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# Computer-mediation Communication and Changing Expectations of Romantic Couples

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COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND CHANGING EXPECTATIONS OF  
ROMANTIC COUPLES

by

Samantha Forbes Quinn

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Communication

at

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May 2018

## ABSTRACT

### COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND CHANGING EXPECTATIONS OF ROMANTIC COUPLES

by

Samantha F. Quinn

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Assistant Professor Erin Ruppel

Due to the complexity of romantic relationships and the integration of new communication technologies into relationship maintenance, the present study uses expectancy violations theory (EVT) to examine expectations, expectancy violations, and the changing expectations of romantic couples when using computer-mediated communication (CMC; i.e., social media websites, email, text messaging, etc.). Additionally, the study investigates the impact of changing expectations on relational quality. Twenty-five individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews were analyzed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach for thematic analysis. Narrative and in-vivo coding were used to identify themes in participants' responses. Themes regarding behavioral expectations for CMC included: (a) a response, (b) clear communication, (c) task-oriented versus relational messages and (d) respect. Regarding expectancy violations, themes included: (a) lack of communication, (b) disrespect, (c) sharing/posting as a violation, (d) affectionate messages. Additionally, the ability to discuss expectations with a romantic partner was positively associated with relational quality. Findings uncovered that committed relationships allow for more communication about expectations and changes in expectations. Practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* expectancy violations theory, romantic relationships, computer-mediated communication, relational quality, uncertainty, satisfaction, commitment

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To  
my amazing family

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## **I. Introduction**

Romantic relationships are both complex and challenging. The advent of new communication technologies and computer-mediated communication (CMC) fundamentally changes the way partners connect, communicate, develop, maintain, and terminate relationships. Social networking websites (SNS; e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), online discussion forums (e.g., Reddit), text messaging (SMS) and email, among others, provide opportunities for couples to interact with friends, family, and one another across space and time. Romantic couples are not inhibited by an inability to communicate face-to-face (FtF). Consequently, novel communication technologies create new avenues to maintain relationships; thus, further knowledge is needed. My dissertation investigates one aspect of relationship maintenance: the management of expectations between romantic partners when communicating via CMC.

One major aspect of romantic relationships that strongly impacts relationship quality and longevity is the management of expectations (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). Because CMC and FtF communication remain essential in most interpersonal relationships, scholars must understand how communication occurs and how relationships are managed through various channels. The current project uses expectancy violations theory (EVT) as a theoretical framework through which to view romantic partners' expectations, expectancy violations, changing expectations, and relationship quality when communicating with one another via CMC. EVT provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how individuals experience and evaluate violations of their expectations (Burgoon, 1993). Expectancies reflect what is normal or typical behavior for the people in our life. In other words, individuals expect friends and loved ones to behave in a certain manner. When an individual such as a romantic partner behaves atypically, that behavior violates their partner's expectations. The partner then evaluates the

violation and reacts based on the perceived severity of the violation and importance of the relationship. EVT was originally developed to explain violations in personal space and FtF communication; however, my dissertation adds to a growing body of research demonstrating the theory's utility in CMC contexts as well.

EVT typically focuses on the receiver or target of the violation; first, how they evaluate the violation, and then, how they react or respond to the violation (Burgoon, 1993). However, in ongoing interpersonal or romantic relationships a dyadic process of communicating and adjusting expectations exists. In other words, both partners in any interpersonal relationship experience expectancy violations and the consequences of such violations. Similar to the relationship, expectancies are not static, but continually in a state of change (Burgoon, 1993). Expectancies and changing expectations constitute a process that plays out over time between the two individuals. Due to the dyadic nature of this communication phenomenon, scholars must understand why and how partners negotiate and communicate changes in and reactions to expectancy violations. How does an individual share that expectations for a partner's behavior have changed? How does the partner respond to changing expectations? And, how do changes in expectations affect the relationship? EVT is the best theory to study expectancy violations and changing expectations because the theory focuses on the perceptions and interpretations of the individual (i.e., participant). In comparison, interaction adaption theory (IAT; Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995), an extension of EVT, focuses on responses within a given interaction and includes biological, social, and individual influences when investigating communicative behaviors. Additionally, the present study focuses on individuals' experiences being in a romantic relationship, not the experiences of the romantic dyad. Moreover, because my

dissertation focuses on the perceptions and experiences of the individual, semi-structured interviews were deemed the most beneficial data collection method.

The current project explores romantic partners' expectations, changing expectations, and relationship quality when communicating via CMC. Past research points to the importance of understanding expectations and how individuals react to violations of their expectations (e.g., Afifi & Metts, 1998; Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon, Stacks, & Woodall, 1979; LePoire & Burgoon, 1994). However, little research specifically investigates CMC and changing expectations in romantic couples. EVT and CMC are important, both theoretically and practically, in the understanding of romantic relationships because partners can communicate, express emotions, and maintain their relationship virtually via CMC. Theoretically, using EVT to study behavior and expectations via CMC demonstrates the utility and flexibility of the theory. As more communication takes place via alternative channels, communication theories must assist in the understanding of human communication beyond FtF interactions. In a practical sense, in-depth knowledge of how individuals evaluate and react to the actions of the partner helps scholars and professionals better understand communication between partners in a technologically advanced world. Additionally, the current study assists professionals in providing romantic partners with advice regarding communication behaviors and the impact on relationship quality. Professionals assisting others to understand changes in expectations, and the potential for such changes to increase relationship satisfaction and commitment. As technology continues to evolve and change, researchers need to apply interpersonal communication theories to new technologies to evaluate how human communication is adapting.

## II. Literature Review

### Expectations in Romantic Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are an essential part of the human experience and thus influence many important aspects of human behavior (Selman, 1980). Interpersonal relationships provide intimacy, help fulfill the need for belonging, and can influence emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Selman, 1980). The degree to which a romantic relationship has positive and/or negative effects on a person often depends on whether the behaviors of their partner meet the individual's expectations for appropriate behaviors within that relationship (Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008). Such expectations are formed through the experiences the individual has had in past relationships and through social feedback (Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008). When relationship expectations are met, an individual's self-esteem increases, which can contribute to increases in satisfaction and emotional well-being (Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008). Conversely, when expectations are not met, individuals may become dissatisfied and thus experience decreased emotional well-being (Sabatelli, 1988; Simon & Barrett, 2010). For this reason, individuals must work to maintain open, honest communication with their romantic partner about their expectations for the relationship.

Romantic relationships are unique in that individuals often generate higher expectations for desirable characteristics in their romantic partners than in their friends (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Research indicates that individuals have higher relationship expectations for romantic partners regarding social companionship, emotional closeness, relationship positivity, exclusivity, and physical intimacy (Buss, 1991; Davis & Todd, 1982; Fuhrman, Flannagan, & Matamoros, 2009). Overall, individuals report that expectancy violations are more negative when they involve a romantic partner than a friend (Bevan, 2003), and partners in romantic

relationships are less tolerant of relational uncertainty and topic avoidance than friends (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998). Expectancy violations by romantic partners also lead to greater disappointment when compared to same-sex friendships (Flannagan et al., 2005). One explanation for the difference is the high levels of exclusivity that exists in romantic partnerships due to the commitment and long-term investment associated with romantic relationships (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Davis & Todd, 1982). Additionally, physical intimacy distinguishes romantic relationships from friendships. Physical intimacy is a key factor in the initiation and development of romantic relationships and involves both close physical proximity and sexual intimacy/contact (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2009).

The differences in behavioral expectations experienced in romantic relationships are significant to my dissertation because often such expectancies and expectancy violations are held in higher regard between romantic partners. Thus, a violation of an expectation may create severe consequences for a romantic relationship compared to a friendship. More severe consequences might include increased uncertainty, loss of relationship satisfaction, or loss of trust in the partner which could lead to interpersonal conflict or relationship termination (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). Scholars and practitioners can benefit from further research on expectations and the changing of expectations because expectations are directly associated with relationship satisfaction (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). Research can help put expectancy violations in the forefront of interpersonal relationship research; assisting practitioners working with couples to understand changing expectations in their relationship and manage relational turmoil caused by changing expectations.

### **Expectancy Violations Theory**

As previously noted, expectations play an essential role in virtually every human

experience (Burgoon, 1993). Our expectations determine how we approach everyday activities and how we interact with others; but when unexpected things happen, how do individuals respond, and why do they respond in that manner? For example, Partner A in a romantic relationship posts a picture of themselves and Partner B on a social networking website with an affectionate caption expressing love and appreciation for Partner B. When Partner B sees the picture and caption, how will that person react? Based on the Partner B's expectations for the relationship, including appropriate online communication, Partner B will assess the post and react accordingly. Furthermore, the post may impact the quality and future of the relationship.

EVT is a post-positivist theory seeking to explain and predict patterns of interaction. The theory was first developed by Burgoon and Jones (1976) to describe how individuals perceive and interpret violations of their personal space. Since its inception EVT has moved beyond the study of proxemics to include both verbal and nonverbal communication in various contexts (e.g., Chiles & Roloff, 2014; Ramirez & Wang, 2008; Wright & Roloff, 2015). In short, EVT is used to explain how communicators identify, interpret, and react to situations based on the expectations they have for that interaction (Burgoon & Jones, 1976). The development of the theory offered a conceptual foundation for understanding how we respond when expectations are violated, both positively and negatively.

According to Burgoon (1993), an expectancy is an enduring pattern of anticipated behavior. Expectancies may be related to behaviors appropriate for the situation or what is typical behavior for a specific person (Burgoon, 1993). Expectancies refer to an anticipation about what will occur (predictive expectations) or what is preferred (prescriptive expectations; Burgoon, 1993). Per EVT, individuals use their expectations to characterize and frame how they interact with others, perceive the interaction, process information, and react during the

interaction (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Our expectations are violated when an individual behaves in a way that deviates from typical behavior (Afifi & Metts, 1998). When violations occur, more attention is given to that specific part of the interaction. A violation results in cognitive arousal and stages of interpretation and evaluation to cope with the unexpected behavior. When an individual violates a partner's expectations, the partner is likely to be more attentive to future behaviors related to the relationship (LePoire & Burgoon, 1994).

In the interpretation stage, the valence of the violation is established and contributes to the assessment of how rewarding the interaction will be (Burgoon, 1993). Burgoon (1978) proposed that there are circumstances when violating the norms can be beneficial. For instance, attractive customers violating expectations of personal space received more favorable treatment than customers conforming to traditional norms because the space violations were a positive indicator of immediacy and intent to buy the product (Burgoon et al., 1979). Positively-valenced violations can also occur via CMC. For example, an individual might unexpectedly send an affectionate text message to a romantic partner when they do not typically text. The receiver may view the text message as unexpected, but be pleasantly surprised by the content of the message. Such behavior may benefit the relationship if the receiver interprets the violation as a demonstration of partner's satisfaction and commitment to the relationship.

EVT proposes that our expectations are influenced by three factors: the communicator, the relationship, and the context of the interaction (Burgoon, 1993). Important factors about the communicator potentially influencing the interaction include age, gender, and personality characteristics, among others. Relationship factors include issues such as the familiarity between the partners and length of the relationship. The present dissertation examines individuals in a romantic relationship, thus there is likely a high level of familiarity between partners. Finally,

contextual elements include the environment where the communication takes place, such as the situation formality (Burgoon, 1993). A contextual element potentially influencing the severity of expectancy violations for romantic partners is whether the violation occurs in public or in private. An expectancy violation that occurs in the public sphere may be deemed as more severe, generating a greater impact on the relationship. Violations occurring in private may be viewed as less severe and may afford romantic partners the opportunity to address the violation immediately. Furthermore, the CMC platform used determines whether expectancy violations occur in public or private. For instance, text messaging is typically (but not always) private, occurring only between the sender and receiver. Conversely, social networking websites, such as Facebook, are public, because as those in an individual's online social network have access to the behaviors and communication that occur on the SNS.

**Violation valence.** EVT proposes that when someone violates an individual's expectations that person is forced to make sense of what happened; therefore, individuals shift their focus to try to determine what the atypical behavior means (Burgoon, 1993). When a violation occurs, a person becomes cognitively aroused; heightened arousal leads to appraisals of the situation, specifically: (a) the meaning of the violation, and (b) whether the violation was negative or positive (violation valence; Burgoon, 1993). Some behaviors carry a distinct meaning and thus the valence is clearly interpreted. For example, if an individual sends their spouse flowers at work for no specific reason, the spouse is likely to appraise the violation as an act of affection, and therefore positively-valenced expectancy violation. However, other behaviors are more ambiguous, especially if individuals are not familiar with the person or context in which the behavior took place. Such instances might occur in the early stages of a romantic relationship, when partners are less familiar and are working to understand each other's



behavioral tendencies. EVT predicts that a negatively-valenced violation will lead to worse interaction outcomes, while a positively-valenced violation typically leads to better interaction outcomes than a non-violation (Burgoon, 1993). In other words, a positive violation typically results in favorable communication or relationship outcomes over normal behavior. Overall, the valence of a violation determines whether it is better to do what is expected or go against what is typical. A key factor that influences violation valence is the reward value of the communicator committing the violation (Burgoon, 1993).

**Communicator reward value.** People generally find some individuals more rewarding to interact with than others. For instance, individuals who are physically attractive, powerful, or highly competent are typically seen as more rewarding than those who do not possess such characteristics (Burgoon, 1993). EVT suggests that an individual's evaluation of a violation depends on their assessment of these positive and negative attributes in others, particularly when the meaning of the violation is open to interpretation. For example, when a person becomes evaluated as a rewarding communicator interacts at a closer than normal distance, we are likely to evaluate the violation positively. However, if an individual who is a non-rewarding communicator interacts at the same close distance, we are likely to evaluate that violation negatively (Burgoon, 1993).

Social exchange theory can shed light on communicator reward value related to communication between romantic couples. Homans (1961) proposed that social human behavior is a method of exchange; typically, humans behave to gain or increase a reward (e.g., money, love, time) and minimize potential losses or costs. Homans (1961) argued that,

The open secret of human exchange is to give the other man behavior that is more valuable to him than it is costly to you and to get from him behavior that is more valuable

to you them it is costly to him. (p. 62)

Arguably, romantic partners use a similar strategy to evaluate expectancy violations and to determine if a change in expectations is warranted. Individuals may evaluate the reward value of a partner regarding how costly or rewarding the positively- or negatively-valenced violation is to the relationship. For instance, if an individual considers their partner to have a high communicator reward value because they are attractive, smart, and kind, they may be likely to perceive negative expectancy violations as less negative or costly to the relationship.

Additionally, an individual may perceive their own behavior as beneficial for both themselves and their partner, but when the behavior does not align with their partner's expectations, it results in an expectancy violation and a decrease in relational quality.

**Extension of EVT.** Afifi and Metts (1998) expanded the study of expectancy violations in two significant ways. First, they identified and categorized relational behaviors individuals view as violations and determined that violations vary in the level of severity and are positively- and negatively-valenced (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Overall, nine violations were classified including support or confirmation, criticism or accusation, relationship initiation or escalation, relationship de-escalation or termination, uncharacteristic relational behavior, relational transgressions, acts of devotion, acts of disregard, and gesture of inclusion or high regard (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Each category was operationalized based on participant responses. For example, relational transgressions were defined as behaviors that constituted "clear violations of taken-for-granted relational rules" (p. 377). Similarly, Bachman and Guerrero (2006) investigated EVT, hurtful events, relational quality, and communication in dating relationships. Results suggested that hurtful events, including relational transgressions, should be considered expectancy violations (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). Further analysis revealed that when respondents evaluated a

hurtful event as a highly negative violation and viewed their partner as unrewarding, the couple was more likely to break up, be less satisfied and committed, and use destructive rather than constructive communication (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006).

The second way Afifi and Metts (1998) extended EVT was to include three aspects of how expectancy violations are interpreted: (a) violation valence, involving the extent to which the behavior is positive or negative, (b) violation expectedness, the extent to which the behavior varies from expected behaviors, and (c) violation importance, the impact that the behavior will have on the relationship. Violation valence, expectedness, and importance remain significant to my dissertation as these three aspects may be associated with relational quality. For instance, if an individual commits a violation when interacting via CMC and their romantic partner evaluates the violation as highly negative, unexpected, and important to the relationship, relational conflict or termination may result.

**Changing expectations.** Romantic relationships are not stagnant; they change and evolve. Similarly, expectations between romantic partners change, adjust, and evolve throughout the relationship (Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008). Changes may occur due to shared experiences, conflict, and relationship status change, among other reasons. Extant research has investigated the development of romantic relationships and the role of expectancy violations in such relationships (e.g., Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). However, little research focuses specifically on partners changing their behavioral expectations of one another, how changes in expectations are discussed, and the effect of violations and changing expectations on the quality of the relationship. For this reason, the current dissertation is essential in adding to the communication discipline's understanding of romantic relationships and the role of expectations and expectancy

violations in such relationships.

