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"You Don't Want to Seem More Into the Conversation":

Texting Identity, Conflict, and Maintenance in Early Romantic Relationships

by

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Abstract

Technology has become an inescapable part of romantic relationships in the 21st century. This study examines how texting identity and maintenance influences early romantic relationships based on four focus groups consisting of college students at a southwest university. Previous studies have conducted research on a multitude of topics related to texting in romantic relationships, though none of them have analyzed the strategies and accepted rules and meanings of texting in early romantic relationships. Results suggest there are gender differences in texting initiation and negative texting behaviors. Both men and women use texting strategically to maintain their partner's interest. Women can use emojis to flirt during texting, though both men and women find it unattractive when men use emojis. Resolving conflict through texting is appropriate in early romantic relationships, yet it is difficult for individuals to understand the emotion of their romantic interest. These findings suggest the calculated thought behind each text message and the difficult process of the receiver to interpret these messages.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

The amount of literature relating to text messaging in relationships continues to grow as texting in relationships becomes more prevalent in everyday life. The discussion varies, and there are many contradictory notions. This study will build upon prior research to examine nuances in how young adults utilize computer-mediated communication (CMC) in developing romantic relationships and the emotions or meanings technology conveys in romantic relationships. The main objective is to understand the norms and rules of texting that young adults follow in developing romantic relationships. Based on findings from prior research, this project seeks to discover how young adults use texting strategically in new romantic relationships to both convey interest and maintain mystery.

Technology impacts relationship development and maintenance, particularly when it comes to texting. Research indicates that text messaging is becoming the dominant form of computer mediated communication among most segments of the population. Nielson Online (2009) reported texting has exceeded voice calls, especially among young adults (Droin & Landgraff, 2012). In the past few decades the rise of technology has made its mark in shaping a new generation and forcing the older generation to adapt. The access to a wide range of technology creates new anxieties, as CMC can at times exclude emotional intents (Lucero, Weisz, Smith-Darden & Lucero, 2014). Studies strive to explain how young adults use and perceive text messages, and if CMC is a positive or negative addition to romantic relationships.

When starting a new relationship, it appears that texters actively work to create an identity that is desirable. Early research in CMC assumed that mediated communication would be problematic because individuals would not be concerned about or be as focused on the

identity or impression they convey. However, Walther (1996) disagreed with this and offered a perspective on CMC known as hyperpersonal communication. He argued that in some cases, people are more attentive to the interpersonal aspects of communication in CMC. Walther found one could, at times, gain more through CMC than normal interpersonal practices. Hyperpersonal communication can enhance a relationship and create a stronger bond. Even so, it is inevitable during all communication practices to have problems.

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication in Texting

Walther (1996) goes into detail about various theories that derive from CMC. For example, a cues-filtered-out theory states CMC has no verbal cues at all. These lack of social cues prevent the receiver from picking up individual's personality traits. Furthermore, this creates an even larger problem that makes the user become, "self-focused and resistant to influence, disinhibited, belligerent, and affectively negative" (Walther, 1996, pg. 446). This theory can clearly lead us to predict the problems in CMC associated with these missing cues when it comes to discussing conflict.

There is no consensus among researchers in this realm of study when it comes to deciding whether or not texting is simply verbal communication, or if there are ways to include non-verbal communication through CMC. The role of non-verbal communication is significant in one's identity development. Non-verbal codes can reveal parts of one's identity that may include race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and class. Doering and Poeschl (2007) argue that the non-verbal codes including chronemics and proxemics are present in CMC. Chronemics is the role of time in non-verbal communication. They state that the time stamp that comes with text messaging is crucial during this type of interpersonal communication. Doering and Poeschl (2007) continue to apply the same idea to proxemics, the non-verbal code that applies to where

the person is during this conversation. This may seem irrelevant at first but this circumstance can affect the texter's behavior and the reader's perspective. Proxemics creates implications based on where a person is during CMC; "[an] identical message might also have different connotations if sent out from a location familiar or unfamiliar, attractive or unattractive to the receiver" (Doering & Poeschl, 2007, pg. 7).

Doering and Poeschl (2007) include in their research how non-verbal cues are expressed within CMC, "they use emoticons or smileys to symbolize their smiles ":-)", kisses ":-*" or frowns ":-(", and they include a variety of expressive disclaimers like "*shrug*", "LOL", "*sigh*", "*stutter*", "<irony on>" etc. to fine-tune their verbal messages" (pg.3). They also emphasize how response latencies in SMS communication are non-verbal codes and can equate to feelings of uneasiness when the response time is long, while short response time communicates thoughtfulness and eagerness.

Walther and Ramirez (2010) discuss the term *mixed-mode relationship,* which refers to the process by which relationships may emerge through CMC and evolve from online to offline. A relationship that is in the online mode would be referring to information transfer such as text messaging, while offline occurs through face-to-face interactions. Walther and Ramirez (2010) focus on the ways to build an authentic relationship when starting with CMC. They found it important for these relationships to include pictures when texting, "for the sake of their prospective relationship trajectory if not for their personal safety" (Walther & Ramirez, 2010, pg. 274). By using photos during the inception of a relationship, it not only further builds one's identity but also creates trust in the relationship. Nevertheless, even if a relationship begins offline, there is sufficient evidence that shows texting's effect on a romantic partnership.

Texting and Perceived Intent

The intention behind what one shares is essential in any form of communication. The ability to censor what one says and craft the perfect message is an important feature of mediated communication. Jin (2013) describes texting as a mundane but necessary activity in most relationships. Jin (2013) surveyed students in various communication courses at an American university to explore the relationship between message intent and interpretation. This was measured by a Likert-type scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree when asking about the amount of emotional pain the message caused. Participants described that their reactions to hurtful messages in face-to-face communication was similar to that in texting.

In both online and offline communication they found distancing oneself after the hurtful message to be used in both situations. One interesting finding Jin shared was, "partners who experience more positive relationship qualities tend to view each other to have good intentions when they communicate hurtful things" (Jin, 2013, pg. 150). They provided the opposite reaction to those with dissatisfying relationships. This brings one to the conclusion that perceived intent is more powerful in influencing a relationship than the words themselves. The relationship's identity does not disappear in CMC, but remains a strong factor in decoding text messages. This study also brings up the conversation of how texting can result in conflict.

Conflict Resolution in Texting

While texting and technology can help partners connect, technology may also give users a platform to bring up a conflict when it seems to be uncomfortable through face-to-face interactions. Research on texting in relationships has noted conflict arising from or conducted through texting is a frequent experience of users (Luo & Tuney, 2013). This is probably at least partly because in texting, communication can be accomplished without physical confrontation,

which allows the texter to avoid a vulnerable situation (Luo & Tuney, 2013). However, this can be problematic because the receiver of the text can misconstrue the emotional intent of the message.

Research has also explored how conflict style influences the way individuals engage conflict through texting. Frisby and Westerman (2010) found that this applies to the specific situation of how to bring up conflict. They studied five different conflict styles that included integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding. They sought out students in romantic relationships at a United States University. Their participants received a survey packet where they answered open-ended questions about (1) the of CMC with their romantic partner, (2) conflict topics (3) experience with conflict during CMC, (4) why they chose to engage in CMC conflict, (5) why they chose to have face-to-face conflict, and (6) the cause of CMC conflict.

Frisby and Westerman (2010) determined that partners who are more dominating prefer CMC as a space to bring up conflict, while partners who associate more with the styles of integrating and avoiding prefer to bring up conflict in person. These popular conflict styles influence the norms in texting and how people learn to react appropriately. Dominating style is based on a person having high concern for self and low concern for others. They may feel CMC allows them to get all their points across at one time, essentially beating their partner in the argument. Integrating and avoiding may be considered opposites because integrating has high concern for both self and other, and avoiding has both low concerns for self and other. But when the two are used together it appears being both careful with one's words as well as withdrawing from the problem itself may create face-to-face communication as the last resort and the only way to see how the other person reacts. But what one must evaluate if conflict can truly be resolved through texting, or is it just used to begin the conversation.

