetitive interactions (Reis & Wheeler, 1991).

The ideal method for studying the everyday interaction of married couples is unobtrusive observation. The reality of an endeavor of this sort is such that this ideal cannot easily be undertaken, however. First, to capture the entire realm of interactions that a couple performs on a daily basis—verbal and nonverbal, private and public—would require a mobile film crew following the couple everywhere they go. Certainly, this is not unobtrusive. Alternatives such as mounting cameras in a couple's home
or asking couples to carry voice-activated recorders might lessen the obtrusiveness, but do not capture the entire realm of interactions. In the former instance, interactions performed outside of the home are neglected, while in the latter case many nonverbal interactions are not captured.

Researchers interested in observing the interaction of married couples typically ask couples to report to a laboratory. Once again, there are drawbacks to this method. Reis and Wheeler (1991) note that the limitations of laboratory observation include the probability that the interaction represents optimal performance rather than typical performance; that the research environment might affect the performance; and that such efforts do not give insight into the breadth of interaction typical for any couple. It is this third limitation that most severely prohibits the use of laboratory observation to answer the research questions posed in this paper.

A more promising method of detailing the everyday interactions performed by married couples is the use of diaries and/or logs (the two terms are often used synonymously, see Duck, 1991). By asking participants to keep regular records of their interactions researchers gain access to interactions they ordinarily could not observe (see Duck, 1991; Reis & Wheeler, 1991; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Thus, the use of a diary/log provides researchers with a record of everyday married life. This record is not biased by the natural tendency of respondents to "smooth out" the regular fluctuations of daily life (see Miell, 1987; see also work on
relational dialectics, e.g. Baxter, 1994). At the same time, it allows researchers to capture both the breadth and depth of marital interaction.

In the realm of personal relationships research there are two commonly used diaries. The first was developed by Wheeler and Nezlek (1977), called the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR). The RIR is a brief form that asks participants to check off such information as with whom one had the interaction, length of interaction, nature of interaction, and quality of interaction. It has been used successfully to study the interaction of physically attractive individuals versus those not physically attractive (Reis, Nezlek, & Wheeler, 1980), as well as the interactions of lonely individuals (Reis, Wheeler, Kernis, Spiegel, & Nezlek, 1985).

The second diary commonly used in the study of personal relationships is the Iowa Communication Record (ICR). Developed by Duck and Rutt (1988), the ICR is a much longer, structured self-report that focuses more clearly on the communication aspects of the interaction. Specifically, the ICR includes questions concerning the quality, purpose, and impact of the communication. The use of this diary has provided insight into everyday talk within a number of different relational types (Duck et al., 1991). However, the ICR is focused entirely on verbal communication, and therefore may ignore some of the symbolic importance of nonverbal interaction. Moreover, the ICR asks participants to report only conversations longer than 10 minutes, which might ignore brief, yet important, interactions.

While these diaries are useful, both the RIR and the ICR are event-contingent records. That is, participants are asked to fill out a diary report
every time a specified event occurs. For example, as described above, Duck et al. (1991) had participants fill out a report after every conversation that lasted over 10 minutes. This is certainly an appropriate method for gathering information about a particular event (i.e., long conversations). It is not appropriate, however, for an exploratory study that is seeking to establish what the events of interest might be. Thus, neither the RIR nor ICR can be used for this study.

Event-contingent reporting is only one of three possible diary methods. A second method is signal-contingent reporting. In this case, participants fill out a report every time they are signalled by the researcher. This method is not without its flaws; because participants are only asked to report their activities at the time they are signalled, there are many behaviors that might be overlooked simply because a participant was not signalled while performing them.

The final method is termed interval-contingent reporting. This method asks respondents to fill out reports at some regular, predetermined time. At the scheduled time, the participant is asked to report all that has occurred since filling out the last diary (i.e., reporting all interactions in a given interval). Although this method relies on more retrospective data than the other methods, if the intervals are sufficiently close together the chances of missing or distorted data are minimized. This method seems suitable for the purposes of this study.

Accordingly, an interval-contingent log has been developed to be distributed to married individuals. The term log has been used rather than diary in keeping with popular connotations of the terms; log implies
a list of activities or events, whereas *diary* implies sharing private thoughts, dreams, etcetera. This research is focused upon overt interactions, not on cognitions. It is hoped that the use of the term log might reassure participants that what is of interest is not their individual thoughts, feelings, etcetera, but, rather, their interaction with their spouse.

The proposed log is more open-ended than either the RIR or the ICR. Because the purpose of this study is to probe the nature of interaction, a closed-ended report such as the two used in previous research is inappropriate. The log itself has six columns, one each for the interaction, the length of the interaction, why the interaction was performed, how much the actor thought about the interaction, how typical the interaction is within the relationship, and the importance of the interaction to the relationship. Finally, the bottom of each log contains a 10-point scale asking the participant to identify how happy they are with their relationship that day, and space is provided to add comments regarding thoughts about the day. For a copy of the log, see appendix A.

**Sample**

A total of 73 married couples were recruited for participation by students at a large, Midwestern university. Students were offered extra credit for soliciting a married couple to fill out a questionnaire and an interaction log. The return rate was 62%. However, 18 couples were subsequently dropped from the study for the following reasons: seven couples voluntarily withdrew from the study, six couples provided incomplete information (e.g., one or both members did not fill out the questionnaire or parts of the interaction log), and five couples failed to
fully comply with the instructions (e.g., one or both members listed interactions in which the partner was not present). Accordingly, analyses are based on the answers provided by 55 couples.

This study sampled both partners of the marital dyad. The mean length of marriage was 17.9 years (range= 3 months to 39 years, SD=11.7 years), and the mean age was 42.1 years (range= 20 to 70, SD=12.1). The mean number of children in the household was 1.05 (range= 0 to 5, SD=1.2). The sample was highly educated, with 55.4% having a college degree or beyond.

Procedure

Respondents were recruited in the following manner. Students of mid- and upper-level communication courses at a large, Midwestern university were offered extra credit to solicit each member of a married couple to complete a questionnaire and an interaction log. Questionnaires and interaction logs were distributed to the students in sealed packets, which included separate questionnaires and logs for the husband and wife. Students were instructed not to open the packets.

Each packet contained instructions that had been adapted from Wheeler and Nezlek (1977) and Kashy (1991). A copy of the instructions given to couples is found in Appendix B.

To prevent student fabrication of responses, participants were asked for their home phone number "for purposes of verification only." Responses were mailed directly to the researcher. A random 35% of the couples were called to verify that they had indeed completed the questionnaires and interaction logs. In line with previous research
utilizing similar data collection methods (e.g., Dindia, 1989; Stafford & Canary, 1991), all couples who were contacted verified that they had indeed taken part in the study.

Post-Log Interview

At the time that couples were called for verification, they were asked to answer a few questions regarding the study. Couples were assured that the student would receive extra credit, regardless of their answers to these questions. A copy of the interview protocol is located in Appendix C.

All questions were scored using a 1-to-5 likert scale. The questions and mean responses are as follows: "How difficult was it to record interactions?" mean = 3.16 (neutral), SD = .93; "How accurate do you perceive your interaction logs were?" mean = 4.53 (very accurate), SD = .51; "How much did keeping the interaction log interfere with your daily life?" mean = 1.74 (somewhat), SD = .99; and "To what extent do you think filling out the interaction logs made you change the number or type of interactions you usually have?" mean = 1.21 (very little), SD = .54.

Coding Procedures

In order to meet the goals of this study the development of descriptive categories of interaction types was necessary. Following Baxter's (1990) recommendation, categories were developed via the method of analytic induction. Specifically, a working category scheme was created from a subsample of 25% of the data. A separate subsample of 25% of the data subsequently was used to modify the category scheme. Eventually, a coding scheme was produced that had 8 superordinate categories and 23 subordinate categories. Additionally, a category labeled
miscellaneous was created for interactions that did not appear to exemplify any coherent theme. This category contained less than 1% of the interactions.

