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Relational maintenance: An examination of how gender, relational maintenance strategies, and commitment affect the use of text messages in romantic relationships

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Relational maintenance: An examination of how gender, relational maintenance strategies, and
commitment affect the use of text messages in romantic relationships

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

This communication study explores the relation between commitment, relational maintenance strategies, and text message use in romantic partners. This study examines how these three factors are connected through the use of surveys. It was hypothesized that romantic partners who were more committed to one another would use text messages to communicate about certain relational maintenance strategies. Results showed romantic partners who used more relational maintenance strategies did in fact use text messages to communicate about these issues more often. Also, couples who were more committed to their partner did use more positivity when communicating through text messages with their partner. It was also found that males use the relational maintenance strategy of openness more often than females when communicating through text messages.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Past research has examined how relational maintenance affects relationships through IM, e-mail use, and internet use. Few studies have, however, examined the relationship through texting use in romantic couples and how relational maintenance strategies and commitment levels play a role in this context of communication. Until recently, maintaining relationships has been viewed as something that takes place only in face-to-face communication (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Pettigrew (2009) stated that text messages are now more than ever being used to create, sustain, and build interpersonal relationships. Overall text messages lack the ability to portray vocal tone, hand gestures, volume, and many other nonverbal behaviors typically used in face-to-face communication. Also, even though there is a lack of nonverbal behaviors, text messaging has an effect on intimacy and feelings of close emotional bonding. Text messaging seems to have an influence on partners overall feeling more connected to one another. This small amount of information being passed back and forth between romantic partners is in turn creating a sense of connectedness. Connectedness is essentially when two people feel a sense of being in touch with one another (Pettigrew, 2009). Manghani (2009) believes text messaging was never intended to be a key feature of a phone; however, it has somehow fulfilled a deep desire and need within certain individuals. Individuals use text messages to portray their emotions, ideals, and values to other people. In a way, text messaging is just an extension of communication where individuals can show emotions to others in a creative way. The mobile phone is just a tool for individuals to deal with distance between others and the loneliness people feel because of this distance.

According to Reid and Reid (2008), text messages allow individuals to have a greater sense of control over the messages they are sending. Individuals feel they can be more expressive

with their language and the message can be carefully and thoughtfully presented in order to achieve the idea of self-presentation. Individuals have the capacity to review and edit all of their messages before they are sent which helps them to arrange face. In other words, individuals can make sure the message they are sending does not portray them in a negative way. Individuals now have the opportunity to store their thoughts within their phones and reflect on their conversations. In this case many individuals can create a different, braver, text self that ordinarily would not be present in the typical face-to-face communication style. Text messages also allow for a more conversational style between users. Texts can either be rapid message exchange between individuals, or they can expand a conversation over time. Interestingly, it has been found college students are generally using text messages only to fulfill relationship needs instead of functional or practical needs. This furthers the argument of text messages being used solely to advance interpersonal relationships. Individuals are feeling connected to other people just through the words they are typing in a text message.

Manghani (2009) found it important to note that the language used in text messages is somewhat different than everyday face-to-face language. Text message users can create their own language through the use of emoticons and unique writing styles. Some words are abbreviated or just understood differently through text messages. Text messages have their own unique language that is developed by the user; it tends to be extremely context specific and many times will be hard for outsiders to decipher. In this same sense text messages are flexible, complex, and overall a great medium for private yet intimate dialogue between two people. Text messages will continue to evolve overtime. Even though the dialogue may be private and intimate, people are still choosing to use text messages in the presence of others. Schroeder (2010) argued that mobile phones then essentially free us from the constraints of being in certain

places to communicate. Holtgraves (2010) found that individuals send more text messages in the presence of others than when they are alone. Individuals are making text messages short and simple, yet to the point and effective at the same time. This demonstrates a link between text messages and maintaining relationships.

