

# Interpersonal Relations and Social Patterns in Communication Technologies: Discourse Norms, Language Structures and Cultural Variables

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## Chapter 4

# Disclosure Decisions in Existing Relationships Online: Exploring Motivations for CMC Channel Choice

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### ABSTRACT

*Use of mediated channels of communication, such as email and instant messenger, is rapidly increasing, especially with adolescents and college-aged populations. This increase may alter interpersonal relationship maintenance strategies and communication patterns. The role of mediated channels of communication in some types of relationship initiation is well documented however, research investigating use within existing relationships is more limited. Self-disclosure is an important part of relationship maintenance, both in the initial stages of development as well as in existing relationships. This chapter explores motivations for disclosure through computer mediated communication (CMC) in pre-existing relationships and describes theoretical perspectives to advance examination of this area. Examples presented indicate four primary motivations for disclosure through computer mediated communication: self, other, relationship, and situational/environmental. Further, we propose several codes within each primary reason, many of which diverged from traditional motivations for FtF disclosure. Implications and future directions for interpersonal CMC research are discussed.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Non face-to-face (FtF) channels of communication are rapidly increasing in use and popularity (Pew Internet.org). This increase in the use of technology requires changes in the way interpersonal discourse is realized in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and also requires shifts in conceptualizations of interpersonal communication more broadly (cf. Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Much initial interpersonal CMC research focused on the development of relationships through CMC (e.g., Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Hian, Chuan, Trevor, & Detenber, 2004; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Whitty & Gavin, 2001) or use of CMC in organizations/business relationships (e.g., Baltes, Dickson, Sherman, Bauer, & LaGanke, 2002; Soukup, 2000) rather than use of CMC in maintenance of existing personal relationships. Given the extent of changes in CMC, we need to analyze how people are utilizing CMC to manage personal relationships. This chapter adapts models and frameworks of interpersonal communication to a CMC context to investigate how people report using CMC to disclose in existing relationships. The chapter will explore why participants report choosing CMC to share private information. By scrutinizing how individuals manage personal and private information, the chapter provides insight into interpersonal communication practices online. We begin with the increase in CMC use before turning to definitions of disclosure and reasons for using CMC disclosure.

## **BACKGROUND**

Even 20 years ago, CMC use was not widespread outside of industry, yet today CMC is an integral part of how many people maintain personal relationships. Pew Internet (2007) reported that 62% of US adults communicated with family and friends using the Internet everyday or multiple

times a week, compared to 38% who communicated via Internet several times a month or less. Many people use their home internet connection predominantly for interpersonal communication (Kraut, Mukhopadhyay, Szczypula, Kiesler, & Scherlis, 2000). People are also using mediated communication channels to seek information about others, which may be related to relationship maintenance (Westerman, Der Heide, Klein, & Walther, 2008). Finally, people are using email to maintain relationships in ways similar to FtF communication (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, & Wigley, 2008). One crucial feature of this relational maintenance is disclosing information online, and we turn next to definitions and description of self-disclosure literature.

There are several conceptualizations of self-disclosure, but self-disclosure is most commonly defined and studied as a voluntary, deliberate, intentional, and honest process (see Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). We define self-disclosure as an interpersonal interaction where one person deliberately shares private information (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences) of a personal nature with another person (Derlega et al., 1993). This definition not equivalent to some researchers who equate disclosure with “openness.” Self-disclosure is often, but not always, related to positive outcomes such as health and social support. For example, researchers have found that verbally discussing or writing about traumatic or upsetting life experiences (compared to trivial events) is associated with lower illness rates (Pennebaker & O’Heeron, 1984), fewer physician visits (Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988), less immune dysfunction (Pennebaker et al., 1988), and decreased severity of physical symptoms (Kelley, Lumley, & Leisen, 1997). These findings have been supported in aggregate by meta-analyses (Smyth, 1999), although the effect sizes are small and there are many moderators (Frattaroli, 2006). Self-disclosure of distressing information is often linked to catharsis (Kelly, Klusas, von Weiss, &

Kenny, 2001; Pennebaker, 1983). Self-disclosure may also provide an opportunity for the discloser to receive social support from others.

Many studies investigate the function of self-disclosure in relationship development, maintenance, and deterioration (see Derlega et al., 1993; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008), although these studies have generally not incorporated CMC. Self-disclosure is often used to accelerate relationship development and to foster intimacy (Gilbert, 1976). This research tends to focus on disclosure in FtF interactions, implicitly assuming FtF communication as the primary (or only) communication channel. New/emerging technologies challenge this assumption and require reconceptualization of channels of communication and the process of disclosure in ongoing relationship maintenance. Communication channel may serve an important function in both information management and impression management.

At one time, studies comparing telephone and FtF interactions found no difference in the amount of self-disclosure (Janofsky, 1970) or accuracy of social perception (Williams, 1977). In the early nineties, however, researchers began to recognize distinct differences between FtF communication and non-FtF communication. For example, Poole, Shannon, and DeSanctis (1992) claimed that FtF communication is the most natural medium of communication, whereas artificial media are slower, more taxing, and more likely to generate annoyance. Drotlet and Morris (2000) argued that FtF contact is a facilitator of mutual cooperation. They refer anecdotally to the propensity for diplomats and business negotiators to travel in order to communicate FtF, now often replaced by various forms of technology including video conferencing. Other studies indicated that managers used to prefer FtF communication (e.g., Johansen, Vallee, & Vian, 1979; Mintzberg, 1980). Research also reports better outcomes in experiments when negotiators communicate FtF rather than in writing (e.g., Sheffield, 1989; Valley, Moag, & Bazerman, 1998).

People may self-disclose more online than in other contexts (e.g., Parks & Floyd, 1996; Reingold, 1993; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Wallace, 1999; Wilkins, 1991), yet the authenticity of this increased disclosure may be questioned as people present themselves strategically (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Walther, 1996). We also know little about the motivations for choosing CMC to disclose in relationships. Researchers generally attribute the popularity of online communication to two features, visual anonymity and text only (non-verbal) channel (Joinson, 2001). Some research suggests that, due to these two factors, CMC is considered task oriented, low in socio-emotional content, and therefore lacks the opulence of FtF communication (Kinney & Dennis, 1994; Rice & Love, 1987; Walther, 1995). The relative anonymity of some online interactions may reduce perceptions of the risks inherent in self-disclosure, and potential disclosers may be less fearful of potential condemnation or rejection (McKenna & Bargh, 1998, 2000). For example, medical patients tend to report more symptoms and undesirable behaviors in computer mediated interviews compared to FtF interviews (Greist, Klein, & VanCura, 1973; see also Ferriter, 1993; Robinson & West, 1992). However, evidence of higher levels of self-disclosure within CMC also extends to interpersonal relationships unaffected by visual anonymity, such as known partners communicating electronically (Joinson, 2001). We turn next to several theories of disclosure and privacy that can assist with exploring CMC disclosure choices.

