

The role of individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance on married couples' commitment

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Abstract

The interaction of maintenance processes between partners constitutes a complex context, which can be categorized into individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance processes. Individual-level maintenance processes refer to both partners' relationship maintenance enactment and perception of partners' relationship maintenance. Interactive-level relationship maintenance processes include similarity, accuracy, and projection. This study investigated the actor and partner effects of individual and interactive relationship maintenance processes on commitment as moderated by relationship satisfaction. We recruited 193 mixed-gender married couples from the midwestern US and adopted the two-intercept actor-partner interdependence model to analyze the data. The results demonstrated a positive association between husbands' relationship maintenance enactment and their commitment, a negative association between similarity of relationship maintenance enactment and wives' commitment, a positive association between husbands'

Statement of Relevance: This paper examines the association between relationship maintenance and commitment in a sample of mixed-gender married couples. We propose a novel approach to conceptualizing the various levels at which partners interact with each other to maintain their relationships.

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accuracy and wives' commitment, and a negative association between husbands' projection and their commitment. Satisfaction was strongly associated with participants' commitment and moderated the association between relationship maintenance enactment and commitment for both partners, the association between husbands' maintenance enactment and wives' commitment, and the association between husbands' partner perception and their commitment. Satisfaction also moderated the association between wives' accuracy and husbands' commitment and the association between husbands' projection and both partners' commitment.

KEYWORDS

accuracy, APIM, commitment, projection, relationship maintenance, satisfaction, similarity

1 | INTRODUCTION

For married couples, higher commitment levels indicate a longer and more stable connection (Stanley et al., 2010), which benefits couples' physical and psychological health through social support and health-related behaviors (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). Hence, understanding the factors contributing to commitment is essential to promoting couple well-being. Relationship maintenance is one such factor that is well-acknowledged by researchers for its importance in keeping people committed to their relationships (Ogolsky et al., 2017).

The interactions between the two partners constitute the complex context of relationship maintenance. For simplicity, we categorize relationship maintenance into individual and interactive level of processes. Specifically, each partner enacts relationship maintenance behaviors and perceives them from their partner, resulting in four individual-level relationship maintenance processes (see Figure 1). In addition, every pair of individual-level processes can be combined to describe the characteristics of relationship maintenance interaction. We adopted Weigel's (2008) conceptualization of dyadic relationship behaviors to categorize these interactive relationship maintenance processes into similarity, accuracy, and projection. Such interactive processes might contain additional information about how couples maintain relationships. Similarity is characterized by comparing levels of relationship maintenance behaviors (or perception) across partners. Accuracy demonstrates the degree to which one partner's perception about the other partner's behaviors is precise. Projection illustrates one's perceived relationship maintenance similarity to the partner, which compares one's relationship maintenance effort with their perception of the partner's maintenance (see Figure 1).

Individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance are associated with many positive relationship outcomes, such as relationship commitment, satisfaction, stability, and quality (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Also, many studies show that people interpret their own and partners' behaviors based on preexisting beliefs (e.g., satisfaction) about the relationships. Relationship satisfaction influences how people make attributions in communication

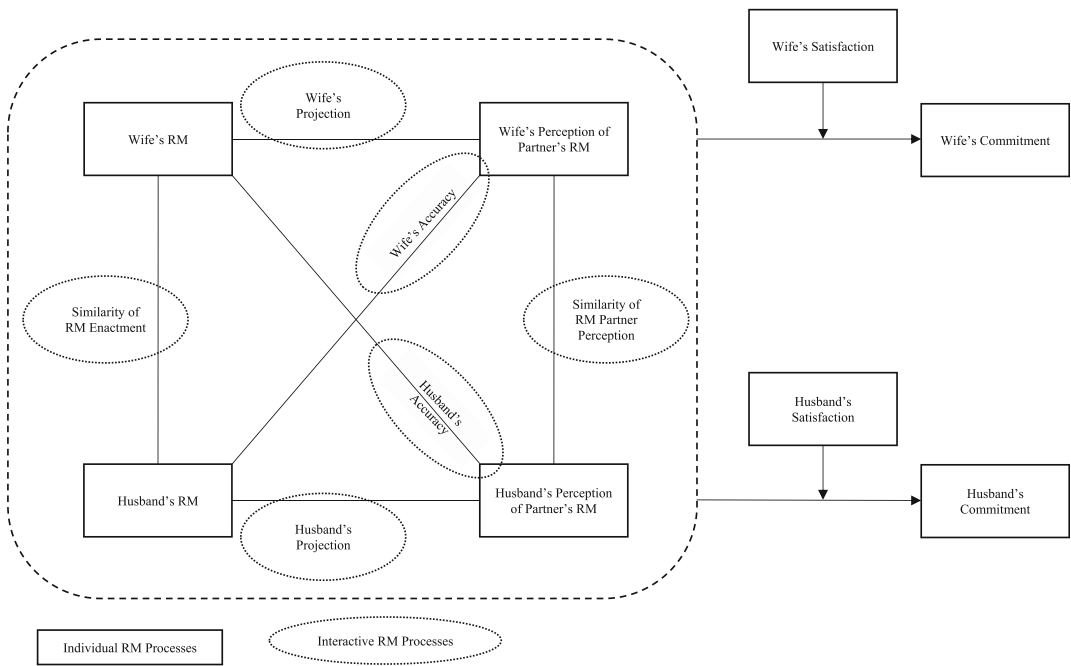


FIGURE 1 Individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance model.

(Sillars et al., 2000), view their partners' behaviors (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Lemay, 2014; Venaglia & Lemay, 2019), and is a strong predictor of commitment level (Le & Agnew, 2003). Theoretically, relationship satisfaction may change the association between individual-level relationship maintenance and commitment levels. Individuals with higher satisfaction levels may interpret maintenance in ways that improve commitment. Similarly, interactive-level relationship maintenance (e.g., similarity, accuracy, and perceived equity) might link to commitment levels differently depending on levels of satisfaction. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate how relationship satisfaction moderates the association between individual and interactive relationship maintenance and commitment.

2 | COUPLES' INDIVIDUAL- AND INTERACTIVE-LEVEL RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

All ongoing relationships require maintenance to keep partners bonded (Dindia, 2003; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Stafford and Canary's (1991) Relationship Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM) is one of the most frequently used measures by relationship researchers. They identified five types of relationship maintenance including positivity, openness, assurances, use of social networks, and sharing tasks. According to Stafford and Canary (1991; Canary & Stafford, 1992), *positivity* occurs when one's interaction with the partner is cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical. *Openness* includes the direct discussion and disclosure of needs in the relationship. *Assurances* refer to one's acknowledgment that the relationship will continue. *Use of social networks* includes interacting with common affiliations and family members. *Sharing tasks* involves the extent to which partners take equitable household responsibility.