Pettigrew (2009) found that mobile phones have essentially created this idea of “perpetual contact.” Mobile phone users are basically accessible at all times, no matter where they are or what they are doing. This idea of always being accessible diminishes a person’s feelings of freedom in a sense. Text messaging allows for perpetual contact, it is a form of private and direct communication, and it facilitates both interpersonal connectedness and autonomy. Relationships often times are trying to balance through dialectical tensions. This idea of autonomy and connection is one of these dialectics. Autonomy is the idea of having individual freedom within a relationship (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Hall and Baym (2011) discussed the idea of hyper-coordination, which is basically having relational dependence on the use of mobile technologies. Ultimately, text messages can be viewed as a productive relationship-building media; however, text messages are also viewed in terms of imprisonment and entrapment. Text messages must “enable one to be with(out) someone else in a completely different temporal and spatial ‘world’; to find union through strings of words, which, like beads upon a bracelet, constantly loop back upon one another in quiet, satisfying recirculation” (Manghani, 2009, p. 230).

Closer relationships tend to use more forms of media to keep in contact. There must be shared norms developed for each medium among partners. The constant use of media also establishes the norm of responsiveness. Individuals assume others should respond within a certain amount of time to maintain the relationship. The idea of mundane maintenance within

relationships also comes into play. According to Hall and Baym (2011), relational partners use text messages to communicate even if it is for mundane exchanges. An example of a mundane exchange would be asking each other, “what are you doing?” In essence relationships are maintained through routine communication that does not necessarily have to be about an important situation or conflict. Most messages individuals engage in on a daily basis are not consciously thought about but just said to have contact with another person (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009).

Conflict may also be more prevalent in text messages because of the ability to edit and revise the message. Individuals may feel they can express their emotions more freely through a text message than face to face. The fear of interruptions lessens, and the ability to communicate without inhibition may increase (Frisby & Westerman, 2010). Frisby and Westerman discussed Social Processing Theory, which suggests that individuals can accomplish communication goals through any means of communication as long as there is enough time for the interaction to occur. This being said, romantic couples could engage in conflict through text messages and in the end resolve the conflict and maintain relationship satisfaction given the appropriate amount of time.

Literature Review

Relational Maintenance. Healthy relationships require a balance between dialectical tensions in order to remain intact. All relationships balance back and forth between stability and flux, openness and closedness, and expression and privacy. If romantic partners cannot find the balance and use relational maintenance strategies to work through these tensions, then it is likely there will be disagreements and disintegration will occur. Relationships go through stages where partners feel stable and certain and other times when partners feel uncertain. Partners also battle with how much information to share and what to keep private while maintaining relationship

satisfaction. All of this boils down to the trust and intimacy that is felt within a romantic relationship (Baxter & Erbert, 1999).

Technology and relational maintenance. Technology is constantly growing and changing, and therefore people have to learn how to use these new technologies to maintain these relationships. Dainton (2000) discussed relational maintenance behaviors, which are essentially behaviors relational partners use to keep their relationship in a satisfied or acceptable state. There are five typical maintenance techniques: positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and sharing tasks. Positivity involves having positive interactions with a partner in an uncritical way. Openness refers to disclosing one's desires and opinions for the relationship and discussing important matters. Assurances are messages that convey the need to continue the relationship. Social networks involve interacting with family members and relatives. Finally, sharing tasks is simply performing the responsibilities needed to continue with everyday life, such as household chores (Stafford, 2010). If text messaging is used within romantic relationships to maintain the relationship, there is the assumption both individuals will continue using text messages to carry out these relational maintenance strategies. Text messages allow for continuous communication, which can, in turn, lead to the feeling of connectedness within relationships. According to Hall and Baym (2011), interpersonal relationships are maintained through contact, and quantity is as important as the quality of the interactions. In essence, text messages allow romantic partners to transcend space and strive for a better form of communication while increasing autonomy.

Negative relational maintenance. Typically, researchers have examined how relational maintenance strategies are used to positively maintain a relationship; however, there are negative relational maintenance strategies. Some examples of these would be jealousy induction, spying/surveillance, and infidelity. According to Goodboy and Myers (2010), normally these

strategies would be viewed as negative, but they are often times used to attend to individual needs and make individuals feel better about their relationship. These negative or antisocial maintenance strategies are behaviors couples may use to simply keep their relationship in existence. Dissatisfied couples may feel they need to engage in negative maintenance behaviors because they feel low levels of commitment and satisfaction. It is important to note, however, that engaging in negative maintenance behaviors is not good to maintain a quality romantic relationship.

