

# What You Don't Know Won't Hurt Me: Impression Management Functions of Communication Channels in Relationships

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*This study addresses the implications of interpersonal communication technology use for personal relationships. Elements of an impression management model, which specifies the processes and outcomes of strategic uses of channel and message for self-presentational goals, are tested. Respondents indicated their preference for interpersonal communication channels (telephone, answering machine, electronic mail, letters) in 4 types of episodes involving issues that either supported or threatened their own or their partner's self-presentation. Findings supported the hypotheses predicting that individuals recognize mediated channels' capacity to manage ambiguity and clarity in interactional episodes and use those perceptions in forming their channel preferences. The constrictions of mediated channels are often seen as advantageous for interactions that could threaten positive impressions. The results support a functional perspective that views mediated communication channels as a tool for managing self-relevant information in pursuit of self-presentational goals.*

One of the more remarkable developments in North American society in the 1990s was the diffusion of new communication technologies from the workplace into the sphere of social and personal relationships. Specifically, interpersonal communication technologies have become important new channels for people to conduct their relational interactions. Given the ubiquity and indispensability of "old" interpersonal media (e.g., telephone and letters), the variety of new interpersonal media (e.g., electronic mail, fax, videotape, videoconference, pagers, personal digital assistant), and prospects for even more options (e.g., videophone, desktop conferencing), the need is increasing for an understanding of the implications of these new technologies for the en-

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tire range of human relationships: romantic, family, friend, business, health care, cross cultural, etc. Much of the social science theory and research have so far focused primarily on business uses of communication technology in corporate settings. The study reported here and elsewhere (O'Sullivan, 1997) contributes to the efforts to identify and examine the implications of technologically mediated communication for social and personal relationships. This paper reports the results of an investigation into several of the propositions and hypotheses emerging from an impression management model of strategic channel use (O'Sullivan, 1996).

The theoretical importance of this line of inquiry is based on several ideas. First, it places technology users, instead of the technology, at the center of inquiry. This shifts the focus of inquiry from the technology characteristics to the people who use the technologies. Second, this research uses a multichannel approach (Perse & Courtright, 1993; Rice, 1993). Although much of the communication technology research tends to focus on a single technology at a time, use of any one technology should be considered in light of the repertoire of other channels available (including face-to-face) to fully understand when, why, how, and with what outcomes any single channel is used. Third, this research focuses on the implications of communication technology use in personal relationships. This focus led to incorporation of theory and research from the interpersonal and relational communication literature as the foundation for the theoretical framework.

The practical importance of this research is increasing every day as technological developments are creating cheaper, more accessible, and more varied channels of interpersonal communication for people to conduct their personal relationships. While communication researchers are increasingly focusing on the role of new communication technologies in communication-related issues, the accelerating pace of dramatic developments and tremendous growth in electronic communication in North American culture has outstripped theory and research. This study contributes to the task of understanding the implications of channels of interaction (mediated and nonmediated) for the processes and outcomes of interpersonal communication as well as for personal relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The information management framework and the impression management model of strategic communication channel use in close relationships, from which the present study is derived, have been described in detail (O'Sullivan, 1996). A summary will be presented here to provide a background for the hypotheses tested. The results will be discussed in light of current research, and suggestions for future research will be presented.

## Information Management and Mediated Channels

Early predictions about how the use of mediated communication channels would affect interactions between relational partners were pessimistic. Studies in the 1970s and 1980s exhibited a technology-centered view that focused on the question, "What do technologies do to communication?" The consensus was that, because mediated channels provide less "social presence" (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976), filter essential cues (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984), or are less "rich" than face-to-face (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987), they would be ill suited for the types of complex, emotional interactions important to relationships. However, a handful of studies of mediated communication indicated that individuals apparently used "lean" media effectively for social interactions (e.g., Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rice & Love, 1987; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Also, research on long-distance relationships, in which partners must use mediated channels to communicate while apart, suggested a fairly robust finding: Long-distance partners frequently indicate levels of satisfaction and resilience that rival or exceed face-to-face relationships (Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stephen, 1986). These findings began to undermine the validity of assumptions about the inferiority of leaner channels for relational interactions and challenged scholars to provide a new explanation for the implications of mediated channels for relational interactions.

The present approach turns the technology-centered question inside out to ask instead, "What do people do with communication technologies?" This adapts the uses and gratifications perspective (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Palmgreen, 1984) to interpersonal communication technologies by considering them tools that people learn to use in creating and exchanging messages in pursuit of their communicational and relational goals. Although the specific capabilities allowed by various communication channels do matter, the ultimate implications of mediated communication use in relationships would be contingent upon how people use the objective, as well as the evolving subjective and symbolic characteristics in pursuit of their relational goals.

What relational goals would have implications for mediated communication activities? A theme emerging from the interpersonal and relational communication literature and recent research on mediated communication—management of self-relevant information—provides a foundation for investigating the implications of mediated communication in relationships (O'Sullivan, 1996; Walther, 1992, 1996). Goffman's (1959) and Schlenker's (1980, 1984, 1985) ideas about self-presentation are key to the present approach to mediated communication, presented in an information management framework (O'Sullivan, 1996). Individuals are seen as

working to regulate what information about oneself is known (and what it not known) by others in order to manage the impression that others have of them. The premise is that, through habit or conscious design, everyone attempts to control to some degree the ways that they appear to themselves and to others (Schlenker, 1980). There is nothing intrinsic to the concept of impression management that dictates that it involves deception or the creation of false persona (Brissett & Edgley, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). From this perspective, self-presentational activities are the means by which individuals convey who they are at whatever degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness that they choose. "In fact, over time, the 'authentic' presentation of self—that is, showing ourselves as we believe we really are—is likely to be met by the greatest internal satisfaction and external approval" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 7).

Certainly, self-presentational activities can be, and have been, used to create false or distorted impressions or to manipulate others for one's personal gain. However, even to reveal oneself as clearly and honestly as possible requires individuals to select from a repertoire of self-presentational activities to convey themselves accurately. This suggests that self-presentation is not limited to manipulative, deceptive behavior, but should be viewed as a broader concept that includes efforts to present oneself accurately.

This discussion suggests at least a partial answer to the question, "What do people do with communication technologies?": They use them to help regulate the exchange of self-relevant information in managing their self-presentation. This information management perspective thus presents a possible explanation for the findings regarding positive evaluations of mediated communication in relationships. Mediated channels, rather than exclusively interfering with relational interactions, can be utilized strategically by interactional partners. What is missing in mediated channels versus face-to-face may be seen not as a problem (at least by the channel selector), but as an opportunity to regulate information exchanged between partners as a means of managing self-presentations. Of course, use of mediated channels can also create issues and problems. Of interest is under what conditions and based on what considerations individuals select from available channels given the possible benefits and costs of each channel in a particular situation and relationship.

