Scripting Relationships Through Adolescent and Adult Dramas: Perceptions of Completion in Romantic Relationships

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Scripting Relationships Through Adolescent and Adult Television Dramas: Perceptions of Completion in Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT
This content analysis sought to observe the number of relational messages present in adult and adolescent serial television dramas in order to understand the presence of Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10, or “Finding the right mate ‘completes you’” (p. 201). The presence of this completion ideal illustrates the Cultivation Analysis Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) and is significant in the development of adolescents’ identities and attitudes due to the persuasive power of repetition. Analysis of 101 conversations in 13 episodes found that relational messages are more frequent in adolescent dramas than adult dramas, but Myth #10 is emphasized more in adult dramas. Further research on the romantic relationship behavior of adolescents in regards to media consumption is suggested.

Media messages bombard teenagers and adults alike with lessons, especially lessons about romantic relationships. One message that appears to be reoccurring frequently is an image of completion, or of needing another to be complete. According to Galician (2004), the dark side of this completion ideal can imply human beings are not complete until they are in romantic relationships, they are not worthy of “living” until they find this other person, and those that decide to remain single are doing something “wrong.” Galician (2004) identifies 12 different mass media myths that illustrate the way people’s perceptions about romantic relationships are affected by the media. The myth depicting the earlier sentiments is Mass Media Myth #10, or the belief that “the right mate ‘completes you’—fulfilling your needs and making your dreams come true” (Galician, 2004, p. 201). This myth is prominent in television shows, movies, and music, and can alter a person’s idea of identity. Given the influence of television on people’s world views, as reinforced by the Cultivation Analysis Theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986), it is important to look at this myth in relation to television’s strong influence as well as what impacts this message could have on adolescents and young adults who are in the process of formulating and solidifying their identities. Misconceptions about romantic relationships represented in the media could be harmful to the development of healthy romantic relationships and self-concepts (Galician, 2004).
The Idea of Completeness

Through the use of a survey, Galician (2004) found the majority of college-age men and women believe finding the right person will complete them, and asserts that something within the media is affecting how people act and what they believe. In this case, the culprit could be something as simple as wanting the Hollywood ending for every story told on television. Dyer (1976) points out popular songs present lyrics that reinforce this myth, but the music industry would be reluctant to change those to a more beneficial message (as cited in Galician, 2004). Galician (2004) even describes a remedy to this myth: “Cultivate your own completeness” (p. 201). Why, then, does this stereotypical message of completion influence the population when it has such a simple remedy?

Myth #10 seeps in through television, much like with music. People miss the realistic expectations of a romantic relationship as they remain media illiterate, or unable to understand the full extent of the effects media continues to hold on them (Natharius, 2004). It is no secret media continues to have an effect on the general public. The theory of Cultivation Analysis (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) describes how media gradually changes a person’s world view over time, as people see something on television and incorporate that new knowledge into what they “know.” This change can result in people behaving in certain ways since they may act on that new knowledge.

The resulting action is not always beneficial to the individual. Galician’s (2004) Myth #10 illustrates the media representation that being single is undesirable (Morgan & Harr-Mazar, 1980; Morgan, 1980; as cited in Signorielli, 1991) and people should be in romantic relationships. The undesirability of being single may lead to concentrated effort to avoid the single status or unrealistic expectations which can later influence people in romantic relationships, such as their perceptions of marriage (Larson, 1988). Galician (2004) explains this myth may have adverse outcomes: “putting your mate in a straight jacket of unrealistic romanticized expectations can actually have the opposite effect [from making dreams come true], leading to disappointment and depression” (pp. 202-203).

Persuasiveness of Media

Media has been closely linked with altered realism from the introduction of television, and research suggests this link is worth exploring. The main reason television holds such an important role in the formation of a social reality is because it is a social institution (Silverblatt, 2004). Silverblatt (2004) argues that television is such a common, steady presence in our lives it is impossible to ever be completely segregated from its effects. This institution can quickly appear “real” and influence people who are in need of guidance (Silverblatt, 2004). Silverblatt (2004) explains “social institutions educate their members—either about the parameters of the social institution itself or about the larger world, interpreted through the ideology of the social institution” (p. 37). Whatever the media decides is worth knowing is shown and repeated. This
has the effect of teaching viewers the values media demonstrates and exemplifies. It may seem as though media, and more specifically television, exist only to entertain, but whether intentionally or unintentionally, media does fulfill the role of a social institution (Silverblatt, 2004). People can learn from what is shown—despite, or because of, their original intentions for watching.