### **Relevant Theories of Disclosure and Information Management**

The following section will review three prominent theories in the disclosure literature and provide a brief overview of each theory or framework, paying special attention to how the theory incorporates CMC or could be used to theorize about CMC choices for disclosing in established rela-

tionships. The theories reviewed in this section are Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 2002), Disclosure Decision-Making Model (Greene, 2009), and the Decision Making Model of Self-Disclosure (Greene et al., 2006).

*Communication privacy management.* Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM; Petronio, 2002) is a dialectic theory that explains how people regulate and control private information in relationships through a rule-based management system. CPM views privacy and disclosure as tensions in a dialectic. According to Petronio (2002), people attempt to exert control over private information for two main reasons. First, they feel they have the right to “own” or control that information including information sent via email. Second, revealing information contributes to feelings of vulnerability, and by controlling that information individuals may feel less vulnerable. The CPM framework does argue that technology can affect privacy, mostly through violations (e.g., monitoring email or electronic medical records), but this conceptualization is less focused on voluntary disclosure decision-making.

CPM does not explicitly theorize about channel or channel choice in the theory except in terms of privacy violations (not disclosure decisions), but CPM has been applied to mediated communication. Metzger (2007) applied CPM to understand the tension between information disclosure and privacy within e-commerce relationships. Results extended CPM into the domain of CMC by demonstrating that “similar kinds of balancing dynamics appear to operate in the Web environment as they do in face-to-face situations” (Metzger, 2007, p. 354). Thus, CPM is a broad framework that has been applied primarily to FtF disclosure and emphasizes dialectical tensions of disclosure/privacy management or risks/rewards; to date, CPM has not been applied to or tested with use of CMC existing relationships.

*Disclosure decision-making model.* The Disclosure Decision-Making Model (DD-MM, Greene, 2009) explains the decision-making

process surrounding disclosure of information. Because disclosure involves risk and contributes to disclosers’ feelings of vulnerability (T. Afifi, Olson, & Armstrong, 2005), individuals make deliberate choices about the persons with whom they choose to share their private/personal information. Both the DD-MM and the Model of disclosure decision making (Greene et al., 2006, see next section) explicate how many features are considered when a potential discloser assesses information and recipients for possible sharing, including sharing online.

The DD-MM (Greene, 2009) elucidates a process prior to the disclosure enactment including both direct and indirect effects. The first part of this process is to assess the information, followed by an evaluation of a potential receiver (including relational quality and anticipated response), and finally exploration of perceived disclosure efficacy in predicting willingness to disclose. The DD-MM argues that disclosures are encouraged or discouraged by the relative evaluation of these factors. The DD-MM (Greene, 2009) is particularly relevant to the process of making health disclosure decisions, especially disclosure of negatively valenced information.

Channel choice is especially important once decision to disclose has been reached. The DD-MM argues that message enactment includes the discloser planning the setting, timing, channel/mode, and the message features, which may also include practice or rehearsal. The choice of disclosure channel, for example email or IM rather than FtF, maybe be influenced by assessment of information, receiver, or perceived efficacy. The only test of the DD-MM to date indicates that the process and variables proposed do represent the disclosure decision process, with anticipated response holding a central role (Greene et al., 2009). Future research on channel choice would also be useful in understanding CMC disclosure decisions.

*Decision making model of self-disclosure.* Greene et al. (2006) propose a Decision making

model of self-disclosure that explicates how background factors and self-, other-, and relationship-, and situation factors contribute to an individual's decision to disclose. The situational assessment may include (but is not limited to) consideration of the availability of the disclosure target, privacy for disclosure, flow of conversation, self-efficacy for disclosure, relationship quality, and the anticipated response (Greene et al., 2006, p. 414). During the process, the potential discloser reviews these factors as well to whom, how much, where, when, and by what channel to disclose the information. The explicit references to CMC for disclosure are anecdotal and have not been tested systematically via this perspective.

Derlega and colleagues identify several motivations for disclosure (and nondisclosure), which have been organized into self-, other-, relationship- and situational/environmental-focused categories (see Greene et al., 2006, 2003 or Derlega et al., 2008, 2004 for reviews). Self-focused reasons for disclosure are related to tangible and psychological benefits of disclosure including catharsis, seeking help, and self-clarification. Other-focused reasons emphasize the recipient and include a duty to inform, desire to educate, and test others' reactions. Relationship-focused reasons for disclosure include being in a close relationship, similarity, and a desire to increase closeness/intimacy. Situational-environmental reasons include the availability of the target, the target's involvement in the content of the disclosure, and the recipient "demands" disclosure or asks questions. Derlega also provides groupings of reasons by category for nondisclosure, but those are not the focus on the present chapter.

Considering the relatively underexplored relationship between CMC and self-disclosure motivations, we now turn to a review of conceptual fundamentals of disclosure. The next section probes why participants report choosing CMC to share information. Finally, we examine issues of self and identity in online communication by scrutinizing how individuals manage personal and private information disclosure.

## **Issues, Controversies, Problems in Disclosing Online**

### **Motivations Regulating Revealing via CMC**

At the core of the examination of CMC disclosure in existing relationships is a discussion of reasons or motivations for choosing to share information via CMC. For this chapter, we adopt the category system developed by Derlega and colleagues (Derlega et al., 2004, 2008; Greene et al., 2003, 2006) as a framework to organize reports of motivations to share information through CMC.

The reasons for revealing personal information via CMC vary widely, and we focus here on IM and email as common vehicles for disclosure in existing relationships. Some people have tendencies to tell others and have incorporated technology as an integral part of some or most relationships. Others find it difficult to disclose either generally or online specifically and consequently conceal. Hence, people are motivated to disclose or keep the information private because of different needs. There are a number of issues that provide insight into disclosure decisions that depend on people's motivations to reveal or conceal. We look at reasons for revealing private information via CMC based on self, other, interpersonal, and situational motivations.

As previously discussed, people's motivations for disclosure can be broadly categorized in four ways (see Derlega, Winstead, Folk-Barron, 2000; Derlega et al., 2004, 2008; Derlega & Winstead, 2001), and to date these have been examined exclusively in FtF disclosure. The following sections will discuss separately these disclosure decision motivations. The first section will discuss how people have personal needs to fulfill, labeled self motivations. The second, how people are motivated to disclose based on others' needs (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Greenspan, 1987). Third, how people disclose to fulfill interpersonal or relational needs, for the sake of the relationship

they have or want to have with the other person. Finally, people also disclose due to situational or environmental needs.