Additional studies have produced crucial evidence supporting the need for understanding conflict in mediated communication. Scissors (2012) examined the role of conflict in CMC romantic relationships. Scissors proposed that CMC inhibits the ability of the recipient of the message to interpret their partner's feelings (Scissors, 2012). During the process of formulating her research, three stages of conflict guided her: conflict initiation, conflict discussion, and conflict resolution (Scissors, 2012). She used in-depth interviews to come to the conclusion that mediated communication is neither inherently negative nor positive. These interviews entailed participant discussion of conflict in their past and present romantic relationships. She made this determination due to a wide range in participants' opinions on how technology has affected their own lives. Scissors (2012) discusses channel switching in relationships, which involves the act of continuing a discussion through a different type of communication. Scissors found her participants to believe it was easier to initiate conflict through CMC and then get their feelings across in a more comfortable offline setting. This study is just another way of showing how individuals create a texting identity related to conflict style and preference as well as how sometimes it can be difficult to understand the meaning of messages.

Duran, Kelly, and Rotaru (2011) examined the positive or negative correlations between autonomy and connection (a common relational dialectic) in relationships between mobile phone users. They conducted a survey that consisted of three short parts. They asked participants (1) to describe their target relationship (casual romantic, exclusive romantic, exclusive and serious, and other); (2) how long they had known the target; and (3) their age. This survey indicated the most common relationship type was exclusive (43%; n=89), and the average age of the target was 21.23, and the average length of the relationship was 21.88 months (Duran et al., 2011, pg. 24). They continued to ask question about frequency of cell phone contact by describing their cell

phone use as well as that of their relational targets. Duran et al. bring up the problem of conflict within the use of texting and found high levels of tension due to cell phone use creating more conflict. Their results brought up the correlation between satisfaction within one's texting relationship as well as the satisfaction when spending time face-to-face with their partner. The expectation of reporting to one's partner where they are and what they are doing at all times creates a loss of independence and freedom. Both of these studies examine CMC as a stage of conflict initiation (a platform to bring up contention or a disagreement), but one thing they cannot agree on is if technology directly produces more tension, or if it is situation-based.

Influence of Texting on Relationships

The role of texting is something that cannot be overlooked in emerging romantic relationships. One way to go about looking at these relationships is using Knapp's Relationship Stages and then apply these to texting behaviors. Knapp includes five escalating and deescalating stages to give one a framework of changes within romantic relationships (Hall, Travis, Anderson, & Henley, 2013). The escalating stages include initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. These stages are important in this study because we are focusing on new romantic relationships and how they are built and maintained through texting. The deescalating stages are differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating. There has not been a lot of research surrounding the end of relationships in CMC. But deescalating stages may also arise during this study due to negative texting behavior leading to these stages early on in a relationship. For the purpose of this study, Knapp's Relationship Stages may emerge as a foundation of texting relationships.

Research has demonstrated that initiating text messages and the use of intimate relationship terms in texts create higher satisfaction in relationships. There is sufficient evidence

that supports the initiating stage in Knapp's Relationship stages appears in CMC. Luo and Tuney (2013) studied the positive role texting could potentially play in romantic relationships. By manipulating messages sent to their participant's partner, they found texting during the initiation stage created contentment within the relationship. These texts gave the impression that the partner was thinking about them in that moment and created security in the relationship. Research has also explored how mediated communication in relationships is impacted by individual differences such as gender.

Mobile phone use can be a predictor on where the relationship is going, which influences the molding of a relationship. Katz and Aakhus (2002) brought up the concept of *apparatgeist*, which reflects the idea that, "mobile phones have logic such that when they are used in closed friendships, people are steered toward increased expectations of connectedness and availability" (Hall & Baym, 2012, pg. 318). When beginning a relationship, during texting we are testing how one's relationship works in CMC. The process of discovering these expected routines of texting can be considered the experimenting stage in Knapp's Relationship stages. CMC creates norms within relationships, and these norms can simply be based on a routine of text messages through the day. What people tend to ignore is how events occur differently each day and how that may influence a familiar routine. The way one maintains a texting relationship may be based on a schedule and when a partner strays away from this schedule it can throw off the relationship balance.

Hall and Baym (2012) examined maintenance and expectations associated with texting. Their participants included students from introductory communication courses, who completed online surveys that asked them to report on mobile phone use within relationships. Hall and Baym (2012) reported a positive correlation between mobile use and increased expectations of

relationship maintenance. The more one uses CMC as a tool in their relationship, the more they have to focus on keeping their partner happy through this consistent communication. Researchers also found the expectation of constant mobile communication by one party in the relationship create heightened dependency on their partner. This relates to the intensifying stage in Knapp's Relationship Stages because this is where a couple begins to deepen their relationship, and disclosure is increased (Hall et al., 2013, pg. 52). One becomes comfortable in enforcing and expressing their need for continual phone use, as well as discussing more intense things through CMC.

The use of CMC for relational maintenance has been referred to as mundane maintenance, "reminding partners of their connectedness" (Katz & Aakhus, as cited in Hall & Baym, 2012, p. 320). But Hall and Baym's research reports this constant communication brings about both solidarity and entrapment when one person becomes over dependent. Schade, Sandberg, Bean, Buscy, and Coyne (2015), focused on distinguishing the connection between technology and relationship variables. Their study was specifically designed to look at emerging adults, ages 18-23. They utilized a survey previously used by others known as Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire. Their data was equally split between one hundred thirty eight males and females. They found female texting frequency positively correlated with relationship stability scores, while male texting frequency was negatively correlated with relationship stability (Schade et al. 2013). This research suggests the divergence between the two genders, as well as the logic behind the desire for texting maintenance in relationships.

Among the texting differences in gender, motives show a clear distinction between different practices of texting. Morrill, Jones, and Vaterlus, were able to find why each gender utilizes texting. This brings one to Knapp's final escalating stage, bonding, as their results

showed females use texting to create intimacy within a relationship and to kill time (Morrill et al, 2013, pg. 10). Males on the other hand used texting to meet other people. These differences may reflect why men and women behave differently in CMC while in relationships. Females seem to feel comfortable expressing themselves and connecting on a deep level through CMC, while males see texting as an easy tool to facilitating face-to-face introductions. In conclusion, society has the ability to construct gender in the realm of CMC.

Relational Uncertainty and Negative Texting Behavior

Recent research shows that texting in a romantic relationships is related to how partners feel about the relationship. The sense of security in a relationship must be constantly reinforced through relational practices. This research reveals that the use and reliance of texting can lead to further uncertainty and anxiety. Jin and Pena (2010) used an online survey at a university. This survey included questions about their estimated time using voice calls and texting, as well as the following scales: Thesis and Solomon's (2006) relational uncertainty measure, Rubin's (1970) love scale, and the adult romantic attachment scale (Brennan et al., 1998). Each measurement had a role in calculating relational uncertainty, love and commitment, and attachment style. Jin and Pena (2010) found greater use of mobile communication with a romantic partner is associated with lower relational uncertainty and greater commitment and affection.

However, other research indicates that technology can increase uncertainty and anxiety in relationships. One example of an anxiety that stems from technology is the process of electronic intrusion (EI) (Reed, Tolman, & Safyer, 2015). EI includes secretly looking through a romantic partner's phone without permission. The urge to commit EI primarily comes from an attachment style closely related to anxiety within the relationship (Reed et al., 2015). When a partner commits EI, it is a way to get relief from one's anxiety. Reed et al. (2015) drew these

conclusions from a final sample of 230 participants who reported having a dating partner in the past year. This sample consisted of college students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a university located in the Midwestern United States. With this information they moved forward and began measuring romantic attachment style by using Experience in Close Relationships scale- Short form (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). Reed et al. (2015) explains, "[ECR-S] is widely used in research with college students to yield continuous attachment anxiety and avoidance scores rather than attachment style categories" (pg. 434).