Television uses the variable of repetition to pursue its point. Repetition of messages will help reinforce those messages and aid retention. Booth (1971) found that:

- Repetition with variation in form and message is more effective than a single exposure in aiding recall and convincing persons to engage in a particular course of action. Sheer repetition may tend to irritate. However, varying messages on the same theme serve continually to remind the individual and simultaneously appeal to different needs or predispositions to learn the material. (p. 605)

Messages depicted in television series—in this case, television drama series—are not one message repeated word-for-word. The messages vary slightly for each show, but subtly work to persuade as long as the format for each remains new (Kellerman, 1985).

Groppe (1984) also explains the number of repetitions has a positive relationship with persuasiveness and a change in perceived reality—the more repetition, the more persuasive the message because the message will be remembered. This idea corresponds with the Cultivation Analysis Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) and helps explain why Galician’s (2004) myths may be believed by many people. Groppe (1984) argues:

- Language does its task of ordering experience by establishing patterns of recurrence…. The degree of intensification depends upon the stability of the world view. The more unstable the world view, the more pronounced the repetition must be. The more stable the world view, the more relaxed and unobtrusive the repetition can be. (p. 168)

The Cultivation Analysis Theory relies on the availability of television and what is shown (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978). Without the repetition of, for example, violence on television, people may not view the world as more violent (Gerbner, Gross, Morgon, & Signorielli, 1980) or be likely to behave more violently (Anderson et al., 2003).

Groppe (1984) suggests, as Silverblatt (2004) described before, “that the function of dominant rhythms in persuasive discourse is to create that common rhythm of the concerted social action” (p. 170). As in the case of violence, one purpose of violence on television could be to show the audience, or society, that violence is around and it is something that they should notice. The audience, then, may believe society is dangerous and violent because these images are overrepresented in television shows (Gerbner et al., 1980). Many reasons for showing relational messages, or conversations about relationships, exist, and not all of the reasons involve teaching the completion myth to the public. However, what could be the effect of repeating relational messages about romantic relationships? If television is thought to represent the idea of reality (Gerbner et al., 1978) and these relational messages support the idea that a person is not
complete without finding a mate by showing dissatisfied single characters or satisfied coupled characters, the audience could inadvertently believe they are not complete unless they have mates. They might also believe society is inherently paired up and feel outside the norm if they are not in a romantic relationship. This is much like people may believe the world is more crime ridden when violence is overly shown. The audience may feel as if they have to be in romantic relationships as well, but are dissatisfied with them because they do not resemble the romantic relationships shown on television.

However, media also has the power to educate the audience about bad romantic relationships. By representing dissatisfied coupled characters and satisfied single characters, audience members could learn to find this sense of completion outside of the bad romantic relationships and through themselves or a healthy romantic relationship. Audience members in bad romantic relationships might recognize that unhealthy romantic relationships are not good and better ones exist. However, they are not isolated from the effects of the other relational messages, though. These audience members may realize these bad romantic relationships are unhealthy and stay in them, because they also may believe they have an obligation to be in romantic relationships regardless. The repetition, in either case, would be a foundation for discord and has the potential to incite an action by society to formulate romantic relationships in order to feel complete.

**Media Influence on Identity Formation**

Feelings of discord further propel people to search for a source of stability, such as an identity. Identity is defined as “a clear and stable self-definition with inner continuity in values, attitudes, beliefs and interests” (Blustein & Palladino, 1991, p. 438). People may turn to a social institution, such as television, that can educate them on how to resolve these feelings of discord and give them models that are socially accepted to follow (Silverblatt, 2004). This results in a social, or group, identity (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). Postmes, Spears, Lee, and Novak (2005) state, “What defines the social identity of a deductive kind is that group members are differentiated from a background (the population at large or a specific comparison group) by a property (or set of properties) that they have in common with the group” (p. 749). Television provides a medium for others to find models of that social identity, which creates the perfect opportunity for Galician’s (2004) mass media myths to take root. Myth #10 is particularly important with the idea of identity, because one appears to find a sense of completion and wholeness through a romantic involvement with another person. However, in order to understand the significance of television’s influence on belief in Galician’s (2004) Myth #10, one must first understand:

