

1-1-2005

"You've got mail": Email use in post-dissolutional relationships

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"YOU'VE GOT MAIL": EMAIL USE IN POST-
DISSOLUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

by

Michelle P. Mosbacher

Bachelor of Arts
New Mexico State University
May 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Hank Greenspun Department of Communication Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**

**Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2005**

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April 11, 2005

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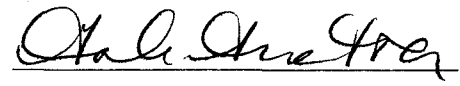
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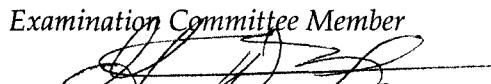
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Master of Arts in Communication Studies


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ABSTRACT

"You've Got Mail": Email Use In Post-Dissolutional Relationships

by

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This study is an examination of the conscious motives involved with using email communication over face-to-face communication in post-dissolutional communication between former romantic partners. This project also answered specific questions regarding the nature of post-dissolutional communication. Data collected from 173 undergraduate students revealed that the ability to plan messages within an email is a conscious motive of using email communication that is not perceived in face-to-face communication, whereas the ability to save-face and avoid topics are not. Additionally, emoticons are sparingly used in post-dissolutional email communication, yet those participants who reported to use emoticons are also concerned with saving face. Finally, the current study indicated that preventative and corrective facework strategies are used only moderately in post-dissolutional communication of communication. This study examines an emergent aspect of interpersonal communication and gives recommendations for further research.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people I need to thank for giving me assistance, guidance, support, direction, and understanding throughout the completion of my thesis and Master's degree program. I am grateful for my committee members, my friends, and my family for the important and instrumental ways in which they have helped me through this long and often challenging process.

First, I owe the biggest, most heartfelt thank you to Dr. Jennifer Bevan, my thesis advisor. Her guidance, suggestions, expertise, and genuine dedication to her roles as a professor and friend have been most appreciated throughout our journey together. I appreciate her taking the time to read more poorly edited drafts, yet having the faith in me to get all my work done and to do it well. I will always remember Dr. Bevan for emailing me journal articles while on her honeymoon in Hawaii; not many professors are that dedicated to their students!! B.F.F. Also, I need to thank Dr. Gary Larson, Dr. Dmitri Shalin, and Dr. Elaine Wittenberg for their intellectual contributions, suggestions, and guidance throughout this project.

My friends have also been instrumental to my success as a graduate student. Without Alex Jacquez, I'm not sure I would have made it through the last year of graduate school. It was always so nice to have someone to talk to that did not care about rhetoric, theory, or methodology, but rather cared only about me and my happiness. Also, I must note that without Alex's special computer "skills" I don't know if I would have ever been able to install SPSS on my computer. Megan Greene, my first true friend in Las Vegas

and my “twin sister” is another friend who has been with me since day one of graduate school. Her easy going, CA spirit was always valuable to me. In addition, I am grateful for my friendships with Amanda Mansfield, Shelly Jungst, Maria Roth, Becky Gregorio and all my people at Firefly who were o-so-good at taking that grad school edge off at the end of a long day. Lastly, thanks to my friends at Ballard Communications; I appreciate their flexibility with my schedule to simultaneously accommodating my educational and professional needs.

Lastly, my family played an integral role in the completion of this project. My parents, brothers, and sisters’ faith and understanding in me this whole time has helped me in a variety of ways. I appreciate the pride they took in me and in everything I do. Also, I am grateful for them always trusting in the decisions I make for myself and always supporting me in all those decisions. I always hope to make them proud.

From the bottom my heart, I love you all!!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today's information age has created a variety of interpersonal communication alternatives to face-to-face communication. The years of the telegraph and Morse code have long been replaced by much faster, more technical communication media such as email, fax, text messaging, and instant messaging. Each of these new medium offers its own enticing qualities such as anonymity, speed, impression management, convenience, and cost effectiveness. Of the modern communication media, however, the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC), and more specifically electronic mail (email), seems to be affecting communication on a daily basis. All further references to CMC will refer only to asynchronous email, meaning email messages that are sent with a lack of temporal concurrence (as opposed to instant or text messaging). Text messaging is often grouped together with email, yet because of qualities such as immediacy and message length limitations, should be investigated independently.

Individuals often have multiple email addresses for multiple activities, such as leisure, bill pay, and news. Today, options exist that will forward emails to telephones, fax machines, and even television screens, making email an even more pervasive communication tool than before. Email is also used to communicate relational information, specifically the development, maintenance, and dissolution of interpersonal relationships (e.g. Anderson, 2001; Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon, & Sunnafrank, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2004).

Specifically, email's many positive qualities lend itself to individuals communicating with their friends, lovers, family, enemies, acquaintances, business partners, anonymous cyber-friends, and an endless number of other relationships. Email use within specific relationships and specific settings is an emergent body of communication research. Recent research has been directed toward the development of online relationships and CMC's involvement in that process (e.g., Hian, Chuan, Trevor, & Detenber, 2004; McQuillen, 2003). Less research, however, is currently dedicated to the functionality and conscious motives involved with using email in the dissolution of romantic relationships.

Romantic relationship termination is one of the most traumatic events an individual typically endures in his or her life (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Thus, a better understanding of the basic nature of romantic breakups will add to the current body of knowledge seeking to predict and explain this very specific communication and relational phenomenon. Bevan and Cameron (2001) found that nearly 75% of romantic couples continue communication and/or attempt reconciliation after dissolution of a relationship has been initiated. Further, Bevan, Cameron, and Dillow (2003) note that relationship dissolution is more of a process than a single event, as it is often perceived. Based on the notion that romantic relationship dissolution is a process, it appears logical to deduce that the communication between former romantic partners will evolve as a process, rather than an event, as well.

With the knowledge of the pervasiveness of email use and with the understanding that romantic couples will often seek to continue communication after a breakup in mind, understanding how email is used as a means to continued communication in the

dissolution process is a relevant endeavor to expand understanding in both research areas. Former romantic partners are likely to report using a variety of communication tools, yet the current investigation seeks to explore only the specific role of email communication in post-dissolution communication. The most frequently studied aspects of CMC examine the content, functionality, and utility of email (e.g., Anderson, 2001; Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998; McQuillen, 2003; Walther & Burgoon, 1992), yet studies addressing the conscious motives involved with email use are scant. Because it is a basic assumption among communication scholars that human communication is strategic and goal motivated rather than random (Afifi & Lee, 2000; Berger, 1995; Berger & Bell, 1988), it is fair to assume that there are conscious motives for email use. Furthermore, it is relevant to explore why the nature of post-dissolutional relationships between former romantic partners is different than so many other relational dyads.

It is necessary to examine what elements of the dissolution process make it such a memorable and often traumatic social event in one's life. One possibility is that terminating a relationship is an extremely face-threatening experience. Kunkel, Wilson, and Olufowote (2003) discovered that relationship dissolution was associated with perceived face threats to both parties' positive and negative face. The notion of *facework* in relation to post-dissolutional communication may be imperative to understanding why former dating partners would choose to use email rather than face-to-face communication as a preferred communication medium when communicating with a former partner. It appears as though facework goals are directly connected with communication; thus, planning theory (which explains goal-oriented communication), facework, and related

findings will be discussed in detail and examined as an additional possible conscious motive for email use.

Overall, the goal of this research is to better understand the use of email as a communicative aspect of the dissolution process. The current study seeks to better understand variables associated with email use as well as to develop a better understanding of the nature and characteristics of post-dissolutional communication. In order to better comprehend the dynamics of this process, this research will focus on the relationships among the following: the current body of knowledge exploring CMC in interpersonal relationships, the nature of post-dissolutional relationships, the human instinct to communicate strategically, and the desire to save the face of one's self and others.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the advent of the Internet, computer-mediated communication has become increasingly popular (Walther, 1996). Communication scholars define CMC as “synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are relayed from senders’ computers to receivers” (Walther, 1992, p. 52). Originally emerging as the byproduct of linking large computers together as a means to military security operations (Walther, 1996), CMC has matured in recent years into a mechanism for the “formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships” in both civilian and military domains (Ramirez et al., 2002, p. 213). Over two decades ago, communication scholars Kieler, Siegal, and McGuire (1984) observed the impacts and potential impacts for the emerging communication medium when they wrote: “Whether eager for this (electronic mail) or resistant, many people believe the organizational, social, and personal effects of computers will be deeply felt” (p. 330).

True to predictions, a nationwide study concluded that the most frequent reason reported by respondents for desiring Internet access was the use of electronic mail (Katz & Aspden, 1997). It is obvious that the impact of the Internet and electronic mail has been profound. Not so obvious, however, are the reasons why people have become so enamored with this new communication tool. It is criticized for being impersonal and lacking “social psychological significance,” yet its attractiveness continues to grow

(Kieler et al., 1984, p. 331). With CMC's rapid growth in popularity and acceptance as a method of communication has come an opportunity for scholarly inquiry.

Much of the existing interpersonal communication scholarship seeks to understand if CMC and face-to-face communication (FtF) are functional alternatives or to explore the role of CMC in an organizational setting (e.g., Flaherty et al., 1998; Hovick, Meyers, & Timmerman, 2003; Papacharisse & Rubin, 2000). Existing dialogue discussing CMC in business settings concludes that qualities such as expediency, convenience, and cost effectiveness promote CMC (more specifically, electronic mail) use in the workplace. In sum, "the majority of work on CMC has focused on its use in organizational contexts and its general effects on social relationships within this context" (Stafford et al., 1999, p. 659). Although these findings are interesting and are pertinent to the organizational communication discipline, no such conclusions have been made as to the conscious motives of CMC in communication between former romantic partners.

The inquiry regarding the characteristics of communication, however, is not a new one. Early communication scholarship (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967) claimed that all human communication possesses both the content and relationship elements. The content message is the actual information within the message, and the relational message is the information about the relationship between the two communicants that brings meaning to the content (Watzlawick et al., 1967). For example, the simple question "How are you doing?" communicates an interest in another's current condition in terms of content, however, when said with certain relational factors, can communicate a variety of meanings ranging from disgust to carnal interest. Because CMC does not allow for relational cues such as eye gaze, tone, expression, and body

language, email communicators are forced to rely primarily on the content of the message, often reading between the lines and assigning meaning to the email's content (although there are small relational cues that will be discussed below). With that in mind, it becomes even more relevant to investigate why individuals would choose one communication medium over another. It seems as though the loss of relational content would be a deterrent to CMC use, however the growing prevalence of the medium provides evidence that CMC may offer something to communicators that FtF does not.

In this study, I hope to take a closer examination at the conscious motives involved with the contextual and relational aspects of CMC. Although research has touched on this aspect of interpersonal communication, existing findings are mixed. For example, Hian et al. (2004) challenged the technologically deterministic view that holds that "unlike FtF interaction, the limitations that characterize CMC as a technology restrict its utility as a channel of rich and varied social information" (p. 4) by finding that intimacy increases at a faster rate in CMC than in FtF interactions. In contrast, Soukup (2000) argues that "because the CMC setting prevents communicators from sending traditional relational cues (i.e., immediacy cues such as eye contact and body lean), interactants do not develop any significant level of intimacy" (pp. 411-412). McQuillen (2003) concluded that CMC may be a tool to permit, encourage, and assist in the development of interpersonal relationships; however, a relationship based solely on CMC will be significantly different than a relationship based on FtF.

Walther (1996) argues that although CMC does not offer interactional elements such as posture and eye gaze, other relational cues can be achieved in CMC (1996):

When is CMC hyperpersonal? When users experience commonality and are self-aware, physically separated, and communicating via a limited cues channel that allows them to selectively self-present and edit; to construct and reciprocate representations of their partners and relationship without the interferences of environmental reality (p. 33).

Walther (1994) also suggests that when participants anticipate future CMC interactions with their relational partner, the relationship moves toward intimacy.

