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It is entitled:
Exploring female perceptions of relational norms in text messaging and their implications for developing romantic relationships

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Exploring female perceptions of relational norms in text messaging and their implications for developing romantic relationships

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts 2018

in the Department of Communication, McMicken College of Arts and Sciences

by

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B.A. Kent State University, May 2016

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Abstract: The pressures and expectations that young adults in romantic relationships face become increasingly complex with the incorporation of various information communication technologies (ICTs). The purpose of this project is to investigate normative relational behaviors and expectations via smartphone use for developing romantic partners and to better understand how these couples manage normative behaviors. This study utilizes a qualitative approach, specifically semi-structured interviews for data collection. There were a total of 20 participants in the age range of 18 to 24 ($M = 19.35$, $SD = 1.31$). Through an inductive iterative approach to analysis, there were three main findings. First, mobile technologies, specifically text messaging, afford everyday talk for romantic couples, which introduces an autonomy-connection dialectical tension that couples must manage. Second, smartphone features, like read receipts and Snapchat streaks, afford continuous communication for couples, consequently adjusting expectations for synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication. Third, there are implicit normative behavior expectations (i.e., response times) and patterns of expectancy violations that frequently occur across couples. Taken together, these findings highlight specific affordances and features of mobile technologies that are pertinent within the developmental phase of romantic relationships, which consequently affect relationship communicative dynamics.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my readers, Dr. Tony Liao and Dr. Stephen Haas for their invaluable feedback as my committee members, instructors, and mentors. Additionally, I would like to thank my colleagues within the Department of Communication at the University of Cincinnati for their support and encouragement. Finally, and most importantly, I owe unending gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Pamara F. Chang, without whom I could not have completed this project. Thank you for pushing me to do my best, for your patience, for helping me realize my potential, and for your immeasurable knowledge and input.
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INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships have indubitably changed, as mobile technologies, specifically smart phones, have gradually become a more omnipresent component of mediated everyday life (Brody & Pena, 2015; Hjorth, Burgess & Richardson, 2012; Ishii, 2006; Ling, 2012; Snickars & Vonderau, 2012). Because mobile phones are compact in size, afford constant connectivity, include a range of sensors (e.g., GPS, Bluetooth), log geographical, personal, and behavioral data (Raento et al., 2009), they have become known as an “intimate technology that users take with them wherever they go, carry or wear close to the body, and place nearby, even in sleep or repose” (Goggin, 2011, p. 152). Smartphones represent the rise of a “personal communication society” (Campbell & Park, 2008, p. 371). Because these phones are so prevalent and so personal, they enable users to have a perpetual sense of contact to others within their close social network (Baym, 2015; Liu & Yang, 2016; Katz & Aakhus, 2002). One of the most prevalent features of smartphones affecting close relationships is SMS text messaging (Anderson, 2015a; Duran, Kelly & Rotaru, 2011; Lenhart & Duggan, 2014; Smith, 2011).

What started as a service that enabled users to send a maximum of 160 characters has evolved into a service that allows users to send paragraphs of text to those in their network in addition to photos, videos, and other interactive messages. Last year in the U.S., 92% of young adults, ages 18-29, reported owning a smart phone (Smith, 2017). In 2011, 95% of young Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 utilized an SMS text messaging service on their smart phones and, on average, sent and received an 87.7 messages per day (Smith, 2011).

The text messaging platform is particularly relevant for those in romantic relationships. The majority of young men and women utilize this medium to contact a
significant other every day (Smith, 2011), supporting that notion that it is the single most popular medium for contacting a romantic partner among American teenagers (Anderson, 2015b). However, existing literature pertaining to the impact of mobile technologies on romantic relationships illuminates inconsistency regarding its effects. For example, some scholars found that mobile communication technologies encourage feelings of connectedness, closeness and intimacy (Morey, Gentzler, Creasy, Oberhauser, & Westerman, 2013; Ohadi, Brown, Trub & Rosenthal, 2018; Pettigrew, 2009). Lenhart and Duggan (2014) conducted a study in which they found that 41% of young adults in the U.S. that are involved in committed relationships feel closer because of conversations they have via text messaging. Taken together, these studies indicate a positive impact of smartphones in interpersonal relationships.

In contrast, other scholars argue that smart phones may have a negative influence on relationships, as they may incite a sense of constant connection, which is thought to replace face-to-face interactions (Duran, Kelly & Rotaru, 2011; Halpern & Katz, 2017; Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Luo, 2014; McQuillan, 2003), furthering tension within a relationship (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014). This inconsistency within the current literature regarding the impact of mobile technologies on romantic relationships calls for a need for clarification by identifying specific mechanisms that drive either positive or negative effects of mobile technology use within romantic relationships and perhaps suggests a need for a different approach regarding this subject.

Young adults utilize SMS text messaging frequently to communicate with those around them, especially within the context of their romantic relationships (Baym, 2015; Liu & Yang, 2016). Evidence suggests that dyads are utilizing the medium, which is simultaneously affecting their relationship. What is unclear is two fold. First, it is unclear specifically how the medium is being used and managed within romantic relationships, and
more specifically, within developing romantic relationships. Second, it is unclear exactly how this platform affects developing romantic relationships. CMC and interpersonal communication scholars have addressed some of these gaps in literature by testing a variety of variables. However, a comprehensive overview of this subject seems to be missing from current research. This study will aim to answer these questions and address this gap in the literature. The central purpose of this project is to investigate the perceptions of relational SMS text messaging norms and how these norms are managed by couples to get a better understanding of the impact that text messaging has in developing romantic relationships.

Following, a review of the literature will serve as a foundation to inform the research questions proposed. First, current theories and propositions about romantic relationships and their typical development will be reviewed. Next, the history of text messaging will be addressed, followed by norms and typical behaviors of text messaging. Third, the extant literature regarding the role that SMS text messages play in romantic relationships will be addressed. And finally, gender differences in smart phone use will be reviewed leading to proposing the research questions.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Romantic Relationship Development**

Within romantic relationship studies, it has been difficult to explicitly relate time duration of relationships to a specific stage of a relationship. Within methods sections of several relational communication studies, scholars will note that there is not a specific time duration that exists for “developing relationships,” especially those that are romantic (e.g., Hurley & Reese-Weber, 2012). However, early stages seem to be a formative period that
can have lasting impacts on a romantic relationship, making it an area that warrants further investigation (Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 2001).

The model of relationship development proposed by Knapp is an important framework to consider in terms of how couples may come together (Knapp, 1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 1991; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). This ten-stage model resembles a dual staircase to illustrate five developmental stages of a romantic relationship, labeled coming together stages, and five dissolution stages, also referred to as the coming apart stages. The model is not necessarily a prescriptive model, and couples can move more or less quickly through stages. Rather, this model emphasizes common stages of relationships and associated stage characteristics.

The first step in the coming together process is the initiation stage. In this stage, according to Knapp (1978), initial encounters take place and disclosure tends to be low in breadth, depth, frequency, and duration. If this stage goes well, the couple will move to the second stage, the experimentation stage, which tends to include positive small talk. An example of this could be discussing similarities and differences. Characteristically, most relationships in an individual's life do not move past the experimentation phase unless they are significant (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). The third step is the intensifying stage. Increased contact, more frequent and personal self-disclosure, and relationship negotiation are examples of communicative practices that occur within this stage. The integration stage is when coupling behaviors take place. During this time, social networks are merged and disclosure becomes even more frequent between the dyad. Specifically, disclosure changes to include both positive and negative information about the self. Finally, the bonding stage is the top level of the step model, where the romantic relationship is institutionalized and revealed to the public in a formal way. Examples of this include marriage, cohabitation, or even disclosing the relationship in an online setting. The five
coming apart stages, as noted by Knapp, include differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding and terminating.

There is couple variation, but the model attempts to generalize the process of relationship development. Furthermore, in the extant literature regarding relationship development, there is not a concrete time period established that is typical for each stage as it varies by couple. For the purposes of this project, the early developmental phases of relationship development will be examined more closely. Specifically, it is likely that most individuals will be in the intensifying and integration stages of their relationship. Additionally, because Knapp’s model does not specifically address the role communicative technologies may play in these early phases, this is an area that warrants further investigation.

While Knapp (1978) has targeted specific attributes of romantic relationships that appear to be typical in the developmental phase of a relationship, this process is likely different within the context new communicative technologies. As a result, Knapp’s model serves as a springboard for newer frameworks that map out stages and attributes in romantic relationships within the context of text messaging or other communicative technologies.

For example, Sherrell and Lambie (2016) define different stages of a developing romantic relationship for young adults, emphasizing the impact of communicative technologies. Sherrell and Lambie (2016) found that the popular social networking site, Facebook, and SMS text messaging are the two primary tools used to get to know a prospective significant other among young adults. Furthermore, the authors created a model to delineate stages of dating for young adults. Their stages consist of: (1) talking, (2) seeing each other, (3) Facebook official, and (4) together. In the talking stage, there is minimal face-to-face communication. Also, it is appropriate to “talk” to more than one
person at a time. In the second stage, seeing each other, more face-to-face communication takes place, most commonly in a group, but sometimes on a one-on-one basis as well. Moving to the third stage, or becoming Facebook official (FBO), is a very significant step as it displays the maximum level of commitment to the relationship to one’s social network (Toma & Choi, 2015; Sherrell & Lambie, 2016). However, the couple only becomes completely committed to one another in the final phase, where they are considered “together” (Sherrell & Lambie, 2016). This study specifically demonstrates how relationship development for young adults has changed over time with the implementation of technology and perpetual contact. It also illuminates how technology use is an integral part of some of these developmental phases of romantic relationships and its association with the intensity of romantic relationships.

Larson (2010) had similar results to Sherrell and Lambie (2016) regarding developmental phases of romantic relationships for young adults. Through surveys and interviews, Larson (2010) mapped early stages of romantic relationships for young adults. First, the author found that “hooking up” is a phase that takes place separately from the developmental process, and usually denotes a physical relationship (Larson, 2010). The first real phase of a technology-related developmental dating process is “talking,” which means that there is frequent text messaging and both parties acknowledge that it could lead to a serious relationship. “Hanging out” is the next phase, which implies that the couple has spent time together in a casual way. Finally, “dating” is the committed, serious, monogamous relationship that two people engage in. This is what makes the relationship “official.” Many of these terms and phrases used to define a relationship are somewhat similar to those proposed by Sherrell and Lambie (2016). This further suggests that 1) relationship development has adjusted and follows atypical scripts and 2) technology now plays a role in the developmental process.
The relational norms, specifically ones related to mobile communicative practices, of young couples evolve over time based on constant negotiation. For example, McEwan and Horn (2016) investigated the importance of relational maintenance and the role text messaging can serve within it for couples in romantic relationships. Using the five maintenance strategies proposed by Stafford and Canary (1991), the authors found that four of the five strategies were typically used via text message by romantic couples to increase levels of relational closeness. These four strategies included 1) positivity, or conveying a positive disposition, 2) assurances, or written affirmations of the relationship and commitment, 3) sharing tasks and 4) sharing networks, which involves talking about friends of the dyad, or making plans with them (Stafford & Canary, 1991). While relational maintenance is not the primary focus of this study, the findings from McEwan and Horn (2016) demonstrate that typical relational strategies and communicative norms can also translate to a technological platform.

