HONEY, WHAT ARE WE WATCHING TONIGHT?: AN EXAMINATION
OF COUPLES’ MEDIA USE AND RELATIONAL SATISFACTION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication

by
William J. Norman Jr.
Summer 2010
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of William J. Norman Jr.:

Honey, What Are We Watching Tonight?: An Examination of Couples’ Media

Use and Relational Satisfaction

[Signature]
Susan A. Hellweg, Chair
School of Communication

[Signature]
Carmen M. Lee
School of Communication

[Signature]
David M. Dozier
School of Journalism and Media Studies

April 30, 2010
Approval Date
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Honey, What Are We Watching Tonight?: An Examination of Couples’ Media Use and Relational Satisfaction
by
William J. Norman Jr.
Master of Arts in Communication
San Diego State University, 2010

Existing research indicates that people around the world are high consumers of media. Considerable research also exists indicating how and why individuals select certain media, and what affect it has on those individuals, however, there is a lack of research examining the effects of media co-viewing. This study examined romantic couples’ media habits and their affect on a partner’s perception of relationship maintenance strategy usage, relational closeness, and relational satisfaction. This study addressed the following research questions and hypotheses: (RQ1) What types of media do people consume individually most frequently?; (RQ2) What types of media do couples consume most frequently when together?; (H1a – H1g) Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the use of relationship maintenance strategies (e.g., positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, social networks, conflict management, and advice); (H2a – H2g) Individual media use alone is negatively associated with the use of each relationship maintenance strategy (e.g., positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, social networks, conflict management, and advice); (H3) Romantic partners who spend more time using media together will experience higher levels of relational closeness; (H4) Romantic partners who spend time using media together will experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction; and (RQ3) Do couples who watch the same television genre alone and together have higher levels of relational satisfaction than couples who watch different television genres alone than when together?

The study’s results revealed positive relationships between couple’s media use and relational satisfaction, and relational closeness. However, individual media use was not associated with a decrease in the use of relational maintenance strategies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and Television Usage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses and Gratifications Approach</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Exchange Theory</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Maintenance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Closeness</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Consumption</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Maintenance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Closeness</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RESULTS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 DISCUSSION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

A  STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT ..............................................................45
B  MEDIA USE QUESTIONNAIRE ...............................................................................49
C  RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE MEASURE ..........................................................53
D  RELATIONAL SATISFACTION MEASURE ...........................................................56
E  DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE .......................................................................59
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Media Use, Relational Maintenance Strategies, Relational Satisfaction, & Relational Closeness ........................................20
Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Self Media Use & Couple Media Use ...............21
Table 3. Self & Couple Television Genre Viewing Means and Standard Deviations.........22
Table 4. Correlation Matrix .....................................................................................................28
Table 5. Summary of Hypotheses and Results ..........................................................................2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee members for helping me through this thesis process. Dr. Susan Hellweg, thank you for serving as my chair through this academic journey. Your patience, accessibility, and sincere desire to help me were invaluable throughout this process. Dr. Carmen Lee, thank you for serving as the second member on my committee and showing me that anything worth doing is worth doing correctly. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. David Dozier for serving as the third member of my committee and providing valuable insight when I needed it. All of you helped me grow as a student and person and I appreciate the time you took to help me complete this thesis.

To my parents, thank you so much for your love and support. I appreciate all the sacrifices you both have made to help me get through the last two years (not to mention the previous 23!). Your patience continues to amaze me and I am grateful to have parents like you. To my sister Clorisa, thank you for your encouraging words and being there to listen to my complaints and worries when grad school got the best of me.

To my best friends who are just like family, thank you for your support while I completed this chapter of my life. Whether it was an NBA conversation, a phone call to commiserate, a supportive message, relaxing on the couch, or a night out, all of you helped me stay mentally sane whether you knew it or not.

A huge thank you must go to the other two members of “the Tripod”: Toni and Rania. There is no way I could have made it through the last two years without the two of you, literally and figuratively. Both of you have been amazing friends and remain the top two reasons why I would still click “apply” on my grad school application if I had to do it all over again.

Toni, (a.k.a. T-Mill!) you have been a great friend. Your sense of humor, impersonations, and positive attitude made even the longest Wednesdays bearable. Thank you for always telling me how it is, especially when I needed to know (or pretended not to know), and our hangouts in your deluxe apartment in the sky.
Rania, you have also been a great friend and continue to be the best-dressed (self proclaimed worst dressed) person I have ever met. Thank you for your constant encouragement (Go Go Buffalo!), always being there to sprinkle a bit of reality into my thought process, and making me feel like the funniest person in the world.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As its options and role within society grow, mass media’s increase in popularity has brought with it an understanding of why and how often people consume the types available. Whether the choices consumers make stem from the media type or the content, people have numerous options to choose from when it comes to mass media. With choices ranging from video games to movie theatres, or DVDs to television, mass media provide many avenues for individuals to satisfy personal needs through their use. Although some might assume that these choices are passive and without consequence, research indicates these choices can impact the personal state of media users. Furthermore, studies have shown that individuals’ media choices have the ability to affect their attitude and behavior (Eschholz & Bufkin, 2001; Gerbner, 1998; Rubin, 1983, 1987, 2006a). However, these changes are not absolutely tied to media use as mediating factors can affect the behavioral consequences associated with consumption habits and motivations (Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke, & Hull, 2006).

Regardless of the factors involved with media selection, scholars have shown that using media has a definite impact on its users. The body of research concerning media consumption and media effects has grown significantly (Rubin, 1983, 1987; Weber, Ritterfeld, & Mathiak, 2006). Some research has focused on the different types available as scholars have examined video games, television, and movie theatres. Additionally, scholars have revealed that the choices people make about the media they consume can affect their attitude and behavior (Eschholz & Bufkin, 2001; Gerbner, 1998; Rubin, 1983, 1987, 2006a). Specifically, studies have shown that media can contribute to violent behavior (Simkin, Hawton, Whitehead, Fagg, & Eagle, 1995), attitudes about sexual activity (Eyal & Kunkel, 2008), and even mental health risks (Carpentier et al., 2008; Nabi et al., 2006; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 2006). Studies like these have highlighted the potential effects media use can have on those who use them. Although research has not shown that media causes individuals to act in a certain manner, overall, the body of work concerning media effects has shown that media can influence a person’s behavior.
Media effects are generally observed from the perspective of the user, but the outcomes of consuming media can potentially extend beyond users and affect other aspects of their life. Specifically, the consumption tendencies of media users can affect their relationships with other people. This is especially evident when media is consumed in high volumes (i.e., time) as extreme media use can act as an isolating activity that takes a person away from a relationship (Chory & Banfield, 2009). While there is considerable research focusing on the individual outcomes of media usage, what is lacking in research is the role media plays in the communication patterns of interpersonal relationships as a result of being consumed individually and in a group setting.

There are numerous types of interpersonal relationships that could be considered when examining the influence of media use in a group setting (e.g., parent-child, friend-friend, sibling-sibling, married couples). However, one specific type of interpersonal relationship that needs further examination is romantic relationships. This is partially due to the amount of time partners spend together, expectations shared between partners, and the voluntary nature of romantic relationships. By examining co-viewing between romantic partners, the effects of media use in a shared setting, and the potential effect on the communication habits of both people can be understood. In order to do this, this present study examined media use and its effect on the use of relational maintenance strategies, relational closeness, and relational satisfaction of people involved in romantic relationships.

This thesis examination of media use was based on a review of literature concerning relevant theories and terms associated with media use and interpersonal relationships, which can be found in the second chapter. Chapter 2 also contains hypotheses and research questions associated with the study. An explanation of the methods involved in data collection and hypothesis testing can be found in Chapter 3. The results of this study can be found in Chapter 4. Finally, after a review of the findings, Chapter 5 will explain the significance of this thesis’ findings, limitations, and implications for the future.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence and use of media in modern society is as prevalent as it has ever been (Nielsen Media, 2009). Due to its looming presence, it has become easier for people to vary their choices about what types of media they consume as well as its content. Researchers have examined the reasons why people have preferences for one medium over another, or prefer one type of content to another (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Jamal & Melkote, 2008; Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). Ultimately, it has been revealed that people select a medium with specific a purpose in mind (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Moreover, this purpose is determined by a person’s internal mood, and a personal need to enhance, change, or maintain that mood. Although these choices have typically been examined from the standpoint of individual use, this study attempted to reveal whether these choices and motivations also affect media users’ interpersonal relationships.

This chapter will review literature concerning the use of media and its corresponding effects on individuals and their interpersonal relationships. First, media statistics will be presented followed by two theoretical perspectives that will help explain individuals’ media use and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, respectively. After these perspectives are explained, remaining relevant concepts concerning this study will be explained and hypotheses and research questions will be presented.

MEDIA AND TELEVISION USAGE

Media use has become a staple in modern society as more options have become available (Nielsen Media, 2009). Consequently, the media’s rise in popularity has been showcased through its usage statistics. A study among college-aged students revealed that 75 percent of females have been involved with a partner that played video games (Knox, Zusman, White, & Haskins, 2009). Approximately 70 percent of U.S. homes have a DVD player, and digital cable service is in an estimated 33 million homes (see Albert & Jacobs, 2008). This trend toward higher use is especially evident in television as Nielsen data shows
that in 2008 the average television viewer watched more than 151 hours of television per month (Average TV Viewing, 2008). This averages to a little more than five hours of television viewing per day. At the time, that number was an all-time high and average television use continues to increase (Nielsen Media, 2009), as well as its presence in research.