3 | INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE PROCESSES

A large body of literature has supported that relationship maintenance enactment and perception of a partner's maintenance are positively associated with one's *own* commitment level (actor effects) and positively associated with the *partner's* commitment level (partner effects; e.g., Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Specifically, all five self-reported maintenance behaviors were positively associated with an individual's commitment level to the current relationship (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Past empirical studies also demonstrated a positive actor effect of relationship maintenance perception on relationship characteristics (e.g., commitment, satisfaction; Dainton, 2017; Ogolsky, 2009; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999, 2008). Relationship maintenance enactment and partner perception should also have positive *partner effects* on commitment. Use of positivity and sharing tasks predicted higher partner commitment for both partners in mixed-gender married couples (Ballard-Reisch et al., 1999). Relationship maintenance behaviors were also positively correlated with partners' relationship satisfaction (Dainton, 2017; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). Perceptions of partners' relationship maintenance were found to be positively correlated with partners' commitment on the same day among same-gender couples (Ogolsky, 2009). Therefore, we expect that individual-level relationship maintenance processes (e.g., each partner's enactment and perception of partner) will have positive actor and partner effects on commitment (H1).

4 | INTERACTIVE-LEVEL RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE PROCESSES

4.1 | Similarity of behaviors or partner perceptions and commitment

Similarity refers to the degree of correspondence between each partner's relationship maintenance enactment or each partner's perceptions. Many published studies have supported the positive influence of similarity in multiple domains (e.g., personal characteristics, attitudes, values, and social skills). Couples who shared a greater extent of similarity (e.g., values, traits, and attitudes) were generally more satisfied with their marriage, experienced less negative affect, and were more committed (Amodio & Showers, 2005; Gaunt, 2006). Past research has found that partners reported greater similarity than dissimilarity in various types of relationship behaviors (e.g., networks, sharing tasks, joint activities, mediated communication, avoidance, and antisocial behaviors; Dainton & Stafford, 1993). In addition, relationship maintenance behaviors consistently demonstrated moderate correlations between partners (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008), indicating that similarity in maintenance behaviors might facilitate relationship development. Thus, similarity of relationship maintenance enactment and perception across partners should associate with both partners' commitment positively (H2).

4.2 | Accuracy of perceptions of partners and commitment

Accuracy of relationship maintenance interaction describes how precise individuals' perceptions of their partners are compared with partners' own reports of relationship maintenance enactment. In general, people prefer self-verifying evaluations to maintain coherent self-views (Swann et al., 1994). Married individuals prefer self-verifying responses from their spouses

regardless of whether their beliefs are positive or negative. For example, accuracy in perception of the spouse's attributes (e.g., self-worth, intellectual capability, physical attractiveness, athletic ability, and social skills) was positively correlated with self-reported intimacy (Swann et al., 1994). Wives' accuracy of their partners predicted less divorce probability two years later (Neff & Karney, 2005). Neff and Karney (2005) argued that people might give inaccurate comments related to global evaluation (e.g., "my partner is great") but remain accurate in assessing the partner's specific attributes (e.g., punctuality). Indeed, being accurate about partners' behaviors allows people to adjust expectations and responses to their partners, allowing better relationship functioning. Therefore, accuracy of perceiving partners' relationship maintenance behaviors should associate with marital commitment positively (H3).

4.3 | Projection and commitment

Projection of relationship maintenance refers to the degree to which people assume their partners' maintenance effort is similar to their own enactment. A considerable amount of evidence has supported evidence of projection in relationships. Perceived similarity predicted romantic liking in a speed-dating context (Tidwell et al., 2013). People in relationships also project their feelings (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001) and values (Murray et al., 2002) to their partners. Moreover, wives and husbands showed strong positive associations between their self-reported positive relationship behaviors and their perception of partners' use of same behaviors (Weigel, 2008). Spouses with higher commitment levels also showed a more positive association between their own caregiving behaviors and perception of partners' behaviors (Lemay et al., 2007), indicating that higher projection of responsiveness is linked to higher commitment. Theoretically, projection can contribute to one's sense of security, reciprocity, and feeling of being understood, leading to more stable and committed relationships. Thus, projection of relationship maintenance behaviors should be positively associated with commitment (H4).

5 | THE MODERATING ROLE OF RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

In relationships, people interpret their own and partners' behaviors based on their preexisting beliefs (e.g., satisfaction) about the relationships. The *satisfaction-benevolence model* argues that "being satisfied with a relationship leads to benevolent perceptions of a partner" (Lemay et al., 2007, p. 836). Hence, people's interpretations of individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance processes can be highly influenced by their relationship satisfaction.

5.1 | Individual-level relationship maintenance processes and commitment

Relationship satisfaction lends people a positive lens to view partners' behaviors and has been shown to predict positive bias in perceiving partners' supportiveness (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Thus, satisfaction might facilitate people's positive interpretation of both their own and their partners' maintenance behaviors. Presumably, people with higher relationship satisfaction may interpret maintenance behaviors more positively than those with lower satisfaction levels. Satisfaction should moderate the actor and partner effects of individual-level relationship

maintenance processes on commitment levels and the association should be stronger for people with higher satisfaction levels (H5).

5.2 | Interactive-level relationship maintenance processes and commitment

5.2.1 | Similarity and commitment

Relationship satisfaction might enable people to interpret dissimilarities positively. Research has found that some couples with low similarity stayed highly committed after one year of dating and reported high levels of liking towards each other (Amodio & Showers, 2005). It is likely that high levels of liking allow these dissimilar partners to view dissimilarities and partners' flaws positively. In other words, being similar can be more important for people with lower satisfaction. Thus, satisfaction should moderate the positive association between similarity and commitment such that the association is stronger for those with lower (vs. higher) satisfaction (H6).

5.2.2 | Accuracy and commitment

Neff and Karney's (2005) global adoration and specific accuracy model proposed that accuracy was beneficial when people held global adoration towards their partners. People with high levels of satisfaction may benefit from accurate perceptions of partners' relationship maintenance behaviors by reporting higher levels of commitment. In contrast, accuracy may be less positively or even negatively associated with commitment under conditions of low satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesize that the positive association between accuracy and commitment should be stronger for people with higher satisfaction, and the association should be weaker or even negative for people with lower (vs. higher) satisfaction (H7).

5.2.3 | Projection and commitment

Due to limited research on projection of relationship maintenance, little is known about whether satisfaction will moderate the association between projection of relationship maintenance and commitment. Based on the satisfaction-benevolence model (Collins & Feeney, 2000), people tend to interpret relationships through a positive lens if they are satisfied with the current relationship. Thus, people with high satisfaction levels might interpret projection more positively, indicating that positive association between projection and commitment might be stronger when satisfaction levels are high. Therefore, we hypothesize that the positive association between projection and commitment will be stronger among those with higher (vs. lower) satisfaction levels (H8).