Communicative practices constantly evolve as the romantic relationships develop over time. It is likely that these stages work together in most relationships in the context of mobile technologies, particularly text messaging, as it plays an fundamental role.

**SMS Text Messaging and Romantic Relationships**

An SMS text message is a “short message that is sent electronically, usually from one cell phone to another” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, 2018). The service is classified as a short messaging service because it was originally designed to be composed of 160 characters or less (Erickson, 2012). The first short-message system (SMS) text message was sent in 1992 by Neil Papworth, a former developer from Sema Group telecoms (Gayomali, 2012).

In 2007, the number of text messages sent per day surpassed the number of telephone calls made per day and by 2010, 6.1 trillion text messages were sent within the
year, making it one of the most popular mediums for communication (Gayomali, 2012). With that being said, SMS text messages have remained relevant and have stood the technological test of time, being used across the world for more than two decades. 92% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 own a smartphone and SMS text messaging on these devices is the most prevalent way that they get in touch with their closest friends, family members, and significant others (Anderson, 2015a; Smith, 2017). Because of its popularity and frequent use, this technology has become a significant platform that affects many different components of everyday mediated life.

Why text messaging? Mobile media scholar, Rich Ling has spent several years studying this very question and has come up with a few reasons for its prevalence. Because text messaging is inexpensive, personal, and more likely than not, a universal way to reach an intended individual, it is a medium that is extremely well suited for teens and young adults (Ling, 2005). This medium enables users to quickly get answers to questions, coordinate events, provide life updates, and entertain themselves when they are bored (Ling, 2004). Further, text messaging allows for connection with others in a space that is separate from physical reality (Ling, 2004). Finally, this medium allows for asynchronous communication, giving users time to think, edit, and carefully craft their messages, which can be a helpful medium for romantic relationships to develop (Ling, 2004).

While other social media platforms enabling romantic partners to communicate have emerged over the last decade (e.g., Snapchat, Facebook), text messaging has remained a useful tool for close relationships (Anderson, 2015a; Anderson, 2015b; Smith, 2011). In fact, text messaging has become the preferred medium for teens and young adults to communicate with those closest to them (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, 2010). Because of its prevalence among teens and young adults and all of the affordances it provides users, this project will investigate the role of text messaging in romantic
relationships.

Time and time again, scholars have demonstrated that text messaging has a strong association with relationship satisfaction, relational closeness, and intimacy levels for romantic couples (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013; Herbert, 2016; Lenhart & Duggan, 2014; Morey et al., 2013). It has also been shown to be a great tool for couples to use for relational maintenance, especially when the couples utilize it synchronously (Brody & Peña, 2015; Brody, Mooney, Westerman, & McDonald, 2009; McEwan & Horn, 2016; Toma & Choi, 2016). Other components of SMS text messages tend to be beneficial for couples, as well. For example, Ohadi, Brown, Trub and Rosenthal (2017) studied the use habits of the text message medium and how similar use habits within romantic couples affected levels of relational satisfaction. The authors administered an online survey to 205 U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 29 that were involved in some sort of romantic relationship. They found that when couples have similar behaviors within this medium, it tends to correlate with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Specifically, the scholars looked at “texting first,” or initiating a text message conversation, and content within the messages, which are both considered to be texting behaviors that one can exhibit. Additionally, individual interpersonal skills have been shown to be an important facet for couples within this medium (Herbert, 2016).

Text messaging and smart phone use have also been shown to require some levels of regulation in order to improve levels of relationship satisfaction. For instance, Halpern and Katz (2017) found that constant attention to a mobile device could have a negative impact on levels of intimacy for couples. As previously mentioned, 42% of young adults in romantic relationships say that their phones have been a source of tension for their relationship (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014). Additionally, individuals who desire to maintain constant contact with their significant other via text message tend to have less satisfying
relationships (McEwan & Horn, 2016). Thus, current research explores how smart phones, and specifically the use of SMS text messaging, are used for communicating in dating romantic couples.

The existing literature pertains to specific behaviors and skills that have an impact on text messaging and consequently on dating relationships. In addition to already investigated variables (i.e., interpersonal skills, texting synchrony, etc.) and their association to relational closeness, a comprehensive perspective on habits, their management, and their association to relational closeness would be beneficial to contribute to the literature.

The range of perspectives on smartphone use in the context of romantic relationships looks at the use of this technological tool is complex, fluid and varies per context. It is important to look at this subject on more of a spectrum to identify how this tool is used and managed by romantic couples. Duran, Kelly and Rotaru (2011) propose that moderation and control may be the key to successful use of text messaging for romantic couples. Duran et al. (2011) reviewed the use of smartphones via phone calls and SMS text messages from the lens of the autonomy-connection dialectic tension and the effect it has on relationship satisfaction. The authors noted several important findings. First, couples who were dissatisfied with smartphone use in their relationship also tended to be less satisfied in their relationships overall. Attitudes regarding phone use in a relationship were directly related to levels of relationship satisfaction. Second, smartphone use was found to be a primary source of the autonomy-connection conflict that many couples faced. This tension regards the desire to be an autonomous individual, while simultaneously desiring to be connected to a partner within a relationship (Baxter, 1988; Baxter, 1990). Couples who experienced high levels of this tension tended to have conflicts centered in the use of their phones. Many of these issues revolved around (1) text message frequency, specifically, not texting frequently enough; (2) response times, specifically, not responding in an appropriate
amount of time; and (3) text messaging correspondents, specifically, texting people of the opposite sex. Finally, the authors noted that many couples recognized this tension and many, but not all, of these couples created rules to manage it (Duran et al., 2011). The work done by Duran et al. (2011) specifically focused on (1) the dialectic tension of autonomy-connection in romantic relationships and (2) how couples create rules in order to manage this tension within their relationships. Further, the work done by Duran et al. (2011) highlights the notion that always being connected can cause problems for romantic couples that, in order to be avoided, may need to be explicitly addressed. The current study will not only provide further insight to this topic, but it will directly investigate the issues noted by Duran et al. (2011).

Miller-Ott et al. (2012) built upon the work of Duran et al. (2011) by specifically investigating the implementation of rules in romantic relationships regarding smartphone use. Arguably, one of the most notable findings from the work of Miller-Ott et al. (2012) was that couples who both established and abided by norms and rules of text messaging tended to be more satisfied in their relationship. Specifically, if the couple has the ability to be in constant communication with each other, they tended to be more satisfied, according to the authors. This does not necessarily contrast the notion from McEwan and Horn (2016) that individuals who desire to maintain constant contact with their significant other are less satisfied in their relationship. Rather, this would suggest that couples want to have the ability to contact their significant other at any given time, but do not necessarily need to sustain constant contact.

Moreover, the authors also noted that couples who did not have rules specifically pertaining to timing or frequency of calls or text messages tended to be more satisfied in their relationship than couples who did create rules around these topics (Miller-Ott et al., 2012). Combined with the finding from Tu, Yuan, and Wang (2018), who assert that
problems arise when couples do not explicitly communicate their expectations regarding the use of a communicative medium, these findings may indicate that an explicit conversation regarding the use of text messaging could affect relational closeness and satisfaction.

Existing norms within SMS text messaging in romantic relationships

Different features of this medium have been analyzed from many angles including investigating components like message length, frequency of messages sent and received, and response times. Different fields of study like information-technology, business, psychology, and communication have also explored the effects of SMS text messaging. In their book Modern Romance, comedian Aziz Ansari and co-author/sociology researcher Eric Klinenberg proposed five different basic rules for text messaging a romantic interest. They mapped out these rules based on focus groups and interviews conducted across America with individuals of various relationship statuses. Their research resulted in five basic rules of text messaging:

- “Don’t text back right away. You come off like a loser who has nothing going on.
- If you write to someone, don’t text them again until you hear from them.
- The amount of text you write should be of a similar length to what the other person has written to you.
- Carrying this through, if your messages are in blue and the other person’s messages are green, if there is a shit ton more blue than green in your conversation, this person doesn’t give a shit about you.
- The person who receives the last message in a convo WINS!” (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2015, p. 57)

In sum, the rules and norms that the authors of this book found to be most significant when
text messaging a potential love interest have to do with timing, frequency, and length. The rules and norms that the authors pose build upon and align with the norms of romantic relationships found in extant studies. For example, Homans (1974) wrote about the principle of least interest and the role that it plays in attraction. Robinson et al. (2014) found that reward uncertainty can increase levels of desire to receive the reward (responses to messages being a reward in this circumstance). Further, Whitchurch, Wilson, and Gilbert (2011) discussed how uncertainty can increase levels of romantic attraction. Although these references were not directly related to texting, the authors drew from research conducted by communication, psychology, and sociology scholars to show how other theories align with the critical rules of texting found from their project (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2015). However, it is still important to see how these subjects align with current research in this subject area.

**Timing**

From an interpersonal communication perspective, responding to messages in a timely manner in face-to-face encounters is based on adjacency pair expectations (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). In conversation analysis, adjacency pairs (e.g., question-answer, inform-acknowledge, request-comply) involve turn taking, meaning that one spoken utterance or sentence typically follows with a response utterance or sentence. Based on common communication expectations, adjacency pairs serve as the building blocks of conversation and typically occur naturally.

However, there is significantly less research that analyzes the subject of responding and turn-taking within the SMS text messaging context, and it is an area that warrants further investigation. Laursen (2005) proposed that the replying norm had quickly evolved in the short years that text messaging had been a medium at the time. Laursen proposed that the ‘appropriate’ reply time reflects the relationship of the two individuals. Specifically,
the average response time between close individuals within this data set was three minutes or under. She argued that sent messages warrant a response like a basic inform-acknowledge adjacency pair (Laursen, 2005).

When a text response is not received within a normal amount of time, it initiates a deviating sequence. The cause of the deviating sequence will dictate the way in which it will then continue within the message. First, if there is a transmission problem, or a technological error, the sender may send a message again to ensure that the recipient reads it. Second, a recipient problem, or when someone does not reply at all, which prompts the sender to send a second message directly asking for a response. An example of this is sending a message, not getting a response, and then sending another message saying “hello?”, in order to directly address that there was not a response. A content problem would indicate that a sender believes that they are not receiving a response because of the content of the first message sent. If the first message seems mean, a sender may think this is the reason the recipient is not responding. If it is a relationship problem from the sender’s point of view, the second message sent would directly address the relationship between the two parties. Laursen (2005) also addresses messages that do not require a response, like chain messages, which are somewhat outdated, and nighttime messages. All of the responses described by Laursen take an active approach to resolving the violation of this norm.