It is apparent cell phones give one the outlet to release anxiety. Lucero, Weisz, Smith-Darden, and Lucero (2014) also found high prevalence of spying and monitoring partner's mobile devices, and noted that this behavior is considered an abusive action. Commonly used abusive actions also included sexting and password sharing. Reed et al. and Lucero et al. research suggests the emergence of new insecurities that derive from electronics. Many researchers discuss the CMC between two romantic partners but it is essential to this research to recognize the legitimate actions that appear as a result of these insecurities.

Research Question

Previous studies have not conclusively revealed the specific language and meanings used by young adults to create romantic relationships in texting conversations. This study will attempt to determine and evaluate the communication codes and patterns used in CMC when building romantic relationships. This study will build upon previous research as well as fill in gaps in the current literature on this subject. These missing pieces include information such as how certain phrases in texting affect individuals and ways in which people use texting as a means to keep their romantic interests attention. Young adults and adolescents around the world have grown up with this ever-evolving form of communication. Together they have constructed the laws and

codes of dating in a technological world. In our society, there is a growing need and desire to understand the meanings of these discrete text conversations. There are many studies that focus on how texting makes people feel, but there has yet to be a study that analyzes specific texting conversation and the reactions generated from the symbols themselves. With extensive research as well as qualitative methods this study aims to understand the meaning of texting discourse and how college students apply meanings to texting codes.

RQ 1: How do young adults use texting strategically in new romantic relationships to both convey interest and maintain mystery?

RQ 2: How do the meanings attributed to texts affect relationship development during early stages of romance?

RQ 3: What role does initial texting behavior play in the maintenance, conflict, and the expectations of a new romantic relationship?

Chapter Two: Methods

This chapter will outline the process of recruitment, focus groups, and the overall reasoning for choosing the method and participants. With this information, a clear analysis will be drawn for how this data will be collected and used to draw conclusions in the findings chapter.

Participants

Participants (N= 27, 13 males, 14 females) were recruited by snowball sampling at a southwest University. Participants in this study ranged in age from 18 years old to 23 years old. To be included in this study, students must have experience with texting in emerging romantic relationships. There were four focus groups conducted with 4 to 10 people in each group. Each focus group was split up by gender, with two groups of males, and two groups of females.

Participants were primarily found in the researcher's communication classes and social circles. Snowball sampling was then used where participants suggested other fellow students to join the next set of focus groups. The researcher created a flyer to email the suggested participants, which included details about the context behind the research project as well as the researcher's contact information. Once participants agreed to join the focus group a time was coordinated and the consent process began. The participants were compensated with dinner.

Below is a table with the number of participants in each group, as well as their pseudonym, age, and major.

Focus Group #1 (Men)	Focus Group #2 (Women)
- Ethan, Communication, 21 - Jeff, History, 22 - Jason, Political Science, 22 - Adam, History, 21 - Wes, Marketing, 22 - Henry, Economics, 22 - Travis, Biology, 21 - Mark, Communication, 21 - Anthony, Advertising, 21	- Sandra, Economics, 21 - Lisa, Communication, 21 - Sadie, Communication, 21 - Veronica, Dance, 21 - Sam, Finance, 21 - Margaret, Communication, 21 - Beth, Communication, 21 - Kim, Communication, 20 - Caroline, Journalism 21
Focus Group #3 (Men)	Focus Group #4 (Women)
- Blake, E-Bio/EMBS, 22 - Drake, MCBB, 22 - Greg, EMBS, 22 - Randy, Studio Art, 22	- Jessica, 18, Undeclared - Amy, 18, Spanish - Shelly, 18, Communication - Kendall, 18, Undeclared - Christy, 18, Chemical Engineer

Procedures

A total of 40 participants were included in this study. The focus groups were held at the researcher's home in an informal living room setting due to group availability only being in the evening. Participants were asked to participate in a focus group that would last between 30 to 45 minutes. Conversation was facilitated based on a prepared discussion guide of questions. Participants were asked if they had any questions before starting the focus group. Once there was a consensus the group was ready to move on, the researcher began the focus group. The researcher requested each of them to introduce themselves by sharing their name, age, and major. This allowed the researcher to take record of each individual's name and demographics.

The full list of interview questions will be included in Appendix B. The majority of questions are open-ended, but there is an option to simply say yes or no, or abstain from volunteering in the discussion. The questions that were asked had impromptu follow up question to get more specific details. The questions began with texting habits and interpretations of text messages, (1) Who usually initiates texting conversation, (2) How many times a week would you expect to have a texting conversation with this person, (3) What do you think the purpose of emojis and words that express emotion are, (4) What do the use of periods at the end of sentences mean to you. Once the group became more in touch with their own texting identity questions arose such as, (1) Do you find yourself altering your personality while texting a new romantic interest, (2) What are the strategies do you use during texting to keep someone interested. Eventually, once the participants were more comfortable, question led into how texting has affected their own emerging romantic relationships, (1) Do you find yourself lacking self-control because of the easy access to texting, (2) How do you respond when someone doesn't text you back [Have you ever regretted this response], (3) Was a relationship ever ruined by your text habits?

Due to each individual texting identity, various follow up questions were unique to each focus group. Some of these questions included: (1) Do you ever lie when you're texting, (2) If you don't want to talk to a guy will you still text them, (3) Is it strategic to have read receipts on, (4) Do you think you really build a relationship through texting or is it when you're actually together, (5) What is everyone's go to first text?

Analysis

The researcher went into the focus groups aware of the main topics within the literature rationale, which include texting identity development, conflict in texting, and the construction of

gender in texting. This prior research allowed the researcher to have an educated perspective and the ability to pick up on things participants shared during the focus groups. This study was thematically measured by identifying clear and ambiguous statements during the focus group dialogue. During this process the researcher used note taking to keep track of the strategies people use during texting as well as their reactions to certain text messages. This qualitative method helped the researcher interpret this data to discover how young adults use texting in romantic relationships.

The focus groups resulted in an audio-recorded file that was transcribed. The transcriptions of these focus groups resulted in 48 pages. This is the first step in the written coding process in thematic analysis. The researcher first read through the transcriptions thoroughly, and chose the most beneficial quotes for her thesis. Throughout this discussion various themes arise and guided the researchers data measurements. The researcher wrote down each finding during each focus group and saw if there were commonalities across all focus groups to be able to make a claim.

With each unique narrative, parallels were made over the course of each focus group, as well as major variations. The researcher sought to compare and contrast the men and women's focus groups. Major themes included texting habits, strategies and past relationships that molded one's texting identity, the positive and negative language used in texting discourse, the effects of substances on texting behavior, and culturally accepted rules about the frequency of texting in an early romantic relationship.

Open coding was applied to organize the researchers critical thinking process about the most fundamental subjects that came from the focus groups. Below is a table of open coding.

Open Coding Themes for Data

Identity	Discourse
An individual's personality that dictates their behavior during texting. Texting identity is perceived separately by their romantic interest from one's face-to-face identity.	There are widely accepted meanings of language in texting.
Influence of Substances	**Culturally Dominant Rules**
Both men and women have different sober and drunk text identities.	Certain behaviors are expected during texting early romantic relationships.