## **Solutions and Recommendations**

### **Reports of Disclosure Decision Motivations in CMC**

To explore these issues, we utilized examples from a survey investigating how non-FtF disclosure is utilized by participants in ongoing relationships ( $N = 410$ ). Participants were asked to report on two occasions, one time when they shared information that was personal or private with another person through a non-FtF channel, and one time when someone shared private information with them non-FtF. Variables included motivation for choosing channel, what was shared (content), and channel (the current emphasis is on CMC including instant messenger (IM) use and email use). Based on these reports, we provide examples of self, other, relationship, and situational motivations for CMC disclosure and compare how these examples represent theories of disclosure and CMC use more generally. We begin with examination of self-focused reasons for disclosing via CMC.

### **Decisions Leading to CMC Disclosure for Self-Gain**

The first motivation for CMC disclosure is based on benefits for self or using disclosure to further their own goals and needs. Greene et al. (2006; Derlega et al., 2008) described at three main reasons people decide to disclose that are based on motivations for fulfilling personal needs: striving for catharsis, seeking help, and self-clarification. In our data, prior categories did not represent the data well, instead four categories were represented in CMC disclosure: immediacy, convenience/efficiency, constrain and organize message and feelings, and ease/comfort. These categories do

not overall mirror reports for FtF disclosure, and we begin with discussion of immediacy.

*Immediacy.* The first self-focused reason for CMC disclosure was labeled immediacy. People express concerns about holding information in and need to share as soon as possible. Examination of self based reasons for CMC disclosure lead us to change this label from catharsis to immediacy, and this represents the data better than similar discussion of catharsis (specifically, this label includes an immediate time element where catharsis does not necessarily involve sharing immediately but can build over time). This is similar theoretically to media richness theory (Lengel & Daft, 1988), describing how channel choice can be motivated by potential for rapid feedback (cf. Timmerman, 2002).

Descriptions of motivations for disclosure via instant messenger included “it was urgent” and “I had to reach her as quickly as possible.” Another person told a friend about his suicide attempt and described, “I needed to tell someone right then.” Finally, one person used IM to share his parents’ reaction to his suspension from University: “because I needed to talk with someone immediately.” Each of these brief descriptions emphasizes the temporal relevance of CMC for information management, specifically disclosure choices. These descriptions emphasize the role of timing in disclosure decisions.

In addition to straightforward descriptions of immediacy, other participants chose to compare motivations for CMC disclosure explicitly with potential FtF disclosure. This makes evident an underlying assumption that current relationships are created/enacted using multiple channels or modes. The theme that runs through each of these examples is again the time feature, needing to share immediately. One woman shared her grades with her boyfriend via email: “I was excited by my straight As and couldn’t wait for face-to-face communication.” Another person used IM with a friend to share fears about having an STI: “It was



the fastest was to get in contact with me without leaving home at the moment.” Another person reported using IM because it was “quicker than waiting ‘til I saw him again.” Finally, a woman reported using IM to connect with a friend who was being abused by her boyfriend and stated, “I could not see her soon enough.” In these instances, participants recognized the utility of CMC channels for contact without delay. With technological connectedness continuing to increase, there may be further expectations for immediate contact.

Although this research is complex (see Kelly, 2002), there is considerable evidence that not sharing or keeping secrets (be it immediately or over time) may take a considerable toll physically and psychologically on people who hold sensitive information (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 1995). Telling someone else may relieve this burden and take some of the pressure off the person. Limandri (1989) suggested that HIV disclosure may be a form of “venting.” People may experience relief in letting a secret out. Stiles’ Fever Model (1987, 1995) explains how psychological distress functions to promote disclosure and relieve distress in the same way that a fever breaks physical infection. Stiles reported that disclosure is more common among people experiencing anxiety or other-arousal than among those not experiencing distress (Stiles, 1987, 1995; Stiles, Shuster, & Harrigan, 1992). Despite the practicality of the fever model, some scholars argue that the fever model may not apply in non therapeutic settings and claim that instrumental relational goals (such as impression management) may override the expressive functions of disclosure (e.g., Afifi & Caughlin, 2006). Keeping secrets (nondisclosure) can be more of a liability for people than telling (Lane & Wegner, 1995), because this constant monitoring is draining. Thus, there comes a point when individuals need to release the weight of the information to someone else (e.g., Lepore, Greenberg, Brunjo, & Smyth, 2002; Lepore, Ragan, & Jones, 2000; Pennebaker, 1995).

For immediacy, a number of examples were evident in the data. Participants recognize that, at times, CMC is one reliable way to quickly reach a recipient. Although the current data emphasize CMC disclosure, some participants reported that email or IM were even more immediate than phone, as phones were recently considered the “best” rapid alternate to FtF communication. This preference was apparent even for cell phones (or texting) where people complained that recipients have their phones off, do not answer calls, or are unavailable, and thus disclosers are at times unwilling to leave messages. In previous research, college-aged IM users reported that communication through IM was very useful for personalized communication. Email and IM offer communicative options that are often faster and more affordable than other channels (Huang & Yen, 2003). Immediate disclosers might be seeking instrumental or expressive support (Derlega et al. have a code for seeking support) but this goal was not articulated as such in these responses to why they chose CMC. Besides disclosing for immediacy reasons, another reason for disclosing via CMC was convenience and efficiency, and we turn to that next.

*Convenience and efficiency.* There were numerous reports of choosing CMC for disclosure because “it was fast, efficient” and “it was quick and more efficient” (both via email). Others reported using IM because “it was just more convenient” and “it was more available.” The terms efficient and convenience were repeated in our data. What separates this code from immediacy is recognition of the function rather than simply speed. As with immediacy, participants recognized how CMC functioned in relationships and the role of these channel choices. Computer mediated channels of communication, such as email and IM, allow users to maintain relationships “anywhere, anytime, on almost any computing platform, at very low cost” (Huang & Yen, 2003, p. 64). Because it lacks nonverbal cues, especially when compared to other channels such as telephonic channels, CMC is usually considered low in social pres-

ence/media richness (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1984; Rice, 1993; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976), even labeled “impoverished.” Conceptualizations generally consider this feature to be a limitation of CMC, however, it may be precisely this reduction in “richness” that facilitates the ease and convenience of CMC, or as Sproull and Kiesler (1985) noted, the decreased information available does not necessarily negatively affect the interaction. This reinforces the notion that people use CMC strategically and actively shape technology use (e.g., Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Hughes & Hans, 2001). Besides immediacy and convenience/efficiency, the next reported motivation for CMC disclosure was constrain/organize self.