Impression management is thus viewed as a primary function of relational interactions. Still to be addressed is the question: How does one use mediated channels in ways that benefit one's desired self-presentation? The literature on relational dialectics offers a useful approach. Drawing on theorizing regarding dialectical tensions such as expression and protectiveness (Rawlins, 1983), disclosure and privacy (Rawlins, 1992), openness and closedness (Baxter, 1990; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996),

O'Sullivan (1996) proposed an "ambiguity-clarity" dialectic between the contradictory and interdependent needs to create ambiguity and clarity about the self and a partner in relational interactions. Although conceptually close to the earlier dialectical tensions, this approach differs in that it views openness and closedness less as discrete activities and more as unattainable ideals. Even when we are trying to be as open as possible, we can never achieve perfect or complete openness. And, when we are trying to be as private as possible, we can never achieve absolute or total closedness. The ambiguity-clarity dialect explicitly recognizes that any openness or closedness will be matters of degree—a broad gray area rather than black-and-white distinctions. This suggests a continuum in which one can approach, but never attain, openness or closedness. Instead, individuals can subtly shade and shape what is known by others and what is withheld. These dialectical tensions function much as described in previous models: The need for clarity in relationships (exemplified by actions that reveal personal information) is in tension with the need for ambiguity (exemplified by actions that withhold personal information).

This dialectic melds research and theorizing on deception (e.g., Camden, Motley, & Wilson, 1984; Hopper & Bell, 1984; Lippard, 1988; Metts, 1989; Miller, Mongeau, & Sleight, 1986), ambiguity (e.g., Brown & Rogers, 1991; Eisenberg, 1984), equivocation (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990; Chovil, 1994), politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), privacy (Petronio, 1991; Petronio & Martin, 1986), miscommunication (Coupland, Giles, & Wiemann, 1991), and self-disclosure (e.g., Bochner, 1982; Hatfield, 1984; Parks, 1982). The common thread linking each of these research areas is that they all focus on the functions of communicative activities regulating the amount, nature, and timing of information exchanged between interactional partners. Individuals are seen to manage the degree of ambiguity and clarity about various topics at various times in their relational interactions to facilitate intimacy and closeness as well as to allow privacy and protectiveness. Ultimately, these activities function as a way for relational partners to regulate and manage what is known and not known about themselves to each other, which is another way of describing self-presentation.

Although a premise of the information management framework is that mediated and face-to-face communication share many of the same basic functions and processes, the use of communication technologies in relational interactions is nevertheless an important issue. The diffusion of newer technologies, such as electronic mail, answering machines, and videoconferencing, into social uses supplements "old" technologies, such as the telephone and letters, to provide people an increasingly broad array of channel options for conducting their interactions. Of course, different channels provide different capacities for conveying information be-

tween interactants (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Rice, 1993; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Mediated channels offer a variety of formats (e.g., voice, written, VDT displays), can be synchronous (e.g., telephone) or asynchronous (e.g., letters, answering machine, electronic mail), and can carry different symbolic meanings (Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Barrios-Choplin, 1992). The relatively constricted information available in mediated interactions compared to face-to-face means messages and interactions using communication technologies could be made to be more ambiguous than face-to-face interactions. These channels, and the opportunities for ambiguity that they provide, can be harnessed in individuals' efforts to regulate self-relevant information.

Channel selection thus provides relational partners with a means of regulating what is known and what is not known about themselves to each other (Brown & Rogers, 1991; Parks, 1982). When viewed in light of impression management processes, channel selection could be incorporated into interactional strategies designed to further a wide range of impression management goals. Although the factors that could be weighed in evaluating various channels in different situations is likely a complex set of considerations, a few more straightforward examples can illustrate some of the ways in which channel selection can be incorporated into impression management activities.

For example, leaner channels (e.g., electronic mail, letters) could be used in ways to benefit the channel selector. Leaner channels could be used to ambiguate, or to obscure completely, unattractive or embarrassing aspects. Attempts at deception would have less chance of detection. Leaner channels could also be used when clarifying unattractive or embarrassing aspects about oneself as a means of muting or avoiding an expected negative response. Leaner channels could also be used to benefit the partner. For example, leaner channels could reduce the intensity when confronting a partner. They could also be used to give the partner greater control over when and how to respond (e.g., asynchronous channels).

On the other hand, "richer" channels (e.g., face-to-face, telephone) could also be used to benefit the channel selector. For example, richer channels could help clarify attractive aspects of the selector. Credibility could be enhanced (whether or not actual honesty is practiced) because deception detection is likely perceived as easier given the availability of more cues. Richer channels that provide immediate feedback could provide the ability for more effective "damage control" when sharing unattractive or embarrassing aspects. Also, when sharing good news about oneself, richer channels could provide greater direct access to a partner's positive reactions that require presence or visual contact, such as hugs and smiles. Richer channels can also be

used to benefit the partner. When being confronted with a transgression, a partner might appreciate the ability to respond immediately and directly. Also, when the interaction is positive for the partner, richer channels provide the means to see, hear, and feel the praise.

This discussion suggests that channel selection can facilitate management of the dialectic contradictions of ambiguity and clarity when dealing with negative or positive topics in pursuit of self-presentational goals. With self-presentational goals providing the motivation, the implications of mediated communication in relationships, then, would be contingent upon the ability of relational partners to use communication media effectively to manage the ambiguity-clarity dialectic. There is some preliminary evidence that relational partners are aware of the considerations in channel use for various types of interactions and weigh those aspects in evaluating channels (O'Sullivan, Gurien, & Wiemann, 1993). Wiemann's (1977) conceptualization of competence encompasses the social skills to manage interactions so that individuals achieve their goals while preserving the other's face. Taking channel selection into consideration, communicative competence would include the ability to select a channel from the available repertoire that is appropriate and effective for a specific interaction.

Thus, this synthesis of concepts from the self-presentation, dialectical, communicative competence, and communication technology literatures suggests that strategic use of mediated and nonmediated communication channels can offer a means for communicatively competent relational partners to manage dialectic contradictions of ambiguity and clarity in pursuit of their self-presentational goals. Channel selection could offer partners an enhanced ability to deal with self-presentational issues by facilitating their efforts to selectively shade the clarity or ambiguity of information important to the impression that they seek to convey.

If strategic channel use provides an increased capability for individuals to more effectively manage their self-presentation, there may be a positive effect on relational outcomes. Partners who competently select channels in support of their preferred impression could, over time, construct, reshape, or reinforce others' views of them. Assuming that people want their partners to perceive them positively, the expanded range of channel options and the utility of mediated channels could explain the positive evaluations found in long-distance relationships (e.g., O'Sullivan, Gurien, & Wiemann, 1993; Stafford & Reske, 1990) and in studies of the contributions of relational misperceptions to relational satisfaction (Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Murphy, 1984).