Researchers have examined specific television genres in order to find why people are drawn to certain types of television programming (Ebersole & Woods, 2007; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Rubin, 2006b). Specifically, in a study of television genres, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) illustrated how individual motivations for watching media and individual gratifications have an interdependent relationship when examining reality television. Their results revealed six reasons why people watched reality television. Among them were: reality entertainment, relaxation, habitual past time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism. Consequently, their study revealed that these factors influenced how much individuals watched television and how much they enjoyed it.

Media studies have also revealed other outcomes and reasons for its usage. Reasons for media use have ranged from diversion (e.g., escapism and arousal), personal relationships (e.g., social utility), personal identity (e.g., reality exploration), and surveillance. For example, Nabi et al. (2006) examined television content to assess whether people felt their own personal needs were being met by watching certain programs. Their results suggested that a person’s past experiences motivated interest in, rather than avoidance of, experience-related storylines. However, this interest did not necessarily translate into greater enjoyment of the programming (Nabi et al., 2006). Despite not revealing an affect on program enjoyment, their study highlighted the role that initiative and personal experience play in media consumption.

While media type is a part of selection, the content of each medium is a significant factor for individuals. Although the use of other media types will be examined, this study focused mainly on television programming because of the role it plays in the average person’s daily media use, as evidenced through its high usage (Nielsen Media, 2009). Additionally, television provides a helpful medium for study because of the numerous content options (e.g., sitcoms, dramas, sports, reality, etc.) it provides for its users.
Although previous studies have highlighted the effects of individual media use, this present study focused on potential effects of media use when consumed between dyads. While considering the audience’s active involvement, this study will examine how individuals actively maintain their relationship through, and at times despite, constant media usage by and with their partner.

**USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH**

There are numerous theories that have been used to examine media consumption and interpersonal relationships, respectively. However, the two theoretical perspectives most appropriate for examining media use and its role in romantic relationships are the Uses and Gratifications perspective (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) and Social Exchange Theory (Thibault & Kelley, 1952). These two perspectives explain the motivations for media use and the process of maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships for romantic partners, respectively. Together, these perspectives will provide an explanation for how the co-consumption of media can affect the dynamics and outcomes of interpersonal relationships.

There are essential assumptions the U&G perspective makes about individual motivations that help explain human behavior in regard to media usage. Katz et al. (1974) identify several assumptions of the U&G perspective. The first assumption is that the audience is active and their patterns of media use are shaped by expectations of what certain content has to offer in comparison to other content. Thus, audience members actively partake in the consumption process as they manage their expectations of various media (Katz et al., 1974).

The Uses and Gratifications Approach explains the audiences’ role in selecting media as being an active process. Overall, Katz et al. (1974) Uses and Gratifications approach (U&G) explains how and why people actively seek out certain media to fulfill personal needs. Their perspective acknowledges people as, “active processors of information and alerted recipients of content who deliberately select media options and purposely apply techniques of exposure to receive calculable satisfaction” (Jamal & Melkote, 2008, p. 1). This perspective highlights the personal impact of media use by addressing users’ active engagement in media selection and exposure.
The U&G approach places complete responsibility for media choice and its resulting consequences on the audience. A primary component of the Uses and Gratifications approach to media use and selection is self-awareness on the part of the audience. The U&G perspective assumes that individuals are aware of their social, psychological, and biological needs. This awareness allows people to satisfy self-diagnosed needs like laughing, crying, or learning based on their knowledge of their innermost feelings and desires (Nabi et al., 2006). Based on this awareness, they evaluate various media channels and content, consider the alternatives, and select the media they believe will best meet their various needs (Wang et al., 2008).

The second assumption the U&G approach posits is that in the mass communication process, audiences must take the initiative to identify what they want from various media (Katz, 1959). For example, researchers have identified unique uses and different patterns of media use among viewers of different television genres like religious programs, soap operas, news programs, and news magazine shows (Ebersole & Woods, 2007). This research revealed individuals’ reasons for seeking out specific types of content.

An additional third assumption of the U&G approach is that media content competes against each other because people also have competing needs. This occurs because different media have the ability to satisfy various needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The fact that certain media satisfy specific needs enhances the competition between media sources as each medium has unique qualities that will entice people to consume it. For example, a video game could satisfy a person’s need to be entertained. On the contrary, a network news program could satisfy a person’s need to learn. The differences in content and their varying appeal to consumers enable competition between different media. Consequently, this rivalry can exist within the same medium (e.g., the various programming options available for a person watching television) (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

From a methodological standpoint, Uses and Gratifications is a helpful perspective because the goals of using mass media can be assessed by simply asking individual audience members about their intentions. Through the perspective of U&G, this is possible because people are sufficiently self-aware enough to be able to report their interests and motives when discussing them (Katz et al., 1974). This present study is not as concerned with accessing the underlying intentions of individual’s media use. This is because although the
perspective is useful, people do not always have access to their underlying motivations for using certain types of media. Furthermore, people might be motivated to make media selections but sometimes less obtrusive methods can be used to assess this process, especially when initial motivations may not be readily apparent to the user (Strizhakova & Krcmar, 2003). Instead of attempting to explain motivations, the principles of the Katz et al. (1974) research will act as an explanation for why the choices individuals make about media type and content are significant. Furthermore, this significance will be assessed from the individual perspective of media users as well as when it is consumed between dyads.

Individuals bring certain levels of experience and have certain preferences that exist before choosing a medium or content. This is attributed to individuals’ identification with a specific medium or type of programming. For example, in a study of minorities and their attitudes about television, Albert and Jacobs (2008) found that minorities have different opinions about the media they consume and that, “ethnic differences endure in television attitudes and emerged in technology beliefs as well” (p. 243). Furthermore, “ethnic variation in program preferences persists with little agreement in favorite shows for the drama, soap opera, reality, and cartoon genres” (p. 243). Their study is one example of the power of the predilections, culture, and experience individuals bring with them prior to media consumption. As evidenced through Albert and Jacobs (2008) study, media provide an avenue to satisfy personal needs and those goals vary from person to person depending on their personal likings and the medium or content with which they personally identify.

Similar to Albert and Jacobs’ (2008) study, previous research has also highlighted how individuals’ media choices are important and can also have consequences for the user (Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Lin, 2007; Harwood, 1999; Knox et al., 2009). In addition to reflecting individuals’ pre-existing preferences, the media that people seek out may be a reflection of their own sense of self-awareness. Research has shown that media have the ability to help people identify themselves and form their own self-concept (Harwood, 1999). In a study of age-identification and social identity, Harwood (1999) revealed that television-viewing preferences could serve identity reinforcement functions. Furthermore, “the mere act of making a viewing choice may enhance one’s sense of belonging in a group and be important to overall-self-concept” (p. 5). This study showed how viewers are drawn to programming that both reflects and reinforces their own personal state
of being (i.e., age). In Harwood’s (1999) study, it was found that these decisions about programming are determined by the lead characters in programs as viewers are drawn to shows featuring characters similar to their own age. This study is one example of the thought that goes into media selection and the consequences it can have on those who use them.

Based on the above literature, it can be assumed that the individual preferences people have are significant even before co-viewing begins. This present study will be examining the media choices people make on a daily basis both individually and when with their romantic partner. However, before addressing co-viewing differences, it is important to ask what media and content individuals actively select when alone. For this reason, this present study will ask:

RQ1: What types of media do people consume individually most frequently?

RQ1a: What types of television programming do people consume individually most frequently?

**SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY**

Although research has focused on the individual consumption of media, this present study will go further to attempt to explain how media choices can affect the satisfaction of those involved when made collectively. In order to explain the dynamics that play into those choices, this present study will attempt to explain how these choices are managed with a separate but applicable theoretical perspective. Along with a U&G approach, this study will incorporate Social Exchange Theory to help explain the management process of media use between individuals and their media choices in romantic relationships.

While the Uses and Gratifications perspective helps explain the active role people play in their media consumption, Social Exchange Theory, an interpersonal relationship theory, helps explain how people manage expectations within their relationship. The theory is based on the idea that individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs in relationships (Hadad, 2007). Byrd (2006) explains that exchange theorists believe that all interpersonal behavior is guided by the principles of social exchange. At its basic level, social exchange is a form of interaction in which two individuals voluntarily provide each other with resources that each perceives as rewarding. Overall, Social Exchange Theory seeks to explain the development, maintenance, and decay of exchange relationships in terms of the
balance between the rewards and costs that they incur by being involved in romantic relationships (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008).

People involved in romantic relationships are mainly concerned with making sure that the perceived rewards of their relationship outweigh the perceived costs of the relationship. However, every relationship features different personalities, therefore, one can expect different types of rewards and costs. Social Exchange Theory assumes only that people behave in ways that increase outcomes they positively value and decrease outcomes they negatively value (Molm, 1997). Although they can be difficult to conceptualize, these outcomes and the way they manifest themselves through media use are the main concern of this present study.