Rationale

The main objective is to understand the norms and rules of texting in developing romantic relationships of young adults. Focus groups allow college students to have open dialogue, where patterns will arise when applying meanings to texting codes. These parallels are difficult to discover through quantitative methods such as surveys because the questions are open-ended. Krueger & Casey (2000) said, "focus group interview is intended to make a group of people with specific attributes provide qualitative data related to the research topic in a comfortable environment, under the guidance of a moderator, and through group discussions" (Kai-Wen, 2014). Kai-Wen's research is about why focus groups are so common in the academic arena.

Throughout literature in this area of research it is popular to use short surveys, which lead me to my own research question that has not been answered due to the lack of focus on the individuals. There will be generalizations made in this study but they can only be accomplished in a setting where one can divulge their own narratives. Focus groups were chosen as opposed to interviews because focus groups contribute a rare conversation that helps the researcher get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Morgan, 1997). The researcher's goal of this study was to acknowledge multiple perspectives, and focus groups take this a step farther by seeing these perspectives interact. Interviews are more effective when capturing an isolated incident or if the subject matter makes the individual feel vulnerable. This study required very little risk emotionally for participants. Texting is a substantial part of individual's lives today, but texting is still a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, focus groups give each participant the ability to brainstorm and explore what they see as their texting reality with a group of people who have had similar experiences.

Chapter 3: Findings

In this chapter the results of the focus groups are revealed. The researcher acquired this data as a consequence of the communication problems discussed in chapter one. After analyzing the data the researcher was left with these major findings. The use of texting in early romantic relationships is complex, with many different perspectives on the subject. Though, there was varying opinions based on gender, there were dominant rules across all genders when it came to texting behavior.

Signaling Interest and Control

Texting must begin with the initiation of a conversation, but is there a meaning behind the initiation itself? Both men and women agreed one has less power when initiating texting conversations. One participant, Jeff, shared, "if you are the first one to text, you definitely have the underhand". Another participant, Lisa, agreed with Jeff, but added, "I think if they text you first it gives you more power because they're texting you and they're vulnerable". The reasoning behind the vulnerability of texting initiation was that the other person is not only putting themselves out there, but also is confirming some level of interest in the receivers of the text message. The receiver can then continue the conversation with assurance their response is of some value to their romantic interest.

Both Jeff and Lisa mentioned gender differences in texting initiation. Jeff responded to another participant, Mark, who pointed out men usually initiate text conversation, "but if a girl texts you first I feel like that's, if you get a girl's number, if she texts you like that's like you know". Jeff means if a women texts you first, you have the evidence to reinforce she is into you. Lisa believes that when men initiate texting conversation it doesn't have to come off vulnerable, but it can show they are confident and powerful. That being the case, with men being the ones to

primarily initiate texts, men are able to maintain mystery. Women, on the other hand, appear to be obviously stating their strong interest in their male romantic interest.

When early romantic relationships begin one must determine what they believe is appropriate. These conventions include a number of different features, including the frequency of texting. Men agreed they tend to have three to five texting conversations per week, while women varied on the amount. One participant, Randy, mentioned, "the less the better, if you text too much you're going to burn it out". This statement leads back to the individual's crave for not only being mysterious but also their attraction to mysterious romantic interests. The more one texts, not only is there less information to seek, but less excitement from receiving these texts.

The women's focus groups differed on what they felt was the appropriate amount of conversations a week. This was due to their male romantic interests initiating conversations most of the time, so it depended on the man's texting habits. Women pointed out if the texting pattern is broken, that is when one must question the relationship. One participant, Sadie, found, "there can be frequency the first few days, but if they don't text you back for a very long time, you're like it's over. And then they text you and you're like it's all great again". The lack of frequency in texting can be a sign of indifference, or simply a way to keep someone interested. Inconsistency during texting can be both positively or negatively. While many participants shared inconsistency kept them intrigued, one participant, Margaret, shared one of her relationships ended because of her unpredictable texting behavior. There were numerous occasions where Margaret would go out at night and not answer her phone for hours. This lack of frequency created mistrust in her romantic interest. Frequency plays a pivotal role whether it is on strategic or not.

The Strategic use of Non-verbal Cues in Texting

Emoji's purpose in texting is to get across an emotion you cannot do through words. There were many strong opinions about emojis during the focus groups. The majority of men and women both agreed emojis are unappealing when men use them. One participant named Beth said, "I think it's unattractive to use emojis. It feels feminine to me". Another participant, Wes, bluntly stated, "No emojis". The only participants who refuted this, mentioned the benefit of emojis in a serious romantic relationship, not during the early stages of romance.

In contrast, men and women felt emojis could be flirty when women use them. While women shared their favorite emojis were the winking face, kissing face, and smirking face, they also warned each other that one should not send heart emojis because that could imply you had strong feelings for them. Another participant Greg, supported this claim when he said he liked most emojis unless they were with a heart. He explained that if a text is accompanied with a heart emoji it would "throw him off", he would begin to question if his romantic interest was feeling the same way as he was. A participant, Caroline, gave her reasoning behind emojis, "I think it makes it more playful and less serious". Emojis add another element to the conversation, which at times can be dull through only the use of phrases. Men shared they enjoyed the devil face, winking face, and the "100" emoji. This is because it maintains the light humor men look for while texting a new romantic interest.

A new type of non-verbal communication method arose during each of the focus groups known as the GIF keyboard. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, GIF stands for graphic interchange format, which means, "a computer file format for the compression and storage of digital video images" (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Men and women enjoyed the new addition of the GIF keyboard for an array of reasons. Jason said, "GIF's give off more of a

message, comedic relief", while another participant named Kim shared, "now that the GIF keyboard has happened I really respect when someone sends me a hilarious GIF". Mark gave us his thought process for when he believes it is appropriate to use GIFs, "You gotta hit them with one kind of short text, and be like I don't care that much about you. And if there is a question you don't want to respond to, you hit them with a GIF". Mark's contribution further supports how much thought goes into texting in early romantic relationships. Each participants made it apparent how much thought not only when into forming a text, but also deciphering one. Participants discussed there are many times when a text is straightforward, but texting during early romantic relationships is much different than other texting dynamics.

During face-to-face communication, social cues have made it appropriate to respond right away. But when it comes to texting, there are beneficial reasons for waiting a certain time period to respond. Both men and women reported mirroring their romantic interests waiting period between texts. This means when a romantic interest takes five minutes to respond to your text message, you respond to their text message in the same time period. Men shared they normally don't text back for at least ten minutes, but notice they text faster when they are trying to meet up. This is a result of the time sensitive nature of meeting up with someone, which they mentioned occurred during weekend nights. Casual texting gives a texter more freedom to use texting strategically. A participant named Jason explained these texting codes to be "purely psychological". The women agreed they would not text back for at least fifteen minutes, but for much different reasons.

Sadie: Sometimes I just don't feel like responding right away.

Sandra: I need to figure out what I should say because I'm nervous thinking about my thoughts. Do I want to be really nice or cold?

Margaret: If someone takes hours to answer me, I'll purposely take two hours to answer them. I judge it off how long they take to text me, and I'll respond in the same time frame.

Delayed responses to texts are used to subtly show how much one likes their romantic interest, or who has the power in the relationship. One participant, Jessica, shares, "if a guy doesn't answer, if he waits like three hours to answer, I do feel weird even if I see the text immediately that he sends back. I feel like I do have to wait a little more so it doesn't seem like I'm waiting by my phone". Another participant, Shelly, exclaimed, "you don't want to seem more into the conversation than the guy is". A participant named Amy took another perspective on the situation, "if I'm on the other side, and I take a long time to respond to someone, and I get a text back like immediately, I'm like that's kind of weird. So I don't want to do that to someone else". During the early stages of romance texting is used to shape one's identity in a new relationship. The contemplation behind even the time period between texts can be critical in early romantic relationships. Based on these focus groups, non-verbal cues seem present in texting.

