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# TEXTING IN THE PRESENCE OF OTHERS: THE USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Jennifer Ann Maginnis

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky  
2011

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STRATEGIES IN CONVERSATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Communications and Information Studies at the  
University of Kentucky

By  
Jennifer Ann Maginnis

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Laura Stafford, Professor of Communication

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### TEXTING IN THE PRESENCE OF OTHERS: THE USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN CONVERSATION

The following study used politeness theory to explore the impact of simultaneously engaging in a face to face conversation and a text message conversation. Specifically the study used Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) five original politeness strategies to see whether strategy choice (in the face to face conversation) impacts the face threat present in engaging in multiple conversations. Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to understand the impact different politeness strategies had on the following variables: conversational appropriateness, relational/social appropriateness, immediacy, attentiveness, and politeness. Findings show that when a face to face partner ignores (no verbal/nonverbal politeness) a text message interruption the partner is seen as more relational/socially appropriate, immediate, attentive, and polite. Findings also indicate that aside from ignoring the text message, politeness messages that acknowledge the text message interruption and offer a relevant verbal message are viewed as more relationally/socially appropriate, immediate, attentive, and polite than those that indirectly deal with the text interruption. This study partially supports the popular belief that texting in the presence of others violates face to face conversational expectations and is perceived as "rude." However, future studies need to look at the role and influence mediated conversational expectations play in overall conversational expectations.

**KEYWORDS:** Politeness Theory, Text Messaging, Conversational Expectations, Conversational Appropriateness

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Dedicated to Elliot, for being by my side through this journey.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction to Study.....	1
Background and Significance.....	1
Chapter Two.....	5
Literature Review.....	5
Conversational Expectations.....	5
Face to Face Communication.....	5
Mediated Expectations.....	6
Expectations.....	7
Turn-Taking/Interruptions.....	7
Multiple Conversations.....	8
Text Messaging.....	8
Functions of Text Messaging.....	9
Social Presence.....	9
Balancing Multiple Conversations.....	10
Politeness Theory.....	11
Speech Act Theory.....	11
Illocutionary Acts.....	12
Perceptions of Face.....	14
Positive and Negative Face.....	15
Face-Threatening Information.....	16
Performing the FTA.....	17
Off-Record.....	17
Bald On-Record.....	17
With Redress.....	18
Positive Politeness.....	18
Negative Politeness.....	18
Cooperative Communication.....	19
Prior Research.....	19
Compliance Gaining.....	20
Target of Request.....	20
Multiple Goals.....	21
Refusal of Requests.....	21
Culture.....	22
Obligation.....	23
Politeness Framework.....	23
Criticisms of Politeness.....	23
Multiple Strategies.....	25
Nonverbal Strategies.....	25
Politeness Strategies.....	26

Summary.....	29
Chapter Three.....	30
Method.....	30
Research Design.....	30
Participants.....	30
Stimulus Materials.....	31
Potential Confounds.....	32
Potential Covariates.....	32
Attitude/Preference.....	33
Familiarity.....	33
Multicommunication.....	33
Measures.....	33
Covariates.....	33
Texting Attitude.....	34
Multicommunication.....	34
Texting Familiarity.....	34
Preference for Texting.....	34
Conversational Appropriateness.....	34
Relational and Social Appropriateness.....	34
Attentiveness.....	35
Immediacy.....	35
Politeness.....	35
Study Analysis.....	37
Chapter Four.....	38
Results.....	38
Preliminary Analysis.....	38
Main Analysis.....	41
Hypotheses.....	43
Hypothesis One.....	43
No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Off-Record.....	43
No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. No Verbal/Nonverbal Impoliteness.....	43
No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Bald On-Record.....	44
No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Negative Politeness.....	44
No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Positive Politeness.....	44
Hypothesis Two.....	44
Positive vs. Off-Record.....	45
Negative vs. Off-Record.....	45
Bald On-Record vs. Off-Record.....	45
Hypothesis Three.....	45
Hypothesis Four.....	46
Interpretation of Analysis.....	46
Post Hoc Thematic Analysis.....	48
Summary.....	50
Chapter Five.....	51
Discussion.....	51

Overall Interpretation and Analysis.....	51
Overview.....	52
Pragmatic Implications.....	52
Text-Messaging.....	52
Face to Face Conversational Expectations.....	53
Mediated Conversational Expectations.....	54
Turn-Taking.....	55
Co-Presence.....	56
Theoretical Implications.....	56
Extensions to Politeness Theory.....	56
Nonverbal Strategies.....	56
Explicit Face Threat.....	57
Research Critiques.....	57
Limitations.....	58
Mediated Partner.....	58
Confounding Variables.....	59
Face Threatening Behavior.....	59
Nonverbals.....	59
Message Content.....	60
Future Directions.....	61
Relationship Type.....	61
Mediated Conversational Partner.....	61
Message Type.....	62
Age.....	63
Conclusion.....	63
Appendix A:.....	64
Appendix B:.....	66
Appendix C:.....	74
References.....	76
Vita.....	81

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Pattern Factor Structure with Direct Oblimin Rotation.....	36
Table 4.1 ANOVA for Independent Variable and Covariate.....	39
Table 4.2 Post Hoc Tests for Independent Variable and Covariates.....	40
Table 4.3 Significant Mean Differences.....	42

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Trajectory for Hypotheses.....	28
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## **Chapter One: Introduction to Study**

Texting has become a common form of communication. Though texting might be common, interruptions to face to face interactions might not always be welcomed. News headlines and popular press articles often comment on the disdain people feel when others answer texts while conversing face to face with them; however, people still continue to text. This challenge of balancing conversational partners (one face to face and one mediated) is made all the more prevalent with the use of text messaging. Texting is a way to maintain connection with a mediated partner, while simultaneously engaging in a face to face conversation with another person. Given the management of multiple conversations, this study will consider whether Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness strategies mitigate the impact of texting in the presence of face to face conversational partners. Specifically this study will test six politeness strategies to determine which strategy is perceived as most conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite to use when engaging in multiple conversations (face to face and mediated).

### **Background and Significance**

In conversations, whether face to face or mediated, there are certain expectations. In conversations people are expected to listen and not talk over one another, participate, avoid silence, demonstrate concern, and be present in the interaction (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Some ways in which individuals are able to meet these expectations are by being conversationally and relationally/socially appropriate (King & Sereno, 1984), attentive (Cegala, 1984), immediate (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Gorham, 1988), and polite (Holtgraves, 2005). When individuals engage in multiple conversations at the same time, they must balance attentiveness and immediacy between two conversational partners, resulting in less attention being paid to each partner.

Reinsch, Turner, and Tinsley (2008) coined the term, multicommuting, which is "engaging in two or more overlapping, synchronous conversations." (p. 391). Engaging in multiple conversations has become common because of the cellular smart phone (Green, 2002). People can now engage in conversations wherever and whenever they choose. Most cell phone communication involves a verbal conversation between two



people that limits someone from actively engaging in a face to face verbal conversation simultaneously. However, texting allows the engagement in a face to face verbal conversation with one person and at the same time the engagement in a text conversation with another person, resulting in the management of two simultaneous conversations (Bakke, 2010).

Text messaging combines the written portion of an email (Walther, 1996), the social presence of an instant message (Walther, 1995), and the accessibility of a telephone (Green, 2002). Although some research attention has been given to the study of each of these individual aspects, little research has focused on the combination and the effects. A study by Smith and Williams (2004) is an exception. In the study the effects of cell phone text messages were looked at with regard to ostracism. Smith and Williams concluded that given the assumption that people always have their cell phones with them the failure to return a text message is viewed as intentional and is considered to be a form of ostracism. In light of these findings, one could speculate that the assumption that text messages should always be read, often leads to psychological reactions (negative and positive) as a result of a returned or not returned message. This then creates pressure on the receiver to answer the text quickly (Walther & Tidwell, 1995). Therefore unlike previous means of computer mediated communication, there is now the expectation of constant connectivity that compels people to balance multiple conversations. Given this expectation, if the receiver is engaged in a face to face conversation with one person and a text message conversation with a different person, a need to communicate with both parties might exist, which may violate certain conversational expectations (Walther & Tidwell, 1995).

Given the potential violation of conversational expectations when engaging in multiple conversations, this study will propose the use of politeness strategies to mitigate the impact of the violation. Although other theories could be used as a framework for this study, the focus is on the impact of politeness messages, therefore Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory is the framework that will be discussed.

In 1978 Brown and Levinson proposed a theory of politeness, which created a model for protective conversational politeness. The model examined how one can go

about producing a face-threatening act in a (Western) polite manner. Brown and Levinson believed that all interaction is characterized by concern over the other person's autonomy needs and his or her desire to be liked, which manifests into strategies that demonstrate those needs (i.e., politeness).

Politeness theory stems from Goffman's (1967) notion of face. Face "is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Goffman argued that "maintaining face feels good - we have an emotional attachment to the face that we maintain and disruptions of this, or losing face, results in a loss of the internal emotional support that is protecting oneself in a social situation" (p. 9). Since the emotional effects of losing one's face can be strong, people often engage in face saving strategies.

In an extension of Goffman's (1967) discussion of face, Brown and Levinson (1978) introduced two types of face, positive face and negative face. Positive face is the pro-social person you present yourself as. In other words it is who you want others to see you as being. Negative face, on the other hand, is the claim to freedom from imposition. Brown and Levinson argued that there is information that inherently violates our positive or negative face because there are a limited number of responses that may be rendered. Given the limited number of responses, an individual may choose to present the information in a strategic manner.

Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) placed face-threatening acts into five strategic categories. The first strategy is the least polite which is to go bald-on-record; simply stating the message. The second strategy is positive politeness, which is showing respect or liking when producing a message. The third strategy is negative politeness, which is dealing with imposition. The fourth strategy is going off-record, meaning being indirect. The final strategy is not producing the message at all. This study will test the four original verbal politeness strategies, as well as, extend the fifth strategy (not produce the message at all) into two strategies: one displaying nonverbal politeness and one displaying nonverbal impoliteness.

Although Brown and Levinson's (1978) original notion of face threatening acts was related to the presentation of a face threatening message, this study will extend the theory and use these strategies outside of the delivered message, and explore face

threatening behavior (a text message interruption and returned text message) and the face threatening politeness strategies (messages) created to mitigate the negative impact of the behavior. Although Brown and Levinson never explicitly stated that a face threatening behavior occurred prior to a face threatening act (politeness strategy/message), it was implicitly present. For example, in Brown and Levinson's "pass the salt" request, the face threatening act was only stated because of an implicit need for the salt. In other words, the requester first had to need the salt (implicit face threatening behavior), in order for there to be a reason for requesting the salt. In this study the face threatening behavior will be explicit (cell phone beeps indicating a text message has been received and a text message sent back in response), thus resulting in a need for a face threatening act (message) to be stated to lessen the overall face threat.

Therefore this research study will present an overview of conversational expectations (which includes conversational appropriateness, relational and social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness) and how these expectations are violated when an interruption (an incoming text message) occurs. This paper will then discuss how interruptions cause individuals to engage in multiple conversations at one time (in this case, one face to face and one mediated), re-enforcing the argument that in order to balance multiple conversations and still maintain face to face conversational expectations we use politeness strategies. Finally, politeness theory will be discussed in detail as a model for testing politeness strategies and hypotheses will be presented addressing politeness strategies and their impact on conversational expectations.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Conversational Expectations**

#### **Face to Face Communication**

In interpersonal interactions individuals have certain conversational expectations (Sacks et al., 1974). People expect others to listen and not overlap, participate while avoiding silence, care (or at least pretend to care), and be present in the interaction. Some ways in which individuals display presence in conversation are by being attentive (Cegala, 1984), immediate (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Gorham, 1988), conversationally and relationally/socially appropriate (King & Sereno, 1984) and polite (Holtgraves, 2005).

Conversational attentiveness is “the extent to which one tends to heed cues to the immediate social environment” (Cegala, 1984, p. 321). One might ask relevant questions, ask for expansion of the topic, or simply engage the speaker in a conversation. When an interruption occurs, attention is pulled away from the current conversation. In order to prevent a permanent violation of attentiveness, one may temporarily shift attention but offer a message indicating there will be a shift and potentially a reason for that shift. One could assume that a verbal justification of reason may lessen the impact of the violation.

Another conversational expectation is immediacy. Immediacy includes behaviors such as gaze and distance (Burgoon & Hale, 1988), and includes messages that are inclusive, such as “we,” and personally expressive (Gorham, 1988). Burgoon and Hale (1988) argued that longer periods of gaze and higher frequency of gaze result in more perceived immediacy as does less distance between the two partners. Gorham (1988) reported that when more inclusive language is used along with personal expressiveness people are thought to be more immediate. When an interruption occurs, the conversation is redirected towards another person. People may separate physically, they may look away (to read the text), and the level of inclusion is decreased as a third party enters the interaction.