Text messages and relational maintenance. Interdependence theory, according to Dainton (2000), stated that relational outcomes are dependent upon what rewards and costs relational partners experience within their relationship. Outcomes are determined by what partners feel they deserve within a relationship. Maintenance behaviors engaged in by one's partner are rewards, but strategies used by the individual are considered costs. Text messages can be used to engage in these behaviors that help maintain interpersonal relationships. Text messages are used to construct the self and to express emotions in a private setting. Tjora (2011) suggested text messages are now the preferred medium of younger people because they can express their true selves and be brave behind the screen of a mobile phone.

Hall and Baym (2011) found that when the number of calls and texts increases among friends, the expectations of mobile maintenance increased as well. This means individuals will, in fact, use text messages to help maintain a relationship. There is an increased expectation of being connected and available to another. Text messages are a new medium to communicate, which leaves a lot of the messages up for interpretation. In other words, individuals are influencing others perceptions and behaviors through the use of text messages (Suler, 2010). Holtgraves (2010) pointed out that the relationship between two people is determined by how

they communicate with one another. When people receive text messages, it seems to make them feel socially superior and almost happy to have received the text (Patterson, 2005). Text messages can be warm, personal, and cost-effective ways for romantic partners to maintain their relationships. The cell phone is now an extension of the individual and is used to express how the owner feels (Faulkner and Culwin, 2005). Faulkner and Culwin suggested that some people enjoy being available at all times because it gives them emotional fulfillment. Typically in the past, individuals used face-to-face communication to use relational maintenance strategies. Now text messages are being used as one of the primary forms for communicating about relational maintenance strategies. Therefore I proposed the following hypotheses.

H1: Romantic partners who engage in higher levels of relational maintenance strategies are likely to have a higher frequency of text messages.

According to Canary and Stafford (1992), relational maintenance strategies can be broken down into five dimensions. The five dimensions are positivity, assurances, openness, tasks, and networks. Given that relational maintenance strategies can be divided into five dimensions, I proposed the following hypotheses.

H1a: Romantic partners who engage in a higher level of the relational maintenance strategy of assurance are more likely to use text messages to communicate about the future of their relationship.

H1b: Romantic partners who engage in a higher level of the relational maintenance strategy of positivity are more likely to use text messages to communicate positive statements about their relationship.

H1c: Romantic partners who engage in a higher level of the relational maintenance strategy of tasks are more likely to use text messages to communicate about household tasks.

H1d: Romantic partners who engage in a higher level of the relational maintenance strategy of networks are more likely to use text messages to communicate about family and friends.

H1e: Romantic partners who engage in a higher level of the relational maintenance strategy of openness are more likely to use text messages to disclose important information to their relational partner.

Commitment

One interesting area of research in relationships is the idea of commitment. According to Ramirez (2008), being personally committed to another person is a basic desire to want to remain in the relationship. Commitment is influenced by relationship satisfaction. Commitment is essentially a result of communication patterns between romantic couples, and it influences how these patterns will develop over time. Previous research has begun to look at how commitment is affected by maintenance behaviors. Personal commitment has been closely associated with the relational maintenance strategy of connection (Ramirez). According to Manghani (2009), text messages transcend space and time and are no longer just an exchange of words but a showing of the commitment two people have to their relationship.

Ramirez (2008) discussed the idea that commitment is linked to interaction patterns and strategies that are used to sustain relationships and inevitably how couples will deal with conflict. There are three factors to commitment: personal, moral, and structural. Personal commitment is the extent to which one partner wants to remain in the relationship and the degree

to which the relationship is central to that individual's identity. Moral commitment is how much the individual feels obligated to stay in the relationship. It depends on what the person's beliefs and values are within any given relationship. Structural commitment is the extent to which a person feels they have to stay in a relationship. In other words, what are the constraints or barriers to relationship termination? Overall when low levels of personal and moral commitment are evident, the individual tends to rely on structural commitment, and this can lead to the sense of entrapment within the relationship (Ramirez, 2008).