One question that remains unanswered is, when someone violates expectations, how do others respond? Such a question is relevant because responses send a message to the violator. Therefore, do responses influence what is happening or change the violator's behavior? Floyd and Voloudakis (1999) sought to answer this question through the examination of expectancy violations by friends during conversations. Since friends are expected to be involved and pleasant with each other, the researchers predicted that reduced involvement and pleasantness would be a negative violation and in response the friend whose expectations had been violated would increase their involvement and pleasantness to bring the other person's interaction back up to a more comfortable level (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999). However, results indicated the opposite: decreased involvement and pleasantness by one friend was generally reciprocated by the other. Arguably, the same may be true for expectancy violations and changes in expectations. For instance, not talking to a partner about a violation or a change in expected CMC behavior might lead to little or no behavioral change and a decrease in relational quality (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). If a romantic dyad perpetuates the cycle of non-communication regarding expectancy violations, the relational quality will likely suffer. Perhaps the idea of discussing violations and the level of uncertainty associated with such as discussion seems too costly for the stability of the relationship, therefore, partners are hesitant to talk about violations and changing expectations.

The overarching idea of social exchange describes how partners respond to violations, that is, what individuals interpret in an interaction (e.g., benefits, rewards, and costs) determines how they reciprocate. More specifically, interdependence theory can provide insight for how individuals respond to unexpected behaviors, unmet expectations, or expectancy violations in an

interaction. Per interdependence theory, relational quality is dependent on the individual's expectations for the type of relationship and the extent to which they perceive their current relationship meeting or falling below these expectations (Thibault & Kelley, 1959). The theory is comprised of two types of expectations: comparison level and comparison level for alternatives. First, comparison level includes expectations for a relationship reflecting the quality of the outcomes the individual feels they deserve (Kelley & Thibault, 1978) and is based on the observation of others, personal experiences, and cultural ideals (Merolla, Weber, Myer, & Booth-Butterfield, 2004). The second expectation is the comparison level for alternatives, which refers to an individual's expectations about the characteristics of a relationship that they could enter into if their current relationship were to end (Kelley & Thibault, 1978). According to interdependence theory, relational satisfaction is determined by the difference between one's perceptions of their current relationship and their comparison level (i.e., ideal). Similarly, relational commitment is determined by the difference between one's perceptions of a current relationship and the comparison level for alternatives. Past research indicates that discrepancies between expectations for an ideal relationship and perceptions of the current relationship are associated with lower relational satisfaction (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001; Sternberg & Barnes, 1985) and discrepancies between one's expectations for available alternatives and their perceptions of the current relationship are associated with lower relationship commitment (Jemmott, Ashby, & Lindenfeld, 1989; Simpson, 1987). Perhaps, in accordance with interdependence theory, romantic partners respond to expectancy violations or unmet expectations by assessing their current relationship, perceptions of ideal romantic relationships, and perceptions of an alternative relationship before changing their expectations for their partner.

Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017) investigated how romantic beliefs/expectations and unmet expectations influence relational satisfaction and commitment in young adult romantic relationships. Identifying unmet expectations is key in the association between romantic beliefs and relationship outcomes. Vannier and O'Sullivan (2017) argued that romantic beliefs create expectations in romantic relationships and such expectations are often unrealistic and cannot be met by the relationship. The difference between the expectations for the relationship and the perceptions of the relationship can lead to negative relationship outcomes. Therefore, unmet expectations lead to poor relationship outcomes (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). Using interdependence theory as a theoretical framework, the researchers found that romantic beliefs were associated with greater relational satisfaction and commitment and unmet expectations were associated with lower satisfaction and commitment (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). Although the study does not directly address the changing of expectations a romantic relationship, unmet expectations could lead to a change in an individual's expectations for a partner. Arguably, when an individual's expectancies are negatively violated the quality of the relationship decreases, thus the person makes changes or adjustments to help increase relationship satisfaction and commitment.

A fundamental question in interpersonal communication is how people negotiate their relationship through talk (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). Similarly, the question arises of how romantic partners negotiate and discuss their expectations and changes in their expectations for one another. Overall, individuals make sense of the relationships using two levels of information: content messages and relational messages. A content message is the meaning of an utterance and a relational message is the underlying information that the utterance, conveys about the status of the relationship (Bateson, 1972). Although both levels of information are essential in

interpersonal communication, a lack of research exists on content messages of relationships, also known as relationship talk (Acitelli, 1988, 1992). Relationship talk is important because it helps partners understand the nature of their relationship (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984), select behaviors that are appropriate for the relationship (Baxter, 1987), and navigate relationship turning points (Bullis, Clark, & Sline, 1993). Relationship talk is also associated with individual well-being including more contentment and less depression (Acitelli, 1992, 2002), as well as dyadic relational well-being including increased relational satisfaction (Acitelli & Badr, 2005). Discussing relationships norms, such as expectations and changes in expectations, is a form of relationship talk with the potential to influence relational quality. Therefore, how individuals in romantic relationships experience and talk about changing expectations for CMC warrants further investigation and can significantly contribute to interpersonal communication research. My dissertation addresses a gap in current research by utilizing semi-structured interviews as a data collection method to obtain rich data regarding participants' experiences.

### **Expectancy Violations and Technology**

Regarding the role of new communication technologies and CMC in romantic relationships, CMC affords romantic partners the opportunity to communicate over space and time. Additionally, individuals can share different aspects of their relationship, such as photographs and anniversaries, with one another and those in their social networks. Certain platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, give friends and loved ones a front row seat as the relationship develops and grows. As a result, romantic relationships may experience less intimacy or fewer "special moments" because members of one or both partners' online social network have access to any posted information (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Due to such transparency, romantic relationships lose some privacy relative to if the relationship were simply

maintained in person. Additionally, lack of privacy may be a key component in the formation of expectations for CMC behaviors between romantic partners.

Despite the prevalence of CMC, people expect conversational partners to be moderately involved in an interaction (Burgoon, Newton, Walther, & Baesler, 1989). In close relationships, individuals expect that their partners will show interest and immediacy in an interaction (White, 2015). However, societal expectations to be continually available via cell phone, as well as other forms of CMC, may inhibit an individual's ability to be present and attentive, especially in romantic relationships where expectations are higher (Kelly, Miller-Ott, & Duran, 2017). Competing expectations exist between interactional partners and the constant connectivity of technology coined as "absent presence," as an individual might be physically present but distracted or absorbed by technology (Gergen, 2002).

Miller-Ott and Kelly (2015) investigated the presence of cell phones in interactions between romantic partners and the management of expectancy violations. Using EVT as a theoretical framework, the study revealed that individuals have an expectation of undivided attention when on formal dates with their partner and when spending intimate time together. Yet, divided attention was acceptable during informal time spent together. How participants responded to expectancy violations in formal settings depended on how well they knew their partner; those in new dating relationships were less likely to say anything about the violation, and if they did it was indirect, such as rolling their eyes or beginning to use their cell phone as well (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). Participants' reasons for being indirect in early dating relationships seemed to reflect uncertainty regarding their expectations about cell phone use due to a clash between expectations for formal dates and the idea of being constantly connected via (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). Those individuals in more established relationships were more direct



when responding to violations during dates. Some participants even reported established rules with their partner around using cell phones during formal dates or intimate time (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). In a similar study, Kelly, Miller-Ott, and Duran (2017) investigated how individuals perceived and responded to expectations of attentiveness and availability via cell phones when with a romantic partner. Phone use behaviors were generally characterized as expected, neutral, and typical, however, violations were more negative when participants expected their partner's attention (Kelly et al., 2017). Behaviors were reported as more unexpected and negative when performed in public versus in private (e.g., at home; Kelly et al., 2017). However, phone sharing behaviors, using cell phones together or simultaneously, were perceived positively. Finally, similar to past research, the most common response to a partners' cell phone use was to say and/or do nothing.

Another study providing insight for the current project identified a variety of expectancy violations specific to Facebook (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011). Negative violations included posting too many status updates, being overly emotional in one's status or wall posts, engaging in conflicts, and posting or tagging inappropriate photos. The negative violations were consistent with reasons for "unfriending" and suggest that unfriending constitutes one way that Facebook users respond to another user's violations. Results are significant because the negative violations reported by romantic partners when using Facebook and other SNS and may have significant implications for the relationship (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011). Further research by Bevan, Ang, and Fearn (2014) considered being unfriended on Facebook an expectancy violation in itself, and examined the valence, importance, and expectedness of the violation based on a variety of relationship and Facebook involvement characteristics. Results indicate that being unfriended was perceived as a negative, moderately expected, and moderately to highly important violation

(Bevan et al., 2014). Additionally, strong versus weak ties with the unfriended person best predicted the valence and importance of the violation (Bevan, et al., 2014). In other words, being unfriended by a good friend or family member is likely to be perceived as an important, highly unexpected, negatively-valenced violation. Such information may be applicable to romantic relationships and the changing of expectations. Partners experiencing negative violations via CMC may adjust their expectations of their significant other, evaluating repetitive negative violations as highly severe and negatively impacting the relationship. Both studies provide significant insight for the current project because they point to expectancy violations previously identified on some CMC platforms, thus giving the researcher a foundation of behaviors that might lead to a change in expectations in one or both romantic partners. For example, if Partner A feels that Partner B is being overly emotional in their status updates, Partner A might evaluate the behavior as a negatively-valenced expectancy violation. Partner A then decides to discuss the violation with Partner B and learns that Partner B feels more comfortable expressing themselves online than in person. Thus, Partner A changes their expectations for Partner B's online behavior and over-emotional posting is no longer an expectancy violation.

In sum, people communicate to maintain their romantic relationships, and one essential type of communication is the communicating of expectations. EVT states that people develop expectancies in their relationships, and those expectancies are a result of different factors such as the type of relationship and context of the interaction (Afifi & Metts, 1998; Burgoon, 1993). When expectancies are violated, individuals react based on their interpretation of the violation (i.e., valence, severity, importance), potentially affecting the quality of the relationship. Extant research focuses on expectancies and reactions to expectancy violations. However, little research has investigated the dyadic aspect of expectancies, namely, how they develop in ongoing

romantic relationships, how partners react when their expectancies are violated, and what subsequent effects violations have on the romantic relationship (e.g., changing or negotiating expectancies and changes in relational quality). CMC is a unique avenue for EVT because expectancies may be similar to those experienced in FtF communication, while simultaneously significantly different. Some unique expectancies experienced regarding CMC included: posting too many status updates, being overly emotional in one's status or wall posts, engaging in conflicts, and posting or tagging inappropriate photos (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011). However, past research has mainly focused on SNS despite evidence that expectancies and expectancy violations exist in other CMC contexts. For example, Miller-Ott and Kelly (2015) and Kelly et al. (2017) both investigated expectancies for cell phone use between romantic couples. Finally, understanding how dyads develop, negotiate, and change their expectancies in CMC contexts advances the study of EVT and romantic relationships as such research has not been previously conducted. Additionally, because CMC currently integrates into the daily communication of many individuals, it is important to understand how such communication compares to FtF communication and how CMC affects relationship quality to assist individuals in using effective and constructive communication. Based on the lack of research investigating EVT, CMC and romantic relationships, and the opportunity to gather rich data about participants' experiences and perceptions through the interview process (Alshenqeeti, 2014), the following research questions are proposed.

**RQ1:** What behavioral expectations do romantic partners have regarding the use of CMC?

**RQ2:** How do partners respond to expectancy violations via CMC?

**RQ3:** How and why do partners' CMC expectations change?

## **Relational Quality**

As previously noted, confirmed and disconfirmed (unmet or violated) expectations have a strong association with the quality of an interpersonal relationship (Tong & Walther, 2015; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). Relationship or relational quality refers to how good or satisfying a relationship, is and includes concepts such as relational uncertainty, satisfaction, communication satisfaction, commitment, trust, and intimacy, among others (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). Regarding interpersonal relationships and EVT, relational quality is an important outcome variable. Per EVT, both communicator reward value and violation valence are associated with relational quality. Additionally, other theories focusing on interdependence, such as social exchange theory, assert that rewards and costs predict relationship satisfaction and commitment. In other words, how rewarding a romantic partner is should be positively related to relational quality, and negatively-valenced violations are typically negatively related with relational satisfaction and commitment. Afifi and Metts (1998) found that relational satisfaction was lowest when a partner performed a negatively-valenced violation that also increased uncertainty. Additionally, Vangelisti and Young (2000) reported that perceived partner intent and frequency of hurtful messages were negatively related to relational quality and satisfaction. Past research clearly demonstrates that EVT and relational quality are interdependent concepts, thus, research should investigate the interplay of these concepts in various contexts. The dissertation seeks to understand the relationship between expectancy violations, changing expectations and relational quality experienced by romantic couples when using CMC. Such information is important because relationships are maintained via a variety of platforms, thus expectancy violations are continually being violated and adjusted accordingly. Understanding the relationship between EVT, CMC, and romantic relationships can provide scholars and

practitioners with further knowledge regarding why some romantic relationships are successful while others are not, arming practitioners with information to help couples communicate their expectations for online communication more effectively. The following conceptualizes a few of the main concepts contributing to overall relationship quality and how they relate to expectancy violations and changes in expectations.

**Uncertainty.** One common belief in relationship development is that individuals are motivated by the need to reduce their uncertainty about their partner and relationship (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Although some relationships function simply on information derived from one's specific role; individuals in interpersonal relationships require idiosyncratic and personal knowledge about their partner to predict and explain behavior (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Berger (1987) explained that although early phases of relationship development exhibit the most uncertainty reduction efforts, established relationships experience periods of uncertainty. Through uncertainty reduction, individuals develop a shared relationship schema which includes establishing similar views on the nature of the relationship, rules for managing conflict, and expectations for appropriate behavior with others, among others (Planalp & Rivers, 1996). Consequently, violations of established expectations lead to an increase in uncertainty (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Although momentary uncertainty lead to excitement and increased interest in the relationship, prolonged periods of uncertainty negatively affect relational satisfaction and leads to destabilization of the relationship (Berger, 1987). Uncertainty may play a key role in changing expectations between romantic partners when communicating via CMC. If expectations are continually changing or are not explicitly expressed, increased uncertainty and decreased relational satisfaction may result.

**Satisfaction.** An individual's level of relational satisfaction refers to the positive versus negative affect experienced in a relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). One's satisfaction depends on the perception of their needs being met by their partner. Needs influencing one's level of relational satisfaction include intellectual, companionship, and sexual needs. Although some research exists on relational satisfaction in a CMC environment, including amount of cell phone communication (Miller-Ott, Kelly, & Duran, 2012), long distance relationships (Maguire & Kinney, 2010) and discussion of conflict (Vangelisti, Middleton, & Ebersole, 2013), little research connects CMC, EVT and relational satisfaction. In a FtF setting, positively-valenced violations are associated with greater relational satisfaction; however, it is unclear if this holds true for various CMC contexts. My dissertation examines the relationship between expectancy violations, potentially both positively- and negatively-valenced, and changing expectations on relational satisfaction. Perhaps positively-valenced violations result in increased relational satisfaction when communicated via CMC. Furthermore, changing one's expectations for CMC and communicating those changes with one's partner may lead to an increase in relational satisfaction.

**Communication satisfaction.** As previously discussed, a social exchange perspective suggests that relationships continue to develop as rewards exceed costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Because communication is the foundation of all relationships, satisfying interpersonal communication also plays a key role in relationship development and relational quality (Hecht, 1978). Satisfying communication occurs when a partner's expectations for the interaction are met and they feel understood by their romantic partner (Hecht, 1978). Perceptions of understanding and successful communication contribute to overall communication satisfaction. Extant research has examined the relationship between communication satisfaction, relational

satisfaction, and relational closeness (e.g., Emmers-Sommer, 2004; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). Specifically, Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) investigated predictors of relational satisfaction for individuals in online romantic relationships. Results indicated that intimacy, trust, and communication satisfaction were predictors of relationship satisfaction, and perceptions of different relationship variables differed depending on the length of the relationship and the time spent communicating between partners. Arguably, couples engaging in satisfying interpersonal communication via CMC would report better overall relationship quality.

**Commitment.** Romantic relationships are complex; it is not always clear why some relationships thrive and others terminate. Commitment is a psychological attachment to the relationship, paired with a long-term orientation toward the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998). In other words, partners enjoy being in the relationship and are committed to remaining in the relationship. Rusbult et al. (1998) argue in the investment model of commitment processes that relational commitment is dependent on relational satisfaction. Per the investment model, highly committed individuals are highly satisfied, perceive few appealing alternatives, and have invested a great deal in the relationship (Rusbult, 1983). Arguably, the ways individuals communicate with one another provides a key indicator of their evaluation of that relationship. Therefore, scholars must seek a greater understanding of how an individual's expectations for a partner's behavior, violations of those expectations, and changes in expectations impact relational commitment and quality. If an individual does not share their expectations or communicate with their partner when a negative expectancy violations occur, it may indicate a lack of commitment to the relationship.