The conflicting perspectives on the personal and intimate qualities of CMC makes the study of CMC complex in nature. Because this is the case, it is important to treat and research each type of relationship as a unique communicative situation. With that in mind, the current research seeks to explore the function of email between former romantic partners. Romantic relationship dissolution is a communicative process that nearly all humans endure. Because of the pervasiveness of this relational and communication phenomenon, research on dissolution and post-dissolutional relationships warrants investigation.

Romantic Relationship Dissolution

Relationship dissolution can be characterized as an attempt by one or both relational partners to reduce intimacy between partners in an effort to terminate the relationship. Much scholarly attention has been directed toward the development and maintenance of romantic relationships (e.g., Kellermann, 1986; Stafford & Canary, 1991), yet significantly less research has explored the dissolution of these relational dyads. Further, the majority of dissolution research (e.g., Cody, 1982) has investigated communication patterns and strategies associated with romantic relationship dissolution.

A more recent trend has been to examine post-dissolutional communication between former romantic partners. There is sparse research dedicated to this unique facet of relational interaction, yet much of the existing research (e.g., Graham, 1997) focuses on divorced couples rather than dating couples. Because people are more likely to endure numerous breakups with dating partners, and a limited number of breakups with a marital partner, post-dissolutional relationships between dating partners likely differ from post-divorce relationships and should be examined more closely.

Regardless of the type of relationship, relational disengagement is an extremely stressful process for all those who endure it. For example, Baxter (1985) states "Certainly, if the importance of a social phenomenon were gauged by its degree of stress and its frequency, relationship dissolution or disengagement would rank as one of the most significant features of social life" (p. 243). Relational dissolution has been found to threaten both the physical and emotional health of its participants. According to Duck (1988), "There is very little pain on this earth like the pain of a close long-term personal relationship that is falling apart" (p. 102). Research suggests that the effects of relationship loss are sometimes powerful enough to cause some physical side effects, from sleeplessness to heart failure (Duck, 1988). The significance of relationship dissolution is fairly well understood by both scholars and those individuals who endure it, yet the nature of post-dissolutional communication is still an opportunity for social scientific inquiry.

Post-dissolutional communication can be characterized as all communication between former partners that takes place after the initial breakup has been initiated by one or both partners. Foley and Fraser (1998) concluded, "Our language describing former

romantic relationships is very final," (p. 209) and is often referred to in terms of "breakup," "relationship fails," ex-boyfriend," and "ex-girlfriend." Research and theory, however, have found otherwise when it comes to defining post-dissolutional relationships and communication. For example, Duck (1982) developed a model of relational deterioration that separates the dissolution process into four communicative stages. It is during what Duck labels as the *social phase* when the post-dissolutional communication is expected to take place. Typically, this stage involves partners who have either already initiated the breakup or have already expressed significant dissatisfaction in the current relationship. At this time, partners typically consult surrounding networks, such as friends and family, for relational guidance and support. According to Duck (1988), this stage "also gives support to fighting partners, takes sides, pronounces verdicts on guilt and blame, and helps to seal the occurrences of breakup by sanctioning the dissolution" (p. 118). It is in this stage that relationships are typically redefined and intimacy decreases significantly. More indirect evidence of relational re-negotiation and continued communication between former partners points to research conducted by Bevan and Cameron (2001), who reported that 75% of an undergraduate sample reported reconciliation with a former partner. Additionally, Bevan et al. (2003) noted that most terminated couples give at least some thought to reconciliation, making it fair to assume that these individuals also continue communicating with one another at some level.

Pinpointing the nature of post-dissolutional relationships, Lannutti and Cameron (2002) found that heterosexual partners reported moderate amounts of both satisfaction and emotional closeness and low amounts of interpersonal contact and sexual intimacy in their post-dissolutional relationships. Also, Lannutti and Cameron (2002) identified

personal and structural variables that predicted the quality of post-dissolutional relationships in both same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. Both groups reported high post-dissolutional relationship satisfaction, moderate emotional intimacy levels, and low amounts of sexual intimacy with their former partners. Further, for both groups, personal variables such as hope for romantic renewal and liking for one's former partner better predicted post-dissolutional relationship quality than structural factors such as the extent to which the former partners shared their friend social networks.

In a similar vein, Busboom, Collins, Givertz, and Levin (2002) sought to understand predictors of quality post-dissolutional relationships. Busboom et al. (2002) found that those individuals who reported higher frequencies of relational resources also reported high post-dissolutional friendship quality. Further, lack of support from friends and family negatively impacted post-dissolutional friendship quality. Lastly, Tashiro and Frazier (2003) explored factors associated with the likelihood of continuing a post-dissolutional relationship with a former partner. They found that attribution, personality, gender, and initiator status would have the greatest impact on personal growth (or lack of) after a romantic relationship has been terminated. Although these findings do not pertain directly to conscious motives involved with choosing one communication medium over another, they reveal the complex nature and intricacies of romantic relationship dissolution.

Up until this point, most research exploring post-dissolutional relationships and communication (e.g., Bevan et al., 2003; Lannutti & Cameron, 2003) has been exploratory in nature rather than theoretically based. This study, thus seeks to expand the current body of knowledge by adding a theoretical component. Specifically, post-

dissolutional relationships and communication are examined via planning theory and facework.

Planning Theory

Underlying much human communication research is the assumption that interpersonal interaction is both strategic and goal-directed (Berger & DiBattista, 1992). Thus, goals and plans are critical in guiding human action (Berger & Jordan, 1992). According to Afifi and Lee (2000), “the assumptions that communicative action is strategic and goal-oriented is virtually a given starting point of communication research...goals and discourse are transparently linked” (p. 285). The notion of plans and -directed behaviors has been central to much cognitive social science inquiry by psychologists; however, research linking cognitive planning with communication behavior has not yet received as much attention by communication scholars (Littlejohn, 2002). Berger’s (1987) Planning Theory is a practical theoretical foundation for examining the impact of cognitive planning on interpersonal communication. More specifically, Planning Theory is a useful tool in the exploration of why former romantic partners would choose to use one communication medium (CMC) over another (FtF) to achieve their communication goals after a relationship is terminated.

Planning Theory is rooted in the assumption that the communication process is the linking of two or more mental representations through verbal and nonverbal symbols. The theory seeks to explain and predict the exchange of symbols, the cognitive process of gathering and interpreting those symbols, and the communication implications of goals (Berger, 1995). Before Planning Theory can be explained and applied to this

investigation, three key constructs central to the theory will be defined and discussed: *goals, plans, and planning*.

Goals

Fundamental to Planning Theory is the goal construct. According Berger (1995), goals are conceptually defined as “desired end states toward which persons strive” (p. 1433). Goals can vary in their importance, urgency, and size, as well as other situational factors. Goals can be either explicit or implicit in nature. For example, if a man sits down for a meal, he eats because he is motivated by his desired ends of a full stomach. His explicit goal may be to cure his hunger or to provide himself with energy, yet his implicit goal may be to preserve his life. People often think of goals only in terms of their explicit form; however, implicit goals can have an equal influence on human action (Berger, 1995).

The ideas of explicit and implicit goals will be central to this study. The explicit goals of a computer-mediated message will likely be to share and/or convey information, whereas the implicit goals will likely be not as evident. It is reasonable to conclude that implicit goals could have an influence on an individual’s preferred communication medium. Variables such as locus of control (Flaherty et al., 1998), social appropriateness (Alterman, 1988; Berger & Jordan, 1992), and cognitive complexity (Waldron, 1990) have all been identified by communication scholars as implicit goals associated with communication planning. To better understand the dissolution process, it will be important to identify implicit goals specifically associated with CMC use.

Communication scholars must also consider several other assumptions when exploring human tendency during goal pursuit. Individuals are assumed to 1) pursue

multiple goals simultaneously; 2) achieve multiple goals by employing a single strategy (Berger, 1988); and 3) adjust and modify goals during interactions in response to feedback (Berger, 1995) and upon finding evidence that their plan may be failing (Berger & DiBattista, 1992, 1993).

Plans

In past decades, several definitions of the plan construct have been noted in cognitive planning scholarship. The following definition is Berger's (1995) "synthesis" of competing definitions and serves as the conceptual definition for this investigation:

A plan specifies the actions that are necessary for the attainment of goals or several goals. Plans vary in their levels of abstraction. Highly abstract goals can spawn more detailed plans. Plans can contain alternative paths for goal attainment from which the social actor can choose (p. 144).

Plans are created when an individual draws upon prior experiences where he or she achieved his or her previous goals. When people plan to achieve a goal, they search their memories for cases that are most similar to the current situation and use prior experiences as a basis for present planning (Berger & Jordan, 1992). Even small children use this process to achieve goals, as a small child learns what to say and what not to say to garner a parent's attention. Once a plan is identified, people often draw upon the appropriate means to achieve their goals.

Because email allows for planning, editing, drafting, and revising, it may be an appealing communication medium for individuals seeking to accurately plan their communication. Further, it allows for individuals to strategically orchestrate their communication plans, which is a luxury that is not always afforded in FtF

communication. Often in FtF communication, conversations are interactions, where the input of one person is dependent upon the communication of the other. Because email is asynchronous, one's communication via this medium does not rely as much on the other person. Individuals using CMC do not have to take into immediate concern the thoughts, reactions, and input of the other individual. The asynchronous nature of CMC affords communicators the luxury of being able to draft, re-read, and ultimately plan their messages before they are sent. This opportunity to plan, in advance, the message being communicated may assist communicators in expressing themselves more clearly and potentially increase the likelihood that their communication goal will be achieved.

Planning

A final core concept of Planning Theory is the concept of planning. Although they are related and similar in nature, it is important to distinguish between a plan and the planning process. According to Berger (1995), "Planning is a process in which persons a) devise action sequences; b) anticipate the outcomes of action sequences; c) adjust projected actions in terms of anticipated outcomes; and d) finally realize their plans in action" (p. 145). Planning may be a conscious process, but it is also commonly an unconscious process, as in the case of implicit goals (Berger, 1995). When examining the planning process, it is interesting to consider how a planner refits an old plan to meet the demands of a new situation (Alterman, 1988). When taking into account the cognitive complexity of both the goals and plans for a situation, "as the planning environment becomes more constrained, interactants are thought to adopt progressively more simple, 'automatic,' and efficient planning processes" (Waldron, 1990, p.15). In contrast, less

restricted conditions allow for a more “knowledge-based” or “creative” planning process (Waldron, 1990).

As previously mentioned, CMC may be an appealing communication medium because it allows for a greater degree of planning compared with FtF. Individuals choosing to use CMC can spend as much or as little time as desired planning their communication in a manner that will best allow their goals, both implicit and explicit, to be achieved.

Planning Theory and CMC. The lack of restrictions and/or pressure involved with email allows for more knowledge-based planning and thus could serve as one explanation as to why former romantic partners may choose to use email as a means of achieving their communication goals. For example, when composing an email, one can, in most circumstances, take his or her time, express him/herself without being interrupted, and edit his/her work, luxuries that are not always available in FtF. Access to knowledge-based planning is an enticing feature of CMC in most communication situations, but it is especially salient with communication between former romantic partners. Romantic partners often use personal idioms, such as labels for outsiders, nicknames, and teasing insults, as communication norms (Cupach & Metts, 1994) and emails may allow for the planning and incorporation of these idioms into an individual’s communication. For example, if former romantic partners meet on the street and get into an argument, the constraints of the situation may mean that they are likely to rely upon automatic responses rather than carefully rehearsed, knowledge-based, and creative plans. As opposed to FtF communication, email may have the capacity to better allow for both

implicit (e.g., face saving and topic avoidance) and explicit goal planning. As such, the first hypothesis states:

H1: Individuals will report using CMC versus FtF to communicate with their former romantic partners because it allows for message planning.

Facework

When examining the use of email in interpersonal relationships, the notion of implicit goal achievement seems relevant. It appears obvious that the explicit goal or reason that individuals initiate CMC is to exchange information; however, the implicit goals associated with choosing CMC over FtF communication are not as evident. A possible explicit goal when choosing email instead of FtF is an individual's attempt to save face and avoid face threats.