6 | METHOD

6.1 | Participants

The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university in which data collection took place. Data collection took place in 2011 and no previous publications have

used these data. Undergraduate students from a Midwestern university in the US assisted in participant recruitment in return for course credit. Eligibility criteria required that couples be married. Same-gender marriage was not federally recognized at the time of data collection, so all couples were mixed-gender. Students were instructed to reach out to people they knew (e.g., parents, relatives, friends) and asked if they were interested in completing a “survey about their marriage.” Students collected email addresses from 193 couples who were interested in participation. Each partner was emailed a separate link to a secure online survey to facilitate them completing the survey independently. One couple dropped out so 192 couples (384 individuals and 50% female) completed the study. Participant age averaged 39.27 years old ($SD = 12.26$). On average, participants got married at 25.23 years old ($SD = 6.42$) and had been married for 14.04 years ($SD = 10.54$) with marital length ranging from 1 year to 40 years. Among 373 participants who reported race/ethnicity information, 90.9% of the participants identified as White/Caucasian, followed by Asian/Asian American (3.8%), Black/African American (3.2%), Native American (1.3%), and other (0.8%). The couples' median household annual income was more than \$100,000. More than half of the participants who reported education information (64.3%) attended college or earned a higher degree.

6.2 | Measures

6.2.1 | Relationship maintenance enactment and partner perception

Canary and Stafford's (1992) relationship maintenance strategy measure (RMSM) assessed relationship maintenance enactment and partner perception. Participants reported their own relationship maintenance behaviors over the past two weeks, which included a total of 28 items on positivity (10 items), openness (6 items), assurances (4 items), use of social networks (4 items), and sharing tasks (4 items), such as “I attempt to make our interactions very enjoyable,” “I try to build up his/her self-esteem, including giving him/her compliments, etc.,” “I act cheerful and positive when with him/her.” Participants responded to each statement from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Participants also reported their perception of the partner's relationship maintenance behaviors over the past two weeks. The 28 items were slightly reworded to indicate perceptions of partner relationship maintenance: “My partner attempts to make our interactions enjoyable,” “my partner tries to build up my self-esteem, including giving me compliments, etc.,” “my partner acts cheerful and positive with me.” We averaged the mean scores of each subscale, and higher final scores indicated higher relationship maintenance enactment or partner perception. RMSM showed good internal reliability for both relationship maintenance behaviors (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) and perceptions of partners (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

6.2.2 | Similarity

We adopted Gaunt's (2006) method of computing the score-based similarity to retain differences in each subscale. We computed each couple's similarity of relationship maintenance enactment by averaging absolute values of differences between partners' ratings of the five subscales of relationship maintenance behaviors. Then we reverse coded the average absolute difference score by multiplying by -1 so that higher values indicated higher similarity. Also, similarity of partners' perceptions of relationship maintenance was the negative average absolute value

of differences between partners' five subscales of partner perceptions. Higher similarity values demonstrate smaller differences in the perception of partners' relationship maintenance behaviors. A zero score on similarity equates to rating all five maintenance behaviors (or partner perceptions) the same as the partner, on average.

6.2.3 | Accuracy

Individuals' accuracy in perceiving partners' relationship maintenance behaviors was computed similarly to the index of similarity. We first computed the absolute values of the differences between partner perceptions and subtracted the partner's self-reported relationship maintenance behaviors. We averaged the absolute values from the five RMSM subscales, and reverse coded values. Negative values in accuracy indicate low accuracy (e.g., overestimating or underestimating) in perceptions of partners' behaviors. A zero score of accuracy means that one is accurate in perceiving their partners' five subscales of relationship maintenance behaviors, on average.

6.2.4 | Projection

Individuals' projection was the negative averaged absolute value of the difference between partner perceptions and self-reported enactment across five subscales of relationship maintenance behaviors. Negative values of projection mean a greater discrepancy between maintenance enactment and perception of partners. Higher values of projection (close to zero) indicate higher projection of relationship maintenance on partners.

6.2.5 | Commitment

Adams and Jones' (1997) Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI) measured three dimensions of commitment: commitment to partner, commitment to marriage, and feelings of entrapment. Because the current study focused on personal commitment, 5 items were included to assess *commitment to partner* (e.g., "I want to grow old with my partner," "When I imagine what my life will be like in the future, I always see my partner standing next to me."). Participants reported the degree of agreement on a 7-point scale where 0 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*. The final commitment score was averaged across items, and higher scores indicated higher levels of commitment. The internal reliability of the measure was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

6.2.6 | Relationship satisfaction

Norton's (1983) Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) was adopted to assess relationship satisfaction. QMI contained 6 items such as "we have a good relationship," "my relationship with my partner is stable," and "my relationship with my partner makes me happy." Participants reported the level related to each statement on a 7-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*).

Higher averaged values described higher relationship satisfaction. The measure showed excellent internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$).

6.2.7 | Covariates

Gender, age, race/ethnicity, income level, education level, marital length, and age when married were collected in the study. Participants reported age, marital length, and age when married in years. Gender was dummy coded into husband and wife to compute distinguishable variables for the two-intercept actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) analysis. Race/ethnicity (e.g., Other, Hawaii/pacific islander, Black/African American, Asian/Asian American, Native American, and White/Caucasian) was dichotomized into one dummy code (e.g., 1 = *White*, 0 = *Non-White*) due to small sample size in minority groups. Participants reported their household income level from 1 to 6, where 1 = *Less than 10 K*, 2 = *10 - 24 K*, 3 = *25 - 49 K*, 4 = *50 - 74 K*, 5 = *75 - 99 K*, 6 = *100 K or more*, and couple's household income was reported as the average across the two partners. Participants also reported their educational level from 1 to 6, where 1 = *did not complete high school*, 2 = *high school*, 3 = *some college*, 4 = *college degree*, 5 = *some post-grad work*, 6 = *graduate degree*.

6.3 | Analysis

We adopted two-intercept APIM to examine the hypotheses using HLM7.03 software. The final model contained covariates, each of the individual-level relationship maintenance processes (e.g., relationship maintenance enactment and partner perception of each partner), interactive-level relationship maintenance processes (e.g., similarity, accuracy, and projection), relationships satisfaction, and the interaction terms of individual- and interactive-level processes by satisfaction. A likelihood ratio test was used for model selection with -2 log-likelihood as the test statistic.

7 | RESULTS

7.1 | Preliminary analysis

The Little's MCAR test showed that data were missing completely at random ($\chi^2(37) = 6.77$, $p = 1.00$) for all variables (covariates included). Tables 1 and 2 contained the descriptive statistics and correlations of variables, including the intraclass correlation (ICC) of individual-level variables. The ICC indicated that 16% of the variance in commitment was between couples.

7.2 | Tests of hypotheses

Household income was positively associated with commitment levels for both wives ($\gamma = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(177) = 2.16$, $p = .03$) and husbands ($\gamma = 0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(177) = 2.14$, $p = .03$). Marital length was negatively associated with wives' commitment ($\gamma = -0.02$, $SE = 0.006$, t

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for study variables.