Commitment and relational maintenance behaviors go hand in hand. Canary and Stafford (1992) discovered positive associations between the five relational maintenance strategies (positivity, openness, networks, assurances, and sharing tasks) and increased commitment levels (Ramirez, 2008). Commitment is generally "viewed as internally driven and freely chosen, indicating individuals commit because they desire to do so" (Ramirez, p. 950). Ramirez (2008) found that both personal and moral commitments were strongly associated with the use of relational maintenance strategies. In particular, assurances and positivity about the future of the relationship and discussing the future created a more positive upbeat relationship in general, which gives the partners the desire to remain committed to the relationship. Given this that commitment does play a role in which relational maintenance strategies are used in romantic relationships, I proposed the following hypotheses.

H2: Romantic partners who have a higher level of commitment to their relational partner are more likely to have a higher frequency of text message use.

According to Adams and Jones (1997), commitment can be broken down into three dimensions. The three dimensions are commitment to a partner, commitment to the relationship, and the feeling of entrapment. Given this, I proposed the following hypotheses.

H2a: Romantic partners who have a higher level of commitment to their relationship are more likely to engage in the relational maintenance strategy of positivity through text message use.

H2b: Romantic partners who have a higher level of feeling entrapped in their relationship are more likely to engage in the relational maintenance strategy of tasks through text message use.

H2c: Romantic partners who have a higher level of commitment to their relational partner are more likely to engage in the relational maintenance strategy of openness through text message use.

Gender

Gender differences have also been discovered in how social networks and text messages are used to maintain relationships. Females generally tend to self-disclose more within relationships. Females are also more sociable, sensitive, and motivated to create and maintain relationships, and develop emotional bonds. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to use communication to maintain their social position (Igarashi, Takai, and Yoshida, 2005). Reid and Reid (2008) discovered that women are more likely to use instant messaging to maintain their relationships, and this may be because women use more relationship-oriented language and affiliative symbols. Women's texts also tend to be longer and more complex, expressing emotion more freely, whereas men's texts are brief and to the point. Women view cell phones as a means of extending responsibility and care for loved ones, whereas men view them more as a business tool (Faulkner and Culwin, 2005).

H3: Females have a higher frequency of text messages than males.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

One hundred and nine participants (43 male, 65 female, and 1 unidentified) from undergraduate communication classes at a large Midwestern university were recruited. The surveys were handed out during class periods, and it took the participants about 15-20 minutes to complete the surveys. Participants were either currently in a romantic relationship at the time or could recall a significant romantic relationship from their past. Ages ranged from 16-50 years, with a mean age of 20.68 ($SD = 5.37$).

Procedure and Instrumentation

Participants recruited for this study were given the general nature of the study and then asked to complete a short survey the researcher developed, along with two other surveys. The researchers' survey questions consisted of demographic information and ten questions relating to the frequency of text message use, relational strategies communicated through text messages, and different questions pertaining to how committed the participant was to their partner and relationship. The scale was a 1-7 Likert type scale, 1 being *not at all* and 7 being *all the time*. An example of some statements used is as follows: How often do you communicate about the future of your relationship through text messages with your relational partner? I feel I am personally invested in the relationship with my relational partner.

The Relational Maintenance Strategy Measure (RMSM) scale that measures the five dimensions of maintenance behavior was also used. This is a 29-item scale that uses five Likert type sub-scales, all of which correspond to one of the strategy categories (positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and social networks). Participants were asked on a 7-point scale the degree to which they agreed with each item, 1 being *strongly disagreed* and 7 being *strongly*

agreed. This scale has been modified to ask individuals about their own behaviors within a relationship instead of their partner's behaviors. Some sample statements are as follows: I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable. I encourage him/her to disclose thoughts and feelings to me.

The Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI) was used to determine relationship commitment. This scale is a 45-item Likert-type instrument composed of 15-item sub-scales and measures three dimensions of relationship commitment. The sub-scales correspond to Adams and Jones (1997) commitment dimensions. The three dimensions are commitment to a partner, commitment to the relationship, and feelings of entrapment. This is a Likert-type scale from 1-7; 1 being *strongly disagree* and 7 being *strongly agree*. The statements have been modified to pertain to romantic relationships instead of marriages. The original statement "I want to grow old with my spouse" has been modified to "I want to grow old with my significant other." Another example is "I am dedicated to making my marriage as fulfilling as it can be," which has been modified to say "I am dedicated to making my relationship as fulfilling as it can be."

Chapter 3: Results

To explore the association between the tendency of relational maintenance strategies and the frequency of text message use, a set of correlation analysis was conducted. As the results indicated, H1 was partially supported (see Table 1). Specifically, H1a was supported. A high tendency to use the assurance strategy is correlated with exchanging positive statements through text messages ($r = .19, p < .05$). H1b was also supported. The tendency of the relational maintenance strategy of positivity was marginally correlated with the use of text messages. H1c was also supported as well. The tendency of the relational maintenance strategy of tasks was correlated with the use of text messages ($r = .35, p < .05$). H1d was not supported. The tendency of the relational maintenance strategy of networks was not correlated to the use of text messages. H1e was supported. The tendency of the relational maintenance strategy of openness was marginally correlated with the use of text messages ($r = .16, p < .01$).

To explore the association between relational maintenance strategies and commitment levels, again a set of correlation analysis was conducted. First, a factor analysis was conducted to determine the dimensions of commitment. Three factors were found. The results corresponded with the results of Adams and Jones (1999). The three dimensions are commitment to a partner, commitment to the relationship, and the feeling of entrapment. However, due to the modification to the current study, the items under each dimension are somehow different, as shown in Table 2. Second the results of the correlation analysis showed that H2 was supported (see Table 3). Specifically, H2a was supported. The level of commitment to a partner was correlated with the frequency of communicating about positive statements via text messages ($r = .36, p < .01$). H2b was also supported. The level of commitment to one's relationship was correlated with the frequency of communicating about household tasks through text messages ($r = .27, p < .01$). H2c

was supported as well. The feeling of entrapment in a relationship was correlated with the frequency of communicating about important topics within the relationship through text messages ($r = .24, p < .05$).

To examine gender differences in the use of text messages, a set of t-tests were conducted. H3 was partially supported. There was a marginally significant difference between genders ($t = 1.81, p = .07$). The results indicated that males ($M = 4.21, SD = 1.82$) are more likely to communicate about important issues via text messages than females ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.85$). There are no other gender differences in the frequency of text message use in any other categories.

Chapter 4: Discussion

As technology changes, researchers are interested in whether texting and CMC will replace face-to-face communication. Regardless of the answer, texting does provide a channel for romantic couples to communicate. It is important to note certain relational maintenance strategies are in fact being carried out through text messages. Different dimensions of commitment are also being shown to have an effect on what relational maintenance strategies are used through text messages.

Relational maintenance strategies and commitment do play a role in how romantic partners will choose to use text messages in their relationship. It is clear that relational maintenance strategies are imperative to relationship survival. Pettigrew (2009) discussed the use of cell phones to create a feeling of perpetual contact within relationships. As technology continues to grow and change, so do relationships. Text messages are being used to reinforce relationships and transmit personal information between romantic partners. This notion of being able to communicate whenever and wherever individuals feel the need to is pushing the necessity for research in this area specifically. In the past, face-to-face communication was the main mode of communication. Now, text messaging is becoming the main mode of communication between friends, families, and romantic partners. This study has found that individuals use text messages to fulfill their relational maintenance goals.