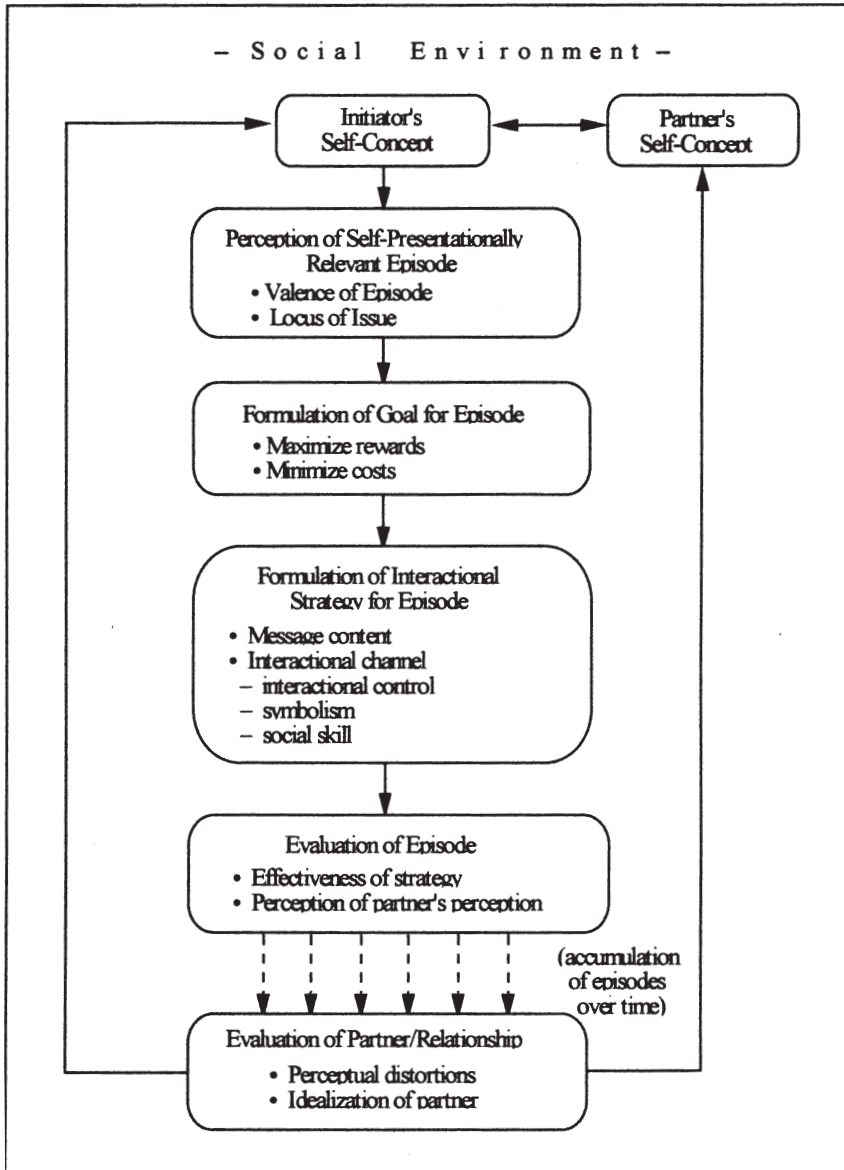


Figure 1: Impression Management Model

## The Impression Management Model

The impression management model (see Figure 1) emerged from the information management framework and proposed key factors guiding the self-presentational use of nonmediated and mediated communication channels. A complete description is provided elsewhere (O'Sullivan, 1996), and the following discussion is intended as a brief review. The model incorporates symbolic interactionist elements (Blumer, 1969; Cushman & Cahn, 1985) with its focus on relational partners' self-concept as a starting point. Individuals' (interrelated) self-concepts help determine which topics or issues make the interaction initiator's self-presentation salient, which would prompt efforts to manage self-relevant information. Interaction initiators who perceive that an episode is potentially threatening or supportive of their own or their partner's self-presentation are expected to strive to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Certainly individuals can be more or less attuned to whether or not an impending episode would raise self-presentational issues, which could be an element of communicative competence. As the initial step in the process of managing self-presentation, varying sensitivities to self-presentational issues, and the ability to perceive the potential for impression-management issues would affect whether or not subsequent considerations were engaged.

The distinction between positively or negatively valenced episodes that involve one's or a partner's self-presentation is likely an oversimplification of complex real-life situations. It is unlikely that a particular episode would strictly implicate only one partner's self-presentation or be perceived as strictly positive or negative. However, these dichotomies are useful as a representation of an overall evaluation of the valence or locus of the issue. Individuals are presumed to consider the various aspects of the impending interaction that suggest its valence and then make an overall assessment. Similarly, weighing aspects that implicate the initiator's and the partner's self-presentations would result in an overall assessment regarding the locus of the key self-presentational issues salient for that episode. Whatever the eventual evaluations on locus and valence, the model assumes that the channel selector's goal is to minimize costs and maximize benefits to one's own or one's partner's preferred impression. That is, individuals are expected to obscure or downplay information that threatens their ability to be seen as attractive to their partners and will emphasize information that supports a positive assessment of them by their partners. They might also try to protect the partner from threats to his or her positive self-presentation and facilitate sharing of information supportive of positive assessments.

When self-presentation is salient for an impending interaction with the partner, two issues arise: (a) the interaction content, and (b) the inter-

action channel. The content of the interactions is obviously a crucial factor in the self-presentation process. The current project focused on strategic channel selection to better explicate this part of the model before addressing the linkage between channel and message in future research.

Drawing on research from both the interpersonal and the communication technology literatures, three primary factors guiding channel preferences are proposed: interactional control, symbolism, and social skill. Interactional control is a key element of communicative competence, conceptualized not as a manipulation of another, but rather as interactional constraints that relational partners place on one another that limit appropriate response options (Wiemann, 1977; Wiemann & Kelly, 1981). Interactional control was also suggested by research on interpersonal media use in long-distance relationships (O'Sullivan, Gurien, & Wiemann, 1993). Respondents noted substantial numbers of advantages of mediated channels (telephone, letters) compared to face-to-face for expressing emotion and making themselves understood to their partners. Advantages focused on the capacity to control the timing, duration, and nature of information exchanged during these interactions. Interactional control, therefore, involves the channel characteristics (Daft & Lengel, 1984) and how they are used to shape the conversational episode.