**RQ:** To what extent do the relational messages repeated in adult and adolescent television dramas support or refute Myth #10? This social identity is extremely important in adolescents’ identity formation (Blustein & Palladino, 1991). While adults are vulnerable to repetition of the messages, adolescents are
particularly vulnerable to the messages apparent on television because of the constant change present in their lives, resulting in a sense of instability (Robbins & Patton, 1985). As Groppe (1984) suggested, messages are persuasive when they are repeated to the point they become reality and convince people to follow what is being shown as socially acceptable and desirable. People could change their perceptions to believe what they see on television represents reality (Gerbner et al., 1986). Adolescence is a time when identity is beginning to form, and due to the instability of their lives at the time, adolescents “may be exploring the various dimensions of their identity in order to seek support and sustenance from their environment” (Blustein & Palladino, 1991, p. 449).

By seeking these external stimuli, adolescents may seek out the media as a representation of reality. Signorielli (1991) explains how:

Morgan and Harr-Mazar (1980) and Morgan (1980) found, in a 3 year panel of 200 adolescents, a positive relationship between television viewing and expressing the view that “single is bad,” “families are good,” and “families are large.” (p. 123)

Television has been shown to influence the perceived realities of adolescents, which makes adolescents particularly susceptible to the unrealistic portrayals of romantic relationships Galician (2004) identifies. Because Potter and Chang (1990) found the amount of television consumption is not as important as the type of television shows people choose to watch, the question, then, is what type of television shows are more likely to reinforce relational messages related to one or more of Galician’s myths?

**Drama as a Medium**

Little has been done to analyze relational messages in prime time serial dramas. Studies of television dramas have typically analyzed the more serious side of the visual message, such as violence (e.g., Gerbner et al., 1986; Reith, 1999) and the role of occupations (e.g., Reith, 1996), with little focus on the idea of romantic relationships outside of marriage and the family (e.g., Morgan & Harr-Mazar, 1980; Morgan, 1980; as cited in Signorielli, 1991). Signorielli (1991), though, explains dramas “present a less positive view of marriage and monogamy. They often revolve around characters who may be divorced, who do not express positive notions about marriage, or who may partake in sexual activity outside marriage” (p. 122).

These romantic relationships in prime time dramas should not be overlooked as all negative. If Groppe’s (1984) argument holds merit, then messages about romantic relationships, whether negative or positive, could be influential if repeated often enough. If the instability of adolescents is greater than adults, relational messages that provide a representation of what is expected of them and reduce the sense of uncertainty would be repeated more frequently. Adolescents would have something to gain from watching the television show. The need to repeat relational messages in adult dramas, targeted toward people who may be older and in a
more stable period in their lives, would be less apparent, because no major shifts in world views are occurring. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Relational messages appear more frequently in adolescent television dramas than adult television dramas.

However, not only should relational messages be more apparent, they are also likely to reinforce the idea of Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10. In order to inform the younger generation (Silverblatt, 2004), adolescent dramas may perpetuate the myth. According to Erikson (1966), each stage of life has a specific purpose, or stage of development, associated with it. In the case of adolescents, they are in the stage of identity versus identity-diffusion where they should be solidifying their identity. The next stage designated by Erikson (1966) for young adults, typically starting around ages 18 to 20, is intimacy versus isolation, or the pursuit of a romantic relationship. While the exact age one enters each stage varies on an individual basis, the fact remains the stages are meant to be completed in order—validating Galician’s (2004) prescription of “cultivate your own completion” before becoming involved in a romantic relationship (p. 201). It is possible television is demonstrating the intimacy versus isolation stage to adolescents by showing single as undesirable and a coupled status as the social norm.

If media shows adolescents on television finding completion through a romantic relationship, the order of the two stages becomes blurred. As a result, adolescents could cultivate a social identity that dictates identity is primarily found through romantic involvement. Adolescents may believe they can only be complete if they are in romantic relationships. This leads to distorted notions of romantic relationships, as Galician (2004) suggests, and could hurt the development of their identities as individuals. However, in Erikson’s (1966) stages of development, adults are past identity formation and are either past or in the stage of intimacy versus isolation; therefore, their identity stability would be higher and the need for repetition would be lower. The following hypothesis is then proposed:

H2: Relational messages that support Galician’s (2004) Myth #10 appear more often in adolescent television dramas than in adult television dramas.