Although the categories were developed inductively, the naming of categories was influenced by previous research. That is, once the category scheme was developed, existing research on marital interaction was reviewed for interaction types similar to those categorized herein. Accordingly, some of the category types are similar to those described in past research (e.g., Canary et al., 1991; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia, 1994; Hays, 1989; Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Kirchler, 1988).

Specifically, the categories are as follows. The first superordinate category is instrumental. Interactions coded as instrumental referenced work-related activities such as housework, shopping, childcare, and getting ready for work.

The second superordinate category is leisure. Such interactions included activities related to fun or relaxation. Specific examples include watching television, reading, playing sports or games, and attending interest group meetings.

Mealtime is the third superordinate category. Interactions in which the dominant or major activity involved eating were categorized in this way. Incidental eating (e.g., eating popcorn at the movies) is not included in this category.

The fourth superordinate category, affection, has three subordinate categories. First, greeting/departure affection specifically references affectionate activities used in saying hello or goodbye (e.g., a kiss
goodnight). The second subordinate category is sexual relations. Finally, other affection includes interactions that are clearly affectionate in nature, but that are not representative of the first two subordinate categories. Examples include saying "I love you," hugs or kisses not related to greeting or departure, and giving a compliment.

Conversation is the fifth superordinate category. It includes four subordinate categories. The first subordinate category is catching up. Interactions coded in this way involved such things as talking about one or both partner's days, as well as calls to or from work in order to "touch base." Planning/coordination, the second subordinate category, involves conversations referring to the scheduling of activities, as well as such things as the discussion of needed household repairs. The third subordinate category is openness. Openness includes serious or deep conversations, typically referencing such things as the state of the relationship, family issues, or the private thoughts/concerns of one of the partners. Finally, other conversations includes gossip, small talk, or anything that simply listed "talk" without providing details of the discussion.

The sixth superordinate category is conflict. Interactions described as disagreements, arguments, differences of opinion, or frustrations with the partner were coded in this way.

Network is the seventh superordinate category. Unlike previous research (e.g., Stafford & Canary, 1991), network simply refers to interactions that take place with persons outside the marital dyad.
Accordingly, "family dinners," in which the marital dyad eats with one or more children, is considered to be a network interaction.

The last superordinate category is combination. Because many participants listed multiple activities within a single interaction, a category was developed that represented each element described above that was present in the interaction. Eleven such combinations were noted. Eight of these combinations involved two activity types (e.g., "ate dinner and talked about the day," which is coded as mealtime and conversation), and three involved three activity types (e.g., "ate dinner, watched t.v., and talked about the day," which is coded as mealtime, leisure, and conversation).

While the category scheme described above reflects a taxonomic approach to content analysis (see Baxter, 1990), a quite different analytic procedure was necessary to code the answers provided to the question "why did you engage in this interaction?" The purpose of this question was to ascertain the extent to which the interaction was performed for maintenance purposes. Accordingly, a category scheme was developed to meet this goal.

Simply put, the category scheme is an ordinal ranking similar to a likert scale, wherein a 1=the interaction was not at all performed for maintenance purposes, and a 7=the interaction was explicitly performed for maintenance purposes. The coding decisions were derived from the arguments presented earlier in this paper regarding the nature of goals. Specifically, it was initially proposed that routine interactions were those that were not performed with the explicit goal of relationship
maintenance. There were two possible interpretations of this statement; first, an actor might not be aware of his or her goals in a situation (perhaps because the interaction had become habituated), and second, an actor might be aware of his or her goals, but those goals were not maintenance of the relationship. Note that the differences between these two interpretations is a function of intent. In the former interpretation, the behavior is nonintentional, whereas in the latter the behavior is intentional.

Based on this differentiation, the coding decisions were as follows. To be coded as a 7, the goal listed must explicitly say "maintenance" or "to keep the relationship together" (i.e., the definition of maintenance provided in this manuscript). To be coded as a 6, the goal must also explicitly reference the relationship, but without explicitly mentioning maintenance (e.g., "to strengthen the relationship"). A 5 goal is one in which the partner is explicitly mentioned, especially in terms of the relationship (e.g., "to show my love for my partner," or "companionship").

Working from the opposite direction for a minute, an interactional goal was assigned a 1 if there was explicit mention of non-maintenance and non-relational goals (e.g., "I was hungry," "entertainment" and "task"). This was given the lowest rating because of the intentionality of the action. Further, a 2 goal is one in which the respondent indicated that he or she "didn't know," or had "no reason" for engaging in the interaction. It was rated slightly higher than explicit non-maintenance goals because of the possibility that the interaction had at one time been
performed for maintenance purposes, but over time had become habituated. Similarly, an interaction goal was assigned a 3 if the respondent indicated that the interaction was performed by habit or as part of a routine. Finally, an interaction goal was coded as a 4 if it implicitly referenced the partner or the relationship (e.g., "interest," or "respect"), or if it did not seem to fit into any of the categories described above.

Reliability for interaction types and maintenance goals was established through intercoder reliability. Specifically, following the development of the two coding schemes, a random 25% of the questionnaires were coded jointly by two coders in order to provide a training period. Following this training period, a different sample of 25% of the data was coded independently by the two coders in order to achieve reliability. For the interaction types, Scott's $\pi = .92$. For the maintenance goals, Scott's $\pi = .91$. 
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

RQ1: What types of interactions are reported in maintained relationships?

Research Question 1 regarded the identification of interaction types. This question was answered via the development of the taxonomy as described in Chapter II. Additionally, Table 1 reports frequencies and percentages of the reported interactions.

As can be seen from Table 1, a total of 3676 interactions were reported. The most commonly reported interaction types were instrumental (14.3%), network (11%), leisure (11%), and greeting/departure affection (10.9%). When looking at the superordinate categories, the most commonly mentioned supratype was combination interactions (19.6%), with mealtime and conversation (5.6%), leisure and conversation (4.4%), and instrumental and conversation (3.8%) comprising the bulk of the combination interactions. The second most common supratype was affection (18%), followed by conversation (17.5%).
Table 1
Typology of Interaction Types, Total Frequencies, and Percentages of Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Instrumental</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Leisure</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Mealtime</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Affection</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Greeting/Departure</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sexual Relations</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Other Affection</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Conversations</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Catching Up</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Planning/Coordination</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Openness</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Other Conversations</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Conflict</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Network</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Combinations</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Instrumental &amp; Affection</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Instrumental &amp; Conversations</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Leisure &amp; Mealtime</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Leisure &amp; Affection</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Leisure &amp; Conversations</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Mealtime &amp; Affection</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Mealtimes &amp; Conversations</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Affection &amp; Conversation</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Leisure &amp; Mealtime &amp; Conversation</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Leisure &amp; Affection &amp; Conversation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Mealtime &amp; Affection &amp; Conversation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>3676</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ2: How routine are interactions in maintained relationships?

Because routine interaction is conceptualized as interaction that requires relatively little thought and that is perceived as typical to the relationship, it is necessary to assess each component separately. Accordingly, the subquestions RQ2(a) and RQ2(b) will be discussed before the overall question can be answered.

RQ2(a): To what extent are interactions thought about?

Respondents indicated the extent to which they thought about the interaction on a likert scale wherein 1=not at all and 7=very much. The mean score was 3.067 (SD=1.97). Assuming that the scale midpoint represents the population parameter given chance distribution of sample means, a t-test was performed to determine if this score is significantly different than what would be expected chance. Results indicate that the mean score was significantly different than the scale midpoint (t=28.64, p<.001). In short, interactions were thought about less than would be expected by chance.

RQ2(b): To what extent are interactions typical?