Before one can fully understand the principles of face saving and face threats, the concepts of *face* and *facework* must be understood. The term face was introduced in the 1950s by Goffman and was used by sociologists whose interests were in public performance (Cupach & Metts, 1994). In recent decades, communication scholars have taken an interest in face and have since uncovered many findings about the role face plays in interpersonal relationships and interpersonal communication (Cupach & Carson, 2002; Cupach & Metts, 1994). A widely accepted definition for face states that it is "socially situated identities people claim or attribute to others" (Tracy, 1990, p. 210). Face involves feelings of respect, honor, status, connection, loyalty, and other similar values (Littlejohn, 2002). When persons interact, they tactfully present a conception of themselves in each encounter; in other words, an individual can "offer an identity that he or she wants to assume and wants others to accept" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 3).

Bragging or boasting about one's own accomplishments is perhaps one of the most overt efforts to maintain one's own face identity.

Face goals differ according to the communication context. For example, an athlete in a championship game might want to maintain a tough, competitive face. Yet in a different setting (i.e., spending time with a significant other), that same athlete may try to maintain a compassionate, loving face.

Based on Goffman's principles, Brown and Levinson (1987) identified two types of face: *negative face* and *positive face*. "Negative face pertains to one's need for autonomy and the desire to avoid impositions by others. Positive face refers to one's desire for approval and acceptance" (Cupach & Carson, 2002, p. 445). Messages that threaten one's negative and/or positive face are called face-threatening acts (FTA) (Cupach & Carson, 2002). Threats to an individual's face can be a very negative experience. As Afifi et al. (2001) note, "Although relatively little attention has been paid to the consequences of face threats in relationships, the data that do exist clearly reflect individuals' dislike for those who threaten their identities" (pp. 293-394). According to Cupach and Metts (1994), "Face threats occur when a person's desired identity in a particular interaction is challenged" (p. 4).

Face threats would include things such as insults, accusations, and blame. The notion of positive and negative face presents a interesting communication dilemma in that satisfying one face need often threatens the other (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Baxter (1988) explains the "dialectical nature" of face:

No relationship can exist by definition unless the parties sacrifice some individual autonomy. However, too much connection paradoxically destroys the relationship

because the individual identities become lost (Askham, 1976). Simultaneously, an individual's autonomy can be conceptualized only in terms of separation from others. But too much autonomy paradoxically destroys the individual's identity because connections with others are the "stuff" of which identity is made (Lock, 1986). (p. 259). However, the balance between positive and negative face does not have to be a negative experience; it can be achieved through facework (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

Generally, face is not a conscious concern, but *facework* is often intentional. According to Littlejohn (2002), "*Facework* is the communication behaviors people use to build and protect their own face and to protect, build, or threaten the face of others" (p. 247). Face and facework are often issues in interpersonal conflict and are practically inherent to situations such as relationship dissolution (Cupach & Metts, 1994). The two primary forms of facework employed to counteract face threats to self and others are preventative facework (sometimes referred to as avoidance facework) and corrective facework. There is a basic assumption that individuals look out for the face of other individuals, as well as their own face (Metts, 1992). It is when threats to face are a possibility that facework is incorporated into an interpersonal interaction.

Facework and Romantic Dissolution

According to Cupach and Metts (1994), "Ending a relationship is perhaps one of the most face-threatening situations we encounter " (p. 81). Additionally, Cupach and Metts (1994) note, "face and facework are especially potent when employed to make sense out of situations where individuals find interaction with a partner challenging, threatening, paradoxical, difficult or awkward" (p. 96). Few individuals would argue that relationship dissolution does not have the aforementioned characteristics of a face

threatening situation. Thus, a significant amount of scholarly attention has been directed toward facework in relationship dissolution (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2003). Research by Kunkel et al. (2003) discovered that pressuring others, making others appear inadequate, losing the current desirable relationship, and looking insensitive were among the most face threatening fears associated with relationship dissolution between former partners. Not looking overly dependant, appearing too forward, and attempting to appear attractive were other face threats identified in this particular research. Also uncovered by Kunkel et al. (2003) were further face-related concerns associated with relationship dissolution, including threats to the others' face (i.e., did the other person feel hurt, upset, sad, miserable, relieved, etc.) as well as threats to one's own face (i.e., do I appear ungrateful, inconsiderate, rude, selfish, etc.). The major findings of Kunkel et al.'s (2003) study, that individuals tend to associate very specific sets of potential face threats with relationship dissolution, is consistent with other research examining similar variables (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

Using email to communicate with a former romantic partner seems to be less face threatening for both relational partners than does FtF communication. McLoad et al. (1997) found that individuals who normally would not take part in discussion and decision-making in the workplace were far more inclined to do so via CMC than in FtF interactions. When asked why participation increased with CMC, attempting to avoid ridicule and public disapproval were cited as situations that were inherently face threatening (McLoad et al., 1997). With that in mind and with the inherently face-threatening nature of relationship dissolution established, it seems logical to explore the

relationship among facework, post-dissolutional communication, and choice of communication medium. The following hypotheses thus posit:

H2: Participants will report using CMC rather than FtF communication with their former romantic partners in an attempt to save the positive face of their former partners.

H3: Participants will report using CMC rather than FtF communication with their former romantic partners in an attempt to save their own positive face.

Topic Avoidance and Face Work

Another aspect of facework is *preventative facework*. Preventative facework occurs in an effort to avoid or minimize the likelihood of face-threatening acts. Tactics would include topic avoidance, changing the subject of a conversation steering in a potentially threatening direction, and pretending not to notice something face-threatening has been said or done (Cupach & Metts, 1994). The idea of topic avoidance is particularly interesting and potentially relevant when inquiring about conscious motives for using CMC rather than FtF communication.

Topic avoidance occurs when an individual strategically decides *not* to disclose information to another person and it can be a means to save face and/or a means of deception (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Although individuals can choose to avoid topics at any time, communication scholars have been able to identify situations in which individuals are particularly likely to engage in topic avoidance. For example, Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) assert that periods of relational transition (e.g., cross-sex friends beginning to exclusively date) and when individuals experience heightened levels

of turmoil, chaos, and drama are times in which individuals are most likely to avoid topics. Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) use the term *relational turbulence* to describe those situations marked by heightened levels of turmoil, chaos, and drama. Further, topic avoidance peaks at moderate levels of intimacy (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), something that defines relationship disengagements according to Duck's (1988) model.

The state of the relationship, information about previous relationships, relational rules, negative self-disclosures, and relational problems are cited as some of the most frequently avoided topics in interpersonal relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Not commonly researched, but another potentially plausible explanation for topic avoidance, is the presence of a new romantic partner or partners: that is, often introducing or even discussing a new romantic partner with a former partner can be an extremely awkward and/or uncomfortable situation. Consistent with the findings of Knobloch and Carpenter-Thune (2003), these early and late stages in relationships are marked with limited intimacy and awkward topics that are often avoided. Thus, it is fair to deduce that due to the face threatening nature of relationship dissolution coupled with the relational turbulence associated with romantic breakups, topic avoidance should be a communication goal of individuals in the dissolution process.

Email provides communicators a unique opportunity to avoid topics. As opposed to FtF communication in which avoiding topics, comments, and questions from a conversational partner is difficult to accomplish, CMC makes avoiding topics a much easier task. For example, if two former partners are communicating face-to-face and one asks, "What were you thinking about while you were cheating on me?" the one who is

being asked has either two options: to answer or not to answer. It is very difficult, however, not to answer such a direct question. The response will continue the conversation, or a lack of response is likely to either escalate an already tense situation, or end it altogether. In CMC however, that same question embedded within an email is easier to avoid. The receiver of the message can address all other issues within the email and easily reply to only the topics he or she feels comfortable addressing. Based on the norms associated with the two communication mediums, individuals do not have to reply to topics in emails as readily as in conversation. Hence, it seems plausible that former romantic partners would choose to utilize CMC as a means of preventative facework and ultimately, to avoid selected topics. The fourth hypothesis thus predicts:

H4: Individuals will report using CMC versus FtF communication with their former romantic partners because it allows them to engage in topic avoidance.

Preventative Facework Strategies

Although it is uncomfortable, individuals are often forced to express themselves in a manner that threatens their own face or the face of others. It is when people find themselves in these situations that the use of disclaimers becomes a face saving strategy. According to Metts (1992), "Disclaimers are conventionalized linguistic devices designed to forestall negative attributions to one's character, competence, integrity, or motives" (p. 113). Hewitt and Stokes (1975) identified five types of linguistic disclaimers: *hedging* (i.e., uncertainty and receptivity to suggestions; "I may be wrong but..."); *credentialing* (i.e., there are good reasons and appropriate qualifications for engaging in sanctionable action; "I'm your husband; I have every right to read your mail); *sin license* (i.e., it is an

acceptable occasion for rule violation and should not be taken as a character defect; “What the hell, this is a special occasion”); *cognitive disclaimer* (i.e., the impending behavior is reasonable and under cognitive control, in spite of appearances; “I know this sounds crazy, but...”); and *appeal or suspending judgment* (i.e., request to withhold judgment for a possibly offensive act until it has been fully explained; “Hear me out before you get upset”).

The aforementioned disclaimers are conversational yet might be easy to “flub up” in FtF communication; thus, it seems logical that individuals would use CMC to strategically communicate preventative facework disclaimers. This research thus seeks to better understand the use of preventative facework strategies employed in post-dissolutional communication.

RQ1: What preventative facework strategies are employed in post-dissolutional communication between former partners?

Usage of emoticons. Because CMC allows for more careful planning and word choice, it would make sense that people would choose to use CMC rather than FtF when it comes to preventative facework. Because nonverbal communication is limited in CMC (although communicators do have access to emoticons and typing in all capital letters to express emotions), the preciseness of words becomes especially important in facework and impression management (Walther, 1993). It is therefore relevant to better understand the frequency that people would use emoticons to fill make up for the lack of nonverbal cues in their CMC with their former partner. In other words, it is useful to investigate if those who use emoticons are more concerned with face-saving than those who do not.

Emoticons, as defined by Walther and D’Addario (2001), are “graphic

representations of facial expressions that many e-mail users embed in their messages” (p. 324). According to Walther and D’Addario (2001), “computer conferees also find ways to overcome the lack of personal contact. They have devised ways of sending screams, hugs, and kisses” (p. 325). With the knowledge that the relational aspect is often lacking in CMC, coupled with the understanding that the use of emoticons is an increasingly popular attempt at filling that information gap, it becomes relevant to explore if and how former romantic partners incorporate emoticons into their post-dissolutional communication.

RQ2: How are emoticons used in CMC between former romantic partners?

Because emoticon use is an overt effort to attach relational messages to the text embedding in an email, the use of emoticons might be positively correlated to the desire to save face. Thus,

H5: The more participants use emoticons with their former partners, the more concerned they will be with face saving with their former romantic partners.

Corrective Facework Strategies.

The other main form of facework, as mentioned before, is *corrective facework*. Corrective facework is employed in an effort to repair the face of either partner. “Although threatening a partner’s face clearly has considerable relational and individual consequences, its impact appears to be weakened if followed by efforts to redress face” (Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001, p. 294). Individuals often aim to simultaneously manage both their own face and their partner’s face; a balancing act that is complicated by the

inherent face-threatening nature of speech acts (Kunkel et al., 2003). According to Cupach and Metts (1994):

Corrective behaviors may be defensively offered by the actor responsible for creating face threat, may be protectively offered by other people who witness the loss of face, or may be offered by the person who has lost face as he or she attempts to regain social identity (p. 8).

Corrective facework often comes in the forms of humor, apology, and accounts, justification, and physical remediation. Scholars have identified other corrective strategies and have noted their respective abilities to repair face. Metts (1994) found apologies to be particularly effective at restoring harmony within a relationship after a transgression. Similarly, Metts (1992) attests that the best corrective strategies are those that acknowledge the positive face of the recipient while at the same time threatening the user's positive face needs (e.g., "I'm a terrible person, please forgive me") and negative needs (e.g., "I assure you that will not happen again; I'll do whatever possible to make it up to you") (Afifi et al., 2001). Understanding the role of corrective facework in post-dissolutional communication may contribute to a broader understanding of the dissolution process as a whole. Specifically, understanding the corrective facework strategies most commonly employed in post-dissolutional communication should lead to a better understanding of why former romantic partners might choose CMC over FtF communication.