Additionally, Tu et al. (2018) investigated the effects of delayed responses via an instant messaging service from the lens of expectancy violations. Because there is an expectation to respond within a certain amount of time, the authors investigated what happens when this expectation is not met and how it is managed within romantic relationships. The authors found that when the sender lets the receiver know that there is a particular reason that he or she may or may not respond within a timely manner, the
receiver of the message can then adjust his or her expectations so a problem will not arise. In other words, communicating messaging availability is very important in romantic relationships to avoid expectancy violations. Furthermore, some couples had norms or certain symbols that indicated that a conversation was over and they would not continue responding back and forth. This habit was intended to avoid further expectancy violations or confusion regarding response expectations. In short, the authors found that explicit coordination or an active approach may be necessary within a couple to avoid problems regarding expected responses when using messaging services, like text messaging. This raises interesting questions regarding rule formation around text messaging in relationships, which will be touched on in a following section.

The findings provided by Laursen (2005) and Tu et al. (2018) regarding response expectations and norms for managing violations are very valuable and require further attention. Some research regarding synchronicity in messaging has been conducted, but it is lacking. For example, in online customer service settings, high synchronicity conversations tend to be perceived more positively than those that are less synchronous (Park, 2015). Additionally, Rendle-Short (2015) compared response times for differing types of messages. According to the study, preferred messages refer to responses that are in agreement with the sender, while dispreferred messages refer to responses that are in disagreement with the sender. An example of this concept could be accepting an invitation or not accepting an invitation, respectively. The author found that preferred responses tend to be sent faster than dispreferred responses. All in all, it is likely that a reply norm, or response expectation, exists within text messaging, but there may be many facets of it that need to be expanded upon.

**Frequency**

Another norm that has been covered quite often, especially within CMC literature, is
the idea of text message frequency. In 2011, the Pew Research Center reported that 85% of teens in romantic relationships expect to hear from their significant other every day, 11% even expect to hear from their partner every hour (Lenhart, Anderson & Smith, 2015). When smart phones, and particularly text messages, are used very frequently to contact others, it has been shown to decrease relational satisfaction (Halpern & Katz, 2017; Herbert, 2016; McEwan & Horn, 2016). However, when they are used in moderation, they can be a great tool for relational maintenance and are typically associated with higher levels of relational satisfaction, closeness, and intimacy (Halpern & Katz, 2017; McEwan & Horn, 2016; Morey et al., 2013). While studies explain that the use of this technological platform exists within relationships, it does not specify what kind of norm exists around the frequency of use of the medium, how this is managed, and what the implications of its use are for romantic couples.

Given the extant literature, it appears that many norms exist within the realm of text messaging, but nothing, as of yet, is comprehensive. In addition to the few that were previously mentioned, some studies have found that some topics are only appropriate for text messaging and some should be reserved for face-to-face communication (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013). More popular literature sources, like blogs and popular press articles (i.e., Ansari & Klienenberg, 2015; Buehler, 2014; Cox, 2015; Klein, 2012), refer to proper etiquette of appropriate message length, time of day to send messages, use of emojis/emoticons, and so forth. Therefore, this study will explore normative behaviors, particularly pertaining to the text messaging medium from the perspective of women in developing romantic relationships.

Gender Differences in Text Messaging Use

Early studies have indicated that the use of the text messaging medium may vary across genders in terms of frequency and motivations of use. For example, sex differences
have been found in the developmental process for forming attitudes and perceptions about technological platforms (Broos, 2005). In general, men and women have been found to interact with their mobile phones differently, and may see it having different purposes (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005). For example, Henderson, Taylor and Tomson (2002) found that women tend to use text messaging more frequently than men. Furthermore, they found that women tend to view their cell phones as a form of connection to others, while men saw them as a form of being restricted because it implies that they are always available. Finally, women tended to utilize the SMS text messaging service more often than men (Faulkner & Culwin, 2005).

Text messaging is the platform that is utilized the most frequently by teen romantic couples to communicate with one another throughout the day (Anderson, 2015b). In one study, men and women were found to exchange a roughly equal number of text messages each day; with men averaging 40.9 text messages per day, and women averaging 42.0 (Smith, 2011). However, in terms of its use for connecting with a romantic partner, there was a significant gender difference. 79% of the women used text messaging for the purpose of communicating with their significant other everyday, while only 66% of men used text messaging for the same purpose (Anderson, 2015b). Further Schade et al. (2013) found that when there is a high frequency of text messages sent and received between romantic partners, men showed a negative associated with relationship satisfaction and women showed a positive association with relationship stability, which again, demonstrates sex differences in this subject area.

Finally, many scholars have made a call for research that studies this subject and the two sexes separately. Ohadi et al. (2017) had a sample that was 75% female and in their limitations, they noted that they could not make conclusive statements about the significance of sex differences in their project. As a result, they called for research that
studied the sexes separately so more conclusive findings could be made. Miller-Ott et al. (2016) made a similar call, saying that their results demonstrated sex differences pertaining to the importance of texting in relationships, but further research should explore this to parse out specific sex differences in relation to text messaging in romantic relationships.

Therefore, because of their more frequent use of the medium for general purposes and for the purposes of communicating with significant others, calls for research in this area, in addition to other previously noted gender differences, women will be the primary focus of this project.

Scholars from a variety of backgrounds have made arguments and claims regarding the role specific affordances of text messaging play in romantic relationships. However, it is clear that the existing research on this topic has inconsistent findings. Therefore, it is necessary to have a more nuanced understanding of the 1) normative texting behaviors that are exhibited within romantic couples and 2) how these normative behaviors are managed by the couples. This study will aim to contribute to the literature by addressing these issues. Thus, the following two research questions are proposed:

**RQ1**: What are the relational norms of text messaging within romantic relationships?

**RQ2**: How do romantic partners manage relational norms of text messaging?

**METHOD**

To address these research questions, I utilized a qualitative study design, conducting semi-structured interviews, with the purpose of illuminating texting behaviors within romantic relationships in the developmental phase, the relational norms of such texting behavior, and the management of these norms. Study participants were recruited in the Spring of 2018. Participants were recruited from classes within the Department of
Communication at the University of Cincinnati and through snowball sampling. Eligibility for this project included criteria of being female, 18 years and older, own a smartphone, and be involved in a serious romantic relationship for six months or less. This project only focused on couples in early developing romantic relationships to focus on developing norms compared to already established norms; as relationships develop and become more intimate, norms and rules for certain behaviors are established (Aune, Buller, & Aune, 1996).

Participants were invited to do the in-depth interviews through Skype or over the phone. After providing informed consent, they were asked questions about their relationship, their general technology use, and normative behaviors pertaining to text messaging within their relationship.

To address the aforementioned research questions, semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data from participants. Semi-structured interviews are used to explore and identify potential themes from the participants and also provide the opportunity to ask follow-up questions (Spradley, 1979). These interviews allow for flexibility and a more natural flow of conversation (Lofland & Lofland, 2006), which is necessary for this project to explore potential new themes. Building on extant research (e.g., Ansari & Klinenberg, 2012; Duran et al., 2011; Larson, 2010; Miller-Ott et al., 2012), the semi-structured interviews included items intended to explore text messaging habits that form naturally in the course of relational development, how response times affect perception of relational closeness, and how text messaging is used differently than other platforms. Interviews ranged from 31 to 57 minutes ($M = 42.15$, $SD = 7.89$). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and edited to remove identifiers and other references that might identify any of the participants or anyone the participants referred to in the interview. The transcripts of the interviews were imported into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis tool.
Participants

In this project, 21 interviews were conducted. However, after transcript analysis, one of the participants was deemed to be unqualified because she had two separate relationship start dates with the same romantic partner. Therefore, there were 20 total participants for this project. The participants all identified as female. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 ($M = 19.35$, $SD = 1.31$) and all of the participants were students at the University of Cincinnati. 45% of participants were freshmen, 45% sophomores, 5% juniors, and 5% were fifth-year students. 55% of the sample identified as Caucasians, 25% identified as Black/African American, 10% identified as Hispanic/Latino, and 10% identified as Asian.

Additionally, 15 participants met their partner in a face-to-face setting and 5 of the participants met their partner on some sort of CMC platform, like a dating website or mobile application, for instance. Table A exhibits the relationship length of the participants and Table B exhibits the frequency of their text messaging and Snapchat use. To protect participant’s privacy, the quotes demonstrating relevant findings are numbered and reported as (Pn) in the sections below followed by participant’s age and length of relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Length (in months)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table A: Relationship length of participants*
| I don’t use this platform | 0   | 2   |
| Less than once per week   | 0   | 0   |
| 1-2 days per week         | 0   | 0   |
| 3-6 days per week         | 0   | 1   |
| About once per day        | 0   | 2   |
| 2-4 times per day         | 2   | 7   |
| 5 or more times per day   | 18  | 8   |

Table B: Frequency of Text Messaging and Snapchat Use of Participants

Procedure

All of the interviews took place either over the phone or over Skype. 24 hours prior to the start of the interview, participants were sent two documents via email. First, participants were provided with a consent document (Appendix A), which they signed prior to the start of the interview. The participants also received a demographic information sheet (Appendix B). On this form, participants were asked to indicate information about their personal background, their relationship length, and how they met their significant other. Additionally, participants were asked how many times per week they interact with certain technological platforms to communicate with their partner (i.e., phone calls, text messaging,
email, Snapchat, etc.) and their perception of their partner’s use of the same platforms. After the interviewer received both documents from the participant, semi-structured interviews were conducted. An in-depth, semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix C) after a number of pilot interviews. Semi-structured interviews were specifically used to guide the interviews, knowing that the questions and direction of the interview would likely adjust based on the responses of the participant. To begin the interview, participants were asked to describe their relationship in order to give the interviewer context for the participant’s relationship and to make the participant feel more comfortable. Next, questions were asked regarding the participant’s general daily technology use to gauge how comfortable she was with her technology. Then, the participant was asked about her technology use within her relationship. Specifically, she was asked to walk through what a typical day looks like talking to her partner using her technology and she was asked to explain why she makes the medium choices that she does each day. For example, she was asked about conversations that she liked and did not like to have with her partner over text message. She was then asked about any implicit or explicit norms that have been established within her relationship regarding her text messaging habits. For example, the participant was asked what text messaging habits formed naturally as her relationship has progressed. Finally, she was asked about response times to text messages within her relationship and how this affects expectations for responses and levels of closeness within her relationship. For example, the participant was asked to think back to different conversations with her partner when there was a delay in a response, what the topic was, and how she felt about waiting for a response in each situation.