Respondents indicated the extent to which they thought the interaction was typical on a likert scale wherein 1=not at all and 7=very much. To be consistent with other scales, responses were recoded such that 1=very much and 7=not at all. The mean score was 2.643 (SD=1.61). Assuming that the response midpoint represents the population parameter given chance distribution of sample means, a t-test was performed to determine if this score is significantly different than what would be expected chance. Results indicate that the mean score was
significantly different than the response midpoint ($t=50.85, p<.001$). Thus, interactions were perceived as more typical than would be expected by chance.

Returning to the general question as to the extent to which interactions are routine, scores for thinking and typicality were summed to create an index of routineness. The new variable has a range of 2 to 14, with the lower end of the scale reflecting routine activity and the higher end of the scale reflecting strategic activity. The mean routine score was 5.7 ($SD=2.56$). The mean routine score indicates that in general, interactions in maintained relationships are more routine than strategic.

Again, a $t$-test was performed to determine if this score is significantly different than what would be expected chance. Results indicate that the mean score was significantly different than the scale midpoint ($t=53.7, p<.001$). In sum, interactions are more routine than would be expected by chance.

RQ3: Which interactional types are routine?

An one way ANOVA was performed in order to ascertain if there are significant differences in the relative routineness of different interactional categories. Results indicate that there are significant differences in routineness [$F(7, 3591)=30.97, p<.001$].

Tukey-b multiple comparison tests were conducted as a follow-up. Table 2 shows the results of these tests. In sum, results indicate that two interactional categories are more routine than the majority of other interactional types (NOTE: the higher the score, the less routine).
Specifically, affection is more routine than all other categories ($M=4.7$, $p<.05$), while combination interactions ($M=5.4$) are more routine than instrumental activities ($M=5.9$, $p<.05$), leisure activities ($M=5.9$, $p<.05$), conversations ($M=6.1$, $p<.05$), network interactions ($M=6.8$, $p<.05$), and conflict ($M=6.9$, $p<.05$).

Table 2
Follow-up Tests for Relative Routineness of Interaction Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>4.700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>5.409</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mealtimes</td>
<td>5.787</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>5.861</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>5.914</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>6.057</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>6.764</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>6.860</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05

*in order from most routine to least routine.

It should be noted that when multiple responses from pairs of individuals are collected, there exists the probability of within-dyad and between-dyad interdependence. Accordingly, some scholars call for analysis procedures that takes into account such interdependence (Kenny & Kashy, 1991). Other scholars, however, assert that as long as sampling independence is achieved (i.e., the coding of an event is not predicated
upon the coding of previous events), such procedures are not necessary (Bakeman, 1991). Because the coders were careful to achieve sampling independence, and because interactions are themselves independent events, the analyses used throughout this study do not adjust for possible threats to independence.

**RQ4: To what extent are interactions in maintained relationships oriented toward maintenance goals?**

Responses to the question "Why did you engage in this interaction?" were coded according to the procedures outlined in the methods section. The frequencies and percentages of the coded responses are reported in Table 3. Results indicate that interactions oriented towards maintenance are quite rare, as only 0.1% of all interactions explicitly identified maintenance as the goal of the interaction. Moreover, interactions performed for relational reasons other than maintenance were also relatively infrequent, accounting for only 4.5% of the interactions.
Table 3
Extent of Maintenance Goals Frequencies and Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Goal Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Explicit Maintenance Goal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Explicit Focus on Relationship</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Explicit Focus on Partner</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Implicit Focus Partner/Rel.</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Routine/Habit</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No Reason/Don't Know</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Explicit 'Other' Goal</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3676</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ5: Which interactional types are reported as being performed for maintenance purposes?

An one way ANOVA was performed in order to ascertain if there are significant differences in the relative orientation to maintenance goals (dependent variable) of different interactional categories (independent variable). Results indicate that there are significant differences in orientation to maintenance goals \[F(7, 3560)=60.03, p<.001\]. Tukey-b multiple comparison tests were conducted as a follow-up. Table 4 shows the results of these tests. In sum, results indicate that affection is used more often for maintenance than all other categories \(\bar{M}=2.81, p<.05\).
### Table 4
Follow-up Tests for Relative Orientation to Maintenance Goals of Interaction Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>1.445</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>1.460</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>1.521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mealtimes</td>
<td>1.544</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>1.648</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>1.714</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>1.858</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>2.807</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05
aIn order from least oriented to maintenance to most oriented to maintenance.

**RQ6:** What is the relationship between an interaction's orientation to maintenance goals and its routineness?

A Pearson correlation was run between the routineness of an interaction and its orientation to maintenance goals (NOTE: goal was treated as a continuous variable ranging from 1 to 7). Results indicate a significant correlation ($r = -.075$, $p < .01$). However, the relationship is relatively weak, accounting for only about one-half of one percent in the variance. Accordingly, there is no evidence for a practically significant relationship between the two variables.
RQ7: Which interaction types are viewed as most important to the relationship?

An one way ANOVA was performed in order to ascertain if there are significant differences in the perceived importance of different interactional categories. Results indicate that there are significant differences in perceived importance \( F(7, 3600) = 60.58, p < .001 \).

Tukey-b multiple comparison tests were conducted as a follow-up. Results are described in Table 5. Specifically, results indicate that affection was perceived to be significantly more important than all other interactional categories (\( M \) perceived importance = 6.09, \( p < .05 \)).

Table 5
Follow-up Tests for Relative Importance of Interaction Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>4.120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>4.423</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>4.640</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>5.230</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>5.250</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>5.259</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealtimes</td>
<td>5.332</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>6.085</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( * p < .05 \)

A in order from least to most important.
RQ8: What is the relationship between routineness and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?

A Pearson correlation was run between reported routineness and perceived importance of interactions. Results indicate that the two variables are significantly correlated ($r = -.06, p < .01$). However, the relationship is relatively weak, accounting for only about one-third of one percent in the variance. Accordingly, there is no evidence for a practically significant relationship between the routineness of an interaction and its perceived importance to the relationship.

Breaking the two components of routine interactions apart, one sees that the lack of a relationship between routineness and importance may be a function of the conflicting relationships between importance and the two variables. Specifically, thinking and importance are significantly, positively related ($r = .17, p < .01$). Conversely, typicality and importance are significantly, negatively related ($r = -.29, p < .01$).

Another way to approach this question is to categorize interactions as relatively routine or relatively strategic. To determine if there is a significant difference in the perceived importance of relatively routine interactions versus relatively strategic interactions, the scale midpoint was used to classify interactions as routine (i.e., below the scale midpoint) or strategic (i.e., above the scale midpoint). A $t$-test was performed to compare the two groups on perceived importance to the relationship. Results indicate that there is a significant difference between the two groups (routine interactions $M$ importance = 5.19, strategic interactions $M$ importance = 5.01, $t = 2.08, p < .05$). These results indicate that relatively
routine interactions are perceived as more important to the relationship than are relatively strategic interactions.

**RQ9**: What is the relationship between the performance of an interaction for maintenance purposes and perceived importance of the interaction to the relationship?

A Pearson correlation was run between orientation to maintenance goals and perceived importance of interactions. Results indicate that the two variables are significantly, positively correlated \( r = .14, p < .01 \). This indicates that the more the interaction is oriented for maintenance goals, the more important it is perceived to be. Again, this relationship is relatively weak, accounting for only two percent in the variance.

To assess the difference in perceived importance of maintenance goals versus nonmaintenance goals, interactions were split into two groups. To be categorized as "maintenance" the reported goal must have been assigned a 6 or 7 in the maintenance goal typology. Goals below a 6 were assigned as "nonmaintenance." Combining categories 6 and 7 to create a maintenance group seems appropriate for theoretical as well as practical purposes; while maintenance scholars have worked at length to differentiate maintenance from other relational goals, it is likely that the participants of this study did not make such a careful distinction. Further, combining these two categories provides a more substantial base for comparison, since so few of the interactions were performed explicitly for maintenance purposes (i.e., few were assigned a 7).
An one way ANOVA was performed to compare the two groups on perceived importance to the relationship. Results indicate that there is a significant difference between the two groups (maintenance interactions M importance = 5.67, nonmaintenance interactions M importance = 5.17, F = 14.81, p<.001). These results indicate that interactions performed for maintenance purposes are perceived as more important to the relationship than are interactions performed for nonmaintenance reasons.