RQ3: What corrective facework strategies are employed in post-dissolutional communication between former partners?

Summary

In summary, post-dissolutional communication is a unique facet of interpersonal communication and should be researched as such. With the overwhelming popularity of CMC as an acceptable means of communication comes the opportunity to explore its impact on existing communication situations such as romantic relationship dissolution. The dissolution process has been labeled by scholars as both traumatic and face threatening. Human communication is identified as goal motivated and plan oriented and post-dissolutional communication is no exception. This study is thus designed to explore the use of email in romantic relationship dissolution using planning theory, facework theory, and topic avoidance as primary tools.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

Participants

Data were collected from 173 undergraduate students taking either introductory or upper division communication course at a large, Southwestern university. Participants reported being 63% female ($n=109$) and averaged 24.5 years of age ($range=18$ to 47 , $SD=11.0$). Most universities have a mostly homogeneous undergraduate population; however, the university where these data were collected is diverse with respect to age and ethnicity. Participants classified themselves as 59% White ($n=102$), Black/African American ($n=19$), Asian ($n=16$), Hispanic ($n=13$), in the “other” category ($n=12$), no response ($n=6$), and Native American ($n=4$). Ninety-two percent of the participants reported that they were heterosexual ($n=160$) and three reported that they were homosexual, four bisexual, one other, and four did not respond. No minors or members of any vulnerable populations were participants in this research. Forty percent of the participants were seniors ($n=69$); with 63 juniors, 32 sophomores, four freshmen, and four participants who did not respond.

The average age of the former partner who was reported on was 26.5 years ($SD=11.0$, $range=16-46$). Participants reported that their former relationship lasted an average of 26.1 months ($SD=25.8$, $range=1-121$), and the average number of months since the breakup was 26.8 ($SD=38.0$, $range=1\text{ week}-312\text{ months}$). Twenty-nine percent

($n=50$) of the participants reported currently having no communication with their former partner and 19.2% ($n=33$) reported having frequent contact with their former partner (somewhat frequent $n=25$, sporadic $n=31$, infrequent $n=28$). When asked to classify their current relationship with their former partners, 44.8% of the respondents ($n=77$) said that they have no contact with their former partners and an additional 21.4% ($n=37$) reported only infrequent contact, 11% ($n=19$) reported being casual friends, 8.7% ($n=15$) reported being close friends, 5.8% ($n=10$) reported being casually dating, 2.9% ($n=5$) reported being exclusively dating, and the other remaining percentages ($n=9$) were participants who marked other or left the item blank.

Procedures

All protocol set forth by the Office for The Protection of Human Subjects was followed. The following is the general procedure used for data collection: The researcher arrived in the communication classes with instructor permission. The nature of the study was described and students with any type of romantic breakup and history of email use were asked to participate. Consent forms were distributed and described verbally. Students reviewed the consent form and were given an opportunity to ask questions; if they did not feel comfortable with the nature of the study, they were given the option to not continue with the project. In an effort to increase anonymity, there was a waiver of informed consent signature; the consent form served as a record for the participants. By submitting the survey, participants consented to participate in the study. Participants were then given a questionnaire to complete. At random, half of the participants received questionnaires asking questions about face-to-face communication and the other half

received questionnaires asking questions about computer-mediated communication. The directions read:

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the appropriate number to document your feelings. We are interesting in learning more about communication between former romantic partners after their relationship has ended.

Think of the individual with whom you had your most significant romantic relationship. THIS MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS ENDED and does not currently have a primary physical or romantic component. If your significant romantic relationship ended MORE than two years ago, please consider your most recent breakup.

Think of your former romantic partner when answering these questions, NOT a friend. Focus on the relationship you have/had with your former partner within one or two months after the relationship has ended.

Further, while answering these questions, think of in-person/face-to-face or email (i.e., use of email such as Yahoo or MSN – not instant or text messages.)

After the questionnaires were completed, participants placed them facedown into a box containing other completed surveys (also facedown). Then, the participants were verbally debriefed and thanked by the researcher. Before leaving the classroom, students were afforded the opportunity to take their survey with them instead of having it be included in the study. After the students left, the researcher could not identify whose survey belonged to whom, and thus the survey could not be returned.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and factor structure of the scales being used and the validity of the items on the survey. The pilot study was approved by the Office of the Protection of Human Services. The research design was a quasi-experiment with two different instruments that were randomly distributed. One version collected data on CMC and the other version specified FtF communication use. The survey consisted of twenty total items that were answered on seven-point, Likert type scales (1= Strongly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 7= Strongly Agree). No demographic information was collected to preserve anonymity.

Pilot study participants ($n=19$) included undergraduate students from a single introductory communication class at a large, Southwestern university. The survey was conducted during regularly scheduled class time and students received no incentive to participate. Participants were briefed about the nature of the study and were provided with a consent form. All data were anonymous.

Independent and Dependent Measures

Independent variables. Communication medium (either FtF or CMC) was the independent variable under investigation. The research design was a quasi-experiment with two different instruments that were randomly distributed. One version collected data on CMC and the other version specified FtF communication use. Slightly over half of the participants ($n=83$) completed the FtF version and slightly under half ($n=81$) completed the CMC version.

Face-saving measures. Three of the five dependent variables (face saving, degree of planning, topic avoidance) were measured using seven-point, Likert-type scales (1=

Strongly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 7= Strongly Agree). Four items created for the current study were used to measure one's desire to save the face of a former partner (e.g., I viewed face-to-face communication as a polite way of saying something that might have threatened my former partner's face; Using email was a way to prevent embarrassing my former partner in front of others). Five items measured one's desire to save their own face (e.g., I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking heartless; I used email to avoid looking inconsiderate).

Several of the items used to measure face-saving concerns were adapted from Cupach and Carson (2002) and Kunkel et al. (2003). For example, Cupach and Carson (2002) asked respondents to recall the actions of an individual with whom they had a significant interpersonal relationship. Then, respondents reported the extent to which they felt each emotion listed on the survey in regards to the actions of their relational partner on a seven-point scale (1=Not at all, 7= Very much so). Cupach and Carson's (2002) items assessed the perceived face threats for both positive face threats ($\alpha=.92$) and negative face threats ($\alpha=.81$). Perceptions of rudeness, insensitivity, blatant disrespect, etc. were identified as positive face threats and perceptions of personal constraint, invasion of privacy, looking bad in the eyes of others, etc. were identified as negative face threats (Cupach & Carson, 2002). Similarly, items used in the current study sought to measure the feelings identified by Cupach and Carson (2002) in an effort to better understand the face-threatening nature of relationship dissolution (e.g., Using email was a way to prevent embarrassing my former partner in front of others).

Kunkel et. al. (2003) used a combination of hypothetical examples and open-ended questions to explore face threats in relationship initiation, intensification, and

termination. In Kunkel et al.'s study, students were asked to read hypothetical examples of relationship initiation, intensification, and termination and then were asked to write out in detail exactly what they would do in each of the situations. Following the written narrative, participants were asked the following open-ended questions: (1) What kind of concerns would you have about seeking to initiate (or intensify or terminate) this relationship? (2) Would you have any specific concerns about how you might appear to the other person in this situation? (3) Would the other person have any such concerns? (4) How would it make you feel to attempt to initiate (or intensify or terminate) this relationship? and (5) How do you think the other person would feel about your initiating (or intensifying or terminating) this relationship. The answers to the open-ended questions were then coded and face concerns were identified that are most common with each of the stages of romantic relationships. The items used in this study to measure threats to one's own positive face were adapted directly from these findings.

To determine whether the face items comprised two separate variables, face of self and face of others, an exploratory factor analysis using a varimax rotation was conducted. For all factor analyses conducted, the following criterion was set forth to retain an item as a part of a particular factor: the item must have a factor loading of .65 on the specific factor and a factor loading below .35 on all other factors. The factor analysis revealed a single factor consisting of seven items and was subsequently labeled "face-saving." The face-saving factor had an *eigenvalue* of 6.92 with 43.3% of the variance explained. A reliability test was conducted based on the seven-item face-saving factor and revealed a Cronbach's *alpha* of .90 ($M=3.18$, $SD=1.54$).

Table 1

Planning, Topic Avoidance, and Face-Saving Variables: Means, Standard Deviations, and alphas.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>alpha</u>
Planning	4.06	1.79	.89
Topic Avoidance	3.37	1.79	.83
Face-Saving	3.18	1.54	.90

Note. $N=173$. All variables were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale with high values indicating greater planning, topic avoidance, and face-saving.

Preventative facework. Because no previous measures existed, three individual items were created to measure the likelihood that participants would use each of the five preventative strategies: hedging, credentialing, sin license, cognitive disclaimers, and appeals for suspended judgment (e.g., Hear me out before you get upset...; You know I'm not an expert, but...; Please allow me to play devil's advocate here). The items used to analyze preventative facework were adapted from research conducted by Hewitt and Stokes (1975). Using a 7-point Likert type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree), participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would use each of the preventative facework strategies. An exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to ensure that the five forms of preventative facework would emerge as separate factors. However, results of this factor analysis revealed a ten-item unidimensional preventative facework factor (*eigenvalue* = 7.49, 49.9% of the variance explained). A test of internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$, $M=3.47$, $SD=1.69$) also indicated that the preventative facework items comprising the factor formed a highly reliable scale. Thus, a single preventative facework composite item was created.

Corrective facework. To explore the frequency of corrective facework use, participants were asked to report the likelihood that they would use each of the corrective facework strategies (humor, apologies, and accounts) using a 7-point Likert type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree) with their former romantic partner. A total of 12 examples of corrective facework were listed on the survey (three humor, three apology, three account/justification, and three account/excuse items). The items used to analyze corrective facework were adapted from Cupach and Metts (1990).

In terms of the present investigation, an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to ensure that the three forms of corrective facework would emerge as separate factors. However, results revealed the presence of only two factors, one consisting of two apology and two justification items, and the other containing one account and three humor items. Because the humor factor's reliability increased from $\alpha=.89$ to $\alpha=.92$ ($M=3.63$, $SD=2.17$) without the account item, the account item was discarded and this factor was labeled "humor." The humor factor had an *eigenvalue* of 1.62 with 13.53% of the variance explained. The second factor, "apology/excuse," was comprised of two apology items and two excuse items and had an *eigenvalue* of 5.59 with 46.57% of the variance explained. Those items demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha=.82$, $M=3.75$, $SD=1.82$). The justification items cross-loaded with other factors and were thus not analyzed further.

Degree of planning. Because no degree of planning scale was known to exist, four items created for the current study were used to measure this variable (e.g., One of the reasons I used email communication was so I could accurately plan my messages; Being able to carefully plan what I was going to say was an advantage to communicating

face-to-face). Using an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation, it was revealed that all four planning items formed a single factor with an *eigenvalue* of 2.104 and 13.1% of the variance explained. A Cronbach's *alpha* of .89 ($M=4.06$, $SD=1.79$) was observed for the planning scale and a composite planning item, was created.

Topic avoidance. Three items created for the present study were used to measure topic avoidance (e.g., My former partner would avoid addressing certain topics I included in our conversations; It was easy to avoid topics brought up in emails). All three topic avoidance items formed a single factor with an *eigenvalue* of 1.515 and 9.47% of the variance explained. Internal consistency testing revealed high reliability ($\alpha=.83$, $M=3.37$, $SD=1.79$) and a composite topic avoidance item was created.

Breakup responsibility. The scale and items assessing break-up responsibility ($\alpha=.78$) were from previous research by Bevan et al. (2003). The following four items were measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale (0=Strongly Disagree, 6=Strongly Agree): I felt like what happened in our break-up was mostly determined by my relational partner; Our break-up was controlled by my romantic partner; Our breakup was determined by my own actions; and Our breakup occurred over email. Through an exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation, two of the four items were retained to form one "breakup" factor ($\alpha=.82$, $M=3.93$, $SD=2.07$).