The symbolic meaning of a channel involves the message conveyed by channel use itself above and beyond the specific content of the verbal or written message. Drawing on the work of McLuhan (1964); Short, Williams, and Christie (1976); and Trevino, Lengel, and Daft (1987); Sitkin, Sutcliffe, and Barrios-Choplin (1992) argued that mediated channels do more than carry data and symbolic information. Channels themselves can embody symbolic meaning reflecting the codes and values of the organization. General social norms exist, as do meanings specific to a relationship. For example, most everyone would consider odd or exceptional a handwritten letter from the power company president asking for monthly payment of a bill (as opposed to a form letter), a postcard announcing the death of a close family member (as opposed to a telephone call or face-to-face visit), or a telephone call to your home from a presidential candidate asking for your vote (as opposed to a television ad). Relational partners can develop norms of appropriateness for various channels within their relationship. Whereas some individuals may consider electronic mail inappropriate for anything but information exchange, others may view e-mail as perfectly appropriate for flirting, expressions of emotion, or cybersex. The model proposes that the interaction initiator's perceptions of various channels' symbolic meaning is a second key consideration in channel selection.

Social skills include the ability to manage interactions competently (Wiemann, 1977) as well as the technical skill in using the channel (Schmitz

**TABLE 1**  
**Locus, Valence, and Self-Presentational Conditions**

		<i>Locus of self-presentational issues</i>	
		Self	Other
<i>Expected valence of episode</i>	Positive	"Boost"	"Praise"
	Negative	"Confess"	"Accuse"

& Fulk, 1991). This preference factor is included because an individual's awareness of a self-presentationally relevant situation and the capability of various channels to regulate interactions and information exchanges may not be enough to explain channel preferences. Individuals might also be guided by their perceptions of their ability to carry off the interaction using a specific channel. For example, individuals' perceptions of their own poor writing skills might affect preferences for letters or email whereas weak conversational abilities might steer someone away from the telephone.

In the model, these considerations then lead to the channel selection and the actual interaction, followed by evaluation of the interaction, which contributes to the ongoing co-construction of the relationship as well as to each partners' evolving self-concept and perceptions of the other partner.

### Hypotheses

Based on the impression management model, a set of propositions and hypotheses was presented as a research agenda (O'Sullivan, 1996). Several of those hypotheses are tested in this study. A central element of the proposed model is that channel selection can be used as a means for maximizing self-presentational benefits and minimizing self-presentational costs. In instances in which self-presentation is an issue, whether a self-presentation is threatened or supported for oneself or a partner, channel selection would be expected to be more salient. The research question is: Do relational partners select the channel of interaction to manage ambiguity and clarity of self-presentationally salient interactions?

Two factors are relevant for individuals anticipating a self-

presentationally salient interaction: the locus of the self-presentational issue (whether one's own or one's partner's self-presentation is at issue) and the valence of the self-presentational issue (whether the self-presentation is perceived to be threatened or supported). This indicates four possible conditions: (a) a negatively-valenced issue for self (for convenience, "confess"), (b) a positively valenced issue for self ("boost"), (c) a negatively valence issue for partner ("accuse"), and (d) a positively valenced issue for partner ("praise"; see Table 1). A pattern of variation in preferences for mediated and nonmediated channels across these conditions, consistent with the proposition that individuals will strive to maximize rewards and minimize costs, would be evidence that channel selection can be a self-presentation management tool.

### *Valence*

When preferred impressions are potentially threatened (negatively valenced interactions), preference for a mediated channel would be higher than when self-presentations are potentially supported. Face-to-face could offer advantages to some individuals for problematic interactions, such as the ability to read reactions immediately and repair misinterpretations. However, the expectation here is that the appeal of a "buffer effect" of mediated channels would dominate the channel preference because it would help insulate the interaction initiator from the distressing reactions of the partner to disclosures that undermine the initiator's self-presentation. Mediated channels could be an asset when accusing the partner by reducing the distress of confronting him or her or (if one is feeling altruistic) giving him or her the benefit of the buffer effect. For instances in which preferred impressions are potentially supported (positively valenced interactions), preference for face-to-face is expected to be higher than for a mediated channel because face-to-face is the expected mode of interpersonal interaction and there is no need for an interactional buffer. In addition, copresence provides the greatest opportunity to receive the maximum rewards from the partner.

H1: When a preferred impression is expected to be threatened, preferences for mediated channels will be higher than when a preferred impression is expected to be supported.

### *Locus*

The question of what communication channel strategies would be used depending on whether the issue involves oneself or the other (whether positive or negative) is expected to be more complex than valence issues.

As suggested in the discussion about negatively valenced episodes, there could be advantages for mediated channels when sharing information that could make the discloser look bad. When the discloser expects the information to make him or her look good, the benefits of being face-to-face are easy to identify: seeing a smile, getting a hug or a kiss. These benefits may motivate a preference for face-to-face as long as confidence is high that reactions will indeed be positive. However, uncertainty about the reaction to a positive disclosure may mean that the buffer effect of mediated channels could also be an advantage even when discussing positive self-relevant information.

For example, someone considering disclosing positive feelings for a partner or sharing good news about an accomplishment (generally expected to enhance the other's positive impression of the discloser) might consider what would happen if the reaction were less than positive. The discomfort of seeing a muted or insincere reaction when one expects an enthusiastic response, although probably not as acute as reactions from negative disclosures, still might carry enough potential sting to prompt a preference for a mediated channel. In addition, if a discloser were concerned that sharing good news might be perceived as self-promotion, he or she might also prefer a mediated channel as a way of playing the news down. This suggests that channel preferences for the person initiating the interaction will lean toward mediated channels in both positively and negatively valenced episodes.

Regarding issues involving the partner's self-presentation, again the benefits of face-to-face for interactions involving information that supports the partner's self-presentation are obvious: sharing the experience with smiles, hugs, kisses, etc. When the episode involves information that potentially threatens a partner's self-presentation, again the considerations could be complex. Although there are likely benefits of mediated channels for these types of interactions (such as literally not being "in his or her face" so there is an opportunity to respond when he or she chooses), there may also be benefits of face-to-face for the channel selector. Confronting a partner in person about a serious relational transgression allows the interaction initiator to monitor the partner's reactions closely and to gauge the level of honesty or regret, which would be expected to outweigh the benefits of mediated channel use. In sum, individuals are expected to prefer mediated channels for episodes involving their own self-presentation (positive or negative) while preferring face-to-face for episodes involving their partner's self-presentation (positive or negative).

H2: When one's own preferred impression is expected to be salient, preferences for mediated channels will be higher than when a partner's preferred impression is expected to be salient.

*Valence-Locus Interaction*

An interaction is expected between valence and locus. The combined benefits of mediated channels for regulating interactions involving the selector's own self-presentation and for negatively valenced episodes, as discussed above, suggests that mediated channels would be especially useful in the "confess" condition. Specifically, episodes involving negative valence for self are expected to produce the highest preferences for mediated channels, because the ability to regulate the information exchange provides the greatest amount of benefits for the channel selector.