Relational Maintenance Strategies

Couples who use higher levels of relational maintenance strategies tend to use text messages to communicate about certain topics. The relational maintenance strategy of assurances was linked with the relational maintenance strategy of positivity. In other words, when romantic couples have a higher level of assurances in their relationship, they use more positive statements

such as “I love you” or “You looked really nice today” when communicating through text messages. This means couples try to assure one another about their relationship through using the relational maintenance strategy of positivity. When romantic couples use the relational maintenance strategy of tasks, they also use text messages to communicate about these tasks. Within every romantic relationship there are tasks such as household chores that need to be discussed. The results indicate that romantic partners are in fact using text messages to communicate about these everyday tasks.

The relational maintenance strategy of openness was, however, marginally correlated to the relational maintenance strategy of networks. This would suggest that being open and disclosing important information about each other’s networks (family and friends) was somewhat important to maintaining the relationship. The relational maintenance strategy of positivity was marginally correlated to assurances. Romantic couples seem to use the relational maintenance strategy of assurances to show positivity in their relationship as well. Statements such as “I look forward to the future with you” would be an example of an assuring statement that is also positive to the relationship.

Romantic partners in this study did not seem to be using text messages to communicate about their personal networks. One explanation for this could be the length of the relationship. Perhaps these couples had not been together long enough to begin communicating about each other’s family and friends. Or possibly networks were not a relational maintenance strategy that was of importance at the current time. Networks were seen as more important to being open in a relationship than just simply communicating about networks alone. Romantic partners may feel when they communicate about their family and friends they are being open with their partner.

Overall these findings support previous research done on relational maintenance strategies. The more positive relational maintenance strategies that are used, the easier it is to maintain a relationship. However, there has been little research connecting relational maintenance strategies to text message use. In that sense this study has discovered that romantic couples are using new technologies to maintain their romantic relationships overall. Holtgraves (2010) found that individuals are using text messages even in the presence of others. This demonstrates that couples can use text messages no matter where they are, even if they are in the same room. Consequently, relationships are being maintained through this constant use of text messages. Individuals are feeling more connected to one another than ever before.

Commitment

Three dimensions of commitment were found: commitment to one's partner, commitment to the relationship, and the feeling of entrapment. Although the current study did not find significant findings in most areas of commitment, it did find a significant result in the dimension of entrapment. Romantic partners are using the relational maintenance strategy of openness in text messages when they have a feeling of entrapment in their relationship.

In line with Ramirez's (2008), this study discovered that commitment to one's partner indicated the relational maintenance strategy of positivity was used more often. Ramirez found that assurances and positivity were significant factors in predicting one's personal commitment. Interestingly though, this study found there was a strong correlation between the feeling of entrapment in the relationship and the use of the relational maintenance strategy of openness through text message use. Ramirez's previous study found a negative correlation between openness and moral commitment; however, this study focused on face-to-face communication and not text message use. Moral commitment is similar to entrapment, in the sense that one feels

obligated to continue the relationship. However, this study found the opposite. For some reason individuals seem to be using openness more often when communicating through text messages. Perhaps this suggests partners would rather communicate about troubles and issues through text messages than face to face. This may also make the couples feel more at ease in their relationship because they understand how the other person feels. Text messages create a barrier between the relational partners, creating a more open environment. Romantic partners in other words, may feel more comfortable discussing problems or issues within the relationship through a text message rather than face-to-face. The results also indicated the more committed the individual was to the relationship the more likely they were to use the relational maintenance strategy of tasks. In other words, romantic couples that feel committed to their relationship use text messages to communicate about everyday tasks with their significant other.

Gender

Although the current study was hypothesizing to find a difference in the use of text messages between males and females, it did not produce significant results. However, it was discovered that males are in fact using text messages to communicate the relational maintenance strategy of openness more often than females. This is different than what previous studies have found.

Interestingly, the only gender difference found in the current study was that males seem to use the relational maintenance strategy of openness more often than females when communicating through text messages. Previous studies have found females self-disclose more in relationships, and men are more oriented towards showing their social status (Igarashi, Takai, and Yoshida, 2005). The finding in this study contradicts what previous studies have found about males and females. In fact, males seem to be self-disclosing more important information through

text messages than females. One explanation for this finding may be that males are generally less open emotionally face to face, so perhaps the barrier of using a cell phone to communicate allows males to open up more. The use of text messages may be creating enough of a barrier that males are now feeling more comfortable sharing important information with their significant other when they may not have otherwise.