Another conversational expectation is appropriateness. Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle states that one should “make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, with the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange” (p. 45). According to King and Sereno (1984), in order to be conversationally

appropriate, one's "conversational contributions must be appropriate to a cooperative realization of the relationship between the conversant" (p. 266). When people violate levels of appropriateness, feelings may be hurt, comments may be made, assumptions of unimportance may be inferred, or future interactions may be stifled. Individuals may be relationally appropriate, in that conversational contributions are appropriate, given the relationship of the conversational partners, or individuals may be socially appropriate in that contributions meet social expectations and follow social norms of the conversation. Since there may be times when conversational contributions may be amiss, messages can be sent to mitigate the impact. For example, one might say, "I'm sorry my mind was elsewhere for a second," in order to decrease the impact of a lack of mental presence. Or one might say, "Sorry, was that comment off topic?" These messages are attempts to create a consistency with regard to the impression one hopes to form and maintain and it helps create the impression of a competent communicator. If one does not care what others think, then there would be no need to offer a message to lessen the impact of the violation. If, however, an individual follows a Gricean belief in cooperative communication, then an explanation is not only necessary, it is appropriate (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

A specific aspect of appropriateness that is addressed in this paper is politeness. Holtgraves (2005) argued that the level of politeness can be regarded as deviating from efficient communication, where a larger deviation would render a more impolite interpretation. The level of politeness and therefore impoliteness is gauged by the implied threat (cost) to the receiver. Specific politeness messages will be addressed further throughout this paper.

### **Mediated Expectations**

Mediated communication holds its own set of conversational expectations. One of which is the notion of time. Walther and Tidwell (1995) looked at the implication of chronemics in mediated communication, specifically email and conference calls. Chronemics is "how we perceive, structure and react to time and the messages we interpret from such usage" (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 99). There is the formal sense of time, which is clearly stamped on the message but there are also temporal cues which

users employ to detect “the arrival of a message or the amount of time between one message and the next” (Walther & Tidwell, 1995, p.356). For example, a cell phone may beep or vibrate indicating a new text message has been received. Given, the expectation that one will be notified of a new message, the response time starts immediately. Walther and Tidwell argued that “such cues have great potential to affect the judgments we make of those who initiate or respond to attempts at communication” (p. 356). Feenberg (1989) suggested that since we are aware of the speed with which computed mediated communication (CMC) travels across space, we now have an expectation of a prompt reply which “mark unusual delays negatively as a possible sign of rejection or indifference since there is no technical excuse for silence” (p. 263).

Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire (1984) argued that “availability of instantaneous electronic communication, might lead people to expect immediate responses” (p.1125). In the 25 years since their argument, we now have instantaneous electronic communication and with that, research supports the expectation of immediate responses (Feenberg, 1989; Walther & Tidwell, 1995).

### **Expectations**

#### **Turn-Taking/Interruptions**

One expectation of conversation is concerned with sharing conversational time, which means avoiding talking over one another, balancing turns, and actively participating in the conversation. Sacks et al. (1974) stated that speech exchange systems are organized to ensure that only one person speaks at a time and speaker change occurs, whether it be a formal debate or a casual conversation. Given communication exchange systems, some form of turn-taking exists. Sacks et al. described a turn as not just a duration of time, but as a right and obligation to speak which is given to a particular speaker. A turn consists of a unit-type which could be a word, phrase, clause or sentence(s). When one is allocated a turn, one has the right to produce a unit-type and then transfer the turn to the next speaker. An interruption is a violation of the conversational expectation of turn taking in that it violates the right of speaker with the floor.

Tannen (1994) defined an interruption as occurring when a speaker takes the conversational floor from another speaker when there is no evidence that the original speaker intended to relinquish the turn. A speaker may intentionally take the conversational floor, by cutting the partner off mid-sentence or a speaker may unintentionally take the floor due to an outside interruption that warrants his or her attention.

Markel, Long, and Saine (1976) argued that interruptions are commonly viewed as evidence of dominance in communication, and are often viewed as negative by the person who is interrupted. Zimmerman and West (1975) stated that an interruption is a violation of the speaker's turn and allows the interrupter to control the subject area and direction of conversation. This control may be viewed as conversational dominance and may be viewed as a violation of conversational expectations.

When the conversation is interrupted by a text message sent by a third party, the recipient has several options. The recipient can ignore the text message, answer the text message, or offer a verbal message to the face to face partner along with answering the text that may decrease or increase the impact the interruption has on the current face to face conversation with another person. As stated previously, there are many types of verbal messages that can be produced. In this study, politeness strategies (messages) will be tested to understand how these messages impact conversational expectations (conversational appropriateness, relational and social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness).

## **Multiple Conversations**

### **Text Messaging**

Text message communication, which is a short (less than 160 characters) typed message sent via cellular phone, has become a common means of communicating, with the average number of monthly text messages sent and received in 2010 by 13-17 year olds at 3,705 messages and 18-24 year olds at 1,707 messages

([http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online\\_mobile/factsheet-the-u-s-media-universe/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/factsheet-the-u-s-media-universe/)).

These two groups comprise the two largest age groups for texting; however 66% of all mobile phone owners send and receive text messages.

In a world where individuals are perpetually connected to others, the balance that must be created amongst conversational partners is a challenge (Reinsch et al., 2008). Texting is a new way to maintain perpetual connectivity with friends, family, work relationships, and acquaintances. As our cellular phone is always with us, the potential for constant communication is a reality. Texting is one way in which people can engage in multiple conversations simultaneously (Reinsch et al., 2008). Whether an individual is on a date and his or her cell phone beeps with an important message from a relative or an individual is in a business meeting and his or her child emails with an urgent question, the management of multiple conversations is possible. Given this new reality, what happens when people engage in text messaging while engaged in a face to face conversation with another person?

Based on conversational expectations (Sacks et al., 1974), one could assume our face to face partner would view our text conversation as potentially face threatening in that it takes away from and potentially belittles the face to face conversation. Therefore in order to mitigate the potential face threat associated with a text interruption an individual could use politeness messages.

### **Functions of Text Messaging**

Green (2002) noted that like the telephone whose function was to “support social communication at a distance” (p. 283), different forms of communication devices can take on different meanings depending on the context. Green argued that text messaging is used for the following functions: to encourage short conversations, to coordinate activities, and to avoid face threatening face-to-face communication (breaking up, saying something rude, etc.). Igarashi, Takai, and Yoshida (2005) found that undergraduate students use MPTM (mobile phone text messaging) to form and sustain personal relationships.

### **Social Presence**

In 1976 Short, Williams, and Christie introduced the theory of social presence. Short et al. argued that social presence is “the salience of the other in a mediated conversation and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions” (p.65). Although CMC is thought to have low levels of social presence (immediacy behaviors



that display nonverbal messages), text messaging can represent a high level of perceived social presence through the response time. If one's partner answers the text he or she received from the partner, the relationship may be viewed as important and higher rates of intimacy may result. However, given the notion that one believes the other's cell phone is present, thinking the text message was "ignored" could have profound negative implications. Therefore, ignoring a text message may be viewed as a violation of mediated expectations and may be a necessary consideration in the balance of multiple conversations.

### **Balancing Multiple Conversations**

Multicommunicating is "engaging in two or more overlapping, synchronous conversations" (Reinsch et al., 2008, p. 391). Specifically, multicommunicating is participating in two or more conversations using "nearly synchronous media, such as face-to-face speech, telephone calls, videoconferencing, chat, and email" (Reinsch et al., 2008; p. 392) Although much of the research surrounding multicommunicating has examined the balance of multiple mediated conversations in a business setting, the idea of engaging in multiple simultaneous conversations in an interpersonal mediated context is similar.

Reinsch et al. (2008) explored the positive and negative effects of multicommunicating. In the business world, the ability to reply to email while conversing on the phone is seen as a benefit, in that one can multitask and accomplish more work in less time. Multicommunicating goes one step beyond multitasking in that the performer is an active participant in two conversations. Each of the conversations could require the person to take on a different role (e.g., mother, wife, employee) and could require different cognitive capability.

One could assume that significant cognitive effort goes into managing multiple conversations. The pull to be cognitively involved in both conversations, violates a conversational expectation of (mental) presence since we are limited by turn taking behavior (Sacks et al., 1974). Given previous research (Walther & Tidwell, 1995) on mediated conversational expectations, one can assume that there is a pressure to respond to the text message in order to maintain the notion of presence with the mediated partner.

However, this may come at the risk of violating the expectation of presence with the face to face partner. This is important with regard to the current study because it supports the argument that receiving a text and/or responding to a text will be viewed as a face threatening behavior by a face to face conversational partner, which requires a politeness strategy to be enacted.

### **Politeness Theory**

In many ways our language and choice of language formation are influenced by conversational norms or expectations. Therefore Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed a theory of politeness, which created a model for protective conversational politeness. In their model assumptions are made about the limitations of speech acts/performatives and the affects of these limitations on the messages an individual chooses to create and share. In order to fully understand the constraints places upon people by society and language, one must consider what speech acts and performatives are available in conversation.

### **Speech Act Theory**

Pragmatics is the relationship between signs and interpreters, creating particular meanings within specific contexts (Searle, 1965). To begin to study pragmatics one must first look at the Searle's (1965) speech act theory. Speech act theory explores truth-conditional statements to determine under which conditions are logical claims true or false. Searle believed that unless we can identify the truth conditions underlying a claim the meaning is indeterminate. If that were true then sentences such as "Hey, how's it going?" would be meaningless, since this sentence could not be deemed true or false. Since this sentence is not meaningless and since we can associate specific meaning with it, then there must be something more substantive to consider when we seek to understand language.

In 1962 Austin coined the term performatives, which are a certain class of declarative English statements that lack truth conditions. Performatives have meaning because they change the world in observable and testable ways. The effects that performatives render are unique and cannot be simply substituted in by any different word(s). So overall since performatives do have an affect they cannot be meaningless even though they do not have truth conditionals. Since performatives do not meet truth

conditions they must have standards to abide by. One of the standards is performatives must have a “happy” performance. This is tested through felicity conditions. The first felicity condition that must be met is that there must be a conventional procedure rendering a conventional effect and the circumstances and persons must be appropriate as specified in the procedure. The second condition that must be met is that the procedure must be executed correctly and completely. The third condition that must be met is that the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings, and intentions as specified (Austin, 1962).

An example would be marrying two people. Consider the statement, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” This only means marriage due to institutions such as the authority of the state that enable marriage to have higher meaning. Therefore felicity conditions rely primarily on the truth of the meaning; which lies in the heart of the source, which is grounded in the society one lives in. The focus of the conditions is in the illocutionary act. An illocutionary act is not what the words mean but what action the words merit (question, threat, request). With the illocutionary act comes the need for uptake; that is the recipient’s response that validates the performative (what is said back). If a performative meets all of the required conditions, it is said to be felicitous (Austin, 1962). This is important with regard to politeness theory, because it allows for words to have meaning and render effects, even when they cannot be shown to be true or false (which was Searle’s original claim). Brown and Levinson (1978) used both Searle’s (1965) logic of speech acts (pragmatics) and Austin’s (1962) notion of performatives (words change the world) in their creation of a theory of politeness.

### **Illocutionary Acts**

In order to understand the creation of politeness theory, one must understand the conditions under which politeness behaviors are enacted. Brown and Levinson (1978) make no attempt to encompass all illocutionary acts, their specific focus was on one category of illocutionary acts: directives. In order to understand the limitations of politeness theory, first one must look at the other types of illocutionary acts and other influences that may aid in language understanding (i.e., rules, intention, and content).

Searle (1965) agreed with Austin (1962) that there are thousands of illocutionary acts but they fit into five categories; representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Representatives are acts that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition being expressed; they state whether things are true or false. Directives are acts that the goal of which is to get the listener to do something. Commissives are acts that commit the speaker to a future type of action. Expressives are a class of acts that express a psychological state (expression of feeling). For example, thanking, apologizing, congratulating. Declarations are Austin's original performatives: acts that bring about immediate changes in the world through reliance on extra-linguistic institutions (Searle, 1965).

Searle (1965) believed that linguistic communication involves intention. Searle also argued that the focus should be looking on constitutive rules not regulative rules. Therefore the importance is on the definition of the meaning (x counts as y). Propositional content along with functional indicators (intent of the words) encompass the pragmatic meaning and/or the constitutive rule of what is being said. Propositional content is the underlying content that is associated with the words that are spoken. Function indicators are things like word order, vocalics, kinetics, etc. All of the indicators together make up the force of the sentence (Searle, 1965).

Searle (1965) also believed that words matter and do not lose their meaning in different contexts. They are just misunderstood or have misled you. Searle's argument loses ground when confronted with situations when one uses words to mean something different. For example, code words, that if heard might be thought to mean one thing but are intended to mean something completely different. Searle's basic argument is that specific words mean certain things and the meaning does not change from situation to situation. Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory is grounded in the illocutionary act; directives. However, Brown and Levinson do not make the claim that word meaning is constant. So, although one major criticism of politeness theory is that it makes universal claims about politeness behavior (Haugh, 2003), it is merely a model for how one may go about producing a face-threatening act in a (Western) polite manner (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

## **Perceptions of Face**

According to Goffman's text *Interaction Ritual* (1967), face "is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (p. 5). Goffman argued that "maintaining face feels good - we have an emotional attachment to the face that we maintain and disruptions of this, or losing face, result in a loss of the internal emotional support that is protecting oneself in a social situation" (p. 9). Since the emotional effects of losing one's face can be very strong, people often engage in face saving strategies. Goffman believed that "face saving is not just a process of the social actor, but of the audience as well. There are social protocols for helping someone maintain and save face" (p. 22). Therefore one does not have direct control over one's face, because other people's views of one's face is how it ends up being labeled. Therefore, one's face is only maintained through the help of other people he or she interacts with.