Emoticon usage. The CMC version of the survey contained three items created for the current study (e.g., I use emoticons in my email communication with my former partner to add a personal element to my message; I use emoticons in my email communication with my former partner to highlight emotional aspects of my message) measuring participants' likelihood of incorporating emoticons into their CMC.

Participants were asked to answer these items using a seven-point, Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 4=Neutral, 7=Strongly Agree). Through exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation, it was found that the three items created a single emoticon factor with an *eigenvalue* of 2.33 and 77.7% of the variance explained. Additionally, a Cronbach's *alpha* of .85 was observed ($M=2.82$, $SD=1.84$) and an emoticon composite item was created.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Before hypotheses and research question testing was conducted, the factor analytic structure and Cronbach's alpha for reliability estimates of scales were examined. From these tests, unidimensional and reliable scales were averaged into composite items for data analysis.

Data were then analyzed for hypotheses one through four by way of univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with communication medium as the fixed factor (CMC or FtF) and degree of planning, topic avoidance, face-saving as the dependent variables. For hypothesis five, a one-tail bivariate correlation test was conducted. To examine the three research questions, means for preventative and corrective facework strategies, and emoticon use were compared by way of a series of one-sample t-tests.

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals will report using CMC versus FtF communication with their former romantic partners because it allows for message planning. A significant main effect was not observed, $F(1,162)=1.25$, $p=.27$. Individuals answering questions regarding FtF ($M=3.89$, $SD=1.5$) and individuals answering questions regarding CMC use ($M=4.2$, $SD=2.05$) did not differ significantly in the degree of planning that each communication medium allows. The data were not consistent with H1.

Hypothesis Two and Three

The second and third hypotheses dealt with an individual's concern to save face. Hypothesis two proposed that participants will report using CMC rather than FtF communication with their former romantic partner in an attempt to save the positive face of their former partner. Hypothesis three predicted that participants will report using CMC rather than FtF communication with their former romantic partner in an attempt to save their own positive face. Because the items measuring face of self and face of others comprised a single face-saving factor, hypotheses two and three were combined and restated as: Participants will report using CMC rather than FtF communication with their former partner in an attempt to save face.

A significant main effect was found, $F(1,162)=28.82, p<.0001, \eta^2=.15$. Participants reporting on FtF communication ($M=3.76, SD=1.38$) and those reporting on CMC ($M=3.57, SD=1.46$) did differ significantly in the amount of face-saving provided by their respective communication medium; however, it was in the opposite direction as predicted. Thus, the data were not consistent with H2/3.

Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis four proposed that individuals will report using CMC versus FtF communication with their former romantic partner because it allows them to engage in topic avoidance. A significant effect was observed, $F(1, 162)=13.99, p<.001, \eta^2=.08$. Individuals completing the FtF version ($M=3.86, SD=1.67$) and individuals completing the CMC version ($M=2.86, SD=1.77$) did significantly differ, but not in the direction predicted by H4 according to the extent to which each medium allows for topic avoidance. The data were not consistent with H4.

Table 2

Univariate Analysis of Variance for Planning, Topic Avoidance, and Face-Saving Variables

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Planning</u>	<u>Topic Avoidance*</u>	<u>Face-Saving*</u>
CMC	4.20 (2.05)	2.86 (1.77)	2.57 (1.46)
FtF	3.89 (1.49)	3.86 (1.67)	1.38 (1.38)

Note. $N=173$.

*Means were significantly difference at $p<.05$, but were in the opposite direction than what was predicted.

Research Question One

Research question one sought to discover what preventative facework strategies are employed in post-dissolutional communication between former partners. Because the factor analysis revealed only one composite preventative factor, this research cannot conclude which of the five strategies is most common and/or uncommon. However, the mean for the preventative facework composite item indicated that usage was at a moderate level ($M=3.47$, $SD=1.69$) in post-dissolutional communication.

Hypothesis Five

Hypothesis five stated that the more participants reported using emoticons in their email communication with their former partners, the more they were concerned with face-saving. A moderate correlation was found between one's use of emoticons and their concern with face-saving ($r=.50$, $p<.001$). People who use emoticons are thus more likely to save face and the data were consistent with H5.

Research Question Two

Research question two dealt with emoticon use, something only applicable to the CMC condition; thus only data collected from CMC participants were analyzed. Research question two sought to understand how emoticons are used in CMC between former romantic partners. Examination of the mean for the emoticon composite item revealed that participants did not report using emoticons frequently in their post-dissolutional CMC ($M=2.56$, $SD=1.91$). Thus, emoticon use may not be prevalent in CMC post-dissolutional communication.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked: What corrective facework strategies are employed in post-dissolutional communication between former partners? Factor analysis results revealed that corrective facework strategies were made up of two categories: humor and apology/excuses. Examination of the composite means for these two facework strategies revealed that participants were moderately likely to use corrective facework strategies as a whole. More specifically, apology/excuses ($M=3.75$, $SD=.182$) were slightly more common than the use of humor ($M=3.63$, $SD=2.17$), though this difference was not significant, $t(160)=-.770$, $p=.47$. It is interesting to note, however, the large standard deviation for the humor factor, indicating that participants vary greatly in their usage of humor as a corrective facework strategy in post-dissolutional relationships.

Supplementary Analysis

In an effort to learn even more about the current data set, additional analyses were conducted. For these supplementary analyses, participants with the FtF version who reported no FtF contact after the breakup were removed and participants with the CMC

version who reported no CMC after the breakup were also removed. With the established criterion, 53 FtF and 42 CMC versions were examined for additional analysis. Using the same methodology explained in previous portions of this project, hypothesis one through four were retested.

The first hypothesis predicted that individuals will report using CMC versus FtF communication with their former romantic partners because it allows for message planning. With the modified data set, a significant main effect was observed, $F(1,93)=5.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Individuals answering questions regarding FtF ($M=4.0$, $SD=1.35$) and individuals answering questions regarding CMC use ($M=4.77$, $SD=1.83$) differed significantly in the degree of planning that each communication medium allows. Under the modified conditions, the data were consistent with H1's predictions.

Hypotheses two and three were examined under the same conditions as in the primary investigation and examined as face-saving as a single variable, rather than face of self and face of others as separate dependent variables. A significant main effect was found, $F(1,162)=13.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$. Participants reporting on FtF communication ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.24$) and those reporting on CMC ($M=2.88$, $SD=1.45$) did differ significantly in the amount of face-saving provided by their respective communication medium, but again, it was in the opposite direction than what was predicted. Hypothesis 2/3 was still not supported under the modified conditions.

Hypothesis four proposed that individuals will report using CMC versus FtF communication with their former romantic partners because it allows them to engage in topic avoidance. Under the modified conditions, a significant effect was not observed, F

(1, 93)=2.46, $p=.12$. Individuals completing the FtF version ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.62$) and individuals completing the CMC version ($M=3.2$, $SD=1.70$) did not significantly differ according to ability each medium allows for topic avoidance. The data collected were therefore not consistent with H4 under the modified conditions.

Table 3

Supplementary Analysis: Univariate Analysis of Variance for Planning, Topic Avoidance, and Face-Saving Variables

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Planning**</u>	<u>Topic Avoidance</u>	<u>Face-Saving*</u>
CMC	4.77 (1.83)	3.21 (1.70)	2.88 (1.50)
FtF	4.01 (1.35)	3.74 (1.62)	1.90 (1.24)

Note. $N=95$.

*Means were significantly different at $p<.05$, but were in the opposite direction that what was predicted.

**Means differed significantly

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

This project was initiated as an attempt to learn more about how CMC is used in post-dissolutional communication between former romantic partners. To this end, four specific goals motivated the current investigation: (a) to better understand how conscious motives are involved when choosing CMC over FtF communication in post-dissolutional communication; (b) to better understand the use of facework in post-dissolutional communication; (c) to uncover how emoticons are used in CMC post-dissolutional communication; and (d) to examine post-dissolutional communication as an understudied and emergent facet of interpersonal communication. A pilot study and one main study using retrospective recall survey research and experimental conditions were conducted to assess the relationships proposed and answered in the previously presented hypotheses and research questions. The final section of this thesis summarizes and discusses the implications of these findings, suggests avenues for future research, presents the limitations of this project, and reports general conclusions about CMC and post-dissolutional communication.

Planning

The first hypothesis was based on previous research (e.g., Berger & Bell, 1988; Berger & DiBattista, 1993) that has identified the goal-directed nature of human communication. Hypothesis one proposed that individuals will report using CMC versus

FtF to communicate with their former romantic partners because it allows for more message planning. When the entire data set was tested, this hypothesis was not supported. However, supplementary analyses that removed: a) data from participants responding to the CMC version with no post-dissolutional CMC, and b) removed data from participants responding to the FtF version with no post-dissolutional FtF communication, hypothesis one was supported.

According to planning theory, individuals use plans and scripts from past experiences to better accomplish their goals in current situations (Berger, 1987). The supplementary analysis revealed that individuals with post-dissolutional communication with their former partners reported that CMC allows for significantly more message planning than does FtF communication. Although there is currently no research that tests the impact of degree of planning on preferred communication medium, these findings are consistent with Waldron (1990), who established that situational manipulations influence plans and tactics. He found that as the planning environment becomes more constrained, people adopt more simple, automatic, and efficient planning processes. Similarly, Berger and Bell (1988) discovered the presence of “considerable intraindividual variation in planning complexity and effectiveness across various social domains” (p. 231). The notion of varying social domains is central to the current investigation, highlighting the fact that each communication experience possesses its own unique communication limitations. These two studies illustrate that mental planning and planning strategies vary in different communication situations, and thus are useful in an experiment such as this that explores two drastically different communication situations. Additionally, the findings for H1 broaden the scope in which planning theory can be

applied and examined; to date, this is the first study that examines plans and planning in post-dissolutional communication.

It is both important and relevant to note that the results of the primary analysis, where the ability to plan email messages was not viewed as an advantage or motive in CMC. Based on the current data set, it is difficult to attribute a single reason for why the primary analysis yielded different results than the supplementary investigation; however, there are viable reasons why the discrepancy exists. According to Berger (1987), “when persons are trying to achieve social goals, their first tendency is to search their long-term memories for plans they have used in the past to reach similar goals” (p. 148). One possible explanation for the primary analysis yielding different results than the supplementary analysis is that CMC participants may have been reporting on a communication medium that they do not frequently use for post-dissolutional communication; thus, their long-term mental plans may not include using the given medium as a means to achieving their communicative goals. For example, if an individual has never driven a car to work, he or she is not likely to list a car as a convenient form of transportation to and from work. Additionally, surveys were removed from participants who had not engaged in CMC or FtF communication with their former partners.

A final explanation comes from Berger and Jordan (1992), who found that in FtF communication where the goal was specific and the plan was abstract (leaving many cognitive holes to be filled in), participants struggled with verbal fluency. By contrast, in situations where the plan was detailed and familiar, fluency was not a struggle for the participants. Perhaps the participants in the current study felt as though they had already

constructed a solid mental plan for the post-dissolutional communication they reported on and thus, felt they could fluidly deliver their messages in any communication situation.

These results, like several others in this study, reflect the differences that might exist between CMC and FtF use in post-dissolutional communication. Additionally, they tentatively suggest that there are conscious motives involved with selecting to use one communication medium over the other in a very unique communication situation. The above finding illustrates that individuals who engage in some form of post-dissolutional communication identify the ability to plan, edit, and re-read their email messages as one justification for communicating via CMC; a justification that may not be present in FtF interactions.

Findings in the current study suggest that post-dissolutional communication is similar to other aspects of communication, in that communicators pursue specific communication goals. Further, the use of plans and planning to achieve those goals is sometimes a conscious motive and may be a consideration when former partners choose to use one communication medium over another. Specifically, findings from hypothesis one (from the supplementary analysis) indicate that participants recognize that CMC offers unique message planning opportunities in post-dissolutional communication, revealing that the achievement of goals in post-dissolutional communication is important. Additionally, findings confirm the applicability and utility of Planning Theory as a whole and when understanding post-dissolutional communication. Goals, plans, and planning have been examined in a variety of contexts, such as those discussed previously; however, this is the first known attempt to apply planning theory to aspects of post-dissolutional communication.