H1: The longer a couple is married, the more routine their interactions will be.

A Pearson correlation was run between length of marriage and an aggregated routineness score. Specifically, the routineness scores for each interaction were averaged for each individual to develop a mean routineness score by individual. Results indicate no significant relationships between the two variables (r=.03, n.s.).

To determine if there was any evidence of a nonlinear relationship, a scatter plot was examined. This examination yielded no evidence of a nonlinear relationship between the two variables.

H2: The longer a couple is married, the fewer interactions will be performed for maintenance purposes.

A Pearson correlation was run between an aggregated goal score and marital duration. The aggregated goal score was created by averaging the orientation to maintenance goal scores of each interaction for each individual. Results indicate no significant relationship between the two
variables ($r = -0.02$, n.s.). Again, a scatter plot was examined, and there was no evidence of a nonlinear relationship between the variables.

**RQ10:** What is the relationship between the presence of children in the household and the routineness of interactions?

An one way ANOVA was performed to compare the two groups (those with children in the household and those without children in the household) on an aggregated routineness score. Results indicate no significant differences between the two groups [$F(1,108) = 0.141, p = 0.71$].

**H3:** Individuals in marriages with children present in the household will report fewer interactions performed for maintenance purposes.

An one way ANOVA was performed to compare the two groups (those with children in the household and those without children in the household) on an aggregated goal score. Results indicate no significant differences between the two groups [$F(1,108) = 0.534, p = 0.47$].
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

This study had several goals. Specifically, this research effort sought to differentiate between routine and strategic interactions in maintained marital relationships; to ascertain the frequency of relatively routine versus relatively strategic interactions; to assess the perceived importance of routine and strategic interactions; and, finally, to determine if there are differences in the nature of interactions in marriages of different durations and in households where children are present. Although the results presented in the previous chapter speak to these issues, a full understanding of the implications of the findings of this study can only be garnered through a discussion of the links between this study and previous research. Accordingly, this chapter will discuss the findings of this study in light of existing research into marital maintenance. Further, limitations of this study will be offered, and future directions posed.

The first research question regarded the identification of interaction types in maintained marital relationships. As reported in Table 1, the most commonly described interaction type was instrumental interactions. This finding is consistent with previous research. For example, Dainton and Stafford (1993) found that sharing tasks was listed most frequently by romantic partners as the way in which they maintain their relationship.
Moreover, respondents listed sharing tasks primarily as a function of a probe into the routine and "everyday" behaviors they enact to maintain their relationship (see also Dainton, Stafford, & McNeilis, 1992), which likely is why other, more strategically oriented maintenance research, overlooked this interactional type entirely (e.g., Dindia & Baxter, 1987) or found the use of shared tasks to be relatively infrequent (Canary et al., 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Further, this research corroborates Huston et al.'s (1986) finding that one of the most frequent everyday activities of married couples is the completion of household tasks. In sum, it appears that the frequency of instrumental interactions reported in the marital interaction logs is entirely consistent with other studies of marital interaction in general, and studies of relational maintenance in particular.

The frequency with which participants reported network interactions, leisure interactions, and greeting/departure affection is not as easily explained by previous maintenance research, however. Dainton and Stafford (1993), for example, found that network interactions only accounted for 1.2% of the responses to the question "how do you maintain your relationship?" However, the coding scheme in the present research effort was different from that used in the previous research. This coding scheme included as network interactions all interactions that occurred in the presence of other people, whereas previous research limited network interactions to the use of social networks for maintenance purposes (see Canary & Stafford, 1992; Canary et al., 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Given the high percentage of couples in this study who reported children present in the household (nearly 55%), it is not surprising that there were
a large number of interactions occurring with other people present. Moreover, this study sampled all interactions that took place in a maintained relationship, not just those oriented to maintenance goals.

Turning to the frequency of leisure interactions reported in this study, previous maintenance research provides little illumination for this result as well. That is, leisure interaction as a distinct interactional category has not been identified in previous research. Again, method might explain why; previous maintenance research has focused solely on behaviors performed for maintenance purposes, whereas this research has assessed all interactions that take place in a maintained marriage. Nevertheless, previous maintenance research has uncovered behaviors conceptually similar to leisure interactions. For example, Dainton and Stafford (1993) found that 11.6% of all behaviors oriented to maintenance involved simply sharing time together. Such behaviors are likely similar to the leisure interactions described in this study.

The relative frequency of leisure interactions and sharing time together raises an intriguing question, however. In a series of research efforts, Huston and colleagues have found that quantity of leisure and companionate time decreases during the first few years of marriage, and that lack of leisure time is one of the biggest complaints of married persons (e.g., Huston et al., 1986; McHale & Huston, 1985; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). Clearly, the participants in this and the Dainton and Stafford (1993) studies reported a large number of leisure interactions. There are several ways to reconcile these seemingly contradictory results. First, it may be that although there were indeed a large number of leisure
interactions, the proportionately larger number of instrumental interactions leaves married partners with the perception that marriage is mostly work with little time to "play." On the other hand, marital life stage might explain the gap between the research results. The average length of marriage in the present study was 17.9 years, and in the Dainton and Stafford study was 13.5 years. Huston and colleagues, on the other hand, studied couples in the first several years of marriage. It may be that amount of leisure time increases again during the course of the marriage, or conversely, that perceptions change over time due to a decrease in idealized visions of marriage.

Finally, the frequency with which greeting/departure affection was mentioned might again be a function of method. Although previous maintenance research uncovered affection as a strategy for maintaining relationships, affection did not emerge as a frequently used category of behavior. Dainton and Stafford (1993), for example, found that affection was mentioned in only 6% of the responses. Dindia and Baxter (1987), on the other hand, found that ceremonial expressions of affection, which is conceptually similar to greeting/departure affection, was the third most frequently mentioned maintenance strategy, although it was mentioned in only 4.8% of the accounts. Clearly, previous research, utilizing questionnaires oriented towards behaviors used for maintenance purposes only, has not found the global category of affection nor the specific category of greeting/departure affection to be used frequently.

In reviewing the marital interaction logs, the majority of accounts of greeting/departure affection listed "habit" or "routine" as the reason
why the interaction took place. This indicates that these types of affection might be highly ritualized. This is in line with the results found by Dainton et al. (1992), who determined that affection is more often a routine rather than strategic means of relational maintenance. In short, it might be that greeting/departure affection is a regular part of an interaction routine, and that the methods utilized in this study allowed this element of the routine to surface in a way that previous research has not.

When looking at the superordinate categories, the most commonly mentioned supratype was combination interactions, primarily due to interactions involving conversation and some other activity. The importance of this finding is quite significant, especially in terms of the way that communication is most often studied. As Duck et al. (1991) argue, talk is embedded in the activities of everyday life, and should be studied in its everyday context. The results of this study indicate that the most frequent way that married participants experience conversation is concurrent with some other activity. Accordingly, future research into marital interaction should contextualize communication if it wishes to enhance external validity.

A second point is worth noting regarding the frequency of supratypes and the nature of conversation in everyday marital interactions. Specifically, the third most frequently mentioned supratype was conversation. The overall frequency of this category is a function of the frequency of conversations focusing on catching up, planning or coordinating, and small talk. Openness contributed very little to the
overall frequency, as it was listed in only .5% of the accounts. However, openness has emerged as the most common way of maintaining a relationship in a number of studies of maintenance (e.g., Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). The importance of this finding is twofold. First, even though openness is a frequently used maintenance strategy, overall it is used relatively infrequently in maintained relationships. Second, this finding indicates that despite theories to the contrary, communication in intimate relationships is generally neither intimate nor deep. In fact, as Duck and colleagues (Duck & Miell, 1986; Duck et al., 1991) have proposed, the majority of theories of relationships fail to take into account the majority of communication in those relationships; "by focusing on the unusual, we gain only a skewed comprehension of the commonplace" (Duck et al., 1991, p. 259).