Considering the essential role of uncertainty, relational satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and commitment in overall relational quality, as well as the importance of confirmed

and disconfirmed expectations in romantic relationships, the following research questions are proposed:

**RQ4:** How do partners talk about changes in expectations and the quality of their relationship?

**RQ5:** How does relationship quality affect how partners communicate about expectations and changes in expectations?

### **III. Method**

#### **Participants**

I interviewed 25 individuals in committed, romantic relationships. In qualitative research, no set rule exists for the number of participants a researcher should recruit for a study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, the sample size was determined based on the idea of saturation (Saunders, Sim, Kingston, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2017). Saturation has become a widely accepted methodological principle in qualitative research and represents the point at which further data collection and/or analysis is unnecessary (Saunders et al., 2017). In other words, once the researcher determines that they are not obtaining new information from the interviews they have reached saturation and may choose to stop interviewing participants. After performing 25 interviews, I determined saturation had been reached, stopped recruiting participants, and began the data analysis process.

The study was open to individuals currently in a romantic relationship lasting at least six months, and who use CMC to interact with their romantic partner on a regular basis.

Relationships ranged in length from 10 months to 15 years, with an average relationship length of five years. Participants ranged in age from 25-46 years, with an average age of 29.7 years.

Sixteen participants identified as female, eight identified as male and one identified as



transmasculine. A majority of participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual ( $n = 23$ ), while two identified as queer. Most participants ( $n = 23$ ) identified as Caucasian, with one participant identifying as Hispanic and one identifying as Asian American.

## **Procedures**

**Recruitment.** After receiving IRB Approval (see Appendix A) recruitment took place through a combination of social network sampling and snowball sampling. Social network sampling, a form of convenience sampling, aims to recruit respondents from the researcher's social network (Lindorf & Taylor, 2011). In many cases, online social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc., are used to disseminate the recruitment message in hopes of reaching a broader audience. Online social networks, such as Facebook, represent one of the biggest social services in the world, therefore, such sites are large-scale sources from which to collect data with the aim of obtaining representative sample (Bhattacharyya, Garg, & Wu, 2011). I posted the recruitment message (see Appendix B) on my personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. Interested participants were asked to contact me directly for further information, to receive the study's informed consent form and prescreening questions, and to schedule an interview. Additionally, members of my online social networks shared the recruitment message with their social networks, and interested parties were instructed to contact me directly.

Snowball sampling “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). Snowball sampling was well-suited for this project because it is often used for studying social networks, subcultures, or people who have certain attributes in common (Lindorf & Taylor, 2011). Snowball sampling was ideal as I was looking to collect data from people with similar experiences, therefore, participants in romantic relationships who use CMC

in their daily life were likely to know other individuals who meet the same criteria. Snowball sampling occurred naturally, as many participants asked if I needed additional participants and offered to contact friends and family who were particularly tech-savvy. In such instances, I asked the participant to pass along my contact information and instruct interested parties to contact me directly. Once I received an email from interested participants, I responded with the recruitment message, informed consent form, prescreening questions, and an invitation to schedule an interview.

**Interviews.** Interpretivist constructionism argues that the core of understanding is learning how people make sense of the world, how people interpret what they experience, and how they assign meaning to different situations, events, and objects (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In other words, in an interpretive approach, human interaction and negotiation is the basis for the creation and understanding of individuals' social lives (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Therefore, the interaction between participants and the researcher in a research interview creates a co-construction of knowledge (i.e., data) about a particular phenomenon (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Participants' ability to recount and convey experiences and feelings to the researcher adds to the richness and salience of data collected through qualitative interviews. Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2006) argued that interviews offer researchers the opportunity to uncover information that is "probably not accessible using techniques such as questionnaires and observations" (p. 172). Additionally, during the interview process the interviewer clarifies, simplifies and/or rephrases questions misunderstood by interviewees, therefore, gathering more accurate data than can be gathered through different methods (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Based on an understanding of interpretivist research and the value of performing interviews, I interviewed individuals in

committed, romantic relationships to understand how they make meaning or sense of the expectations in their relationship.

Before each interview, I asked each participant if they read the informed consent form and completed the prescreening questions and if they had any questions regarding the study. Next, I asked for verbal confirmation that they consented to continue the interview and if they agreed to have our conversation audio recorded. All 25 participants provided verbal confirmation and consented to having the interview recorded. Each interview was conducted with one participant at a time, and the interview had a semi-structured approach. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a limited number of interview questions and follow-up questions on the interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semi-structured interviews help the researcher build rapport with participants, allow for greater flexibility in the direction of the interview, can lead to exploration of unknown areas of interest, and produce richer data other forms of data collection, such as an open-ended questionnaire (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Smith, 1995).

Interviews typically lasted 20 to 40 minutes and were performed in-person or via video conference (i.e., FaceTime or Skype). In-person interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee. I encouraged participants to choose a location that was both quiet enough to conduct the interview and comfortable for them. Although in-person interviews were preferred, video conference interviews are also appropriate because of their similarity to in-person interviews as the researcher can see and hear interviewees' verbal and nonverbal communication. Additionally, the option of a video conference interview allowed for the interviewing of participants who had issues with proximity, mobility, and/or limited availability. The video conference interview option is particularly salient because I recruited from online social networking websites and some participants were not located in the same geographic area.

The interviews explored individuals' expectations, changes in expectations, and relational quality with their romantic partner (See Appendix E). Questions revolved around expectations for one's romantic relationship (e.g., behaviors, responsibilities, communication, etc.), the occurrence of changes in expectations, how individuals address changes in expectations (e.g., whether individuals discuss changes in expectations with their partner and how they discuss changes), the types of CMC partners use to communicate on a regular basis (i.e., telephone calls, text messaging, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), and expectations for communication occurring via CMC (e.g., typical or acceptable behaviors). Interview questions investigated changes in expectations for communication occurring via CMC, how individuals address changes in expectations for communicating via CMC, and the relationship between relational quality and use of CMC.

The first set of questions was intended to orient participants to thinking about and sharing expectations in their romantic relationship. The second set of questions was intended to elicit responses about how participants communicate with their romantic partner via CMC, expectations for use of CMC, violations when using CMC, and responses to CMC expectancy violations (RQ1 and RQ2). The third set of questions focused on how individuals' expectations for using CMC with their romantic partner may have changed and how partners discuss such changes (RQ3). Finally, the last set of interview questions explored the relationship between expectations for using CMC, changing expectations for CMC, and relational quality in romantic relationships (RQ4 and RQ5). After each interview, participants were thanked for their participation and asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up conversation (i.e., member checking).

**Recording data.** I recorded the interviews using a small hand-held audio recording device. The files were then transferred to a password-protected computer in a password protected folder. All interviews were transcribed by two undergraduate students and me. The students underwent transcription training and guidelines prior to transcribing the interviews. In most cases, I was present when the students were transcribing. The transcription process produced a total of 367 pages. All identifying information, including participants' names and the names of their romantic partners, children and loved ones, as well as specific locations were camouflaged to protect the participants' identity.

### **Data Analysis**

**Establishing data credibility.** In contrast to objectivist research, qualitative or interpretivist researchers generally regard those they interview as knowledgeable about their own life experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Consequently, participants are deemed capable of evaluating the truthfulness of the descriptions, themes, and findings that researchers extract from their life experiences. This technique is referred to as member validation or member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In short, conducting a member check means taking findings back to the field to determine whether participants recognize them as true or accurate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Although some challenges exist, member checking provides an opportunity to summarize preliminary findings and assess the adequacy of the data.

To establish validity and credibility of the data set, I performed member checks with a subset of my sample ( $n = 12$ ). Participants were contacted via email and received a copy of their interview transcript, themes with definitions from the analysis process, and quotes from their interview that were exemplars of each theme. I asked participants to review their interview transcript first to help recall our conversation and to ensure accuracy. Then, participants were

asked to review the themes and their definitions, as well as the quotes extracted from their interview and consider if they believe the theme is an accurate representation of their statement. St. Pierre (1999) suggests asking participants questions such as “What did I get wrong?” or “Have I been fair?” For this reason, during the member check participants were asked similar questions including, “Do you feel how you communicate with your romantic partner is accurately represented in the themes?” and “Do you feel anything is missing from your interview or the information you provided?” Most participants responded with a brief email in agreement with the themes, definitions, and their interview quotes. I did not receive any responses stating that the participant felt their interview and exemplars were a misrepresentation of their relationship or our interview. In many cases, respondents offered to provide additional examples if needed or asked if I required additional participants.

**Conducting the thematic analysis.** To analyze the data, I performed a thorough thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework. A thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a thematic analysis is a highly valuable qualitative method, as it cultivates core skills that are useful in coding many other types of data analysis. In other words, the ability to successfully perform a thematic analysis will assist researchers in performing other types of qualitative data analyses. Another advantage to conducting a thematic analysis is that the method is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective, making it a more flexible and useful method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis is appropriate for my dissertation because it is exploratory in nature; the project looks to gain a general understanding of expectations and changing expectations via CMC. Additionally, the study does not seek to confirm an already established set of themes or categorizations of expectancy

violations. Furthermore, past research investigating the use of CMC in romantic relationships supports the use of a thematic analysis to examine qualitative data (e.g., Kelly, Miller-Ott & Duran, 2017; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). For example, Miller-Ott and Kelly (2015) investigated the expectations that romantic partners have for cell phone use during time spent together and how they manage expectancy violations.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis is widely accepted in the social sciences as it offers a clear and useable framework. As previously mentioned, the goal is to identify themes or patterns that are significant and use those themes to address the research phenomena. A successful thematic analysis summarizes the data, as well as interprets and makes sense of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two distinct levels of themes exist: semantic and latent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Semantic themes are explicit, surface level themes that simply represent participant responses. Latent themes move beyond the topic to focus on interpreting and explaining the responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that latent themes "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84).

I performed a thematic analysis per Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The steps are as follows: (a) become familiar with the data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define themes, and (f) write up the findings. During the first step of the analysis, I became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. I made notes of my early thoughts and impressions, as well as highlighted interesting sections of data. In the second step of the thematic analysis I began to generate initial codes by reducing data into fragments or small chunks of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, open coding was used as I did not have an already established set of codes. Instead, I worked to

develop and modify the codes throughout the coding process. During the third step of the process I began to search for themes in the codes. I was looking for a pattern that captured something of significance from the data for each research question. During the fourth step, I reviewed, modified, and developed preliminary themes based on the themes developed in step three. I also began to gather data (i.e., direct quotes) that were relevant to each theme. Gathering data for each theme helps to determine whether the data supports the theme or if the theme needs further consideration and revision.

The fifth step involves refining and defining the themes and subthemes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this step, I decided on final labels for each theme, as well as clear definitions that capture the essence of each theme in a concise manner. Member checking typically occurs between steps five and six, as the researcher needs to have determined themes, developed clear definitions, and found exemplars in the data set before taking findings back to the field to determine whether participants recognize them as true or accurate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The final step is to product the report or write up of the themes and subthemes as they relate to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The writeup involves transforming the analysis of the data into an interpretable piece of writing, including compelling examples from the data that relate to the themes, research questions, and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I provide such a report in the following section.

#### **IV. Findings**

I will begin by explaining the tiered levels of communication individuals use to communicate with their romantic partner. After this, I will unpack the themes and subthemes uncovered through the thematic analysis as they relate to the research questions. Each theme and subtheme is accompanied by a definition and examples from the data set.



## **Tiers of Communication Between Romantic Partners**

During the interview process, participants were asked how they typically communicate with their romantic partner and what types of CMC they use to communicate with their partner on a regular basis. After in-depth review of their responses, it became clear that different levels of communication, including CMC, exist for romantic couples. For my dissertation, I refer to them as tiers of communication because participants made a clear distinction between the most important forms of communication used in their relationship, as well as alternative methods used on occasion and/or that served a specific purpose. The tiers are significant to the present study because partners may have more strict expectations or appraise expectancy violations differently for forms of CMC that are used more frequently or are of higher importance. Additionally, the tiers of communication are significant as they are a clear demonstration of media richness theory (MRT; Daft & Lengel, 1986). The subsequent sections describes and provides evidence of each tier, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings.

**Tier #1: Face-to-face communication.** Most participants responded that the most prominent form of communication in their relationship was FtF or in-person communication. Almost all participants were cohabitating, therefore, FtF was the most natural and convenient form of communication. Respondents claimed FtF communication was used for daily, routine communication, as well as significant conversations about serious issues such as financial concerns, relationship issues, as well as other major relationship decisions. Most participants preferred FtF communication to all other forms due to the high levels of information richness and clarity. For example, one participant Cait stated, “Well we, so we live together. So, when we’re here we’re always communicating verbally” (line 142). Marques shared, “I’m big on, I

prefer face-to-face communication. If I can't do that, I want to talk to someone, so there's always something I call her about usually" (lines 113-115). Finally, one participant stated,

So, it's like one or the other. If he's home, we're very present with each other...we're, like, physically communicating and talking. It's not like I'm going to text him because he's upstairs, you know, I'll holler upstairs to him or whatever (Heather, lines 118-120).

**Tier #2: Video conferencing, voice-to-voice, and SMS.** The second tier of communication between romantic couples included video conferencing (i.e., Skype and FaceTime), voice-to-voice communication (i.e., telephone calls via cellphone, landline, etc.), and text-based communication (i.e., text messaging, instant messaging, and email). These forms of communication were not as essential as FtF communication, but were still used frequently. Most participants reported in addition to FtF communication, they regularly interacted with their partner through phone calls and text messaging. Text messaging was the most prominent second tier form of communication. Respondents claimed text-based communication was a convenient way to keep in contact with their partner throughout the day, including sending reminders, coordinating schedules, and showing affection. Text-based communication occurred through a variety of outlets, such as traditional text messaging via cell phone, as well as web-based applications such as *Facebook Chat*, *Google Chat*, and *WhatsApp*. Each method allows for the sending and receiving of text-based messages, picture messages, and the exchange of links to websites, locations, etc. For example, when one participant was asked what form of communication she and her partner use most frequently if they are unable to speak FtF, she stated, "Text. It would definitely be text. Yeah, definitely texting" (Lindsey, line 42). Another participant who does not live in the same country as her romantic partner shared,

On a daily basis through *Facebook* messenger. Since I've been in graduate school, we Skype each other quite often probably four to five times a week if it's a good week or at least once or twice a week if it's a really heavy week. I mean occasionally we use WhatsApp. It's kind of strange. We like, talk with each other using *Facebook* messenger, but we send photos and media to each other by *WhatsApp* and then face to face on *Skype* (Alison, lines 135-139).

Another second-tier form of communication was video conferencing/chatting.

Interestingly, both proximal and non-proximal partners reported using video conferencing to talk to their romantic partner. One participant who cohabitates with her partner stated,

...also, we FaceTime too, as well. Uh, even when we were in the same city, sometimes just to show each other something cool. Uh, but also specifically when he's gone, we do that too just to see each other's faces and have that connection (Alicia, lines 18-20).

Another participant shared,

Daily, generally through *Facebook*, like, *Facebook* chat. Um, so text messages. Um, and when we can make it, we don't have a fixed schedule for that, whenever we can make it, we meet each other on *Skype* and talk through *Skype* with um, with video, but that really depends on our schedules really (Patrick, lines 86-89).

**Tier #3: Applications.** The final tier of communication reported by participants included popular web-based applications included *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat*, *Google Calendar*, among others. Although participants reported that they did not use these applications to communicate with their romantic partner daily, they did use applications to supplement their communication overall. In many cases, respondents claimed using applications for entertainment purposes such as sending funny pictures or posts, sharing news articles, and sending pictures of

themselves or their daily activities. One participant stated, "...it's mostly if, it's mostly if one of us sees an article on Facebook that we think the other one would like, it's just easier to send it in messenger. But we don't really talk on it. Ya know?" (Keith, lines 97-98). Another respondent shared, "...we do Snapchat. Um, I don't think we really use, the only thing we use Facebook for is to tag stuff, like tag each other in things." (Stephanie, lines 31-32). Finally, Alicia described an application she and her partner use particularly when they are apart for long periods of time. She described the application saying,

...yeah, it's called Couple. And you can connect with each other, there's a chat feature, it shows your location, uh, you can share, uh, pictures over it. Also, you can do this thing where you go into the screen and it sends a notification to the other person and you follow, it's really silly, you follow your finger around on the screen and the other person matches it up with you and then when you match, it's like a kiss (lines 30-34).

### **Expectations and Expectancy Violations for CMC**

The aim of my dissertation is to further understand expectations and changing expectations between romantic couples. Importantly, the interviews inquired about how changes in expectations are communicated between partners and how the changes affect relationship quality. RQ1 asked, "What behavioral expectations do romantic partners have when using CMC?" During the interview, participants were asked what types of behaviors they expect from their partner when communicating via CMC, and whether their partner has ever done something surprising or unexpected when using CMC. Responses uncovered participants' expectancies, as well as expectancy violations. After in-depth analysis, I uncovered that the findings and themes for expected behaviors and expectancy violations corresponded with one another. Not surprisingly, most communicative behaviors participants expected from their romantic partner

would be considered violations if they did not occur or if the opposite behavior occurred.