The difficulty for researchers in the past has come from trying to quantify the exact costs and rewards each person experiences within the relationship. In a study of marital couples, Nakonezny and Denton (2008) found that although the principles of social exchange exhibit themselves in various forms throughout a relationship (e.g., sharing chores, time spent together, activities done together), they can be difficult to completely quantify. This is due to the fact that “the principal source of potential confusion in social exchange theory is the delineation of rewards and costs. What is rewarding to one person may be punishing to another” (p. 410). In terms of the rewards and costs of media use, this study attempted to identify individual media use. Then it addressed any potential changes that could occur when it is shared between dyads.

While the difficulty in quantifying rewards and costs can be a hindrance, it does not make assessing overall satisfaction impossible. Individuals’ attempts to maintain more rewards than costs help explain why people are “more likely to engage in interactions where they are exchanging or reciprocating resources” (Monge & Contractor, 2003, p. 63). Further, in order for people to be happy in a given relationship, there simply have to be more overall perceived rewards than perceived costs in the relationship (Byrd, 2006). Additionally, despite the difficulties that can come from attempting to quantify individual rewards and costs, couples can still indicate their feelings about the social exchange within their relationship. Media consumption is similar to the balance of cost and rewards in a relationship because in both cases, the processes are active and deliberate. Furthermore, any differences in media consumption between partners could potentially lead to perceived inequities.
People choose specific media in a deliberate fashion similar to the way they actively balance the rewards and costs of their relationship. For example, in a study on video games and its effect on romantic relationships, Knox et al. (2009) revealed that men play video games much more than women, and three-fourths of women have been in a relationship with a partner who played video games. When considering these perspectives, this present study viewed the rewards of a romantic relationship as the time couples spend together using media both parties are willing to consume. Alternatively, the costs of a relationship will be determined by differences between individuals’ solitary media use and their shared media use with a romantic partner. This is partially based on previous research that has revealed how media use alone can distract one from maintaining or contributing to other interpersonal relationships (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Ultimately, if people are able to maintain a favorable ratio of rewards to costs in their relationship they will ultimately be satisfied, maintain their relationship, and experience higher levels of closeness.

Similar to the variety of media choices available to the public, the rewards and costs of relationships fluctuate, as do the personalities and preferences of the people within them (Kramer, 2005; Monge & Contractor, 2003). Individuals cognitively weigh the costs of their romantic relationships similar to the way they weigh the costs of using one medium over another. Conversely, the rewards of a relationship are actively considered similar to the way gratifications are sought when choosing media. Furthermore, people are more likely to engage in activities when rewards are perceived to be greater than the costs (Kramer, 2005).

When considering media, time spent watching television together can be considered a potential reward of the relationship. Costs can also be attributed to any discrepancy between time spent using media together and time spent using it separately. Although this study examined how the time couples spend watching television together and separately affects their relationship satisfaction, it is also important to assess what type of media and content is co-consumed between people in romantic relationships. Therefore, based on the above rationale and in an attempt to assess couples’ media use, this study asked the following questions:

RQ2: What types of media do couples consume most frequently when together?
RQ2a: What types of television programming do couples consume most frequently when together?
RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE

Similar to the active way people select media, people can actively engage in strategies to maintain their relationships. Baxter and Dindia (1990) explain that relational maintenance refers to “using communicative strategies and behaviors to prevent a relationship from breaking up through parties efforts to sustain a dynamic equilibrium in their relationship definition and satisfaction levels as they cope with the ebb and flow of everyday relating” (p. 188). That is, couples do certain things consciously and unconsciously in order to maintain personal satisfaction within their relationship. The principles of relationship maintenance are consistent with Social Exchange Theory as both parties attempt to maintain desired levels of satisfaction (Guerrero, Andersen, & Affifi, 2007; Stafford, 2003). This sense of equality is achieved through the use of specific maintenance strategies aimed at their romantic partner.

Stafford and Canary (1991) describe five primary relationship maintenance strategies that are intentional. These maintenance behaviors are positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and social networks and can be explained in numerous ways. The first strategy is positivity, which refers to interactions occurring between people that are generally pleasant and not critical in nature. Another strategy is openness, which refers to partners engaging in open and direct discussion about the relationship (Stafford & Canary, 1991). A third strategy is assurances, and they include messages that in some way assure the other that the relationship will continue or that the person is committed. Yet another strategy is sharing tasks, which occurs when persons participate in activities together. Finally, the social networks strategy refers to partners focusing on connecting elements like mutual friends (Chory & Banfield, 2009; Stafford & Canary, 1991). This present study will examine all of these strategies to see which are enhanced or hindered by media use between romantic partners.

When considering the principles of Social Exchange Theory, people balance their personal needs, the needs of their partner, as well as the potential outcomes of not having those balances met. Moreover, the effects of media use change when media use is a shared activity instead of a separate activity that may distract one of the partners from the relationship. Media use can affect certain activities that can be related to relational maintenance strategies in three specific ways. Media dependence can keep persons from spending time doing activities that involve spending time with loved ones, overuse can
mentally fatigue its user, and certain program content can impact users’ beliefs about how to act in a relationship (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Further, media dependence may decrease relational maintenance for a number of reasons. First, persons dependent on a given medium tend to spend a great deal of time using it, which likely detracts from the time they spend nurturing their interpersonal relationships (Chory & Banfield, 2009). However, when a dependence on media use is absent these outcomes can be different.

In their study of television use and video game use, Chory and Banfield (2009) highlighted the effect media use has on interpersonal relationships and how media use, and its resulting dependence, can change the dynamics of relational maintenance in romantic relationships. They found that video game dependence was more strongly related to relational maintenance than was television dependence, and conflict management and shared tasks were the maintenance strategies most strongly related to media dependence. Additionally, the maintenance strategy of openness, although associated with media dependence, was also strongly related to the participants’ personal characteristics of sex and relationship type (Chory & Banfield, 2009). This study showed that when media use occurred in the presence of a loved one, instead of acting as a distraction, romantic partners could still use relationship maintenance strategies.

Previous literature has highlighted the effect media use can have on the use of relational maintenance strategies between romantic partners (Ledbetter, 2008). Although previous research has not examined whether co-viewing media can have a more positive effect, this study will attempt to see whether relational maintenance can be enhanced between dyads. Therefore, based on the above rationale, this present study hypothesized the following:

\[ H_{1a}: \text{Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategies of positivity.} \]

\[ H_{1b}: \text{Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy of openness.} \]

\[ H_{1c}: \text{Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy of assurances.} \]

\[ H_{1d}: \text{Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategies of shared tasks.} \]

\[ H_{1e}: \text{Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the} \]
relationship maintenance strategies of social networks.

H1f: Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategies of conflict management.

H1g: Romantic partners’ combined media use is positively associated with the relationship maintenance strategies of advice.

As explained by Stafford and Canary (2006), “people who perceive their relationships as equitable will engage in efforts to maintain those relationships as they are, whereas people in inequitable involvements will expend less energy to maintain them” (p. 229). The perception of balance by individuals is an important indicator of whether people use relational maintenance strategies in their interpersonal relationships. This is why in addition to viewing joint media use, this study will examine whether media use alone can affect maintenance behavior between dyads. Collective media use is one aspect of interpersonal relationships and one measure of how people spend their time together. However, individual media use and the potential outcomes of excessive usage can also affect the dynamics of relationships (Baym et al., 2007). Furthermore, any imbalances between how much time is spent using media together and apart may be an indication of whether a partner is motivated to maintain an interpersonal relationship. Therefore, in addition to examining the effect of joint media usage, this study attempted to see if individuals’ media use alone can affect their use of relational maintenance strategies with their partner. Therefore, based on the above rationale, this present study hypothesized the following:

H2a: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy of positivity.

H2b: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy openness.

H2c: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy assurances.

H2d: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy shared tasks.

H2e: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy social networks.

H2f: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy conflict management.

H2g: Individuals’ media use alone is negatively associated with the relationship maintenance strategy advice.
RELATIONAL CLOSENESS

Bowman (2008) defines relational closeness as, “the extent to which an individual within a relationship exhibits interdependence, liking, and mutual knowledge of the other individual” (p. 319). Relational closeness is determined by numerous internal and external factors. In addition to relational maintenance, relational closeness can be mediated to some extent by media use. In a study of media use and its affect on relational closeness, Ledbetter (2008) found that media has the ability to help people remain close and people are willing to change their media habits to remain close over time. Ledbetter’s study revealed that, “while the association of postal mail with relational closeness seems to have diminished, the association of the telephone with relational closeness seems to have grown… and the telephone’s niche for maintaining relational closeness seems to have grown” (p. 559). Although this type of media is different from that of this study, the implications for affecting relational closeness remains the same. Romantic partners can potentially use television, movies, DVDs, or video games as ways of connecting in the same way a telephone is used to keep in touch with an old college friend. Therefore, if joint media use among couples can be considered an activity that enhances, instead of distracts from, the use of relational maintenance strategies, it may also affect romantic partners’ perception of relational closeness within their relationship. Therefore, this present study hypothesized:

H3: Romantic partners who spend more time using media together will experience higher levels of relational closeness.