*Constrain and organize message and feelings.* Besides disclosing immediately to relieve the burden of holding in sensitive information or convenience/efficiency, people reported using CMC to disclose in order to contain their own emotions and provide opportunity to organize and edit messages. The descriptions emphasize a greater of time—rather than the previously reported less time in immediacy—in motivating some CMC choices, and this category included reports of both email and IM. This emphasizes CMC self-presentation as “more malleable and subject to self-censorship” (Ellison et al., 2006, p. 418; see also Lengel & Daft, 1988; Walther, 1996).

First, using IM, one person reported why a friend would choose IM to disclose: “He talks more freely and openly when he can write things down and look at them and reword them. He gets his point across better without saying anything offensive.” This person acknowledges the feature of editing and planning that can be crucial in choosing CMC. Similarly, another person described how a friend shared her relationship issues over IM: “I would assume it was to give her time to think things (the situation) through as she expressed them to me through instant messaging.” This example emphasizes reflection or using time to refine a message (see Huang & Yen, 2003).

In terms of email, themes were similar. One person described, “Overall, I wrote her an email because I could word myself better and because I wanted to be short and clear about what I was feeling.” Another participant echoed her decision to disclose via email was “to ensure that I was able to present my info completely and in an organized manner without being distracted.”

Finally, a person described using email because “I am very closed when it comes to sharing my emotions—good or bad. It is hard to say things straight out—even when it is positive and showing how much you love a person. Writing it down so that I could look at it, choose the words and sending it through email helped me say it the way I wanted to.” These examples all point to the strategic aspects of CMC where planning and editing is maximized, much like prior reports of rewriting letters or other technology (see Bargh & McKenna, 2004, for historical review). Walther (1996) indicated that the lack of spontaneous cues in CMC allows for strategic self-presentation and may support information management. Asynchronous forms of computer-mediated communication allow people to communicate more strategically than they might when communicating FtF (e.g., Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Walther & Parks, 2002).

One portion of this category was participants’ awareness of a desire to deny nonverbal cues to recipients, emphasizing the visual anonymity aspects oft-referenced in CMC literature (e.g., Joinson, 2001). For example, one person used IM to share his sexual past, “because it’s easier to deal with something of this magnitude without having to see the person’s facial and nonverbal response.” One woman used email “because I don’t want her to see that I am crying.” Another woman was disclosing concerns about her relationship to her boyfriend via IM: “I was upset and I didn’t want him to read my face.” One person emailed his friend about his breakup “because he was crying so it was easier to type than to talk.” In each of these examples, participants recognize

one benefit of CMC for disclosure is restricting available cues to the other. CMC is described as being low in social presence when compared to FtF communication and other telecommunication media (see social presence theory, Short et al., 1976). CMC is also considered much *leaner* than telephonic communication (media richness theory, see, Lengel & Daft, 1988), with reduction of available cues. Rather than this being a detriment in interaction, strategic users may be taking advantage of these features (e.g., Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Sproull & Kiesler, 1985).

Several participants explicitly compared their choices of CMC to FtF disclosure, emphasizing consideration of disclosure FtF before relying on CMC. We note that most participants did not report first considering FtF and many specifically chose (rather than defaulted to) CMC because of the inherent benefits noted previously. These reports echo discussions of disclosure efficacy seen in DD-MM (Greene, 2009) described previously, that people need to feel confident to share difficult messages and may feel unable to accomplish this FtF due to “loss of words” or being overwhelmed by emotions. One woman broke up with her boyfriend over email: “I was ashamed and did not think I would physically be able to tell him face to face.” Another participant used IM to disclose: “I tried to do it face-to-face, but my mind would always go blank and I couldn’t think of the words.” Finally, a man was sharing relationship issues with his friend who described, “I think he could not find the right words in person and needed more time to compose his thoughts.” Thus, CMC may serve an additional function within organizing/constraining of facilitating disclosure efficacy when people feel unable to share a message FtF. The time to edit/revise and word the message in the desired manner was central to these reports, and future research on disclosure efficacy would be useful (see Greene, 2009), for example to see if disclosing via CMC increases perceived efficacy.

The constrain and organize message and feelings category is related to the concept of online disinhibition. CMC may present weakened social restraints, resulting in online disinhibition, defined by Joinson (1998) as “an apparent reduction in concerns for self-presentation and the judgment of others” (p. 44). CMC provides some individuals with the social freedom needed to communicate interpersonally by reducing social inhibition, anxiety, and self-consciousness (McKenna, 1998). People may thus feel more “free” to share messages via CMC or have increased efficacy to disclose (see DD-MM, Greene 2009). Now that we have discussed the constrain/organize self motivation for sharing online, we turn to the last self-focused reason of ease and comfort.

*Ease and comfort.* The next category represented in the data for self-focused reasons was ease and comfort. Participants repeatedly used phrases “easier” and “more comfortable” in describing why they used CMC to disclose. For example, a participant used email “because it was easier than having to say it”, while another chose IM to share her bulimia with a friend “because it is easier to disclose.” Similarly, a woman described sharing a past abusive relationship over email “because it was more comfortable for me than talking about it face to face.” Additionally, participants reported that it was “less painful,” “less personal,” and “felt more safe” to disclose via CMC. Each of these examples emphasizes some emotional benefit of disclosing via CMC.

As with other codes, some participants explicitly referenced rejection of FtF options when describing reasons for disclosing via CMC. For example, one person shared with a friend that she was dropping out of school because she could not afford it after her parents’ divorce: “email felt most comfortable not telling him face to face.” Another friend shared her past eating disorder: “I think it was easier for her to tell me online because it was hard for her to tell me in person. I think that it’s easier to say things that are personal without

seeing them face to face.” Another participant described a friend’s sharing his arrest for drug possession via IM: “he was more comfortable expressing his situation via instant message and not having to actually tell me.” A woman shared her same-sex feelings with a friend using IM: “she has been holding this back from her close friends for a long time and therefore probably felt much more comfortable online as opposed to face-to-face confrontation.” Finally, a woman told a friend about her sexual assault via IM because “sometimes it’s easier to type things rather than speak them.”

We have noted how decisions to disclose via CMC for self-related reasons are motivated by four factors (immediacy, convenience/efficiency, constrain and organize message and feelings, ease and comfort). These factors emphasize personal reasons for disclosure. However, people may also factor in others’ needs and characteristics in CMC disclosure decisions. Thus, individuals take account of other-related issues, as they factor in the other through constraining the other’s reaction.

### Decisions Leading to CMC Disclosure for Other-Gain

The second overall motivation for disclosure online is based on perceived benefits for the other person. Although people are motivated to disclose so they can achieve positive outcomes for themselves, they also consider how their disclosure affects others and balance these considerations in disclosure decisions. Derlega et al. (2004, 2008) described three main reasons people disclose that are based on considering others: duty to inform, educate others, and test others’ reactions (see also Greene et al., 2003, 2006). In our data, these categories did not represent the data well, thus constrain other’s reaction is our single category for CMC other-gain.