Therefore, the following section will define and provide evidence of themes for both expected behaviors and positively- and negatively-valenced expectancy violations.

Regarding expectations for communication via CMC, participants' responses revealed four main themes: (a) response, (b) clear communication, (c) task-oriented versus relational messages and (d) respect. After discussing behavioral expectations participants were asked to share if their partner had ever behaved in a way that was surprising or unexpected when communicating via CMC. In many cases, participants reported that their partner was consistent in their communication style and rarely acted out of the ordinary. Of those participants who provided an example of an unexpected behavior of their partner, both positively- and negatively-valenced violations emerged. Positively-valenced violations refer to behaviors that were unexpected, but reflected positively on their partner or the state of their relationship. In other words, positive violations made the participant feel appreciated by their partner. Negatively-valenced violations refer to behaviors that were unexpected and made the participant feel unsure about their partner's action and/or the state of the relationship. Although negative violations were discussed, the violations in this sample were not severe enough to cause major relational conflict or turmoil. Regarding expectancy violations, four main themes emerged, including (a) lack of communication, (b) disrespect, (c) sharing/posting as a violation, and (d) affectionate messages. The following will define and provide evidence of each expectation theme and subtheme, followed by the corresponding violation theme.

**Expectation: A response.** Theme 1 was the expectation of a response, which appeared in nearly every participant's discussion of expectations. Essentially, if one partner sends a message through a form of CMC they expect a response from the other romantic partner. Alicia simply

stated, “Well, I expect him to respond frequently and he does” (line 45). Another participant who frequently calls her husband stated, “I usually expect that he’ll answer right away” (Ashley, line 53). Sam put a time frame around when he expects a response from his wife, but later in the interview he made a point to say that he does understand if it takes longer for her to respond when she is at work. He stated, “Um, usually respond back within the hour, I guess” (line 36). Participants provided rich descriptions of the frequency and type of responses they expected from their partner, thus, revealing three subthemes in the data. The subthemes regarding the response theme included, (a) promptness, (b) response is method-dependent, (c) acknowledgement.

***Promptness.*** The first subtheme refers to participants’ expectation that when they send a message to their romantic partner via CMC they will receive a response in a timely manner when possible. Many participants qualified the notion of promptness by acknowledging that a prompt response may not always be possible due to work responsibilities or busy daily schedules.

However, they did expect their partner to respond as promptly as possible. Most participants did not give a specific time frame in which they expected their partner to respond. Referring to her husband, Stephanie stated, “Like, generally a quick response. Because if he, like, lingers I’m like, ‘Oh my god, what are you doing?’ And I have to call him” (lines 51-52). Bob said, “But just, not exactly promptness, but promptness to a point” (line 175). Finally, Marques shared,

Again, it’s probably an unspoken expectation. It’s not something, it’s not something if I don’t hear back in 30 minutes or an hour that, you know, I worry or either one of us has an issue with. But again, I think some of it is just how we have communicated with one another. We regularly respond quickly so I think that has just become the expectation (lines 151-155).

*Method-dependent.* The second subtheme was that receiving a response was method dependent. Many participants shared that although they expect a response, the time, frequency, and/or content of the response was dependent on what form of CMC the couple was using. The type of CMC being used might also be dependent on what is available or acceptable for the situation (i.e., work, school, home, etc.) For instance, if partners were interacting through an instant message service on their desktop computers, the expectation for a quick response or a long message decreased due to work responsibilities. Conversely, participants who knew their partner had their cell phone near them at all times appeared to expect quicker response time or message frequency. When referring to her husband's new Apple iWatch, one participant said, "It buzzes on his wrist every time I text him, so he really has no excuse" (Scarlett, line 232). One participant's partner lives in a different country and, therefore, the couple relies heavily on CMC to stay connected and maintain their relationship. Their reliance on CMC also affects their ability to respond to one another. Alison shared:

...but I think part of it is because we don't really get to see each other regularly and this is our only way of communicating. It's like we have the ability to answer each other right away or we just do what we can and that's kind of like, how its developed. (lines 178-181)

Another respondent shared how she does expect her husband to answer her phone calls or call her back promptly, yet if the communication occurs through text messaging he does not use emoticons (i.e., emojis), often responds with short messages, or does not respond at all:

Um, as far as text messages go, I am used to, so I expect him to, like, reply with short answers that are clear, with no emojis. And I'm like, emoji, paragraph, like, I write all kinds of stuff. So, he's just really to the point. And if I'm writing to him and friends at the

same time to make plans, he almost never responds to anything. And I just expect that now, I know he's listening. I know he's following along, but I don't expect him to reply at all (Ashley, lines 73-78).

**Acknowledgement.** The third and final subtheme was acknowledgement. Respondents expected that their partner, even if they did not have time to call or give a full response, would send a message acknowledging their message. In many cases, the participant simply expected a confirmation from the other person that the message had been received. Katherine shared her frustration when not receiving acknowledgement from her husband saying, "I sent him a really long text yesterday being like, 'This is why I feel like this...X, Y, Z.' And he didn't acknowledge it at all, like, didn't say, 'Okay, we'll talk about it when we get home'" (lines 187-188). Similarly, Karen expressed that she did not need an instant response or long message back during the work day, but that she did expect her text messages to be acknowledged by her partner. She stated, "I expect that when I'm texting him he acknowledges my text message even if its hours later, you know, just acknowledging it" (lines 115-116). Another participant stated, "Um, but I don't know if I expect anything, like, specific from it. Maybe just a good resp-, like a response, might be the only thing. Um, like a confirmation" (Stephanie, lines 58-59). One participant shared the importance of acknowledgement or a confirmation as it relates to making plans with her partner. She said,

...so usually I expect him to the do same or especially if it's something like, like we have plans. Like, you were coming over today at 4:30 and so, like, I'll text him, like, 'Tonight at 4:30 is still good for you, right?' So, like, I expect him to confirm that with me so I'm not lingering and not knowing the plan, you know? (Cait, lines 233-236).



**Expectation: Clear communication.** Theme 2 regarding expected behaviors was clear communication. Participants expected a partner to use clear, concise communication when interacting via CMC. Clear communication included being purposeful and direct in their messages, as well as using open, honest, and respectful communication. Theme two reflects the potential lack of nonverbal and verbal cues available in some forms of CMC, thus the need for clear messages between partners. One participant stated, “I guess just responding the best she can throughout the day and being as clear as she can. Usually, it it’s a text that’s bewildering, we’ll call each other, you know, to clear things up” (Bob, lines 172-173). Another respondent stated, “...I expect him to, like, reply with short answers that are clear with no emojis” (Ashley, line 74). Finally, one participant shared,

I think it’s more contextual to what’s going on, like, with the conversation. So, it we’re in a conversation that’s more serious, then I know it’s gonna be a longer text. And if we’re just talking about random stupid stuff, then it’s gonna be shorter and more to the point (Robert, lines 122-125).

**Violation: Lack of Communication.** The first CMC expectancy violation theme was lack of communication and participants experienced it as a negatively-valenced violation varying in severity and importance. Lack of communication refers to not responding or not providing acknowledgement of messages from one’s romantic partner. Most participants reported that their partner typically responded promptly, therefore, if there was a lack of communication was noticeable. Some respondents expressed that the lack of communication was simply an annoyance, especially if the matter was time sensitive. A few participants reported experiencing anxiety and concern if their partner did not respond. One participant shared how she reacts if her husband does not respond to a message or if she has not heard from him in a while. She stated,

“Um, well, first I would do “Check my iPhone” to see where his iPhone is, and he does the same” (Lindsey, line 93). Another participant shared an example that he perceived as both highly important and severe. The situation did not negatively affect the relationship but does demonstrate the importance of open and honest communication, even during difficult conversations:

Um, when we Skyped that happened, it was like two times in our entire relationship now, or like, since we were dating that happened twice or so where she feels very bad and she wants to tell me, and we, we’re on Skype and we’re talking about it and she gets, she doesn’t, she wasn’t able to calm down and then she just hung up on me because she didn’t want to talk anymore. It wasn’t necessarily because we were having a fight or something, it was unrelated to us, but it made her so upset that she didn’t want to talk about it anymore and just hung up. (Patrick, lines 144-150)

Another participant shared that he understood when there was a lack of communication from his wife, but that it was still frustrating. He stated:

I never think she’s ignoring me, so it’s always kind of like, “All right, when is she going to get out of that meeting, when can I get my reply?” Its more just me being impatient, but yes, I think that technology has driven that instant, I need instant information, its technology, give it to me now! So, yes, I have gotten frustrated at times because it’s, like, all right what’s going on, I’m trying to make plans... (Ryan, lines 212-216)

**Expectation: Task-oriented v. relational messages.** Theme 3 for expected behaviors via CMC was task-oriented versus relational messages. Participants often made the distinction between which types of messages they typically sent via CMC. Task-oriented messages referred to information regarding daily activities or responsibilities, such as appointment reminders, child

and pet care logistics, and shopping lists, among others. Relational messages referred to messages sent to share fun or interesting information with their partner, inquiries about one's day, as well as loving and affectionate messages between partners. Some relational messages also contained a level of significance or seriousness; for that reason some participants reported not engaging in relational communication via CMC. Theme 3 appeared to be relationship specific; some participants stated that most communication via CMC was strictly task-oriented, while others reported sending and receiving both task and relational messages with their romantic partner. One participant simply stated, "...but we don't like, have serious communication via text message or I mean definitely not text message" (Heather, lines 177-178). When asked about how much of their communication via text messaging was task-oriented versus relationship-oriented, one participant stated:

It's right now the middle. So, like, we won't, we'll give each other a heads up. So, like I said it's like, 'Hey, I texted my parents about the fact that we're thinking about buying a house.' And we would never have that conversation over text. But, then, when he gets home he knows that we can, we'll have that conversation. Um, we do sometimes on the other end of the spectrum, like, share like, little memes or links to stuff. I'd say that's like 10% of what we share. (Jessica, lines 174-178)

Marques explained how he and his partner use phone calls and text messaging mostly for task-oriented communication:

You know, I see her when I wake up in the morning and when I come home. And so our phone calls can be very short and sweet. And, I guess, the expectation is I don't think either one of us, you know, if she calls me and I'm busy or in a hurry and I'm short and to the point, I'm not really loving. I think the expectation is we don't hold it against each

other and if we kind of, we understand that phone calls especially, are very, for the most part, are very informational. I called, I called her today, 30 minutes ago about something on insurance for [child's name] and I just wanted to call and tell her, it wasn't a lovey dovey thing but, you know, we use that, you know, when we're talking face to face and then text messaging, again, there's probably minimal expectations. We use text messages informationally, sending grocery lists and stuff like that. (lines 126-136)

**Violation: Sharing/posting as a violation.** The second theme for expectancy violations via CMC was posting as a violation. Participants reported both positively- and negatively-valenced violations regarding a partner posting about them or their relationship on CMC, namely, social media websites. Positive violations often occurred when a partner who does not frequent SNS, posted a kind, thoughtful, affectionate message (e.g., picture, status update, check-in, anniversary posts) about their significant other. One respondent shared a positive posting violation that made her feel grateful for her relationship with her partner because he was willing to publicly share his feelings for her via SNS. She stated,

Also, he'll randomly post pictures on Instagram, he has a pretty big following, and he'll post pictures of me or something we've done together and, you know, express how grateful he is, so those things definitely mean a lot because they're unexpected. (Alicia, lines 59-62)

Another participant shared that her husband rarely posts on his SNS, therefore, it is surprising when he posts about her or their relationship. She also expressed appreciating such posts because other people can see it as well. When asked how the posts make her feel, she said, "Good. It's happy. It's nice to see it, you know, him say it to everybody and not just in the privacy of our own home" (Scarlett, lines 194-195).

Negative violations occurred when a partner behaved in a way that was outside the participant's comfort level for the relationship, such as posting too often or sharing information about the relationship early on or before discussing it within the couple. One participant stated, "There are, for example, the only surprising thing every now and then will be like, maybe it's a Facebook post and I may be surprised on how repetitive, you know, or how frequently she's sending something out" (Marques, lines 170-172). Another participant expressed,

Um, and she hasn't done it recently but there was a while where she was just sending me humane society dogs, which I like but I had to tell her, "This kind of, like, I wanna do this but, like, I just don't have the proper place to do it yet." So, it's kind of, I wouldn't say annoying, but it kind of bums me out a little bit. (Steven, lines 192-196)

**Violation: Affectionate messages.** Theme 3 for expectancy violations was affectionate messages, which were positively-valenced violations and varied in severity and importance. Often affectionate messages referred to messages that were sent with the intention to make the other person happy such as humorous messages, SNS posts or pictures, but this theme also included loving or sexual messages (i.e., sexting). Participants reported that affectionate messages made them feel confident and stable in their relationship, as well as closer to their romantic partner. One participant shared that he was pleasantly surprised when his girlfriend started sending affectionate and sexual messages via SMS. He shared, "I was genuinely surprised how she would talk about sex in texting" (Keith, line 143). Another participant expressed that her partner sends her funny, affectionate, goofy messages or pictures on a regular basis. Yet, even though she knows this about him, his spontaneity is still surprising and helps keep their relationship interesting:

...one of the reasons I feel in love with him, cause he's really weird! And, like, it's never a dull moment cause I dated a lot of people who it was, like, I dated them for, like, two weeks cause they were so boring, that I was like, "Oh my god! It's the same thing every day." I am never bored with [husband's name]. Like, he's always, like yesterday he sent me, like, a series of, like, texts of his face, making weird faces. Which was kind of obnoxious cause I'm like, in the kitchen and he's texting me these weird faces but, um, so he's like, always doing something out of the ordinary. (Cait, lines 240-246)

Another participant shared that her partner does pleasantly surprise her, saying "Yeah, actually, um, he posts really sweet things on Facebook sometimes and that does really brighten my day. He's, like, very affectionate and cute" (Kristina, lines 161-162). Finally, one respondent shared "Um, I get surprised if I get a random, like, 'I love you text' that is not connected to some other conversation" (Cynthia, lines 179-180).

**Expectation: Respect.** Finally, theme 4 regarding expected behaviors was respect. Respect was a clear expectation voiced by participants, but also a latent theme woven into most participant responses regarding expected behaviors. Respect referred to acting in a manner that was considerate of both one's romantic partner and the relationship. Generally, participants expected their partner to act appropriately when communicating with one another and when using CMC. Respect or acting respectfully is a main component of responding to one another, providing clear communication and the use of task versus relational messages via CMC. Romantic partners must be able to notice and abide by their partners' expectations to be respectful of their relationship. When talking about her expectations for her husband, one participant shared, "But other than that I think I just expect respect. Like, that's like, I think our biggest thing. Because if you can respect the relationship then I don't think there's anything that

can really go wrong” (Stephanie, lines 139-141). Another participant and his wife discussed the amount of information posted on SNS as a matter of respect for themselves, their relationship, and their son. Edward simply stated, “. . .we’ve kind of both agreed that we don’t like a whole lot of social media PDA or, um, we don’t like to post a lot for the world to see it or be able to take, um, copies of it” (lines 167-169). Finally, one participant discussed the expectation of respect established early in her relationship with her partner:

I think both of us knew that we were interested and cared about each other’s lives, but never bombarded each other. . .It was reassuring because as much as it sounds nice and it makes you feel good, I respect your life and you respect my life. It’s always reassuring to have something pop up on a Wednesday afternoon to remind you or let you know, to reassure you that the other person is thinking of you (Everly, lines 235-245).

**Violation: Disrespect.** The final theme for violations was disrespect, meaning any behaviors that were perceived as discourteous to a partner or the relationship. Acting disrespectfully included behaviors such as posting about one’s partner or the relationship without permission and violations of privacy, among others. In many cases lack of communication was also seen as disrespectful. Overall, participants did not report experiencing incidents of disrespect, but spoke in the hypothetical regarding potential negative violations. One participant who works for the government, talked about the importance of keeping their relationship and private life off CMC because it could threaten their jobs and safety. She shared that she would be surprised if he were to violate that understanding:

And a part of me has an inherent fear because [name of college] owns his cell phone, like, I wouldn’t put anything on there that probably wouldn’t feel comfortable with [name of college] knowing, cause technically they pay for it, they can read it. Um, so, no it’s

pretty day to day. Anything, anything about, you know, disagreements we've had or real personal information, probably just wait to talk to him in person. (Scarlett, lines 149-153)

Another participant discussed her view on responding as a matter of respect for the other person, therefore, if her partner does not respond to a text or phone call she perceives the violation as disrespectful:

I think it's because I'm first a planner and second a worrier. So, if I say 'What are we doing next Friday?' or 'What time does dinner start?' I'm asking because I need to know for a reason, not just to try to interrupt his day. So, I think it's courteous to respond back when people ask something. (Everly, lines 215-220)

### **Discussing Expectations for CMC**

During the interview process, participants were also asked if and how they talk to their romantic partner about their expectation for communicating via CMC. Many participants reported that they did not have an explicit conversation with their partner about their expectations for using CMC. Respondents described the discussion or understanding of expectations as a process that happened organically or that evolved with the progression of the romantic relationship. Participants who reported having an explicit conversation with their partner about their expectations regarding CMC stated that they openly voiced their concerns with the goal of influencing change. Often participants opened up about their expectations when a situation arose or when they felt they felt it was necessary to share their communication needs with their partner:

You know, in the beginning, when we were negotiating our relationship, I think there were some miscommunications. And I think really the problem is both of us, we're too nice about everything and I think, you know, I don't, we necessarily didn't make certain



expectations for the relationship super clear in the beginning. And then we didn't want to like, hurt the other one's feelings. And then, finally, we talked and we were like, 'We just have to talk about this.' And then we did, and then we were like, 'Oh, this is fine. Oh, I just didn't understand you.' Or whatever. (Keith, lines 207-213)

Another stated, "So, we talked about that and how at times we're going to have to put other things first, but how we can also reinforce the relationship through that constant communication with each other and being very open" (Alicia, lines 94-96).