In sum, the results of this study replicate and extend previous relational maintenance research regarding the type and frequency of interactions in maintained relationships. That is, the results described above are generally consistent with previous research. However, by collecting information about all interactions—not just those oriented towards maintenance—a broader picture of marital interaction emerges. Specifically, the results of this study leads one to the tentative conclusion that the bulk of interactions in maintained relationships are task-oriented, take place in the presence of others, are ritualized, involve multiple activities occurring simultaneously, and are non-intimate in nature.

The second research question sought to uncover the routineness of interactions. Because routine interaction was defined as interaction that
requires relatively little thought and that is perceived as typical to the relationship, both components were assessed separately before a final result was offered. In short, the data suggest that interactions were thought about less than would be expected by chance, were perceived as more typical than would be expected by chance, and are more often routine than strategic. These results speak to the very essence of the purpose of this endeavor; to empirically ascertain the extent to which interactions in maintained relationships are routine rather than strategic. As indicated earlier in this document, the vast majority of those who have studied relationship maintenance have focused upon the strategies that relational partners intentionally invoke to sustain their relationship (e.g., Baxter, 1994; Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Bell et al., 1987; Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dindia, 1994; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Rawlins, 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). The results of this study indicate that by focusing on the strategic, researchers are overlooking a wealth of information about interactions in maintained relationships.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the methods of this study do not allow the generalization to be made that these interactions--whether routine or strategic--actually do maintain the relationship. The only assertion that can be made is that the interactions reported herein were within the context of a maintained relationship. Still, the question of whether interactions lead to maintenance or maintenance leads to certain types of interaction is still up in the air. The strongest evidence to date is that relational qualities lead to variations in interaction (see Noller, 1982; White, 1983; Zuo, 1992). Thus, it may be that a maintained relationship
leads to the types and frequencies of interactions reported in the marital interaction logs, rather than vice versa.

The failure of this research to determine causality is not unique among studies of relational maintenance. Indeed, the methods of previous maintenance research are equally limited. The bulk of maintenance research has asked individuals what they do to maintain their relationships. Such information does not provide evidence that what participants report doing actually does maintain the relationship. Future research will have to use longitudinal research to establish the causal link between particular cognitions, behaviors, interactions, and external factors with relational maintenance.

The third research question sought to ascertain if there are significant differences in the relative routineness of different interactional types. Results indicate that interactional types from most to least routine are as follows: affection, combination, mealtimes, instrumental, leisure, conversation, network, and conflict. These results make sense given the operationalization of routine utilized in this study. That is, if routine interactions are those that require relatively little thought and that are perceived as typical to the relationship, it is intuitive that affection would be reported as the most routine, and conflict as the least routine. First, regarding affection, it has been previously stated that affection might be a part of a couple's interaction routine. Accordingly, it is likely to be reported as very typical to the relationship. Further, the wealth of research into cognitive processes and structures provides every indication that
typical or habituated interactions require less thought (e.g., Greene, 1984; Ginsburg, 1988; Kellermann, 1992; Langer, 1978, 1989).

On the other hand, it also makes sense that conflict would be reported as least routine (note that the mean routineness score for conflict still places it as more routine than strategic). Looking at the frequencies of reported interactional types, only 1.4% of all interactions were classified as conflict. Clearly, participants were consistent in reporting conflict relatively infrequently in the marital interaction logs, and also describing it as relatively atypical for their relationship. This provides some evidence that the one-week period during which participants kept track of their interactions might be a fairly representative slice of their marital interactions overall.

The relative infrequency of reports of conflictual interactions may appear surprising at first glance given the attention conflict has received in communication research. Nevertheless, the results of this study are consistent with other studies of marital interaction. For example, Huston and colleagues have found that married couples experience negative interactions (of which conflict is only one type) less than once a day (Huston et al., 1986; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). The couples studied by Huston were in the first few years of marriage, however. Using couples married for longer periods of time, Burgess (1981) found that unhappily married couples report arguments as often as once a day, whereas happily married couples report conflicts approximately once a week. Since the bulk of the couples in this study were happily married at the time of the study, a frequency of 50 conflictual interactions indeed averages to about
one conflict per couple per week. However, all of these figures are for expressed conflicts. Roloff and Cloven (1990) have found that individuals in relationships often experience conflict without any overt interaction. Since this study focused only on interactions and not on cognitions, married individuals may have experienced an incompatible goal without expressing the conflict. Such an experience is beyond the scope of this study.

Moving on to the fourth research question, responses to the question "Why did you engage in this interaction?" were coded according to the procedures described in Chapter II. Results indicate that interactions oriented toward relational maintenance are very rare indeed; only one-tenth of one percent of all interactions were oriented towards maintenance. This percentage increases when one also considers interactions oriented towards the relationship, and increases yet again when partner-focused interactions are included (i.e., categories 6 and 5). Adding these three categories together, however, accounts for only 9% of all interactions. As suggested previously, this indicates that scholarship focusing only on maintenance-oriented behaviors is focusing on only a very small amount of interaction that takes place in maintained marital relationships. It is quite possible that the vast majority of interaction, that which is not oriented specifically to maintenance, may also contribute to the sustenance of the relationship. If nonmaintenance-oriented interaction does not contribute to relational continuation, then the infrequency of maintenance-oriented interaction indicates that it may take very little effort to keep a relationship together. Recalling Duck's (1988)
differentiation between centrifugal and centripetal forces, this implies that marital relationships may be maintained through centripetal forces (i.e., they stay together until taken apart) more than through centrifugal forces.

Further, it is important to note that for nearly 18% of all interactions, participants didn't know why they had engaged in the interaction. This provides empirical evidence for Burnett's (1987) proposal that people generally don't recognize the causes of their behavior. In an additional 4% of interactions individuals reported engaging in the interaction out of habit or routine, an answer that may indicate a lack of awareness of why they engaged in the interaction. Indeed, it is possible that in the 82% of the cases in which people did provide a reason for the interaction, they may have retrospectively created a reason that was not the cause of their action, as both Turk (1974) and Burnett (1987) have argued. The implication for this finding is that researchers must be careful when using goal as a central construct. First, the research presented herein indicates that in approximately one out of five interactions, individuals are unaware of their interactional goals. Second, it is possible that individuals might retrospectively "create" goals because they are asked to provide them.

Research Question 5 asked whether there are significant differences in the relative orientation to maintenance goals of different interactional categories. Results indicate that affection is used more often for maintenance than all other categories, while combination interactions are the second most frequently used interactions for maintenance purposes. Interestingly, these results reflect exactly the results for the question
regarding the relative routineness of interactional categories. That is, affection and combination interactions appear to be simultaneously the most routine interactions and the most frequently used to maintain a relationship. This indicates one of two things; either these interactional types are sometimes used routinely and sometimes used more strategically in order to maintain the relationship, or, the most common way of maintaining a relationship is through routine interaction. The latter possibility would provide support for the conjectures of a large number of maintenance scholars (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Duck, 1988, 1994; Roloff & Cloven, 1994).

Also of interest is that instrumental interactions were those least frequently performed for maintenance purposes. Since instrumental interactions were the most frequently performed interactions in this sample, this provides further evidence that a large number of interactions in maintained relationships are not directly performed to keep the relationship together, even if they function to do so. Paradoxically, however, Dainton & Stafford (1993) found that sharing tasks was the most frequently described maintenance behavior. The results of these two studies are therefore contradictory. It may be, however, that the instructions of the Dainton and Stafford probe directed attention to routine or everyday behaviors moreso than to maintenance behaviors. Dainton and Stafford instructed respondents that "Much of maintaining a relationship can involve mundane or routine aspects of day-to-day life. These are things you might not have thought of above because they might seem too trivial. Please try to describe the routine things you do to
maintain your relationship" (emphasis added). Accordingly, the probe may have directed attention to routine behaviors without adequately focusing attention to routine maintenance behaviors. Further, the nature of the Dainton and Stafford (1993) was such that respondents may have retrospectively ascribed certain behaviors as being performed for maintenance purposes when at the time of enactment no such goal was present. This would be consistent with the work of Turk (1974) and Burnett (1987), who have proposed that individuals frequently create a reason for their behavior retrospectively when that reason was not the actual cause of their behavior.