H3: When one's own preferred impression is expected to be threatened, preferences for mediated channels will be higher than in the other conditions.

## METHOD

The present study is the first of two phases in a multimethod project. Phase 1, reported here, examined strategic channel uses in the context of self-presentational goals by individuals in romantic relationships. A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information, characteristics of respondents' relationships, assessments of relational outcomes, and preferences for various communication channels in four types of relational episodes.<sup>2</sup> Multivariate statistical analyses were used to analyze the questionnaire data to test Hypotheses 1–3. Phase 2, reported elsewhere (O'Sullivan, 1997), involved interviewing a stratified random sample of Phase 1 respondents to explore factors that they took into consideration in determining channel preferences for the various self-presentational situations.

In the current study, a  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 4$  mixed between/within-subjects design examined channel preferences in interactional episodes that implicate partners' self-presentation. The between-subjects factor was type of relationship, with two levels: long distance and geographically close. The first within-subjects factor was locus of self-presentation issue, with two levels: self and partner. The second within-subjects factor was valence of self-presentational issue, with two levels: positive and negative. The third within-subjects factor was channel of interaction, with four levels: telephone, answering machine, letters, and electronic mail. These mediated channels were included for study because O'Sullivan, Gurien, and Wiemann (1993) found that these channels were likely to be used by individuals in relationships extensively enough to allow them to evaluate each channel based on their everyday experience using each.

Data were collected from a sample of 136 undergraduate students in communication courses who had identified themselves as currently in a premarital romantic relationship. Respondents participated in exchange

for extra credit or for entry in a drawing for a \$25 gift certificate. Pilot tests indicated that a small to medium effect size was likely. For a within-subjects design, the sample size provided a power of .90, given a significance level of  $p < .05$ , for the multivariate tests planned for the data analysis (Kraemer & Thiemann, 1987).

Data were gathered on the duration of the relationship and amount of time per week using various communication channels in their relationship. Standard demographic information was also collected. Questionnaires included questions regarding preferences for the four study channels across four self-presentational study conditions, corresponding with the four cells in the  $2 \times 2$  design. Respondents were instructed to recall or consider one of four types of episodes that had occurred or could occur in their current relationship, each corresponding with the four possible combinations of locus (self and other) and valence (positive and negative) proposed in the hypotheses. The episodes were distinguished by whether the issue was about them or their partner, and whether it was an issue that would make them or the partner look bad or look good to the other (see Table 2). Respondents were unaware of the labeling of the conditions as "confess," "boost," "accuse," and "praise."

Within each condition, respondents were directed to indicate their degree of preference for each of the four mediated channels (telephone, answering machine,<sup>3</sup> letter, and electronic mail) compared to face-to-face. Nine-point scales were used, with *face-to-face* at one anchor point and one of four mediated channels at the other anchor point. Each mediated channel was evaluated with face-to-face as the alternative.

The scales were designed this way because evaluations of a channel for potential use in an interaction do not take place in a vacuum—the channel is evaluated in light of other possible channels and each channel's relative advantages and disadvantages for the interaction. Thus, a preference for a particular channel should be assessed taking into consideration the other choices that are available. Although a more orthodox scale would likely use *high* and *low* preferences at the anchors, it would beg the key question of this study: High or low preference for the channel compared to what? Positioning channel choices at the anchor points addresses this question and more closely represents the real-world comparisons among various channels that people make.

Also, each mediated channel is compared to face-to-face based on the assumption that face-to-face is the "default" channel of preference. That is, face-to-face is assumed to be the most obvious or purest example of what constitutes interpersonal communication. Of interest, then, are instances when individuals' channel preferences diverge from face-to-face toward a mediated channel and when they remain strongly in favor of face-to-face. If differences occur across the study conditions even in the

**TABLE 2**  
**Self-Presentationally Relevant Episodes**

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Study condition explanations</i>
CONFESS Valence: Negative Locus: Self	Think for a minute about a topic, issue, or incident that would UNDERMINE how YOUR PARTNER thinks about YOU. For example, it could be a discussion about you failing to meet his or her expectations, you doing something morally distasteful, you holding an opinion you know your partner would find repugnant, you being disloyal toward your partner, etc.
BOOST Valence: Positive Locus: Self	Think for a minute about a topic, issue, or incident that would ENHANCE how YOUR PARTNER thinks about YOU. For example, it could be a significant achievement by you, you revealing highly positive feelings toward your partner, you proposing something you know your partner would love, etc.
ACCUSE Valence: Negative Locus: Other	Think for a minute about a topic, issue, or incident that would UNDERMINE how YOU think about YOUR PARTNER. For example, it could be your knowledge about his or her failure to meet your expectations, him or her doing something morally distasteful, him or her being disloyal toward you, you revealing your unhappiness with him or her, etc.
PRAISE Valence: Positive Locus: Other	Now think for a minute about a topic, issue, or incident that would ENHANCE how YOU think about YOUR PARTNER. For example, it could be news of his or her significant achievement, his or her admirable behavior in a difficult situation, a demonstration of his or her loyalty toward you, etc.

face of a strong cultural bias toward face-to-face as the channel of choice (especially for interactions between partners in a close relationship), this would be an indication that situational factors are influencing respondents' view of the relative utility of face-to-face and mediated channels regarding their interactional goals. Stronger preferences for mediated channels in situations that threaten self-presentation and face-to-face in situations that support self-presentation would be offered as evidence of the strategic value of channel selection for impression management.

Respondents indicated their degree of preference for the channel of interaction for each self-presentational situation by circling the number that represented their preference. Each number, then, represents the respondent's degree of preference for a mediated channel versus face-to-face in each of the four study conditions. The order of these conditions, as

presented in the questionnaire, was rotated between the questionnaire packets using a Latin squares procedure. Data collection took place in a large lecture hall in two sessions in which respondents could arrive at any time within a 2-hour window. Respondents were informed that their responses were confidential and were encouraged to be candid in their responses. Questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Repeated measures procedures were used to test for main effects (H1 and H2) and the for interaction (H3). The two levels of valence (positive, negative) were computed as the mean score for each pair of study conditions: "boost" and "praise" for the positive level and "confess" and "accuse" for the negative level. The two levels of locus (self, other) were computed as the mean score for each pair of study conditions: "boost" and "confess" as the self level and "praise" and "accuse" for the other level.

## RESULTS

### Assumptinal Tests

Following Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1995), assumptinal checks focused on issues of normality and equality of the variance-covariance matrix. The expected social norm favoring face-to-face over any mediated channel emerged and skewed dependent measures. All attempts at transformations did not reduce the skewness. However, assumptinal checks indicated all measures were within acceptable ranges, so parametric analyses were used.<sup>4</sup> Three respondents' data were excluded from analyses: two respondents who did not complete the questionnaire, and one respondent who indicated on her questionnaire that she was married.