The "Situational" Texting Identity

Each focus group provided evidence that one's texting identity not only changes based on who one is talking to, but also when, where, and why. Men and women also voiced that their texting identity was different than their face-to-face identity. One participant, Andy, found himself questioning what he was going to say more during texting than in face-to-face interactions. Men also shared they tried to be more formal and gentleman-like while texting. Mark divulged that he curses a lot in person, but during texting he tries to hide that side of

himself. Men appear to embody the more traditional idea of how a man should act while texting during early romantic relationships.

Women alter their texting identity in various ways to appear more exciting. For example, if their romantic interest brings up a topic they are unfamiliar with, they will look it up and pretend they know what they are talking about. Women also use deceit in texting when discussing their daily plans, Lisa said, "if you are lying in bed all day, and they will say what did you do today, and you're like oh you know just went on a hike". Sandra even claimed she pretends to be bad with her phone because she never knows how they are going to be. This can described as a power move to maintain the less intense forward identity. Texting is a powerful tool in constructing the image of who they are versus who they want to appear to be. While both men and women shared they try to be more humorous to keep someone interested, men also pointed out they act nonchalant or aloof.

There are not only texting strategies that form one's texting identity, but the actual use of grammar in texting can be a reflection of who you are and how you feel about a person. Acronyms are used to put common used phrase together like "hby" which translates to "how about you". Jeff shared his feelings on acronyms, "I think it's a sign if they say, using acronyms, they're too lazy to try to talk to you, and it's like are you kidding me you're not going to try to spell those three words, you're going to hit it with a nmu (nothing much you)". Kim agreed and pointed out that she respected people when they spelled words out. Sandra also gave us an inside look of how acronyms can be used strategically by sharing, "it depends on who you're talking to. If it was out of the blue I'd be pissed". This notion distinguished how one has the capability to act different during texting, therefore demonstrating the critical role of texting identity in relationships. Just as it was suggested above when it came to change of frequency in texting, the

change of language use can be a powerful indicator of how one's romantic interest is feeling. During the early stages of romance, face-to-face time can be limited between the two individuals. This leaves texting as a platform to not only learn about one another, but to build a connection.

Punctuation matters in formal writing, but when it comes to texting, the rules are much different. Jessica explained, "I use a lot of exclamation points, because I feel like I can get my point across without sounding cold". Jessica believes she comes across very different in texting. She describes herself as brash, not very girly, and having a low voice in person, but when she texts she appears enthusiastic and flamboyant. Another participant, Christy agreed with Jessica, "I always have to sound overly excited". Women give the impression they want to present a feminine personality by seeming more engaged. Having said that, periods at the end of sentences can also express powerful emotions:

Kendall: I never use periods so if I do you know I'm mad.

Christy: If it's a paragraph, you're just separating your thoughts.

Kendall: If you type something that's less than a sentence or a sentence and you put punctuation like a period than that's like harsh to me at least.

Christy: The worst is like "okay."

Amy: Even just one word answers.

The common knowledge that punctuation expresses these feelings makes using exclamation points and periods strategic. The calculated use of punctuation to tell a romantic partner how you are feeling is prevalent in everyday texting. If punctuation is not a part of your texting identity, the use of punctuation can be alarming. Consequently, revealing how even the slightest change in texting behavior leads to uncertainty and anxiety about a relationship.

When texting, one must use their words very carefully due to unintentional non-verbal cues. During the focus groups words and phrases that create anxiety were disclosed. Both men and women agreed the phrases "sure", "k", "ha", "fine", and "alright" lead to feelings of tension and nervousness. They justified this by noting the lack of effort within the text message, as well as it being a common subtle hint of annoyance used in texting. During the men's focus group they went back and forth sharing their position of texts that lead to uneasiness:

Devin: Fine with a period, or alright. One-word answers are annoying.

Devin: The single letter k is different then the word okay spelled out.

Greg: It means I'm pissed off in a passive aggressive manner but I'm sending it pretty blatantly.

Beyond just simple one-word answers, even the sequence of these answers in conversation can be troubling. For example:

Jackson: Or you say "what're you doing", and their like, "nothing".

Tim: "how was your night?", "good".

These commonly known phrases that show irritation almost act as non-verbal codes. By simply responding short, one-word answers, without an open-ended question following, you are symbolically giving the recipient a cold shoulder.

Studies have shown how substances such as alcohol can alter one's regular texting identity. Both men and women believed they had different sober and drunk texting identities. This stemmed from the lack of control they felt when texting their romantic interest when they were under the influence of alcohol. Half of the men said when their romantic interest does not respond they wouldn't text back sober, while if they were drunk, they would text back a few times. Caroline simply stated, "when you're drunk you don't care". Shelly felt it was common

during early romantic relationships to send a million texts when you were drunk, which included, "where are you", "I want to hang out", "what are you doing", and "can I come over". Women did believe however, if the recipient knows you are drunk, it may at times come off as a compliment. As a whole the focus groups shared the easy access to texting was only detrimental when under the influence of substances or during conflict.

The Positive and Negative Effects of Initiating Conflict through Texting

Texting can be used for multiple purposes, whether that is to make plans or get to know someone, communication problems arise. During the focus groups participants considered how they have used texting as a platform to bring up conflict. Men believed it is easier to bring up conflict during texting, but also pointed out some of the negative side effects.

Henry: But more conflict could arise.

Anthony: Your tone can't be translated to the person.

Travis: You can totally manipulate.

Mark: They can show everybody, they have that stuff on their phone.

Men's fear of conflict during texting was similar to how women felt. Both men and women believed texting had the ability to create more problems. Mark pointed out how easily privacy can be breached through texting. One's discussion lives on far passed the end of the conversation; the evidence is there on the phone for as long as the receiver wants it to be. Mark suggests how texts can be used to reflect poorly on a person when shown to someone's peers. Women shared how they seek advice from friends when they have a texting conflict. Shelly revealed that she sends her texts to a group chat, which is a texting conversation consisting of multiple people. Some of the men admitted to seeking help from their friends. Another participant, Adam, shared, "girls do that all the time. I knew a girl that wasn't even texting, her

friend was texting for her. He thought it was her the whole time". During face-to-face interactions one is unable to get private advice from their friend in the moment. This is a considerable difference when looking at CMC versus face-to-face communication.

Women felt bringing up conflict during texting was more appropriate in early romantic relationships. Kim said, "it depends on how far you are into the relationship too, like if it's your serious boyfriend- talk to them about it in person. But if it's someone you just started hooking up with just text them that wasn't chill". Kim shared that the use of texting during conflict is determined by the relationship status. Christy disagreed and shared how it would only make her more upset if someone brought up something sensitive through texting in an early romantic relationship.

Lisa shared why she felt it was necessary to bring up conflict during texting, "if you're about to fight, it's just easier to text them because you don't have to say it in person. If you find something out about your significant other you can text them right away, 'are you kidding me'". This statement both combines how texting can cause avoidance as well as lack of self-control due to the easy access. Sadie explains both the positive and negative reasoning behind initiating conflict through texting, "but then if you say it through text, and they take it the wrong way, you're like oh this person is just bringing it up and they are not actually mad. I mean its easier using text in conflict. It's not face-to-face so it's less pressure, but it also can be misread". Sadie brings up some of the reasons texting can backfire when discussing conflict. One major miscommunication that can occur is the conflict you are bringing up may seem more or less serious. This can be extremely frustrating during the early stages of a romantic relationship because one feels they do not have the option to discuss conflict face-to-face.