The sixth research question asked about the relationship between routineness and orientation to maintenance goals. Although there was a significant, negative relationship between the two variables (-.075), the relationship is extremely weak, and therefore practically insignificant. The lack of a practical relationship between routineness and orientation to maintenance goal indicates that the same maintenance interaction may be enacted either routinely or strategically, providing some empirical support for an assumption that has been made in previous research (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993).

Moreover, the lack of a relationship indicates that simply because one engages in an interaction for maintenance purposes, that interaction is not necessarily a strategic one. This provides some evidence for the assertion that over time, maintenance strategies may become scripted, and are therefore performed with little thought or awareness (see Dainton, 1992). It also establishes a solid reason why the term maintenance strategy
should be replaced by the more accurate terms maintenance behavior or maintenance interaction.

The next research question asks which interactional types are perceived as most important to the relationship. Not surprisingly, affection was perceived to be significantly more important than all other interactional categories. This is in line with previous research, which indicates that marital partners perceive affection as an important part of their relationship (Menaghan, 1983). Moreover, it is consistent with the results of Research Question 5, which indicates that affection is the interaction type most frequently reported as being used for relational purposes. By implication, then, it seems that the participants in this study viewed those interactions that were performed for maintenance reasons to actually be more important to the relationship (note that this relationship was tested directly to answer Research Question 9, and will be discussed in more depth shortly).

Surprisingly, however, conflict was identified as significantly less important to the relationship than five other interaction types: affection, mealtimes, network, conversation, and combination interactions. This finding is unexpected, since previous research has established that unresolved conflicts can have very negative consequences on relationships (Duck, 1988; Lloyd & Cate, 1985). There are two possibilities regarding the perceived unimportance of conflict. First, it may be that participants failed to consider negative events as important, despite instructions to do so. That is, participants might have had a positivity bias in assessing the importance of an interaction to the relationship. On the
other hand, research indicates that unresolved conflicts are problematic (see also Roloff & Cloven, 1994). It may be that the conflicts experienced by the participants while they were completing the marital interaction log were resolved, and therefore perceived to be unimportant.

Finally, the significant differences in the perceived importance of varying interactional categories provides further evidence for Duck et al.'s assertion that "all communications are not created equal" (1991, p. 228). When considering the impact of particular interactions on the relationship, one must be aware that different interactions are weighted differently in interactants' minds. Accordingly, as Burleson and Samter (1994) propose, some types of behavior are more important in fulfilling relational functions than are others.

Research Question 8 asked about the relationship between the routineness of an interaction and its perceived importance to the relationship. A Pearson correlation indicated that the two variables are significantly correlated ($r = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$). However, the relationship was quite weak, accounting for less than one percent in the variance, indicating no practically significant relationship between the two variables. As described in the results chapter, this may be because of differing relationships between the two components of routineness—thinking and typicality—and perceived importance.

When classifying interactions as routine (i.e., below the scale midpoint) or strategic (i.e., above the scale midpoint), however, results indicate that relatively routine interactions are perceived as more important to the relationship than are relatively strategic interactions.
This provides empirical evidence for the contention made by many scholars that everyday, mundane interactions serve important relational functions (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Duck, 1988, 1994; Roloff & Cloven, 1994). Although the efficacy of routine and strategic interactions in actually maintaining relationships is yet to be determined, the results of this study provide a foundation for considering both classes of interaction when a causal link is sought.

The next research question proposed to uncover the relationship between the goal of performing an interaction and the interaction's perceived importance to the relationship. A Pearson correlation indicates that the two variables are significantly, positively correlated, providing evidence that the more the interaction is oriented for maintenance goals, the more important it is perceived to be. However, this relationship is relatively weak, accounting for only two percent in the variance.

When interactions were split into two groups—maintenance (i.e., a code 6 or 7) and nonmaintenance (below 6)—results again indicate that interactions performed for maintenance purposes are perceived as more important to the relationship than are interactions performed for nonmaintenance reasons. Together, these two analyses indicate that maintenance interactions are recognized as such by marital partners and indeed are perceived to be important to the relationship, quelling the argument that maintenance cannot be distinguished from other relational states and is therefore not as important as other variables (e.g., Baxter, 1994).
The final series of hypotheses and research questions concerns life-span differences in marital interaction. Specifically, the first hypothesis states that the longer a couple is married, the more routine their interactions will be. This hypothesis failed to achieve support, however, as a Pearson correlation showed no significant relationship between marital duration and routineness of interactions in that relationship. The failure to ascertain a relationship between the routineness of interactions and marital duration is quite surprising given a host of research studies establishing a link between the length of marriage and interaction styles (e.g., Scanzoni et al., 1989; Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). More importantly, the lack of a relationship between routineness and marital length is in direct contrast to a number of theoretical propositions asserting that communication becomes more predictable and efficient over the course of the marriage (Sillars & Wilmot, 1989; Waller, 1938).

The reason for the lack of a relationship between these variables is not immediately apparent. However, certain possibilities can be suggested. First, it simply may be that some couples are routine in their interactions while others are not, regardless of the length of their marriage. Perhaps a factor in whether a couples' interaction is routinized or relatively strategic is couple type (see Fitzpatrick, 1988). That is, an argument could be made that Traditional couples, who rely upon a traditional ideology of marriage, might develop interaction routines more easily than Independent couples, who buy into an ideology of uncertainty and change. Further, mixed couple types might by necessity be more strategic than pure couple types,
since each partner has differing relational schemas; such couples might simply have to think about their interactions more.

A second reason why hypothesis one failed to be supported might be due to the lack of variability in routineness scores. Because marital length is a property of people, not interactions, the unit of analysis for the correlation was the individual. Accordingly, an aggregated routineness score had to be calculated for each individual, which severely diminished the variation in routineness scores. Thus, it may be that the method employed obscured a relationship between marital length and interaction routineness.

The second hypothesis also failed to achieve support. Specifically, hypothesis two asserted that the longer a couple is married, the fewer interactions will be performed for maintenance purposes. Again, a correlation between the two variables was nonsignificant. Like hypothesis one, a possible reason why this hypothesis failed to achieve support may be due to method. Because so many of the interactions were coded 1 (explicit nonmaintenance goal) and so few of the interactions were performed for maintenance purposes, when scores were aggregated there was very little variability in maintenance goal scores; nearly every couple had an average goal score around 1. Thus, it is not surprising that no relationship was found.

Because so few interactions were reported as being performed for maintenance purposes, the possibility also exists that the one-week period in which participants logged their interactions was insufficient to capture variations in the use of interactions oriented toward maintenance by
couples of different marital lengths. Future research may want to increase the number of days participants keep track of their interactions in order to ascertain if this is indeed the case. Alternatively, researchers may ask couples to complete the logs for two one-week intervals that are several weeks apart. This latter option may prevent skewed results due to the experience of an atypical week.

Research Question 10 and Hypothesis 3 both concerned the relationship between the presence of children in the household with other variables. Research Question 10 asked: what is the relationship between the presence of children in the household and the routineness of interactions? Results indicate no significant difference in the relative routineness of couples with children in the household and couples without children in the household. This is surprising, since research indicates that the presence of children has a traditionalizing effect on marriage (Belsky, 1989; McHale & Huston, 1985; Sillars & Wilmot, 1989). If interaction that follows sex-stereotyped patterns requires less thought—as would seem to be the case—one would expect to find the presence of children to be associated with more routine interactions. However, it may be that once a routine way of interacting is established, such a routine is maintained regardless of whether the children are still in the household. Further, the lack of variability of routineness scores might also be the culprit in this case.