Therefore face is not only who one thinks one is, it is also how one is labeled by others. There are several strategies in which face is maintained. The first is through internal consistency. Moment to moment actions must be consistent. One's face also has to be supported by other people. Therefore if people know something about an individual and that person tries to show them something else his or her face will be violated through inconsistency. One's face also has to be supported by surrounding circumstances. If an person is considered a happy person but is put into unhappy situations then his or her face may be violated.

As stated there are many things that could potentially discredit one's face or put someone in wrong face. The goal of pranks is to put a person in wrong face. For example, someone puts candles on a cake that do not blow out and everyone around is laughing and pointing. The goal of that prank was to put that person in wrong face, but one can avoid that by keeping one's composure. People contribute to their own loss of face when they lose their poise. If one maintains poise (capability to avoid shame) then one will not lose face.

Because our face lies in the eyes of others there is a working agreement to save each other's face. There is an overwhelming pattern for people to be kind to one another and maintain one another's face (Goffman, 1967; Grice, 1975). But this does not mean

that individuals believe who they are claiming to be. So although a student might seem interested in class material, and that belief is supported by the instructor, the student might not really be interested. Ultimately it does not matter what people think of other people, it matters how they treat them (Goffman, 1967). That is, we do not always believe people are a certain way we just treat them as if they are that way (Grice, 1975). This process of maintaining face is important with regard to politeness theory as the premise of the theory is that one will manipulate face threatening acts in an attempt to save both parties' faces. Specifically Brown and Levinson (1978) argued that a face threatening act is produced to address the sender's desire to be liked (positive face), while addressing the receiver's positive and/or negative face needs.

One of the interactions common in relationships is the formation of requests. Requests are the type of directives examined specifically by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their creation of politeness theory. Brown and Levinson's face work looked at what kind of reasoning and patterns people use to formulate requests in politeness forms. For small requests people tend to use mild indirection. For example, "Do you know what time it is?" On the surface it is a question regarding the knowledge of time and a simple yes or no would suffice. In actuality it is a direct time request – "Tell me what time it is." There are also mild requests that are somewhat imposing. They shift from mild indirection to more elaborate forms of politeness and most commonly occur alongside an apology; such as, "I am sorry to bother you, but do you think I could borrow 20 dollars?" Then there are large requests that are almost completely indirect. For example, "Do you want to spend the night tonight?" which can mean, "I want to have sex." The idea of using indirect communication to request something is counter-intuitive because one would think that if something was important to you, you would want to be clear about it. However, that is not the case in language and this trend is argued to be generally universal (Brown & Levinson, 1978). The reason that request size increases as the amount of direct communication decreases is because of face.

### **Positive and Negative Face**

In an extension of Goffman's (1967) concept of face, Brown and Levinson (1978) introduced two types of face, positive and negative. Positive face is the social person one

present oneself as. In other words, who you want others to see you as being. It is not necessarily a “nice” face, rather the face you want others to see. In fact positive face can be seen by others as negative. For example a person’s positive face, can be that of a jerk, and while this may seem negative, it is still his or her positive face. Positive face can either be violated by others or by oneself. For example, others can criticize, degrade, insult, and tease all of which violate one’s positive face. Another way in which one’s positive face could be violated is through one’s own actions. For example, if one’s positive face is that of a happy easygoing person and one day that person is in a crabby mood and snaps at someone, then he or she has violated his or her positive face and people may consequently see him or her as unhappy.

Negative face, on the other hand, is our claim to freedom from imposition. In other words, it is the idea that we all want to do what we want to do (Brown & Levinson, 1978). An example of a violation of negative face would be when a teacher holds a student after class when that student just wants to go home. The teacher would be imposing on the student and that student would see it as undesirable because people want to do what people want to do. Examples of violations of negative face include: requests, threats, commands, questions, suggestions, and advice. For example, when someone asks for forgiveness, he or she is potentially threatening one’s negative face, because one may or may not wish to grant the request. The cutting down of negative face is an implied cutting down of positive face. One example of this is constructive criticism. Someone is violating one’s positive face by criticizing and is also offering unwarranted advice, which can be viewed as a violation of one’s negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

### **Face-Threatening Information**

Whenever one possesses face-threatening information Brown and Levinson (1978) argue three things happen. First the face-threatening act (FTA) is presented. Then the information is either presented efficiently to help your own negative face wants, or face is attempted to be either protected or maintained (both your own positive face and your partner’s positive and/or negative face). Most of the time people are less efficient in order to save face.

## **Performing the FTA**

Brown and Levinson (1978) present a framework for how face-threatening acts are performed. First the act is either performed or it is not. If the act is performed it is either on record or off record. If the act is on record then it is with redress or bald. If it is with redress then it is either in the form of positive politeness or negative politeness. The sequence starts with an initial decision of whether or not you have content that is relevant to disclose. If you choose not to disclose information that is relevant then you are deceiving someone. If you choose to disclose the information then you can either be off record or on record.

### **Off-Record**

When you present a message off record you present face threatening information. However, you do so in a way that says that you cannot be held accountable (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Ways of doing this are by hinting or sarcastic joking. That is one may put a “tone” in the comment, but if confronted the comment is defensible. This notion of tone is directly from Searle’s (1965) and Austin’s (1962) work on word meaning. Since face it public, one may use this strategy to avoid a direct confrontation which allows for a future detract of the statement if necessary.

### **Bald On-Record**

On record, however, is when you present information in a way that it is obvious that you intend something to be face threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Therefore, you must choose between redress or baldly (Brown & Levinson, 1978). If you go with redress you are attempting to repair the situation, perhaps with a reason for why you said it or with an apology. If you go baldly then you are prioritizing efficiency over face saving actions and you state the comment explicitly and say nothing else. When you go baldly you are generally seen as inappropriate and inferences will be made about you and your intentions.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) there are times when on-record bald comments are considered socially appropriate and people will accept them, not like them, but accept them. One instance could be when the threat to face is initially small, for example, “Have a seat.” Another time could be when it is obvious that efficiency trumps



face needs. An example of this would be emergency situations. The third time when bald on record comments are considered appropriate is when there is clear power distance between the partners (i.e., when one person holds more power than the other person). For example your boss tells you Friday at five o'clock that he or she needs the report completed by nine am Monday morning and you respond with, "Okay". Although this is seen as socially acceptable it is not personally seen as the best way to handle a situation or demonstrate authority (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In general it is not acceptable to report bald on record FTAs. People will often think you are joking when you present them because it seems too abrupt. You can also use bald on record statements to understand power distance in relationships by looking at who performs them (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

### **With Redress**

If you decide not to use bald on record FTAs then you would use on record FTAs with redress. This refers to the addition of disclaimers to your information in order to offset or soften the face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1978; 1987). The bigger the threat the more the disclaimer and indirect language is needed. For example, "Sorry to bother you" or "Do you think it would be possible...". If you use on record with redress then you either do so with positive or negative politeness.

### **Positive Politeness**

With positive politeness you know you are going to threaten someone's positive face. An example of this is when a student meets with an instructor to discuss an exam he or she did very poorly on. Just talking about the exam is face threatening, therefore the instructor may say "You are a great student, this was just a mishap." Therefore you decrease the face threat by playing up solidarity between partners noting that both people are a part of the interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1978). You also use informal language and recognize the other person's wants.

### **Negative Politeness**

Negative politeness is used is when there is a negative face threat and it is often accompanied with an apology such as "I am sorry to interrupt but..." One can mitigate the face threat by being respectful, avoid presuming too much by using questions and

hedges, and communicating a desire not to impinge by using apologies (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Although there are many different options in presenting FTAs, face considerations are always present.

To summarize Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework one could put face-threatening acts into five strategies. The first strategy is the least polite which is to go bald-on-record; simply to state your message (e.g., bring me my jacket). The second strategy is positive politeness, which is when you show respect or liking when stating a message (e.g., my sweet niece would you bring me my jacket). The third strategy is negative politeness, which is when you deal with imposition (e.g., I know you are busy, but would you bring me my jacket). The fourth strategy is going off-record, meaning you are being indirect (e.g., it sure is cold in here). The final strategy is not stating a message at all.

### **Cooperative Communication**

Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) adhered to a Gricean norm-based approach. This approach argued that people are cooperative in communication (Grice, 1975). Therefore people use politeness to save one another's face. More specifically as the face threat increases people may be expected to use multiple politeness strategies to save another's face (Lim & Bowers, 1991). This study will look at how the use of different strategies influences one's perceptions of relational appropriateness, social appropriateness, immediacy, attentiveness, and politeness. Specifically this study will not only address the four original verbal politeness strategies, but will also extend the fifth strategy to include a nonverbal politeness and a nonverbal impoliteness condition, for a total of six strategies.

### **Prior Research**

Politeness theory has been studied in many different communication contexts: compliance gaining (Baxter, 1984), type of request (Shimanoff, 1987), multiple goals (O'Keefe & Sheperd, 1987), refusal of requests (Johnson, Roloff, & Riffée, 2004; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998) culture (Holtgraves & Yang, 1992) and obligation (Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991). Although many communication issues have been studied using the politeness framework, what remain constant criticisms in politeness

research are the rigid nature of the theory (Bavelas & Chovil, 1997), the use of speech acts as units of analysis (Holtgraves, 2002), the lack of a distinction between the sender's and the receiver's face (Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986), and the notion of face threatening acts as universals (Haugh, 2003; Jary, 1998). The following portion of this paper will briefly address prior areas that have used a politeness framework and will discuss the criticisms of the theory.

### **Compliance Gaining**

Baxter (1984) studied compliance-gaining through the lens of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Brown and Levinson (1978) believed that all interaction is characterized by concern over the other person's autonomy needs and his or her desire to be liked, which manifests into strategies that demonstrate those needs (i.e., politeness). Baxter focused on the likelihood to use politeness within the three areas established by Brown and Levinson (1987): relationship distance, relationship power, and the magnitude of the request. Results indicated that females and persons in close relationships use more polite tactics than males and persons in more distant relationships. Gender was never discussed in the original formation of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978). However, these results may be culturally dependent and since Brown and Levinson were attempting to step outside of culture, perhaps they intentionally sought to avoid gender. Results from Baxter's study also indicated that persons with power use less politeness than less powerful persons. This finding is consistent with Brown and Levinson's original theory with regard to inferences and societal acceptance. Although power, distance, and size of the request are important in predicting the likelihood of using a politeness strategy, the current research study will control for these.

### **Target of Request**

Another area in which politeness theory has been used is with regard to the target of request. Shimanoff (1987) looked specifically at making requests of one's spouse. This is similar to Baxter's (1984) study that looked at the role of the relationship on politeness strategies. Shimanoff attempted to look at the differences between unpleasant emotional disclosures with regard to requests and pleasant emotional disclosures. Shimanoff hypothesized that hearers would be more likely to comply with requests that were

displayed with pleasant emotions and attitudes. However, Shimanoff found that spouses were not any more likely to comply with pleasant requests in comparison to unpleasant requests. Shimanoff concluded that this finding may be because perhaps married couples hold minimal face concerns.

Brown and Levinson (1978) argued that face concerns are the main reason for why one enacts politeness strategies. However, Brown and Levinson's assumptions may hold for only causal relationships or initial encounters. The area of long-term relationships and politeness needs to be analyzed more thoroughly. Therefore the current study will look at the affect politeness strategies have on close friends (an established relationship).

### **Multiple Goals**

In O'Keefe and Sheperd's (1987) study on management of multiple communicative goals in interpersonal arguments messages, one concern of goal management was the manner in which subsidiary communicative goals of face protection and management of interaction maintenance were addressed. Brown and Levinson (1978) focused on goal-based interactions, in that all requests in any politeness form are attempts to reach specific goals. In O'Keefe and Sheperd's study impression management strategies were analyzed with regard to their influence on multiple aims and objectives in message formation (i.e., goal management strategies; selection, integration, and separation). Brown and Levinson argued that as face protection becomes more important the sender is less likely to produce the FTA (or he or she might choose to do it off-record). O'Keefe and Sheperd's study supported this claim in that when the aim/objective of a goal message is more likely to threaten the hearer's face, the sender is less likely to use the message as a goal management strategy. Therefore the current study will test a interaction where the face threat is low (still present, but low), therefore the need for face protection is also relatively low, thus allowing a politeness strategy to be enacted in a seemingly natural way.

### **Refusal of Requests**

In 2004, Johnson et al. extended Wilson et al.'s (1998) revision of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory by focusing on the relationship between face threat

and refusals to requests. Brown and Levinson did not specifically address what happens when the request is refused. Their main focus was on how requests are formatted by the sender. Both Johnson et al. and Wilson et al. found that when requests are refused, threats to the negative face needs of the sender are more prevalent than threats to the negative face of the hearer. However depending on the issue underlying the refusal there are differences in type of threat present to the sender's face and the hearer's face needs. The differences once again address the issue of "context," which was left out of Brown and Levinson's (1978) original theory of politeness. Arguably though, Brown and Levinson did not attempt to make any claims about what happens after the initial act, their focus was on the politeness strategy, not on the response. Therefore the current study will limit the interaction to the original boundaries established by Brown and Levinson and leave out the response to the politeness strategy. However, it should be noted that the study in this project is still technically bound by the original two response types (acceptance or refusal –of the interruption).