Limitations and Future Research

Similar to other studies, there are certain limitations to the current study. A more precise scale on how to ask participants about not only their frequency of text message use but the quality of text messages as well would be beneficial. A scale needs to be developed to ask specifically what romantic partners are communicating about to discover what relational maintenance strategies are being used and how they are being used through text messages as well.

The current study focused on young college students as the primary population. Future research can look at an older generation to discover if there is a significant difference in the use of relational maintenance strategies and text message use. It may be interesting to discover the difference between generations that were not raised in such a technology-driven society.

Also, using a population of strictly married couples may produce significantly different results. The levels of commitment might be stronger using married couples versus just dating couples.

This study has furthered the research in the area of communication by discovering that text messages are being used more often than ever before. Our society is drastically changing because of the development of technology, and text-messaging is now being used on a daily basis. This suggests romantic couples are going to be using text messages to maintain their relationships in some way. This study has found a few significant areas that could be further

examined. Specifically, why are males using the relational maintenance strategy of openness more often than females now? Future studies need to examine how the dynamic of gender is changing and how text message use is helping to change this. There needs to be an understanding of why individuals seem to prefer the use of text messaging over any other form of communication.

Conclusions

Everyone has a different expectation of what they feel a relationship should be. It is hard for partners to balance dialectical tensions and relational maintenance strategies. Texting has recently become another dimension to consider within these interpersonal romantic relationships. The idea of how texting affects relational maintenance strategies and therefore determines the overall relational satisfaction is an area that should be examined. Previous research has clearly determined that text messaging, e-mail, and Internet use has all had an effect on overall relationship satisfaction and how relational maintenance strategies are played out. In my study I hope to further this research by examining how relational maintenance strategies and levels of commitment are carried out through the use of text messaging.

Text messages have essentially changed the status quo on how romantic partners go about communicating important relationship topics. Instead of the typical face-to-face communication to discuss emotions and potential problems, romantic partners are now using text messages to communicate these same emotions and problems. Text messages are private and remove the nonverbal cues that many times are important in determining how to react. Romantic partners are using text messages to maintain their relationships, so there is the idea that relational maintenance strategies must be carried out through text messages.

Cell phones have become so important in our society that they now demonstrate status, security, and identity. Butt and Philips (2008) discussed how cell phones have become a part of people's personalities, which, in turn, affects how people decide to use them. Overall, individuals who prefer to talk on their phones report less anxiety and loneliness than those who do not. Butt and Phillips also found that individuals who are extraverted, neurotic, and disagreeable tend to use text messages more often. People who are lonely and anxious prefer text messages because they express their true selves through the ability to control what they want to say.

Overall, through examining previous research, I have discovered a link between levels of commitment and use of relational maintenance strategies. This is important to examine because the use of text messaging in romantic relationships is ever increasing since technology is now so engrained in our society. Almost everyone has a cell phone and most individuals are using them to remain in contact with a romantic partner. Therefore, some relational maintenance strategies are being carried out through text messages, and how committed partners are to their partner and their relationship will affect how they decide to use text messages, either to an advantage or disadvantage to the relationship.

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Table 1

Correlation between RMS and the Frequency of Text Message Use

	Assurance	Positivity	Tasks	Network	Openness
Communication about future of Relationship	-.02	.18	.09	-.03	.14
Using positive statements such as “I love you”	.19*	.15	-.02	.00	.15
Communication about daily chores	.05	.10	.35**	-.04	.01
Communication about friends and family	.15	.14	.14	.13	.16
Communication about important issues and topics	-.12	-.06	.03	-.05	.04

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2
Factor Loadings for Commitment Items