After the first four interviews, a common theme emerged that was not addressed within the interview guide. Therefore, using a constant comparative method, the interview
guide was adjusted and included a section on the smartphone application Snapchat (Appendix D). In this section, participants were asked about their use of Snapchat within their relationship and how they use this app differently than text messaging.

**Data Analysis**

I used an iterative and thematic coding approach as proposed by Lofland and Lofland (2006) to identify emerging themes across the interviews. Following the guidelines of qualitative data collection, I discontinued recruitment for interviews after I reached data saturation, when I saw no new themes emerging from the interviews (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). This resulted in a total of 21 participants. Throughout the data collection process before reaching data saturation, I met regularly with my advisor to debrief about the interviewing process, emergent themes, and theme prevalence. Additionally, we discussed edits to the data collection tool, the interview guide, to implement the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965).

After reaching data saturation, I systematically identified themes and subthemes through reading all of the transcripts as part of an open and iterative-coding process and wrote up in-depth memos while reading the transcripts multiple times. Once themes were identified and extracted, I created a codebook that specifically defined each theme, and consequently focused coding was employed where these thematic codes were systematically applied to a randomly selected 10 interviews (Charmaz, 2014). I, along with a research assistant, utilized the codebook to systematically apply these codes to these randomly selected 10 interviews. However, the inter-rater reliability was weak (kappa = .47). I met with the research assistant to refine categories and to discuss and reconcile all discrepant cases until agreement was reached. Consequently, the codebook was revised to reflect these changes from discussion and to be more specific when it came to the revisions of the codes.
I conducted axial coding here where I examined relationships between key themes to help refine categories and ensure a close association between participant’s responses and emerging analyses. This axial coding process allowed us to reorganize and redefine codes; in this process I also drew on existing theories to inform the organization, interpretation, and definition of the themes. Then, another randomly selected 10 interviews were coded using the revised codebook where the inter-rater reliability was strong (kappa = .83). Finally, all the transcripts were imported into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis tool, divided into meaningful units, and coded appropriately, incorporating selective coding to organize the findings of the project. The in-depth memos and selective coding process allowed us to analyze the data by comparing themes to theory, recurring themes, and possible relationships among major categories. Additionally, Dedoose allowed us to draw connections between the data and information from the demographic sheet.

**FINDINGS**

There were three main themes that emerged from the data collected: First, mobile technologies afford mundane communication within developing romantic relationships, enabling a dialectical tension. Second, various features of mobile technologies (i.e., text messaging, snap streaks) are strategically used by romantic partners to ensure continuous communication. Third, there are specific implicit normative behavior expectations (i.e., response times) and patterns of outcomes when these expectations are violated. These findings highlight specific affordances and features of mobile technologies that are pertinent within romantic relationships, consequently affecting relational development. Following, the description of core emergent themes are discussed with demonstrative quotes from participants.
Mobile technologies as a mechanism for mundane communication

First, mobile technologies, specifically its feature of text messaging, affords everyday talk for romantic partners. Duck, Rutt, Hoy and Strejc (1991), Goldsmith and Baxter (1996), and many other scholars have studied and defined the different types of everyday talk over the years. Everyday talk, also known as mundane communication, can be displayed in many ways, but can be classified into categories including superficial talk, informal talk, task talk and deep talk (Duck et al., 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Keating 2012). The three types of everyday talk that were most prevalent within the present set of data were deep talk, task talk, and informal talk.

Deep Talk

Deep talk refers to serious conversations involving heavy topics (Duck et al., 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter 1996). Examples of deep talk include directly discussing the relationship between the dyad, complaining, and sharing problems. A majority of the participants said that they use mobile technologies, specifically text messaging, to communicate heavy and serious topics with their romantic partners, which can be categorized as deep talk. According to participants of this study, this type of talk is used the least on mobile technologies, but is used during selective times because participants found that it could be helpful for conducting difficult conversations. One participant indicates how she uses text messages to communicate with her partner when they are experiencing conflict:

“There were conversations that were really hard to have in person because I would just always cry. So I think it was better to have them over text because I was able to, you know, maintain composure on the surface level to him and kind of get my point across better.” (P21, 19, 1 month)
The participant explains that messages during conflict are easier to communicate over text messages because it allows her to control the influence of emotional reactions, allowing her to express herself more effectively. On the other hand, deep talk can also be beneficial for messages that do not involve conflict. Another participant explains how deep talk made a positive impact on her relationship when communicating positive messages:

“I made this list of like things that I didn't tell him in person. But for some reason, I just feel like with my personality, if I were to say things how I text it, like all the things that I'm like thankful for and stuff, I think that with my personality it would've came off like sarcastic or like not as serious. But me taking the time to like write out everything and like for it to like me to be able to read over it like helped me and then he like loved it.” (P8, 18, 3 months)

For this participant, deep talk via text messaging was beneficial because it allowed her to express her emotions and communicate more effectively than she would in a FtF setting because she can convey the appropriate emotional tone without FtF nonverbal signals altering her message. Another participant explains a similar feeling and explains why it is easier for her to express herself over text message:

“I'm really shy so it made me more comfortable sharing things with him that I wouldn't share as readily in person. And it helped me formulate what I was trying to say in such a way that it was like clear and concise and I would just press the send button, but in person if I try to say the exact same thing, it would come out so wrong
and not as clear and he would probably be really confused. So I think it helped me personally just like the editing aspect of it.” (P16, 20, 5 months)

For this participant, the editing and asynchronous aspects of text messaging make it easier to communicate deeper messages. Sharing these types of messages, a form of deep talk, over text message is easier than it is in a FtF setting for participants in this study.

**Task Talk**

Task talk refers to any conversation that involves goal-setting or completing concrete tasks (Duck et al., 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). Examples of task talk include making plans, talking about homework, or an event. More often than not, the participants mentioned making plans with their partner via text messaging, which falls into the category of task talk. This is also called goal-directed talk (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). Task talk was the second most prevalent type of everyday talk that emerged across the interviews. One participant explains how task talk is used regularly within her relationship:

“Well, it's like, what's your schedule like for the day? Just so I know like if he's going to be busy and like, I'll tell him if I get a good grade on a test or something. Like we talked about that today and I go to visit him every weekend so we'll talk about our plans for the weekend and really just like stuff like that. It's mostly about what we're doing that day or something like that.” (P21, 19, 1 month)

Conversations that revolve around daily schedules, tasks that are performed throughout the day, and plans all pertain to task talk, a common topic for romantic couples. Another participant explains common conversations in her relationship:
“It's usually like me asking him a question and him answering it. Or him asking me where I am and him answering it. Sometimes I use it to check his location to like see if he's in class or like see if he's home or see if I could call him. Sometimes we're making plans to do something later in the day” (P12, 20, 4 months)

Therefore, according to this participant, most of their text messages are purposeful and are sent for a specific reason. In terms of scheduling and making plans, some participants find it more useful and convenient to do this over text messaging than face-to-face. For example, one participant said, “I guess I would rather make plans over text than in person and for some reason I remember them better that way” (P19, 20, 1 month). For this participant, having the visual, written confirmation is beneficial for decision making and planning.

Informal talk

Third, informal talk is used for updates throughout the day, checking in, joking and having light hearted conversations (Duck et al., 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). The use of informal talk was by far the most common type of everyday talk used for romantic partners, with almost all of the participants indicating that they use text messaging for informal talk with their romantic partner. One participant explains what she and her partner talk about throughout the day:

“We'll just text throughout the day, just having conversations about anything. Honestly, like little mini conversations, talking about work, talking about school, talking about if I'm going to see him later or not. What's for dinner? Like what are you doing later? Stuff like that” (P10, 20, 6 months).
Simple check-ins about each other’s lives and their whereabouts is a common conversation for participants. Another participant explains that checking in with her partner throughout the day makes them feel closer to each other:

“I think talking to him over text just keeps me updated about the stuff he does during the day. I like to know what he does or how his day is going. It just makes me feel like I am more in the loop, I guess. It makes us feel closer.” (P2, 18, 3 months)

By staying up-to-date and aware of their activities throughout the day, they feel a sense of connection, even when they are not physically together. In addition, many participants said that their daily communication with their partner has evolved over time into informal talk:

“I feel like when we first started talking and dating, it was a lot of getting to know each other like, oh, what's like stuff about your family? Like asking questions. Now it's more of like, we just kind of send like what just happened? like what's going on throughout your day? Like, oh, I just ordered food from Uber eats or I'm going to do some homework and going to the library kind of thing. But we don't really ask a bunch of questions while we're texting now. In the beginning, we were just asking a lot questions because we obviously didn't know each other. So now it's just kind of like day to day things that we text randomly.” (P9, 19, 1 month)

This participant suggests that texting habits, and sometimes the type of talk conducted, is more common as levels of relational closeness increase.
Active utilization of features that affect perceptions of continuous communication

Another prevalent and emergent theme that arose from the interviews was the active use of features for individuals to confirm continuous communication between romantic partners throughout the day. For example, a feature that was mentioned several times by participants is Snapchat streaks. A Snapchat streak is an indicator for how long continuous communication has been maintained between a dyad. In order to maintain a Snapchat streak, the dyad must send each other at least one Snapchat per day. After three days, they will have a streak. This streak number increases everyday that the dyad maintains continuous communication. Many participants mentioned the influence of Snapchat streaks on their relationships and some said that they have a mutual expectation to maintain a Snapchat streak with their romantic partner.

This feature has given users the ability to quantify the amount of communication with their partner across days and they actively try to not break this expectation, as demonstrated in the following quote:

“Sometimes like he will just forget to respond and our Snapchat streak will just end and then we’ll start it back up. And then like, I reminded him one time that like he forgot to. And then it's been going, we’ve got a streak now. So it’s fine now!” (P7, 19, 3 months).

An expectation for this communication tool developed for many of the participants. If this expectation is violated, it can lead to explicit conversations and reminders for the couple that keep them accountable. For example, the same participant explains how she and her partner make sure that this is maintained:
“So like if we forget to Snapchat each other but we’re with each other, we just send like a random picture of each other or like anything to keep it going.” (P7, 19, 3 months)

This participant is saying that even if the couple is together and sitting right next to each other, they will still send a random picture to each other via Snapchat in order to maintain their Snapchat streak. Along the same lines, some individuals take this communicative commitment a step further and use their Snapchat streak as an indicator for relational closeness:

“Actually, he brought it up that we should aim for like a streak on Snapchat. And he suggested it because there was like one point where our communication didn’t feel as strong. So he suggested that this is a way just to make sure that we are talking to each other and checking in, things like that. So he said if we ever lose that streak then we know we have to do a better job of staying in communication. So I thought that was a good idea.” (P4, 19, 6 months)

Being able to keep track of this through a feature within the technology allows couples to measure their communication in a way that they could not before. This also helps couples stay accountable for any lack of connection that they may experience within their relationship.