*Constrain other’s reaction.* This other-focused category included explicit references to choosing CMC disclosure to direct or limit the reaction of

the recipient. This is slightly different from prior research test other’s reaction, as in our descriptions people were relatively certain about the type of response they were likely to receive and thus did not use CMC to “test” a reaction. For example, one woman contacted a boyfriend after breaking up to ensure that her message was not ignored: “I emailed because he had to listen to me or read what I wrote.” Another woman used IM to disclose to a friend that she had “hooked up” (had sex with someone she was not dating) because “my friend might have got mad and yelled at me if we were face to face, and I didn’t want to give her the chance to yell at me.” Finally, one woman shared her decision to abort with a friend via IM because “she knows I oppose abortion, so I’m sure she was afraid I would respond negatively but AOL IM is so detached and impersonal that it made it easy, I suppose.” In these cases, participants wanted to limit options available to the other, and the emphasis is on how the receiver handles the information. This category is similar theoretically to the DD-MM (Greene, 2009) assess receiver, where anticipated response is a central variable. In testing the DD-MM, Greene et al., (2009) reported a strong relationship between anticipated response with efficacy and willingness to disclose. Specifically, negative anticipated response (e.g., gossip or negative relational consequences) reduced disclosure efficacy and disclosure. For CMC disclosure decisions, other’s reactions should receive attention.

*Avoiding as a type of constrain other’s reaction.* One aspect of constraining other’s response is avoiding and focuses on specifically not engaging with the disclosure recipient’s reaction to the shared information. For avoid other’s reaction, the emphasis is not on limiting the other in a specific way, but many use CMC to disengage from the other’s reaction while still completing the goal of sharing the information. Withholding information may be related to protection of self-identity or impression management (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; cf. Walther, 1996). This is especially true when information

presents a threat to identity (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ogilvie, 1987). People do not share without attempting to estimate reactions of others for their own protection and safety (e.g., Greene, 2000, 2009; Greene & Faulkner, 2002; Greene et al., 2003, 2006; Holt, Court, Vedhara, Not, Holmes, & Snow, 1998; Kalichman, 1995; Kelly, Otto-Salaj, Sikkema, Pinkerton, & Bloom, 1998).

This avoid theme was repeated several times by participants reporting choosing CMC for disclosure “to avoid the reaction” and “I did not want to see what she thought.” One participant emailed her mother about getting another speeding ticket because “I figured I would not have to hear or see the disappointment in her voice or face.” Another person IM’d a friend to share her first sexual experience and avoid possible negative feedback: “I actually didn’t want to see her facial expression when I told her.” Another person emailed a friend that she is dating a married man because she “didn’t want to see my reaction. Maybe she thought I would be critical.” A participant emailed her boyfriend that she was pregnant because “I was nervous about his reaction—I didn’t know if he would be angry.” Another person sent an email to a roommate (indicating that she was moving out) because “it was something I really wasn’t proud of; it made it easier not to have to look her in the eyes.” Finally, a participant used IM to share with a friend that he is homosexual: “I think he might have been afraid to see my reaction (nonverbal).” In all of these cases (and others), participants estimated that others would respond negatively and sought to avoid these reactions. These anticipated responses were all negative and lead to decisions to share but attempt to limit reaction. There are studies about nondisclosure based on anticipated response, but one theoretical advancement of this finding is how people balance CMC disclosure rather than nondisclosure when expecting negative responses.

This calls to mind the issue of topic avoidance. When both parties know the (potentially private)

information but actively choose not to discuss it (e.g., because communication results in conflict, discomfort, or some other negative outcome) it is topic avoidance (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006, Caughlin & Afifi, 2004). Although theoretically-based arguments suggest that some topic avoidance may be functional in relationships, empirical research, in general, indicates that topic avoidance in relationships is related to dissatisfaction. However, using CPM to ground their investigation Caughlin and Afifi (2004) discovered that dissatisfaction is moderated by individuals’ motivations for avoidance as well as by the personal and relational characteristics linked to these motivations. Topic avoidance may be circumstantially benign or, in fact, helpful. Moving forward, research should consider how using CMC for disclosure may be perceived by the discloser and/or recipient as “avoiding” [FtF] and how this perception might affect relational outcomes.

*Avoiding embarrassment as a type of constrain other’s reaction.* One specific negative emotion described by participants is a desire to avoid embarrassment. Some references to avoiding embarrassment were direct. For example, one person emailed a friend about an STI diagnosis “probably because she was embarrassed.” Another person IM’d a friend that he had gotten drunk and was unfaithful “probably it was less embarrassing for him.” AIM is much easier to share feelings, especially for guys.” Finally, a person IM’d a friend that she was having an affair with a married man, “probably because she was embarrassed and felt more comfortable talking this way.” Common in these examples is protecting self from embarrassment by restricting others’ responses. The emphasis is on identity and self-presentation, similar to themes present throughout CMC literatures (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006; Walther, 1992; 1996; Walter & Parks, 2002) such as in Social Information Processing (SIP) theory.

Other references to avoiding embarrassment directly referenced a choice not to utilize FtF

communication. For example, a woman shared with a friend her relational infidelity via IM because “I was too embarrassed to disclose it face to face.” Another person used email to share her eating disorder “because she did not have to feel the discomfort of face to face—she was embarrassed.” Someone shared abuse in her home via IM “because it was more embarrassing to say face to face. You let your guard down more on the phone or online.” Finally, a man reported that his sister shared via email that she was adopting a baby because “it was probably too intense and intimate for her to lay out all of her fertility problems in person, right in front of me.” For all of these examples, participants mentioned how CMC can decrease embarrassment of FtF disclosure, again emphasizing uses of strategic self-presentation in channel choices.

We have noted how decisions to disclose for others are motivated by one factor, constrain other’s reactions. These factors emphasize other or recipient focused reasons for disclosure, specifically concerning how the other would react to the disclosure. There were fewer of these examples than motivations for self-gain, and this is a substantive difference from FtF findings. One difference from prior research on motivations is the absence of educating others or generally duty to inform (although there were isolated reports of using CMC to notify a partner if someone was pregnant or had an STI), with CMC disclosure for other-gain emphasizing specific recipient reactions. These other motivations may be more implicit in CMC or perhaps prior research emphasizing health disclosure (e.g., HIV) does not generalize across all types of disclosed information. Besides other-focused motivations, people may also factor in interpersonal or relational needs in disclosure decisions. Thus, individuals take the relationship into account and factor in the relationship. In our CMC data, one code was apparent for relational gain: normal mode of contact.