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Sk</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>Kt</i> (<i>SE</i>)
1. RM Enactment	384	4.74 (0.84)	−1.29 (0.13)	2.48 (0.25)
Wives	192	4.84 (0.82)*	−1.29 (0.18)	2.57 (0.35)
Husbands	192	4.65 (0.85)*	−1.32 (0.18)	2.52 (0.35)
2. RM Perception	381	4.71 (1.01)	−1.21 (0.13)	1.88 (0.25)
Wives	192	4.68 (1.06)	−1.29 (0.18)	1.95 (0.35)
Husbands	189	4.74 (0.95)	−1.09 (0.18)	1.69 (0.35)
3. Similarity of Enactment	384	−0.99 (0.65)	−1.51 (0.13)	2.83 (0.25)
Wives	192	−0.99 (0.65)	−1.52 (0.18)	2.88 (0.35)
Husbands	192	−0.99 (0.65)	−1.52 (0.18)	2.88 (0.35)
4. Similarity of Perception	378	−1.00 (0.67)	−1.17 (0.13)	1.87 (0.25)
Wives	189	−1.00 (0.67)	−1.18 (0.18)	1.91 (0.35)
Husbands	189	−1.00 (0.67)	−1.18 (0.18)	1.90 (0.35)
5. Accuracy	381	−0.97 (0.68)	−1.51 (0.13)	2.82 (0.25)
Wives	192	−0.99 (0.70)	−1.49 (0.18)	2.76 (0.35)
Husbands	189	−0.95 (0.65)	−1.53 (0.18)	2.93 (0.35)
6. Projection	381	−0.79 (0.57)	−2.31 (0.13)	9.27 (0.25)
Wives	192	−0.82 (0.63)	−2.31 (0.18)	8.84 (0.35)
Husbands	189	−0.76 (0.51)	−2.15 (0.18)	8.58 (0.35)
7. Commitment	379	5.39 (1.04)	−2.34 (0.13)	6.02 (0.25)
Wives	191	5.41 (1.05)	−2.30 (0.17)	5.58 (0.35)
Husbands	188	5.36 (1.03)	−2.41 (0.18)	6.70 (0.35)
8. Satisfaction	380	5.21 (1.17)	−1.92 (0.13)	3.72 (0.25)
Wives	191	5.20 (1.29)	−1.92 (0.18)	3.26 (0.35)
Husbands	189	5.22 (1.05)	−1.83 (0.18)	4.04 (0.35)

Note: * $p < .05$ for paired sample *t*-test of gender differences in variables.

(177) = −2.58, $p = 0.01$). The final model demonstrated an improvement in fit over the empty model ($\chi^2(2) = 418.39$, $p < .001$; see Table 3).

7.2.1 | Individual-level processes and commitment

H1 was partially supported because husbands' relationship maintenance enactment was positively correlated with their own commitment ($\gamma = 0.34$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = 4.01$, $p < .001$), but not with partners' commitment ($\gamma = 0.10$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 1.34$, $p = .18$). Wives' relationship maintenance enactment was not associated with their own commitment ($\gamma = 0.03$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = 0.49$, $p = .63$), nor with their partners' commitment ($\gamma = 0.03$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.34$, $p = .73$). Wives' perception of partners' relationship maintenance was not correlated with their own commitment ($\gamma = 0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.32$, $p = .75$), nor with their partners' commitment ($\gamma = -0.07$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = -0.94$, $p = .35$). Husbands' perception of partners'

TABLE 2 Bivariate correlations and ICC for study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	ICC
1. RM Enactment	0.26***	0.60***	0.35***	0.25***	0.15*	0.37***	0.55***	0.50***	0.25
2. RM Perception	0.72***	0.45***	0.09	0.53***	0.42***	0.56***	0.61***	0.72***	0.45
3. Similarity. of Enactment	0.53***	0.42***	—	0.42***	0.57***	0.21**	0.17*	0.17*	—
4. Similarity. of Perception	0.43***	0.50***	0.42***	—	0.68***	0.35***	0.32***	0.40***	—
5. Accuracy	0.44***	0.55***	0.71***	0.57***	0.34***	0.29***	0.24***	0.33***	0.32
6. Projection	0.52***	0.43***	0.40***	0.35***	0.28***	0.05	0.21**	0.40**	0.04
7. Commitment	0.60***	0.57***	0.36***	0.39***	0.38***	0.24***	0.15*	0.84***	0.16
8. Satisfaction	0.54***	0.65***	0.31***	0.38***	0.34***	0.38***	0.77***	0.51***	0.51

Note: The lower diagonal elements were the correlation coefficients for husbands. The upper diagonal elements were the correlation coefficients for wives. Diagonal elements were correlation coefficients between partners.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

relationship maintenance was not correlated with their own commitment ($\gamma = 0.003$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.03$, $p = .97$), nor with their partners' commitment ($\gamma = -0.07$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = -0.98$, $p = .33$).

7.2.2 | Interactive-level processes and commitment

H2 was not supported such that similarity in relationship maintenance enactment was negatively correlated with wives' commitment ($\gamma = -0.30$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(177) = -2.72$, $p = .007$), but not with husbands' commitment ($\gamma = 0.03$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(177) = 0.26$, $p = .79$). Similarity in perception of partners' relationship maintenance was not correlated with commitment ($\gamma_{\text{wives}} = -0.18$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(177) = -1.70$, $p = .09$, $\gamma_{\text{husbands}} = 0.09$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(177) = 0.94$, $p = .35$). H3 was partially supported. Husbands' accuracy was positively associated with wives' commitment ($\gamma = 0.23$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = 2.46$, $p = .01$), but not with their own commitment ($\gamma = -0.04$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(311) = -0.38$, $p = .70$). Wives' accuracy was not correlated with their own commitment ($\gamma = 0.13$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(311) = 1.29$, $p = .20$) or with husbands' commitment ($\gamma = -0.06$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = -0.63$, $p = .53$). H4 was not supported. Husbands' projection was negatively associated with their commitment ($\gamma = -0.32$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = -3.74$, $p < .001$), but not with wives' commitment ($\gamma = 0.01$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.14$, $p = .89$). Wives' projection was not associated with their commitment ($\gamma = 0.19$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(311) = 1.79$, $p = .08$), nor with husbands' commitment ($\gamma = 0.04$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.46$, $p = .65$).

7.2.3 | Moderation by satisfaction

Satisfaction linked to commitment positively ($\gamma_{\text{wives}} = 0.67$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 8.08$, $p < .001$, $\gamma_{\text{husbands}} = 0.53$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = 6.03$, $p < .001$). Significant interaction effects of satisfaction are reported below. Nonsignificant satisfaction interactions with other individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance processes are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Moderation of satisfaction on associations of individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance with commitment.