Another feature that is available now is read receipts. Read receipts are an indicator that a message has been opened, seen, or read by the recipient. Most participants indicated that they expect an immediate response from a message once it has been opened
or read, which affords continuous communication. One participant explains why she has this expectation regarding read receipts:

“It gives the same kind of impression as if you were face to face with somebody and they said something and then you just kind of walked away and then walked back to them was like, oh yeah, that was hilarious. It's just kind of awkward because you both know that you saw the message and then you're just going to like not say anything for awhile and then say something back to it. It's just kind of awkward. Like why couldn't you have responded to it, you know, quicker I guess.” (P19, 20, 1 month).

In other words, there is an expectation for continuous, synchronous communication over a text messaging platform in the hopes that it mimics a conversation in a FtF setting.

Expectancies, violations, and consequences to violations between partners via mobile technologies

Finally, findings demonstrated that partners in the developmental phase of their romantic relationships have expectations for each other regarding their mobile technology use and have strategies to handle violations for these expectations. Participants reported expectations for their text messaging within their relationship for many different areas, but the most common pertained to expectations for response times. Further, participants discussed how broken violations are handled in their relationships and what the outcome typically looks like.

First, a large majority of participants indicated that they have some sort of expectation regarding a response time to sent messages from their partner. Response time expectations refer to how fast the participant expects a romantic partner to reply to a sent
message. More than half the of participants indicated that the average response time in their relationship is less than 15 minutes, while the other participants indicated that they expected a response in approximately 30 minutes. These expectations for appropriate response times can be affected by different factors like availability, prior knowledge about partner’s texting behaviors, and read receipts.

Almost all of the participants said that their expectations for a response are affected by their partner’s level of “control,” or availability, in a given situation. This means that an individual may have a different expectation for a response from their partner if they are able to control for their response time. Being available means that their partner is not occupied with something else that is deemed more important, like being in class or being at work. However, if their partner has the ability to reply to a message, they should. One participant describes this sentiment below:

“If they take forever to respond and there’s no real good reason. If they’re not doing anything all day, then why didn’t you respond? You know, the only time we normally take a long time to respond is when we’re at work or in class or like, or with someone else. So like you’re not being rude obviously.” (P9, 19, 1 month)

This quote demonstrates that there must be a specific, known reason in order for a longer response time to become acceptable in the eyes of a romantic partner. If not, it is considered to be rude, and thus, a violation of the norm. Another participant explains why a delay in response is considered to be a violation and how control plays a role in this violation.
“Just ignoring a call or a text, like completely for like hours I feel like is almost a little disrespectful because it's how you're communicating during the day. Almost like how you're spending time with each other, like when you can't be there. And so I feel like just by ignoring that you're kind of like pushing the other off and being like, ‘you're not a priority’. I don't know, like ‘I don't have the time for you right now’ or like it's a chore. I don't want to do it. Rather than when it's just something you can't control. Like I don't know how to explain this. Like when you can't control it, you can't control it. It's no one's fault. And so I feel like responding like in a decent amount of time or, I'm not saying he has to text me back like in five seconds and he's not saying that either. But that's, it's just kind of like a courtesy to the other.” (P6, 19, 3 months)

This suggests that when an individual is available, they are expected to text their partner and respond within an appropriate amount of time. The participants explained that by adhering to this norm, they communicate a certain level of care and emotional commitment to their relationship.

Additionally, a majority of participants said that their expectation for a response is affected if they know what their partner is doing upon sending or receiving a message. In other words, if the individual knows where their partner is or what they are doing, expectations for an acceptable response time may be adjusted. To communicate this, the couple may have discussed schedules or had an explicit conversation to explain why response times may vary at a particular time. One participant explains how this works without having an explicit conversation:
“Yeah, we know each other's schedules. So when there’s maybe like 30 minutes to an hour or more between when we know each other has classes we will usually expect text messages from each other.” (P17, 18, 3 months)

In this case, the individual knows where her partner is likely to be based on his schedule and as a result, she knows when a response time will be faster or slower. Therefore, the individual will feel less uncertainty and anxiety. The same participant was asked what she does if there is a response lag time when it is not expected.

“I'll usually ask about it later and he'll be like, oh yeah, I ran into a friend or something and we just decided to hang out or I had to stay after and do extra credit or I had to go to the band room and do something. Just things like that.” (P17, 18, 3 months)

This shows that individuals will have an explicit conversation about a delayed response time when a delay is unexpected. Another participant explains why this explicit conversation about response time makes a difference: “it makes a difference because like, then I don't have to wonder or worry what he's doing” (P12, 20, 4 months). This indicates that having an explicit discussion, or at least the knowledge of the whereabouts of their partner, decreases uncertainty and anxiety.

Finally, as it was previously mentioned, read receipts play a critical role in managing norms for response times. Most of the participants indicated that they expect an immediate response to messages that have been read or opened. In fact, reading a message and not replying or leaving someone “on read,” as many of the participants called it, can send implicit message of disinterest or low levels of care toward the sender. One participant
explains the implicit, nonverbal ‘statement’ that is sent when a message is left without a reply.

“I feel like it’s a kind of a statement if you open it and then like you see that they opened it but they didn’t reply. It’s almost kind of like a, ‘Oh I saw you. I’m just not getting to you right now for whatever reason’. But like normally that is something like negative. So I definitely think it plays a role there. Other than that, like I don’t ever think I have mine on. Like I don’t, I didn’t just turn them on to like piss someone off (laughs). I always have them on and I think he has too. And like I typically, if I’m opening your message, I’ll just reply like right then and there. Unless, again, you want to send a statement, which I try not to do because I think that’s a little petty.”

(P6, 19, 3 months)

Therefore, when read receipts are on, there is a higher expectation for an immediate response to a message. When there is not an immediate response, or that expectation is violated, another implicit and typically negative message is sent, simply with the read receipts turned on. In order to avoid sending that implicit message, there is an expectation to reply immediately.

The second part of this finding pertains to the way that violations are handled by romantic partners. When the response time expectation is violated, the individual may take many different courses of action according to the violation. For instance, most of the participants said that a violated response time expectation may cause them to worry or feel anxious. Participants also emphasized that they would think of different reasons as to why they would not receive a response or said they would take action and “double-text,” or send a follow-up message to their partner to see why they did not respond. One participant
explains the worry and anxiety that she felt after a response time expectation was violated within her relationship:

“Oh my gosh it was the worst (laughs). I was like I shouldn't have sent it! Or, maybe that was too much! Or, can I unsend it? (laughs) Yeah it’s always rough waiting because it already takes a lot of courage to put your feelings out there and express that. So that waiting time feels like years.” (P4, 19, 6 months)

This participant explains that waiting for a response back from a partner causes anxiety, which makes the waiting time feel much longer. Another participant explains how she thinks of reasons for why her partner may be taking a long time to respond:

“I don’t really think anything of it when he takes a half hour to respond. But if it’s more than like an hour or two, then I figure that something is up or he is mad at me or something or something is going on with his family.” (P2, 18, 3 months)

A response time violation, according to this participant, can potentially indicate that there are problems, so the individual may try to think of what those reasons might be when a response time expectation is violated. Finally, some participants explained that they will take action and send another message to check in for a response time violation:

“Like the other day, like we were like making plans to go to the movies and I was in class when we were doing this. So I was like, ‘Hey, look up the times.’ We were going to see A Quiet Place. And I was being impatient at the time so he didn't
respond. And like five minutes went by and I was like ‘hello?’ And he responded after that.” (P20, 19, 5 months)

This participant attempted to remedy this violation by reaching out again to elicit a faster response. Many participants in the sample remembered having some sort of explicit conversation with their partner after a norm, or expectation, was broken pertaining to their text messaging habits with one another. The violated norms included no response to their messages, a low frequency of messages within a day, a long response time, and short messages.

Some participants actually said that they may intentionally break this response time norm in order to elicit some of these reactions from their receiver. For example, one participant explains why this is important in the early stages of a relationship to break this expectation:

“I don’t know where I got the rule, but I think my friends were like, yeah, don’t respond immediately because it just seems like you’re just staring at your phone and waiting for them to text. But if you kind of hold off and wait five to 10 minutes, then they’ll be the one looking at their phone, like did she text yet? Did she text yet? (laughs). So I feel like it gives you a little bit more power because you’re like, I’m not going to respond yet. I’m going to make them wait, which is silly, but I think it kind of adds to the fun aspect of it because you’re like, haha! I have more power!” (P16, 20, 5 months)
In other words, if a message is responded to immediately, there is an automatic assumption of a lower sense of power. Another participant explains the implications of intentionally breaking this expectation.

“So there's, you know, like the stereotype that if a guy texts you, you have to wait at least three minutes and then reply and I never really felt that. I was like, why? Like if I am on my phone, and I'm clearly on my phone, why wouldn't I just reply? .... But I just didn't want to seem needy because like I did really want to talk to him, but I felt like if I replied that minute it would definitely seem needy.” (P21, 19, 1 month)

This implies that the response time expectation will result in an adjusted power structure within the couple or perception of the sender of the message. Therefore, participants are saying that they may intentionally violate this response time expectation in their relationships to achieve a certain outcome.

Overall, the findings of these interviews show that mobile technology platforms are being used for everyday talk, specific features are being used to confirm continuous communication, and expectations are being created based on the affordances of these technological platforms. These findings demonstrate that norms for text messaging habits emerge within romantic relationships and further, there are standards and expectations for their management.

**DISCUSSION**

Using a qualitative approach, the goal of this project was to investigate the role that text messaging plays in developing romantic relationships, what the relational normative behaviors are for couples on this medium, and how these norms are managed. The findings
show that mobile technologies afford mundane communication through text messaging, allows for active utilization of features of mobile technologies (i.e., read receipts, Snapchat streaks) to confirm continuous communication, and affects relationships and communicative dynamics of romantic partners when communication patterns via text message are violated.

This project offers a unique perspective on relationship development in the context of mobile technologies for a few reasons. First, this project illuminates how specific features of technological platforms, like text messaging and Snapchat, are being used by romantic couples and how these features affect developing romantic relationships. Further, it explains specific expectations that many couples have in new romantic relationships for reciprocal technological behaviors and concrete ways to manage violations of these expectations. Therefore, this project investigates a specific phase of romantic relationships in the context of mobile technologies while extending computer-mediated communication literature by highlighting specific features and affordances of mobile technologies and how they influence romantic relationships.