### Descriptive Statistics

Of the remaining 133 cases, 65.4% were females ( $n = 87$ ) and 34.6% were males ( $n = 46$ ). The average age was 20.7 years, and the average number of years of college education was 2.7. The mean duration of the relationship was 16.9 months ( $SD = 14.36$ ), and the mean length of time the respondent had known his or her partner was more than 2 years ( $M = 28.31$  months,  $SD = 24.5$ ). Fifty-six percent ( $n = 74$ ) said that they were in a long-distance relationship ( $M = 9.2$  visits per month,  $M = 4.1$  hours travel time). Forty-four percent ( $n = 59$ ) said that they were in a geographically close relationship ( $M = 26.3$  visits per month,  $M = 0.14$  hours travel time).

Regarding mediated channel use, respondents reported an average of 23.5 hours per week of face-to-face interaction, and an average of 4 hours

per week of mediated interactions with their relational partners. Of those 4 hours, an average of 3.25 hours involved using the telephone, and the remaining 0.75 hour apportioned fairly evenly among answering machine, letters, and electronic mail. Because answering machines and electronic mail use might be less pervasive than the telephone or letters, respondents were asked if they had convenient access to answering machines and electronic mail. Almost all (93.2%,  $n = 123$ ) said they had access to an answering machine and all (100%,  $n = 133$ ) said they had used answering machines previously. Whereas 80% of respondents ( $n = 107$ ) indicated that they spent no time using electronic mail in their relationship, 64% ( $n = 85$ ) indicated that they had access to electronic mail and 53.4% ( $n = 71$ ) had used electronic mail before. When those two measures were examined together, 69% ( $n = 92$ ) of all respondents had either access to electronic mail or had used electronic mail, or both. *T*-tests found no significant differences between email users and nonusers on the DVs, so users and nonusers were combined for analyses.

No significant differences were found on the dependent measures between those in proximate and long-distance relationships, so the data from both groups were combined for further analyses. The data were also examined for sex differences. No main effects were significant although two interactions were significant. There was a significant sex by locus interaction,  $F(1, 130) = 4.32, p < .05, \omega^2 = .036$ , which will be addressed in the context of the locus main effect test. There was also a three-way interaction of sex by locus by channel,  $F(1, 130) = 3.23, p < .05, \omega^2 = .02$ , which will be addressed after the channel by valence hypothesis test. As the only significant tests involving sex, sex differences were considered insufficient to justify conducting separate analyses by sex, so hypotheses tests were conducted on the entire sample.

Four mediated channels were incorporated into the study. A main effect for channel indicated there were significant between-channel differences in preferences,  $F(1, 390) = 39.1, p < .001$ . Tukey comparisons indicated the mean preferences for telephone ( $M = 2.49, SD = 1.74$ ) and letters ( $M = 2.48, SD = 1.50$ ) were significantly greater ( $p < .01$ ) than mean preferences for answering machine ( $M = 1.76, SD = 1.13$ ) and electronic mail ( $M = 1.60, SD = .97$ ). The results indicated a pattern that is inconsistent with expectations based on media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Letters, the leanest mediated channel of the four included in the study, and telephone, the richest mediated channel of the four included in the study, were evaluated the same compared to face-to-face. Answering machines and electronic mail, which were expected to be differentiated based on their different richness characteristics, were also evaluated similarly, and both received lower preferences than both letters and the telephone. The results suggested that factors beyond media richness are important for

predicting channel preferences and deserve further study.

To address the study hypotheses, results for each channel were aggregated into a "mediated channels versus face-to-face" score to compare against face-to-face. Hypotheses used "mediated communication" as a global measure based on the rationale that all of the mediated channels share crucial characteristics that differentiate them from face-to-face interaction: physical separation and dramatically reduced access to the rich array of social cues (visual cues, proxemics, haptics) important for interactants' perceptions of each other. Understanding when and why individuals depart from face-to-face can help us to understand the implications of mediated channels as a category of interactional channel, even as the specific capabilities of specific channels continue to evolve and the array of choices continues to expand.

### Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis 1 predicted a main effect for valence in that preferences for mediated channels were expected to be higher than face-to-face when a preferred impression is expected to be threatened compared to when a preferred impression is expected to be supported. Results of the repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there was a significant main effect for valence,  $F(1, 130) = 9.92, p < .01, \omega^2 = .06$ , which supported H1. An examination of the means indicated that, as predicted, preferences for mediated channels were higher in negatively valenced situations compared to positively valenced situations. Means comparisons are presented in Table 3.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a main effect for locus, in that preferences for mediated channels would be higher in episodes involving one's own self-presentation than in episodes involving the partner's self-presentation. The analyses also indicated a main effect for locus,  $F(1, 130) = 8.27, p < .01, \omega^2 = .07$ , which supported H2. An examination of the means indicated that, as predicted, preferences for mediated channels were higher in situations involving the respondent's own self-presentation compared to situations involving the partner's self-presentation.

The interaction for sex and locus noted above helps explain the locus main effect. Examination of the means in the sex by locus interaction indicated that, although males and females did not differ in their preferences for mediated channels in situations involving the partner's self-presentation, males' preferences for mediated channels was higher in situations involving their own self-presentation, whereas women's preferences did not differ. This suggests that males' greater preference for mediated channels when sharing self-presentationally relevant information contributed to the main effect for locus.

**TABLE 3**  
**Channel Preference Means by Self-Presentational Condition**

		<i>Locus main effect*</i>	
		"Self"	"Other"
		<i>M</i> = 2.21 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.75 <i>SD</i> = 1.41	<i>M</i> = 1.95 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.5 <i>SD</i> = 1.11
Valence main effect*	"Positive"	"Boost"	"Praise"
	<i>M</i> = 1.88 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.5 <i>SD</i> = 1.12	<i>M</i> = 1.94 <i>Mdn</i> = 1 <i>SD</i> = 1.47	<i>M</i> = 1.82 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.25 <i>SD</i> = 1.17
	"Negative"	"Confess"	"Accuse"
	<i>M</i> = 2.29 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.75 <i>SD</i> = 1.58	<i>M</i> = 2.49** <i>Mdn</i> = 1.75 <i>SD</i> = 1.93	<i>M</i> = 2.08 <i>Mdn</i> = 1.5 <i>SD</i> = 1.53

NOTE: *N* = 133 for all cells. Means are an aggregation of scales assessing preference for each of four mediated channels (telephone, answering machine, letters, and electronic mail) versus face-to-face, with 1 representing highest preference for face-to-face and 9 representing highest preference for mediated channels.