**Method**

A content analysis was conducted in order to observe the number of relational messages present in prime time adult and adolescent dramas as well as which messages support Galician’s (2004) Myth #10.

**Sample**

To find the shows watched by adolescents, a list was compiled of all the current dramas shown on major networks and other popular stations (ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, CW, MTV, ABC FAMILY). A show was categorized as an adolescent drama if the main characters were adolescents or the story followed the life of an adolescent. An adult drama was identified as
such if it was classified as a drama according to the network and did not fit the category of an adolescent drama. A preliminary survey of adolescents, ages 14-18 (N = 65), from a Midwestern high school was conducted in order to find the most commonly watched adult and adolescent dramas. The students were asked to identify the shows they watched on a regular (two or more times a month) basis. The results were analyzed and the top three shows for each type (adolescent: Laguna Beach, The O.C., & Gilmore Girls; adult: CSI, House, & Without a Trace) were coded. Only episodes for which transcripts were available were considered and a random numbers table was used to narrow the seasons down to two episodes per television show. This was done for all but one show due to a difference in show durations. Because Laguna Beach is a shorter show, an extra episode was coded to equal out the time difference. Thirteen episodes of adolescent and adult dramas were coded in total.

Unit of Analysis

For this study, the unit of analysis was the relational message. Only direct relational messages, involving an explicit statement one or more persons made regarding their feelings (negative or positive) about their romantic relationship status, were coded. Of the 13 episodes coded, all had at least one relational message, for a total of 101 relational messages.

Coder Training

Relational messages were coded by six student coders enrolled in a first-year introductory college course to ensure interrater reliability. Each episode was coded twice. Coders were broken into pairs and given 4-5 episodes to watch (2 adult & 2-3 adolescent). Coders were trained by the principle researcher using one episode of a television drama not included in the final analysis. Coders practiced together with the researcher, and they explained after viewing the practice episode what their individual responses were. They discussed with the primary researcher what would and would not be considered examples of the variables coded until reaching an acceptable level of understanding. Coders were then asked to view and code their assigned episodes independently of one another.

In order for a relational message to be considered, both coders had to have coded the same relational message. A transcript of the episode was used to see which relational messages a coder was identifying and to ensure separate coding. A seventh coder (the researcher) also went through the episodes when disagreement between coders occurred or an episode was only coded once. Coding done by the researcher was only used for reliability tests, and analysis was done on the six outside coders’ content to reduce the possibility of introducing researcher bias. Interrater reliabilities are discussed below and were calculated using Cohen’s Kappa (Cohen, 1960).
Coding Categories

Character attributes. The initiator, or the character who began the relational message, and the recipient, the character the comment was directed to, were coded for gender, character status (major/minor), and relationship status (single/coupled/married). Characters could be either major or minor and a list of major characters for each episode was given to coders to ensure reliability. A character was coded as single if he or she was not in a mutual romantic relationship, coupled if in a mutual romantic relationship, and married if in a legally binding romantic relationship. Cohen’s Kappa (1960) was used to measure interrater reliability for the initiator: for the initiator’s gender, 95% agreement (κ = .90); for the initiator’s character status, 95% agreement (κ = .83); and for the initiator’s relationship status, 86% reliability (κ = .76). The recipients also showed high reliability using Cohen’s Kappa (1960): for the recipient’s gender, 93% agreement (κ = .86); for the recipient’s character status, 93% agreement (κ = .64); and for the recipient’s relationship status, 92% reliability (κ = .85). Differences among coders about who was the initiator and the recipient caused these disagreements.