**Mobile technologies as a mechanism for mundane communication**

One of the main findings from this study is that mobile technologies afford different types of everyday talk within developing romantic relationships, specifically deep talk, task talk and informal talk. This finding specifically addresses RQ1, as the different types of talk via text messaging are communicative norms in romantic relationships. Deep talk was one of the emergent themes from this study and the findings demonstrate that individuals in the developmental phase of their romantic relationship like to communicate about heavy and serious topics over text messaging, especially when they are experiencing conflict. The participants expressed that they find it easier to experience conflict over text messaging compared to face-to-face interactions because it allows them to express themselves more articulately and effectively. This may be due to the ability for individuals to more easily
regulate their emotions and carefully craft their messages on computer-mediated platforms compared to face-to-face settings (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008). This suggests that messages sent to romantic partners can be regulated via CMC platforms because it takes time to type out messages and reflect before sending it to a partner, thus reducing impulsive emotional outbursts. Consequently, this could help individuals carefully craft their messages and help them communicate their thoughts as clearly as possible, which is beneficial for developing relationships.

Compared to other forms of everyday talk however, deep talk was the least prevalent across interviews compared to task talk and informal talk. This finding is consistent with the finding that deep talk on CMC platforms is more of a common occurrence in closer and deeper relationships rather than developing relationships (Keating, 2012). This project confirms these findings by illustrating that deep talk is the least common and least preferred form of everyday talk that takes place via text message for romantic couples in the developmental phase of a relationship.

Task talk, another form of everyday talk, was also very prevalent among participants in this project because of its usefulness for making and remembering plans. Making plans and scheduling are important for romantic relationships because they are instrumental in how couples develop intimacy and relational closeness (Guerrero, Eloy & Wabnik, 1993).

Additionally, smartphones enable users to have a digital trace as a reminder mechanism, which is a way that they are commonly used, helping them to remember the plans that they create with their partners (Hand, 2016). Further, task talk that is conducted specifically over CMC platforms has a high association with relational closeness (Keating, 2012). Therefore, this would then suggest that task talk via text message can cultivate and support the development of romantic relationships.

Finally, the most prevalent form of everyday talk through text messaging found in
this study was informal talk. Instant messaging services, like text messaging, have been deemed to be a great tool for relational maintenance specifically because they afford everyday communication and informal talk (Ramirez Jr. & Broneck, 2009). Informal talk is an important factor for relational closeness because it allows partners to participate in each other’s everyday lives, even when they are not physically together. This allows them to feel more connected to one another and thus, helps them develop a closer relationship. This finding from this study supports the notion that informal talk is a critical component of romantic relationships in general and it is particularly helpful for newer, growing relationships as they develop relational closeness (Duck et al, 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Haythornthwaite, 2005; Keating, 2012).

Additionally, another salient factor identified from the data is the features that Snapchat provides that make it an ideal platform for lighthearted communication, which is one of its primary uses of mobile technologies for romantic couples and supports extant Snapchat research (Bayer, Ellison & Schoenebeck & Falk, 2016; Xu, Chang, Welker, Bazarova & Cosley, 2016). The findings of this project indicated that features like ephemerality and face filters make it a fun and visual medium for users. In fact, the majority of participants said that they use Snapchat for lighthearted content and visual content, which makes it much more fun to use. This suggests that Snapchat affords this lighthearted, informal, and mundane talk within romantic couples, allowing them to develop close relationships.

These findings pose a few interesting ideas. First, these findings support the Hyperpersonal Model, as proposed by Walther (1996). Essentially, the model suggests that computer-mediated communication can provide mechanisms influencing communication dynamics that influence relationship perception and relationship closeness. Conversations that take place over CMC afford selective self-presentation in disclosures for the sender of a
message and also afford cognitive reallocation with the features in messages, over attributions based on message characteristics, and behavioral confirmation based on previous knowledge for receivers. The participants in this project suggested that they make assumptions about the sender of a message based on the way that they text and the way they also used text messaging in their romantic relationships to communicate their messages the most effectively, both of which confirm the conclusions of Walther (1996). Furthermore, the findings of this study extend and illuminate the constructs of the hyperpersonal model on a text messaging medium which emphasizes newer features that can serve as mechanisms for CMC.

Second, based on these findings, mobile technologies afford everyday talk for romantic partners when they are not physically together. However, this increased sense of connection can lead to a tension proposed in Relational Dialectics Theory between autonomy and connection (Baxter, 1988; Baxter, 1990). Relational Dialectics Theory, as proposed by Baxter (1988; 1990) posits that individuals in relationships experience tensions between different, contradictory desires. The primary tensions in the theory are explained internally, or just within the context of the relationship, and externally, or between the relationship and others. The three primary tensions in the theory include autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness. Concerning the autonomy-connection dialectic, individuals feel a tension within their relationship between the desire to be autonomous and be an individual entity and the desire to be connected to their significant other (Baxter, 1990).

Mobile phones enable partners to be connected at all times, which is a common tendency of romantic couples, as posed in the findings of this project. Duran, Kelly and Rotaru (2011) investigated the application of the autonomy-connection dialectical tension in mobile phone use between romantic couples and found that text messaging frequency and
response times are associated with high levels of this tension. The current project confirms these conclusions and builds upon them by divulging that everyday talk, and specifically informal talk, perpetuates constant connection and this texting frequency for romantic couples. Further, the results of Duran et al. (2011) found that couples desired more connection when they felt this tension and this project contradicts that finding, as more individuals in this sample felt like they had too much connection through the day. Thus, this project adds to others that have investigated the influence of the autonomy connection dialectical tension with smartphones in romantic relationships (Duran et al., 2011; Hall & Baym, 2012; McEwan & Horn, 2016; Miller-Ott et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 2009).

Therefore, the findings from this project propose that informal talk influences the autonomy connection dialectical tension that many couples experience when using their phones. By checking in and having light hearted conversations, individuals in these relationships are connected to their partner throughout the day. Because of the increased levels and methods of connection this type of communication affords, individuals in relationships may experience this autonomy connection dialectical tension.

**Active utilization of features that affect perceptions of continuous communication**

Another critical finding of this study is the active utilization of features provided by mobile technologies like text messaging and Snapchat that enable users to have the perception of consistent and relatively continuous communication throughout the day. This finding addresses both RQ1 and RQ2, by 1) identifying different norms pertaining to the features on these mediums and 2) discussing the management of these norms pertaining to the features on these mediums. Individuals in this project indicated that different features, like Snapchat streaks and read receipts, allow romantic partners to confirm and ensure that they maintain the perception of consistent and continuous communication with their partner throughout the day and throughout their relationship. Many participants in this project
indicated that they expect to maintain a Snapchat streak with their romantic partner. The findings from this project also suggest that this feature has become a measure for couples to see how they maintain communication with each other in their relationship.

Further, read receipts confirm perceptions of continuing communication based on the expectation they pose and implicit message they elicit. Almost all participants indicated that they expect an immediate response to a message once it has been read. Otherwise, it sends a nonverbal message that an individual, or a message sent by an individual, is not worthy of a response. Thus, a reply must be immediate to avoid sending that implicit message. Features like these are allowing romantic partners to make sure that they are maintaining communication with one another throughout the day and throughout their relationship.

This finding is particularly interesting because these features are very new to mobile technologies; there is little to no research that covers them or discusses how people are using them, let alone how they are used in romantic relationships. Therefore, this finding has many implications and poses many different thoughts. First, although more than half of participants felt like there was too much connection with their partner, many participants reported that they desired more connection to their partner throughout the day. These features afford individuals the ability to keep themselves and their partners accountable for their perceptions of continuing and consistent communication. This perpetuates a sense of the autonomy-connection dialectical tension, as proposed in Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter, 1990), that can actually be measured. By having a feature that quantifies levels of communication between a couple, they can actually monitor the consistency of their communication with one another and make sure it is maintained. This opens the door to research in CMC and interpersonal communication disciplines looking into how these features are used and how they affect interpersonal relationships of all kinds.
Second, along similar lines, these features allow for transparency in communication. Up until this point, communication technologies afforded asynchronous communication, which allowed individuals to write and respond to messages whenever it was convenient. However, with features like read receipts on iMessage or the colored arrow on Snapchat that serves as a read receipt, users feel more accountability and responsibility for their response times, especially for those in romantic relationships who have a commitment to communicate with their partner. This level of transparency completely alters how people communicate via CMC because asynchronous communication over mobile technology is now expected to be more continuous and consistent. This supports and extends the findings from Tu et al. (2018) and Park (2015) by asserting that those in romantic relationships prefer more consistent communication, or at least the perception of continuous communication, even over mediums that are designed to be asynchronous.

Another important component pertaining to this finding is the idea of a quantified measurement of communication frequency via Snapchat streaks. This feature is one that is considerably unfamiliar to the realm of CMC and interpersonal communication research. Measuring communication frequency explicitly is not something that has been afforded other mediums, at least not any that are as popular as Snapchat. However, this concept is similar to the notion of gamification, which poses that mobile technologies use video game elements in non-video game contexts in order to enhance the overall experience for a user (Deterding, Sicart, Nacke, O’Hara & Dixon, 2011). Specifically, by returning to this platform everyday, engaging with others, and utilizing the features, users of the medium are “rewarded” with a Snapchat streak with their partners. This poses many interesting questions for CMC and interpersonal scholars. For instance, how does the use of this feature affect levels of relational closeness? What would these effects look like? How would the effects be managed? Answers to some of these questions were suggested in the
findings from this project, but were unfortunately out of the scope, warranting further research in this area.

Finally, this finding suggests that mobile technology platforms impact perceptions of relational closeness for those in interpersonal relationships. Before CMC platforms became popular, perceptions of relational closeness were based almost entirely on FtF and synchronous interactions. Before CMC platforms, frequency of contact and breadth of information known about a person would likely indicate levels of relational closeness. However, with CMC and mobile technology platforms being as prevalent as they are, individuals have the opportunity to learn so much about people that they are not even remotely close to relationally. For example, many participants in this project indicated that they have Snapchat streaks with many people and closeness to this person is irrelevant. This, again, points to the question, what, if any, relationship exists between relational closeness and quantified elements of communication frequency?

Taken together, active utilization of features like read receipts and Snapchat streaks pose implications for 1) perceptions of consistent communication between romantic partners, 2) preferences for consistent communication regardless of the channel, and 3) for perceptions of relational closeness.