Texting can be lost in translation, but it can also lead to more intense feelings that would not come up during face-to-face interactions. Jessica said, "I rather do it in person because I feel like people are nicer in person. If I was going to bring up a subject that was uncomfortable I feel like in text they could easily be so rude about it, but in person it is weird to hurt someone's feelings". Amy disagreed with this though, and stated, "It gives you time to get less heated. If you know in your logical head you shouldn't care that much, but if they were talking to you about it you'd get emotional, then it gives you a second to step back and be like okay let's be rational". Randy agreed with Amy, and stated, "Sometimes I prefer it because you can actually articulate what you're trying to say. Where if like you're actually having a conflict with someone and you're talking and you're emotional about it. Where if you have thirty minutes you can outline your argument". Participants also felt texting about conflict can backfire because one's romantic interest has the ability to not only craft the perfect message, but also decide to stop responding to you. When faced with no response, there are only a few more options. One could "double text", which is sending two texts in a row for the purpose to get a response. One could also accept the conversation is over, even if they do not feel it has been resolved. Participants shared this decision is difficult but necessary in continuing the formation of their texting identity in this particular relationship. In the end, it seems to appear during early romantic relationships participants felt it was more appropriate to divulge their discontentment through CMC.

The Impact of Texting on Dissolving a Relationship

Before texting, relationships were solely based on face-to-face interaction. With the introduction of CMC there are many other variables that can lead to the conclusion of a relationship. Participants shared narratives about how their texting habits ruined past early

romantic relationships. Due to an overwhelming amount of accounts during the focus group process, data found that men ruin early romantic relationships by aggressive hook up texts.

Jason: I said are we going to do this or what? And then she just didn't respond.

Adam: I got like thirty of them. I think one time I was just giving like one word answers, but that was not my intention. So after like three of them she stopped answering at all. So I hit her with are you coming over?

Henry: Said mean things because she wouldn't hook up with me soon enough.

Travis: I was hooking up with a girl a little bit. Came back from break and hit her up, was way too aggressive.

Wes shared what he has found based on his experiences, "if you text her all the time and have a great conversation, and then you get drunk and bored and said are you coming over or not, that's the end". Most of the other men agreed, but Mark discussed his own personal issues with relationships ending based on texting, "a lot of the my issue is I will get too drunk and not even think about it. And get texts from girls and totally miss out on a perfectly good opportunity". Many of the male participants in this study blamed their mistakes during texting on alcohol, and noted that self-restraint was not a problem when sober texting. Consequently, being too forward as a woman to men can turn men off as well.

Men found certain abrasive texting habits to be a turning point in an early romantic relationship. Devin said, "straight off, early on and they are double texting a lot that wards me off. That means she's way too into it". Greg agreed by sharing one thing in particular that bothered him, "when a woman texts you too much, and is paranoid, saying, 'is anything wrong', repeatedly". Blake concluded the discussion by saying, "if they wait twenty minutes to send a question mark, that's bad". It is evident men believe that if this type of anxious texting behavior

comes up early during a romantic relationship, things will only get worse in the future. When beginning a romantic relationship, these are the moments where one's texting identity is a determining factor.

Women were aware of some of the texting habits that were unattractive to their romantic interests. For example, Shelly found that, "sometimes when I text people I sound really cold and that could have scared someone off". When one comes off cold in texting it could be read as either they are uninterested or an unpleasant person. Christy considered, "if you text a guy too much that could definitely be a turn off if they are not replying, like if you are just rapid firing text messages and they are not answering- that's bad". This behavior is problematic because either the romantic interest is not responding on purpose, or this could be a turnoff to guys, as mentioned earlier.

Rather than sharing particular texting habits of all their romantic interests, the women shared stories about texting behavior that made them uncomfortable. Jessica told the focus group about her experience with a past romantic interest, "I really liked a guy and he texted me selfies all the time, and I hated it. It would make me mad, and I really liked hanging out with him in person". She also included that she doesn't think it's appropriate to text something really serious early on in a relationship. Amy explains how serious conversations in general aren't satisfying over texts, "you can't have those deep conversations over texts, those only naturally happen in a certain zone and a certain mood. If someone texted me a long thing right now, I'm clearly not in the space to give an emotional response, but when you're together that happens for both people". Furthermore, when texting during a new romantic relationship you cannot rely on solely your face-to-face interactions. These texting habits do give off warning signs to the recipient and can be the demise of a potential serious romantic relationship.

Ending any type of relationship can be difficult, and one must consider if the use of texting is a suitable, or just a convenient outlet. Shelly believed it was not wrong to end things via text if the break up was early in the romantic relationship. Amy said you can even end things by not responding to your old romantic interest. Nevertheless, this can lead to communication problems if the old romantic interest does not "get the hint". Amy said this tends to occur because, "there are those people who live through technology in a different way you do, so the social cues are not the same". The diverse texting identities that are based on numerous factors, including demographics, may lead to miscommunication.

Atypical Texters

The findings in this study support that there are accepted practices and norms when texting in early romantic relationships. There appeared to be a consensus when it came to each aspect of texting, but there were some exceptions. The majority of participants agreed texting was limited to a certain amount of times per week when forming a new romantic relationship. One participant, Kim, felt differently, "sometimes I'm bored, I'm just trying to chat with anyone that will talk to me". Many of her texting habits went against this formula so many participants described. Kelly used a feature of texting, which is optional, called read receipts. This means every time someone sends you a text, once you read it, a time stamp is posted which states the exact time that person read the message. She said this practice derived from fights that occurred with her ex boyfriend, "I used to put it on when I was fighting with Patrick so he could know I read them, and was pissed and not answering". Another participant, Margaret, noted she used read receipts differently, "my read receipts are on because people think its rude if you don't respond right away, so I need them to know that I'm not looking at my phone". Based on other

findings, read receipts can play a positive or negative role in texting to confirm the person has read the message.

In both CMC and face-to-face interactions one has the ability to not respond. Both men and women shared how they went about either continuing the conversation if someone does not respond, or starting a new conversation entirely. Various strategies were discussed, including waiting until the next day, double texting but changing the conversation, or waiting until you see that person again so you have a valid reason to text them. One participant, Wes, had no patience if someone decided to not respond to his text. He shared that if his romantic interest does not respond after at least two days, he is done with the relationship. Many of the participants were shocked and disagreed. They stated that no responses were apart of texting and if they liked someone enough it would not matter. They did however suggest if they saw evidence that their romantic interest was constantly using social media it would make them believe they had lost interest in them.

College Freshman VS. College Seniors/Juniors

The women's focus groups consisted of university students in their freshman, junior, and senior year. One women's focus group was entirely freshman year students. Though, they shared many similar positions and experiences during texting in early romantic relationships, there were still notable differences. Earlier in the research both the women and men had strong opinions on the use of emojis. When the freshman women were asked about how they felt about men's use of emojis, most of them shared they didn't mind or did not have a preference. During the senior and junior women's focus group there was no discussion about how one got their romantic interest's number. The freshman women shared during their first year of college they were put in awkward positions often when it came to sharing their number. Jessica disclosed, "I do feel weird saying

no to giving my number out", while Christy stated, "I always give it out and just don't answer". Jessica also included how this affects the initiation stage of texting, "I think lately, I'll get guys numbers, or they will get mine at a party and they will text me right when they get their number like hi, and then I'll choose if I want to respond or not". This discrepancy may be due to the freshman's arrival at a new school, and constantly meeting new people, while juniors and seniors have found their social circle.

The junior and senior women's focus group varied in amount of texts per week, but definitely recognized texting occurs not only during the weekend. The freshman women's focus group however discussed the lack of texting during the weekdays. The researcher asked, "would it be weird for someone to text you during the week", and a participant, Christy responded, "No that would be refreshing, just unexpected". Another participant named Amy came to explain, "that's more of I want to get to know you rather than meet up once". The freshman women described their texting relationships as consistently hot and cold, and Kendall even exclaimed, "texting is kind of a bold move". Kendall continued to share that snapchat is used during early romantic relationships before texting occurs. The age difference of the freshman participants led to deviant behavior in texting due to experiencing a new college environment.