RELATIONAL SATISFACTION

Relational closeness and the use of relational maintenance strategies are elements of interpersonal relationships that also affect relationship satisfaction. Dainton, Stafford, and Canary (1994) defined relational satisfaction as “an individual’s attitude toward the partner and the relationship, typically in terms of the perceived quality of the relationship” (p. 90). This perceived quality is important because it is based on personal expectations and relational satisfaction is “calculated by the discrepancy between what an individual actually experiences and what he or she expects to experience” (Dainton, 2000). From the standpoint of media use, it is reasonable to assume that both parties expect time spent together to take precedent over media use alone.
Despite individual expectations, media use together can have a positive impact on the state of an interpersonal relationship. Previous research has shown that people who are in relationships that utilize media experience higher levels of relational quality and satisfaction (Baym et al., 2007; Ledbetter, 2008). In a study of media use and its affect on the quality of interpersonal relationships, Baym et al. (2007) revealed that “Internet use is associated with increased communication in some friendships and families and that relationships formed online are of relatively high quality, as are online interactions” (p. 728). Although the relationships of this study are not being formed online, the use of mass media between dyads may have a similar affect on the satisfaction of those involved in the relationship. Consequently, the time couples spend using media together can be a predictor of how satisfied each person is with the perceived quality of their relationship. Based on the positive effects that have been revealed from joint media use, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H4: Romantic partners who spend time using media together will experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Although combined media use can be thought of as one way to conceptualize how much time couples spend together, this study also examined how this time is spent. This study accomplished this by examining the television genres couples watch when they are together. On the surface, time spent watching television together can be an indicator of shared interests. However, a closer comparison of how couples spend their time using media individually and collectively, specifically the medium of television, may explain why their satisfaction does or does not exist. Furthermore, an examination of whether a relationship exists between content and satisfaction may lead to a better understanding of the implications of shared media use on interpersonal relationships. Based on this reasoning, the present study will ask the following question:

RQ3: Do couples who watch the same television genre alone and together have higher levels of relational satisfaction than couples who watch different television genres alone than when together?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

This thesis collected data using a convenience sample ($N = 394$) from a large Western university. Participants who were under the age of 18, did not complete the survey, had been dating less than six weeks, or were involved in a homosexual relationship were removed from the final sample. After the removal of those who did not qualify, the remaining survey participants ($N = 300$) were undergraduate and graduate students who were actively involved in a heterosexual, romantic relationship lasting a minimum of six weeks. The majority of participants (79.9%) were lowerclassmen. Out of the final participants who were used 17.3% ($n = 52$) were male, and 82.7% ($n = 248$) were female. The average age of the participants was 18.94 ($SD = 2.25$). The average length of their relationships was 17.26 months ($SD = 13.78$).

The majority of participants were European American/White (51.0%), with the remaining participants being Mexican/Latino(a) (22.3%), Asian American/Asian (12.0%), Pacific Islander (4.0%), African American/Black (1.7%), and Native American (1.0%). The remaining participants indicated another ethnicity (e.g., Middle Eastern, African American/White, multicultural, etc.). The average age of romantic partners was 19.73 ($SD = 3.30$). Additionally, the majority of romantic partners were European American/White (57.3%). The remaining romantic partners were Mexican/Latino(a) (19.7%), Asian American/Asian (10.7%), African American (4.0%), Pacific Islander (1.7%), and Native American (.7%). The remaining participants (5.7%) indicated their partner was another ethnicity (Indian, Persian, etc.).

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited from communication courses. Instructors in communication courses were emailed a link to the online survey housed on the Survey Monkey website to send to their students who were willing to participate. Participants
received course credit at their instructor’s discretion. The questionnaire opened with an informed consent statement (see Appendix A) and then continued on to ask participants to consider the following: their media consumption individually and as a couple, their relational maintenance behavior, relational closeness, and relationship satisfaction (see Appendix B). For the purpose of the study, a committed relationship was defined as a romantic relationship lasting at least six weeks in which both parties were seeing each other exclusively. This time frame was chosen because research has indicated that relationship stability for heterosexual couples who have been dating a minimum of six weeks was positively related to commitment (Sacher & Fine, 1996).

**MEASURES**

This section will describe the measures used in the study, including measures for media consumption, relational maintenance, relational closeness, and relationship satisfaction. It will also discuss the demographic questions included in the study.

**Media Consumption**

In order to assess the amount and type of media consumed individually and as a couple, participants were supplied with a media questionnaire. This media questionnaire asked participants to indicate how many hours they spend on a monthly and weekly basis using different types of media (e.g., video games, watching DVDs, going to the movies, watching television). Additionally, participants were asked to identify how much time they spent watching specific genres of television. These genres included: drama, comedy, news (local and national), reality television, talk shows (daytime and late night), and sports.

After assessing individual use, participants were asked to assess their co-viewing habits with their partner. This was done by having participants fill out the same questionnaire that asked them about the time they spend consuming media with their relational partner. This questionnaire was identical to the previous media measure except for its focus on co-consumption with a romantic partner. The media used, along with the television genres, were based on previous research and current television genre classifications (Average TV Viewing, 2008; Nielsen Media, 2009).
Relational Maintenance

Stafford, Dainton, and Haas’ (2000) measure was used to measure relational maintenance strategies (see Appendix C). This scale is the product of combining two previous scales. Specifically, 27 items from Canary and Stafford’s (1992) scale were combined with 31 items from Dainton et al. (1994) study. For this study, the final 31 items that factor analyzed were used and loaded based on criteria related to relational maintenance. The 31 items were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly agree). Sample items from this measure include: “I say I love you,” “I like to have periodic talks about our relationship,” and “I like to spend time with our same friends.”

Stafford et al. (2000) principal components factor analysis indicated the scale is comprised of seven factors: assurances (8 items, $\alpha = .91$), openness (7 items, $\alpha = .89$), conflict management (5 items, $\alpha = .69$), shared tasks (5 items, $\alpha = .81$), positivity (2 items, $\alpha = .68$), advice (2 items, $\alpha = .75$), and social networks (2 items, $\alpha = .71$). A rotated factor matrix was conducted on the 31 items. The analysis revealed six factors instead of the seven expected from previous research (Stafford et al., 2000). Moreover, 6 items had very low primary loadings (e.g., .47 to .57).

Despite items not loading as expected, the researcher decided to use the expected dimensions based on previous research. This decision was made based on the high reliabilities of the expected dimensions. Those reliabilities were as follows: assurances ($\alpha = .92$), openness ($\alpha = .90$), conflict management ($\alpha = .90$), shared tasks ($\alpha = .92$), positivity ($\alpha = .93$), advice ($\alpha = .90$), and social networks ($\alpha = .85$).

Relational Closeness

Aron, Aron, and Smollan’s (1992) Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self (IOS) Scale was used to measure the amount of closeness couples experience in a relationship. This scale is a single-item, pictorial measure. Although it is difficult to assess reliability for a single-item scale, Aron et al. (1992) used a reliability check (test-retest) on two different versions of the IOS scale and found the scale to be reliable ($\alpha = .85$) across the test-retest usage.
Relationship Satisfaction

Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas’ (2000) Perceived Relationship Quality Component (PRQC) Inventory was used to measure relationship satisfaction (see Appendix D). This is an 18-item, Likert-type scale measuring six-components of perceived relationship quality: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. Participants were asked to rate their degree of relational satisfaction with their partner on a scale from 1 “Not at all” to 7 “Extremely.” Sample items from the measure include: “How satisfied are you with your relationship?” “How dedicated are you to your relationship?” and “How connected are you with your partner?”

A principal components analysis was run for the PRQC Inventory. The analysis revealed three factors instead of the six factors expected according to previous research. The majority of the items loaded on the first factor and three of the items loaded across the other two factors. Given the study’s interest in relational satisfaction as a unidimensional construct, all items were summed and found to be reliable ($\alpha = .95$) as a unidimensional construct.

Demographics

Survey respondents were asked questions about their sex, age, school standing, and ethnicity (see Appendix E). Conversely, participants were also asked questions about their romantic partner’s sex, age, ethnicity, and whether or not they were currently living with their romantic partner. Additionally, participants were asked the following screening questions about their romantic relationship: “How long have you been dating your romantic partner?” and “What is the sex of your partner?”
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In order to test the hypotheses and research questions presented in the study, a series of Pearson r correlations, bivariate regressions, and independent sample t-tests were conducted. The means and standard deviations for variables used to test and answer the hypotheses and research questions are presented (see Table 1), along with the means for combined self media use and couples’ media use, the means and standard deviations for television genres consumed, and the correlations of all variables. Finally, the tests and subsequent findings for all hypotheses and research questions are presented.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Media Use, Relational Maintenance Strategies, Relational Satisfaction, & Relational Closeness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Media Use</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple Media Use</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurances</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Tasks</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Closeness</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1 asked what types of media people consumed individually most frequently individually and their overall usage. Frequency and descriptive analyses were used to answer Research Question 1. Analyses revealed that when it comes to individual usage,
people spend the most time (i.e., hours per week) watching television ($M = 8.65, SD = 16.23$) followed by watching DVDs ($M = 3.31, SD = 10.07$), playing video games ($M = 1.78, SD = 10.20$), and time spent going to the movies was reported least overall ($M = 1.26, SD = 9.87$) (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Self-Viewing (Hours per Week)</th>
<th>Couple Viewing (Hours/per week)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std dev.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the Movies</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching DVDs</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Video Games</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1 also asked what types of television programming people consume most frequently when alone. Frequency analysis revealed that when it comes to individual usage, people spend the most time (i.e., hours per week) watching reality programming ($M = 3.23, SD = 17.63$), dramas were reported second-most ($M = 3.15, SD = 15.19$), and sitcoms were reported third-most ($M = 3.00, SD = 10.78$). Despite the average use of reality television being the highest, dramas were the television genre people reported watching the most frequently alone (see Table 3).