**Expectancies and violations between partners via mobile technologies**

Another emergent theme from this study indicated clear expectancies set within romantic partners and the consequences of what occurred when these expectancies were violated. This finding also addresses both RQ1 and RQ2 because the expectations explain the normative behaviors pertaining to the medium and the typical standards for violations explain how these norms are managed. Expectancy violations theory (EVT), as proposed by Burgoon (1993), poses that humans have spoken or unspoken expectations regarding the behavior of others and when these expectations are not met, a violation
occurs. A violation is dealt with in different ways based on three primary factors: 1) interpreting the behavior, 2) how it compares to the existing expectation and 3) the extent to which an expectation is violated. The findings from these interviews demonstrate that many expectations about text messaging habits exist, but one of the most prevalent regards response times to messages. However, there are different components of this expectation that influence how it is managed: 1) levels of control or availability, 2) explanation and 3) read receipts and 4) intention. Based on these conditions, receivers may 1) feel anxiety or worry, 2) think of reasons for a delay in response or 3) double-text.

*Influential Components of Response Time Expectation*

First, level of control or availability was considered to play a considerable role in response time expectations from romantic partners, as it was mentioned by an overwhelming majority of participants. This means that if a romantic partner is available to send a text message and reply, they should. However, if they are involved in a situation that is deemed to be more important or something that is out of their control, like class or work, then they have lower expectations for a response. This is a subject that is not addressed in any known literature.

Second, when there is a specific reason that a romantic partner does not respond to a message, or has a longer than normal response time, and they are aware of what this reason is, they have lower expectations for a response. In other words, when there is an explicit conversation for delayed response times, the individual can lower their expectations for a response. This finding is a direct replication of what was proposed by Tu et al. (2018), further confirming their conclusions.

Third, read receipts influence response time expectations. As it was previously mentioned, most participants indicated that an immediate response is expected when a message is read. If it is not replied to immediately, it sends a nonverbal message to the
sender that their message does not require a response, which can lead to conflict. Therefore, in order to avoid sending this nonverbal message, individuals are expected to reply immediately upon reading or opening a message. This points to an effort to verify continuous, synchronous communication in romantic relationships, which supports and extends the findings from Park (2015) and Tu et al. (2018).

Fourth, many of the participants in this project indicated that individuals may intentionally violate this response time expectation, especially in the early phases of relationship development. The participants proposed that this was for the purpose of selective self-presentation, which allows users to communicate a certain image of themselves through message enhancement and impression management (Walther, 2007). In this case, participants indicated that they may intentionally wait to reply to a message from a romantic partner in order to elicit a reaction like anxiety/worry, more thought about the message sender, or even a check in or double text. Participants also indicated that this results in an adjusted power structure for the relationship. This finding supports a text messaging rule proposed by Ansari and Klinenberg (2015) regarding response times and suggesting that it is better to delay a response. However, this finding extends extant literature regarding the power structure, as this was not referenced in any known sources.

**Management of Violated Response Time Expectation**

When the response time expectation is violated, there may be many outcomes for its management. First, some individuals may feel some level of anxiety or worry about not receiving a response. Second, they may think of or imagine reasons why their partner may not respond or may have a longer than usual response time. Both of these approaches are relatively passive and do not require any direct action from the sender of a message. The more active approach would be for the individual to send a follow up message to their partner to see why they did not respond, or as many of the participants called it, “double
text” their partner.

All of these methods to handle a response time violation are in line with the findings from Laursen (2005). The findings of that study concluded that when a message is not replied to, the sender may assume that there was a problem with the technology, the content or with the relationship between a dyad and thus, may send a follow up message. The conclusions from this project confirm and extend this notion by 1) discussing what would influence this expectation to be violated and 2) discussing means for coping with these violations outside of taking an active approach.

Moreover, the conclusions from this project were in line with other existing research in this area posing that CMC platforms are also included in expectations, especially when it comes to cell phone use (i.e., Halpern & Katz, 2017; Kelly, Miller-Ott & Duran, 2017; Tu et al., 2018). Additionally, the findings support the notion that there is a tangible effect of violating an expectation. In CMC platforms, like text messaging and Snapchat, individuals may explicitly confront an individual who violates an expectation (Xu et al., 2016). By explicitly addressing the expectation violation, the couple is holding each other accountable for their actions and their violations of certain expectations. This study extends EVT by discussing the implications of expectancy violations in the context of developing romantic relationships on mobile technologies.

Taken together, the findings of this project illuminate normative behaviors on the text messaging medium and how these norms are managed within developing romantic relationships. These findings provide more insight for major interpersonal communication theories like EVT and RDT, while also highlighting specific affordances and features of mobile technologies that are pertinent within romantic relationships, which consequently affect relationship development.

First, mobile technology platforms, like text messaging, afford everyday talk between
romantic partners, including deep talk, task talk, and informal talk, which is a result of frequent communication throughout the day. All of these forms of everyday talk conducted via text message can promote feelings of relational closeness for romantic couples. Further, this frequent informal talk can lead to an increased sense of connection within the autonomy connection dialectical tension.

Second, features of these platforms, like Snapchat streaks and read receipts, allow partners to monitor and keep each other accountable for their communication, which can now be quantified and used to actually measure feelings of the autonomy-connection dialectical tension. Furthermore, these new features indicate that near-synchronous communication, or at least the perception of consistent communication, is preferred even on asynchronous communication channels.

Third, individuals in romantic relationships have expectations pertaining to their use of text messaging, particularly for their response times. There are several factors that influence how this violation is perceived and there are different courses of action to take after a violation occurs for romantic couples when it comes to their mobile technology use.

**Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to illuminate normative behaviors of relational norms via text messaging within developing romantic relationships and see how these relational norms are managed. After conducting 21 semi-structured interviews and utilizing a three-step coding process, many normative behaviors pertaining to the affordances and features of these mobile technologies and typical management strategies were uncovered. There are many practical and theoretical implications for this project, despite some limitations.

There are both practical and theoretical implications from the findings of this study. First, practically, the goal of this project was to illuminate young adult dating practices for
couples in newer relationships. The findings from this project demonstrate the importance of technology use in the early phases of romantic relationships and how it is being used and managed by couples. Second, this project has the potential to inform developers for technological platforms like SMS text message, iMessage, and Snapchat, about common user habits and uses for the medium. Third, this project demonstrates that not only do explicit norms about text messaging for developing relationships exist, but they influence actions of individuals in these relationships in order to ensure that they adhere to, or at least consider, the common norms.

Theoretically, this project contributes to the fields of CMC and interpersonal communication research in many ways. First, this is one of the first known projects to address the effects and use of continuous communication tools, like Snapchat streaks and read receipts. Future research should investigate this area further and explore the effects that this idea has on expectations, perceptions of relationships, and synchronous v. asynchronous communication channels. Second, this project supports and extends existing claims pertaining to EVT into the outcomes and implications of what happens after a violation has occurred within romantic relationships, specifically over CMC platforms. Finally, this project sheds light on the idea of intentionally causing violations in order to adjust power structures within romantic relationships, which warrants further research, as well.

Limitations

Every research project has its limitations and this one is no different. First and foremost, the small sample size is one of the largest limitations of this project. As with all qualitative studies, this project is not generalizable and is very exploratory in nature. Future research could take the findings from this project and use it as a springboard to test specific features and variables and its effects on romantic relationships. For example, future studies
could further investigate mechanisms like read receipts and Snapchat streaks and their effects on relational closeness over time.

Second, this project only focused on the topic of relational norms via text messaging for couples from the perspective of females in relationships. Not only does this only get one perspective from the dyad, it also does not consider the thoughts of men in romantic relationships. While this was an active choice for this project, it would be very valuable to replicate this study and focus on the male perspective to see if the relational CMC norms are similar between the sexes in relational development. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct a study where both partners of a romantic relationship were interviewed.

Third, because of the classes that were recruited and the nature of the project, the sample was very young, with a mean age of only 19.35. While many new college relationships may start around this age, many do not. An older sample size, or a sample that was of a more diverse age range, may have yielded more diverse findings.

Finally, the Snapchat subtheme became very prevalent after the interviews had started and thus, the interview guide had to be adjusted in the midst of data collection. The primary focus of this project was text messaging and but after seeing the significance of Snapchat, the interview guide had to be adjusted and the conclusions from the interviews may have shifted because of this. Future research could investigate the Snapchat findings specifically or this project could be replicated with a primary focus on Snapchat as opposed to SMS text messaging.

Conclusion

The goal of this exploratory, qualitative project was to investigate relational norms via text message for couples in developing romantic relationships and see how these norms are managed. To assess this, RQ1 asked what relational norms exist within SMS text
messaging for couples in developing romantic relationships. The findings suggested relational norms pertaining to response times, use of different features to ensure continuous communication, and common types of everyday talk. RQ2 assessed how couples manage these norms and concluded that through the autonomy connection dialectical tension, couples make choices to confirm continuous communication and keep each other accountable for their violations of the norms and expectations they have for one another regarding their mobile technology use within their relationship.

Overall, this project divulged findings pertaining to affordances and features of mobile technology platforms, the expectations around them regarding response times, and the effects they all have on romantic relationship development. This project shed light on what is important to couples in the early phases of a romantic relationship, confirming many of the suggestions in popular culture and popular literature regarding text messaging and Snapchat use.
References


Appendix A: Consent Document

Adult Consent Form for Research

University of Cincinnati
Department: Communication Studies
Principal Investigator: Chelsea Guest
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Pamara F. Chang

Title of Study: Exploring social norms of SMS text messaging and its effects on relational closeness in romantic relationships

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Chelsea Guest of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Communication. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Pamara F. Chang.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to investigate social norms of SMS text messaging within the context of romantic relationships. These social norms of SMS text messaging within romantic relationships will help us better understand how and why these aforementioned norms will influence perceived closeness and relationship outcomes.

Who will be in this research study?
About 30 people will take part in this study. You may be in this study if you:

1. Are at least 18 years old
2. Are female or identify as a female
4. Are currently involved in a romantic or dating relationship that has been going on for six months or less.
5. Own a cell phone.
What if you are a student where the research study is done?
Taking part in this research study is not part of your studies. Refusing to be in the study will not affect your grade. You will not be offered any special benefits if you take part in this study.

What if you are an employee or a student where the research study is done?
Participation by volunteers, who are associated with or employed by this institution, will not negatively or positively affect their status.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place at the University of Cincinnati Library in a private study area, over the phone, or using Skype. This interview will be audio recorded. In this study, the research being collected will pertain to the use of smartphones in romantic relationships.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?
It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by participating in this research study. While some probing of sensitive information may take place, please keep in mind that you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study. But, being in this study may help communication scholars understand technology and its role in relationships better.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
You may receive extra credit from your instructor for participating in this study. The exact amount is up to the discretion of your instructor but will not have a significant impact on your final grade in the course. The total amount of extra credit will amount to less than 2% of your final grade in the course.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
If you do not want to take part in this research study you may simply not participate and will not be treated any differently. We will thank you for your time.
How will your research information be kept confidential?