The final hypothesis states that individuals in marriages with children present in the household will report fewer interactions performed for maintenance purposes. Once again, this hypothesis failed
to achieve support. Again, this may be because interactions oriented to
to maintenance were proportionately rare, causing a lack of variability in the
aggregated goal scores. It is still possible that the presence of children is
associated with a decrease in interactions oriented toward the marital
experience, and that discussions in couples with children in the
household more often focus on instrumental as opposed to affectional
concerns (e.g., Belsky, 1989; McHale & Huston, 1985). It may be, however,
that interactions oriented toward the marital experience and affectional
conversations are not always performed for explicit maintenance
purposes.

In sum, although some hypotheses were not supported, the results
of this study are for the most part consistent with previous research and
theorizing about relational maintenance. Overall, the results indicate that
the majority of interactions in maintained marital relationships are
routine rather than strategic, and are not oriented toward relational
maintenance. Moreover, affection seems to be viewed as the most routine
of the interaction categories, the most frequent interaction type to be
performed for maintenance purposes, and the most important interaction
type for the relationship. Surprisingly, however, very little relationship
research has focused on affectional expression (but see Dainton et al., in
press). Certainly, the results of this study indicate that more research into
expressions of affection is warranted.

The results of this study also indicate that there is no relationship
between the routineness with which an interaction is performed and
whether it is performed for maintenance purposes or not. Accordingly,
this study provides empirical evidence that studies of maintenance must consider both routine and strategic interactions if an accurate portrait of relational maintenance is to be painted. Further, the results reported herein establish that routine interactions are perceived as more important to the relationship than are strategic interactions, and that interactions performed for maintenance purposes are more important to the relationship than are those not performed for maintenance purposes. The strength of these relationships are quite weak, however.

Finally, the results of this study show no evidence for a link between the length of a couple’s marriage and their use of routine interactions or the frequency of interactions they perform for maintenance purposes. Similarly, this research provides no evidence for a relationship between the presence or absence of children in the household and a couple’s use of routine interactions or the frequency of interactions they perform for maintenance purposes. However, there is a possibility that methodological limitations prevented such relationships from emerging.

Certainly, there are other limitations to this research. First, this research shares with all diary research certain methodological weaknesses. Specifically, studies of memory indicate that more recent events are more likely to be recalled than are more distant events, and that recall is influenced by implicit prototypes about what should have occurred (Ross, 1989). Regarding the former problem, this study has attempted to overcome recency biases by keeping the period in which one had to recall events fairly short. Still, it is quite possible that interactions early in the
day were forgotten more often than those that occurred later in the day. Diary studies are retrospective no matter how soon after an interaction the diary is completed, and therefore are subject to all of the problems associated with retrospective data.

Regarding the latter problem, it is quite possible that implicit prototypes about marriage interfered with the accuracy of recollection. However, the nature of the research questions posed in this study necessitated using participants' perceptions of events; information regarding how much they thought about the interaction, their goal for performing the interaction, the typicality of the interaction, and the perceived importance of the interaction on the relationship could not be gathered in any other way. Thus, the results of this study are tempered by the very real possibility that participants' cognitive structures influenced the way the interactions were recorded.

Diary studies have several other inherent limitations. Comparing data gathered by diaries to data gathered by phone records, Higgins, McClean, & Conrath (1985) found that individuals keeping diaries consistently understated the actual frequency of interactions, underrepresented very short interactions, overestimated the length of very short interactions, and estimated to the nearest five minutes the length of interactions. It is quite likely that the participants in this study also "misreported" their interactions in these ways. For example, in scanning the frequency of answers to the length of interaction question, it is quite apparent that respondents tended to round interaction lengths to five-minute intervals. Further, since the average length of interaction was 53
minutes, it is quite likely that shorter interactions were both under-represented and that the length of these interactions was overestimated.

Beyond typical limitations to diary studies, this study has some unique limitations due to the variables of interest. As Berger and Douglas (1982) note, there are several intervening variables to be considered when one is studying the relationship between thought and talk. Specifically, having to record interactions may have made people more aware of themselves and their interactions, which in turn would affect the extent to which they thought about their interactions. Similarly, self-monitoring might have been an intervening variable; some people are simply more aware of and more selective of their communicative behaviors, which in turn affects their answers to the thinking and goal questions. Moreover, Berger and Douglas propose that high self-monitors have superior recall of their interactions, which means that whether one is a high or low self-monitor likely affects the thoroughness of their diary.

More specific still to this study is the limitation of the sample. By no stretch of the imagination is the sample used in this study a random sample. At the very least, the individuals who filled out the marital interaction logs have in common the fact that they all know someone who attends The Ohio State University. More specifically, this sample seems to be a relatively older, well-educated group. How this has affected the results is unknown. Nevertheless, the results of this study should not be disregarded simply because the sample is skewed towards a certain demographic group; future research should strive to include a greater variety of demographic groups. Until that time, this study provides a good
descriptive foundation for explorations into the nature of interaction in maintained marriages.

Yet another limitation of this study is the overall positivity bias that seems to be apparent in the diary entries. Very few negative interactions were reported. Granted, the couples who filled out the interaction logs scored relatively high on measures of marital satisfaction, and there is a great deal of evidence that happy couples have more positive interactions (see e.g. Gottman, 1979). Nevertheless, social desirability may have been at work.

Finally, by focusing entirely on marital interaction, this study makes an ideological assumption that marriage is freely negotiated by the marital partners, and that couples have complete control over the way they view marriage and the way they interact. Such an assumption overlooks the reality that interactional patterns in marriage may be culturally prescribed. As Allan (1993) asserts:

In present-day industrial societies, those characterized by late modernity, there is, however, an increasing emphasis on marriage as a "pure relationship," individually constructed principally to meet the emotional and personal needs of the two individuals involved. (p. 16)

This belief in the ability of individuals to construct their own relationship is itself a cultural prescription for relationships. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence that married couples in the United States follow such a cultural prescription; numerous studies have uncovered the existence of individual relational cultures, which are unique systems of
meaning that are created and maintained by relational partners (Baxter, 1987). These relational cultures are informed by, but not totally dependent upon, dominant cultural norms for relationships (Baxter, 1987; Stephen, 1984; Montgomery, 1992; Wood, 1982). Thus, while there is a cultural influence upon marital interaction in the United States, there is also a great deal of within-group variablitlity. This variablitlity deserves to be studied in its own right. Accordingly, this study has not made any attempt to place marital interaction within a larger cultural context. Future research might strive to examine the culture-interaction link more closely.

Indeed, there are many future directions for this research. As has been discussed earlier in this document, the results of this study indicate only what people do in maintained marital relationships. The extent to which the interactions described by the participants of this study actually serve to maintain their relationships cannot be determined in the present study. Further, the extent to which maintenance is achieved centrifugally versus centripetally has not been ascertained. These questions remain fruitful avenues for future research that utilizes longitudinal methods.