Research Question 2 asked what types of media and television genres couples consume most frequently when together. Frequency and descriptive analyses were conducted in order to answer this question. Those analyses revealed that when it comes to co-consuming media with a romantic partner, individuals report watching television with their partner the most on a weekly basis ($M = 4.93, SD = 7.86$), watching DVDs together second-most ($M = 3.39, SD = 3.16$), and going to the movies ($M = 1.77, SD = 1.56$). Playing video games were the least reported joint media activity ($M = .61, SD = 1.36$). The second part of Research Question 2 asked what types of television programming couples consume most
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Genre</th>
<th>Self-Viewing (Hours per week)</th>
<th>Couple Viewing (Hours per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramas (e.g., “Gossip Girl,” “Grey’s Anatomy”)</td>
<td>3.15*</td>
<td>15.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitcoms (e.g., “Family Guy,” “How I Met Your Mother,” “The Office”)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>10.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National News (e.g. CNN, Fox News, CNBC)</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>9.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local News</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>9.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational/Informational (e.g., “Cake Boss,” “Man vs. Wild”)</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>9.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality (e.g., “The Real World,” “Tool Academy”)</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>17.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daytime (e.g., “Good Morning America,” “Live with Regis and Kelly”)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>11.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Night (e.g., “The Late Show with David Letterman,” “The Daily Show”)</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>10.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports (e.g., Live Sporting events, “Sports Center,” “Pardon the Interruption”)</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>10.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Paired sample t-tests indicate that the mean is statistically different at the p < .05 level.
frequently when together. A frequency analysis was conducted and it revealed that when co-
consuming media with a romantic partner, couples report watching sitcoms the most overall
\(M = 1.89, SD = 3.00\) followed by reality television \(M = 1.43, SD = 2.82\), and sports
programming came in third \(M = 1.27, SD = 2.08\).

The first series of hypotheses (e.g., H1a through H1f) suggested a positive relationship
between the time romantic partners spend using media together and a partner’s use of various
relational maintenance strategies. Correlational and regression analyses were run to test the
relationship between a couple’s media use and the following relational maintenance
strategies: (H1a) positivity, (H1b) openness, (H1c) assurances, (H1d) shared tasks, (H1e) social
networks, (H1f) conflict management, and (H1g) advice. All regressions were run with
couples’ co-media use as the independent variable and each relational maintenance strategy
as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 1a proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners
spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of
positivity. The results of the bivariate correlation analysis indicated that there was no
relationship between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance
strategy of positivity, \(r (293) = .03, p = .29\). In addition, the regression analysis revealed no
significance, \(F(1, 291) = .30, p = .59\), adjusted \(R^2 = .00\). Romantic partner’s combined media
use (β = .03, \(t = .54, p = .59\)) did not significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational
maintenance strategy of positivity in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was not
supported.

Hypothesis 1b proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners
spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of
openness. The analysis revealed no association between partners’ combined media use and
the use of the relational maintenance strategy of openness, \(r (288) = .09, p = .06\). There was
not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \(F(1, 286) = 2.57, p = .11\),
adjusted \(R^2 = .01\). Romantic partner’s combined media use (β = .09, \(t = 1.60, p = .11\)) did not
significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of openness in the
relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 1c proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners
spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of
assurances. The analysis revealed a slight, positive association between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of assurances, \( r(289) = .13, p < .05 \). There was a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 287) = 5.11, p < .05 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .01 \). Romantic partners’ combined media use (\( \beta = .13, t = 2.26, p < .05 \)) positively predicted a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of assurances in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1c was supported.

Hypothesis 1d proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of shared tasks. The analysis revealed no association between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of shared tasks \( r(287) = .07, p = .11 \). There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 285) = 1.52, p = .22 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Romantic partners’ combined media use (\( \beta = .07, t = 1.23, p = .22 \)) did not significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of shared tasks in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1d was not supported.

Hypothesis 1e proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of social networks. The analysis revealed no association between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of social networks, \( r(293) = .10, p = .05 \). There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 291) = 2.66, p = .10 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .01 \). Romantic partner’s combined media use (\( \beta = .10, t = 1.63, p = .10 \)) did not significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of social networks in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1e was not supported.

Hypothesis 1f proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management. The analysis revealed no association between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management, \( r(288) = .04, p = .27 \). There was not a significant analysis of variation for regression effects, \( F(1, 286) = .38, p = .54 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Romantic partner’s combined media use (\( \beta = .04, t = .61, p = .54 \)) did not significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1f was not supported.
Hypothesis 1g proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners spend using media together and one partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of advice. The analysis revealed no association between partners’ combined media use and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of advice, $r (295) = .08, p = .08$. There was not a significant analysis of variation for regression effects, $F(1, 293) = 1.97, p = .16$, adjusted $R^2 = .00$. Romantic partner’s combined media use ($\beta = .08, t = 1.41, p = .16$) did not significantly predict a partner’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of advice in the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 1g was not supported.

The second series of hypotheses (e.g., H2a through H2f) suggested a negative relationship between the time individuals spend using media alone and their use of various relational maintenance strategies. Correlational and regression analyses were run to test the relationship between individual media use and the following relational maintenance strategies: (H2a) positivity, (H2b) openness, (H2c) assurances, (H2d) shared tasks, (H2e) social networks, (H2f) conflict management, and (H2g) advice. All regressions were run using media use alone as the independent variable and each relational maintenance strategy as the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 2a proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of positivity. A bivariate correlation with one-tailed significance levels was used to test this hypothesis. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy of positivity, $r (295) = .01, p = .45$. In addition to a bivariate correlation analysis, regressions were run to further test this hypothesis. There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, $F(1, 293) = .02, p = .89$, adjusted $R^2 = .00$. Individual use of media ($\beta = .01, t = .14, p = .89$) did not significantly predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of positivity in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

Hypothesis 2b proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of openness. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy of openness, $r (290) = .01, p = .41$. There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, $F(1, 288) = .05, p = .82$, adjusted $R^2 = .00$. Individual use of media ($\beta =
.01, \( t = .23, p = .82 \) did not significantly predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of openness in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2c proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of assurances with their partner. There was no significant relationship between individual media use and the use of the maintenance strategy of assurances, \( r (291) = .05, p = .18 \). In addition to a bivariate correlation analysis, a regression was run to further test this hypothesis. There was not a significant analysis of variation for regression effects, \( F(1, 289) = .82, p = .37 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Individual use of media (\( \beta = .05, t = .91, p = .37 \)) did not significantly predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of assurances in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2c was not supported.

Hypothesis 2d proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of shared tasks. A bivariate correlation with one-tailed significance levels was used to test this hypothesis. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy of shared tasks, \( r (288) = -.02, p = .38 \). There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 286) = .09, p = .76 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Individual use of media (\( \beta = -.02, t = -.30, p = .76 \)) did not significantly predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of shared tasks in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2d was not supported.

Hypothesis 2e proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of social networks. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy of social networks, \( r (295) = .02, p = .37 \). There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 293) = .10, p = .75 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Individual use of media (\( \beta = .02, t = .32, p = .75 \)) did not negatively predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of social networks in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2e was not supported.

Hypothesis 2f proposed a negative relationship between individuals’ media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy
of conflict management, \( r(289) = .01, p = .41 \). There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 287) = .05, p = .82 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Individual use of media (\( \beta = .01, t = .23, p = .82 \)) did not significantly predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2f was not supported.

Hypothesis 2g proposed a negative relationship between an individual’s media use alone and their use of the relational maintenance strategy of advice. The test revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and use of the maintenance strategy of advice, \( r(297) = -.02, p = .37 \). In addition to a bivariate correlation analysis, a regression was run to further test this hypothesis. There was not a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 295) = .11, p = .74 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .00 \). Individual use of media (\( \beta = -.02, t = -.33, p = .74 \)) did not negatively predict a person’s use of the relational maintenance strategy of advice in his or her relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 2g was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive relationship between the time romantic partners spend using media together and their level of relational closeness in the relationship. Relational closeness was a tested using a unidimensional pictorial scale. A bivariate correlation was used to test this hypothesis. Hypotheses 3 found a slight, positive relationship between the amounts of time partners spend using media together and their level of relational closeness, \( r(297) = .17, p < .01 \) (see Table 4). In addition to a bivariate correlation analysis, a regression analysis was run to further test this hypothesis. The regression was run with a couple’s media use as the independent variable and relational closeness as the dependent variable. There was a significant analysis of variance for regression effects, \( F(1, 293) = 8.83, p < .01 \), adjusted \( R^2 = .03 \). Romantic partners’ combined use of media (\( \beta = .17, t = 2.97, p < .01 \)) positively predicted a person’s sense of relational closeness in his or her relationship. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 suggested a positive relationship between romantic partners use of media together and their overall relationship satisfaction. Correlational analyses revealed a slight, positive relationship between romantic partners’ combined media use and overall relationship satisfaction, \( r(291) = .14, p < .05 \) (see Table 4). In addition to a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Partner Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Self Media</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Positivity</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Openness</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.65***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Assurances</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>.75***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Shared Tasks</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.67***</td>
<td>.59***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Social Networks</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Conflict Management</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.67***</td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Advice</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.90***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Relational Closeness</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.59***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 300. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*
bivariate correlation analysis, a regression analysis was run to further test this hypothesis. The regression analysis was run with a couple’s media use as the independent variable and relational satisfaction as the dependent variable. There was not a significant analysis of variation for regression effects, $F(1, 287) = 5.45, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$. Romantic partners’ combined use of media ($\beta = .14, t = 2.34, p < .05$) positively predicted individuals’ sense of relational satisfaction in their relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported. The findings for all hypotheses involved in this study can be found in Table 5.