Facework

The idea that it is human tendency to save the face of one's self and others is widely held among communication scholars. According to Face Management Theory, "all humans have face, which is the desired image that one creates for oneself through interactions with others" (Cupach & Carson, 2002, pp. 444-445). Further, humans possess the desire to maintain and defend their face and the face of others; however, conflict and relationship dissolution are typically marked as face-threatening situations for both relational partners (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

As Kunkel et al. (2003) state, "the management of face is particularly relevant to the formation and erosion of personal relationships" (p. 385). Thus, it is reasonable to deduce that individuals who experienced the erosion of a romantic relationship will seek the least face threatening communication medium available. Research has suggested (McLoad et al., 1997) that CMC is a less face threatening communication medium than FtF communication. In a study examining CMC use of minority opinion expression in a work setting, participants were significantly more likely to participate in online discussions and group emailings than in FtF interactions. When asked to explain the increased participation, avoidance of ridicule and disapproval were the most commonly cited reasons and both are inherently face-threatening situations (McLoad et al., 1997). As such, hypotheses two/three predicted that former partners would report using CMC rather than FtF with their former partners as a means to save their own face and the face of their former partners.

Contrary to this prediction, the ability to save face was not a conscious motive identified by participants for using CMC in post-dissolutional communication.

Specifically, findings were opposite to predictions made by H2/3 in both the primary and supplementary analyses. Although this contradicts predictions, there may be a reasonable explanation for these findings. According to Walther (1996), some “research and theory suggests that computer-mediated messages are inappropriate and/or ineffective for exchanges in which interpersonal exchange is needed because the medium provides ‘scant social information’” (pp. 3-4). Similarly, it is posited that because of CMC’s role in history as a purely functional tool of the military, CMC is still perceived as just that: a tool to be used over geographically dispersed individuals (Walther, 1996). Because romantic breakups are often distressing on several personal levels (Duck, 1988), CMC may, perhaps, be viewed as too impersonal a medium for use in post-dissolutional communication.

Flaherty et al. (1998) examined CMC and FtF communication as functional alternatives. With locus of control as the mediating variable, Flaherty et al. (1998) discovered that “the face-to-face channel has more social presence than the Internet; the possibility of immediate feedback with face-to-face interaction conveys greater social presence” (p. 264). This findings suggests further research that examines a) locus of control as a factor in CMC use in post-dissolutional communication; and b) the dynamics of post-dissolutional communication to uncover what level of social presence and personable interaction is expected and/or is acceptable.

Topic Avoidance

Another way to protect one’s self against face threatening situations is to avoid topics. Some topics and situations are so face-threatening, it is human tendency to avoid those circumstances (Cupach & Metts, 1994). As Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune

(2004) note, “topic avoidance reflects people’s attempts to circumvent conflict, to protect face, and to promote or impede relationship progression” (p. 174). Moreover, according to Caughlin and Afifi (2004), “Expressing complaints about one’s partner too freely, for instance, can harm a relationship; thus, avoiding topics related to such complaints may enhance a relationship” (p. 479). Because CMC is sometimes viewed as having a lack of immediacy and low pressure to respond on demand to communication initiated by the other person, hypothesis four proposed that participants will report using CMC versus FtF communication because it allows for more topic avoidance.

Inconsistent with H4’s prediction, the ability to avoid topics was not a conscious motive participants noted for using CMC over FtF communication in post-dissolutional communication in both the primary and supplementary analysis. This could possibly be attributed to the notion that avoiding topics can leave communicators dissatisfied. Research by Caughlin and Afifi (2004) revealed that if topics were avoided out of fear of losing a relationship, as opposed to avoiding topics as a matter of privacy, dissatisfaction was significantly greater. This suggests that a certain amount of risk assessment is involved when choosing to avoid topics. Although certain topics in post-dissolutional communication may be face-threatening, Caughlin and Afifi’s findings (2004) indicate that it may be more dissatisfying to avoid them than to address them in some situations. Petronio (2002) echoed this possibility: “If the perceived risks in discussing an issue are too great, the individual would avoid the topic, even though that person valued openness in relationships” (p. 481).

The inconsistencies between past and current research indicated that there could possibly be a third moderator variable, such as risk assessment or importance of privacy,

responsible for the nonsignificant finding for H4. For example, if participants indicate they perceive a high level of risk in avoiding topics, they would be less likely to seek out a communication medium that allows for topic avoidance, regardless of the face-threatening nature of the interaction. As such, it is important that future topic avoidance scholarship build upon the current scholarship and research the likelihood to avoid topics in relation to motives for avoiding topics.

Facework

Facework is a communicative strategy designed to counteract face threats to self and others (Goffman, 1967). Cupach and Metts (1994) point out that facework and the management of face is “particularly relevant to the formation and erosion of interpersonal relationships” (p. 15), as ending a relationship is perhaps one of the most face-threatening situations that we endure. Because of facework’s relevance to the study at hand, research questions one and two sought to better understand how two types of facework, preventative and corrective, functioned in post-dissolutional communication.

Examining the verbal strategies employed by former partners during face-threatening predicaments enhances our understanding of how persons utilize language to manipulate their social identities and to manage the course of disrupted social interaction (Cupach, Metts, & Hazelton, 1986). As such, research question one asked, what preventative facework strategies are employed in post-dissolutional communication between former partners? Because previous research (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1994; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) had suggested individual preventative facework strategies, this research attempted to quantify these in relation to CMC and FtF post-dissolutional communication. However, factor analysis findings in the present study revealed no

distinct differences among the five different preventative strategies; thus, the use of preventative facework was examined as a single variable. Data revealed that preventative facework was used at a moderate level across communication mediums.

The moderate use of preventative facework strategies could have several implications regarding the nature of post-dissolutional communication. First, it could indicate that there is only moderate regard for the other person's reaction in post-dissolutional communication. According to Hewitt and Stokes (1975), "Socialized individuals carry with them a vast store of information as to how various types of persons will behave, what they are like, their typical motives and values, how to deal with them, etc." (pp. 2-3). If individuals know how their former partners are likely to act in certain post-dissolutional situation, yet still elect not to use preventative facework strategies, it could be that these individuals are not concerned with their partner's reaction and, thus are not motivated to use preventative strategies.

A second potential explanation is that former partners avoid conversations where these types of tactics would be necessary. Hewitt and Stokes (1975) point out that "from the user's standpoint, the disclaimer is an effort to dissociate his identity from the specific contents of his/her words or deeds" (p. 6). Perhaps if participants feel that their actions will provoke a negative reaction from their former partners and project that preventative strategies are necessary, they will avoid those conversations and situations altogether. Investigating this possibility may be relevant for future research. A final potential reason is the operationalization of the preventative facework items. A scale was created specifically for this investigation; thus, the validity of these items as multidimensional

scales may be questionable. Only additional research will be able to refine the valid operationalization of preventative facework strategies.

Multiple scholars (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1994; Kunkel et al., 2003) have identified the inherently face-threatening and/or face-damaging nature of relationship dissolution. According to Cupach and Metts (1994), "In an effort to repair face damage that has occurred because of transgression, corrective facework is employed" (p. 8). As such, research question two sought to better understand how former partners deal with this loss of face. In doing so, RQ2 explored which corrective facework tactics were most frequently utilized by former partners in post-dissolutional communication.

Data revealed that apologies, excuses, and humor were the corrective facework strategies most frequently used, whereas the justification tactic did not factor out as a separate face restoration tactic. These findings are consistent with prior research. In a study where participants reported on strategies that they would employ to cope with embarrassing and face-threatening situations, Cupach and Metts (1990) found that justifications were the least used form of corrective facework. Cupach and Metts (1990) state, "Justifications, particularly, seemed to be an unfavored option, appearing among the least reported strategies for the research-generated scenarios, and the recollected events" (p. 230). By contrast, however, and consistent with findings in this investigation, humor was a readily used face-repair tactic. This may be because humor in some way attenuates the unpleasant feelings felt by the threatened person, yet does not require the cognitive effort necessary to produce some of the other corrective strategies (Cupach & Metts, 1990). It is also interesting to note that the excuse aspect of the account strategy is commonly used, whereas the justification aspect is not. This could possibly be attributed

to the anticipated reaction when justifications are used, as one study (Cupach et al., 1986) discovered that the justification strategy was found to be only moderately satisfying to others.

The collective moderate use of facework strategies in post-dissolutional communication could be explained in one way. It is possible that participants did not perceive the interaction as face-threatening, but rather just as an expected and necessary aspect of post-dissolutional communication. Kunkel et al. (2003) found that people associate very specific sets of face threats with each of the three stages of romantic relationships (initiating, intensifying, and ending). If the situation that was being reported on fell outside of the bounds of these very specific sets of face threats, there may only be only moderate need for preventative and corrective facework strategies.

Emoticons

Watzlawick et al. (1967) outlined the multiple layers of human interaction when they identified the content and relational dimensions of interpersonal communication. CMC is a unique communication medium because it consists mostly of the content, or informational aspects, of a message, due to limited availability of relational cues such as tone, proxemics, and eye gaze (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). The use of emoticons, however, is an available means to include a relational aspect to CMC post-dissolutional communication. As Walther and D'Addario (2001) state, "because the use of e-mail eliminates visual cues such as head nodding, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact found in face-to-face communication, CMC users often incorporate emoticons as visual cues to augment the meaning of textual electronic messages" (p. 325). Due to this

intriguing relational component of CMC, research question three questioned, how are emoticons used in CMC between former romantic partners?

Those participants who completed the CMC version of the survey reported only low-to-moderate use of emoticons in their post-dissolutional emails. This findings is consistent with Walther and D'Addario's research (2001), which they found, by way of a content analysis of over 3,000 email messages, that only 13.2% of those contained emoticons. Although emoticon use is not extremely prevalent, it is still important to understand because it is one of the few options available to CMC users to express the relational content of their email messages. Because of the increasing popularity of email and because CMC allows for so few relational cues, it is imperative that scholars thoroughly examine emoticons, one of the few available channels for communicating relational messages in CMC. Because post-dissolutional communication is often marked with feelings of high emotions and stress, any attempt at expressing those feelings is central to the study of post-dissolutional communication. Additionally, the current study indicates that emoticons are being used and thus, could potentially provide some insight into the nature of post-dissolutional communication.

Wolf (2000) points out that the use of emoticons to rely on relational messages is a deliberate and conscious action, whereas a smile or certain nonverbals in FtF communication are not. This means that people strategically choose to include emoticons in their messages. One potential explanation for the strategic use of emoticons is that emoticon users are concerned with face. One study (Walther & D'Addario, 2000) reported that participants reported using emoticons to influence the interpretation of their message; however, the use of emoticons turned out to have little influence on the actual

interpretation of the message content. As such, hypothesis five proposed a positive correlation between emoticon usage and the concern to save face. Data were consistent with this prediction. This demonstrates that face maintenance is an issue in post-dissolutional communication via CMC. Kunkel et. al (2003) noted that the development, maintenance and dissolution of romantic relationships can be face-threatening, and the present findings suggest that post-dissolutional communication involve face maintenance as well. More specifically, CMC users identify the incorporation of emoticons as a viable strategy for ameliorate a message and save face.

The current study applied several aspects of face negotiation theory to post-dissolutional communication. This theory has been studied in many contexts and in multiple aspects of interpersonal communication; however, to date, this is the first known study that researched the role of face in computer-mediated post-dissolutional communication. This research suggests that face concerns are related to post-dissolutional communication; however, it is not entirely clear how they are related. Despite the fact that findings for H2/H3 were opposite to the projected direction, the fact that the hypothesis was significant indicates that the desire to save face is an aspect of post-dissolutional communication. Previous research has indicated that relationship dissolution is face threatening, yet still unanswered is how those face threats impact post-dissolutional communication. It is perhaps the characteristics of the type of communication medium used that accommodates for face concerns. For example, qualities such as lack of eye contact and immediacy that can make CMC less threatening are also the same qualities that may make FtF communication a viable communication option. As such, FtF communication seems to be preferred over CMC for its perceived

face-saving capacity in post-dissolutional communication. Face management theory should thus continue to be a theoretical foundation in the study of post-dissolutional communication.