\* $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 3 predicted an interaction between valence and locus, such that preferences for mediated channels were expected to be higher in the "confess" condition than in all the other conditions. A planned comparison contrasted the channel preference mean in the "confess" condition to the aggregate score of the other three conditions. Results indicated a significant difference,  $t(131) = 2.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , which supported H3. An examination of the means indicated that, as predicted, preferences for mediated channels were higher in the "confess" condition than the aggregate preferences in the "accuse," "boost," and "praise" conditions.

## DISCUSSION

The results largely support the information management model and the rationale used to develop the model. The results suggest a partial answer to the question, "What do people do with communication technologies?": People can use communication technologies to regulate self-relevant information in ways that minimize costs and maximize rewards to preferred impressions. Consistent with the impression management model, channel preferences varied depending on the perceived threat or

support for self-presentations. Preferences for mediated channels increased when a partner's—and especially one's own—self-presentation were threatened. This suggests that individuals recognize that mediated channels can help minimize the costs for themselves or their partners associated with embarrassing or unattractive information.

Taken together, then, the findings regarding the hypotheses provide evidence supporting the impression management model, which views people as active selectors among interactional channels as a means of managing their self-presentation. Consistent with the ambiguity-clarity dialectic, the results suggest that respondents perceive utility in mediated channels in situations when a greater level of ambiguity in the interaction would be useful for protecting their own, or their partner's, preferred presentation. In situations in which greater clarity would be useful for accepting support for one's own self-presentation, or providing support for a partner's, respondents perceived more benefits in the face-to-face channel.

#### Media Richness, Equivocation, Dialectics, and Privacy

Although the percent of variance explained in this study is not overwhelming, these findings contribute to our understanding of mediated channel use in several ways. First, these findings contrast with media richness theory predictions. Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987) assumes that individuals seek to reduce equivocality by selecting relatively richer channels to match interactional needs. These findings suggest that, in some circumstances, individuals in fact seek to *increase* equivocality by selecting *leaner* channels (Eisenberg, 1984). Specifically, situations in which individuals seek to regulate very closely what information is exchanged—such as when self-presentations are on the line—are when mediated channels can provide advantages over face-to-face. These findings suggest that the assumption in media richness theory that individuals seek high efficiency and low equivocality in making channel choices is applicable only in certain situations. Situations exist in which individuals desire to shade and shape impressions, and that is when low efficiency and high equivocality channels can be functional and effective in helping individuals reach their interactional goals.

These situations may be far more frequent than many assume. Many scholars have argued that deception, equivocation, nondisclosure, and privacy regulation are central, pervasive, and functional in close relationships (Baxter, 1990; Bavelas et al., 1990; Buller & Burgoon, 1994; Hopper & Bell, 1985; Parks, 1982; Petronio, 1991). And, this proposition is consistent with Schlenker's (1980, 1984, 1985) and Goffman's (1959) view of impression management as a primary function of interpersonal interactions.

Thus, these results extend theory and research on strategic uses of equivocation (Bavelas et al., 1990), (non)disclosure (Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1982), deception (Buller & Burgoon, 1994), and privacy management (Petronio, 1991) by identifying another means by which people can regulate the timing, amount, and nature of sharing self-relevant information with others. For example, Bavelas et al.'s (1990) analysis of the functional use of equivocal communication focused directly on the message content and context yet did not consider channel. The present study has identified an additional means by which people can equivocate and manage disclosures—by selecting among the array of interactional channels to maximize the ability to equivocate about embarrassing disclosures. Bavelas et al. (1990) approached equivocation from a functional perspective (Why, when, and how do people use equivocal communication?) as a way of “rehabilitating” this type of message strategy by distancing it from the ethical taint that accompanies messages labeled as deceptive. Similarly, the present approach also views channel selection from a functional perspective (Why, when, and how do people use various interactional channels?) and argues that, although channel selection can be functional in the performance of deceptive messages, it can also function in positive ways in protecting one’s privacy, preserving harmony, and reducing the negative consequences of disclosures while preserving one’s sense of self and individuality (Parks, 1982). Future research could further explore the use of channel as a means to facilitate equivocation.

The results are also consistent with what Baxter (1990) called a dialectical strategy of “segmentation,” in which individuals designate some topics as appropriate for disclosing, whereas others are “off limits.” Baxter’s use of the term was in the context of her “openness-closedness” dialectic, which suggests that individuals have categorical options for this strategy: Either disclose or withhold information. When viewed in terms of the ambiguity-clarity dialectic, however, the options for accomplishing the strategy are seen to exist along a continuum of degree of information exchange. Individuals are seen as being able to shade, shape, and vary the amounts of self-relevant information as they balance the potential costs and rewards of revealing or concealing the many bits of information that constitute aspects of themselves. Although this shading certainly occurs through what is said, these results suggest that selection of an interactional channel (how what is said is conveyed) can be an effective complementary strategy.

Similarly, these results are consistent with privacy boundary management theory (Petronio, 1991, 1994; Petronio & Martin, 1986). Considering the role of channel could enhance and extend privacy theory in close relationships. For example, Petronio (1991, 1994) argued that individuals seek to control their privacy boundaries through judgments about whether or

not to disclose information to others based on an assessment of their vulnerability in the situation. Results of this study suggest that communication channel selection can facilitate, complement, and enhance privacy boundary management. Episodes prompting "tight" boundary management, such as when perceived threats to privacy exist, would likely be associated with use of mediated channels. For example, a telephone conversation might be the best choice for a woman wanting to talk to a new romantic interest as an alternative to inviting him home. Episodes in which "loose" boundary management is appropriate, such as when little vulnerability to privacy violations exist, would presumably be associated with face-to-face. The dynamic could be more complex. Mediated channels, which allow interactional access to distant others, could be appropriate when boundaries are loose and the threat of privacy invasion is low. Calling someone at home may feel like an invasion of privacy if the caller is a salesperson but not if it is a close friend or colleague. Further research should examine the ways in which channel can be used to manage privacy boundaries.

It is important to note that, although the results supported the predictions and as such provide support for the underlying rationale, the considerations that individuals use in evaluating various interactional channels are likely more complex than the basic set of motivations discussed above. Although individuals interacting with others in casual or professional relationships may tend to be motivated primarily by their self-interest, individuals in close relationships likely include their partner's interests to some degree in making decisions about self-presentational topics.