### **Responses to Expectancy Violations**

RQ2 investigated how partners respond to expectancy violations via CMC.

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that their response to an expectancy violation depends on the valence and severity of the violation. In other words, partners are less likely to acknowledge or address the violation if it does not threaten or disrupt the state of the relationship. Therefore, negatively-valenced violations often received the most attention between romantic partners.

Regarding negatively-valenced violations participants reported that they have had or would have an explicit conversation with their partner about the violation. Those who had experienced such violations and discussed the violation with their partner stated that they felt the need to share what they did not like about the violation, clarify expectations, and provide an opportunity for both parties to understand one another. One participant stated,

So, she posted some stuff earlier in our relationship and I'm not big on putting personal shit too much on social media...So, when we first started dating that was kind of a thing for me where I'm like, 'Why are you putting, putting this shit out there, you're a professional, people can look at that and see that as a reflection upon you as a professional.' ...it was viewed negatively by myself, you know, initially. And we talked

about it and she understood my point of view and doesn't do it as much now... (Robert, lines 157-165)

A prominent type of negatively-valenced violation reported by participants was lack of communication. When specifically asked how they addressed the violation, participants reported various coping techniques. Some participants stated that if they did not receive a response from their partner they would simply wait until they did receive a response or speak to their partner at a later time (i.e., at home, after work, etc.). Other participants would send a follow up call or text message requesting a response or to check in with their partner. A few participants revealed that if they did not receive a response or some type of acknowledgement from their partner within a reasonable amount of time, they would check the GPS location of their partner's cell phone to verify where they were and gain peace of mind regarding their partners' safety. One participant shared, "I would freak out! Yeah I'm too anxious for him to not respond. Like, if he didn't respond, I have GPS on him" (Stephanie, lines 88-89). Another participant appraised a lack of communication as a moderately severe violation because she feels responding or acknowledging her messages is courteous and a sign of respect:

I would say 'Sometimes when you don't respond to me, I don't know if you haven't seen it or if you're just too lazy to text me 'yes' or 'no' back or, you know, I don't, I don't know if you don't text me back.' (Everly, 286-289)

Regarding positively-valenced violations, participants reported acknowledging and/or expressing appreciation for the affectionate posts or messages they received. Acknowledgement included making a light-hearted joke or comment about a post or message that they liked.

Participants reported showing appreciation by providing positive feedback to their partner or by

“liking” or commenting on the SNS post or picture. One participant said she make a point to tell her partner how much his affectionate posts of messages mean to her:

Yeah, I definitely have. But I’ll maybe send him something back or say something like, ‘You’re the best, thank you so much and I miss you.’ Or also, on Instagram, because it’s such a public platform, I think it’s really cool that’s he’s outwardly acknowledging our relationship and he’s perfectly comfortable with me commenting on there and, you know, and doing the kissy emoticon. (Alicia, lines 71-75)

### **Changing Expectations between Romantic Couples**

RQ3 investigated how and why individuals’ CMC expectations for their romantic partner change during their relationship. The overarching idea from participant responses was the expectation of more communication or interaction with their romantic partner:

I think just expecting a little bit more, um, especially, when we moved in together. Just again, courtesy things. If you going to the store, asking the other person, “Do you need anything?” Updates, you know, if we are busy and we don’t have a lot of time to talk face-to-face, if there’s things that are going on or questions about plans. If we were apart for 3, 4 or 5, however many days when we first started dating, we could go that whole time and not interact or communicate with one another at all. Whereas, now I feel like both of us are gone for 12 days and I don’t know if I expect to hear from him every day, but I definitely expect to hear from him. (Everly, 322-335)

Under the umbrella of increased communication, four themes emerged including, (a) availability, (b) information sharing, (c) increase in media used, and (d) increased communication via select media. The following will operationalize each theme and provide evidence from the data.

**Availability.** Theme 1 regarding increased communication between romantic partners was availability. Participants responded that as their relationship with their partner became more committed or due to life events, they expected that their partner would have a higher level of availability when communicating via CMC. The subtheme included expectations of prompt responses and that partners were accessibly through various CMC outlets. One participant shared, “Yeah, yeah, I think I get more frustrated if I don’t have a more immediate response because, ‘cause we have a kid...” (Ryan, lines 244-245). Another participant expressed availability in terms of not avoiding communication with one’s partner:

I mean since we are married and we’re deeper in our relationship, yea I feel like there’s more expectation there. Because we’re, we’re a family now. So, you know, you can’t just ignore your family or not answer me just because you’re mad (Cait, lines 279-281).

**Information sharing.** Theme 2 was information sharing. Information sharing refers to the expectations that romantic partners will share more (i.e., general information, pictures, links to articles, music, etc.) via CMC as their relationship progresses. Information sharing did not include an increase in the disclosure of personal or private information via CMC. Overall, participants reported that as they got to know their partner better, there was an expectation that more information would be shared between them as a way of staying connected with one another. One participant shared that she and her husband are constantly sharing information or articles with one another now that they are more connected via CMC. She stated,

I think it’s mostly news for us, probably political news. Ah, you know, if you find a good story you share it, you know? Some politician makes an ass of themselves, I want to be the first one to see it or tag me in it if you put it on Facebook so that I can read it with you. (Lindsey, lines 256-259)

Another participant expressed the need for her and her husband to share more information on a regular basis to coordinate their life together. She said,

I mean we probably just mutually know we need more because we have details we have to sort out that we didn't before. Who's going to pick her up from daycare? Um, you know, who's going to pick her up from my parents' house, who's in charge of bedtime? Did you pick up diapers? You know, like stuff we just didn't have to deal with before.

(Melissa, lines 289-293)

**Variety of CMC.** Theme 3 was an increase in the types and variety of CMC used between partners. The expectation was that as the relationship progressed, partners would begin to connect on additional forms for media such as Facebook, Instagram, and/or have shared documents they could both access (i.e., Google calendar or spreadsheet). One participant shared the experience of her husband getting his first smartphone, she stated,

Only because when he got the smartphone. Like, other than that, all he could do was call and text. So, I think once that changed it kind of opened up, you know, a little bit more of a genre of communications, you know, instead of it just being like, calling and texting, he could like, tag me in stuff and like, Snapchat again. (Stephanie, lines 287-290)

Another participant shared,

When she moved away from [name of country] we Skyped maybe twice or three times before we started dating officially. Um, and then also, we also only Skyped on the weekends. Whereas now, we Skype whenever we can make it. Um, WhatsApp is something we added later in our relationship I would say. Um, just because it became more popular in my family and they were sending pictures of my nephew and stuff like that and I just would forward them to her, so that also changed. (Patrick, lines 177-182)

**Select methods.** Finally, theme 4 regarding how individuals' CMC expectations change was increased communication via a select method(s). The change refers to partners expecting that once they integrated a certain form of CMC into their relationship, communication via that preferred form would increase. The expectation was not that all communication via CMC would increase, just the communication via desired media. Preference occurred for a variety of reasons including availability and personal preferences. One participant shared that her and her partner's overall use of CMC has changed, stating, "We definitely do it more often than we did when we started [dating]" (Jessica, line 224). One participant expressed that CMC, namely text messaging, was clearly integrated into their relationship, she stated,

I would say that yes, but in a positive way because we've been able to communicate more and disclose more about what we want in the relationship and also using, you know, the different platforms and text, you know. Sometimes you can be more honest with the other individual when it's not face-to-face. And although sometimes we've been apart and have been forced to talk about those things, I think that it's been really useful, you know?

(Alicia, lines 188-122)

A significant portion of the interview focused on why and how individuals' expectations for their romantic partner change over the course of their relationship. RQ3 focused specifically on these issues highlighting the importance of understanding changing expectations because of potential for expectancy violations and an impact on the relationship. Although most participants viewed changes and adjustments in expectations as a normal, natural part of a progressing relationship, themes emerged regarding why expectations change and the way partners communicate about those changes. The second part of RQ3 explored why individuals' CMC expectations of their romantic partner change. An analysis of the data revealed three clear themes

for changes in expectations: life events, the evolution of technology, and relationship commitment level. Themes will be operationalized and supporting evidence from the data is provided.

**Life events.** The most prominent theme for why individuals' CMC expectations for their partner change was life events. Participants expressed that as their relationship progressed changes in communication were warranted for the relationship to remain stable. Life events included experiences such as career or job changes, changes in living arrangement (e.g., long-distance to proximal), getting engaged or married, having a child, and experiencing a traumatic life event, among others. Life events often meant that one partner was going to have to change their main method of communication, or that the relationship now required that both partners work hard to increase their availability. One participant felt strongly that the addition of their daughter into the family significantly changed her expectations. She shared,

And like for instance, I was gone for a night this weekend and like, I guess I had higher expectations that when I call I do want you to answer because I'm not with my child and I want to make sure everything's okay. Like, what, what else are you doing other than like, answering my phone call if I'm not with my kid, like, and I want to know how she's doing. So, I think like, communication if we're away from each other regarding our child has upped the ante in terms of we need to stay connected. Like, I need to have access to you and you need to have access to me because of our kid. (Heather, lines 251-258)

Another participant openly shared about a particularly traumatic time in her life that had a significant impact on her expectations for her husband. She shared,

Um, we, we've both been pretty consistent with what we do, how we behave, our jobs are the same, all those things, right? A dramatic change would have been when [son's name]

had cancer. So when my son, my youngest son had cancer, um, and I was heavily medicated, cause I needed to work to keep the health insurance, um, so obviously I had to keep that, so I had to manage work and mental health. And mental health was losing cause it's not as easy to deal with, so I expected probably more out of him then. In terms of communication he had to be there every time, all the time and at the drop of a hat because if [son's name] needed something it could be life or death. (Lindsey, lines 144-151)

Finally, one participant expressed that the expectation for how affectionate message are shared has changed now that the couple is cohabitating. He stated,

...when she was in [name of state] and I was here, um, I don't know a better word to use, but our text messages and our calls were more lovey dovey is the best way to describe it. Just because we couldn't see each other and that was our primary form of communication. And so, we had to express, you know, feelings and emotions through that form of communication, whereas now that is done in person. (Marques, lines 225-229)

**Evolution of technology.** Theme 2 was the evolution of technology. Participants expressed that their expectations for using CMC to interact with their partner changed as technological updates occurred or as new technologies or methods of communicating were invented. For instance, some couples were together before text messaging became popular, therefore, earlier in their relationship they would most talk on the phone and more recently the expectation is that they will text instead. One participant simply stated, "I think they have, but I think part of it is also like the passage of time and the change of technology has shaped it, you know, because like I said, when we first started dating, oh my god, AIM was still a thing"



(Melissa, lines 272-274). Another participant highlighted the transition into using different types of CMC into their relationship saying,

So, we're talking 11 years. When, when we first started dating it probably would have been more regular phone, sort of shorter messages, if we were texting. Um, and Facebook, like, when we first started dating, like, we didn't do the friends of Facebook, he didn't even know Facebook existed. So, I got him on but I didn't want to be his friend until I knew that we were in a stable relationship. Cause I didn't know if he was a stalker, jealous kind that, again, is like my 'no-no.' Um, so outside of changes in technology my expectations haven't changed... (Lindsey, lines 135-141)

Another participant shared that her partner received an advanced piece of technology, which has increased her expectation of getting timely responses to her phone calls or text messages. She shared,

I mean, I know that [husband's name] has his phone all the time. Like, it's on him all the time. So, pretty much I would imagine if he's not in a meeting that he's able to check his phone, that he would respond, even if it was, 'I have to check, I'll let you know later.' Um, he got an iWatch for Christmas, so really the expectation is now that I get even a quicker response. Um, we'll see how that goes. (Scarlett, lines 126-130)

**Commitment level.** Theme 3 regarding why individuals CMC expectations for their partner change was commitment level. The more stable, dedicated, and comfortable relational partners became to one another, the more likely their CMC expectations were to change or be adjusted to align with the personalities of each individual and/or the overall goals of the relationship. One participant who had been with her partner for 13 years continually expressed that she knows who her partner was as a person and that although she might like him to

communicate in a certain way, it is not a natural part of his personality. However, because they are committed to one another she has changed her expectations to accept him. She shared,

I guess, I just resigned to the fact that he's very much who he is and like, anything that I'm like, 'That would be nice,' if that's not something he would naturally do then I'm not going to expect it. And it's not a disappointment necessarily, but it's like, I'm not going to come home to a dozen roses, I'm okay with that. But, just establishing that is good for both of us. (Ashley, lines 147-151)

Another participant shared,

I think, like, you know, the more we're in the relationship the more it was an expectation that we would, we would communicate more regularly, you know? Um, I think that's pretty normal in terms of, you know, when you get serious with someone you're just going to talk to that person more... (Robert, lines 178-181)

### **Communication about Changing Expectations**

RQ4 asked how romantic partners communicate about changing expectations for using CMC in their romantic relationship. Overwhelmingly, participants reported openly talking about expectations as they change. Participants shared that once the expectations had changed, one person would remind the other about the change to help further reinforce those behaviors.

Additionally, respondents reported openly discussing any upcoming deviations from what was typical or routine, as well as changes they might like to implement in the future. Regarding open and honest communication about changing expectations, one participant shared, "Um, I think it's made us stronger because now we kind of are just now more to the point. We get into a routine and then if the routine needs to change, we just tell each other..." (Scarlett, lines 254-255).

Another participant shared that he and his wife were trying to decrease the amount of time they

spent on their smartphones when at home with their son. He stated, “Um, yeah we definitely talked about it or have brought it up a couple of times. We it’s like, ‘Hey honey, your son wants to sit on your lap. Um, you know, or ‘Hey can you get off your phone and take the trash out?’ Or something like that” (Edward, lines 348-350). Finally, another respondent reiterated the need for reminders about changes in expectations, saying, “You know, sometimes I might need a few more reminders than she does. She’s got a better memory than I do, so” (Sam, lines 116-117).

Of those participants who claimed that they did not have explicit conversations with their romantic partner about their changing expectations, many said that the process of changing expectations was an organic process. In other words, the couple’s expectations evolved over time, and they figured out what worked better for their relationship as they went along. Some reported making brief comments or criticisms if a behavior or situation was not working, but not an explicit discussion about the changes that needed to be made to satisfy the needs of both parties. One participant stated,

Evolved, into just keeping each other updated for the day, um, it used to, it used to be like, it used to be not a priority, you used to just, you know, keep in touch at your own discretion and now it’s, it’s kind of a, I wouldn’t say its mandatory cause it’s not forced, like, we both work to outwardly want to, to keep up with tabs with each other and that feels like, you know, work smarter not harder when two brains are getting everything, all the information on a day then we know, you know, if I had a rough day she knows, like, oh he might need a little more sensitivity coming home or vice versa. (Bob, lines 229-235)

Another participant stated,

We've actually let it happen pretty organically. I know from the get-go since we are in different cities, we didn't want our relationship to be something that would put stress on either of us, right? Because, you know, we don't want it to feel like any kind of, like, obligation or stressful – I have to get to this place by, like, three o'clock on Friday afternoon. Because that wouldn't make either of us happy. (Kristina, lines 39-43)

### **Changing Expectations and Relationship Quality**

RQ4 and RQ5 also examined how individuals communicate about expectations, changes in expectations, and the overall quality of their romantic relationship. Responses were clear and consistent and reflected an important relationship between the state of the relationship and one's ability to change and discuss expectations. The following will unpack the consensus from participants regarding each research question and provide supporting evidence for such findings.

RQ4 asked "How do partners talk about changes in expectations and the quality of their relationship?" Participants were split on how they communicate with their partner about their expectations and relationship quality. Respondents who reported discussing such issues with their partner claimed that they would have explicit conversations about their expectations, namely, when a situation occurred in which expectations were not met, were violated and contradicted the state of the relationship. One participant shared, "I mean, I'm, we're both, well I'm especially big on communication, so anytime I can establish things clearly, I will" (Ashley, lines 222-223). Another participant expressed, "Definitely, cause I emphasized, especially when you're gone like, I need that communication, I need that, cause it helps me feel more connect to him and be agreed" (Alicia, lines 201-202). Finally, one participant shared,

...we did because of [the officiant] actually. Like she, when we, before we got married she gave us like, all, this list of all these questions that I probably have around here

somewhere. Um, and like, we actually like, did them together. So, and, so like, a lot of those questions had to do with expectations...of like, kids, and family, and marriage, and money, and like, all the tough, but really questions to ask (Cait, lines 306-310).