Finally, Research Question 3 asked whether couples who watched the same television genre when alone and when together would have higher levels of relational satisfaction than couples who enjoyed different genres alone than when together. In order to answer this question, a syntax was created to compute one new variable with two levels for whether individuals’ television genre viewing was the same (1) or different (2) from their relational partner. These variables were then used to divide participants into two groups. An independent samples t-test was run in order to answer Research Question 3 and compare people who watch the same television show separately and when with their partner, as well as people who watch a different television show alone than when they are with their partner. The t-test revealed there were no differences in satisfaction scores for those who watch the same genre alone and together ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.16$) and those who watch a different genre while alone and together ($M = 6.09, SD = .88$), $t(91) = -1.02, p = .31$. This test revealed that there is no difference in reported relational satisfaction for individuals who watch the same or different television programs as their relational partner.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H#</th>
<th>Hypothesis/Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of positivity</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of positivity</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of openness</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of openness</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of assurances</td>
<td>Couples’ media use together predicts one partner’s perceived use of assurances in the relationship</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1d</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of shared tasks</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of shared tasks</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1e</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of social networks</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of social networks</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1f</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of conflict management</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of conflict management</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1g</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of advice</td>
<td>Couples’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of advice</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of positivity</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of positivity</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H#</th>
<th>Hypothesis/Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H2b</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of openness</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of openness</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2c</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of assurances</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of assurances</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2d</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of shared tasks</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of shared tasks</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2e</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of social networks</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of social networks</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2f</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of conflict management</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of conflict management</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2g</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use predicts a partner’s use of the maintenance strategy of advice</td>
<td>Individuals’ media use is not associated with a partner’s use of advice</td>
<td>No support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts relational closeness</td>
<td>Couples’ media use together predicts one partner’s sense of relational closeness in the relationship</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Couples’ media use predicts relational satisfaction</td>
<td>Couples’ media use together predicts one partner’s sense of relational satisfaction in the relationship</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess the degree to which individuals’ media use affected their communication habits and satisfaction with their romantic partner. Specifically, this study aimed to examine whether individual or collective media use had any affect on a person’s perceived use of relational maintenance strategies, overall relationship satisfaction, and degree of relational closeness to their relational partner.

Previous studies indicated that media have the ability to affect the state of individuals’ interpersonal relationships (Baym et al., 2007; Chory & Banfield, 2009), but there lacked research that examined effects resulting from collective media use. This present study attempted to examine potential affects on interpersonal relationships while also accounting for joint media usage. Although some of the study’s hypotheses were either not supported or only partially supported, this study still revealed some telling information about the nature of media-related shared activities and how they can affect the communicative details of romantic partner’s interactions. This section will discuss those findings, as well as address limitations of the study, and potential directions for future research of this topic.

The first series of hypotheses (e.g., $H_{1a} - H_{1g}$) indicated there would be a positive relationship between romantic partner’s combined media use and the use of each relationship maintenance strategy. Of those hypotheses, only Hypothesis $1c$ was supported. This hypothesis suggested that romantic partner’s media use together would be associated with the relationship maintenance strategy of assurances. Stafford and Canary’s (1991) research explains assurances as messages that in some way assure the other that the relationship will continue or that the person is committed to the relationship. As an activity, media use may have been one way of assuring a romantic partner that the relationship would continue. However, a better explanation for the connection between media use and assurances may stem from the gender majority of this study’s population. In their study of attachment styles and relational maintenance strategies, Simon and Baxter (1991) found that females were
more likely than males to report the use of assurances. Due to the large amount of females in this study, it makes sense that the participants reported the assurances strategy most often. Additionally, due to the expectation of finding an overall connection it was suggested that associations would be found with each individual strategy. Although the relational maintenance strategy of assurances was associated with couples’ combined media use, no other hypothesis connecting relational maintenance strategies with co-consumption was supported. This might be due to the fact that more prominent factors might be connected to an individual’s use of relational maintenance strategies in an interpersonal relationship. For example, Simon and Baxter (1993) found that “attachment style is correlated with a variety of relationship outcomes that are salient in the scholarship on relationship maintenance” (p. 428). This study did not take the attachment styles of its participants into account when assessing media behavior, or relationship style between dyads. However, despite not finding connections between each strategy, it is worth noting that all the positive relationships this study expected to find between the use of relational maintenance strategies and combined media use were predicted in the right direction.

These findings suggest that couples that use media together have a greater likelihood of using those strategies because they are in each other’s presence more often than those who use media independently of their partner. The fact that couples’ time is being spent using media together strengthens the possibility that relational maintenance occurs between both partners. Chory and Banfield (2009) revealed how media dependence can distract from a romantic relationship, but this study’s findings suggested that media use together could possibly prevent or hinder that distraction from occurring. Moreover, combined media use may be a way of lessening the effects that extreme media use alone can have on a person’s behavior with his relational partner.

The second set of hypotheses suggested that a negative relationship would exist between individuals’ media use alone and their use of relational maintenance strategies with their romantic partner. Specifically, this study suggested that the more time individuals spend using media alone the less likely they are to use maintenance strategies with their partner. Despite previous research that suggested such a negative relationship existed, the second series of hypotheses (e.g., H₂a – H₂g) were not supported.
Previous research that examined media dependence and relational maintenance highlighted some reasons why individual characteristics can affect the use of maintenance strategies between couples (Chory & Banfield, 2009; Ragsdale, 1996; Stafford et al., 2000). For example, media dependence may decrease relational maintenance strategies due to the time spent consuming a particular medium, user fatigue, and some possible negative cognitive effects (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Furthermore, independent media use or dependence can “trigger a destructive process in which relational maintenance declines, perceptions of relational inequity increase, and relational partners ultimately pull away from the relationship” (Chory & Banfield, 2009, p. 50). Additionally, time spent using media independently of one’s significant other would appear counterproductive to using maintenance behaviors within the relationship.

Despite research that indicated a negative relationship existed between individual media use and relational maintenance strategies (Ragsdale, 1996), this study revealed no significant relationship between individual media use and communication patterns between relational partners. Moreover, only the strategies of shared tasks and advice were correctly predicted in the negative direction, although they were not found to statistically significant. These findings can also be partially attributed to other factors that contribute to the presence or absence of maintenance behaviors between romantic partners.

The participants’ overall lack of media use may have contributed to these findings. For example, previous research indicated people watch an average of five hours of television a day (Nielsen Media, 2009). However, on average, participants indicated watching television slightly more than one hour per day. Furthermore, participants indicated using all media combined individually less than two hours a day. This difference between expected media use and actual use may explain why usage was not extreme enough to significantly affect the use of relational maintenance strategies. Additionally, most participants indicated that they still spend time using media with their partner. Therefore, their use of media alone did not prevent them from finding time to spend with their romantic partner. The lack of difference between media use alone and combined use with a partner may have contributed to this study not finding more statistically significant negative relationships.

There are a few reasons that may explain why associations between each relational maintenance strategy and combined media use were not statistically significant in this study.
The demographics of the participants, personality differences, and interactions that occur during media consumption might make clear why some hypotheses were not supported. For example, some relationship maintenance strategies have been more strongly related to the participants’ personal characteristics of gender and relationship type (Chory & Banfield, 2009). This could explain why a connection was not found between media co-consumption and the use of the relational maintenance strategies besides assurances. Although using media together can provide one avenue to facilitate relational maintenance strategies between romantic partners, it may not be the most relevant feature of romantic relationships.

Despite previously addressed literature that supported the idea that media use would have an adverse affect on the use of maintenance strategies, other research may provide a stronger explanation for this study’s findings. Researchers have found numerous factors also affect the use of maintenance strategies in relationships. Some of the factors mentioned were attachment styles, age, and gender which all contribute to whether people use relational maintenance strategies (Myers & Glover, 2007; Ragsdale, 1996; Simon & Baxter, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 2006). All of these factors may provide a better explanation for why all relational maintenance strategies were not associated with media use. The use of these strategies are affected and mediated by these factors to such a degree that it may be difficult to find a singular association with a variable like media use, whether it occurs in an individual or collective setting.