### **Culture**

Holtgraves and Yang (1992) used Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory with participants from the United States and Korea in order to study the implications of culture when making a request. The participants were asked to indicate exactly what they would say in a request situation and what their perceptions of the request size, the hearer's power, and the closeness of their relationship with the hearer would be. Results were found to be consistent with politeness theory, with regard to power, distance, and request size. However, there was evidence of cultural and gender differences in the weighting of importance with regard to these variable. For example, in Korea the greater the hearer's power the less likely one is to initiate a request. Although this study does support some of the claims made by Brown and Levinson, it does note cultural differences which fail to support their notion of universals. However, the current study is limited in culturally diversity, therefore the concern of politeness as "universal," is not relevant to this study. The current study will also limit the influence of power distance, by making the interactants close friends (equal power).

## **Obligation**

Wilson et al. (1991) looked at when messages become face threatening in regard to compliance gaining messages. Wilson, et al. argued that messages only become face threatening in compliance gaining when the directive “projects a definition of the situation which reflects unfavorably on the target” (p. 221). This definition often takes the form of an obligation to perform the behavior. Therefore Wilson et al. argued that not all direct compliance gaining messages threaten face, there needs to be an assumption of obligation in order for the message to threaten face. This sense of obligation is important to the current study, given the balance of face to face and mediated conversational expectations, in that the face to face receiver of the text message may feel an obligation to both conversational partners.

## **Politeness Framework**

Meier (1995) called for an extension of politeness outside of just positive and negative politeness. Meier argued that advancements such as Janney and Arndt’s (1992) modifications of social politeness and interpersonal politeness need to be the new framework from which to study politeness in everyday interactions. Therefore the current study will attempt to look at the role of positive and negative politeness in a social interaction guided by conversational expectations.

### **Criticisms of Politeness Theory**

One specific criticism of politeness theory is that the theory is too rigid (Bavelas & Chovil, 1997). Bavelas and Chovil (1997) argued that true politeness takes time to develop and cannot be claimed in one utterance. Holtgraves (2002) also addressed a similar concern, suggested that the focus of politeness cannot and should not be analyzed by a single speech act. Both Bavelas and Chovil, as well as, Holtgraves argued that politeness theory is limited by the focus of the theory on one specific utterance, without consideration of an entire interaction.

Another criticism of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) is that the theory does not differentiate between the sender’s and the receiver’s face threats (Craig et al., 1986). Craig et al. argued that when a sender produces a face threatening act using negative politeness, he or she is concerned with the negative face needs of the receiver.

However, it is not known what face needs of the sender are also being met by the face threatening act. Although Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) did not address what face needs are being met by the face threatening act, they did consider a face threatening act to be an attempt to maintain the sender's positive face. Therefore, although the outcome of the face threatening act may not be known with regard to the sender's face, the reason for producing the act is to both meet the sender's positive face needs and the receiver's positive and/or negative face needs (or fail to meet them). It is this rationale for a need to meet both the sender and receiver's face, that guides the current research study. Specifically politeness messages are necessary to produce in order to meet both face to face conversational partner's face needs.

A final criticism of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) is that of politeness as universal. Haugh (2003) took issue with politeness and social norms. Haugh argued that in different cultures politeness means different things. For example in Japanese culture being polite involves showing that one respects the social position of others (or one does not respect one's own social position too much). In American culture, however, being polite involves showing that one respects the right of others to be free from imposition (or that one does not think too highly of one's own right to be free from imposition). Haugh argued that if different cultures have different reasons for engaging in politeness (and perhaps different definitions of what politeness is) then they will utilize different strategies or perhaps no strategy at all (if they do not see information as face threatening) when expressing face-threatening messages.

Jary (1998) also critiqued the assumption of universal politeness messages and strategies. Jary specifically looked at the relationship dimensions between the speaker and the hearer. Jary argued that depending on the intimacy level of the relationship the use of politeness strategies may differ. Jary did note that Brown and Levinson (1987) in their extension from their original theory (1978) noted the implications of power distance in both the use of politeness strategies and the inferences that are made, Jary however, extended the relationship dimension to not just encompass power but intimacy levels as well. Jary argued that there can be no universals in politeness messages as all

relationships are unique and any overlying assumptions about individual relationships are still impacted by culture, thus making messages context dependent.

### **Multiple Strategies**

Lim and Bowers (1991) argued that politeness strategies are intended to mitigate face threats that render from certain FTAs. According to Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) positive politeness messages are approach based in that they actively promote the hearer's desire for approval and negative politeness messages are avoidance based as they passively preserve a hearer's need for autonomy. Lim and Bowers argued that positive and negative politeness messages are not mutually exclusive and we may use multiple message types or use a nonverbal message to display politeness.

### **Nonverbal Strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1978) introduced four verbal strategies for presenting a face threatening act. They also argued that a final strategy exists, which is to not present a face threatening act at all. This study will test Brown and Levinson's four verbal strategies and extend the final strategy (no message), to include a nonverbal display of politeness (say nothing and ignore the incoming text message) or a nonverbal display of impoliteness (saying nothing and send a text message back in response). Given previous research (Zimmerman & West, 1975) that found that interruptions are viewed as violations to conversational expectations and therefore may be viewed as face threatening, one could presume that ignoring a face threatening behavior (incoming text message) could be a nonverbal display of politeness and therefore result in being viewed as more likely to meet conversational face to face expectations. While simply responding to a text message and offering no verbal or nonverbal politeness message may be viewed as impolite and as a failure to meet conversational face to face expectations. Therefore the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: A text message interruption accompanied by no verbal message and that is noticed and then ignored will be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than a text message interruption followed by a verbal message or a text message interruption following by no verbal message but that is answered.



## **Politeness Strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) argued that not performing the face threatening act at all would be viewed as the most polite strategy to use, however in a context where face threatening behavior (text interruption –received and sent back) has occurred a message/face threatening act may be necessary as a means of mitigating the impact of the behavior. Also contrary to Brown and Levinson’s argument that the off record strategy (saying something vague and indirect) would be viewed as the most “polite” verbal strategy in that it does not directly threaten the face of the receiver. However, given the presence of a face threatening behavior a lack of a relevant verbal message may appear to be disregarding of conversational norms (either face to face norms or mediated conversational norms). Conversational norms include producing relevant responses (Cegala, 1984) and keeping the current conversation on topic (Sereno & King, 1984). Therefore the following hypothesis is presented:

H2: A text message interruption accompanied by a relevant verbal message strategy (bald on-record, with redress using positive politeness or negative politeness) will be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than a text message interruption without a relevant verbal message (off-record).

Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) argued that redress messages (with positive or negative politeness) will be viewed as more polite than messages without redress (bald on-record) since conversational and (Western) societal norms argue for the use of politeness. As discussed earlier, politeness is a component of conversational norms, the following hypothesis is presented.

H3: A text message interruption accompanied with a redress message will be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than a text message interruption with a bald on-record message.

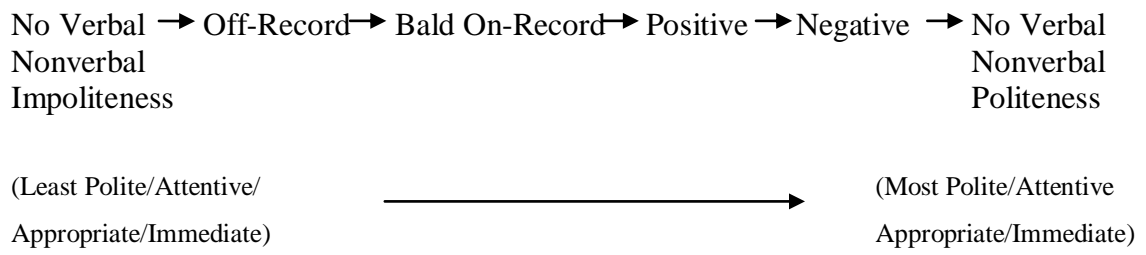
Brown and Levinson (1987) also argued that when making small requests (low level of face threat) with low distance partners, negative politeness strategies will be viewed as more polite than positive politeness strategies because negative politeness addresses impingement of another’s time, while positive politeness assumes that the solidarity amongst relational partners is enough to mitigate the impact of the request.

Therefore, given the level of the text message interruption (low face threat), the negative politeness strategy may be viewed as the most appropriate strategy as it offers an apology for the behavior (text interruption) and does not merely rely on the relationship type to mitigate the impact of the behavior. Therefore the following hypothesis is presented:

H4: A text message interruption accompanied by a negative politeness strategy will be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than a positive politeness strategy.

Figure 2.1, represents the predicted trajectory of the politeness strategies for all four hypotheses.

Figure 2.1: Trajectory for Hypotheses



## **Summary**

As noted in the previous section, the proposed study is designed to examine the influence that different “politeness” messages have on face to face conversational expectations. In order to evaluate the message’s impact, several hypotheses will be tested. The next section will address the methods and approach to data analysis.

## **Chapter Three: Method**

### **Research Design**

Participants consisted of students from communication courses at a large southern university. Students in these courses were required to participate in one research activity for course credit. Multiple opportunities to fulfill this research credit were provided to the students through the SONA website where the date, time, location, and a brief description of the studies were posted. The current study on texting was listed as one such opportunity. The students then self selected the opportunity in which they chose to participate. Students who selected the opportunity were sent an email confirmation and reminder.

The research study took place in a computer lab, where each participant had his or her own computer. Prior to entering the lab, attendance was taken to confirm research credit could be awarded properly. Participants were then ushered into the lab and asked to pick a computer to use. The lab had 20 available computers, and the participant group size ranged from 9-20 students depending on the scheduled time. Participants were then told the study would take 30 minutes and were asked to sit quietly at their computer upon completion until the entire group had completed the survey. Participants were also told that they would be reading a short paragraph about an interaction between themselves and Terry (their close friend). The participants were told the paragraph would be present on the top of each page for them to reference and they were to answer the questions that were listed. Once the participants had taken their seats, they were told they could begin the study. The first page of the survey was a consent form that the students read and if agreed to advanced them to one of the six randomly assigned conditions. The conditions were randomly assigned by a router in the online survey construction program (qualtrics). Once the entire group completed the survey, the participants were dismissed and research credit was immediately awarded.

### **Participants**

Three hundred thirty-one participants completed the survey, 163 males (49.2%) and 168 females (50.8%). Participants were undergraduate students: freshman (35.3%; *n*

= 117), sophomores (34.4%;  $n = 113$ ), juniors (18.1%;  $n = 60$ ) and seniors (12.1%;  $n = 40$ ) enrolled in a large southern university and were recruited to participate in this study as part of their research requirement in various communication courses. The respondent's ages ranged from 18-47: 18 years old (28.4%), 19 years old (29.3%), 20 years old (18.4%), 21 years old (8.2%), 22 years old (5.7%), 23 years old (1.9%), 24 years old (1.3%), 25 years old (.6%), 25 years old (.3%), 26 years old (.3%), and 47 years old (.3%). The mean was 20 years. The majority of participants were White (84.8%), followed by Black/African-American (8.5%), Asian-Pacific Islander (3.3%), Other (2.4%), Hispanic (.6%) and Native American (.3%).

### **Stimulus Materials**

Participants who volunteered for this study were told that they would read a short paragraph (vignette) about an interaction which they were to imagine as taking place between themselves and Terry (their close friend). The vignette (Appendix A) was followed by an online survey (Appendix B) that asked them to answer questions about the interaction in the vignette. The survey included questions about each of the dependent variables, covariates, demographic information, what sex they believed Terry to be, whether Terry was polite to the mediated partner, and what they would have said if they were Terry. The survey took participants approximately 30 minutes. Prior to starting the survey a consent form (Appendix C) was read online that when agreed to, moved the students into one of six randomly assigned conditions. In all of the six conditions Terry and the participant were close friends that were out to lunch discussing a new relationship. In the first four conditions Terry received a text message from an outside party and offered a verbal politeness strategy.

- "I have to check this message" (bald on-record);
- "I'm really enjoying our conversation and would like to hear more details, but I need to check this text" (positive politeness);
- "I'm sorry but could you hold on just a sec, while I check this text" (negative politeness);
- "This cell phone is constantly beeping" (off-record).

In the other two conditions Terry received a text message from an outside party did not offer a verbal strategy, and either sent a text message back in response (no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness) or ignored the text message (no verbal/nonverbal politeness).

### **Potential Confounds**

Several relationship characteristics are often studied with regard to politeness. These include power, distance, and weightiness of the face threatening act. This study attempted to control for power, by having the participant be a friend of Terry's. Also the participant was told that he or she and Terry are close friends (low distance), not merely acquaintances so the conversational expectations of conversational appropriateness, relational and social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness are present; as closeness is linked to the use of politeness messages. Given the type of relationship that the participant and Terry have (close friends), the topic of a new relationship should be engaging. Therefore an interruption to the conversation should be viewed as rude or potentially face threatening. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) the weightiness of the act is suppose to influence the amount of politeness one uses. Therefore since the weightiness or level of rudeness in the text message interruption was designed to be relatively low, the message that followed was also small in size.

Each condition was compared on conversational appropriateness, relational and social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness. Potential covariates that were measured and controlled for in the data analysis include: texting attitude, texting familiarity, preference for texting, and multicomunication.