Relational messages. Type of relational message was also recorded to determine to what extent Galician’s (2004) Myth #10 was supported. Coders determined whether the relational message showed single dissatisfaction, single satisfaction, couple dissatisfaction, couple satisfaction, or desire for being set-up. The relational message showed single dissatisfaction if the initiator showed dissatisfaction, or unhappiness, towards his or her own single status or towards someone else’s (e.g., “I just want to go on a date” or “What’s wrong with you? Why won’t you go out?”). Single satisfaction occurred when the initiator showed satisfaction toward his or her own single status or someone else’s (e.g., “I’m happy now” or “You seem so much more content now that you are single”). Couple dissatisfaction was coded when the initiator showed dissatisfaction for his or her coupled or married status or for someone else’s (e.g., “Why won’t he/she listen to me?” or “You aren’t happy in this relationship”). Couple satisfaction happened when the initiator showed satisfaction for his or her coupled or married status or someone else’s (e.g., “Things are so much better now that we are together” or “You seem so much happier now that you’re together”). The desire to be set-up by another character or to set-up another character showed extreme single dissatisfaction to the point of action. If the relational message did not fit into any of these categories but the coders felt the relational message was applicable, the other category was used. The primary researcher reclassified the other relational messages based on the notes of the coders. Interrater reliability was evident in this variable as well; relational messages showed 88% agreement (κ = .84).

Relational messages thought to support Myth #10 were single dissatisfaction, couple satisfaction, and set-up. In these three relational messages, characters were seen as reinforcing the idea that one cannot be happy unless they are with someone else, because they were reinforcing the idea that being single was not a good thing and people are only happy when in a romantic relationship. Because of the low number of set-up classifications, those were recoded
under single dissatisfaction. Single satisfaction and couple dissatisfaction were not necessarily viewed as illustrating Galician’s (2004) Myth #10’s prescription “cultivate your own completion” (p. 201), but were considered refuting Myth #10 by not supporting it.

Results

Out of the 13 episodes coded, 101 relational messages were analyzed. The initiator was female 61.4% of the time (n = 62) and male 38.6% (n = 39) of the time. Initiators were also usually major characters (n = 86, 85.1%). The majority of initiators were single (n = 57, 56.4%), with the rest either coupled (n = 11, 10.9%) or married (n = 33, 32.7%). Recipients were also more likely to be female (n = 59, 58.4%) than male (n = 42, 41.6%) characters. Recipients were major characters (n = 90, 89.1%) more frequently than minor characters (n = 11, 10.9%). The recipients also depicted characters whose relationship status was single (n = 66, 65.3%), coupled (n = 7, 6.9%), and married (n = 28, 27.7%).

Research Question: Relational Messages and Support of Myth #10

As noted before, a greater number of the characters in the shows were single (56.4% of the initiators), while the second biggest category was married (32.7% of the initiators), suggesting more relational messages would revolve around single dissatisfaction or couple satisfaction because single is undesirable and families are desirable (Morgan & Harr-Mazar, 1980; Morgan, 1980; as cited in Signorielli, 1991). Presence of these perspectives would support Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10. The myth was supported in 56.4% (n = 57) of the 101 relational messages apparent in the dramas. The myth was refuted, or not shown, in 43.6% (n = 44) of the relational messages. This means the episodes, when looking at both adult and adolescent dramas, are both supporting and not supporting Myth #10.

Hypothesis 1: Frequency of Relational Messages

Hypothesis 1, which proposed relational messages would occur more often in adolescent dramas, was supported by this study. Relational messages appear four times more frequently in adolescent dramas (n = 80, 79.2%) than in adult dramas (n = 21, 20.8%). This supports Groppe’s (1984) idea that repetition would appear more frequently for those, such as adolescents, who needed the reinforcement to stabilize their world views.

Hypothesis 2: Adolescent Dramas and the Support of Myth #10

While Hypothesis 1 was supported, Hypothesis 2, or the proposition that relational messages supporting Galician’s (2004) Myth #10 are more frequent in adolescent dramas, was not. Within adolescent dramas, relational messages supporting the myth are single dissatisfaction
(n = 18, 22.5%) and couple satisfaction (n = 22, 27.5%). Although these relational messages represent 50% (n = 40) of the total adolescent dramas coded, no real variation between what does support Myth #10 (single dissatisfaction and couple satisfaction) and what does not (single satisfaction and couple dissatisfaction) exists.

Although adult dramas were less frequent (n = 21, 20%) than adolescent dramas, relational messages apparent in the episodes were more likely (n = 17, 90%) to support Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10. Single dissatisfaction was most apparent (n = 15, 71.4%) within all adult dramas.

Post Hoc Analyses

To further explore the meaning of the results of this study, a series of post hoc analyses was conducted.