The third hypothesis proposed that romantic partners that spend more time using media together would experience higher levels of relational closeness. Ultimately, this hypothesis was supported as participants who spend more time using media with their partner also indicated that they felt closer to their romantic partner. The connection between media use and closeness makes sense due to the fact that it was also associated with relational maintenance. Relational maintenance has typically been connected with other relational factors like closeness and satisfaction. This was consistent with previous research that indicated that media used between dyads could help people remain close over time (Ledbetter, 2008). Although different media was used to find that association, it still makes sense that mass media use would also be associated with closeness. As mentioned earlier, combined media use is one indication of the amount of time couples spend together, and how they spend their time when together. Although spending time together does not cause one
person to feel close to another, time spent together is one factor that can affect how close partners feel to each other.

The fourth hypothesis suggested that couples that spend time watching media together would experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was ultimately supported. Previous research has linked media use and relational satisfaction or quality (Baym et al., 2007). Studies revealed that the amount of time couples spend using media could be one predictor of the quality of their relationship. Although relationships were not found with each individual strategy, an overall association was found between media use and the use of relational maintenance strategies. Studies have indicated that maintenance strategies are consistent and strong predictors of relational characteristics such as love, liking, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton et al., 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Therefore, the connection between media use and overall relational maintenance is indicative that a relationship might exist between media use and satisfaction. Although the medium was different from previous research, the connection between the amounts of time spent using media together and the quality of a relationship was supported.

The first set of research questions focused on individual media use and television viewing habits. Of the options available, the participants revealed that television was their preferred medium. That finding was consistent with previous literature that indicates the continued importance of television among young adults (Nielsen Media, 2009). On a weekly basis, participants reported watching about eight hours of television a week. Consequently, the television genre participants reported watching the most (i.e., average hours per week) when alone was reality television programming, followed by dramas and sitcoms. Previous studies have addressed the reasons for the popularity of the reality television genres (Barton, 2009; Ebersole & Woods, 2007). In their study of reality television, Ebersole and Woods (2007) revealed several reasons why people enjoyed reality television, which included their own personal affinity for television and parasocial interaction. Additionally, the study revealed that individuals closely identify with characters they relate to on a very personal level, or characters that represent viewers in some way (Ebersole & Woods, 2007).

The second set of research questions focused on media use and television viewing habits between romantic couples. The participants indicated that television was also their
most used medium when with their romantic partner. Additionally, the most watched
television genre was sitcoms, followed by dramas and sports programming. These changes
can be partially attributed to the potential changes that occur when media is consumed
between dyads. In this study, most female participants indicated watching sports more often
when with their male partner than when they were alone. This is consistent with previous
research as sports programming has been shown to have the ability to draw both men and
women and together. ESPN ranks among the top networks and programs in its ability to draw
both men and women to the same programming (“Does ESPN Spell,” 2009). Further,
compared to other networks, ESPN offered both above average reach for males and females
as well as a high percentage of women co-viewing with a male counterpart (“Does ESPN
Spell,” 2009). This may help explain why programming choices can change when watching
television in a coed group setting as opposed to alone.

Finally, the third research question asked whether there was any connection between
individual viewing habits and overall relationship satisfaction. Participants who revealed
watching the same television genre alone as when they are with their partner did not result in
higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In fact, the opposite was found to be true. Those
who indicated that they watch a different genre alone than when with their partner actually
had higher levels of overall relationship satisfaction. This finding hints that although media
choices may be deliberate, those choices may not have an effect on the interactions and
satisfaction between romantic partners.

**LIMITATIONS**

This study was not completed without limitations that should be acknowledged. First,
this study used a convenience sample that resulted in mostly young adults. Further, most of
the participants involved in this study were college students and their ages, media choices,
and relationship interactions may not be reflective of the larger population (Crano & Brewer,
2001). Due to the sampling of communication courses, mostly females were involved in this
study. This imbalance between genders affected the generalizability of the study’s findings.
The fact that the majority of participants were females may have limited the findings because
the sample did not have an equal amount of males represented. Additionally, the lack of
males may have skewed the study’s findings as previous studies have highlighted the
differences between the viewing preferences and maintenance strategy use of males and females (Ragsdale, 1996).

This study also used a self-report survey. As with all surveys involving self-reporting, participants may not be able to accurately recall past events. Furthermore, Crano and Brewer (2001) show that even when participants are willing to be truthful, “they may be unable to report accurately on their own inner feelings or mental states (p. 293). Due to the fact that participants were being asked to recall their previous maintenance use, it may have impaired their ability to recall their use accurately. Further, only one partner per romantic relationship was represented in each survey. The exclusion of one partner may have lead to inaccurate recollections. These recollections cannot be compared to the experience of the other partner in the relationship in regard to maintenance behavior, satisfaction, and closeness. Lastly, it is also possible that the maintenance strategies used in the survey were not applicable to those participating in the study.

Yet another limitation of the study is participants’ knowledge and recall of the relational maintenance strategies addressed in the study. One reason why some relational maintenance strategies may not have been associated with media use is because of each participant’s awareness of his or her own maintenance behavior. Stafford and Canary (2006) revealed that women specialize in the development and maintenance of relationships more than men. Furthermore, In Ragsdale’s (1996) study of relational maintenance between married couples, it was discovered that some partners were unaware of their own maintenance behavior. Consequently, some indicated their relationship satisfaction was based on other factors like love, familiarity, or trust. Furthermore, some indicated they had to change their way of thinking to notice and record their own maintenance behaviors (Ragsdale, 1996). This difficulty can possibly be attributed to the participants in this study.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of measures used to assess variables related to media dependence and relational maintenance. Although other factors have been related to the use of relational maintenance, extreme media use, and relationship satisfaction, this study did not utilize measures to capture those factors. Behavioral or personality measures or media dependence measures may have been more useful in assessing the media use behavior of participants in this study. Additionally, questions regarding participants’ enjoyment of the media they used while alone and with their partner may have also helped
explain any changes in the relational satisfaction, relational maintenance or closeness experienced by each participant.

Another limitation of this study relates to correlational data. Correlational data indicates that a relationship or association exists with another variable. Research has indicated that a variable can predict another but the data used in this study do not indicate that one variable causes the other. Furthermore, as evidenced by Crano and Brewer (2001), it has been suggested that the truth of the causal relationships regarding other studies involving college students may be limited to that particular population. Therefore, the generalizability and the strength of the relationships found within this study, as well as other studies that utilize inferential statistics, are not absolute.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

The topic of media use between dyads provides many avenues that could use further exploration. Future research should look into how choices are made when people are sharing media and examine how much people enjoy media relative to who consumes it with them. This may help explain the degree to which people enjoy or are affected by media alone, in a dyad, or in a group setting. This study focused on dyads, but examining media use in groups can help future scholars gain insight into motivations, and consequences for users. The study of these interpersonal relationships could also branch out past romantic relationships (e.g., family, friends, co-workers, etc.). Research in this area could help discern whether differences exist between the relationships of families who use watch their favorite television show on a weekly basis, roommates who play video games together on a daily basis, or friends who get together to watch movies on a consistent basis. This type of insight could help clarify the role media plays when people are together and explain the relationship between communication patterns (or lack thereof) and media use.

When studying collective media use, future research should ensure that all parties who are consuming the media are accounted for in the research. For example, research devoted to examining romantic dyads should make sure both partners are involved in the study in order to get a more accurate assessment of the media use, maintenance behaviors, and satisfaction reported by both people. For example, the media content, levels of satisfaction, or closeness that is reported by each partner may be different. When it comes to
television use, Barton (2009) found that the content of reality-based programs might be more gender-biased than assumed in previous research. The involvement of both romantic partners may help to offset potential differences and provide greater depth to the insight of the media-related and relational comparisons of the topic. Further examination may reveal different motivations for watching gender-specific programming.

This study utilized quantitative methods, but qualitative research in this area could also be useful. Interviewing dyads or groups about the content or motivation for their media use can provide awareness that cannot be gained from quantitative research. Interviews or questionnaires can reveal whether conflicts over programming, type, or content exist between users. Additionally, it can reveal the motivations for consuming media in a group setting as opposed to alone. The negotiation that inevitably occurs between users when media is shared can also be revealed through qualitative research.

The Internet has been discussed as a transformative medium, which will lead to profound changes in the media users’ personal and social habits and roles (Ruggiero, 2000). Therefore, future research in this area should explore some of the newer Internet technologies people use to view media online (e.g., YouTube, Hulu). The examination of whether the use of ever-growing technology like the Internet is enhancing or distracting people from maintaining their relationships may be useful for future scholars.

Although numerous factors affect relationship satisfaction, this study showed how media use together can affect the use of relational maintenance strategies, closeness, and satisfaction. Future research about co-viewing media should incorporate personality characteristics, affinity for television measures, and attachment styles of media users. These qualities can affect individuals’ viewing habits and may provide a better explanation for why and how often media is used when in a group setting or between dyads. Furthermore, it can provide insight about the parasocial relationships users may form with characters within media content. By investing scholarly efforts toward examining the media’s role in interpersonal relationships, it can lead to a greater understanding of the ways media influences behavior. Moreover, scholars can gain insight into whether the media or the users have the greatest affect on satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, this information can reveal whether media is acting as a binding force or a hindrance to the maintenance and satisfaction experienced in interpersonal relationships.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT
Statement of Informed Consent

San Diego State University
Consent to Act as a Research Subject
A Look at Media Use in Romantic Relationships

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators:
Will Norman, M.A. Candidate, School of Communication, San Diego State University
Susan A. Hellweg, Ph.D., School of Communication, San Diego State University

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this research study is to examine the relationship between media use (e.g., playing video games, watching television, watching DVDs, etc.) and relationship maintenance, closeness, and satisfaction. Specifically, this research will examine whether there is a connection between how much media couples use together and their overall satisfaction in their relationship. This study will involve 250 participants.