### **Potential Covariates**

One's perceptions and personal texting use may influence his or her perception of texting behaviors. Individuals may be more or less inclined to view a text message interruption as a face threatening behavior that warrants a face threatening act (message) depending on their personal texting behaviors. Therefore the following variables were considered: attitude of using text message communication, familiarity of using it, preferences of text communication, and comfort and ability to engage in multiple conversations (multicomunication).

**Attitude/Preference.** One's attitude toward texting was considered. Ledbetter (2009) argued that one's attitude toward a medium would influence how and why one uses the medium. Therefore if people have a positive attitude toward texting in that they enjoy it and think it is useful, they may be more likely to use texting to communicate and prefer texting as a primary form of communication. This preference of text message communication over face to face communication was also measured as a potential covariate.

**Familiarity.** Familiarity with texting was another variable measured. Although texting may not be considered a natural form of communication, it may still be used frequently. With this frequency comes the issue of comfort and competence. Research (Mallen, Day, & Green, 2003; Spitzberg, 2006) has found that being more familiar with a medium can result in higher levels of comfort with conversational partners as well as a more positive view of the medium itself. Therefore questions were asked about how frequently one texts and how comfortable one is using this form of communication.

**Multicommunication.** Finally, Kock's (2004) media naturalness theory argued that how naturally we communicate using computer mediated technology is based on a comparison to face to face communication. Therefore if texting is a natural part of daily communication and we have the ability and are comfortable texting while engaged in a face to face conversation with another person, the text message interruption might not be viewed as a face threatening behavior. Since some people may find the medium to be more natural than others, questions were addressed to gauge their ability and comfort level of engaging in multiple conversations (one face to face and one mediated).

## **Measures**

The items for the dependent variables (conversational appropriateness, relational/social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, politeness) and the items for the covariates (texting attitude, texting familiarity, preference for texting, and multicommunication) were rated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Covariates.** Twenty-one items were created to measure potential covariates in the present study. Table 3.1 provides the factor analysis for the 21 items. According to



Stevens (2002) loading greater than 0.4 represent substantive values, therefore items were kept if they met this criterion. In addition, items should have a minimum of .20 difference (Cliff & Pennell, 1967). Using these criteria three items were dropped due to cross-loadings. This resulted in five factors. However, one factor consisted of only one item and therefore was also dropped from the analyses. This procedure resulted in the four proposed factors. The four components included: texting attitude (7 items), multicomcommunication (3 items), texting familiarity (5 items), and preference for texting (2 items). Each component was then analyzed separately as a potential covariate. The items representing each factor and factor loadings can be seen in Table 3.1.

**Texting Attitude.** Composite reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .838 ( $M = 40.8$ ,  $SD = 6.4$ ) for the complete seven item scale.

**Multicomcommunication.** Composite reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .739 ( $M = 10.9$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) for the complete three item scale.

**Texting Familiarity.** Composite reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .716 ( $M = 34.4$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ) for the complete five item scale.

**Preference for Texting.** Composite reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .716 ( $M = 9.1$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ) for the complete two item scale.

**Conversational Appropriateness.** The 20 items that were used to analyze conversational appropriateness were from the Conversational Appropriateness Scale (Spitzberg & Canary, 1985; as cited in Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004). The current study modified the wording of the original questions to ensure relevance to the scenario presented. For example, "she/he said several things that seemed out of place in conversation," was changed to "Terry said several things that seemed out of place in conversation." Composite reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .952 ( $M = 97.2$ ,  $SD = 26.1$ ) for the complete 20 item scale.

**Relational and Social Appropriateness.** The three items that were used to analyze relational and social appropriateness were from the Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; as cited in Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004). Only three of the eighteen items were used from the scale as these were the only items that specifically measured appropriateness. The current study modified the wording

of the original questions to ensure consistency with the scenario presented. For example, “she/he wanted to communicate with me in an appropriate manner,” was changed to “Terry wanted to communicate with me in an appropriate manner.” Composite reliability using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was .849 ( $M = 13.7$ ,  $SD = 4.5$ ) for the complete three item scale.

**Attentiveness.** The four items that were used to gauge attentiveness were from the Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1978; as cited in Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004). Only four of the 51 total items were used as only four specifically measured attentiveness. The current study modified the wording of the original questions to ensure consistency with the scenario. For example, “I can always repeat back to a person exactly what was meant,” was changed to “I believe Terry could repeat back to me exactly what was meant.” Composite reliability using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was .818 ( $M = 17.6$ ,  $SD = 5.5$ ) for the complete four item scale.

**Immediacy.** The scale that was adjusted and used to analyze immediacy was part of the Relational Communication Scale (Burgoon & Hale, 1984; as cited in Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 2004). Seven of the nine immediacy/affection questions (from the 41 item scale) were used. The other two questions were dropped as they measured attraction, which was not a variable of interest in the current study. The current study modified the wording of the original questions to ensure consistency with the scenario. For example, “He/she was intensely involved in our conversation,” was changed to “Terry was intensely involved in our conversation.” Composite reliability using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was .934 ( $M = 29.1$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ) for the complete seven item scale.

**Politeness.** The items that were adjusted and used to analyze politeness were adapted from Trees and Manusov’s (1998) politeness scales. The questions were modified from their original format to fit with the given scenario. For example, “How polite was the speaker?,” was changed to “Terry was very polite.” Composite reliability using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was .808 ( $M = 22.0$ ,  $SD = 6.6$ ) for the complete five item scale.

Table 3.1: *Pattern Factor Structure with Direct Oblimin Rotation*

	Att.	Mul.	Fam.	Pref.
I enjoy communicating using text messages	.787			
I enjoy texting	.777			
I think texting is a useful way to communicate	.701			
I find texting to be a natural way for people to communicate	.720			
I think everyone should text	.643			
I think texting is rude* <sup>a</sup>	.542	.409		
I intend on continuing to communicate using text messages	.507			
I feel comfortable engaging in two conversations at once	.403			
I think it is rude when people text while engaged in a face to face conversation with me*		.880		
I am uncomfortable when people text while engaged in a face to face conversation with me*		.803		
I can text while in face to face conversation with someone else		.649		
I enjoy texting while in a face to face conversation with someone else <sup>a</sup>		.605		.428
I do not mind when others text while in my presence <sup>a</sup>	.518	.490		
I understand how to send and receive text messages			.817	
I can send text messages to multiple people			.789	
I know how to text			.687	
I text on a daily basis			.588	
I can send pictures via text message			.407	
I text people so I do not have to call them			.864	
I prefer to send text messages instead of talking to people			.782	
I feel disconnected when I am not texting <sup>b</sup>				.666

\*Recoded Item <sup>a</sup>Dropped due to cross-loading <sup>b</sup>Dropped due to singular loading  
 Note: Only factor loading above .40 are listed.

### **Study Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the data using SPSS 18.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine all variable means and standard deviations. Individual items that needed to be reverse scored were recoded and composite variables were created. Group comparisons were made to test the hypotheses. The following chapter discusses analyses that were conducted and the results.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Preliminary Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with Bonferroni correction was conducted. Bonferroni correction was made for adjustment of multiple comparisons. Six conditions were analyzed with (54-56 participants per condition). Prior to the MANCOVA being conducted several preliminary tests were done. To test for multicollinearity, an ANOVA was conducted between the independent variable and covariates to ensure independence. Table 4.1 provides the results of the ANOVA. Due to the indicated significance ( $p < .018$ ) between the independent variable (condition) and one of the covariates (multicommunication), post hoc tests were necessary. Scheffe post hoc tests revealed non-significant findings ( $p > .05$ ), therefore, concluding the covariates and independent variable are independent. Table 4.2 provides the results of the post hoc analysis for multicommunication and condition. Given that one's sex can often bias opinion of message use (Tannen, 1994). Therefore participants were asked what sex they thought Terry was; 45.3% ( $n = 150$ ) thought Terry was male and 54.4% ( $n = 179$ ) thought Terry was female. The sex of Terry was examined with regard to condition on the dependent variables and an insignificant multivariate effect was indicated [ $F(5, 309) = .96, p < .44, \eta^2 = .015$ ]. Univariate F-test also indicated similar nonsignificant results for each dependent variable: conversational appropriateness [ $F(1, 313) = 1.53, p < .22, \eta^2 = .005$ ], relational/social appropriateness [ $F(1, 313) = .74, p < .39, \eta^2 = .007$ ], attentiveness [ $F(1, 313) = 2.36, p < .13, \eta^2 = .002$ ], immediacy [ $F(1, 313) = 3.82, p < .07, \eta^2 = .012$ ], and politeness [ $F(1, 313) = 3.24, p < .07, \eta^2 = .010$ ].

Table 4.1 ANOVA for Independent Variable and Covariates

Covariates	ANOVA				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>
Texting Attitude	5.717	5	1.143	1.391	.227
Multicommunication	28.064	5	5.613	2.770	.018
Texting Familiarity	.149	5	.030	.237	.946
Preference for Texting	4.595	5	.919	.362	.874

Table 4.2 *Post Hoc Tests for Independent Variable and Covariate*

		Multiple Comparisons					95% Confidence Interval	
Dependent Variable	(I) Condition	(J) Condition	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>p</i>	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Multicomm	Scheffe	Bald	Positive	-.70	.26	.238	-1.60	.19
		Record	Negative	-.54	.27	.549	-1.44	.36
			Off	.01	.27	1.000	-.89	.91
			NonImpol	.04	.27	1.000	-.86	.95
		Positive	NonPolite	-.25	.27	.973	-1.15	.65
	Bald		.70	.26	.238	-.19	1.60	
	Negative		.16	.27	.996	-.74	1.06	
	Off		.71	.27	.227	-.19	1.61	
		Negative	NonImpol	.74	.27	.183	-.16	1.65
	NonPolite		.45	.27	.730	-.45	1.35	
	Bald		.54	.27	.549	-.36	1.44	
	Positive		-.16	.27	.996	-1.06	.74	
		Off-Record	Off	.55	.27	.532	-.35	1.46
	NonImpol		.58	.27	.463	-.32	1.50	
	NonPolite		.29	.27	.949	-.61	1.19	
	Bald		-.01	.27	1.000	-.91	.89	
		No Verbal	Positive	-.71	.27	.227	-1.61	.19
	Nonverbal		Negative	-.55	.27	.532	-1.46	.35
	Impolite		NonImpol	.03	.27	1.000	-.87	.94
			NonPolite	-.26	.27	.968	-1.16	.64
		No Verbal	Bald	-.04	.27	1.000	-.95	.86
	Nonverbal		Positive	-.74	.27	.183	-1.65	.16
	Impolite		Negative	-.58	.27	.463	-1.50	.32
			Off	-.03	.27	1.000	-.94	.87
		No Verbal	NonPolite	-.29	.27	.946	-1.20	.61
	Nonverbal		Bald	.25	.27	.973	-.65	1.15
	Polite		Positive	-.45	.27	.730	-1.35	.45
			Negative	-.29	.27	.949	-1.19	.61
	Polite	Off	.26	.27	.968	-.64	1.16	
		NonImpol	.29	.27	.946	-.61	1.20	

At this point it should be noted that the basic assumption of homogeneity of variance (using Levene's test for two of the dependent variables and two of the covariates), was not met. However, due to the similar sample size (54-56 participants) in each condition and the lack of theoretical reasoning for transforming data (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), this does not raise concern. All other assumptions (normality, independence, etc.) were met.

### **Main Analysis**

A main effect was found for texting attitude, Pillia's Trace [ $F(5, 297) = 4.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .064$ ]. Between subjects F tests on each of the dependent variables found a significant effect on conversational appropriateness [ $F(1, 301) = 8.92, p < .003, \eta^2 = .029$ ], attentiveness [ $F(1, 301) = 14.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .047$ ], relational/social appropriateness [ $F(1, 301) = 4.91, p < .027, \eta^2 = .016$ ], immediacy [ $F(1, 301) = 6.35, p < .012, \eta^2 = .021$ ], and politeness [ $F(1, 301) = 12.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .041$ ]. Pillia's Trace also indicated a main effect for multicomunication, [ $F(5, 297) = 3.42, p < .005, \eta^2 = .054$ ]. Between subjects F tests on each of the dependent variables found a significant effect on conversational appropriateness [ $F(1, 301) = 6.31, p < .013, \eta^2 = .021$ ], attentiveness [ $F(1, 301) = 5.78, p < .017, \eta^2 = .019$ ], relational/social appropriateness [ $F(1, 301) = 4.98, p < .026, \eta^2 = .016$ ], immediacy [ $F(1, 301) = 12.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .041$ ], and politeness [ $F(1, 301) = 13.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .044$ ]. The main effect for condition, texting familiarity, and texting preference did not approach significance. None of the interaction effects approached significance either.

The Pillia's Trace test for multivariate effect of condition rendered a significant result, [ $F(25, 1505) = 3.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .058$ ]. Wilks' Lambda offered a similar result, [ $F(25, 1104) = 4.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .063$ ]. Univariate F tests on each of the dependent variables found a significant effect on conversational appropriateness [ $F(5, 301) = 2.33, p < .042, \eta^2 = .037$ ], attentiveness [ $F(5, 301) = 6.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .104$ ], relational/social appropriateness [ $F(5, 301) = 7.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .117$ ], immediacy [ $F(5, 301) = 5.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .089$ ], and politeness [ $F(5, 301) = 15.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .209$ ]. Pairwise comparisons were then reviewed to see where the significance resulted. Table 4.4 lists the mean differences between conditions, by each dependent variable.