Second, the literature review identified four levels of relational maintenance: cognitions, actions, interactions, and external characteristics. This study focused exclusively on interactions. Clearly, all four levels should be assessed to develop an accurate picture of relational maintenance. This should be a goal of future research. Further, future research should strive to ascertain the relative importance of these levels in keeping a relationship together.
Third, previous maintenance research has provided a strong foundation for studies linking maintenance activities with various salient relational characteristics. Although the definition of maintenance utilized in this study is grounded in the notion that maintenance is a stage of relational life, the argument presented in Chapter I asserts that many processes take place during this stage, including processes to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition. Accordingly, future research might strive to uncover the link between the extent to which interactions are performed routinely and relational characteristics such as love, satisfaction, and commitment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is time that maintenance scholarship turns to theory development. Although the study of relational maintenance is relatively new, there is a strong foundation of research from which the skeleton of a theory can be erected. Indeed, the results of this study, as well as the accumulated results of a growing body of literature, lend support for the idea that maintenance is distinct from other relational stages. It is time that maintenance scholarship transcends its variable analytic past.
APPENDIX A
MARITAL INTERACTION LOG
Marital Interaction Log

INSTRUCTIONS: At a set time each day (preferably at the end of the day) reflect upon all of the things that you and your spouse have done together during the past 24 hours. These things might seem "significant" (like having a discussion about your children or talking about your frustrations at work) or "insignificant" (like playing with the kids together, cooking dinner). Make sure that you include the "little" things, even if they seem trivial or mundane. After listing all of the interactions, go back and fill in the columns to the right for each interaction. PLEASE SEE A SAMPLE LOG ON THE NEXT PAGE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of interactions</th>
<th>How long did the interaction last?</th>
<th>Why did you engage in this interaction?</th>
<th>How much did you think about the interaction?</th>
<th>How typical was the interaction?</th>
<th>How important was it to the relationship?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Briefly (but specifically) describe the interaction. If the interaction was a conversation, or if it included conversation (e.g., &quot;we had lunch and talked&quot;), make sure to include the topic(s) of conversation. If you did two activities simultaneously (e.g., &quot;watched TV and talked about politics&quot;), list them together but provide separate information in the columns to the right if necessary (e.g., watching TV is typical, but talking about politics is not). If other people were involved with the interaction, list the roles of the individuals (e.g., &quot;played a game with our daughter&quot;).</td>
<td>Give an estimate of how much time you spent interacting.</td>
<td>Indicate your reasons for engaging in the interaction. For example, was the main purpose of the interaction to accomplish some task? Or to aid in some social objective (i.e., playing a game)? Or to make your partner feel better about something? Or to maintain your relationship? Feel free to list as many reasons as you feel are appropriate. On the other hand, feel free to indicate if there was no real reason for performing the activity (i.e., &quot;just because&quot;). Also, do not think of reasons just to fill in this box. If you don't know why you performed the activity, indicate that you don't know.</td>
<td>For all of these items, write the number from the above scale that corresponds with your feelings about the question.</td>
<td>Did you think about whether you should do this behavior or how to do it? Or did you just do it; you didn't think about it, it just seemed to happen? If you thought a lot about the interaction indicate a high number. If it seemed to &quot;just happen&quot; indicate a low number.</td>
<td>Is this a typical or usual interaction in your marriage? The more typical or usual the interaction is, the higher the number you should select.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the back of the sheet if necessary in order to include ALL interactions during a 24-hour period.
Marital Interaction Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Interactions</th>
<th>How long did the interaction last?</th>
<th>Why did you engage in this interaction?</th>
<th>How much did you think about the interaction?</th>
<th>How typical was the interaction?</th>
<th>How important to the relationship?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10</td>
<td>3  4  5</td>
<td>6  7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>very</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, how positive do you feel about your relationship today? (circle one)

extremely negative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 extremely positive

Comments (Such as how you felt about any of the interactions):

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________
APPENDIX B
INSTRUCTIONS TO COUPLES
Appendix B

Instructions to Couples

This study is being conducted to understand more fully how husbands and wives interact in their day-to-day lives. This research will have practical application in counseling and marital enrichment programs. Your responses will be used for the purposes of research only. **All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous—no one but the researchers will see the responses. Neither the student who recruited you nor your spouse will have access to your answers.**

1) Review the instructions carefully, as well as the materials in the packet. If after this review you are willing to participate, sign the consent form that is attached to the preliminary questionnaire. Upon receipt of your packet the researcher will detach the consent form from the questionnaire. **In no way will your name be attached to the data.** As indicated above, all responses will be confidential and anonymous. However, a signed consent form is necessary to comply with University Research Guidelines.

If you decide that you are uncomfortable with this research in any way, simply return the materials without completing the questionnaire and log. Participation is voluntary, and failure to consent to this research will not adversely affect the grade of the student who recruited you.

2) If both partners decide to give consent, each partner should separately complete the preliminary questionnaire. **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** should partners discuss their answers with each other. After completion, place the questionnaire in one of the preaddressed envelopes and mark on the envelope "husband" or "wife" to indicate which of the partners completed the questionnaire inside. **DO NOT SEAL THE ENVELOPE** at this time. Keep these envelopes in a safe location until after the Marital Interaction Log is completed. Please do not review your answers at any time after you have completed the preliminary questionnaire.

3) **For seven (7) days** each one of you must complete one of the Marital Interaction Log forms. These forms must be completed separately. Again, partners should not discuss their answers with each other.
4) At the end of seven days place the logs in the SEPARATE preaddressed, stamped envelopes with the questionnaires. On each envelope, write the name of the student who is to receive extra credit in the return address section of the envelope and mail to the researchers.

5) Sometimes thinking about your relationship might bring issues to the surface that may cause you stress. If engaging in this research causes you stress, feel free to discontinue the project. Also, a list of certified marital and family therapists is available from the researchers if you are interested in acquiring assistance in dealing with any of these issues.

Specific Instructions for the Marital Interaction Log
At the same time each day (preferably before you go to bed), list all of the interactions between you and your partner. A definition of what we mean by interaction is below. After you list all of the interactions, go back and fill in the answers to each of the questions to the right of the interaction (see the specific directions for these questions on the sample log). Finally, circle how you feel about the relationship and write any comments about the day.

Definition of interaction: An interaction occurs when you and your partner respond to the behavior of each other. A conversation is the most obvious example of an interaction, but there are many others. Dancing, playing games, cuddling, and lovemaking are also interactions. An interaction might be as short as a few seconds (e.g., a brief kiss goodbye) or as long as several hours (e.g., watching television and talking about current events).

Sometimes interactions might be difficult to record. For example, you might interact with your whole family (including your partner) at the dinner table. This should be included, and the number of other interactants and their roles should be listed (e.g., "Had dinner with family and talked about family vacation. My husband/wife and two children present.") Other times you might be primarily interacting with someone else, but your partner might be present. If your behavior at any time during the interaction was a response to your partner, list it as an interaction. In this case, list the primary interaction and how you responded to your partner (e.g., "Talked on phone with my mother, grabbed my partner’s hand when he/she made a face").

If you are in doubt about whether something is an interaction, include it.
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR POST-LOG INTERVIEW
Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Post-Log Interview

Hello. I am an instructor in the Department of Communication at the Ohio State University. My name is Marianne Dainton.

Recently, a married couple at this phone number was recruited to participate in a study about marital interaction. Would you be one of the participants?

If no--Is there a married individual at this number who may have completed this research? May I speak to him or her?

If yes--I am simply calling to verify that you had participated. At this point, let me reassure you that the student who recruited you is guaranteed to receive extra credit. However, I would like to ask you four questions about your experience in the study. By answering these four questions you will in no way affect the student's extra credit: that is guaranteed. However, we would like you to be completely honest so that we can determine whether your responses should be included in the study. Would you be willing to answer these four questions?

If yes--Okay, for each question I will read a list of categories. Please tell me which category applies to you.

1. How difficult was it to record interactions?
   1= very difficult
   2=somewhat difficult
   3=neutral
   4=somewhat easy
   5=very easy

2. How accurate do you perceive your interaction logs were?
   1=very inaccurate
   2=somewhat inaccurate
   3=neutral
   4=somewhat accurate
   5=very accurate
3. How much did keeping the interaction log interfere with your daily life?
   1=very little
   2=somewhat
   3=neutral
   4=quite a bit
   7=very much

4. To what extent do you think filling out the interaction logs made you change the number or type of interactions you usually have?
   1=very little
   2=somewhat
   3=neutral
   4=quite a bit
   5=very much

At this time, do you have any questions regarding the study?

If no—Thank you for your time today, and for participating in the study.
Have a pleasant day/evening.
LIST OF REFERENCES