Description of the Study:
Participation in this study will involve completing a web-based self-report survey. You will be asked to report on your relationship with your romantic partner. Various questions will be asked about you and your relationship, including: the types of media you use, the frequency of use, and what types you use when you are with your partner. Additionally, you will be asked about your relational satisfaction, and communication satisfaction. These questions will be based on a series of existing reliable scales.

If you choose to complete the survey, it is recommended that you complete it during one sitting. For confidentiality purposes, this web-based survey will not allow you to go back to previously asked questions. The completion of this survey should take no longer than 30 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts:
When responding to the questions, you may reflect on potentially sensitive areas of your experiences and your beliefs about the nature of your relationships with others of your experiences and your beliefs about the nature of relationships with others. If you are uncomfortable with any part of this survey, you may choose not to respond without penalty. If you find that the questions in this survey cause you to reflect on a specific situation that is troubling for you, please contact Counseling and Psychological Services at SDSU at 619-594-5220.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:
Your participation in this study is completely anonymous. Your name will not be linked with your responses. Additionally, your questionnaire responses will be kept confidential and will not be viewed by anyone other than the experimenter(s) in this study. Upon downloading, the
data itself will not contain any identifiable information unique to the respondent.

Incentive to Participate:
You may or may not receive extra credit from your instructor for completing this questionnaire. Your informed consent signature page, when turned in separately, will be used to identify participants so that credit may be awarded if applicable. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this survey.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

Questions about the Study:
If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact one of the following investigators:

Will Norman, M.A. Candidate                  Susan A. Hellweg, Ph.D.
School of Communication                  School of Communication
San Diego State University                  San Diego State University
Communication Bldg., Rm. 223                 hellweg@mail.sdsu.edu
wnorman@rohan.sdsu.edu                     (619) 594-4561

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (619-594-6622; irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

Consent to Participate:
The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp.

Please take your time in completing this survey, while answering questions honestly. Thank you in advance for your participation.

In order to award you credit for participating in this research study, please fill out the following information. NOTE: The information you provide below is for credit awarding purposes ONLY. Your information will in no way be linked to your survey responses.

Name (Last, First): _______________________ Red ID Number: ________________

By clicking on the “Next” button below, you indicate that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. It also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Finally, by clicking on the “Next”
button below, you are only giving your consent to participate and not giving up any of your legal rights. You can save or print out a copy of this consent form from your computer.

You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study by clicking on the “Next” button below.
APPENDIX B

MEDIA USE QUESTIONNAIRE
Part I: Television Viewing Habits

*General Instructions:*

*This questionnaire is about your personal television viewing behavior as well as with your romantic partner. When answering these questions, please recall to your best extent.*

**MEDIA USE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please identify how much time you spend using the following media, on average, while alone:

How often do you go see a movie while it is in theatres without your partner?
_____ times/month

How much time do you spend watching DVDs while alone on a daily basis?
_____ hour(s)

How much time do you spend playing video games on a daily basis while alone?
_____ hour(s)

How much time do you spend watching television on a daily basis while alone?
_____ hour(s)

How much time do you spend watching the following television genres while alone?

_____ Dramas (i.e., Soap operas, detective/police shows, medical mystery, etc.)
_____ Sitcoms (including parody shows and animated sitcoms)
_____ National TV News Programs (e.g., “NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams,” “ABC World News with Diane Sawyer,” etc.)
_____ Local TV News Programs
_____ Educational/Informational Programming (e.g., History Channel, Discovery,
MEDIA CO-USE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is about your television viewing behavior with your partner. When answering the questions, please recall to your best extent.

Please identify how much time you spend using each of the following types of media with your partner on average:

How often do you go see a movie while it is in theatres with your partner?
_____ times/month

How much time do you spend watching DVDs with your partner on a daily basis?
_____ hour(s)

How much time do you spend playing video games on a daily basis with your partner?
_____ hour(s)

On average, how much time do you spend watching television with your partner on a daily basis?
_____ hour(s)

How much time do you spend watching the following television genres with your partner?

- Reality TV (e.g., “The Real World,” “Survivor”)
- Day Time Talk Shows (e.g., “The View,” “Good Morning America”)
- Late Night Talk Shows (e.g., “The Tonight Show,” “The Late Show with David Letterman”)
- Sports Programming (i.e., Live sporting events, ESPN, etc.)

What television show do you watch most often while alone?

____________________________________
______ Dramas (i.e., Soap operas, detective/police shows, medical mystery, etc.)
______ Sitcoms (including parody shows and animated sitcoms)
______ National TV News Programs (e.g., “NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams,”
                              “ABC World News with Diane Sawyer,” etc.)
______ Local TV News Programs
______ Educational/Informational Programming (e.g., History Channel, Discovery,
                              PBS)
______ Reality TV (e.g., “The Real World,” “Survivor”)
______ Day Time Talk Shows (e.g., “The View,” “Good Morning America”)
______ Late Night Talk Shows (e.g., “The Tonight Show,” “The Late Show with David
                              Letterman”)
______ Sports Programming (i.e., Live sporting events, ESPN, etc.)

What television show do you watch with your partner most often?

__________________________________________
APPENDIX C

RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE MEASURE
Part II: Relationship Maintenance

Indicate the extent to which each of the following statements accurately reflects the way that you maintain your relationship. Do not indicate agreement with things that you think you should do, or with things you did at one time but no longer do. That is, think about the everyday things you actually do in your relationship right now. Remember that much of what you do to maintain your relationship can involve mundane or routine aspects of day-to-day life. (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I say “I love you.”</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I show my love for my partner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I imply that our relationship has a future.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I tell my partner how much s/he means to me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I talk about our plans for the future.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I stress my commitment to him/her.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I show him/her how much he/she means to me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I talk about future events (e.g., having children).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I encourage my partner to share his/her feelings with me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I simply tell my partner how I feel about the relationship.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I talk about my fears.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I disclose what I need or want from the relationship.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I like to have periodic talks about our relationship.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am open about my feelings.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I talk about where we stand.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I apologize when I am wrong.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I cooperate in how I handle disagreements.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I listen to my partner and try not to judge.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I am understanding.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. I am patient and forgiving with my partner. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. I help equally with the tasks that need to be done. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. I offer to do things that aren’t “my” responsibility. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. I do my fair share of the work we have to do. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. I perform my household responsibilities. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. I do not shirk my duties. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I act cheerful and positive around him/her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. I try to be upbeat when we are together. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. I tell my partner what I think s/he should do about her/his problems. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. I give him/her my opinion on things going on in his/her life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. I like to spend time with our same friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. I focus on common friends and affiliations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
APPENDIX D

RELATIONAL SATISFACTION MEASURE
Part III: Relationship Closeness and Satisfaction

INSTRUCTIONS: Please choose the picture below which best describes your relationship with your romantic partner.

PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP QUALITY
(Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Norton, 1983)

Directions: Please base your responses to the following items on the relationship reported on the previous page. Rate the relationship you have with your partner on each item. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement by writing the number in the space provided, using the following scale: “Not at all” (1) to “Extremely” (7) The 4, or middle position on the scale, represents “undecided” or “neutral.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How content are you with your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How happy are you with your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How committed are you to your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How dedicated are you to your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How devoted are you to your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How intimate is your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How close is your relationship?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How connected are you with your partner?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How much do you trust your partner?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How much can you count on your partner?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How dependable is your partner?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. How passionate is your relationship?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
14. How lustful is your relationship?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
15. How sexually intense is your relationship?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
16. How much do you love your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
17. How much do you adore your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
18. How much do you cherish your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Part III: Demographics

To interpret your answers to the above questions, we need some additional information about you and your partner. Please answer the following questions by filling in the blank or selecting the appropriate response.

What is your sex?  ____ Male  ____ Female

What is your age?  ____ (years)

What is your current college standing?

____ Freshman  ____ Senior
____ Sophomore  ____ 5th year Senior (or beyond)
____ Junior  ____ Other (please specify)

What is your ethnicity?  (Please check one of the following)

____ African American/Black  ____ Pacific Islander
____ Asian American  ____ European American/White
____ Mexican American/Latino(a)/Hispanic  ____ Other (please specify):
____ Native American

What is the sex of your romantic partner?  ____ Male  ____ Female

What is your partner’s age?  ____ (years)

How long have you been dating your partner?  ____ year(s)  ____ months

On average, how much time do you spend with your partner on a weekly basis?

______ hour(s)

What is your partner’s ethnicity?  (Please check one of the following)

____ African American/Black  ____ Pacific Islander
____ Asian American  ____ European American/White
____ Mexican American/Latino(a)/Hispanic  ____ Other (please specify):
____ Native American

Thank you for your participation!