Limitations

The findings of this investigation provide interesting and significant implications for the study of post-dissolutional and computer-mediated communication. Additionally, they contribute to the existing body of knowledge about message planning, topic avoidance, and face-saving. However, it is important to point out that several limitations concerning the generalizability and usefulness of these findings do exist. Each of the limitations will be further explained below.

First, it is important to note the limitations associated with retrospective recall. Whenever researchers ask participants to recall past events, it is always possible for an incorrect recollection of these events and/or actions. Although participants were asked to report on their most recent romantic relationship breakups, any lapse of time allows for error in the accuracy of retrospective recall.

Although utilizing retrospective recall involves external validity limitations, two arguments exist as to why this is an appropriate choice in the current study and is not a serious limitation. First, participants were asked a series of items measuring each variable of interest. Because all scales displayed internal consistency, there is evidence to believe that the recollection process did not influence the quality of data collected. Secondly, the average time since participants' breakup was 26.8 months, indicating that just over two years had elapsed since the breakup, a relatively short amount of time.

A second limitation is one that occurs frequently in social scientific research of this nature - the use of a fairly homogeneous undergraduate convenience sample. Interpersonal communication research is often criticized for using young adults rather than a more representative sample including older individuals. Despite this criticism, the current study examined college undergraduates with a mean age of 24.5 years, which is older than a “typical” undergraduate convenience sample. Further, the current sample is more ethnically diverse than most college age samples. Thus, though findings for the present study should not be extended beyond individuals who share similar demographic characteristics, the present sample does possess elements of diversity.

However, there are two justifications as to why undergraduates were studied. First, romantic relationships are quite prevalent during individuals’ college years, meaning that studying college undergraduates increases the likelihood that most of the sample will have experienced a fairly recent romantic breakup. Second, individuals in this demographic are likely to use the internet and other forms of computer-mediated communication. Thus, utilizing a college undergraduate sample for the current study is both appropriate and informative. It is important to note, however, that in order for these results to be generalizable to other groups, further research should be conducted.

An additional limitation came from the data that were collected from the participants; 28.9% of the sample reported having no post-dissolutional contact with their former partner. Because those participants were reporting on communication that did not actually take place, it is likely that their answers were either a) fabricated or b) inaccurate. The influence of those participants on the entire data set is difficult to assess, yet their potential influence is important to note. Future research of this nature should

include a filter question as one of the first survey items; this will ensure that only those individuals who have experienced post-dissolutional communication will be included in the study.

Conclusions

Findings in this investigation support the notion that key differences exist between motives for using CMC over FtF communication and vice versa. This research also confirms that communication does continue after a romantic breakup has been initiated, and thus reinforces the importance of post-dissolutional communication research. Results confirmed that the degree of planning afforded in email is unique to that medium and is an advantage over FtF communication in post-dissolutional communication. The desire to save face did not emerge as a motive associated with email use; however, some interesting questions about the function of facework in post-dissolutional relationships were explored. Preventative facework strategies were only moderately used in post-dissolutional communication, as were the corrective facework strategies of humor, apology, and excuse. Additionally, this study revealed that emoticons were used to a low-to-moderate degree in post-dissolutional CMC, and those reporting emoticon use were also concerned with face saving.

The current findings give rise to several directions for future research. First, it would be relevant to continue the investigation regarding conscious motives for choosing one communication medium over another in post-dissolutional communication. It is apparent that FtF communication and CMC differ in several respects; thus, a deeper investigation would be beneficial in order to better understand the dynamics of the increasingly popular communication medium of CMC.

Second, other forms of CMC such as instant and text messaging should be examined in a similar fashion. The scope of this study was limited to only email communication, yet with the aforementioned increase in computer-mediated communication and use of technology, an interesting opportunity for research presents itself. Third, it would be interesting to research emoticon use in post-dissolutional communication as a function of gender as multiple studies (e.g., Walther & D'Addario; Wolf, 2000) have found that women are significantly more likely to incorporate emoticons than are men. For example, Walther and D'Addario (2001) found that women used emoticons primarily to express humor rather than sarcasm, whereas men used them for sarcasm more than humor. Lastly, it would be worthy to extend this investigation beyond former romantic partners to more generalizable populations. Because of the pervasiveness of email and its evolving role in interpersonal interaction, there is a need to better understand reasons why individuals would generally choose to use CMC over FtF in interpersonal communication.

In sum, the current project provides valuable insight into the intricacies of post-dissolutional communication. In addition, applying and testing planning and facework theories in a way that neither theory had previously been applied, the current study took a theoretical approach to a previously exploratory and emergent aspect of interpersonal communication. Because some pertinent findings were uncovered in this study, it should serve as a starting block for future research of a similar nature. Two new scales measuring degree of planning and topic avoidance were also developed, tested, and found to be reliable, and thus can be utilized in future research projects. Most importantly, however, this study further justifies the emerging discipline of post-dissolutional

communication. The findings of this study indicate that romantic relationship communication cannot always be examined in the traditional, linear fashion, but rather as a process that often continues after the initial breakup has taken place.

APPENDIX A

OPRS Approval Form for Pilot Study



Social/Behavioral IRB - Expedited Review Approval Notice

DATE: September 23, 2004

TO: Dr. Jennifer Bevan
School of Communication (103)

FROM: Dr. Paul Jones, Chair
UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
via the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

RE: Protocol Title: Pilot Study for Masters Thesis "You've got mail": Email Use in Romantic Relationship Dissolution OPRS# 0409 - 1335

This memorandum is notification that the protocol for the project referenced above has met the criteria for exemption from full committee review by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in regulatory statutes 45CFR46.110. The protocol has been submitted through the expedited review process and has been approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB review. Work on the project may proceed as soon as you receive written notification from OPRS.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond September 22, 2005, it would be necessary to request an extension 30 days before the expiration date. Should there be any change(s) to the protocol, it will be necessary to request such change in writing through the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@ccmail.nevada.edu or call 895-2794.

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
4505 Maryland Parkway Box 451037
Las Vegas, NV 89154-1037
Office (702) 895-2794 Fax (702) 895-0805

Research Administration Building 104 M/S 1037
Email: OPRSHumanSubjects@ccmail.nevada.edu
Website: <http://www.unlv.edu/Research/OPRS/>
Directions: Campus Map #63

OPRS Approval Form for Main Investigation



**Social/Behavioral IRB - Expedited Review
Approval Notice**

DATE: November 5, 2004

TO: Dr. Jennifer Bevan
School of Communication (103)

FROM: Dr. Paul Jones, Chair
UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
via the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

RE: Protocol Title: "You've Got Mail": Email Use in Romantic Relationship
Dissolution
OPRS# 0410 - 1396

This memorandum is notification that the protocol for the project referenced above has met the criteria for exemption from full committee review by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in regulatory statutes 45CFR46.110. The protocol has been submitted through the expedited review process and has been approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB review. Work on the project may proceed as soon as you receive written notification from OPRS.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond November 4, 2005, it would be necessary to request an extension 30 days before the expiration date. Should there be any change(s) to the protocol, it will be necessary to request such change in writing through the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@ccmail.nevada.edu or call 895-2794.

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APPENDIX B

Examples of Instruments Used In Pilot Study

CMC Version

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the appropriate number to document your feelings. We are interesting in learning more about communication between former romantic partners after their relationship has ended.

Think of the individual with whom you had your most significant romantic relationship. **THIS MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS ENDED** and does not currently have a primary physical or romantic component. If your significant romantic relationship ended **MORE** than two years ago, please consider your most recent breakup.

Think of your former romantic partner when answering these questions, **NOT** a friend. Focus on the relationship you have/had with your former partner within one or two months after the relationship has ended. Further, while answering these questions, think of **in-person/face-to-face** or email (i.e., use of email such as Yahoo or MSN – not instant or text messages) communication as your only available means to communicate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

In my email interactions with my former partner:

1. ___ I used email in an effort to avoid saying certain things to my former partner's face.
2. ___ I planned what I was going to say in the emails.
3. ___ I used email to avoid looking heartless.
4. ___ I avoided topics included in emails.
5. ___ It was awkward when my former partner did not reply to every topic in my emails.
6. ___ I used email to avoid looking rude.
7. ___ I viewed email as a polite way of saying something that might have threaten my former partner's face.
8. ___ I found it easier to be respectful with what I was saying if I expressed my feelings in an email
9. ___ It was easy to avoid topics brought up in emails.
10. ___ One of the reasons I used email was so I could accurately plan my messages
11. ___ I used email to avoid looking ungrateful.

12. ___ Using email was a way to prevent embarrassing my former partner in front of others.
13. ___ I used email because I was concerned with my former partner's feelings.
14. ___ Being able to carefully plan what I was going to say was an advantage to using email.
15. ___ I used email to avoid looking harsh.
16. ___ I felt I could precisely plan what I said when using email.
17. ___ My former partner would avoid addressing certain topics I included in my emails
18. ___ I used email to avoid looking inconsiderate.
19. ___ I replied to every topic discussed in emails
20. ___ When I planned my emails before I sent them, I felt like I accomplished my communication goals.

FtF Version

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the appropriate number to document your feelings. We are interesting in learning more about communication between former romantic partners after their relationship has ended.

Think of the individual with whom you had your most significant romantic relationship. **THIS MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS ENDED** and does not currently have a primary physical or romantic component. If your significant romantic relationship ended **MORE** than two years ago, please consider your most recent breakup.

Think of your former romantic partner when answering these questions, **NOT** a friend. Focus on the relationship you have/had with your former partner within one or two months after the relationship has ended. Further, while answering these questions, think of **in-person/face-to-face or email (i.e., use of email such as Yahoo or MSN – not instant or text messages)** communication as your only available means to communicate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

In my email interactions with my former partner:

1. ___ I used face-to-face communication even when I didn't wish to see my former partner.
2. ___ I planned what I was going to say in my face-to-face interactions.
3. ___ I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking heartless.
4. ___ I avoided topics included in our conversations.
5. ___ It was awkward when my former partner did not reply to every topic in our conversations.
6. ___ I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking rude.
7. ___ I viewed face-to-face communication as a polite way of saying something that might have threaten my former partner's face.
8. ___ I found it easier to be respectful with what I was saying if I expressed my feelings in face-to-face communication.

9. ___ It was easy to avoid topics brought up in conversations.
10. ___ One of the reasons I used face-to-face communication was so I could accurately plan my messages
11. ___ I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking ungrateful.
12. ___ Using face-to-face communication was a way to prevent embarrassing my former partner in front of others.
13. ___ I used face-to-face communication because I was concerned with my former partner's feelings.
14. ___ Being able to carefully plan what I was going to say was a reason that I communicated face-to-face.
15. ___ I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking harsh.
16. ___ I felt I could precisely plan what I said when using face-to-face communication.
17. ___ I would avoid addressing certain topics my former partner included in our conversations.
18. ___ I used face-to-face communication to avoid looking inconsiderate.
19. ___ I replied to every topic discussed in our conversations.
20. ___ When I planned my conversations before we had them, I felt like I accomplished my communication goals.

APPENDIX C

Examples of CMC Instruments Used In Main Investigation

CMC Version

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the appropriate number to document your feelings. We are interested in learning more about communication between former romantic partners after their relationship has ended.

Think of the individual with whom you had your most significant romantic relationship. **THIS MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS ENDED** and does not currently have a primary physical or romantic component. If your significant romantic relationship ended **MORE** than two years ago, please consider your most recent breakup.