A World Without Texting

Texting is only a small blip in world history, yet the participants felt it would be very difficult to date without the use of texting. Men shared how texting made access to their romantic interest easier. Randy disagreed with this and stated: "No, it makes it so people don't have to talk to each other. And then that makes people way worse at communicating, like when I say, 'how are you' in a text message', a girl can take that in so many different directions. She can be like

what an asshole. And then I can say 'hello, how are you', and she can hear the connotation in my voice and there is way less ambiguity".

Women discussed the pros and cons of texting in a romantic relationship:

> Kim: It grows the relationship but then it ends up killing the relationship.
>
> Lisa: And if you're out and their home, and they aren't texting you back, you're like shit. If we didn't have phones we wouldn't be worrying oh he's not answering because he's out.
>
> Kim: And we wouldn't be looking at snapchats seeing what they are doing.
>
> Veronica: But you probably wouldn't meet up in the beginning as much either.

Participants are aware of how texting can make communication easier, but it seems to add more complications to relationships. Fights that didn't exist before now exist because of texting. Not only does one's texting identity influence the way one looks at another person, but some of the conflict discussed by participants stemmed directly from texting behavior. Whether it was not responding fast enough, or having someone else respond for you, texting can be interpreted as deceitful, or is truly deceitful. Shelly believes that only a real romantic relationship can be possible without texting because you know you are going to see them again. Early romantic relationships are filled with uncertainty and texting is a tool to ease the anxiety that comes from this.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Rationale

Each year technology continues to surprise us with new advancements. These advancements claim to make life easier and less complicated. Texting in early romantic relationships has not made communication easier, but has created elements that were not there in the past. People engaging in texting during early stages of a romantic relationship will have to strive to create an identity that coexists with the identity they have during face-to-face interactions. Individuals now use texting strategically to appeal to their romantic interest. There are bad habits of texting, and good tactics of texting. Past research has examined texting within romantic relationships, but they have not focused on the perspective of individuals using texting as a means to influence romantic interests. This study examines the discourse and socially accepted rules young adults have produced for texting behavior in early romantic relationships.

Results and Previous Research

The Prominence of Verbal and Non-verbal Cues in Texting

Walther (1996) discussed theories that stemmed from CMC. One theory in particular was noted cues-filtered-out theory. This theory assumes there are no verbal cues present during CMC. This study refutes this statement for multiple reasons. Participants in this study shared their consistent use of punctuation to display the mood they were in, which reveals the nuances of the voice. For example, many women noted using exclamation points often so they did not come off cold. Both men and women mentioned the use of periods to insinuate they are mad, as well as produce anxiety in their romantic interest. The use of punctuation is a clear and consistent use of verbal cues for both the sender and receiver of the text message. Walther (1996) stated that CMC could lead to individuals becoming "self-focused and resistant to influence".

This statement was disproved during this study with many accounts of influence in texting behavior based on their partner's texting habits.

Doering and Poeschl (2007) studied the role of non-verbal codes during CMC. They discussed two major non-verbal cues, which include chronemics and proxemics, as well as the use of smilies. Throughout this study these non-verbal cues were mentioned when discussing texting early romantic relationships. Both participants and Doering and Poeschl mention the time stamp that is present in CMC. Participants maintained appropriate texting relationships by mirroring the time period of their romantic interest's texts. This time period varied from an average of ten to fifteen minutes for men and women, but in certain contexts, participants could end up waiting hours to respond if their partner does not respond right away. The act of mirroring time period during text messages also support Doering and Poeschl (2007) work on how response latencies affect romantic relationships. One participant reported the end of her romantic relationship was due to her not responding fast enough and creating uncertainty in her relationship. Doering and Poeschl (2007) mention smilies in particular during their research, but during this study the use of emojis were discussed. Both men and women believed emojis had the ability to be flirty when women used them. However, when men used emojis, women reported negative impressions.

Texting Identity and the Demise of a Relationship

The previous studies mentioned did not solely look at the use of texting when ending relationships, but mentioned how CMC plays a role in hurtful situations. Jin's (2013) research dealt with how one responds to hurtful text messages. Jin (2013) found that in both online and offline communication, it was common for the recipient of the message to distance oneself from the sender. Men shared their own narratives about sending belligerent texts when trying to hook

up with their romantic interests and how that could lead to the end of their relationship. Men also mentioned distancing themselves from a relationship if their partner sent them an overwhelming amount of "double texts". This brings us to the study by Walther and Ramirez (2010) on mixed-mode relationships. Mixed-mode relationships are the evolution of relationships beginning online and eventually leading to an offline relationship. During this study the majority of relationships began offline, but relationships were ended due to online behaviors. One important finding in this study was how one's texting identity is not only influential in their partner's perception of them, but also is separate from one's face-to-face relationship identity.

Knapp's Relationship Stages

Throughout this study participants mentioned phases in their early romantic relationships that emerge in Knapp's Relationship Stages. Some of these stages are accepted as common during this point of a relationship, while others were disagreeable. The escalating stages were more common in early romantic relationships (initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, bonding). The initiating stage is pivotal when beginning this type of relationship. Participants in this study opened up about all of the thought and rules that go into text initiation. One major theme was the gender differences in text initiation. This was attributed to the implications of the texts if initiated by a man or women. Due to the socially accepted norm of men texting first, if a woman texted first this conveyed the impression she was very interested.

Every relationship is unique and there will always be an experimenting stage in each relationship. After numerous experiences with texting in early romantic relationships, participants shared how their past helped them learn and become the texter they are today. Whether it was texting too much to the point their romantic interest ended things, or learning to mirror the waiting period between texts, these experiences taught each individual how to come

off more appealing. Therefore, their experimenting stage is never ending and always evolving with each relationship. This brings one to the last escalating stage, bonding. Participants shared texting is used for a variety of different reasons during early romantic relationships. In the very first stages, it is used to make small talk and make plans for face-to-face interactions. This small talk has the ability to bond the two individuals, and at times to a fault. One participant shared how if one texts too much before they spend time face-to-face, they may have very little to talk about. All in all, texting is a low-pressure environment for two people to bond that are beginning a romantic relationship

Participants' narratives also included Knapp's deescalating stages (circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating). Hall et al. described stagnating, "[consisting] of individual engagement in imagined interactions, which consists of the story line or conversation an individual thinks they know will likely occur" (Hall et al., 2013, 26). Participants shared their uneasiness when one stopped initiating conversation or responding. The stagnating period may lead to an individual avoiding the conversation they have been imagining. One participant brought up their concern of when the texting pattern is broken. The participant said it was resolved once she received a text, even if it was many days later. However, the days until she received the following texts were filled with anxieties, and she was unwilling to double text. She did not take the problem into her own hands, and avoided the conversation she thought may come out of the reason for fewer texts.

Individuals can experience numerous early romantic relationships in their lifetimes. The terminating stage is usually part of the process of the relationship process. This is Knapp's final stage and occurs when the relationship has come to an end. Participants considered how to end an early romantic relationship through texting. Terminating a relationship in its early stages

through texting was not only appropriate, but also convenient because the relationship is not serious yet. Participants used the tactic of not responding or ignoring future text messages once they decided they wanted to terminate the relationship. When it came to serious romantic relationships, participants felt texting would not be a suitable method when terminating a relationship.

Conflict Online and Offline

Previous research is constantly questioning a recipient's ability to comprehend a text message. Scissors (2012) suggested CMC inhibited the ability of the recipient to decode their partner's feelings. The ability to decipher what one's partner is saying during text messaging is paramount when using texting to initiate conflict. Participants discussed when they use texting to initiate conflict, their partners often misread their emotion, taking it either more or less seriously than they meant it. Scissors (2012) also presents the term channel switching. Channel switching occurs when one continues a discussion through a different type of communication. Scissors' participants felt it was easier to initiate conflict through CMC, because they felt offline communication was more comfortable. Participants in this study agreed with this and mentioned the easy access to texting allowed one to share their feelings the moment conflict arose. They also found it easier to articulate more logically rather than emotionally while texting. This study further explained the reasoning behind why people prefer texting during conflict.