Some participants reported that in their relationship they did not explicitly communicate about expectations. For those participants, communication seemed to be more implicit or changes occurred based on a specific situation or experience, not because of a conversation. Some respondents described changing expectations as a process of evolution throughout the relationship. As they became more serious or committed expectations were established and met without explicit discussions. When asked if she and her partner had ever talked about changing their expectations and how it impacted their relationship, one participant stated, “Its more organic. Like, it just kind of happened or whatever” (Katherine, line 403). One participant described discussing changing expectations in his relationship saying,

...I think our communication with text and just communication in general, I guess, it kind of just evolved without talking. I really think, there are basic expectations that were talked about and followed through on but the amount that we go kind of evolved without, or maybe that’s just something that I’m missing because it’s been so long that its, it’s been, maybe that’s a conversation in my memory that I’m missing because it’s been so long that it’s been, keep each other updated, keep each other updated. (Bob, lines 240-245).

RQ5 explored the relationship between how partners communicate about expectations and changing expectations and relational quality. Overwhelmingly, participants reported that a change in an individual’s expectations for their partner or the relationship had a positive effect on the romantic relationship overall. Respondents expressed that changing expectations to better

align with the goals of the relationship or to reflect changes occurring in the relationship made the relationship stronger. Discussing and meeting changed expectations brought partners closer together, increased their connection with one another, and increased the level of trust and understand in the relationship. Heather shared, “I think if anything, the changing expectations and then meeting each other’s expectations has made us more confident in each other and more trusting in each other, like, okay, we’re on the same page...” (Lines 269-271). Another participant stated, “I think it made it stronger because now we, kind of, are just now more to the point” (Scarlett, line 254). Finally, one respondent shared, “Yeah, I think it’s made it stronger. And, um, being able to communicate is huge” (Alicia, line 139).

Finally, participants were asked how relationship quality affects the way they communicate about expectations and changes in expectations with their partner. Most participants reported that because they felt they had a strong, committed relationship with their partner, the couple could have open and honest communication about their expectations. Interviewees expressed that they were a part of a team or a partnership with their significant other; the trust and commitment they had to one another was motivation for continually communicating about their wants, needs, and overall expectations for each other and the relationship. One participant put it simply stating, “Yeah I mean, I think that one of the biggest things is that we’re a team, right? We have to be on the same page so that’s like, the number one thing” (Ashley, lines 251-252). Another interviewee expressed the importance of friendship and respect in their romantic relationship saying,

Yes, because we both have that expectation of each other and we both consistently meet that expectation, right? Like, there’s no letting the other person down. We’re a team. We don’t, you don’t let your best friend down. We would never do that, ever. I mean, think of

your best friend, you just would never let that person down. All of the rules of the relationship are followed because not doing it would hurt the person that you care about the most (Lindsey, lines 276-280).

Finally, one participant shared that because their relationship is strong, talking about important issues, such as expectations, is not challenging or difficult conversation. Kristina stated,

I think that both of us feel very grounded and very secure in our relationship and that helps. You know, I think we're both, like, honest and forthright with each other and that helps. And neither of us have any kind of like, big jealousy issues, so I think we can, we know we can talk to each other about anything and its, and we're both laid back and always willing to listen to each other (lines 275-279).

In sum, the data collected from participant interviews provided significant insight into how romantic partners communicate with one another about expectations and violations of CMC, changing expectations for CMC, and the effect of changing expectations on their romantic relationship. Findings highlight the corresponding nature of behavioral expectations and expectancy violations for CMC. In other words, what individuals expect from their romantic partners may be appraised as a violation when unmet. Furthermore, participants described the reasons their expectations change during their relationship, how they discuss changing expectations. Participants expressed that the ability to have open, honest communication with their partner about expectations and changing expectations had a positive impact on the quality of their relationship.

## **V. Discussion**

Using EVT as a theoretical foundation, I conducted a thematic analysis to explore the perceptions and experiences of expectations, expectancy violations, and changing expectations of

romantic couples when communicating via CMC. My analysis of the data identified three tiers of communication between partners, as well as themes/subthemes for each research question. The subsequent section will unpack and expand upon the results of the data analysis, followed by a discussion of the limitations of my dissertation, avenues for future research, and practical implications.

### **Tiers of Communication Between Romantic Partners**

During the interview process, participants were asked how they typically communicate with their romantic partner and what types of CMC they use to communicate with their partner on a regular basis. After an in-depth review of their responses, it became clear that different levels of communication, including CMC, exist for romantic couples. I refer to them as tiers of communication because participants made a clear distinction between the most important forms of communication, as well as additional methods that were used on occasion and/or that served a specific purpose. The various ways couples communicate with one another is salient because some forms of CMC may have different functions and expectations associated with them, demonstrating how romantic partners coordinate their daily lives and maintain their relationship. Additionally, the tiers of communication for romantic couples are significant to the study of human communication as they reflect and add to the body of research on Media Richness Theory (MRT; Daft & Lengel, 1986) and media multiplexity theory (MMT; Haythornwaite, 2005).

MRT was originally developed to explain how organizations process information (Daft & Lengel, 1986) but has since been applied to the use of communication technologies in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Cummings, Lee, & Kraut, 2006; Walther, 2011). MRT discusses how effectively information can be disseminated through various communication media based on the affordances of that medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986). In other words, the



richness of a medium is determined by the amount of information (i.e., verbal, vocal, and nonverbal cues) that can be shared between the sender and the receiver. MRT can be used to support the three tiers of communication in romantic relationships as participants chose to communicate via certain media based on the information that can be conveyed and the significance or gravity of the information being shared. All participants identified FtF communication as the most important and most frequently used form of communication in their romantic relationship. Additionally, respondents expressed that the richness of second-tier communication media was enough to allow them to share important information and maintain their relationship even when not in the presence of their partner. One participant, who used a multitude of CMC with her partner, discussed the importance of second-tier forms of communication stating,

...also, we FaceTime too, as well. Uh, even when we were in the same city, sometimes just to show each other something cool. Uh, but also specifically when he's gone, we do that too just to see each other's faces and have that connection (Alicia, lines 18-20).

Finally, third-tier communication media were some of the least rich forms of CMC. For example, some participants reported using Google calendars or spreadsheets to coordinate their weekly schedules and remind one another of upcoming events. Other respondents shared that they rarely email their romantic partner, unless they need to share important information, such as real estate listings, financial paperwork, or information about upcoming family events. Online calendars and email offer few affordances and are mostly text-based, thus, they are some of the least rich forms of CMC used between romantic partners. However, participants intentionally select such media when necessary or the best option for disseminating information. Such findings are significant because they demonstrate MRT at work in romantic relationships, but

also align with the notion of increased communication expressed by participants and the theme of information sharing. Individuals expect that their partner will share more information as the relationship progresses and they become more interdependent. The three tiers of communication between romantic partners highlight the value of different media in relationship maintenance as couples are able to use multiple forms of CMC to coordinate their everyday lives. Finally, expectations are a key influencer in the use of the three tiers of communication. Based on the norms of the relationship, romantic partners expect to communicate with their partner via certain media over others.

The tiers of communication also demonstrate the salience of media multiplexity theory (MMT; Haythornwaite, 2005), as individuals are comfortable using a variety of communication technologies with their partner. Past research viewed CMC's reduced cue environment as hindering the transmission of feelings in messages, because important nonverbal cues cannot be transmitted through some forms of CMC (Walther & Parks, 2002). However, recent research demonstrates that individuals can successfully adapt their language and behavior to convey affective communication online and, therefore, have integrated a variety of media into their regular communication with close others (Walther, 1992). MMT highlights that interpersonal partners may use multiple media, or be multimodal, when communicating and maintaining their relationships (Walther & Parks, 2002). Specifically, the theory focuses on the tie strength of the relationship (i.e., strong, weak) and the communication methods used; individuals in closer or more interdependent relationships tend to use more communication media in their relationship (Haythornthwaite, 2000). Arguably, the strong ties between romantic partners suggest multimodal communication. MMT is clearly reflected in the findings of my dissertation, as participants expected an increase in the variety of CMC used as their relationship grew and

developed. For instance, one participant who is geographically separated from her romantic partner shared how they communicate on a regular basis to facilitate closeness and intimacy in the relationship:

On a daily basis through Facebook messenger. Since I've been in graduate school, we Skype each other quite often probably four to five times a week if it's a good week or at least once or twice a week if it's a really heavy week. I mean occasionally we use WhatsApp. It's kind of strange. We like, talk with each other using Facebook messenger, but we send photos and media to each other by WhatsApp and then face to face on Skype. (Alison, lines 135-139)

Additionally, the tiers of communication between romantic partners align with Haythornwaite's (2005) research of communication in online education which indicated that communicators developed "tiers of media use, each supporting ties of different strengths" (p. 132). Findings suggested that CT(s) used for communicating with strong ties in one group may have been used differently in another group and were often dictated by classroom requirements or norms (Haythornwaite, 2005). Such findings are reflected in the results of this dissertation. Participants reported being multimodal, frequently using a variety of CMC with their romantic partner to convey both task and relational information. Arguably, romantic partners do not use CMC for the same purposes as they do with other individuals in their life. In other words, the way an individual communicates with their romantic partner via CMC may be significantly different than their interactions with a parent or friend. Furthermore, the types of CMC used between partners reflects particular relationship expectations and norms. As noted by several participants, text messaging was their main form of communication due to availability and/or work responsibilities. Additionally, participants noted the importance of a phone call, expecting

that if they called their partner or their partner called them, the information was significant enough to warrant a voice-to-voice conversation.

Findings support MMT and demonstrate the essential role of tie strength in interpersonal communication through CMC. Additionally, the findings align with empirical results indicating that the extent to which people use various modes of communication is positively associated with relational closeness (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Participants' reports of an increase in the modes of CMC used and increased frequency of communication via those modes, as well as the three tiers of communication between romantic partners, also demonstrates a communication interdependence perspective which focuses on the extent to which different modes of communication are interconnected within a given relationship (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013). For example, does a couple's communication via CMC affect their conversations FtF? My dissertation adds to this perspective by providing evidence that the mode of communication does affect FtF communication for some couples. Some respondents made it clear that they do not have serious conversations via SMS or FaceTime/Skype. They may express the need for an important discussion, but will wait until they can discuss the issue FtF. Arguably, the mode of communication does affect romantic partners' interactions. Such findings are significant because they align with the communication interdependence perspective and suggest the need for further research on the relationship between how romantic partners communication via CMC and how particular modes of CMC influence relationship talk and the expectations for communication between couples.

### **Expectations for CMC**

RQ1 asked, "What behavioral expectations do romantic partners have when using CMC?" Interview responses revealed both expected behaviors and expectancy violations. Of the

behaviors expected by participants, four main themes emerged: (a) a response, (b) clear communication, (c) task-oriented versus relational messages, and (d) respect. The response theme also contained three subthemes: (a) promptness, (b) response as method dependent, and (c) acknowledgement. Additionally, participants were asked if their partner had ever behaved in a way that was surprising or unexpected when communicating via CMC. Of those participants who provided an example of an unexpected behavior of their partner, both positively- and negatively-valenced violations emerged. Positively-valenced violations refer to behaviors that reflected positively on their partner or the state of the relationship, while, negatively-valenced violations referred to behaviors that were unexpected and made the participant feel unsure about their partner's action and/or the state of the relationship. Although negative violations were discussed, violations were not severe enough to cause major relational turmoil. Perhaps this stems from partners' ability to see past the violation to intentionality, recognizing that their partner is not engaging in such behavior to harm the relationship. Another reason negatively-valenced violations may not result in relational turmoil could be due to the tie strength between romantic partners or the commitment level of the relationship. Arguably, individuals who are highly committed to the relationship and feel a strong tie to their romantic partner may not appraise the violation as severely as if it occurred with another individual. Furthermore, committed individuals may engage in relationship talk to negotiate and make sense of the violation (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). Future research should investigate indicators (e.g., personality traits, conflict style, relational commitment) that a negatively-valenced violation between a romantic couple will lead to relational turmoil or termination.

Additionally, the themes uncovered from the data regarding expected and unexpected behaviors via CMC align with the nine interpersonal expectancy violations classified by Afifi

and Metts (1998). The violations included: support or confirmation, criticism or accusation, relationship initiation or escalation, relationship de-escalation or termination, uncharacteristic relational behavior, relational transgressions, acts of devotion, acts of disregard, and gesture of inclusion or high regard (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Many respondents expressed that their partner was consistent in their communication, thus, any atypical behaviors would support with the violation of “uncharacteristic relational behavior” (Afifi & Metts, 1998). The subthemes of promptness in a response and acknowledgment or confirmation align with the violation categories of “support or confirmation” and “gesture of inclusion or high regard” (Afifi & Metts, 1998), as participants expected or were pleasantly surprised when their partner demonstrated a high regard for them. Gesture of inclusion also includes demonstrating trust in one’s partner and the desire to include them (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Additionally, the expectation and corresponding expectancy violation of respect/disrespect reflect the category of “acts of disregard” which was defined as behaviors that signaled a general lack of regard for relationship rituals, as well as a lack of affection or showing little concern for one’s partner (Afifi & Metts, 1998). Similarly, interview respondents expressed an expectation that their partner would be respectful of their relationship and that any behaviors that threatened the stability of the relationship will be considered an expectancy violation.

The findings of my dissertation demonstrate the validity of the expectancy violation categories developed by Afifi and Metts (1998) which could therefore be applied to violations occurring via CMC. Additionally, Afifi and Metts’ (1998) results demonstrate expectancy violation effects on relationship quality, namely, positively-valenced violations result in positive effects on the quality of the relationship. Such findings and the findings of the present study align as participants reported positively-valenced violations such as posting/sharing as a

violation and affectionate messages as positively impacting their relationship. Participants reported feeling a stronger connection and more committed to the relationship when they posted or shared messages displaying affection for the partner and/or the relationship. Again, the impact of positively-valenced violations on romantic relationships extends the research on Afifi and Metts (1998) by demonstrating that the same reactions occur in CMC as in FtF interactions. The benefit of knowing such information is that researchers have further evidence affective communication happens via CMC and can focus future research specifically on positively-valenced expectations violations occurring through communication technologies.

My dissertation goes beyond previous research by focusing specifically on romantic relationships while not limiting the type of CMC explored. Past research has examined issues such as, romantic relationships and cell phone use (Kelly et al., 2017; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015), confirming and disconfirming expectations via CMC (Tong & Walther, 2015), media use between romantic partners (Coyne et al., 2011), text messaging and closeness (Pettigrew, 2009), and the misrepresentation of romantic relationships online (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001). Yet, no research has been done combining our understanding of EVT and changing expectations with the use of CMC between romantic partners. Such knowledge is beneficial because relationships are maintained both online and offline, therefore, researcher and scholars must understand how individuals communicate in both contexts to teach and encourage constructive communication.

Further investigation regarding RQ1 and the expectations individuals have for their partner when communicating via CMC, I asked participants how (if at all) they talked to their partner about their expectations. Many participants reported that they did not have explicit conversations, describing the understanding of expectations as a process that occurred organically or that evolved throughout the relationship. Of those participants who reported

having a conversation about their expectations, they stated that they openly voiced their concerns with the goal of influencing change. Often participants brought up their expectations when a situation arose. Such discussions are a clear demonstration of relationship talk. Relationship talk is used to negotiate and understand relationships and occurs as a method for reducing uncertainty (Acitelli, 2001). Although relationship talk can be beneficial, partners' desire to save face may prevent them from expressing discontent with the couples' communication (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). When individuals experience more relational uncertainty than is typical, they may be less likely to engage in relationship talk. However, avoiding relationship talk may impact their level of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). Therefore, discussing CMC expectations in a romantic relationship constitutes a form of relationship talk. Arguably, those participants who do not explicitly discuss expectations may be experiencing an abnormal amount of relational uncertainty and/or are working to save face. Conversely, participants who did openly discuss CMC expectations may be more comfortable with relational uncertainty and, therefore, more likely to discuss potentially sensitive topics with their romantic partner. Another explanation for partners' decision not to discuss expectations is the notion that norms are usually implicit and are only made explicit when they are violated (Burgoon, 1993). Arguably, romantic partners develop typical patterns and expectations for communication via CMC as the relationship develops and an implicit understanding of those norms keeps the relationship on track. For example, Ashley shared that after knowing each other since they were children and being a couple for 13 years, she and her husband know each other and understand their relationship well. Regarding the norms of their relationship, she shared:

...if that's not something he would naturally do then I'm not going to expect it. And it's not a disappointment necessarily, but it's like, I'm not going to come home to a dozen



roses, I'm okay with that. But, just establishing that is good for both of us. (lines 148-151)

Additionally, the notion that some individuals do not explicitly discuss their expectations for CMC aligns with and extends the study of mind reading expectations (MRE) between intimate partners (Wright & Roloff, 2015). In other words, some individuals believe that their intimate or romantic partner should be able to understand their needs and feelings without having to express them (Wright & Roloff, 2015). Some respondents noted that they did not explicitly discuss expectations with their partner because they felt the norms of their relationship were understood or their partner's behavior was consistent with their expectations. Possibly, these couples are able to understand each other's needs without necessitating a conversation. My dissertation extends this line of research by recognizing the potential presence of MRE between romantic couples regarding CMC, a context that has not yet been studied regarding MRE. However, my study also contradicts the finding that MRE is associated with relational problems as most participants did not report relational turmoil when expectations were not discussed. Further research is needed focusing specifically on MRE via CMC and negative relational outcomes (e.g., destructive conflict, turmoil, termination).