### Decisions Leading to CMC Disclosure for Interpersonal/Relational-Gain

Although people are motivated to disclose via CMC so they can achieve positive outcomes for themselves and others, they also consider how their disclosure would affect the relationship. These motivations for interpersonal gain in prior research establishing emotionally supportive relationships, similarity, and increasing closeness. But in our data one code was more representative: normal mode of contact.

*Normal mode of contact.* The interpersonal reason reported for CMC disclosure described CMC as “normal mode of business” in many of these relationships. For example, one person described, “our schedules are completely backwards, I never get to see or actually talk to him, so we rely on email.” Participants described why they chose IM to reveal as “just how we normally talk,” “it was our common means of communication,” and “we regularly converse in this manner.” Another person utilized IM for similar reasons, “We never have time to call or see each other, so we just IM when we’re online and that way we can keep in touch.” These participants have incorporated CMC into everyday relationships and are accustomed to communicating online. This is consistent with previous research that demonstrates how people use the internet as another means of contacting friends and family when FtF or telephonic communication would otherwise be difficult (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Hampton & Wellman, 2001).

For others, the notion of normal contact is more extreme, rather than being common practice CMC was utilized by some as a default method of communication. One woman contacted her boyfriend’s ex-girlfriend to share the timing of when they started dating (implying infidelity): “she only had my email and no other way to contact me.” Another ex-girlfriend tested positive for an STI and emailed her boyfriend “because I would not accept her phone calls and would not

want to see her.” Finally, one person described, “Internet was our usual mode of communication, as we were broken up and rarely saw each other.” For these participants, CMC was not necessarily the first choice of one (or both) of the parties, but the channel choice was a reflection of the status of the relationship. This is something of an aberration from the norm as Wellman, Haase, Witte, and Hampton (2001) reported that Internet users use email to supplement rather than replace FtF and telephone contact, especially to maintain longer distance relationships.

Others reported using CMC after making attempts through other communication channels. One person shared her past abuse with a professor via email because “I was a busy person and always got his voicemail.” Another person shared an illness diagnosis with a staff person via email because “it was required because of the bureaucracy of a large institution.” For this group, CMC was not the preferred means of disclosure but rather they resorted to it. These participants accept the role of a less personal channel to disclose based on a particular situation. Implicitly, some of these reports demonstrate preference for a more rich medium than CMC for certain disclosures (e.g., Lengel & Daft, 1988), and this is in stark contrast to the organize and constrain own feelings code where participants sought out a leaner medium to serve their own goals. This is somewhat consistent with what Bargh and McKenna (2004) reported in their review of Internet communication; that for some interactions CMC is preferred and results in better outcomes.

We have described one category people report as a motivation for disclosing online for interpersonal or relational gain, normal mode of contact. These motivations emphasize the relational features for channel choice and are not equivalent to previously reported categories close relationship, similarity, or desire to increase intimacy. In these CMC reports, decisions to disclose were motivated more by function than to strategically increase relationship closeness. Next, we turn

to reasons people may disclose for situational/environmental reasons.

### Decisions Leading to CMC Disclosure for Situational/Environmental Reasons

The final motivational grouping for CMC disclosure is based situational or environmental reasons. In our data five codes emerged: availability, distance, contact multiple people, privacy, and came up in conversation. Previous research identified three codes that were somewhat consistent with our data, availability, other person asked or demanded information (similar to same up in conversation), and the other person was involved. We begin examining availability.

*Availability.* The first situational/environmental code for CMC disclosing is based on availability; people report disclosing via CMC because they see this as a way to ensure contact with the recipient. For example, one person described using IM because “he knew that I check my e-mail every day and that I am busy with schoolwork, so he emailed it to me with all the information, so it saved time.” Another person IM’d because “it was too late at night,” similar to using IM because “she just got home and it was late.” Finally, one person sent an email because “I didn’t want to wake her up with a phone call, it was too late.” Timing is key in many of these descriptions, where people acted to share the information but did not consider the information significant enough to disrupt the other (e.g., wake someone up at 6 am). According to Derlega et al. (2008), at times a disclosure recipient is chosen mainly because of proximal or situational availability. In this case, we extend the argument that not just a particular receiver is chosen based on the availability, the availability additionally drives channel choice. We turn next to distance, a similar category but emphasizing geographic proximity rather than temporal or situational availability.

*Distance.* By far, the most common reported relationship motivation for disclosing via CMC

was related to distance or physical location (see Wellman et al., 2001). These participants primarily had previously established relationships and were utilizing CMC as a way to remain connected, thus disclosure was a crucial part in remaining involved in the other's life. We separate these reports for permanent versus temporary distance.

Some participants reported that CMC had become the primary means of communication with friends and family because of a change in geographic location. For example, one person used IM "because he is a friend from home and is at a different school." Another person emailed a coworker regarding an experience with a customer: "because my co-worker actually works in [Midwest] not [east coast]." Most of these examples in the data were similar. Strikingly, the majority of people reporting geography as a reason for CMC disclosure were sharing with friends and only occasionally with family or other groups. The topics of these disclosures were wide-ranging, including: friend was pregnant, relationship troubles, considering abortion, friend was sexually assaulted, friend had sex with an acquaintance, friend fears failing a class, friend began dating someone, friend considers himself bisexual, friend broke up with boyfriend, friend had job offer, friend started having sex, and a friend was diagnosed with an illness. One person IM'd because "I live too far away to talk face to face." Another IM'd a friend that he broke up with his girlfriend because "he goes to school in Philly-we don't see each other than often but like to keep up on events in our lives." Finally, a friend emailed about having sex for the first time because "that's the only way for us to communicate because we're both away at college in different states." For these participants, using CMC is a normal and expected part of a relationship. There is a naturalness to these descriptions of CMC, emphasizing integration of CMC into everyday lives and relationships.

For some participants, there was recognition that distance may be temporary, and they sought to creatively employ CMC to remain connected.

One woman emailed a pregnancy scare to a friend: "I shared it via email because I was out of the country at the time." Another woman used IM to share that she was thinking of cheating on her boyfriend because her friend "was away for the weekend and I wanted her to know." Finally, a woman IM'd that she was raped, because her friend "doesn't go to this school so he wasn't around." For these participants, the distance was temporary on some level, but the information needed to be shared (recall immediacy) or they wanted some type of support. Thus, CMC disclosure provides a means to maintain relationship across geographical constraints.