Table 4.3 *Significant Mean Differences*

Condition	n	Dependent Variables				
		Conversational Appropriate	Relational/Social Appropriate	Attentiveness	Immediacy	Politeness
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Bald	56	4.82 (1.21)	4.47 (1.49) <sup>bc</sup>	4.27 (1.28) <sup>bc</sup>	4.05 (1.55) <sup>ac</sup>	4.31 (1.13) <sup>bd</sup>
Positive	56	4.85 (1.28)	4.95 (1.13) <sup>ac</sup>	4.74 (1.21) <sup>ac</sup>	4.44 (1.28) <sup>bcd</sup>	4.91 (.97) <sup>be</sup>
Negative	55	5.22 (1.32) <sup>a</sup>	4.60 (1.60) <sup>bc</sup>	4.47 (1.54) <sup>acd</sup>	4.33 (1.50) <sup>bcd</sup>	4.64 (1.40) <sup>bc</sup>
Off-Record	55	4.49 (1.23) <sup>b</sup>	3.99 (1.44) <sup>b</sup>	3.76 (1.31) <sup>bd</sup>	3.46 (1.33) <sup>a</sup>	3.66 (1.31) <sup>a</sup>
Non/Impol	54	4.69 (1.38)	4.07 (1.50) <sup>b</sup>	4.02 (1.30) <sup>bc</sup>	3.88 (1.50) <sup>bc</sup>	3.79 (1.26) <sup>ce</sup>
Non/Polite	55	5.09 (1.26)	5.45 (1.16) <sup>a</sup>	5.01 (1.10) <sup>a</sup>	4.77 (1.35) <sup>ad</sup>	5.24 (.81) <sup>ad</sup>
Total	331					
F (5, 301)		2.33	7.97	6.97	5.88	15.89

Note: Different superscript indicate significant differences at  $p < .05$

## Hypotheses

In the following section major findings for each hypothesis will first be presented, followed by speculations about the findings. A post hoc thematic analysis will also be presented to address the open ended question regarding what participants would have said if they were Terry.

### Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one predicted the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition (text message is ignored) would be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate and polite than the other five politeness conditions. This hypothesis was partially supported. Table 4.3 displays all mean differences indicated by the multivariate analysis of covariance.

#### No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Off-Record

The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) was rated significantly higher on attentiveness ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was rated significantly higher on relational/social appropriateness ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) was rated significantly higher on immediacy ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) was significantly higher on politeness ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ).

#### No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. No Verbal/Nonverbal Impoliteness

The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) was rated significantly higher on attentiveness ( $p < .001$ ), than the no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness condition ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was rated significantly higher on relational/social appropriateness ( $p < .001$ ), than the no verbal message/nonverbal impoliteness condition ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ). The nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) was rated significantly higher on immediacy ( $p < .014$ ), than the no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness condition ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) was also

rated significantly higher on politeness ( $p < .001$ ), than the no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness condition ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ).

#### **No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Bald On-Record**

The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) was rated significantly higher ( $p < .038$ ) on attentiveness than the bald on-record condition ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was rated significantly higher ( $p < .006$ ) on relational/social appropriateness than the bald on-record condition ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ). The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) was rated significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) on politeness than the bald on-record condition ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ).

#### **No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Negative Politeness**

The no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was rated significantly higher on relational/social appropriateness ( $p < .032$ ) than the negative politeness condition ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ).

#### **No Verbal/Nonverbal Politeness vs. Positive Politeness**

However, the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition was not significantly different ( $p > .05$ ) on any of the dependent variables when compared to the positive politeness condition.

In summary the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition (text message was ignored) was seen as somewhat more relationally/socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite when compared to four of the conditions (off-record, no verbal/nonverbal impolite, bald on-record, negative politeness). However, the verbal condition was not significantly different than the positive politeness condition. Also, with regard to conversational appropriateness the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition was not significantly different ( $p > .05$ ) than any other condition.

### **Hypothesis Two**

Hypothesis two predicted that the bald on-record condition, positive condition, and negative condition would be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite, when compared to the off-record condition. This hypothesis was partially supported.

### **Positive vs. Off-Record**

The positive condition ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) was viewed as more attentive ( $p < .002$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ). The positive condition ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) was more immediate ( $p < .007$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). The positive condition ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) more relationally/socially appropriate ( $p < .013$ ) than then off-record condition ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). The positive condition ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) was also more polite ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ).

### **Negative vs. Off-Record**

The negative condition ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) was viewed as more conversationally appropriate ( $p < .050$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). The negative condition ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) was more immediate ( $p < .019$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). The negative condition ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) was more polite ( $p < .001$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ).

### **Bald On-Record vs Off-Record**

Finally the bald on-record condition ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) was viewed as more polite ( $p < .046$ ) than the off-record condition ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ).

Overall the positive condition was viewed as more attentive, immediate, relationally/socially appropriate and polite than the off-record condition. The negative condition was viewed as more conversationally appropriate, immediate, and more polite than the off-record condition. The bald on-record condition was viewed as more polite than the off-record condition. Therefore, as previously stated, the hypothesis was partially supported.

### **Hypothesis Three**

Hypothesis three predicted that the positive and negative condition would be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate attentive, immediate, and polite than the bald on-record condition. No significant mean differences were indicated by the analysis (see Table 4.3), therefore this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Hypothesis Four**

Hypothesis four predicted that the negative condition would be viewed as more conversationally appropriate, relationally and socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than the positive condition. No significant mean differences were indicated in the analysis (see Table 4.3), therefore this hypothesis was not supported.

### **Interpretation of Analysis**

Although only two of the hypotheses were partially supported, the implications of this study are worth noting. Focusing specifically on the dependent variables addressed in this study, it is important to note the differences found amongst them. For example, only one statistically significant difference was found between conditions (negative politeness and off-record) for conversational appropriateness; concluding that it is more conversationally appropriate to offer an apology (I'm sorry, can you hold on a sec) than to be indirect (this cell phone is always beeping) when a text message interruption occurs. On the other hand six statistically significant differences between conditions were found on relational/social appropriateness. In all six of these differences, positive politeness and no verbal/nonverbal politeness were found to be the highest on relational/social appropriateness. Theoretically, the difference between the types of appropriateness is that one focuses on the appropriateness of behaviors and messages in a given conversation (conversational appropriateness) and the other (relational/social appropriateness) focuses on the appropriateness of behaviors and messages given a specific social context or relationship (King & Sereno, 1984).

Therefore the interaction between the participant and Terry may have violated beliefs about relational/social appropriateness, in that when one is engaged in a conversation with a friend it is more appropriate to ignore a text or offer a positive politeness strategy (I'm really enjoying our conversation...but I need to check this message). However, the interaction may not have violated expectations about acceptable behavior in normal face to face conversation, as the text interruption did not move the conversation in a new direction or make the conversation less relevant. Therefore findings support the idea that people may have less stringent expectations associated with violating conversational appropriateness (speaking out of turn, saying something

irrelevant, etc.), than with violating appropriateness expectations associated with a specific relationship or social context (King & Sereno, 1984).

Two other dependent variables were attentiveness and immediacy. Attentiveness deals specifically with the behavior of the conversational partners, in that each person is present and engaged in the conversation (Cegala, 1984). Immediacy encompasses behaviors such as eye contact, distance, and inclusiveness (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). When Terry ignored the text message (no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition) he/she was found to be more attentive and immediate than when Terry was off record (this cell phone is constantly beeping) or when the text was checked but nothing was said (no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness). Also Terry was viewed as more attentive when a positive politeness message (I'm really enjoying our conversation...but I need to check this message) was said then when an off record message (this cell phone is constantly beeping) was said. Similar to this Terry was viewed as more immediate when a positive politeness message or negative politeness message (I'm sorry can you hold on a sec...) when compared to an off record message.

Interestingly no statistically significant difference was found when comparing the positive or negative politeness message conditions with the condition where no verbal message was stated, but the text was checked. Therefore, although politeness theory would predict saying "something" when a text message interruption has occurred is better than saying nothing at all, it may not be the choice that is viewed as most attentive and immediate. It may be possible that making an indirect (or direct) comment about the text interruption actually causes more attention to be paid to the interruption making the interruption seem more obtrusive.

Given the importance placed on politeness in the creation of the messages tested, it is no wonder the largest number of significant findings between conditions were found for the dependent variable politeness. Offering an apology (negative politeness), stressing importance of the speaker (positive politeness), being direct (bald on-record; I have to check this message), or ignoring the text message were all viewed as more polite than being indirect (off-record; This cell phone is constantly beeping) or than saying nothing but sending a text back in response (no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness). It is important to

note though that aside from the direct (bald on-record condition) and no verbal/nonverbal politeness (ignoring the text) condition being statistically significantly different, no difference exists between ignoring the text (no verbal/nonverbal politeness), the positive politeness condition, the negative politeness condition, and the bald on-record condition, on level of perceived politeness. Therefore, if an individual enacts one of the following four conditions: no verbal/nonverbal politeness (ignores the text), positive (I'm really enjoying our conversation...), negative (I'm sorry, but can you hold on a sec...), or a bald on-record (I have to check this message) politeness strategy, the individual might be viewed as having relatively the same level of politeness.

Overall, the largest number of significant differences between conditions were reported with regard to politeness, which makes sense as this study tested the original five politeness strategies created by Brown and Levinson (1978). Despite this, politeness differences were not as prevalent as might have been predicted by the theory. The finding that ignoring the text (no verbal/nonverbal politeness) was viewed as the most polite, attentive, immediate, and relationally/socially appropriate (by adjusted mean scores) may align with popular belief. Further the finding that ignoring the text does not differ significantly from the positive or negative (except on relational/social appropriateness) politeness messages on conversational appropriateness, relational/social appropriateness (note exception previously listed), attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness is important to note. This finding demonstrates that although ignoring the text may be the best strategy to use, responding with an apology or a message that stresses importance of the conversation (I am really enjoying our conversation...) can be just as affective at meeting face to face conversational expectations.

### **Post Hoc Thematic Analysis**

A post hoc thematic analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the open ended question, "what would you have said if you were Terry?" The following two themes were salient throughout the responses; participants would have said who the text was from (57.4%; 190 responses) and the participants would have shared the content of the text message (50.2%; 166 responses). When participants indicated they would have said who the text was from, they typed things like "Could you hold on... it's my

girlfriend” or “It’s my mom, hold on.” When participants indicated they would have shared the content of the message, they typed things like, “I would have told them what the message said” or “I would have shared what the person wrote, so they felt like a part of the conversation.” A theme that was not present, but should be noted due to validity concerns, is the lack of a similar response to Terry. Less than 10% of the participants responded that would have said what Terry said. Concerns about this finding will be addressed in the following chapter.

Another question that was considered was only present in the condition where the text message was ignored. Participants were asked if they thought Terry was being polite to the texting partner. Of the 55 participants in this condition, 44% ( $n = 24$ ) responded no, they did not think Terry was being polite, and 66% ( $n = 31$ ) responded yes, Terry was being polite. Implications of this finding will also be discussed in the following chapter.



## **Summary**

While this chapter provided the statistical results and interpretation for the study, the next chapter will discuss limitations that were present in the current study, present the implications of the study, and provide directions for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Overall Interpretation and Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of multicomunicating. More specifically, the study looked at how one manages a face to face interaction, while engaging in a separate text message interaction. In order to accomplish this, Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness strategy framework was invoked. Thus, the study tested and extended politeness theory. This study focused on testing Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) four original verbal politeness strategies (hypotheses two, three, and four); as well as extending their fifth strategy to included nonverbal politeness or impoliteness (hypothesis one). Specifically it was hypothesized that ignoring an incoming text message would be perceived as more conversationally appropriate, more relationally/socially appropriate, more attentive, more immediate and more polite than offering a verbal message or saying nothing. It was also hypothesized that relevant verbal messages (bald on-record, positive, and negative) would be viewed as more (appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite) compared to an irrelevant response (off-record). Predictions were also made arguing that negative would be more (appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite) than positive and positive would be more than bald on record. However, these predictions were largely unsupported.

Although most of the hypotheses were unsupported, some significant findings were rendered. Strategy choice did impact some of the dependent variables. Specifically, the conversational expectation of politeness was impacted by the politeness strategy offered, with the nonverbal/no verbal politeness condition (ignoring the text message) being perceived as the most polite condition. The perception of relational/social appropriateness was also significantly impacted by strategy choice, and to a lesser extent so was attentiveness and immediacy. The perception of conversational appropriateness, on the other hand, was not impacted by the strategy offered.

This study also extended the original face-threatening context to include not only a face threatening message, but a face threatening behavior (text message interruption) that warranted the need for a face threatening message. However, given the controlled

scenario (small face threat, no power distance, close relationship) the predicted hypotheses were mostly unsupported.

### **Overview**

The following section will discuss the pragmatic implications of the study, specifically addressing the impact to text messaging, conversational expectations, turn-taking, and co-presence. Theoretical implications will also be addressed with regard to extensions to politeness theory, by adding nonverbal strategies and explicit face threats. Finally limitations of the study will be discussed, as well as directions for future research.