Information about you will be kept private by:

- Changing names after the information has been transcribed
- Limiting access to research data to the research team
- Not including the participant's name on the typed transcript
- Erasing audiotapes as soon as they are transcribed
- Keeping research data on a password-protected computer

No personal information will be disclosed within this project. The only source of identifiable information would come from audio recording the interviews, which would perhaps present an opportunity for voice recognition. However, once the audio is recorded and transcribed, the audio file will be deleted.

Your name and the name of your significant other (if a name is mentioned) will be changed to pseudonyms or a randomized unique ID number in order to protect your identity. Identifying information will be removed and replaced when each participant completes the research project.

Once data collection is complete, emails and email addresses will be deleted from the account of the P.I., as well. The information from this study may be published but you will not be identified by name. Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes. Your identity and information will be kept confidential unless the authorities have to be notified about abuse or immediate harm that may come to you or others.

What are your legal rights in this research study?

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?

If you have any suggestions, questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Chelsea Guest at guestca@mail.uc.edu or 440-665-0558. Or, you may contact Dr. Pamara Chang at changpf@ucmail.uc.edu.

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.
If you have suggestions, questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

**Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?**

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Chelsea Guest at guestca@mail.uc.edu

**Agreement:**

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature _________________________________ Date _______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____________________________ Date _______

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR REFERENCE.
Appendix B: Demographic Information Sheet

Demographic Sheet

Name: ___________________________________________________
Age: _____________

Sex:
___ Male
___ Female
___ Other: __________________________

Racial Identification (Please mark all that apply):
___ Asian
___ American Indian or Alaska Native
___ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific
___ Black or African American
___ White/Caucasian
___ Hispanic/Latino
___ Other: __________________________

Year in school:
___ Freshman (1\textsuperscript{st} year)
___ Sophomore (2\textsuperscript{nd} year)
___ Junior (3\textsuperscript{rd} year)
___ Senior (4\textsuperscript{th} year)
___ Fifth year
___ Graduate student
___ Not applicable

Major: ____________________________

Approximate Length of Romantic Relationship: _______________________
Sex of Significant Other: ____________________________
How did you first meet your significant other?
___ In person
___ In an online setting (dating app, facebook, twitter, snapchat, etc.)
___ Other: ________________________________

For questions 1-8, please indicate how often you use each platform on an every day basis to communicate with your significant other.

1. Phone Calls:
___ I don’t use this platform
___ Less than once per week
___ 1-2 days per week
___ 3-6 days per week
___ About once per day
___ 2-4 times per day
___ 5 or more times per day

2. SMS Text Messages
___ I don’t use this platform
___ Less than once per week
___ 1-2 days per week
___ 3-6 days per week
___ About once per day
___ 2-4 times per day
___ 5 or more times per day

3. Emails
___ I don’t use this platform
___ Less than once per week
___ 1-2 days per week
___ 3-6 days per week
___ About once per day
___ 2-4 times per day
___ 5 or more times per day
4. **Facebook (and/or Facebook Messenger)**
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
   ___ 2-4 times per day
   ___ 5 or more times per day

5. **Twitter**
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
   ___ 2-4 times per day
   ___ 5 or more times per day

6. **Instagram**
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
   ___ 2-4 times per day
   ___ 5 or more times per day

7. **Snapchat**
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
2-4 times per day
5 or more times per day

8. Other, if applicable (please indicate here: ________________)
I don’t use this platform
Less than once per week
1-2 days per week
3-6 days per week
About once per day
2-4 times per day
5 or more times per day

For questions, 9 – 16, please indicate how often you think your significant other uses each platform on an everyday basis to communicate with you.

9. Phone Calls:
I don’t use this platform
Less than once per week
1-2 days per week
3-6 days per week
About once per day
2-4 times per day
5 or more times per day

10. SMS Text Messages
I don’t use this platform
Less than once per week
1-2 days per week
3-6 days per week
About once per day
2-4 times per day
5 or more times per day

11. Emails
__ I don’t use this platform
__ Less than once per week
__ 1-2 days per week
__ 3-6 days per week
__ About once per day
__ 2-4 times per day
__ 5 or more times per day

12. Facebook (and/or Facebook Messenger)
__ I don’t use this platform
__ Less than once per week
__ 1-2 days per week
__ 3-6 days per week
__ About once per day
__ 2-4 times per day
__ 5 or more times per day

13. Twitter
__ I don’t use this platform
__ Less than once per week
__ 1-2 days per week
__ 3-6 days per week
__ About once per day
__ 2-4 times per day
__ 5 or more times per day

14. Instagram
__ I don’t use this platform
__ Less than once per week
__ 1-2 days per week
__ 3-6 days per week
__ About once per day
__ 2-4 times per day
__ 5 or more times per day
15. Snapchat
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
   ___ 2-4 times per day
   ___ 5 or more times per day

16. Other, if applicable (please indicate here: ____________________)
   ___ I don’t use this platform
   ___ Less than once per week
   ___ 1-2 days per week
   ___ 3-6 days per week
   ___ About once per day
   ___ 2-4 times per day
   ___ 5 or more times per day
Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Consent form: Walk participant through the whole consent form and have her sign a physical copy. 
Remind her again that this will be recorded, this will be confidential, and she can refuse to answer any question or discontinue her participation at any time

Demographic sheet: Send participant demographic sheet 24-48 hours prior to interview via email. Also in this email, I will ask what phone number or skype ID she would be most comfortable using.

Overview of interview process:
1. First, we will talk a little bit about your relationship.
2. Next, we will talk about how you use technology everyday and how you use it in your relationship.
3. Finally, we can wrap up with anything extra you want to add about your relationship or how you use technology.

Descriptive Information about couple:
1. To start, why don’t you tell me about your relationship? For example: you can tell me about how you met or how much time you spend together.

Transition: Thanks for the overview! I want to delve a little bit into the more specific tech use in your relationship use.

Use of Technology (individual)
1. Tell me about your daily use of your smart phone.
   a. Follow up if necessary: For example, texts do you send per day? How many calls do you make per day? Social media, etc. General use of phone, but be sure that she mentions texting at least a little.

Thanks for telling me about your use! Now we can talk about how you use it in your relationship.

Use of Technology (couple)
1. Tell me about a typical day talking to your partner (using technology). → tell me about your daily use of your smart phone within your relationship
   a. What do you use it for? (primary means of comm., scheduling) → out of what you already mentioned, what do you use the most & least and why
   b. From what you said earlier about your use, how many are related to your partner?
i. Texts

Follow-up questions to follow each medium if necessary based on interview flow
- When do you turn to this medium as opposed to others? (follow-up if necessary: making plans, arguments, everyday talk, etc., if not previously addressed)
- When you use this medium, what do you typically talk about?
- Tell me about conversations that you like and don’t like to have via this medium.

Transition: Thank you for the examples you mentioned. Now, I would like to talk specifically about the tendencies while texting your significant other.

Use of Rules:

1. What text messaging habits formed naturally? In other words, have you and your partner come up with specific behaviors or rules pertaining to your use of text messaging as your relationship has progressed?
   a. If yes…
      i. Can you tell me about them or list some of them?
      ii. When and why do you think these formed? did this begin in your relationship?
      iii. Do you think this will be something that will have to be explicitly addressed at some point? Why or why not?
      iv. Try to get her to mention how often, length of messages, topics, use of certain characters or emojis & response time, time of day?

2. Based on what you just listed, have you and your partner ever explicitly discussed any of these specific behaviors or rules pertaining to your use of text messaging? By explicitly, are there concrete, rules that you two have decided on?
   a. If yes…
      i. Can you explain some of these rules to me? (make sure they’re very clear)
      ii. How do you feel that these rules have impacted your relationship?
      iii. Can you explain to me how you and your partner created these rules, negotiated these rules and maintained them or not?
      iv. How do you feel this conversation/negotiation process has impacted your relationship?
   b. If no…
      i. Tell me why not.
ii. Do you think you will ever have to have this discussion with your partner?

2. Are you satisfied with the text messaging habits in your relationship?
   a. If yes, tell me why.
   b. If not, what would you like to see change?

3. Tell me about a time that text messaging made a positive difference in your relationship.

4. Tell me about a time that text messaging made a negative difference in your relationship.

5. Have your texting patterns changed from the beginning of your relationship? How?

6. Do you think that your texting patterns and habits will change as your relationship progresses? How?

Response times:

1. Can you think back to a few conversations you had with your partner via text message or Snapchat where there were response lag times? (follow-up if necessary: feel free to take out your phone and look through if they need a reminder)
   a. What was the topic?
   b. Within that interaction, can you tell me how you felt? They may mention more than one so go through each.

2. Do you think that your messages were influenced by the fact that they were sent via text message? Follow-up: how would it have been different if you were talking face-to-face or over a phone call or through social media? Go through each story again to ask this question
   a. If so, why?
   b. If not, why not?

3. In your relationship, how does the time in which you wait for messages with your significant other affect your relationship? Please elaborate.
   a. How does it affect how close you feel to your significant other?

Other comments or follow-up questions:

1. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that you did not get a chance to mention earlier?

2. Is there anything that I did not cover that you think is important?

3. Do you have any questions for me?

Off-record information:

1. Did I visit one of your classes?

2. Who is your instructor? I can inform him or her (through a random email address) that you participated in this study so you can receive extra credit.

Provide debriefing form.
Appendix D: Snapchat Interview Questions Addendum

Snapchat Use:

1. How often do you use Snapchat?

2. Can you recall a couple of snaps you’ve sent through Snapchat, when did you send the snap, what were you doing at that time, and who did you send it to? (How do they choose examples)
   a. How did you decide you wanted to send the snap you just mentioned through Snapchat rather than through another photo based applications or app in general?
   b. Examples (Get as many as possible; let them recall as many details as possible: WHEN, WHERE they sent and received WHAT snap to WHO)
   c. What kinds of reaction did you expect from your receiver?
      i. How did they actually respond?
      ii. How would you feel if you got no response from your receiver, why?
   d. What kinds of reaction did you expect from your receiver on these (other) social media rather than Snapchat? Why?
   e. Who do you normally communicate with using other apps other than Snapchat, why not on Snapchat?

3. How do you use snapchat differently than text messaging? Please elaborate.

4. Can you recall a couple of snaps you’ve received though Snapchat? (Again let them look at their snap history)
   a. How many of them can you still recall exact contents/photos in those snaps?
   b. (Even if they cannot recall) What do you remember or feel from these snaps?
   c. What do you think the snap sender would like you to get from this snap?
   d. Is the visual usually consistent with the text in the snapchat?

5. How do you normally respond to others’ snaps?

6. Overall, what about Snapchat do you think makes you want to use it?