	Commitment to Partner	Feeling of Entrapment	Commitment to Relationship
26. If there are too many problems in a relationship, it's okay to break up.	.78	-.18	-.25
18. I don't feel obligated to remain in a relationship with my significant other.	.74	-.18	-.19
19. I've spent so much money on my relationship with my significant other that I could never break up with him or her.	.67	-.06	-.02
45. My future plans do not include my significant other.	.66	-.28	-.14
32. When my significant other and I promised to be together we knew that it meant forever.	.65	.08	-.10
25. I like knowing that my significant other and I form an inseparable unit.	.64	-.24	-.18
23. A relationship should be protected at all costs.	.63	-.02	.11
8. I am completely devoted to my significant other.	.61	-.30	-.13
37. I am not confident that my relationship will last forever.	.60	-.19	-.11
41. I could never leave my significant other; I have too much invested in him or her.	.57	.35	.06
36. I don't believe that relationships should last forever.	.56	-.11	-.08
14. There is nothing I wouldn't sacrifice for my significant other.	.53	-.18	-.03
9. Relationships are supposed to last forever.	.52	.39	-.24
40. It would be shameful if my significant other and I broke up or separated.	.51	.41	.07
4. No matter what, my significant other knows that I'll always be there for him or her.	.50	-.12	.09
42. I believe that a relationship is for life regardless of what happens.	.50	.38	.22
22. I believe in relationships working.	.50	-.19	-.17
3. It is morally wrong to break up with your significant other.	.50	.29	.30
21. I could never leave my significant other because it would go against everything I believe in.	.48	.15	.25
13. I truly believe that significant others should remain devoted to one another.	.48	-.28	-.01
30. I feel free to break up with my significant other if I so desire.	.46	-.05	.53
7. It would be humiliating if my significant other and I broke up.	.45	.16	-.29
1. I am dedicated to make my relationship as fulfilling as it can be.	.45	-.23	-.34
15. My family would strongly disapprove if I broke up with	.43	.28	-.38

my significant other.			
38. My significant other and I remain together because we value our relationship.	.42	-.15	.01
27. Under no circumstances should a relationship bond be broken.	.41	.10	.24
39. I often think about what it would be like to be romantically involved with someone other than my significant other.	.32	-.50	.04
29. I am not very devoted to my significant other.	.32	-.66	.18
28. I frequently daydream about what it would be like to be dating someone other than my significant other.	.30	-.60	.01
31. I can imagine several situations in which a relationship bond should be broken.	.24	.00	.56
5. I have to stay in a relationship with my significant other or my family will think badly of me.	.07	.66	-.28
10. Even if I wanted to, it would be impossible for me to leave my significant other.	.38	.48	.16
6. I was raised to believe that once on is in a relationship, one does not break up, no matter how unsatisfying that relationship may be.	.20	.46	-.14
2. A break up would ruin my reputation.	.28	.46	-.28
17. I've spent so much money on my relationship with my significant other that I could never break up with him or her.	.35	.44	.09
44. It would be particularly hard on my family and friends if my significant other and I broke up.	.17	.40	-.06
16. I don't feel obligated to remain in a relationship with my significant other.	.15	-.11	.55
35. I don't think it's morally wrong to break up with your significant other.	.37	.18	.37
43. I'm afraid that if I were to leave my significant other, God would punish me.	.10	.36	.31
34. I don't think I could handle the shame of breaking up.	.30	.33	.14
20. My friends would disapprove if I ended my relationship.	.23	.29	-.14
33. I often think that my significant other and I have too many irreconcilable differences.	.16	-.31	.11
11. When things go wrong in my relationship, I consider breaking up.	.27	-.24	.16
12. I would not be embarrassed to break up.	.31	.05	.03
24. If there are too many problems in a relationship, it's okay to break up.	.31	.11	.28

Note. Factor loadings > .40 are in boldface.

Table 3

Correlation between Commitment and the Frequency of Text Message Use

	Commitment to Partner	Commitment to Relationship	Feeling of Entrapment
Communication about future of Relationship	.15	.07	.05
Using positive statements such as “I love you”	.36**	.16	.01
Communication about daily chores	.14	.27**	.10
Communication about friends and family	.09	-.02	-.03
Communication about important issues and topics	.03	.04	.24*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).