### **Pragmatic Implications**

#### **Text-Messaging**

As noted in the introduction of this study, there is a popular belief that texting in the presence of other is rude. This study was designed around this assumption and explored what could be said or done to mitigate the impact of engaging in multiple conversations. The study proposed that a specific type of politeness message might lessen the impact. However, as noted this was only partially supported.

Of all the politeness strategies, the no verbal/nonverbal politeness strategy (ignoring the text message) was rated highest (adjusted mean scores) on conversational appropriateness, relational/social appropriateness, attentiveness, immediacy, and politeness. Although the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition was found to have the highest mean scores, these mean scores did not differ significantly from the other conditions on some of the dependent variables. Therefore although ignoring a text interruption seemed to be the best strategy in this scenario, offering an apology (negative politeness) or indicating enjoyment in the conversation (positive politeness) may be equally as beneficial.

The type of verbal message offered may mitigate the impact of texting in the presence of others. Specifically offering a message that acknowledges the received text, offers a relevant response, and/or acknowledges that one is going to check the message (positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald on-record) is viewed as more relationally/socially appropriate, attentive, immediate, and polite than simply responding to the text message (no verbal/nonverbal impolite) or being indirect (off record).

Therefore, ignoring a text message is not the only way to meet face to face conversational expectations.

### **Face to Face Conversational Expectations**

As previously noted, individuals have expectations in conversation, whether face to face (Sacks et al., 1974) or mediated (Walther & Tidwell, 1995). Face to face expectations include being attentive (Cegala, 1984), immediate (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Gorham, 1988), conversationally and relationally/socially appropriate (King & Sereno, 1984) and polite (Holtgraves, 2005). This study found that strategy type had little to no impact on the participants' perceptions of Terry's conversational appropriateness (Terry was rated as being conversationally appropriate). Therefore demonstrating that engaging in two synchronous conversations (one mediated and one face to face) does not appear to have violated the participants' perceptions of what it means to be conversationally appropriate. On the other hand, strategy type did influence the perception of Terry's ability to be relationally and socially appropriate. Both the positive politeness message (displaying liking) and the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition (ignoring the text message) were viewed as more relationally and socially appropriate than the other message types. Therefore, although people might be able to maintain face to face expectations of conversational appropriateness, when engaging in two synchronous conversations, a politeness strategy (specifically positive or ignoring) might be helpful in maintaining face to face conversational expectations of relational/social appropriateness.

The participants' perceptions of Terry's attentiveness and immediacy in the face to face conversation were also influenced by which politeness strategy was offered. Terry was seen as being more attentive and more immediate when he or she ignored the text message (no verbal/nonverbal politeness) compared to when Terry simply responded to the text without saying anything (no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness) or when Terry made an indirect comment (off-record). Engaging in multiple conversations takes away from one's ability to be acutely focused on one thing (Reinsch et al., 2008). Therefore it makes sense that the condition where the text message was ignored would be viewed as more attentive and more immediate than conditions where Terry was engaged in multiple

conversations. However, it is interesting to note that no differences existed between the positive politeness condition or the negative politeness condition compared to the ignoring the text message condition. This supports the argument that a message displaying liking (positive politeness) or an apology (negative politeness) may lessen the impact a text message interruption has on perceptions of attentiveness and immediacy.

Depending on which of the politeness strategies was used by Terry, the perception of Terry's politeness was different. Overall when Terry offered a message that displayed liking (positive politeness), messages offered an apology (negative politeness) or ignored the text message (no verbal/nonverbal politeness), Terry was perceived as more polite than if he or she answered the text without a verbal message (no verbal/nonverbal impoliteness) or when he or she was indirect and irrelevant (off-record).

### **Mediated Conversational Expectations**

As previously noted, there are certain mediated conversational expectations that exist. The time it takes to respond to a mediated comment is one of them (Walther & Tidwell, 1995). Although mediated expectations were not the focus of this research study, they should not be ignored. In the no verbal/nonverbal politeness condition (ignoring the text message) participants were asked if they thought Terry was being polite to the person sending the text, when the text was ignored. Forty-four percent responded no, that they did not think Terry was being polite to the texting partner. This question was not asked in the other five conditions, as the text message was responded to in all other conditions. Since Terry's phone beeped indicating a new text message had been received, the response time to Terry's mediated partner started immediately. Walther and Tidwell (1995) argued that "such cues have great potential to affect the judgments we make of those who initiate or respond to attempts at communication" (p. 356). Therefore Terry's choice to ignore the text message, may have met face to face conversational expectations of the participants. However, as noted by the participants, it was perceived 44% of the time as not being polite to the mediated partner. Feenberg (1989) argued that since we are aware of the speed with which computer mediated communication (CMC) travels across space we now have an expectation of a prompt reply which "mark unusual delays negatively as a possible sign of rejection or indifference since there is no technical excuse

for silence” (p. 263). Not only is there the expectation of a prompt reply from a mediated partner with which we are engaged in communication with, but perhaps also an expectation of a prompt reply from anyone that receives a text message. In other words, perhaps the participants considered the mediated expectations and pressure (Feenberg, 1989; Kiesler et al., 1984) that Terry was under or even what they might have done if they were in Terry’s position, which may explain why different verbal messages were not found to be significantly different (on face to face conversational expectations). Therefore, the need to study the many pressures and expectations that exist with engaging in multiple conversations is critical.

### **Turn-Taking**

This study demonstrated that if a text message is received, in order to meet face to face conversational expectations it might be best to ignore the text message at least in the context examined here. If that is not plausible then the next best strategy is to offer a verbal message that acknowledges the message and lets the face to face partner know the message will be checked. This finding is directly related to turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974) in that by acknowledging the text interruption, Terry is taking an extra turn and potentially asking for a turn for the mediated partner. The face to face partner may find the text interruption to be an initial violation of turn-taking norms (Zimmerman & West, 1975). However, once “invited” into the new conversation, by simple acknowledgement, the face to face partner may find the interruption to be less face threatening and less of a violation of conversational expectations. This is important in everyday conversations because mediated interruptions are increasingly more common. Therefore, if one can lessen the impact of the interruption by acknowledgement of it, then face to face conversational expectations are less likely to be violated. However, this does not take into account the potential impact on the mediated partner when the text message is not returned. Therefore this strategy might work for meeting conversational expectations of one’s face to face partner but may not work for meeting conversational expectations of one’s mediated partner. What may meet both sets of conversational expectations would be a verbal message of invitation to the face to face partner and a typed message of

acknowledgement of third party involvement to the mediated partner. This would allow both conversational partners to be actively engaged in both conversations.

### **Co-Presence**

As previously noted text messaging can represent a high level of perceived social presence through the response time. If one's partner answers the text he or she received, the relationship may be viewed as important and higher rates of intimacy may result. Ignoring a text message on the other hand may be viewed as a sign that the relationship is not viewed as important. Given the pressure to respond to a text message (if the relationship is important) and the pressure to maintain engagement in a face to face conversation, this study found that offering specific messages (ones displaying liking or an apology) may allow for simultaneous management and the ability to be actively present in each conversation. Although this was not examined, active presence in two conversations, while meeting both set of expectations, may alter the perceived rudeness commonly associated with texting in the presence of others.

### **Theoretical Implications**

#### **Extensions to Politeness Theory**

#### **Nonverbal Strategies**

This study extended Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) five original politeness strategies to include two different versions of the "do not present the face threatening act," strategy, both which include a nonverbal message. Overall this study found that ignoring a text message (no verbal/nonverbal politeness), while engaged in a face to face conversation with someone else, meets face to face conversational expectations of politeness, relational/social appropriateness, attentiveness, and immediacy. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is a linguistic theory, therefore nonverbal messages were not a consideration of the original framework. Lim and Bowers (1990) argued that politeness could be displayed nonverbally. However, research had yet to test this idea. Although the nonverbal extension was only represented by two broad categories of politeness and impoliteness, the significant findings between the conditions indicate an avenue for future study. This research study is useful for future research on politeness theory, as it provides support for a nonverbal strategy as a useful and perhaps preferred strategy to display

politeness. Therefore, additions to the original politeness strategies should be made to encompass not just verbal communication, but nonverbal communication as well.

### **Explicit Face Threat**

This study also introduced an explicit face threatening behavior (text message interruption) prior to the face threatening act (message) being produced. Although Brown and Levinson (1978) had an implicit face threat (the need for something which warrants a request) the introduction of an explicit face threatening behavior perhaps allows for new types of politeness to be explored and tested as face saving strategies. Brown and Levinson argued that we use politeness to maintain face needs while receiving compliance for a request. In this study politeness was used to maintain face needs of the sender and receiver and meet face to face conversational expectations when an interruption (text message) occurred. This study also considered the face needs of the mediated partner, in the pressure to respond to the text message. Though prior research (Baxter, 1984; Wilson et al., 1991) has extended politeness beyond requests, this is the first study to consider a response to a face threatening behavior and strategy. Therefore, this study extended politeness theory outside of request formation and although the differences between message type were not as strong as the original theory predicted, message type did impact perceptions of some face to face conversational expectations.

Overall this study supports Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) notion that different politeness strategies render different effects. However, the predicted differences between message type (i.e., negative politeness displaying highest level of politeness, etc.) were not supported. This may be explained by the introduction of an explicit face threatening behavior in that different types of politeness may be more or less impactful when the face threat is made public. The lack of support for the predicted differences between message type may also be a result of the nonverbal strategies. For example, if people believe there is an option to ignore an incoming text message, then what Terry said may not mitigate the impact to face to face expectations.

### **Research Critiques**

Politeness theory has been critiqued for being too rigid (Bavelas & Chovil, 1997), for limiting the focus of politeness on one specific utterance without consideration of an



entire interaction (Holtgraves, 2002), and for not differentiating between the sender's and the receiver's face threats (Craig et al., 1986). As previously stated, this research study extended politeness strategies outside of requests and the strategies were found to be influential on perceived politeness. Therefore, although the original theory was intentionally limited in its predictive capacity, the strategies hold true outside of just request formation. This research study also extended the interaction to not only include a politeness strategy, but an explicit face threatening behavior (text message interruption). Therefore it was not just the utterance that was considered but the behavior as well.

Craig et al. (1986) pointed out that politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) fails to distinguish between face threats to the sender's face and face threats to the receiver's face. In this study there is another face threat concern, which is that of the mediated partner. Although the focus of this study was on the message Terry created to save the face of his/her face to face partner, Terry was also managing another conversation (mediated) and the face needs of that partner, were not considered (by the scope of this study). Future research needs to address how one balances multiple face threats to multiple people, while simultaneously balancing one's own face.

### **Limitations**

#### **Mediated Partner**

As previously indicated, one critical component left out of this study is role of the third party (the texting partner). As noted in the literature review, there are mediated conversational expectations, as well as, face to face conversational expectations. This study only focused on the face to face conversational expectations, using mediated conversational expectations as a rationale for checking the text at all (Walther & Tidwell, 1995). As a society, there is a priority given to face to face communication, in that it is often held as the golden standard of communication (Short et al., 1976). However, there are times when a mediated conversation may be a higher priority and not responding to that conversation may be perceived as "rude" to that partner. As previously noted, in the condition where the text message was noticed and then ignored, 44% of the participants reported that they thought Terry was not being polite to his/her texting partner. Although this is less than half of the participants in this condition, it is important to note this

finding as future research studies may look specifically at mediated conversational expectations and the relational impact which results from multicomunication.

### **Confounding Variables**

The design of this study also may have limited the impact of the message. The study was designed so that Terry and the participant were close friends (no power distance) and only one text message was received/sent (low face threat). However, the verbal messages may not have influenced the impression of Terry, simply because the face threat was so low (only one text) and the expectations of close friends lessen the need for politeness messages. The pop-culture belief that texting in the presence of others is rude, was not fully addressed in this study, as only one text message was received and responded to. Perhaps individuals might excuse one interruption (text message). However, when multiple interruptions occur (multiple text messages sent back and forth) the face threat may be too great to be mitigated by a politeness strategy. Therefore future research needs to look at the threshold of interruptions which will be tolerated while in a face to face conversation.

### **Face Threatening Behavior**

Another limitation of this study is with the nature of the original politeness strategies. By adding a face threatening behavior prior to and after the face threatening act (message), the face threatening act (message) was not the only variable considered by the participant. Prior research (Holtgraves, 2005; Trees & Manusov, 1998) on politeness theory has only studied the impact of the act (message). However, adding the behavior (text message interruption) may lessen the impact of the actual act (message). In other words participants may be paying less attention to what is said and more attention to what is done. Also given the popular belief that texting in the presence of others is rude, one may be predisposed to focus on the behavior and not on what is said in response to the behavior.

### **Nonverbals**

One aspect of the strategy design that was not considered, but should be noted is the presumed lack of nonverbal paralanguage associated with the strategies in the vignette. Brown and Levinson (1978) predicted that the off-record condition would be

viewed as more polite than the bald on-record, positive, or negative strategies because of the tone that is often offered with these types of messages. This research study predicted that since the off-record strategy was not relevant to the interaction, the message would be viewed as less polite than bald on-record, positive, or negative. Although the current study's predictions were upheld, tone was not considered as a factor for strategy perception. Tone should be considered, however, as one's interpretation of a message is often influenced by the tone of the message (Lim & Bowers, 1990). For example, a seemingly off-record response could be rendered relevant through tone, facial expressions or gestures. The focus of this study was on the verbal message, not the nonverbal associations. Therefore this study attempted to control for tone, facial expressions, and gestures (through a written vignette), it was not measured and therefore should be noted as a limitation of the implications of the findings.