Whereas adolescent dramas did not support Media Myth #10 (Galician, 2004) to the same extent adult dramas did, adolescent dramas did show a large number of couple satisfaction and dissatisfaction interactions. This suggests a coupled status is more important than was originally thought. Adolescent dramas portrayed couples’ satisfaction (n = 22, 27.5%) and dissatisfaction (n = 30, 37.5%) in 65% of the 80 adolescent dramas. Relational messages about coupled relationships only occurred 23.8% of the time in adult dramas, while 76.2% of the relational messages in the adult dramas consisted of single dissatisfaction (n = 15, 71.4%) or single satisfaction (n = 1, 4.8%).

Further analyses also revealed the unsurprising finding that characters who were single tended to initiate more conversations about their single status, while characters who were part of a couple (coupled or married) initiated more conversations about their partnered status, regardless of whether the drama was targeted toward adolescents or adults. However, the number of interactions focusing on couples’ relational issues is disproportionately higher in both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Message Focus</th>
<th>Single-status</th>
<th>Couple-status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Dramas (n = 80)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single (n = 40)</td>
<td>23 (57.5%)</td>
<td>17 (42.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupled (n = 8)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married (n = 32)</td>
<td>3 (9.4%)</td>
<td>29 (90.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Dramas (n = 21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single (n = 17)</td>
<td>14 (82.4%)</td>
<td>3 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupled (n = 3)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married (n = 1)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
types of dramas than the number of initiators who are coupled, continuing the emphasis on couplehood in yet another way. Within adolescent dramas, couples account for only 50% of all initiators, yet 65% \((n = 52)\) of all conversations focus on couples’ relational messages. In adult dramas, couples account for 19% \((n = 4)\) of all initiators, yet 23.8% \((n = 5)\) of conversations still focus on couples’ relationships. Adult dramas, however, primarily focused on the single relational messages: 82.4% of the single initiators supported the single relational messages of single dissatisfaction and satisfaction. See Table 1 for complete results on these findings.

Furthermore, within each relational message category, the frequency of characters who supported Myth #10 varied according to relationship status. Conversations initiated by singles in adult dramas usually sustained the myth, while single initiators in adolescent dramas still supported the myth the majority of the time, but not as frequently as in adult dramas. Married initiators in adult dramas supported the myth in all of the cases coded, but coupled initiators only supported it 66.7% of the time. A different pattern was observed in adolescent dramas, as married initiators reinforced the myth in only 40.6% of the cases, while coupled initiators supported the myth in 62.5% of the cases. See Table 2 for complete results on these findings.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Message Focus</th>
<th>Myth Supported</th>
<th>Myth Refuted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescent Dramas ((n = 80))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single ((n = 40))</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
<td>18 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupled ((n = 8))</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married ((n = 32))</td>
<td>13 (40.6%)</td>
<td>19 (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Dramas ((n = 21))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single ((n = 17))</td>
<td>14 (82.4%)</td>
<td>3 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coupled ((n = 3))</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married ((n = 1))</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The results of this study might suggest to viewers that relational messages supporting or refuting Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10 are fairly balanced. While relational messages supporting the myth are 56.4% of all the relational messages coded, the fact remains relational messages exist and are repeated. This demonstrates the completion message is still able to affect people through repetition and varied narrative patterns even though couple dissatisfaction and single satisfaction were also shown. Belief in Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10 is still a viable social reality that can influence the behaviors of adolescents. The idea that coupled status is desirable was also reinforced by the presence of a large number of married and coupled characters within the relational messages, especially in adolescent dramas. This was not as
obvious in adult dramas, where conversations focused primarily on single characters, but the majority of relational messages in adolescent dramas were about couples and/or married characters.

In adolescent dramas, it could be suggested those coupled-centered relational messages also support the idea that being in a romantic relationship is better than being single due to the sheer repetition of the coupled/married (satisfaction and dissatisfaction) relational messages. This could influence adolescents watching these shows, because their idea of reality is influenced by a television world of couples and their lives—a person is in the minority if single while an adolescent, reinforcing the idea that being single is undesirable (Morgan & Harr-Mazar, 1980; Morgan, 1980; as cited in Signorielli, 1991). This could be sending mixed signals to adolescents: either they are in a romantic relationship and “better” or they are single and people may think something is “wrong” with them. Adolescents in a coupled status could think they are more interesting, or more worthy of interest, because 65% of adolescent dramas focused on relational messages about couples.