Think of your former romantic partner when answering these questions, **NOT** a friend. Focus on the relationship you have/had with your former partner within one or two months after the relationship has ended. Further, while answering these questions, think of email (i.e., use of email such as Yahoo or MSN – not instant or text messages) communication as your only available means to communicate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

With my former partner:

1. ___ I use email communication when I don't want to see my former partner.
2. ___ I use email communication to avoid looking harsh.
3. ___ I use emoticons (i.e., :-), :-(, ALL CAPS) frequently in my email communication with my former partner.
4. ___ One of the reasons I use email communication is so I can plan my messages.
5. ___ I use emoticons in my email communication with my former partner to add a personal element to my message.
6. ___ I avoid replying to specific topics during our email interactions.
7. ___ Being able to carefully plan what I am going to say is a reason that I communicate with email.
8. ___ I use email communication to avoid looking inconsiderate.
9. ___ I find it easy to be respectful in email communication.
10. ___ I plan what I am going to say in my email interactions.
11. ___ I use email communication to avoid looking ungrateful.
12. ___ I view email communication as a way to be polite to my former partner.

13. ___ I avoid topics discussed in our email interactions.
14. ___ I use email communication to avoid looking heartless.
15. ___ I feel I can precisely plan what I say when using email communication.
16. ___ I use emoticons in my email communication with my former partner to highlight emotional aspects of my message.
17. ___ I avoid addressing certain subjects my former partner brings up in our email conversations.
18. ___ I use email communication to avoid looking rude.
19. ___ I use email communication because I was concerned about my former partner's feelings.

We are next interested in the type of communication former romantic partners use. Please indicate the likelihood that you would use the following types of communication with a former partner where 1=Not Very Likely and 7= Very Likely.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All			Neutral			Very
Likely						Likely

In my email interactions with my former partner, I have said something like....

20. ___ Hear me out before you get upset...
21. ___ You know I'm not an expert, but...
22. ___ Please allow me to play devil's advocate here...
23. ___ You'll probably think this is against the rules, but...
24. ___ You may think I'm wrong, but...
25. ___ Hear me out before you explode...
26. ___ It may seem that I haven't thought this through very well, but...
27. ___ Don't get me wrong, I like you, but...
28. ___ You might get mad about this, but...
29. ___ This might seem strange to you...
30. ___ Don't react right away to what I am going to say...
31. ___ I don't want to make you angry by saying this, but...

32. ____ You might think I'm wrong for doing this, but....
33. ____ I was your girlfriend/boyfriend, I have every right to...
34. ____ You may think this sounds crazy, but...

Think of an awkward situation with your former partner in which your face (self-image) was threatened or challenged. Please indicate the likelihood that you would take the following types of actions on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

In my email interactions with my former partner, I have done something like....

35. ____ I attempted to convince my partner that it was the best thing for both of us.
36. ____ I attempted to turn our problem into a comical situation
37. ____ I explained that it was something that had to happen.
38. ____ I apologized for my actions.
39. ____ I admitted my mistake, but made an excuse for why I did it.
40. ____ I told a joke to better the mood.
41. ____ I promised to change my actions in the future.
42. ____ I blamed somebody else for the situation.
43. ____ I brought up other examples of similar situations where the current problem wasn't a problem in the past.
44. ____ I stressed that my actions were an accident.
45. ____ I accepted blame and asked for forgiveness.
46. ____ I used humor to better the situation.

Please answer the following set of questions about your breakup with your former partner on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

47. ___ I felt like what happened in our breakup was mostly determined by my relational partner.
48. ___ Our breakup was controlled by my romantic partner.
49. ___ Our breakup was determined by my own actions.
50. ___ Our breakup was conducted on email.

The following questions are intended to reveal specifics about the former relationship that you are reporting on.

51. How long were you and your former romantic partner involved in a romantic relationship before the breakup occurred? (please indicate amount of time in years and months): _____

52. How long has it been since your relational breakup took place? (please indicate amount of time in years and months): _____

53. How would you best describe communication with your former partner? (please circle best answer):

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| 1 Frequent | 4 Infrequent |
| 2 Somewhat frequent | 5 No contact |
| 3 Sporadic | |

54. Please indicate the frequency that best describes how often you use **face-to-face communication** to communicate with your former partner after the breakup? (please circle one):

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Multiple times a day | 4 Once a month |
| 2 Once a day | 5 Less than once a month |
| 3 Once a week | 6 I did not use face-to-face communication |

55. Please indicate the frequency that best describes how often you used **email communication** to communicate with your former partner after the breakup? (please circle one):

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Multiple times a day | 4 Once a month |
| 2 Once a day | 5 Less than once a month |
| 3 Once a week | 6 I did not use face-to-face communication |

56. How would you best classify your relationship with your former partner NOW? Please circle your answer.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 No contact at all/No relationship | 5 Casually dating |
| 2 Infrequent contact
(e.g. see each other on campus) | 6 Exclusively dating |
| 3 Casual friends | 7 Engaged |
| 4 Close friends | 8 Married |
| | 9 Other (please specify): _____ |

57. The overall frequency of my email use can be best described as:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Multiple times a day | 4 Once a month |
| 2 Once a day | 5 Less than once a month |
| 3 Once a week | 6 I did not use face-to-face communication |

Please answer the following questions by circling the appropriate answer.

58. I am: 1 Female 2 Male

59. My former partner is: 1 Female 2 Male

60. The category that best describes me is (please circle one):

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Gay | 2 Lesbian | 3 Bisexual |
| 4 Straight | 5 Transgender | 6 Other (Please specify) _____ |

61. How old are you? _____ (in years)

62. How old is your former partner? _____ (in years)

63. Which ethnic background or race best describes you? Please circle one.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Asian | 4 Native American |
| 2 Black/African American | 5 White |
| 3 Hispanic | 6 Other (please specify) _____ |

64. The category that best describes my year in school is:

- 1 Freshman
- 2 Sophomore
- 3 Junior
- 4 Senior

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US LEARN MORE!

Please place your survey face down in the box provided by the researcher and return to your seat.

FtF version

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use the appropriate number to document your feelings. We are interested in learning more about communication between former romantic partners after their relationship has ended.

Think of the individual with whom you had your most significant romantic relationship. **THIS MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS ENDED** and does not currently have a primary physical or romantic component. If your significant romantic relationship ended **MORE** than two years ago, please consider your most recent breakup.

Think of your former romantic partner when answering these questions, **NOT** a friend. Focus on the relationship you have/had with your former partner within one or two months after the relationship has ended. Further, while answering these questions, think of **in-person/face-to-face** communication as your only available means to communicate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

With my former partner:

1. ____ I use face-to-face communication even when I don't want to see my former partner.
2. ____ I use face-to-face communication to avoid looking harsh.
3. ____ One of the reasons I use face-to-face communication is so I can plan my messages.
4. ____ I avoid replying to specific topics during our face-to-face interactions.
5. ____ Being able to carefully plan what I am going to say is a reason that I communicate face-to-face.
6. ____ I use face-to-face communication to avoid looking inconsiderate.
7. ____ I find it easy to be respectful in face-to-face communication.
8. ____ I plan what I am going to say in my face-to-face interactions.

9. ____ I use face-to-face communication to avoid looking ungrateful.
10. ____ I view face-to-face communication as a way to be polite to my former partner.
11. ____ I avoid topics discussed in our face-to-face conversations.
12. ____ I use face-to-face communication to avoid looking heartless.
13. ____ I feel I can precisely plan what I say when using face-to-face communication.
14. ____ I avoid addressing certain subjects my former partner brings up in our face-to-face conversations.
15. ____ I use face-to-face communication to avoid looking rude.
16. ____ I use face-to-face communication because I was concerned about my former partner's feelings.

We are next interested in the type of communication former romantic partners use.

Please indicate the likelihood that you would use the following types of communication with a former partner where 1=Not Very Likely and 7= Very Likely.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not At All			Neutral			Very
Likely						Likely

In my face-to-face interactions with my former partner, I have said something like....

17. ____ Hear me out before you get upset...
18. ____ You know I'm not an expert, but...
19. ____ Please allow me to play devil's advocate here...
20. ____ You'll probably think this is against the rules, but...
21. ____ You may think I'm wrong, but...
22. ____ Hear me out before you explode...
23. ____ It may seem that I haven't thought this through very well, but...
24. ____ Don't get me wrong, I like you, but...
25. ____ You might get mad about this, but...
26. ____ This might seem strange to you...
27. ____ Don't react right away to what I am going to say...

28. ___ I don't want to make you angry by saying this, but...
29. ___ You might think I'm wrong for doing this, but....
30. ___ I was your girlfriend/boyfriend, I have every right to...
31. ___ You may think this sounds crazy, but...

Think of an awkward situation with your former partner in which your face (self-image) was threatened or challenged. Please indicate the likelihood that you would take the following types of actions on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

In my face-to-face interactions with my former partner, I would have done something like...

32. ___ I attempted to convince my partner that it was the best thing for both of us.
33. ___ I attempted to turn our problem into a comical situation
34. ___ I explained that it was something that had to happen.
35. ___ I apologized for my actions.
36. ___ I admitted my mistake, but made an excuse for why I did it.
37. ___ I told a joke to better the mood.
38. ___ I promised to change my actions in the future.
39. ___ I blamed somebody else for the situation.
40. ___ I brought up other examples of similar situations where the current problem wasn't a problem in the past.
41. ___ I stressed that my actions were an accident.
42. ___ I accepted blame and asked for forgiveness.
43. ___ I used humor to better the situation.

Please answer the following set of questions about your breakup with your former partner on a 1 to 7 scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neutral			Strongly
Disagree						Agree

44. ___ I felt like what happened in our breakup was mostly determined by my relational partner.

45. ___ Our breakup was controlled by my romantic partner.

46. ___ Our breakup was determined by my own actions.

47. ___ Our breakup was conducted on email

The following questions are intended to reveal specifics about the former relationship that you are reporting on.

48. How long were you and your former romantic partner involved in a romantic relationship before the breakup occurred? (please indicate amount of time in years and months): _____

49. How long has it been since your relational breakup took place? (please indicate amount of time in years and months): _____

50. How would you best describe communication with your former partner? (please circle best answer):

1 Frequent	4 Infrequent
2 Somewhat frequent	5 No contact
3 Sporadic	

51. Please indicate the frequency that best describes how often you use **face-to-face communication** to communicate with your former partner after the breakup? (please circle one):

1 Multiple times a day	4 Once a month
2 Once a day	5 Less than once a month
3 Once a week	6 I did not use face-to-face communication

52. Please indicate the frequency that best describes how often you used **email communication** to communicate with your former partner after the breakup? (please circle one):
- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Multiple times a day | 4 Once a month |
| 2 Once a day | 5 Less than once a month |
| 3 Once a week | 6 I did not use face-to-face communication |
53. How would you best classify your relationship with your former partner NOW? Please circle your answer.
- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 No contact at all/No relationship | 5 Casually dating |
| 2 Infrequent contact
(e.g. see each other on campus) | 6 Exclusively dating |
| 3 Casual friends | 7 Engaged |
| 4 Close friends | 8 Married |
| | 9 Other:(please specify)
_____ |
54. The overall frequency of my email use can be best described as:
- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Multiple times a day | 4 Once a month |
| 2 Once a day | 5 Less than once a month |
| 3 Once a week | 6 I did not use face-to-face communication |

Please answer the following questions by circling the appropriate answer.

55. I am: 1 Female 2 Male
56. My former partner is: 1 Female 2 Male
57. The category that best describes me is (please circle one):
- | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Gay | 2 Lesbian | 3 Bisexual |
| 4 Straight | 5 Transgender | 6 Other (Please specify) _____ |
58. How old are you? _____ (in years)
59. How old is your former partner? _____ (in years)
60. Which ethnic background or race best describes you? Please circle one.
- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Asian | 4 Native American |
| 2 Black/African American | 5 White |
| 3 Hispanic | 6 Other: (please specify)
_____ |

61. The category that best describes my year in school is:

- 1 Freshman
- 2 Sophomore
- 3 Junior
- 4 Senior

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US LEARN MORE!

Please place your survey face down in the box provided by the researcher and return to your seat.

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