### **Message Content**

Another limitation of the study falls with the messages themselves. Participants were asked open-ended questions about what they would have said if they were Terry. Less than 10% of the participants stated that they would have responded the same way that Terry did. This indicates that either the messages were not realistic to what people actually say or that the messages did not influence the impact of the behavior (text message interruption). Participants instead indicated that they would tell their partner "who" was texting or "what" the text message said. Perhaps by telling a face to face partner who the text message is from or what the text message says, increases feelings of immediacy and inclusion (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). This increase in immediacy and inclusion may be the key in simultaneous management of conversations in that it allows each conversational partner to be a member of both conversations, thus lessening the impact of the interruption and allowing one to engage in multiple conversations without being perceived as impolite to either party. Therefore future research needs to test different messages, in different contexts to test the impact to both face to face and mediated conversational expectations.

## **Future Directions**

Given the previous limitations, several avenues for future research exist, such as studying different face to face relationship types, studying the relationship with the mediated partner, studying the impact of different verbal and nonverbal messages, and studying the affect of age on perceptions of texting behavior.

### **Relationship Type**

Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that power distance between conversational partners might influence which politeness strategies are enacted. Politeness messages may play a greater role in impression formation if the conversational partners are acquaintances, strangers (Shimanoff, 1987), or if a power dynamic exists (e.g., boss and employee). In this study Terry and the participant were close friends having a conversation about a new relationship. If, however, the interaction occurred between two people on a first date, or an employee and a supervisor, the strategy enacted and the perception of that strategy may have been different. The conversational expectations may too have been different in that one may expect some people to be more or less polite, appropriate, immediate, or attentive based on the relationship that exists. Therefore testing different relationship types will add to the understanding of the affect of politeness messages.

### **Mediated Conversational Partner**

Another avenue of research is the mediated conversation. Given the changing dynamic of communication, mediated conversations are becoming more prevalent (Reinsch et al., 2008). This study focused on face to face conversational expectations and prioritized the face to face interaction. However, as previously noted there are times with the mediated conversation might be the priority and the desire to meet mediated expectations greater. In this study there was no acknowledgement of who the mediated partner was or what the mediated partner said (both of which were aspects participants would have liked to know as noted in the open ended responses). Knowing who the text message was sent by and/or what the text message said may be important in understanding the impact on conversational expectations.

Future research also needs to understand the role of other mediated conversational expectations, aside from response time. For example, how does politeness play into sending grammatically correct texts? Does one offer politeness messages similar to Brown and Levinson's (1978) when texting? Since the mediated interaction was not a consideration of this study, future research avenues are necessary. Overall it is important to not only understand how politeness messages impact face to face conversational expectations, but also how similar messages may be used with a mediated partner to meet mediated conversational expectations.

### **Message Type**

Yet another avenue for future research encompasses looking at the verbal messages that are produced by people who engage in multiple conversations. As previously noted less than 10% of the participants stated that they would have said the same thing that Terry said, demonstrating the low ecological validity present in the study. Therefore, although message type did influence perceptions of some face to face conversational expectations, future research needs to look at other messages that may be offered. When participants were asked what they would have said if they were Terry, they stated that they would have told their conversational partner who was texting or they would have shared the content of the message. Therefore future research needs to look at other messages that may be offered to mitigate the impact of a text message interruption.

Future research needs to not only test different verbal messages but also test which are perceived as successful (meets conversational expectations) and which are shown to render negative effects. If people continue to engage in multiple conversations, it is important to understand how to successfully balance each conversation, while simultaneously balancing each relationship.

Future research also needs to explore the many different types of nonverbal messages that could be present in the management of multiple conversations. This study tested two broad nonverbal strategies that were classified as being polite and impolite. However, as previously noted with regard to tone, other nonverbal message types have yet to be explored. Although this research study did attempt to encompass several different politeness messages, the focus remained on politeness messages. Exploring

different types of messages, both verbal and nonverbal, that represent what people actually say in conversation is a necessary avenue for future studies.

### **Age**

Finally future research needs to look at the impact age has on perceptions of texting behavior and engaging in multicomunication more broadly. The mean age of the participants in this study was 20 years old. This age group has grown up texting and may have different perceptions on acceptable use for this medium (Bake, 2010). Other age groups, however, may feel differently about the frequency and acceptability of its use. Therefore future research needs to survey a variety of age groups in order to grasp the exact impact of engaging in multicomunication has on interpersonal relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this study demonstrated that the popular belief, that texting in the presence of others is rude, is not entirely inaccurate. Although ignoring a text message interruption is perceived as polite, it is no more polite than offering a message that displays liking or an apology, at least in this scenario between college age friends. This study found that by using some of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness messages the impact of the "rudeness" can be mitigated. This is important since no matter what one may believe about the rudeness of texting in the presence of others, people still continue to do it. Therefore, the potentially more important finding rendered from this study is that when one engages in multiple conversations (one mediated and one face to face), one does not have to ignore either partner, one can offer a verbal message (I'm really enjoying our conversation..., I'm sorry, can you hold on a sec..., or I have to check this message) to his/her face to face partner that acknowledges the text is an interruption to the conversation and lets the partner know the message will be checked. This verbal acknowledgement may be the key to lessening the impact of a mediated interruption on a face to face conversation, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of a mediated conversation. Future research is necessary to understand the implications (for all members) of balancing multiple conversations. However, this study is the stepping stone to begin to understand how one can balance both.

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## Appendix A

**Please read the following scenario, you will then be asked questions about what you have just read:** *(Students were randomly assigned to ONE of the following six vignettes)*

1. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message and tells you “I have to check this message.” Terry then sends a text message back in response.
2. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message and tells you “I’m really enjoying our conversation and would like to hear more details, but I need to check this text.” Terry then sends a text message back in response.
3. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message and tells you “I’m sorry but could you hold on just a sec, while I check this text.” Terry then sends a text message back in response.
4. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message and tells you “This cell phone is constantly beeping.” Terry then sends a text message back in response.
5. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs

and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message and then sends a text message back in response.

6. Imagine you and Terry are having your usual Friday lunch at the local coffee shop. You and Terry have been friends for years and share details about your jobs and personal lives. Today you are telling Terry about a new potential romance. You tell Terry “I have met someone new and I am so excited.” Terry replies by saying “Oh, that’s great. I hope this one works out. It would be so great to double date.” Suddenly, Terry’s cell phone beeps indicating a text message has just been received. Terry notices the text message but ignores it.



## Appendix B

**Now, please answer the following questions regarding your interaction with Terry.**

	1=Strongly Disagree	2=Moderately Disagree	3=Slightly Disagree	4=Undecided	5=Slightly Agree	6=Moderately Agree	7=Strongly Agree
<i>Conversational Appropriateness (Adapted from Spitzberg &amp; Canary, 1985)</i>							
1. Terry said several things that seemed out of place in the conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Terry was a smooth conversationalist	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Everything Terry said was appropriate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Occasionally, Terry made me feel uncomfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Terry's conversation was very suitable to the situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Some of the things Terry said were awkward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Terry's communication was proper	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Terry said some things that should not have been said	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I was embarrassed at times by Terry's remarks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Some of Terry's remarks were	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

inappropriate							
11. I was comfortable throughout the conversation with Terry's remarks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Some of the things Terry said were in bad taste	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. None of Terry's remarks were embarrassing to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Terry said some things that were simply incorrect things to say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Terry did not violate any of my expectations of the conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. The WAY Terry said some remarks was unsuitable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. The things Terry spoke about were in good taste as far as I'm concerned	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Some of Terry's remarks were simply improper	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Terry interrupted me in the conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. At least one of Terry's remarks was rude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Attentiveness (Adapted from Norton, 1978)</i>							
21. I believe Terry could repeat back to me exactly what was meant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

22. Terry deliberately reacted in such a way that I knew that Terry was listening	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Terry really seems to like to listen very carefully to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Terry is an extremely attentive communicator	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Relational/Social Appropriateness (Adapted from Spitzberg &amp; Cupach, 1989)</i>							
25. Terry wanted to communicate with me in an appropriate manner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. Terry was aware of the rules that guide social behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Terry acted in ways that met situational demands for appropriateness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Immediacy (Adapted from Burgoon &amp; Hale, 1984)</i>							
28. Terry was intensely involved in the conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Terry found the conversation stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Terry communicated coldness rather than warmth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. Terry created a sense of distance between us	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

32. Terry acted bored by our conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. Terry was interested in talking to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. Terry showed enthusiasm while talking to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Politeness (Adapted from Trees &amp; Manusov, 1998)</i>							
35. Terry was concerned with my feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36.. Terry put forth a lot of effort to show that Terry did not want to impose on me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. Terry was very inappropriate when the text message was received	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. Terry was very proper about receiving the text message	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. Terry was very polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

\*Reverse code: 1 ,4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 30, 31, 32, 37

**Now, please answer the following questions about text messaging.**

	1=Strongly Disagree	2=Moderately Disagree	3=Slightly Disagree	4=Undecided	5=Slightly Agree	6=Moderately Agree	7=Strongly Agree
<i>Texting Naturalness</i>							
40. I find texting to be a natural way for	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

people to communicate							
41. I enjoy texting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. I do not mind when others text while in my presence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. I think everyone should text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Texting Familiarity</i>							
44. I know how to text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45. I text on a daily basis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46. I understand how to send and receive text messages	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47. I can send text messages to multiple people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48. I can send pictures via text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Texting Attitude and Intentions</i>							
49. I think texting is rude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
50. I feel disconnected when I am not texting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
51. I enjoy communicating using text messages	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
52. I think texting is a useful way to communicate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
53. I intend on continuing to communicate using text messages	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
54. I text people so I do not have to call them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
55. I prefer to send text messages instead of talking to people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Multicomunicatio n</i>							

56. I feel comfortable engaging in two conversations at once	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
57. I can text while in a face to face conversation with someone else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
58. I enjoy texting while in a face to face conversation with someone else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
59. I am uncomfortable when people text while engaged in a face to face conversation with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
60. I think it is rude when people text while engaged in a face to face conversation with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

\*Reverse code: 49, 59, 60

61. How many text messages do you receive each day? 1  $\longrightarrow$  200 or more

62. How many text messages do you send each day? 1  $\longrightarrow$  200 or more

*(These will be on sliding scales, where students can indicate an exact amount)*

63. Which of the following messages do you think Terry should have said? Please rank your choices. Your first choice should be indicated with a (1), your second choice (2), your third choice (3), your fourth choice (4), and your fifth choice (5).

\_\_\_\_\_ “I have to check this message”

\_\_\_\_\_ “I’m really enjoying our conversation and would like to hear more details, but I need to check this message”

\_\_\_\_\_ “I’m sorry but could you hold on just a sec, while I check this text”

\_\_\_\_\_ “This cell phone is constantly beeping”

\_\_\_\_\_ No verbal message

64. What would you have said, if you were Terry?

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65. What sex did you think Terry was?      (1) Male      (2) Female

*(The following questions will only be asked in the 6<sup>th</sup> scenario condition)*

66. Did you think Terry was being polite to you, when the text message was ignored? (1) Yes (2) No

67. Did you think Terry was being polite to the person sending the text message, when the text message was ignored? (1) Yes (2) No

68. What would you have done if you were Terry?

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**Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself.**

*Demographics*

69. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

70. What is your sex? (1) Male (2) Female

71. What do you consider to be your primary ethnic background ?

(1) White (2) White, non-Hispanic (3) African American/Black (4) Hispanic

(5) Asian-Pacific Islander (6) Native American (7) Other

72. What is your class rank?

(1) Freshman (2) Sophomore (3) Junior (4) Senior



## Appendix C

This was on the first web page and contains all of the elements of informed consent.

### **COLLEGE STUDENTS' VIEWS ON TEXTING AND POLITENESS, WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about texting and politeness. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about three hundred people to do so.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** The person in charge of this study is Jennifer Maginnis of University of Kentucky Department of Communication.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** By doing this study, I hope to learn about how college students use politeness messages to mitigate the impact of text message interruptions.

**WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?** You will be asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of politeness messages and texting and will be asked about your texting behavior. Many of the questions on the survey are answered using rating scales provided for you. For these questions, simply click on the answer choices that best reflect your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your feelings about politeness and texting

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?** To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

**WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. You can withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

**WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?** There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** You will receive research credit for taking part in this study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?** I will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private.

I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information, or what that information is. Paper records will be kept under lock and key in the research office. Electronic copies of the data will be kept only with the PI.

I will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from organizations such as the University of Kentucky.

**CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?** If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

### **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Jennifer Maginnis, at (231) 758- 0552 or [jennymaginnis@uky.edu](mailto:jennymaginnis@uky.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

Clicking on the link below implies consent for the data you provide to be used for research propose.

“I agree”

Thank you for consenting to participate in this survey. [Click here to begin.](#)

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#### **Scholarly Presentations**

Neuberger, L., Shulman, H.C., & Maginnis, J. A. Candidate Website and Local Newspaper Coverage in the 2006 Senatorial Elections: Implications for 2008 and Beyond. *Conference presentation at Annual APSA Preconference on Political Communication, Harvard University, August 2008.*