*Contact multiple people.* Another category that may be unique to CMC disclosure emerged in these data using CMC, contact multiple people. Several people reported using email (but not IM) to disclose to multiple recipients simultaneously. For example, a friend shared difficulties adjusting to college: "it was sent in a bulk email, so just to save time repeating the information. He couldn't deal with sending a note to each person." Another person emailed her cancer diagnosis to a group of friends: "the information needed to be passed onto a mass number of people." Finally, a participant used email to share with friends that he was getting divorced: "he told several people at once. That way everyone knew at the same time." In each of these examples, there is recognition of others' right to know or expectation to know certain information in addition to reducing the level of effort of the discloser. Thus, these decisions are deliberate uses of email to facilitate disclosure to multiple recipients. This is a special case of disclosure that has not received a great deal of attention except in "public disclosure" literature that occurs often for "educating others." For example Wiener, Heilman, and Battles (1998) studied when children become "poster kids" for a particular disease (i.e., HIV). In this situation, the "receiver" is difficult to detect and not selected per se, much like posting information online on a social networking site is certainly self-presentation and information management but



not the same kind of self-disclosure discussed in this chapter because it lacks a particular recipient. In our data, however, the emphasis for contact multiple people was placed on saving time and energy for the discloser rather than emphasizing needs of the receiver.

*Privacy.* The next situational motivation was privacy, and this is another difference in findings for CMC. Specifically, in prior literature (e.g., Derlega et al., 2004, 2008; Greene et al., 2003, 2006), privacy was noted as a reason for non-disclosure. In this case, however, perceptions of privacy are driving decisions to choose a particular channel to share a message rather than choosing nondisclosure as reported in prior research. There is an implicit recognition of selectivity in sharing information and carefully choosing recipients that is foundational to theories of disclosure and privacy.

Descriptions of privacy as a motivation for channel choice were rare. For example, a friend shared that she had hooked up (had sex with someone she did not know) via IM because “conversations behind closed doors in our house are always suspect—by using IM, we avoided dealing with questions from other housemates who would have wondered what we were talking about.” This woman wanted to restrict the information to the particular recipient. Another woman shared her pregnancy via IM “because we rarely have class together and if she told me during class others might hear and make fun of her.” Another man described, “I get tired of people listening in to my phone calls, so I try to use email or IM for really personal business, like telling her that I’d bounced our rent check.” Another participant described how his friend came out using IM: “He was at work, so it’s not like we could talk on the phone, so IM works very well in this kind of situation.” Finally, one woman described trying to support her younger sister who was trying to begin dating against family wishes: “the only times we are face-to-face is at home. At home, my parents or grandmother is ALWAYS around. They either can

hear us, sneak up on us, or suspect things based on our reactions and movements whenever we would talk about such things. Online, however, they know we’re talking but never know what it is we’re talking about or who we are talking with.” For each of these descriptions, the theme of privacy included emphasizing sharing with a particular receiver and not others. This is similar to CPM (Petronio, 2002) boundary notion where people feel that they “own” or control information, and this is expanded in Venetis, Greene, Banerjee, and Bagdasarov (2008) description of implicit or explicit rules used in gossip. The DD-MM (Greene, 2009) also considered the receiver and gossip in disclosure decision-making, and these themes are evident in some descriptions of CMC disclosure choices.

*Came up in conversation.* The final category of situational motivations was came up in conversation, and this is somewhat similar to prior reports of other asked/demanded information. This category only emerged with IM and not with email. With new and expanding technology including mobile phones and text message packages, there may be even further increase in reports of topics “emerging” in online conversations. In the simplest terms, “as we were talking on IM it just came up,” “it just happened to come up in conversation [IM],” and “I was already talking to her through AIM so it kinda just happened.” Some of these topics that “just came up” could be considered stigmatized (or secret), indicating that the context can create openings for disclosure (e.g., Petronio et al., 2006). These topics included: depression, stealing, drug use, sexual past, relational fidelity, and STI. Another person similarly described, “because we were already discussing the topic, so I figured I would tell her my personal problems with it.” Another person wrote, “the subject had somehow come up while we were talking online so while he probably could have told me face-to-face, we had already been talking on instant messenger. He made the blog entry to even out the details and tell his side of the story with no interruption-it

was easier in that case than doing it face to face.” Finally, a woman described sharing her abortion online because “it was relevant to our discussion on AIM, she brought it up.” This is similar to DD-MM’s description of how reciprocity can bypass normal disclosure decision processes; specifically if a topic is raised by the recipient, someone may choose to share—even if they had not planned to—if they perceive some level of similarity. People may share with others who have a common background (Derlega, Lovejoy, et al., 1998; Derlega & Winstead, 2001). Because they have common experiences, these people are generally expected to react better. This may be due to the perception that the other person is likely to be supportive or less likely to be rejecting.

### Decisions Leading to CMC Disclosure for Multiple Reasons

Thus far, the discussion has emphasized participants’ reports of one of four reasons or motivations for CMC disclosure. This perspective, however, does not take multiple goals into account (see Berger, 1997; Goldsmith, 2004; O’Keefe, 1988). That is, people at times have more than one motivation for channel choices, and these motivations can reinforce or contradict one another. Some people factor in situations where two categories of motivations might apply (for example both a self-gain and an situational gain to disclose apply). People much balance what may be competing or complementary motivations to utilize the channel that will maximize benefits (and minimize risks). For example, some participants balanced distance with immediacy and chose to share via IM: “We both attend different schools, and he wanted to talk asap,” and “she was in college in a different state and wanted to tell me right away.” Another person balanced distance with constrain/avoiding reaction in choosing to email: “there are two reasons. The first because she lives out of state and the second because it was an embarrassing subject.” These examples illustrate tensions in

multiple goals, and CPM (Petronio, 2002) argues that information management involves a constant balancing of these dialectical tensions. The DD-MM is more specific in identifying assessments of information, relationship (quality and anticipated response) and efficacy as central to managing these disclosure decision tensions.

Other examples of balancing multiple goals are more complex, beyond juggling two motivations. One man shared via CMC how his parents’ ugly divorce was affecting him because “email is the fastest way to send out a message, the easiest to communicate with (I think I would have broken down if I talked on the phone). At that time it was late at night, and I didn’t want to deal with the emotions.” Another woman described her sexual past via IM because “I am shy and would have been embarrassed talking about it face-to-face. Plus, the subject came up while talking online, so it was convenient.” Finally, a woman shared her pregnancy with a friend via email because “she is so distraught right now and busy, we don’t see each other much, and in addition doesn’t want to hear my immediate reaction.” For each of these people, using CMC to disclose was an outcome of balancing a variety of goals and needs to maximize the choice and relational outcome. The themes presented, both singly and multiply, emphasize the significance of examining motivations for interpersonal communication processes in CMC in existing relationships.

### FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter discussed four CMC disclosure decision— self, other, relationship, and situational/ environmental focused motivations—and explored how these motivations are consistent with or required changes in CMC and interpersonal theories.