### **Responses to Expectancy Violations**

RQ2 investigated how partners respond to expectancy violations via CMC. Participants reported that their reaction to an expectancy violation depends on the valence and severity of the violation. In other words, partners are less likely to acknowledge the violation if it does not threaten the state of the relationship. Therefore, negatively-valenced violations are more frequently recognized and often given the most attention between romantic partners. Communicator reward value can be used to understand why participants are more likely to

recognize and attend to negatively-valenced violations (Burgoon, 1993). As previously discussed, individuals may evaluate the reward value of their partner regarding how costly or rewarding the positively- or negatively-valenced violation is to the relationship. Regarding my dissertation, participants are likely to view their partner as having a high communicator reward value, therefore, evaluating negatively-valenced violations as less negative and harmful to the relationship. A high communicator reward value may also account for participants acknowledging and discussing violations that threaten the state of the relationship, as they value their partner and want to remain in a romantic relationship with that person.

### **Changing Expectations**

RQ3 focused on how and why partners' CMC expectations change. Four themes emerged regarding the general expectation of more communication in their relationship. Themes included, (a) availability, (b) information sharing, (c) increase in media used, and (d) increased communication via select media. Furthermore, an analysis of the data revealed three themes regarding why individuals' expectations change, including: (a) life events, (b) the evolution of technology, and (c) relationship commitment level. Data analysis revealed a strong relationship between how expectations change and why expectations change. Participants described changes in their expectations based on what was going on in their life or within the relationship. Arguably, increases in certain types of CMC would not have occurred for some participants if not for life events, such as having a child or changing jobs. Such information is significant as it demonstrates the evolution of communication technologies in individuals' everyday lives.

### **Relational Quality**

RQ4 explored how romantic partners communicate about changing expectations for using CMC in their romantic relationship and the quality of the relationship. Overwhelmingly,

participants reported openly talking about their expectations as they change. Participants shared that once the expectations had changed, one partner would give reminders help reinforce the new expected behaviors. Additionally, respondents reported discussing upcoming deviations from their typical communication patterns, as well as changes they might like to implement in the future. Discussions about changing expectations is another example of relationship talk in romantic relationships. Talking about changes in expectations, providing reminders, and giving notice of an upcoming deviation from the norm clearly demonstrates partners' respect for the relationship and for their romantic partner. Arguably, those who are highly satisfied and feel committed to their partner and the relationship are more likely to talk about changing expectations for CMC. Discussing changes or deviations is also a strategy for reducing uncertainty and can lead to better relationship quality. Such findings are further evidence supporting open, honest communication in romantic relationships.

The final research question examined the relationship between relational quality and how partners communicate about expectations and changes in expectations. Responses were clear and consistent and reflected an important relationship between the state of the relationship and one's ability to change and discuss expectations. However, participants were split on how they communicate with their partner; nearly half of the participants reported not discussing changing expectations and the impact of such changes on their relationship. Respondents who reported discussing such issues with their partner claimed that they had explicit conversations about their expectations. Namely, when a situation occurred in which expectations were not met, were violated and contradicted the state of the relationship. Such findings reflect the habitually reactive nature of relationship talk; individuals often discuss issues when they experience an increase in uncertainty (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). Therefore, deviations in behavior that do not

disrupt the relationship in a significant way are less likely to be discussed, even if a proactive discussion would result in an increase in relational and communication satisfaction.

Additionally, respondents expressed that changing expectations to better align with the goals of the relationship or to reflect changes occurring in the relationship made the relationship stronger. Most participants reported that because they felt they had a strong, committed relationship with their partner, the couple could have open and honest communication about their expectations. Participants' responses reflect the importance of relational and communication satisfaction in romantic relationships and demonstrates the cyclical nature of effective communication and relational quality. Because communication is the foundation of all relationships, satisfying interpersonal communication also plays a key role in relationship development and relational quality (Hecht, 1978). Thus, partners who have satisfying communication about their expectations or changes in their expectations are more likely to feel understood by their romantic partner and be satisfied in their relationship. Furthermore, if partners are satisfied with their relationship they are more likely to communicate their expectations and changes in expectations with their partner.

Overall, the findings of my dissertation contribute to the study of EVT by adding to the variety of interpersonal relationship and communication media to which the theory has been applied. The study also extends EVT by investigating how expectations for CMC change over time. Research focused specifically on EVT and changing expectations in romantic couples when communicating via CMC has not been conducted before. Therefore, my study contributes to interpersonal communication research by continuing to demonstrate the utility and flexibility of the theory. Additionally, scant research exists on the changes in expectations throughout the course of a romantic relationship. My dissertation draws attention to a significant gap in the

research that EVT and Interaction Adaptation Theory (Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005), an extension of EVT, could shed light on in future research.

### **Practical Implications**

The present study provides significant insight regarding communication occurring between romantic partners via CMC. The knowledge gained from the study has practical implications beyond the communication discipline. Understanding CMC expectations, expectancy violations, and changes in CMC expectations can arm practitioners (e.g., counselors, therapists) with valuable knowledge for helping couples cope with relationship turmoil. Uncertainty is a key player in relationship satisfaction, therefore, when expectations for CMC change, partners may experience an uncomfortable level of uncertainty and a reduction in relational satisfaction. Individuals may find themselves unhappy or dissatisfied in their relationship, yet unable to articulate the reasoning behind their feelings. Practitioners can use the information gathered from the present study, as well as other communication research on EVT and romantic relationships, to inform couples about the difficulties they are facing in their relationship and the importance of open, honest communication about expectations.

Practitioners can also use the findings of my dissertation to understand and educate others regarding the presence of uncertainty in relationships and its relationship with relational quality. Uncertainty is a normal part of the human experience, therefore, individuals should be aware of its existence and coached to use uncertainty as a tool in their relationships. Instead of viewing uncertainty about expectations in CMC in a negative light or as a sign of a deteriorating relationship, individuals and romantic couples should be taught to view uncertainty as an opportunity for open, honest communication about partners' needs and wants. My study demonstrates that communication about expectations is key in romantic relationships and may be

associated with an increase in relational quality. Therefore, practitioners, scholars, and teachers should work to educate others about the essential role of relational uncertainty and communication in all interpersonal relationships.

### **Limitations**

Although the project has several strengths, such as its identification of previously unstudied expectancy violations between romantic couples via CMC and an extension of EVT to understand how expectations change over time, limitations exist. One possible limitation was the data collection method. Although the use of in-person and video conference interviews allowed participants time to reflect on their responses, potentially permitting for more detailed or accurate descriptions, focus groups or dyadic interviews may lead to the collection of richer, more in-depth data. The interview process allows for follow-up questions to brief or vague answers, however, employing focus groups would provide time for brainstorming and the discussion of experiences between participants to generate additional viewpoints about expectations and changing expectations between romantic couples via CMC. Focus groups resemble qualitative interviews in that a researcher may prepare an interview guide in advance and interact directly with participants by asking them questions. In other words, focus groups are planned discussions designed to elicit group interaction and “obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). Like a focus group, dyadic interviews give couples the opportunity to piggyback off one another’s responses, leading to the collection of richer data. Additionally, responses from dyadic interviews can be compared to determine if romantic partners have similar perceptions of expectancy violations, changes in expectations, and relational quality. The collection of dyadic data is essential for future research due to the potential for partners to have differing perceptions of their relationship and, therefore,

differing behavioral expectations. Nondyadic data cannot provide information about one partner's perceptions and expectations in relation to those of their partner, leaving researchers with only one side of the story.

The retrospective nature of the study constitutes another potential limitation. Participants reflected on past expectations and expectancy violations committed by their partner; their reaction to and perceptions of the violations may not have been as intense as when the incident initially occurred. Additionally, participants were asked if their expectations for their partner have changed during their relationship, and some reported it was a gradual progression or evolution of expectations. Typically, these participants did not provide specific examples of a change in expectations. Such responses did not provide an indication of what expectations have changed, how they had changed, and why the expectations had changed, thus, providing little data for analysis. Future research could address this limitation by conducting a longitudinal study of romantic couples in committed relationships. The study could focus on couples about to embark on significant life events or changes (e.g., marriage, having a child, career change) and have participants document their expectations for CMC before, during, and after such life events. This data collection method would allow for more accurate and rich information regarding individuals' expectations and changing expectations as the relationship progresses.

A third limitation occurred when some participants struggled to provide examples of expectations, expectancy violations, or changes in expectations. In some cases, I provided simple examples or rephrased the interview question. Some participants would claim not experiencing an expectancy violation from their partner when asked directly, but would remember an incident later in the interview. Although prescreening questions, including a definition of CMC, was given to each participant prior to the start of the interview, I believe a pre-interview

questionnaire containing the definition and examples of expectancy violations could help orient participants to the focus of the study and, therefore, provide more specific responses. Another method for addressing the issue would be to perform two interviews with each participant. Interview 1 would be similar to the interview I performed for the present study, while Interview 2 would be an unstructured interview in which participants would be asked to share their experiences communicating with their romantic partner online. The intention of Interview 2 would be to elicit additional expectations, expectancy violations and incidents of changing expectations not captured in the first interview.

### **Future Directions**

My dissertation provides a multitude of opportunities for future research. A logical next step would be to conduct a replication of the present study, but collect data from focus groups with individuals currently in a romantic relationship and who use CMC to communicate with their romantic partner on a regular basis. As previously stated, focus groups allow for brainstorming and piggybacking off other participants' responses which may provide additional information. Repeating the current study with the use of focus groups would also provide a validity check of the current findings. Replication or follow-up studies are valuable because research that relates to other research can provide greater breadth and depth of understanding of a communication phenomenon (Benoit & Holbert, 2008). Additionally, replication studies allow for more definitive statements, enhancing the certainty about the nature of certain relationships (Rosenthal, 1991).

Another direction for future research would be to employ a longitudinal study design to observe CMC behaviors, expectations, and changing expectations of romantic couples over time. Participants would be asked to keep a daily journal to report their perceptions and reactions to



expectancy violations via CMC as they occur. Additionally, participants would complete pre- and post-study surveys to assist in confirming their responses, as well as to gauge the extent to which their expectations had changed over the course of the study. The study would take place over a significant length of time (6 to 12 months) to allow for relational development and potential life changes to occur within the romantic relationships (i.e., career changes, relocation, children, etc.). Although longitudinal studies risk poor participant retention, the data collected could provide better insight into expectations between romantic partners. Perhaps uncovering violations or unmet expectations that lead to relational termination. Such knowledge would significantly contribute to the field of communication, but also arm scholars and practitioners with knowledge to share with students, colleagues, and patients.

Finally, a goal of future research should be to study EVT and romantic relationships via specific types of CMC, including text messaging, email, video conferencing, and SNS, among others. Perhaps expectations differ for various forms of communication depending on intended use and frequency of interactions via the CMC. The findings of my dissertation suggest the need for further investigation based on the three tiers of communication between romantic partners; some forms of CMC ranked higher in importance and were used more frequently which suggests individuals may have more expectations for those forms of CMC. Additionally, the themes uncovered regarding participants' changes in CMC expectations that included availability, information sharing, variety of use of CMC, and frequency of CMC use also suggest that within a romantic relationship expectations may differ for particular forms of CMC. Past research shows that social networking sites are growing in popularity and are becoming fully integrated into romantic relationships (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013); therefore, future studies should focus on general expectancy violations occurring on each SNS, violations specific to each SNS, and

reactions to violations by romantic partners. Research comparing different CMC platforms may expose communicative functions specific to each medium when used by romantic partners. Such information could inform researchers about relationship maintenance behaviors or transgressions unique to each form of CMC and use the knowledge to inform practitioners and users to promote healthy online communication.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this exploratory study investigated the expectations and changing expectations between romantic couples when communicating via CMC. Expectancy violations theory, MRT, MMR, and relationship talks offered insight into the relational experiences of romantic couples. Through semi-structured interviews it became clear that couples communicate in a variety of ways, but still expect open and honest communication with their partner about expectations, changing expectations and expectancy violations. Moreover, discussing expectations and changes in expectations in relation to relationship quality is a cyclical process. In other words, the ability to discuss one's expectations with a romantic partner positively affects relationship quality and positive, committed relationships allow for more communication about expectations and changes in expectations.

The findings of my dissertation are significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, results demonstrate the utility and flexibility of EVT as the theory can be applied to CMC as a type of communication and specific forms of CMC (e.g., text messaging, FaceTime). Additionally, the present study is unique in that little research has investigated changing expectations via CMC and the findings suggest EVT is salient in studying both expectancy violations and changes in expectations. From a practical standpoint, the study provides significant insight into communication between romantic couples. Although FtF

communication remains the optimal form of communication between partners, individuals are integrating CMC into the maintenance of their relationship. Scholars and practitioners can use such knowledge to help couples understand the importance of communicating expectations in the maintenance of the stable and committed relationship.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter



**Leah Stoiber**  
IRB Administrator  
Institutional Review Board  
Engelmann 270  
P. O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413  
(414) 229-7455 phone  
(414) 229-6729 fax

<http://www.irb.uwm.edu>  
[lstoiber@uwm.edu](mailto:lstoiber@uwm.edu)

#### New Study - Notice of IRB Exempt Status

**Date:** December 18, 2017

**To:** Erin Ruppel, PhD  
**Dept:** Communication

**CC:** Samantha Quinn

**IRB#:** 18.138

**Title:** Computer-mediated Communication and Changing Expectations in Romantic Couples

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been granted Exempt Status under **Category 2** as governed by 45 CFR 46.101(b).

This protocol has been approved as exempt for three years and IRB approval will expire on **December 17, 2020**. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, please respond to the IRB's status request that will be sent by email approximately two weeks before the expiration date. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu) with the study number and the status, so we can keep our study records accurate.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., [FERPA](#), [Radiation Safety](#), [UWM Data Security](#), [UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts](#), state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

Leah Stoiber  
IRB Administrator

## **APPENDIX B: Recruitment message**

Hello,

I am conducting a study to understand the relationship between expectations and relationship quality experienced by romantic couples when communicating via computer-mediated communication (e.g. email, text messaging, social media, FaceTime, etc). This information is important because many romantic relationships are maintained through a variety of platforms, and partners have different expectations for the different ways they communicate and are continually adjusting their expectations accordingly. Understanding the relationship between computer-mediated communication and romantic relationships can provide further knowledge about why some romantic relationships are successful while others are not.

I would greatly appreciate talking to you if you are currently in a romantic relationship and regularly communicate with your partner through any of the many types of computer-mediated communication. I am seeking participants who are at least 18 years old, currently in a romantic relationship lasting at least six months, use computer-mediated communication to interact with their romantic partner regularly, and willing to discuss their experiences and expectations when using computer-mediated communication in an in-person or video chat interview. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes although follow-up conversations may be necessary if I need clarification or elaboration on something we talk about. I will keep all of our conversations confidential. Your participation is voluntary, so there is no penalty for non-participation. Furthermore, you may refuse to answer any of our questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions about it, please email Samantha Quinn at [sfylling@uwm.edu](mailto:sfylling@uwm.edu).

Thank you,

Samantha F. Quinn  
PhD Student  
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

IRB Approval # 18.138

## **APPENDIX C: Consent to Participate in Interview Research form**

### **University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee**

#### **Consent to Participate in Interview Research**

**Study Title:** Computer-mediated Communication and Changing Expectations in Romantic Couples

**Person Responsible for Research:** Dr. Erin Ruppel and Samantha F. Quinn

#### **Study Description:**

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the expectations romantic partners have for one another when communicating via computer-mediated communication (e.g. email, text messaging, social media, FaceTime/Skype, etc.). Approximately 50 participants will participate in this study. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and expectations for your partner when communicating via computer-mediated communication. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. The interview will take place in a private location and it will be audio recorded. The researcher may also follow up with clarification questions after the initial interview.

#### **Risks / Benefits:**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research study. You may experience discomfort in recalling your life experiences related to your experience of discussing behavioral expectations with your romantic partner. The study is completely voluntary, so if you do feel uncomfortable or wish to stop your participation, you may do so at any time. There are no costs for participating in this study. Benefits to participation may include knowledge that your experiences are contributing to a body of information about the role of computer-mediated communication in romantic relationships.