This focus on coupled or married characters was not nearly as evident in adult dramas, but adult dramas supported Myth #10 (Galician, 2004) to a greater degree. As Groppe (1984) suggested, the number of repetitions were lower and less obtrusive. But one could argue that due to the lower amount of repetitions, the repetitions would not be able to vary from the original message—in this case, the idea of needing to find a mate to be “complete.” This, as with the adolescent world, could be advocating the same disregard of the single status. Instead of the message being directed to both the single and coupled audiences, relational messages in adult dramas seem to be focusing on the single. Relational messages present in adult dramas circle around single characters and single dissatisfaction. A majority of single characters (n = 14, 82.4%) initiated conversations that illustrated Galician’s (2004) Myth #10 and relational messages focused on single satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Relational messages present in adult dramas were primarily single dissatisfaction (n = 15, 71.4%). The message of completion is for single people in the audience, it appears—a single person, in an adult drama, is seldom happy with his or her single status. The repetition appears to be stressing that being single is something with which to be dissatisfied. If that is true, why should the world view of the viewer be any different?

It is being subtly suggested through the repetition of single dissatisfaction and couple satisfaction relational messages that viewers of adult dramas, if they are happy with their single status, should not be. The relational messages conveyed in these dramas suggest that to be single is to be unhappy with that level of romantic relationship, and this unhappiness could be said to combine with a sense of desperation. This desperation could be because of the repetition of single dissatisfaction. This potentially creates a need for action—to be in a romantic relationship regardless, or to never be happy with the romantic relationship a person is in because it is not “perfect.”

In addition to the adult audience, adolescents are receiving this desperation message. However, due to the instability of an adolescent’s life (Robbins & Patton, 1985), their sense of
identity remains vulnerable to outside influences. Their beliefs about, and actions regarding, romantic relationships could be shaped by the relational messages presented. The presence and repetition of Galician’s (2004) Mass Media Myth #10 illustrates what seems to be expected of them—a coupled relationship status. They are receiving this message at an age where they are learning who they are and are grasping at the lessons society is giving them. Society, through the use of television, though, is telling them that completion, or in this instance, the formation of an identity, is primarily achieved through an interpersonal romantic relationship. The overwhelming presence of coupled-centered relational messages \((n = 52, 65\%)\) in adolescent dramas demonstrates the amount of repetition adolescents face. This could negatively affect their perceptions and implementation of future romantic relationships, such as marriage (Larson, 1988). Also, if their perceptions of completion are wrapped up in another person, they may never know how to depend on themselves.

**Directions for Future Research**

While there were ample observations of relational messages in adolescent dramas on which to base a conclusion, the number in adult dramas was far less. This could have skewed the results. One might code more adult and adolescents dramas, as well as increase the diversity of dramas coded (e.g., coding the top six dramas watched instead of the top three), for a better representation of what relational messages adult and adolescent dramas contain. Another suggestion would be to code relational messages in a different genre of television, such as a sitcom, in order to see how the different genres represent Galician’s (2004) Myth #10, as Potter and Chang (1990) found the genre matters more than the amount of consumption in the acceptance of the social reality presented by the media. Also, Galician’s (2004) myths focus on romantic relationships, yet the myths, especially Myth #10, could be expanded to incorporate other types of relationships, such as parent-child or friendship.

Furthermore, much speculation exists about the effects of this myth on people. Galician (2004) explains how in her survey a majority of both the males and females believed Myth #10; but do those beliefs ever translate to action? Further research could be compiled on the manifestations of this ideal in adolescent or adult communication in order to make a more direct comparison between the media portrayals of this myth and the interpersonal romantic relationships of those age groups.

**Conclusion**

Relational messages apparent in adult and adolescent dramas may not perpetuate the idea of completion as defined by Galician (2004), but adolescent dramas do show couples, and relational messages about couples, more frequently. By reinforcing the idea of a “couple,” adolescents, as well as adults, remain vulnerable to the idea that finding the right person will “complete you” as the repetition present in the media could inherently change a person’s world
view. Much along the lines of the “mean world” syndrome (Gerbner et al., 1986), believing the world to be more couple oriented essentially creates a paired-world syndrome. This would support the idea that an individual is not “right” unless he or she is in a romantic relationship. Adolescents may realize being in a romantic relationship does not guarantee completeness, but the social presence of this idea may make it difficult to truly surmount.

References