Self-focused reasons for disclosure dominated reports of motivations for disclosing via CMC. Many participants identified motivations for

disclosure online that were related to the absence of context clues inherent in CMC. Theories of social presence (Short et al., 1976) and media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1984) propose that FtF is held to be the ideal, standard, and/or goal for interpersonal communication. However, these data indicate that people are deliberately utilizing and benefiting in particular from these oft-lamented “disadvantages” of CMC, such as leanness. Theories of CMC and relationships should consider how the widespread adoption and acceptance of interpersonal relationship maintenance not only makes mediated channels of communication “par” with FtF communication, but possibly even superior in some cases as indicated in this chapter. In particular, theories of disinhibition and efficacy can be adapted to explain these findings.

The data revealed one other-focused reason for disclosure through CMC, constrain and avoid other’s reaction (including embarrassment). These constrain and avoidance goals were overall very well accomplished in these reports, at least temporarily. People made strategic decisions using CMC to constrain and avoid others’ reactions, but it remains to be seen if in the longer-term these disclosers still manage to avoid the dreaded expected reactions (one participant called her friend “cowardly” for sending an IM instead of calling or seeing her FtF). That is, with time, are negative reactions to disclosure more or less intense? These reasons were also related to utilizing the features of CMC (not available in FtF communication) for the specific purpose of interpersonal communication. It is possible, for example, to use CMC to allow the recipient time to adjust before reacting, and this chapter notes that perceived reaction is crucial in CMC disclosure decisions. This is consistent with the DD-MM (Greene, 2009) where anticipated response is central to disclosure decision-making, and Caughlin et al. (2005) reminds us that disclosure reactions are often less negative than anticipated, with some intense exceptions (see also Greene & Faulkner, 2002).

Relationship focused reasons for disclosure through CMC were inconsistent with research in FtF communication, for example increasing closeness and similarity. For this group, using CMC for disclosure was simply the normal mode of communication. This may be related to the younger sample, who, having grown up with this technology, find CMC disclosure integrally incorporated in their friendships and dating relationships, and perhaps family relations as well (see Bargh & McKenna, 2004). That is not to say that participants failed to recognize when they were strategically managing a relationship by choosing CMC. We need to explore overall patterns of when people choose FtF compared to CMC and general technology use patterns in the relationship to delve into this further (cf. Lea & Spears, 1995; O’Sullivan, 1996).

Finally, the data revealed five situational/environmental focused reasons for disclosure through CMC, more categories than prior research and widely reported. The first category was availability, somewhat unique to constantly changing technology. A new reason that would not be applicable in FtF communication is distance. It is not uncommon for today’s romantic relationships to be initiated and/or maintained across great physical distances. In addition, social mobility also extends to family relations and friendships, when people move with greater ease than prior generations. The third category included a different use of the concept of privacy. CPM (Petronio, 2002) argues that individuals feel they have the right to “own” or control their personal/private information, yet executing this notion becomes more complicated when others become “co-owners” of information and can gossip (see Venetis et al., 2008). The idea of co-ownership of information is especially interesting when considering CMC and the information sharing capabilities it allows. For example, future research could test this respect for “ownership” phenomenon with blind CC and forwarding of emails. The fourth situational motivation was *came up in conversation*, similar to prior reports of

other asked (see also DD-MM, Greene, 2009, for asking questions). The final situational motivation was to contact many people at once, and this is clearly grounded in the context and ease afforded by technological options. It may be argued that the motivations underlying all reasons explicated are to some extent environmental/situational focused. This data collection intentionally sought descriptions of disclosure events through mediated channels of communication. Future research may endeavor to collect data encompassing both FtF and non-FtF disclosure so that other situational reasons for disclosure may be compared.

### **Extending Disclosure Theories to CMC for Existing Relationships**

We proposed three theoretical perspectives of disclosure that could be applied to sharing information via CMC. The decision making model of self-disclosure (Greene et al., 2006) provided groupings of reasons to disclose via CMC overall that in the broadest sense matched the framework, but subcategories differed a great deal. One conclusion would be that future research on disclosure goals via CMC should explore self, other, relationship and situational focused structure but adopt the subcategories of FtF with caution. There are apparent similarities at the abstract level but differences are also apparent. Additionally, for this model, future research could test these motivations in relation to decisions for timing and setting, as utilized via CMC.

Next, the DD-MM (Greene, 2009) showed promise for explaining CMC disclosure decisions. As noted previously, the components of efficacy (cf. disinhibition) and anticipated response should be included in future research, along with information assessment such as valence (recall discussion of avoiding embarrassment, which is rooted in information content). We should seek to explicate channel choice in DD-MM. It is easy to specu-

late how assessment of information, relationship (relational quality and anticipated response), and efficacy could predict channel choice. We have seen examples and categories in these data that would support developing hypotheses. The DD-MM is developed to date to explicate the decision to disclose and not message enactment per se (e.g., channel choice or setting), thus one logical extension would be to use the model to hypothesize about channel selection and test the relations.

Finally, CPM (Petronio, 2002) had been utilized once previously for CMC but not with personal relationships. In the present context, CPM was useful to highlight balancing dialectical tensions in reports of multiple goals. Additionally, CPM can be used to conceptualize reports of privacy for situational motivations to disclose via CMC, but a different conceptualization of privacy goals may be required. In the present context, privacy was not a motivation for nondisclosure, rather it explained channel choice to restrict the information to specific recipients. The concept of perceived information ownership and gossip (see Greene, 2009; Venetis et al., 2008) is worthy of exploration. We can use CPM to extend CMC disclosure and examine how people protect information when they utilize CMC.

### **CONCLUSION**

Technology use is embedded in many existing relationships. This chapter includes reports of widespread CMC use for the critical function of self-disclosure, part of information management in relationships. We concur with prior conclusions that people actively shape their technological interactions (see Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Hughes & Hans, 2001). We are also not concluding CMC has unilateral negative effects for heavy users, rather there are additional positive effects and benefits of CMC for social interaction through disclosure (cf. Bargh & McKenna; Sproull & Kiesler, 1985).

Examinations such as this one help us move beyond study of business relationships, relationship initiation, or exclusively online relationships to include management of information via CMC for people using both FtF and CMC channels. This is an important area for continued research, as people continue to expand their use of CMC technologies to maintain relationships. We emphasized IM and email examples in this chapter, one step in exploring the overall process. Some findings are consistent with both interpersonal and CMC theories, but in places pointed to need to expand and reconceptualize certain features, reinforcing similar calls by others (e.g., Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Lea & Spears, 1995). People are taking advantage of CMC technologies strategically in their disclosure choices and should reexamine assumptions embedded in FtF theories. Over time, with greater experience and more diffusion, we would expect increased skill, adaption, and use of CMC to disclose in interpersonal relationships. This will continue to be a crucial area for research, how people use CMC to maintain close relationships, emphasized here through disclosure and information management.

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