For example, when an individual wishes to confront a relational partner about the partner's transgression, a sometimes contradictory mixture of selfish and altruistic motivations may come into play. The interaction initiator may want to (a) maximize the importance of the accusation (perhaps best accomplished face-to-face), (b) maximize the partner's awareness of the pain that the transgression caused (also best accomplished face-to-face), (c) minimize one's own distress of experiencing the partner's discomfort over the accusation (best accomplished via mediated channels), (d) minimize the partner's discomfort in dealing with the accusation (best accomplished via mediated channels), (e) maximize one's own ability to control the unfolding of the interaction (best accomplished via either mediated channels or face-to-face, depending on other factors such as ability and the specific nature of the desired control), and (f) maximize the partner's ability to control the unfolding of the interaction (again, best accomplished via either mediated channels or face-to-face, depending on other factors). This is probably not a comprehensive list of competing motivations influencing channel preferences, but it illustrates the po-

tential complexity of the considerations that could be weighed in just one type of interactional episode. Other types of episodes likely raise distinct sets of considerations.

What immediate and long-term altruistic and selfish goals are important under what conditions is an intriguing question for future research. If there is indeed a mix of various considerations, how people evaluate them, weight them, and use them to guide their channel choices needs to be clarified. This study indicated that people do make strategic decisions regarding their channel choices and identified some interesting trends. Despite the possible competing motivations that could make either mediated channels or face-to-face appealing, the factors that favor mediated channels apparently are more numerous or weighted more heavily in episodes involving negative topics than they are in episodes involving positive topics.

The study has several limitations. The topic presented a sampling challenge because communication technology use in relationships is a still-emerging phenomenon. Respondents had to be individuals with access to or experience with the technologies of interest. That criterion is not problematic with established technologies because penetration of telephones in the United States is 99% of all households, and previous research involving individuals in romantic relationships found that almost all used the telephone in their relationships (Gerstel & Gross, 1984; O'Sullivan, Gurien, & Wiemann, 1993). It is also reasonable to assume that all literate adults have access to writing and sending letters. However, identifying respondents who have access to, or experience with, new communication technologies is more difficult. Adoption of electronic mail as a means of communicating in relationships appears to be higher among younger people (Hall, 1995). Also, young adults in premarital romantic relationships are expected to be sensitive to self-presentational concerns. Therefore, a nonrandom sampling method was used to identify young adults in premarital romantic relationships likely to have access to and experience with newer technologies such as electronic mail.

These factors contributed to the decision to seek young people as respondents, which may limit the generalizability of these findings. However, these findings may also provide a preview of future attitudes toward newer communication technologies as the current computer generation grows up. Subsequent studies can examine other types of relationships with probability samples that would allow greater generalizability.

Regarding technology use, ideally all respondents would have been using electronic mail, the newest of the technologies under study. However, those who did not use electronic mail, or who had not used it before, still would likely hold perceptions and opinions about the utility and ap-

propriateness of the channel for interactions with their relational partners. Those perceptions might even be part of the reason the individual does not use electronic mail even though it was available free to them as university students. In this study, no significant differences were found between electronic mail users and nonusers, which suggests that the channel evaluations were not affected by the inclusion of a percentage of nonusers. Future studies will have an advantage in that the everyday use of electronic mail will likely be more widespread, which will make more feasible the task of identifying large numbers of respondents who use electronic mail in their relational interactions.

Respondents answered questions about channel preferences based on situations that they have experienced, or might have experienced, in their relationship. Thus, they were recalling or imagining a situation corresponding with the four study conditions. The implications of this approach are that evaluations of channel choices in actual situations may be different than those reported here. Individuals facing a real-life episode involving self-presentations might favor face-to-face more strongly because of a greater salience of social norms favoring face-to-face. However, individuals facing such situations might also be more aware of the potential advantages of mediated channels and indicate that in their channel preferences. The pragmatic difficulties in identifying individuals found to be facing parallel self-presentational situations, or in setting up an experiment that arranges for parallel situations, are considerable. However, research that creates or more closely replicates actual self-presentational episodes for data gathering would contribute to further clarifying the issues addressed in this study.

## Conclusions

The information management framework tested here offers a way to understand new interpersonal communication technologies through the lens of interpersonal communication theory and research. The focus is on the individuals and the choices they make in interactions in the context of their relationships, rather than on the technology itself. Although the role of channel has received scant attention from interpersonal communication scholars in recent decades, these results argue for a renewed recognition of the role of channel in efforts to fully understand interpersonal communication. Attention to channel is more important than ever, given the increasing array of interpersonal communication channels available and the promise of new ones.

These results suggest that we may know a lot more about new interpersonal communication technologies than recognized. Human goals and motivations are not likely to be much different regardless of whether in-

teractions are mediated or not and, if mediated, whether the mediation is through new or old technologies. From a functional perspective, it appears new technologies may be providing nothing terribly new—just new ways of doing things that people have been doing throughout the history of social interaction. Although there may be additional types of interpersonal and relational goals useful to frame the study of interpersonal communication technologies, other scholars have noted the value of impression management as a valuable foundation for inquiry. For example, this study describes specific strategies involving communication channels that can complement Walther's (1996) "hyperpersonal" perspective.

The impression management model also can incorporate both utopian and dystopian views of technology. The focus is on understanding individuals' use of various technologies for a wide range of goals, separate from the issue of how individuals should use these new communication tools. The issues are the choices that individuals make rather than the technology itself. Thus, individuals can make what are likely considered appropriate and commendable choices (e.g., save the partner's face) as well as inappropriate and reprehensible ones (e.g., deceiving a partner). This is an alternative to those who tend to see technologies on good-bad, appropriate-inappropriate, or beneficial-detrimental dichotomies based on channel characteristics.

Future research should examine more closely the rationales that guide individuals in their evaluation and selection of a channel from among the various options available. The implications for outcomes of the interaction as well as longer-term implications for the relationship should be explored as well. These would help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of channel use (new and old, mediated and nonmediated) in relationships.

## NOTES

1. The term *implications* is used purposefully as an alternative to *effects* to reflect the study's theoretical focus on the users and the choices that they make in utilizing communication technologies for specific goals. Use of the term *effects* is viewed as reflecting a more technologically deterministic perspective that is focused on the nature of the technology itself.

2. The questionnaire is available from the author.

3. The answering machine as a channel choice is, of course, intimately linked with telephone use. For this study, respondents were instructed to consider answering machines as a channel choice when they would call the partner specifically to reach the answering machine (for instance, waiting until they knew the partner was not at home).

4. Transformations did not substantially reduce skewness. Because the general linear model is generally viewed as robust to violations of normality with sample sizes larger than 20 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989), skewness was considered to be not a problem. Regarding outliers, although Mahalanobis's distances indicated outliers with high and significant values,

examination of Cook's distances indicated that none was significant, in turn indicating that none was distorting the model. Therefore, outliers were viewed as useful and interesting data points and were retained (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). Regarding the assumption of equality of the variance-covariance matrix, although Box's *M* was significant for most analyses, this measure is considered highly sensitive to nonnormality. Following Tabachnick and Fidell (1989), because the within-subjects design meant groups were of equal size and the sample size was relatively large, the assumption of equality was appropriate.

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