Studies about electronic intrusion are based on anxieties that derive from technology, and can lead to destructive behaviors such as looking through a partner's phone without permission. Reed et al. and Lucero et al. discuss electronic intrusion in relevance to serious romantic relationships. This study focused solely on early romantic relationships, which meant access to the other persons phone was limited. During the focus groups one participant discussed their fear

of other people reading his texts. This fear was confirmed when individuals agreed they showed their friends text messages for advice on what to say next. Participants shared this was a common habit when dealing with texting and conflict. The anxiety of how to respond appropriately led to the need to share their romantic interests messages, which is encroaching one's privacy without permission. Based on this evidence, it appears electronic intrusion occurs during early romantic relationships, just in different ways.

The Desired Expectations of Texting

When beginning a texting relationship, individuals anticipate certain behaviors, and hope for specific messages. Luo and Tuney (2013) wanted to discover how texting could play a positive role in romantic relationships. Their major finding was that the initiation staged led to satisfaction in a relationship. During this study, men shared the excitement and assurance they found when a woman texted them first. Women believed that when men initiate conversation it was attractive, coming off as confident and powerful. Morrill, Jones, and Vaterlus, found that men and women had different texting behavior and motives. Morrill et al. believed women sought a deeper emotional connection through CMC, while men used texting to meet face-to-face. This study did find that men used texting to meet face-to-face, but also discovered women did as well. Women in this study explained their discomfort with texting about serious topics during early romantic relationships, and how they preferred to do this in an offline setting. This leads one to believe texting is different during early stages of romantic relationships. Jin and Pena (2010) found that greater mobile communication was connected to lower relational uncertainty in romantic relationships. This was apparent in this study because of findings that uncovered women questioned relationships if a texting pattern was broken. Thus, it is evident one's expectation during texting influence their feelings about their romantic interest.

Limitations

During the process of gathering this research limitations occurred. Each participant in this study was either in the researcher's social network, or was recruited from someone within the social network. The vast majority of these participants were also in their final year of college. This can lead to some behaviors being isolated attributed to similar interests and peers.

Focus groups can be overwhelming for participants, while for others it can be a safe place to open up. During the focus groups certain individuals had a stronger voice than others. This led to disparity in feedback from the participants. There may have been opinions that were not stated because of the participants who volunteered often, as well as agreement among the group when it was not there. Though, the researcher asked participants to go around the circle and share for particular questions, this could not be done for each question in the time period allotted.

Finally, due to each focus group having unique conversations, different follow up questions were asked. This led to findings occurring in only one or two focus groups. Therefore, the population decreases significantly.

Future Research

This study focused solely on the role of texting during early romantic relationships. It would be valuable for future researchers to study the texting strategies used in serious romantic relationships. This study found that individuals have a texting identity, but once their partner is well acquainted with this identity does that play a role in their relationship? It would be beneficial to focus on the conflict that may arise in serious romantic relationships because of one's texting identity.

During this study the influence of alcohol on texting was apparent. Participants shared how their self-control was altered while drinking alcohol. Looking at how one's texting behavior

and identity is altered by alcohol would be extremely useful. When comparing sober texts to drunken texts many distinctions may arise. Further studies could be dedicated to instances where this had changed a relationship's future.

Conclusion

Each generation has their own way of forming romantic relationships. It seems likely that each generation in the future will continue to build upon the rules, codes, and gender dynamics that have been formed in texting a romantic interest. When reflecting on this process, it is clear the importance texting has in romantic relationships, and the strong feelings associated with it. One's texting identity plays a huge role in the vitality of a romantic relationship. The way one utilizes texting in their relationship influences the way they will communicate.

This study is significant as it yielded various findings and observations, which help inform the motives behind romantic text messaging. The study also highlighted the emotional responses that arise from a simple text. Readers will ultimately become more aware how instrumental texting can be in their relationship, and invariably, will improve upon their communication skills. With this knowledge texting has the potential to develop into a more positive tool in getting to know someone in early romantic relationships.

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Appendix A:

IRB Letter of Approval
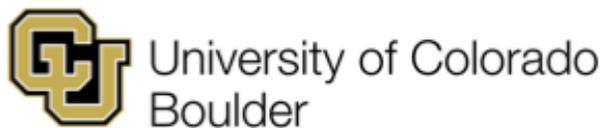
	Institutional Review Board
	563 UCB
	Boulder, CO 80309
	Phone: 303.735.3702
	Fax: 303.735.5185
	FWA: 00003492

University of Colorado Boulder

APPROVAL

07-Jan-2016

Dear Alexis Berusch,
On **07-Jan-2016** the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Submission:	Initial Application
Review Category:	Exempt - Category 2
Title:	Focus Groups with University of Colorado College Students about Texting in New Romantic Relationships
Investigator:	Berusch,Alexis
Protocol #:	15-0819
Funding:	None

The IRB approved the protocol on **07-Jan-2016**.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: Approved Documents. Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
Vena Dunne, Ph.D.
Director, IRB Office
Institutional Review Board

Appendix B:

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Consent Process

Participants in this study will receive an informed consent form before the focus group begins. They will fill out this form completely to be able to be apart of this study. If anything on this consent form makes a participant feel uncomfortable they are able to withdraw from the study.

Introduction

1. **Welcome**

a. Good evening and welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on how texting influences romantic relationships in college. My name is Alexis Berusch and I am a communication major pursuing honors. I will be asking a series of questions which you may choose to answer or not. Any questions?

2. **Explanation of the process**

3. **Ground Rules**

4. **Turn on Tape Recorder**

5. **Question before we get started**

6. **Introductions**

· Go around group: name, major, what interested you in this study.

7. **Questions**

1. Who usually initiates texting conversation?

    i. And what does it mean to be the one to initiate conflict?

        ii. More power less power?

2. How many times a week would you expect to have a texting conversation with this person?

3. Do you use emojis and words that express emotion? E.g. "haha"

    i. Which ones do you use most and why?

4.   What do you think the purpose of emojis and words that express emotion are?

5.   Is there or has there been a consistency in the frequency of texting for both you and your partner?

6.   How do you use texting in early stages of a romantic relationship?

7.   What do the use of periods at the end of sentences mean to you?

8.   What do the use of acronyms during texting mean to you? E.g. "Nmu"

9.   Do you find yourself altering your personality while texting a new romantic interest? If yes, how so?

10. Do you believe there are differences in word use in texting when it comes to gender? If yes, how so?

11. How long do you wait to respond to a text?

        i. Does this vary? Based on what context?

12. Is it possible to date today without the use of texting? Why do you feel this way?

13. Do you feel like texting is a positive tool in relationships, if so why?

14. Is it easier to bring up conflict during texting, if so why?

15. What are the strategies you use during texting to keep someone interested in you, and has it worked?

16. Do you find yourself lacking self-control because of the easy access of texting? If yes, how so?

        i. How do you respond when someone doesn't text you back?

        1. E.g. text again, wait, ignore them until they respond

17. How often do you find yourself editing texts before sending them?

        i. Have you had friends help you while you texted?

18. Was a relationship ever ruined by your texting habits? If yes, how so?

19. What are some words that come up during texting that create anxiety or confusion? E.g.

"sure", "k"

8.   Conclude focus group and thank participants for being there.

Materials and supplies for focus groups

- Consent forms, (one copy for participants, one copy for the PI)

- Evaluation sheets, one for each participant

- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator

- 1 recording device

- Batteries for recording device

- Notebook and pencils for note-taking

- Refreshments and pizza