Model variables	Final model	
	W commitment	H commitment
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
<i>Fixed effects</i>		
Intercept	5.14 (0.23)***	5.66 (0.24)***
Length	−0.02 (0.006)*	0.002 (0.005)
Income	0.08 (0.04)*	0.10 (0.05)*
Age	0.005 (0.005)	−0.003 (0.005)
White	0.15 (0.12)	0.06 (0.20)
Education	−0.008 (0.02)	−0.04 (0.03)
RM Enactment		
Actor's RM Enactment	0.03 (0.07)	0.34 (0.09)***
Partner's RM Enactment	0.10 (0.08)	0.03 (0.08)
RM Perception		
Actor's RM Perception	0.02 (0.08)	0.003 (0.08)
Partner's RM Perception	−0.07 (0.07)	−0.07 (0.07)
Similarity of Enactment	−0.30 (0.11)**	0.03 (0.11)
Similarity of Perception	−0.18 (0.11)	0.09 (0.10)
Accuracy		
Actor's Accuracy	0.13 (0.10)	−0.04 (0.10)
Partner's Accuracy	0.23 (0.09)*	−0.06 (0.09)
Projection		
Actor's Projection	0.19 (0.11)	−0.32 (0.09)***
Partner's Projection	0.01 (0.08)	0.04 (0.08)
Satisfaction	0.67 (0.08)***	0.53 (0.09)***
Similarity of Enactment × Satisfaction	−0.16 (0.13)	−0.10 (0.12)
Similarity of Perception × Satisfaction	0.13 (0.11)	−0.27 (0.13)*
RM Enactment		
Actor's RM Enactment × Satisfaction	−0.28 (0.10)**	−0.54 (0.11)***
Partner's RM Enactment × Satisfaction	0.15 (0.07)*	0.08 (0.09)
RM Perception		
Actor's RM Perception × Satisfaction	0.09 (0.08)	0.17 (0.07)*
Partner's RM Perception × Satisfaction	−0.02 (0.06)	−0.05 (0.07)
Accuracy		
Actor's Accuracy × Satisfaction	0.05 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)
Partner's Accuracy × Satisfaction	0.06 (0.10)	0.44 (0.12)***
Projection		
Actor's Projection × Satisfaction	−0.03 (0.10)	0.41 (0.11)***

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Final model	
	W commitment	H commitment
Partner's Projection \times Satisfaction	-0.19 (0.09)*	-0.03 (0.11)
<i>Random Effects</i>	Variance (<i>SD</i>)	Variance (<i>SD</i>)
Intercept Variance	0.03 (0.18)	0.05 (0.22)
Residual Variance	0.19 (0.44)	
Model Fit		
$-2(L_{\text{empty}} - L_{\text{full}})$	418.39***	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Actor effect of RM enactment

We failed to support H5 about actor effects of maintenance enactment. The interaction between satisfaction and wives' relationship maintenance enactment was significant such that the associations became weaker as satisfaction increased ($\gamma = -0.28$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(311) = -2.84$, $p = .005$). Figure 2 shows the moderating effect of satisfaction on the association between wives' relationship maintenance enactment and their commitment. According to the simple slope test, wives' relationship maintenance enactment was negatively correlated with their commitment when they were highly satisfied with their marriage ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(311) = -3.02$, $p = .003$). However, wives' relationship maintenance enactment was positively associated with commitment when satisfaction was low ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.17$, $t(311) = 2.26$, $p = .02$). Wives' relationship maintenance enactment and their commitment was not correlated at average levels of satisfaction ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = 0.49$, $p = .63$). The association between husbands' relationship maintenance enactment and their own commitment was less positive when husbands reported higher satisfaction levels ($\gamma = -0.54$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(311) = -4.99$, $p < .001$). As displayed in Figure 3, Husbands' relationship maintenance enactment was not associated with their commitment when relationship satisfaction was high ($b = -0.23$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(311) = -1.89$, $p = .06$). However, there was a positive association between relationship maintenance enactment and commitment at average ($b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = 4.01$, $p < .001$) and low levels of satisfaction ($b = 0.91$, $SE = 0.17$, $t(311) = 5.64$, $p < .001$).

Partner effect of husbands' RM enactment

H5 was partially supported, which related to the partner effect of maintenance enactment and the actor effect of perception of partners' maintenance among husbands. Partner's relationship maintenance enactment was associated with wives' commitment more positively when wives reported higher satisfaction levels ($\gamma = 0.15$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = 2.14$, $p = .03$; see Figure 4). Simple slope tests showed that husbands' relationship maintenance was positively correlated with wives' commitment only when wives' satisfaction was high ($b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(311) = 2.74$, $p = .006$). However, partner effects of husbands' relationship maintenance enactment were not significant at mean or low satisfaction of wives ($b_{\text{mean}} = 0.10$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 1.34$, $p = .18$, $b_{\text{low}} = -0.09$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(311) = -0.73$, $p = .47$). Satisfaction also moderated the association between husbands' perception of partners' relationship maintenance and their own commitment.

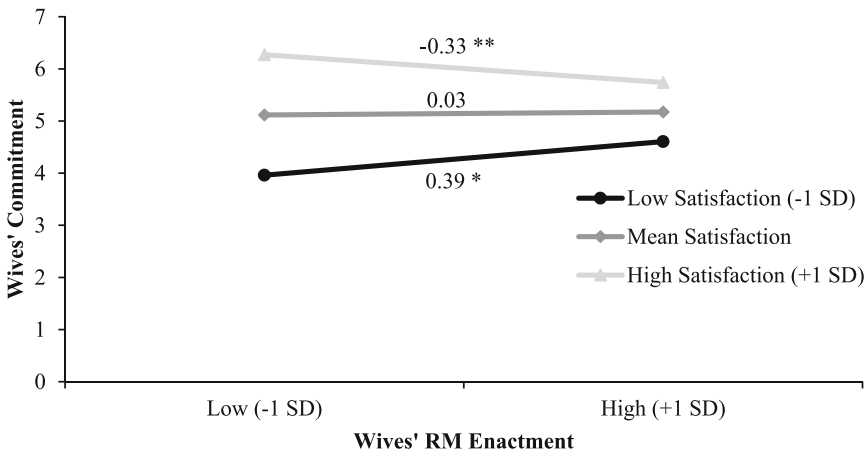


FIGURE 2 Moderation of wives' satisfaction on the association between wives' RM enactment and wives' commitment. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

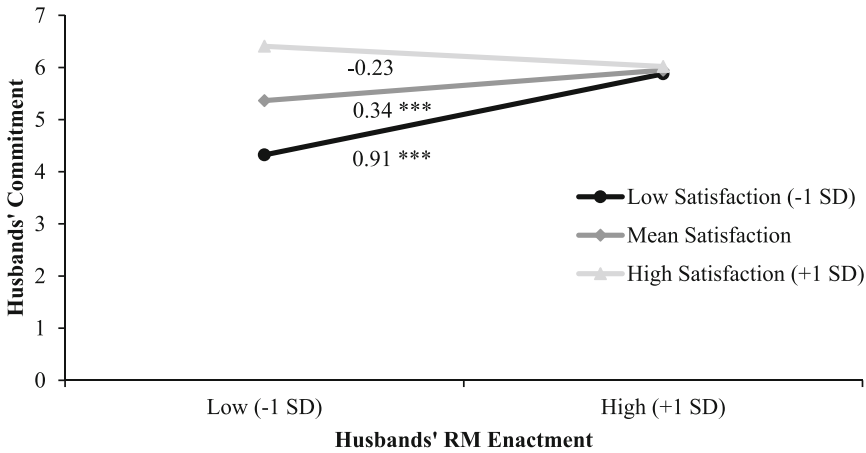


FIGURE 3 Moderation of husbands' satisfaction on the association between husbands' RM enactment and husbands' commitment. *** $p < .001$.