#### **Confidentiality:**

During the interview your name will not be used. Your responses will be treated as confidential and any use of your name and or identifying information about anyone else will be removed during the transcription process so that the transcript of our conversation is de-identified. All study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing the results will ever be able to match you with your responses. Direct quotes may be used in publications or presentations. Pre-screening questionnaires, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be saved in a password protected computer. Only the researchers named above will have access to your information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records. Interview transcripts and audio recordings will be retained for a period of four years after the interview takes place.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

**Who do I contact for questions about the study:**

For more information about the study or study procedures, contact the researchers, Samantha F. Quinn at sfilling@uwm.edu or the principal investigator, Dr. Erin Ruppel at ruppel@uwm.edu.

**Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?**

Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or irbinfo@uwm.edu.

**Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. If you are receiving this form via email, please type your name and the date on the designated lines. This will serve as your signature. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project. At the beginning of the interview, the researchers will also ask for verbal confirmation of your consent to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX D: Prescreening Interview Questions**

### **Prescreening Interview Questions**

#### **Computer-mediated Communication and Changing Expectations in Romantic Couples**

Please review the following definition of computer-mediated communication (CMC), as you will be asked interview questions regarding your experiences and expectations when using CMC to communicate with your romantic partner.

**Computer-mediated communication** (CMC) refers to human communication that occurs via computers and includes many different forms of synchronous (occurring at the same time) and asynchronous (occurring a different times) interaction that people have with each other using computers as tools to exchange text, images, audio and video. Some examples of popular forms of CMC include: smartphones, text messaging, social media, video chat/conferencing, etc.).

**Prescreening Questions:** Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Are you 18 years or older?
2. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
3. How long have you been in your current romantic relationship?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your gender identity?
6. What is your sexual orientation?
7. What is your race?
8. Do you use some form computer-mediated communication to communicate with your romantic partner on a regular basis?

## **APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Computer-mediated Communication and Changing Expectations in Romantic Couples**

**Orientation to the Interview Process:** (explain the interview process and provide definition of CMC)

#### **Interview Questions:**

1. I'd like to begin by having you tell me about your relationship with your significant other. (Possible probing questions: How did you two meet? How long have you been together?)
2. Have the two of you ever talked about expectations in your relationship? (How? When? What did you talk about?)
3. Have your expectations for your significant other changed over the course of your relationship?
4. If so, what led you to change your expectations of your significant other? (potential follow-up: Do you think talking about expectations with your significant other influenced a change in your expectations?).
5. Has changing your expectations of your significant other affected your relationship?
6. Have you ever discussed the change in your expectations with your partner? How has discussing (or not) your change in expectations affected your relationship?
7. How do you typically communicate with each other?



8. What types of computer-mediated communication do you typically use to communicate with one another? (What type do you use most frequently?)
9. Can you please explain what you expect from your significant other when you communicate via (insert types of CMC here)? How do you expect them to behave?
10. Has your significant other ever done something surprising when talking to you via (insert types of CMC here)? (What was it? Why did you find it surprising? How did it make you feel? How did you feel about your relationship when the violation occurred?)
11. Did you talk to your significant other about what surprised you? If so, how? How did you feel after you talked about it?

If you didn't talk to them about it, would you talk to your partner about what they did that surprised you? Why or why not? If so, how would you talk to them about it?
12. Have your expectations for using this type of CMC changed during your relationship? (How? Why?)
13. When your expectations changed did you tell your significant other or talk to your partner? How? Why or why not?
14. Do you think changing your expectations for how you communicate via (insert type of CMC here) has affected your relationship with your partner? How? Why or why not?
15. Do you think discussing your expectations for how you communicate via (insert type of CMC here) has affected your relationship with your partner? How? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX F: Curriculum Vitae

# SAMANTHA F. QUINN

## Curriculum Vitae

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Address: Department of Communication  
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee  
P.O. Box 413 Johnston Hall 210  
2522 E. Hartford Ave  
Milwaukee, WI 53201

### EDUCATION

- Ph.D.** University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (Milwaukee, WI)  
Degree in: Interpersonal Communication  
Emphasis: Computer-mediated Communication in Romantic Relationships  
Dissertation: *Computer-mediated Communication and Changing Expectations in Romantic Couples*  
Advisor: Dr. Erin Ruppel  
Completed: May 2018
- M.A.** University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point (Stevens Point, WI)  
Degree in: Interpersonal Communication  
Emphasis: Interpersonal Communication and Conversation Analysis  
Advisor: Dr. Timothy Halkowski  
Completed: May 2010
- B.A.** St. Norbert College (De Pere, WI)  
Degrees in: Communication & Sociology  
Completed: May 2008

### AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

2018 Central States Communication Association – Top Paper Award Recipient  
2017 Central States Communication Association – Top Paper Award Recipient  
2017 Department of Communication Research Recognition Award  
2014 University of Wisconsin –Milwaukee Chancellor’s Award  
2009 University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point Graduate Student Teaching Excellence Award  
2009 University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point Albert J. Croft Memorial Scholarship  
2008 St. Norbert College Dean's List of Superior Academic Achievement  
2007 St. Norbert College Dean's List of Superior Academic Achievement  
2006 St. Norbert College Dean's List of Superior Academic Achievement  
2005 St. Norbert College Dean's List of Superior Academic Achievement  
2004 St. Norbert College Presidential Scholarship (renewed annually)

2004 St. Norbert College Diversity Leadership Scholarship (renewed annually)

## RESEARCH

### PUBLICATIONS

Ruppel, E. K., Blight, M. G., Cherney, M. R., & Fyelling, S. Q. (2015). An exploratory investigation of communication technologies to alleviate communicative difficulties and depression in older adults. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 28, 600-620.  
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0898264315599942>

Quinn, S. F. (2017). Technology and social media in the workplace. Choi, C. S. & Allen, M. (Eds.), *Business and Professional Communication Second Edition*. New York, NY: Pearson.

Allen, M., Burrell, N., Bourhis, J., Quinn, S. F., Benedict, B., Adebayo, C. T., Peck, B., Cherney, M., Richards, R., & Langston, D. (in press). Evaluation communication of master's program on the basis of google citations. *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*.

### UNDER REVIEW

Quinn, S. F. & Jageillo, K. "Attack of the green-eyed monster": A review of jealousy and envy in small groups. *Annals of the International Communication Association* (revise and resubmit)

Quinn, S. F. Gossip via text message: Motivations for using text messaging to share gossip. *Talk & Text*.

Quinn, S. F. "Have you seen my birth parents?": Adoptees seeking birth parents online. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Stoll, A., Quinn, S. F., & Kuloviz, K. "Just like the first day of a regular job": Exploring first-time prostitute experiences. *Porn Studies*.

### IN PROGRESS

Jagiello, K. & Quinn, S. F. (preparing for journal submission). Discussing non-monogamy with a romantic partner.

Quinn, S. F. (preparing for journal submission). Expectancy violations theory and communication privacy management theory: An integrated approach.

Quinn, S. F. (preparing for journal submission) "I just wasn't expecting it..." Expectancy violations between romantic partners on facebook.

**Quinn, S. F.** (preparing for journal submission) “Don’t disrespect our relationship”: Expectancy violations between romantic couples on facebook, a dyadic analysis.

**Quinn, S. F.** & Stoll, A. (preparing for journal submission) Experiences of Self-identified, Self-selected sex workers

Ruppel, R., **Quinn, S. F.**, & Cherney, M. (writing up results) “They call me”: Older Adults’ Use and Perceptions of Mediated Communication in Close Relationships

**Quinn, S. F.** (writing up results) “That’s not how this works”: Expectancy violation theory and modality switching in online dating.

Ruppel, E. K., Cherney, M., **Quinn, S. F.**, & O’Neill, G. (data collection) Effects of communication technology use on marital conflict, arousal, and depressed mood

### **RESEARCH ASSISTANT EXPERIENCE**

Grant Research Assistant, Fall 2016 – present

Effects of Communication Technology Use on Marital Conflict, Arousal, and Depressed Mood  
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

- Assist in the development of research experiment procedures
- Recruit, screen, and guide research participants through the experiment process
- Review and analyze data collected during the experiment
- Write and revise manuscript on the findings of the study

### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

Ruppel, E. K., Cherney, M. R., & **Quinn, S. F.** (2018, July) *Effects of communication technology use on marital conflict, arousal, and depressed Mood*. Paper to be presented at the International Association of Relationship Research annual conference, Fort Collins, CO.

**Quinn, S. F.** (2018, April) *Gossip via text message: Motivations for using text messaging to share gossip*. Paper to be presented at the Central States Communication Association annual conference, Milwaukee, WI. (Top Paper Award)

Jagiello, K. & **Quinn, S. F.** (2018, April) *Discussing consensual non-monogamy with a romantic partner*. Paper to be presented at the Central States Communication Association annual conference, Milwaukee, WI.

**Quinn, S. F.** (2018, February) “That’s not how this works”: *Expectancy violation theory and modality switching in online dating*. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the Western States Communication Association. Santa Clara, CA.

- Quinn, S. F.** (2017, November) *Expectancy violations theory and communication privacy management theory: An integrated approach*. Paper panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association. Dallas, TX.
- Quinn, S. F.** (2017, November) *“Don’t disrespect our relationship”*: Expectancy violations between romantic couples on facebook. Paper panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association. Dallas, TX.
- Quinn, S. F.** (2017, March) *“Have you seen my birth parents?: Adoptees’ seeking birth parent(s) online*. Paper presentation at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association. Minneapolis, MN. (Top Paper Award)
- Fyelling, S. Q., & Stoll, A.** (2016, November) *Experiences of self-identified, self-selected sex workers*. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association. Philadelphia, PA.
- Fyelling, S. Q., & Jageillo, K.** (2016, November) *“Attack of the green-eyed monster”*: Jealousy and envy in small groups: A critical synthesis. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association. Philadelphia, PA.
- Ruppel, E. K., **Fyelling, S. Q.**, Cherney, M. R., & Alvarez, S. (2016, July). *“They call me”*: Older adults’ use and perceptions of mediated communication in close relationships. Paper presented at biannual conference of the International Association for Relationship Research, Toronto, ON.
- Fyelling, S. Q.** (2016, March). *“I just wasn't expecting it...”* Expectancy violations between romantic partners on facebook. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association. Grand Rapids, MI.
- Stoll, A., **Fyelling, S. Q.**, & Kuloviz, K. (2015, November) *“Just like the first day of a regular job”*: Exploring first-time prostitute experiences. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.
- Fyelling, S. Q.** & Cherney, M. R. (2015, November) *“He’s just so wonderful”*: Facebook affection, negativity, and relationship quality. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.
- Kulovitz, K., Stoll, A., & **Fyelling, S. Q.** (2014, November) *“Prince Charming he says”*: An analysis of monetary bidding & the trading of goods for first dates. Panel presentation at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.
- Ruppel, E., Blight, M., Cherney, M. R., & **Fyelling, S. Q.** (2014). *An exploratory investigation of communication technologies to alleviate communication difficulties and depression in older adults*. Presented at the annual meeting of the International Association for Relationship Research on “Relationships, Health, and Wellness”, New Brunswick, NJ.

## **INVITED ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS**

**Quinn, S. F.** (2017, March) Interviews and interviewing. Presentation to Project Q at the Milwaukee LGBT Center, Milwaukee, WI

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

COMMUN 363: Communication in Human Conflict, Spring 2018  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1 online, stand-alone section (25 students)

Course Description: Investigation of the relationship between communication and the processes of human conflicts. Focus upon the nature and origin of human conflict and communicative strategies which may be used to manage conflict situations.

COMMUN 313: Human Communication and Technology, Fall 2017 – Spring 2018  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1 online, stand-alone section (25 students)

Course Description: Examination of the actual and potential role of technology in facilitating satisfying communication relationships.

COMMUN 363: Communication in Human Conflict, Fall 2016 – Fall 2017  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1 stand-alone section (25 students)

Course Description: Investigation of the relationship between communication and the processes of human conflicts. Focus upon the nature and origin of human conflict and communicative strategies which may be used to manage conflict situations.

COMMUN 105: Business and Professional Communication, Fall 2016 - Spring 2017  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1 stand-alone section (22 students)

Course Description: Analysis and application of communication principles and practices (interpersonal communication, teamwork issues, public speaking, technological communication) fundamental to successful participation in organizational and professional activities.

COMMUN 105: Business and Professional Communication, Fall 2015 - Spring 2016  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2 stand-alone sections (44 students)

Course Description: Analysis and application of communication principles and practices (interpersonal communication, teamwork issues, public speaking, technological communication) fundamental to successful participation in organizational and professional activities.

COMMUN 105: Business and Professional Communication, Fall 2014 - Spring 2015  
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 3 discussion sections (64 students)

Course Description: Analysis and application of communication principles and practices (interpersonal communication, teamwork issues, public speaking, technological communication) fundamental to successful participation in organizational and professional activities.

COMM 101: Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Fall 2008 – Spring 2010  
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, 3 discussion sections (72 students)

Course Description: Analysis and practice of public speaking including information gathering, persuasion and argument. Focused on the successful delivery of information to an audience through practice and evaluation.

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Communications and Alumni Relations Specialist, Bellin College**

Green Bay, WI, August 2012-August 2014

- Plan and oversee the implementation of the College's communications and public relations policies.
- Compose student and alumni newsletters, as well as internal and external communications.
- Enhance the College's web presence and maintain all social media platforms.
- Organize all alumni relations events and facilitate meetings of the Alumni Council.

### **Interim Recruiter, Bellin College**

Green Bay, WI, December 2011-May 2012

- Recruit prospective students for the College's Nursing and Radiologic Sciences programs
- Act as a liaison between the College and the community by answering questions, giving campus tours, and promoting the College's programs at college fairs.
- Develop an open a dialog between the College and prospective students regarding application requirements and acceptance standards.
- Utilize social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, as a recruiting tool to inform the College's target audiences of upcoming events, on campus activities, and Bellin College news.

### **Academic Advisor/Scheduler, Bellin College**

Green Bay, WI, April 2011-August 2012

- Advise students on their path to earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing or Radiologic Sciences.
- Review and explain liberal education and degree specific course requirements during academic advising appointments.
- Uphold College policies regarding unsuccessful grades, student probation/dismissals, and special schedules, as well as provide guidance and support for Bellin College students.

- Create each semester's academic schedule by coordinating classes, labs, clinical sites, and faculty assignments.

### **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS**

2015-present Member, CSCA

2014-present Member, NCA

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

2018 CSCA Paper Reviewer, IPSG Division

2018 NCA Paper Reviewer, HCT Division

2018 CSCA Respondent, Interpersonal and Small Group (IPSG) Division

2018 CSCA Panel Chair, Graduate Caucus

2017 Central States Communication Association (CSCA) Paper Reviewer, Graduate Caucus

2017 NCA Paper Reviewer, HCT Division

2017 NCA Panel Chair, HCT Division

2016 NCA Panel Chair, HCT Division

2016 NCA Paper Reviewer, HCT Division

2015 National Communication Association (NCA) Paper Reviewer, Human Communication and Technology (HCT) Division

2014 Member, Alumni Council, Bellin College

2013 Member, Alumni Council, Bellin College

2012 Co-Chair, General Education Committee, Bellin College

2011 Co-Chair, General Education Committee, Bellin College

2011 Member, Staff, Wellness, & Inter-Institutional Committees, Bellin College

2009 Instructor, LEAD Program: Problem Solving/Leadership Workshop, UW – Stevens Point

2007 President, BUD: Independent Service and Social Group, St. Norbert College

2007 Vice President, St. Norbert College Independent Council

2006 Community Service Chair, BUD: Independent Service & Social Group, St. Norbert College

2005 Community Service Chair, BUD: Independent Service & Social Group, St. Norbert College

2005 First Year Experience Mentor, St. Norbert College

### **DEPARTMENT SERVICE**

2018 Independent Study Facilitator, UW-Milwaukee

2018 Public Speaking Showcase Volunteer Judge, UW-Milwaukee

2017 Public Speaking Showcase Volunteer Judge, UW-Milwaukee

2015-2018 Communication Graduate Student Council Vice President, UW-Milwaukee

2015 Social Media Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council, UW-Milwaukee

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

2016-present Milwaukee LGBT Center Volunteer

2014 Wellness Day Community Volunteer, Bellin College

2013 Bellin Run Volunteer, Green Bay, WI



2013 Habitat for Humanity Volunteer  
2012 Wellness Day Community Volunteer, Bellin College  
2011 Wellness Day Community Volunteer, Bellin College

## **REFERENCES**

Dr. Erin Ruppel (Assistant Professor and Doctoral Advisor)  
Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201  
Office phone: (414) 229-1122  
Email: [ruppele@uwm.edu](mailto:ruppele@uwm.edu)

Dr. Mike Allen (Professor and Dissertation Committee Member)  
Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201  
Office phone: (414) 229-4261  
Email: [mikealle@uwm.edu](mailto:mikealle@uwm.edu)

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Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201  
Department phone: (414) 229-4261  
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