Actor effect of husbands' partner perception

Husbands' partner perception linked to higher level of own commitment when they reported higher satisfaction ($\gamma = .17$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(311) = 2.44$, $p = .02$). Moreover, as depicted by Figure 5, the simple slopes was significant among those with high satisfaction ($b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 2.09$, $p = .04$), but not among those with mean satisfaction ($b = 0.003$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.03$, $p = .97$), or low satisfaction ($b = -0.17$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(311) = -1.41$, $p = .16$).

Similarity of partner perception

H6 was partially supported among husbands even though similarity of partner perception did not have a main effect on husbands' commitment. Similarity of partner perception and husbands' commitment was moderated by husbands' satisfaction ($\gamma = -0.27$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(311)$

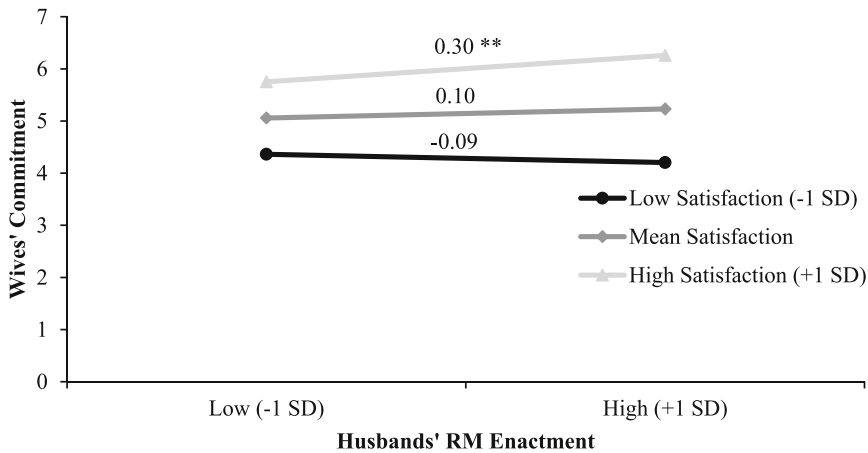


FIGURE 4 Moderation of wives' satisfaction on the association between husbands' RM enactment and wives' commitment. ** $p < .01$.

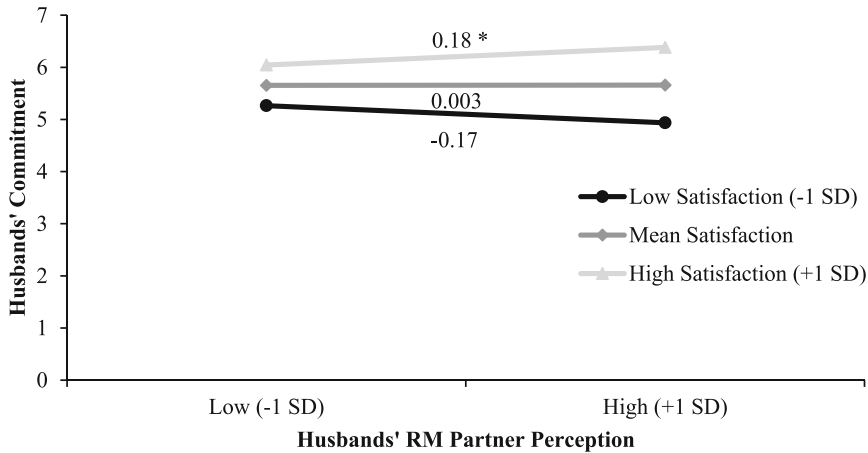


FIGURE 5 Moderation of husbands' satisfaction on the association between husbands' RM partner perception and husbands' commitment. * $p < .05$.

= -2.09 , $p = .04$; see Figure 6) such that similarity of partner perception was positively associated with husbands' commitment with lower satisfaction ($b = 0.37$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(311) = 2.00$, $p = .046$), but not with mean and higher satisfaction ($b_{\text{mean}} = 0.09$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(311) = 0.94$, $p = .35$, $b_{\text{high}} = -0.19$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(311) = -1.31$, $p = .19$).

Partner effect of wives' accuracy

As depicted by Figure 7, wives' accuracy in perceiving partners' relationship maintenance was linked to husbands' commitment more positively with higher satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.44$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(311) = 3.63$, $p < .001$), which supported H7. When husbands reported high satisfaction levels, wives' accuracy was positively correlated with husbands' commitment ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(311) = 2.97$, $p = .003$); the association became more negative when husbands' satisfaction decreased ($b_{\text{mean}} = -0.06$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = -0.62$, $p = .53$, $b_{\text{low}} = -0.52$, $SE = 0.18$, $t(311) = -2.97$, $p = .003$).

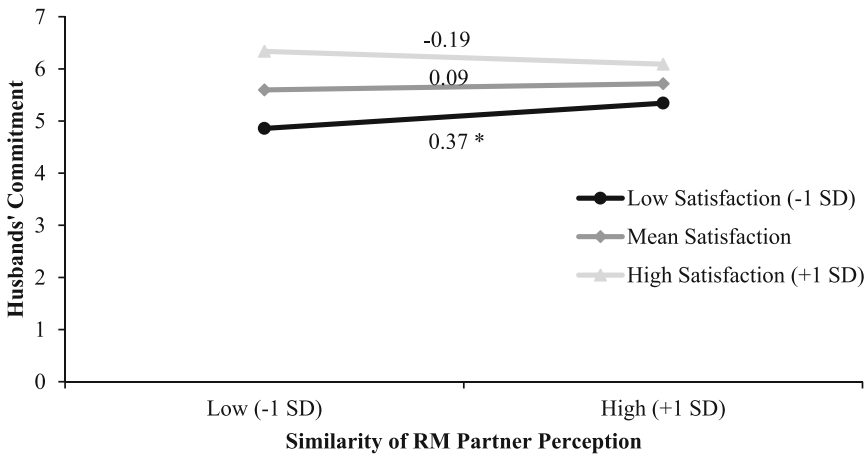


FIGURE 6 Moderation of husbands' satisfaction on the association between partner perception similarity and husbands' commitment. * $p < .05$.

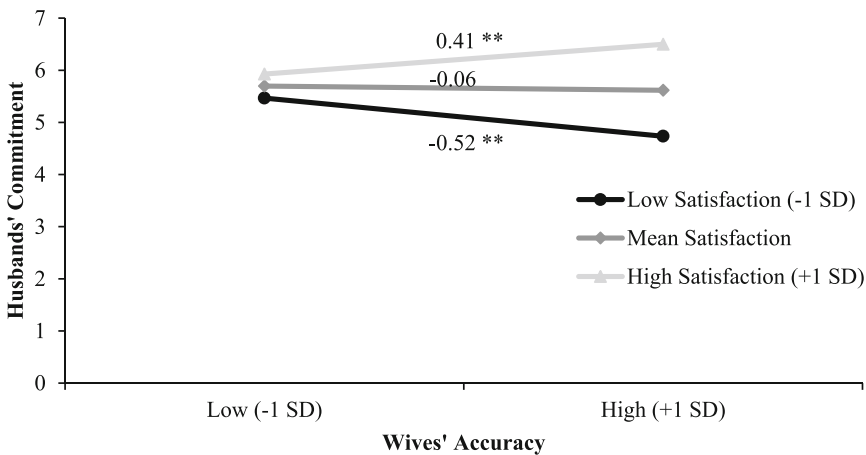


FIGURE 7 Moderation of husbands' satisfaction on the association between wives' accuracy and husbands' commitment. ** $p < .01$.

Actor and partner effect of husbands' projection

Husbands' projection was associated with their commitment less negatively when satisfaction was higher ($\gamma = 0.41$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(311) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, see Figure 8). Husbands' projection was negatively correlated with commitment with lower satisfaction ($b = -0.75$, $SE = 0.16$, $t(311) = -4.77$, $p < .001$); the association became less negative when husbands' satisfaction increased ($b_{\text{mean}} = -0.32$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = -3.74$, $p < .001$, $b_{\text{high}} = 0.10$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(311) = 0.75$, $p = .45$). Wives' satisfaction moderated the partner effect of husbands' projection ($\gamma = -0.19$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(311) = -2.18$, $p = .03$, see Figure 9). However, simple slope tests failed to detect significant association between husbands' projection and wives' commitment across wives' satisfaction levels ($b_{\text{low}} = 0.26$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(311) = 1.93$, $p = .055$, $b_{\text{mean}} = 0.01$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(311) = 0.14$, $p = .89$, $b_{\text{high}} = -0.24$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(311) = -1.60$, $p = .11$).

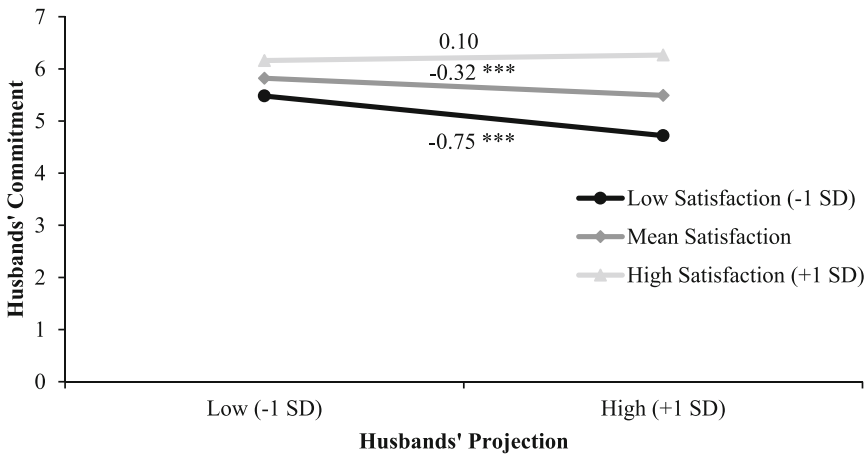


FIGURE 8 Moderation of husbands' satisfaction on the association between husbands' projection and husbands' commitment. *** $p < .001$.

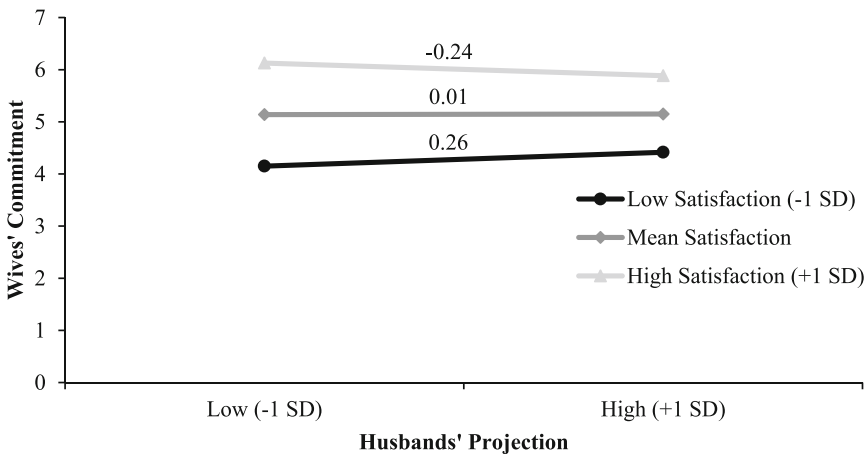


FIGURE 9 Moderation of wives' satisfaction on the association between husbands' projection and wives' commitment.

8 | DISCUSSION

The current study took a dyadic approach to examine how individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance links to marital commitment as moderated by satisfaction. The diverse findings suggested some nuanced perspectives of the roles of individual- and interactive-level relationship maintenance, which we discuss below.

8.1 | Individual-level relationship maintenance

Previous studies generally support the positive actor and partner effects of individual-level relationship maintenance processes. However, our findings suggested that relationship

maintenance enactment and partner perception may have different roles in relationships under different levels of relationship satisfaction. People might view their partners' behaviors, as opposed to their own, more positively under high satisfaction levels. The partner effect of relationship maintenance enactment was more positive when people had higher satisfaction such that partners' enactment was positively associated with wives' commitment when wives reported higher satisfaction levels. Also, husbands' perception of their partners' maintenance effort was only positively associated with their own commitment with higher satisfaction levels. However, the actor effect of relationship maintenance enactment on commitment was less positive as satisfaction levels increased for both partners, contradicting the hypothesis that higher satisfaction should link to more positive correlations between relationship maintenance enactment and commitment. Counterintuitively, wives' relationship maintenance enactment was negatively associated with their commitment when they reported higher satisfaction levels. Other unmeasured factors such as conflict or stress might motivate intensive relationship maintenance enactment even with high satisfaction levels, leading to less commitment to partners.

8.2 | Interactive-level relationship maintenance

8.2.1 | Similarity

In contradiction to our hypothesis, similarity of relationship maintenance enactment was negatively correlated with wives' commitment, revealing that similarities in positive interaction behaviors (e.g., relationship maintenance enactment) might work differently in relationship dynamics than similarities in value, trait, or attitudes. In stressful situations (e.g., chronic illness), it is critical for both partners to be on the same page and work as a unit (Lyons & Lee, 2018). Thus, whether partners work collaboratively in relationship maintenance should be of greater importance than behavioral similarity. Past research shows that complementarity, instead of similarity, in some positive interaction behaviors (e.g., dyadic coping) can be beneficial to couple relationships. For example, complementarity in dyadic coping strategies indicates that the couple possesses a "broader coping repertoire" (Revenson, 2003, p. 540), leading to higher effectiveness when coping with stressful events. Likewise, partners initiating dissimilar maintenance behaviors can be functional in relationship development. One partner might provide more positivity and assurances, whereas the other partner might be better at using social networks. Having such dissimilarity in maintenance behaviors indicates a broader maintenance repertoire where both partners work collaboratively to maintain the relationship. Additionally, we found that similarity of partner perception was positively associated with husbands' commitment for those with low satisfaction levels but not with average or high satisfaction. The similarity of partner perception might still benefit relationships even with lower satisfaction because it shows that both partners are on the same page.

8.2.2 | Accuracy

Our study suggested accuracy in perceiving partners' relationship maintenance was associated with greater commitment, which supported Neff and Karney's (2005) global adoration and specific accuracy model. Also, accuracy in perceiving partners' behaviors was more relevant to partners' commitment than to one's own commitment. We found that husbands' accuracy was

positively associated with wives' commitment. Wives' accuracy was positively associated with husbands' commitment when husbands reported high satisfaction levels. Accuracy in perceiving partners' maintenance enactment indicates validation of the partners' effort in relationships, thus contributing to higher commitment levels of partners. Of note, being accurate might be harmful without global adoration. Specifically, when husbands reported low satisfaction levels, partners' accuracy in perceiving their maintenance behaviors might negatively impact husbands' commitment to their partners.

8.2.3 | Projection

We found that husbands reported lower levels of commitment when they had higher projection levels of relationship maintenance; such negative association became weaker as husbands' satisfaction increased. This finding failed to support the literature perhaps because we accounted for the *difference* between one's own maintenance enactment and the perception of the partners' enactment instead of other approaches to measuring projection (e.g., covariance-related coefficients). According to the find-remind-and-bind theory (Algoe, 2012), the difference between relationship maintenance enactment and perception of partners' maintenance might remind people of partners' effort, leading to expression of gratitude and appreciation, which then strengthens commitment. Other work has shown that providing emotional support to partners is linked to increased positive mood and decreased negative mood because of feeling self-efficient (Gleason et al., 2003). Therefore, people might feel gratitude when perceiving more maintenance from their partners and feel self-efficient when enacting more relationship maintenance behaviors than partners. Such positive perception might lead to an upward spiral of positive relationship interactions. Moreover, the difference between maintenance enactment and partner perception might indicate the complementarity of relationship maintenance interactions between the partners. For instance, if husbands perceived their partners using more positivity, they might use other positive maintenance behaviors in return (e.g., show more assurances, use more networks).

8.3 | Implications and limitations

Our study aligns with existing literature showing that relationship maintenance enactment and satisfaction are positively associated with commitment. At the same time, many nonsignificant findings and diverse moderating effects reaffirmed the complexity of couple dynamics. In our study, most individual-level relationship maintenance processes were associated with commitment when moderated by satisfaction but not linked to commitment individually as main effects. Of note, partner perception did not show any main effects on either partner's commitment after we accounted for interactive-level maintenance processes (e.g., similarity, accuracy, and projection). Perhaps partner perception works comprehensively with maintenance enactment such that people view relational behaviors from partners in an integrated and dyadic perspective based on their own enactment. Although the bivariate correlations showed that individual- and interactive-level maintenance processes were positively associated with commitment, the final model suggested that each maintenance process may not necessarily play a positive role when controlling for other predictors in the model. The mechanisms of how relationship maintenance and commitment are related needs further investigation.

This study had multiple limitations to be noted. Our study adopted a cross-sectional design, which limits directional predictions, even though we assumed commitment as the outcome. Indeed, relationship maintenance behaviors and commitment might be bidirectionally related (Ogolsky, 2009). Also, relationship maintenance has a stronger association with concurrent commitment than future commitment, indicating that relationships need constant maintenance effort from both partners (Canary et al., 2002). Also, this study focused on personal commitment. The tripartite model of commitment proposes that personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment are the three major types of commitment (Johnson et al., 1999). Previous studies suggested the association between relationship maintenance behaviors and commitment differ based upon the basis of commitment (e.g., moral vs. structural; Ramirez, 2008). More studies are necessary to investigate how relationship maintenance and other types of commitment are associated. Furthermore, we investigated interactive-level relationship maintenance based on an overall evaluation across subscales of relationship maintenance instead of specific types of maintenance behaviors. Unfortunately, our sample size was too small to uncover how each type of relationship maintenance behavior works in relationships. Also, to avoid exact multicollinearity, we computed accuracy based on absolute values, as opposed to the directional differences, which may have obscured the direction of accuracy (e.g., overestimate or underestimate). There are also other ways to operationalize accuracy levels in dyadic analysis. According to Truth and Bias Model (West & Kenny, 2011), one's perception of partners' behaviors may regress on their own behaviors and partner's self-report, such that the intercept can be interpreted as directional bias (e.g., positively biased vs. negatively biased). Also, the regression coefficient of one's own behaviors estimates projection levels. However, such a method requires a longitudinal design to build the regression model of each couple. Future studies may consider a larger sample with a longitudinal design to uncover more details about relationship maintenance dynamics.

This study was based on a mixed-gender, married, and predominantly White sample collected in 2011. Participants in our study reported high levels of commitment and satisfaction and had been married for 14 years on average. Hence, conclusions have limited generalizability to people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, other types of relationships (e.g., dating), other gender minority groups (e.g., LGBTQ), or more contemporary couples. Accuracy in perceiving partners was more positively associated with relationship satisfaction as relationship length increased (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). Thus, accuracy and commitment might be associated differently in dating couples who have been together for less time. Couples from minority groups tend to have unique maintenance strategies to combat stress and stigmatization (Ogolsky et al., 2017), which awaits investigation of relationship maintenance dynamics considering the intersectionality of the couples. Thus, caution should be taken in applying these findings outside the context in which the data were collected.

9 | CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations in sampling and statistical methods, the current study supported that relationship maintenance enactment and satisfaction were positively associated with commitment and provided multiple findings related to the interactive relationship maintenance processes. Also, the study suggested that other possible mechanisms (e.g., the complementarity of relationship maintenance, gratitude) might influence relationship dynamics, accounting for the unexpected findings. The diverse findings on individual- and interactive-level relationship

maintenance suggest avenues for future research to thoroughly investigate additional mechanisms including the consideration of behavioral and relational contexts with larger and diverse sampling, and longitudinal design.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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